

2004

**The role of physical education and sport in education (SPINED) :  
extending at risk students' participation in school life: a case  
study of progress within a specialist sports school**

Dawn Penney

Andrew Taggart

Sean Gorman

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ecuworks>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

Penney, D., Taggart, A., & Gorman, S. (2004). *The role of physical education and sport in education (SPINED) :  
extending at risk students' participation in school life: a case study of progress within a specialist sports school.*  
Perth, Australia: Edith Cowan University.  
This Report is posted at Research Online.  
<https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ecuworks/7138>

# Edith Cowan University

## Copyright Warning

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study.

The University does not authorize you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site.

You are reminded of the following:

- Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright.
- A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. Where the reproduction of such material is done without attribution of authorship, with false attribution of authorship or the authorship is treated in a derogatory manner, this may be a breach of the author's moral rights contained in Part IX of the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth).
- Courts have the power to impose a wide range of civil and criminal sanctions for infringement of copyright, infringement of moral rights and other offences under the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth). Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.



**THE ROLE OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT IN EDUCATION  
(SPINED)**

**Extending 'at risk' students' participation in school life:  
A case study of progress within a Specialist Sports School.**

**Report of the Clontarf Aboriginal College and Clontarf Football Academy  
Case Study Project, Perth, Western Australia.**

**Dawn Penney, Andrew Taggart and Sean Gorman**

**Sport and Physical Education Research Centre  
and  
Kurongkurl Katitjin, the School of Indigenous Australian Studies**

**Edith Cowan University, Western Australia.**

**September 2004**

## Acknowledgements

Thanks go to the staff at the Clontarf Football Academy and the Acting Principal at Clontarf Aboriginal College for their support and participation in this research.

Funding support from the SPINED project for this research has been greatly appreciated.

Thanks also go to Kurongkurl Katitjin, the School of Indigenous Australian Studies at Edith Cowan University, for funding to support the continuation of the research.

## Contents

	PAGE
Summary	3
Introduction	4
The Case Study: A Specialist Sports School	5
The College and the Football Academy	7
Football at Clontarf: Developing students and developing lives through sport	10
Football at Clontarf: Making a difference?	12
Developing Sport	15
Extending Impact	18
Conclusion: Progress and prospects	20
References	22
Appendix 1:	23
The Western Australia Curriculum Framework Overarching Outcomes	

## **CASE STUDY REPORT - SUMMARY**

### **Extending 'at risk' students' participation in school life: A case study of progress within a Specialist Sports School.**

Dawn Penney, Andrew Taggart and Sean Gorman

Sport and Physical Education Research Centre  
and

Kurongkurl Katitjin, the School of Indigenous Australian Studies

Edith Cowan University, Western Australia.

#### **CASE STUDY LOCATION: Clontarf Aboriginal College and Football Academy, Perth, Western Australia.**

This case study focused on developments at Clontarf Aboriginal College and Football Academy, a Specialist Sports School in the Perth metropolitan area. The study specifically explored:

- the ways in which the development of an Australian Rules Football academy at the school have enhanced opportunities for Aboriginal students, many of whom may be deemed in educational terms 'at risk', to engage in school life;
- the organisational / institutional, social, cultural and economic factors (i) enabling and (ii) inhibiting enhancement of educational and sporting opportunities and take-up of these opportunities by the Aboriginal students;
- the extent to which progress achieved within the school context can be mirrored beyond the school, in terms of the lives and lifestyles of the students concerned.

The case study highlights the complex dynamics between social, cultural, economic and institutional issues in educational developments that seek to engage students in learning, in school life, in future careers, and in community life, via a central focus on sport. Data collected via institutional records, a questionnaire survey of academy staff, in-depth interviews with staff, and a questionnaire survey of students enrolled at the academy, is reported. The data provides important insights into the challenges and potential of sport-focused initiatives that are directed towards social and educational agendas, and specifically, the life experiences and 'life chances' of young people who are deemed to be 'at risk'. Developments are described that are fundamentally concerned to both extend and shape the life choices that students make on and beyond the sports field, school grounds and their school years. Data from staff and students points to the football program at Clontarf having a significant impact upon the social and physical development of students, and their current and prospective future lifestyles. Although focusing on a Specialist Sports School, the case study raises many issues relevant to non-specialist schools. The data presented supports the case for investment in clearly focused physical education and school sport programs, and accompanying longitudinal research capable of tracking addressing the long term impact of participation in initiatives such as the football program at Clontarf.

## 1. Introduction

A recent joint statement issued by the Australian Prime Minister and the federal government Minister for Education, Science and Training (Howard & Nelson, 2004) highlighted agendas for education in Australia that may well seem familiar to international readers. The statement identified priorities directly relevant to this case study:

- There is a high level of public concern about the **disengagement of boys** from education and their lower levels of achievement...the evidence is overwhelming that boys are falling behind in our education system.... The Australian government is strengthening its commitment to boys' education, providing a further \$19.4 million towards a new initiative – *Success for Boys*. This initiative 'will provide grants of \$10,000 to up to 1,600 government and non-government schools to implement proven initiatives to improve the education of boys – especially in *role modelling and literacy*'

(Howard & Nelson, 2004: 4, our emphasis)

- Although educational outcomes for **Indigenous students** are better than ever, they still lag well behind those of non-Indigenous Australians. Over the next four years the Australian government will invest \$2.1 billion in Indigenous specific education programs...Funding has been refocused around programs that have demonstrably improved educational outcomes.

(Howard & Nelson, 2004: 5, our emphasis)

- The **transition from school to career** is a significant milestone. We want all young people to have a clear understanding of their career options once they leave school. The Australian government will spend more than \$214 million on career, transition and partnership programmes over the next four years assisting young Australians to gain a range of experience in different vocations and access to professional careers guidance throughout their secondary schooling.

(Howard & Nelson, 2004: 5, our emphasis)

These priorities are at the core of our case study, which was specifically designed to explore the impact of physical education and school sport in relation to the social and lifestyle domains of development.

Notably, the statement from Howard and Nelson also highlighted that schools and physical education teachers in Australia face the challenge of identifying and evidencing what can be achieved through physical education and sport in schools, in terms of students' learning and lives. This report presents such evidence from a Specialist Sports School in Western Australia.

## 2. The Case Study: A Specialist Sports School

Our focus is on a Specialist Sports School, a 'label' that needs clarification. Internationally, Specialist Sports Schools have been developed in different ways, with various intended outcomes in mind. Arguably, they have reflected broader tensions and some confusion in relation to the expectations of what will be achieved in and through involvement in physical education and school sport. Invariably, they appear to have been established as sites of many 'hopes and dreams' – political, educational, sporting, social. They are what might be termed notably 'crowded policy spaces' (Houlihan, 2000). Although priorities have differed, developments have repeatedly sought to combine sport development and educational agendas. For example, in Finland specialist status has been linked to provision for talented young athletes and directed towards development of international sporting excellence. Elite sport training represents 'an integral and respected part of the curriculum, pursued within school hours' (Thomson & Fairweather, 1999: 11) and is provided by sports coaches. Yet Thomson and Fairweather (1999) also identified accompanying academic expectations and intended pathways to academic and/or vocational careers. More recently, Sports Colleges have rapidly grown in numbers in England, under the umbrella of the Specialist School programme<sup>1</sup>. Once again, educational agendas (particularly, the raising of standards in teaching and learning across the whole curriculum) have been accompanied by sport development agendas (DfES, 2003; DCMS, 2001; YST, 2002, Penney, 2004).

In Western Australia (WA), Specialist Sport Schools (SSSs) are not a new development, but neither are they part of a sharply focused initiative. Dating back to 1988, SSSs have a history of a focus on (or association with) a specific sport. In WA it is notable, however, that one of the parameters set for specialist developments was that 'the special programme must not weaken the mainstream curriculum programme in the school' (Goddard, 1995: 32). Development has been a school-driven, rather than a government / system-led initiative, giving rise to a situation that in 1995 Goddard identified as characterised by 'confused rationales of social, economic and political derivations' (p.7). In his view, 'until the rationales behind the programmes are clarified and understood, outcomes for the schools, and for sport, will remain vague' (p.7).

It is against this backdrop and emphasis of a need for clarity in purpose and focus that we embarked upon research that is exploring the outcomes being pursued and achieved at **Clontarf Aboriginal College and Football Academy**. This case is significant in establishing clear priorities in relation to the provision of new sporting opportunities at school. Further, the choice of Australian Rules Football as the sporting specialism has not been arbitrary.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Specialist Schools website:

[http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/specialistschools/what\\_are/?version=1](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/specialistschools/what_are/?version=1)



The choice relates directly to the social, cultural and educational agendas that are being pursued at the College. As we explain below, Australian Rules Football is regarded as having perhaps unique potential to counter the negative social trends that are in danger of becoming lived realities for the students that Clontarf seeks to attract and retain. Data from documentary research, questionnaire surveys of staff and students from the academy and interviews conducted with staff in 2004 is used in reporting developments and achievements since the Football Academy was established on site at Clontarf Aboriginal College in January 2000.

### 3. The College and the Football Academy

Clontarf Aboriginal College is a college run by the Catholic Education Office, for students in years 10-12 of schooling, aged 15-18 years of age. It has an explicit community orientation. The College is viewed as a community and simultaneously, seeks to connect with communities. Specifically, the focus is on enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians 'to access opportunities for spiritual, educational, cultural and social renewal that will enhance their future lives' (CAC, 2003: 4). The student handbook emphasises that

At Clontarf, Aboriginal people have access to opportunities to develop vocational and other life skills...We foster a climate of justice among staff, students and community. Through mutual respect and a caring environment we support our students as they develop responsibility and grow towards their full potential at Clontarf.

(CAC, 2003: 4)

Very clear intentions are set out for the College and the students choosing to enrol:

*At Clontarf we seek to enable all who attend to leave with:*

- Enhanced self-esteem;
- Pride in their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures;
- Pride in their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Identity;
- The skills to positively contribute to and participate in their local and wider communities.

(CAC, 2003: 4)

*Clontarf Aboriginal College is for young people who want to:*

- Get back to learning again;
- Come to a place where they can learn at their own level and own pace;
- Prepare for more study;
- Prepare for employment;
- Come to a place where they feel at home among their own people and can celebrate their culture and Aboriginal Spirituality;
- Achieve success through education, music, art and sport.

(CAC, 2003: 5)

This clarity of focus and purpose is equally evident in the documentation that introduces the **Clontarf Football Academy**, which is run by the Clontarf Foundation working in partnership with (but remaining independent from) the college. The Foundation is a 'not for profit' organisation incorporated in Western Australia with the explicit aims 'to help improve the health, employment, education and life skills of Australia's teenaged male indigenous population (Clontarf Foundation, 2004).

### ***Mission***

The Clontarf Football Academy exists to improve the discipline, life skills and self-esteem of young Aboriginal men and by doing so equip them to participate more meaningfully in society. The Academy achieves this through the medium of its Australian Rules Football coaching program in partnership with Clontarf Aboriginal College which caters for the specific educational needs of participants.

(Clontarf Foundation, n.d.)

### ***Intended student outcomes***

- Attend school regularly;
- Re-enter education after prolonged absences;
- Enhanced self-esteem and self-concept;
- Healthy lifestyle decisions;
- Set goals and persevere to achieve them;
- Improved academic results;
- Enhanced employment opportunities;
- Participation in the reconciliation process;
- Development of football skills and training habits.

(Clontarf Foundation, n.d.)

The Football Academy was established in 1999 by Gerard Neesham, an experienced football player and coach, with the specific aim of making a difference to the lives of young Aboriginal men. It became operational on-site at Clontarf Aboriginal College in January 2000. The Academy staff, many of whom are ex-AFL players<sup>2</sup>, act as mentors and trainers to students, not just in relation to the development of their football skills. They are life skills / lifestyle coaches as well as football coaches, encouraging the development of skills, attitudes and behaviours that will make a difference in students' lives beyond school. They provide significant personal support to students and endeavour

---

<sup>2</sup> 4 of the 6 Academy staff are ex-AFL players; 2 of the 6 are indigenous, 4 are non-indigenous.

to get to know, understand and develop them as individual young people. The status and identity of the staff as ex-AFL players is vital here in providing the 'point of connection' and giving them credibility amongst the students, but so too is the extent to which the staff can relate to the backgrounds and life circumstances of the students and share in the vision of the Foundation. The students are thus far more than merely football players and the academy is about far more than football. Football is the medium and vehicle being used to attempt to reverse an anticipated downward spiral that may otherwise come to characterise many students' lives; of non-attendance, lack of qualifications, skills and experience for employment, increased risks of developing unhealthy lifestyles, lacking regular physical exercise, having a poor diet, using drugs and becoming involved in crime. The program at the Academy is therefore specifically designed to achieve:

- healthy lifestyles;
- enhanced self-esteem;
- sustained educational attendance and achievement (through to completion of year 12);
- post-school employment;
- life-skills and leadership;

as well as the development of football skills.

In the program, importance is therefore attached to:

- 'shared ownership' of the program;
- a celebration of success;
- the maintenance of a supportive environment (amongst students and between staff and students);
- staff-student-family relationships;
- the value of participation and retention in the college education program, and post-school employment.

Achievements in all of these respects are celebrated and actively promoted within the College and via the media. Particular emphasis is placed upon the development of self-discipline, behaviour management and inter-personal skills. As indicated above, mentoring is a key strategy for achieving these outcomes. This reflects the concern that the students will develop life skills and have changed life opportunities as a result of their time at the Academy.

The Academy and college are committed to supporting students into employment, with a specialist employment officer helping with job searching and offering support post-employment.

The Foundation, in partnership with the host school, sponsors and local community, works with students to develop pathways to employment. Students need to demonstrate through their attitude and commitment to education and football that they are 'work ready'. We will then assist students and graduate to gain part-time and full-time employment.

(CAC, n.d.)

A member of staff at the Academy explained these hopes and the support provided, saying that

... if they come in here...in year 10, they stay 'til the end of year 12, they spend 120 weeks with us and at the end of that 120 weeks you'd hope those kids are able to communicate confidently, are able to go into a range of social settings and feel confident and able to participate, have the confidence to go and get a job and stick it out, have the punctuality skills and attendance skills, those general skills that we get normally but a lot of these kids don't have. They get a work ethic and when they leave here, they get support in the initial years, so when they leave at 17 that's not the end of it. We're actually still working with kids at 18, 19, 20...I still go out to work placements...

(Staff Interview C, 2004)

Any boy who is enrolled at the College can be part of the program. Joining the program means accepting specific expectations and making a dual commitment; 'To retain their position in the Football Academy participants need to show commitment towards training and the education program' (CFA, n.d.).

#### **4. Football at Clontarf: Developing students and developing lives through sport**

The Academy was formed as a result of observations that involvement in football could have a positive impact on behaviour amongst Aboriginal students and a view that it could succeed in attracting students to school, and keep them at school. Australian Rules Football is regarded as seemingly unique in its potential to 'buck' the negative realities that students face – that as Indigenous people living in modern Australia, statistics tell them that they are destined to die earlier, become sick more often and are less likely to have a job than fellow Australian residents (Clontarf Foundation, 2004). The Foundation's 2004 Memorandum explains that:

Methods are based on the premise that many Aboriginal youths fail to experience achievement in their formative years and hence lack self-esteem. This coupled with a position of under privilege often leads to alienation, anger, a feeling of hopelessness and worse. In order to break this downward spiral and as a prelude to tackling issues such as education, employment and lifestyle the Foundation provides an opportunity for them to succeed using Australian Rules Football as the vehicle.

(p.4)

The Clontarf Football Academy program has **six areas of focus**:

1. Healthy lifestyles
2. Education
3. Employment
4. Life Skills
5. Football Skills
6. Leadership

These focus areas are designed to facilitate the realisation of the Academy's goals for students. Planning documents describe Outcomes, Strategies, Activities, Resources and Monitoring details for the six focus areas. When outcomes are targeted and who is responsible for their achievement is also detailed. The promotion/achievement of these outcomes, and associated Overarching Outcomes (1, 5-13) of the Western Australian Curriculum Framework<sup>3</sup>, are supported in a range of contexts:

**Instructional Football:** All year 10 students participate in an instructional one-hour session four days per week.

**Football Training and Breakfast:** All students (years 10-12) participate in an early morning/before school training (one hour) and breakfast program three mornings per week. (Monday, Wednesday, Friday)

**Coaching:** All students participate in two designated coaching sessions on Mondays (after school) and Thursdays (afternoon) (each session lasts for approximately 2 hours).

**Drop-in Pastoral Care:** Staff are available during lunch and recess times to chat, counsel, advise and work with students who drop-in to the Academy's offices, classrooms and meeting rooms.

**School Games and Competitions:** Students participate in a range of Academy-organised competitions on Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons, the Associated and Catholic Colleges sporting competition, and on Saturday mornings play against PSA (Private Schools Association) schools.

**Community Competition:** Students play with a community-based club or for the local Mossman Park Colts team on Saturday mornings.

**Other Games and Competitions:** Students participate in a range of practices matches against WAFL (Western Australia Football League) Club development squads (15's and 16's). in September and October and February and March. Students attend carnivals in metropolitan and regional centres during the football season and participate in interstate games at least once each year.

**Leadership:** Students engage a range of recreational activities (eg. Bowling) on Friday evenings with a focus on developing leadership skills.

---

<sup>3</sup> The Western Australian Curriculum Framework has 13 'overarching outcomes', identified as outcomes that 'all students need to attain in order to become lifelong learners, achieve their potential in their personal and working lives and play an active part in civic and economic life. These outcomes apply across all learning areas and are the responsibility of all teachers' (Curriculum Council, 1998: 20). A complete list of the overarching outcomes appears in Appendix 1.

## 5. Football at Clontarf: Making a difference?

Data relating to enrolment, average length of stay at the school, re-enrolment for a subsequent academic year and completion of the school year, all point towards the academy 'making a difference' to the College, to students' engagement in education and to their achievement prospects. The data presented below is acknowledged as in need of extension and the onus is on the college and academy to demonstrate the measurable differences that they are making. From the data currently available, there is a firm indication of positive initial outcomes following the establishment and early years of operation of the Academy.

### **Students completing the year:**

1998: 22.5% (of 54) 1999: 33.9% (of 56) 2000: 45.5% (of 74) 2001: 66.1% (of 168)

### **% Re-enrolment at the college:**

1998: 41.2% 1999: 51% 2000: 51.6% 2001: 59.4%

In 2002, 178 students were enrolled at the College, an attendance rate of 80% achieved, with an average retention of 38.5 weeks over the year and average length of stay at the College of 80 weeks. This compares starkly and very positively to the pre-2000 figures of 54 students at the college, achieving an 60% attendance rate, having an average retention of 12-18 weeks over the year and an average length of stay at the college of just 15 weeks.

### **Enrolment in the academy:**

2000: 25; 2001: 80; 2002: 78; 2003: 79

### **% Re-enrolled in the Academy:**

2001: 68%; 2002: 66%

Interviews with staff reaffirmed the success of the Academy in attracting more students to the college and perhaps more importantly, meaning that they stay in education for longer.

...the outcomes were pretty immediate in terms of getting new enrolments, attendance became much better. Prior to this program kids stayed for an average of 15 weeks, they now stay for an average of 37 weeks a year. We've got a lot of kids who've...will have done 120 weeks by the end of this year...I worked in Aboriginal education for over 10 years and despite everyone's best efforts, good resourcing, good programs, I never saw the sort of progress that we were wanting in our schools and when I came here I could immediately see the outcomes being achieved...attendance, retention, self-esteem, life-skills, all those sorts of things...

[region name] kids in particular used to last a term, go home and not get back on the plane that's supposed to bring them back, but they're now staying for the duration...prior to the football program starting in the previous seven years there were no year 12 graduates, no year 12 boys that graduates from this college...

(Staff interview B, 2004)

This member of staff went on to explain that over the last two years the Academy has helped 25 students to gain employment and that 90% of those are still working. Of 17 Academy participants in the College 2002 leavers, 13 gained full-time employment in 2003.

Yet there is also acknowledgement that while year 12 graduation should be seen as a tremendous achievement, it also needs to be recognised as an achievement that will never be realistic for all of the students.

I think the statistics show that by the time a lot of them get here they've missed a third of their schooling. We've got the philosophy that getting the year 12 graduation certificate is fantastic but it's not for everyone. We want them to graduate with a year 12 certificate because that has a whole range of advantages but not all of them are going to achieve that.

(Staff interview B, 2004)

A questionnaire survey of the six Academy staff provided further detail of the outcomes being achieved through the football programs. In the Table 1 below, 😊😊 indicates a member of staff *strongly agreeing* with the statements about students' experiences / achievements. 😊 indicates a member of staff *agreeing*. ☹ indicates 'disagree' and ☹☹ indicates *strongly disagree* as a response. (A four point scale was used. --- indicates no response. n = 6)

**Table 1: Questionnaire data from staff**

<i>Students...</i>	☺☺	☺	--	☹	☹☹
learn advanced football skills	5		1		
enjoy inter-school competitions	5			1	
enjoy community competition	6				
develop good self-management / time-management		4		2	
improve their diet		4		2	
enjoy fitness training	1	4		1	
have good school attendance	3	3			
make good academic progress	3	1	1	1	
highly value Aboriginal culture	2	2	1	1	
will get a job when they leave Clontarf	3	2	1		
improve their communication skills at Clontarf	2	4			
improve their independence at Clontarf	2	3		1	
<i>Staff are pleased with student participation in...</i>					
school competitions	3	3			
community competitions	4	2			
academic school work	1	3	1	1	
<i>Staff are satisfied with student performance / achievement in ...</i>					
personal skills	2	4			
communication skills	2	4			
attendance	3	2		1	
fitness skills	1	4		1	

In any developments of this nature, however, the 'real test' is arguably what the students say and do. As indicated above, the very fact that students are attending the Academy and College needs to be acknowledged as a significant achievement in itself. Questionnaire data gathered from 43 students<sup>4</sup> at the Academy adds significant weight to the view that football can provide a means of developing important life skills and improving the outlook that the students have of their life chances and potential achievements.

The students surveyed ranged in age from 14-18 years, and had been at Clontarf for between 1 and 7 terms. 9 (21%) of the students lived with their families and 34 (79%) lived in a hostel. The students were asked a series of questions that required a response on a four point scale, *strongly agree-agree-disagree-strongly disagree*. Table 2 documents the spread of responses received (n=43).

<sup>4</sup> The student sample comprises students for whom consent for participation in the research was received from parents/guardians. Occasional variation in the response total for a question reflects instances of no response or an unreadable response to individual questions. In all instances percentage figures use n=43 and are given to the nearest whole per cent figure.



**Table 2: Questionnaire data from students**

	😊😊	😊	😞	😞😞
I have a good school attendance record at Clontarf	26 (60%)	15 (35%)	1 (2%)	
I am making good academic progress at Clontarf	10 (23%)	30 (70%)	2 (5%)	
I highly value Aboriginal culture	30 (70%)	13 (30%)		
I have improved my diet since being at Clontarf	8 (19%)	24 (56%)	9 (21%)	
I have good personal hygiene	16 (37%)	24 (56%)	2 (5%)	
I will get a job when I leave Clontarf	24 (56%)	18 (42%)		
The Clontarf program has improved my independence	17 (40%)	23 (53%)	1 (2%)	
The Clontarf program has improved my self-management skills e.g. Time management	12 (28%)	27 (63%)	3 (7%)	
The Clontarf program has improved my life skills eg communicating with others	19 (44%)	18 (42%)	5 (12%)	
The Clontarf program has improved my football	21 (49%)	17 (40%)	3 (7%)	1 (2%)
The Clontarf program will help me get a job	17 (40%)	19 (44%)	3 (7%)	

## 6. Developing Sport

As emphasised throughout, football is the vehicle for pursuing educationally oriented outcomes. But development of football skills and enhanced student involvement in football remain important parallel concerns. In relation to these concerns, it is appropriate to begin by dispelling something of a myth:

...everyone thinks that Aboriginal kids play community sport. Well the fact is they don't. Five per cent of Aboriginal kids of age to play Auskick in [region name] play. The rest don't play because no-one takes them... no-one takes them, no-one buys them a uniform, no-one pays their fees...

(Staff interview C, 2004)

The Academy is therefore proud to be able to report progress since 2000 in terms of:

- Increased enrolment in the Academy;
- High average attendance of training sessions;
- High re-enrolment to the Academy;
- Increased number of games played by college teams;
- High percentages of games won;

- Increased percentage of students involved in community football – including some students attaining Western Australian Football League, Colts and State representation.

Impressively, the percentage of students involved in community football advanced from 60% in 2000; to 100% for 2001 and 2002. Once again, questionnaire data from students provides important support for the Foundation's own records. Amongst the 43 students completing a questionnaire, there had been extensive involvement in football in school PE/Sport, school team and community contexts during the past year.

**Table 3: Participation in football**

<b>Students playing football...</b>	<b>(n=43)</b>
At school for PE/sport	26 (60%)
For the school team against other schools	26 (60%)
In a community club team	30 (70%)
In state / district representative team	7 (16%)
Students who have been a field umpire	18 (42%)

One of the staff highlighted that achieving this level of involvement may be far from easy given many students' home and family circumstances. He drew attention to economic and institutional barriers to participation, explaining that:

Quite often they don't engage or attach themselves to community football because ...they got to buy a pair of boots, got to find 50 bucks to become a member, you've got to have someone who'll get you out of bed on a Sunday morning to take you, the person's got to have a car to travel around...

(Staff interview B, 2004)

Another member of staff captured the harsh realities of some of the students' home lives, saying that:

I have had kids who go home, family would come from other areas, lob in their house, parties, cards all night, nowhere to sleep, nowhere to do homework, clothes not getting washed, not getting a decent feed.

(Staff interview C, 2004)

The Academy staff also highlighted an important achievement not reflected in the bullet points above:

Quite often when they come to us they're...many of them are pretty undisciplined in terms of on-field behaviour and in terms of playing a team-orientated brand of football and that's one thing that we really focus on

strongly, both of those things...that there is no intimidatory behaviour on the field, there's no back-chatting umpires, there's no fighting ...and we deliberately develop a team-orientated style of football. In the four years that I've been here we've had two players sent off ...

(Staff interview B, 2004)

The environment is a safe environment for them to come to so it's not something that is scary, that's negative, where they struggle to get results. There are football outcomes mainly but there are mental health outcomes, there's self-esteem and that's a really big outcome. So with their self-esteem in place they can do the education that is presented to them in a confident manner.

(Staff interview G, 2004)

The questionnaire responses from students reaffirmed their enjoyment of football, the associated fitness training, desire and aspirations to continue in the game.

**Table 4: Enjoyment of football**

	😊😊	😊	😞	😞😞
I enjoy playing football	29 (67%)	13 (30%)		
I want to play AFL/WAFL football	22 (51%)	15 (35%)	4 (9%)	
I enjoy the fitness testing at Clontarf	19 (44%)	19 (44%)	4 (9%)	
I enjoy the fitness training at my club / community team	19 (44%)	20 (47%)	2 (5%)	1 (2%)

Looking ahead to next year, students were generally keen to play in school team and/or community club football.

**Table 5: Plans for continued participation in football**

Next year students would like to play football...	(n=43)
For a community club	31 (72%)
For a school team	37 (86%)
Both community club and school team	26 (60%)

## 7. Extending Impact

Data arising from two items in the staff questionnaire drew particular attention to issues that present ongoing challenges for the Academy.

All six of the staff strongly agreed that the Academy football program should be **integrated across the curriculum**. Achieving enhanced linkages between learning on the football oval and the academic curriculum at the college is clearly important if the potential of football as a vehicle for learning is to be fully realised. Formalising linkages across curriculum areas and between staff in high school settings is not easy and demands time in discussions and collaborative planning. These challenges are far from unique to Clontarf or specialist sport schools. It was interesting to note, however, that one of the staff saw the mainstream curriculum as a significant barrier to educational engagement and achievement on the part of these students:

...a curriculum and design that hasn't fitted these kids so when we've actually reengaged all these kids in partnership with the school then put over then the same curriculum and the same style and the same system so it's taken a while for us to convince the educators that there's quite a different way to do it and that's the biggest inhibiting factor, is you know having an old, old system that's been so successful for most people but seriously unsuccessful for this group...

(Staff interview G, 2004)

Another member of staff reaffirmed the importance of 'looking at the curriculum and how we can develop the curriculum so that it better meets the needs of the kids, engages the kids' in the way that the 'footie' program appears to be doing:

...it gets them in, it gives them confidence, it gets them into an...education setting that is non-threatening, non-judgemental where they can develop some skills and once you get them in there and you develop some of those skills then you can start to work on life skills, the employment skills, the academic skills...

(Staff interview C, 2004)

Another member of staff reflected that **age of intake** may be another significant issue in relation to the achievements possible at Clontarf:

I don't reckon we get enough time with them and I reckon we get them at an age where they possibly could be a little bit old...

(Staff interview A, 2004)

Responses from all of the staff indicated that perhaps the greatest challenges came in seeking to make **positive connections between football and family and home-life**. Many of the students at Clontarf are not local and distance is therefore a very pragmatic barrier for many. 'Home' (including extended family home) situations clearly raise issues for the students and staff at Clontarf that highlight both the scale of the challenges faced, but also of the achievements reported.

...when I've picked certain people up in the morning and seen where they've come from and their living arrangements at home and that had a really big impact on me and made me realise how important our jobs are and the program here because without it I would seriously worry about some of them ...actually come out of that environment and then into this warm friendly environment where they can have sort of male interaction that isn't as critical or judgemental on them...

(Staff interview A, 2004)

Another member of staff provided a reminder that:

...a lot of the kids who come here have huge gaps in their education...heaps of non-attendance, times where due to family issues they get out of school, a lack of a supportive environment in the home, nowhere to do your homework, no resources to do your homework...

(Staff interview C, 2004)

On a pragmatic note a colleague commented that transport was a major problem for many students. He added:

If we could hostel more of the students we'd get better outcomes with them 'cause we've consistently got them here and then we can impact on them but if they are sitting at home we can't...

(Staff interview A, 2004)

Another member of staff reaffirmed once again that actually having students attend the college was an achievement not to be underestimated in many instances. He explained:

I picked a fellow up from his home for a month or two...he started catching the bus with everybody else and then started enjoying coming here...you can see improvement by him getting up and catching his own bus to school...

(Staff interview D, 2004)

There was also a timely reminder of the type of downward 'spiral' that remains a risk for students:

...one of the real problems that we have is kids wanting to come to school but not having the dough to come but they get the train anyway then they get a \$50 fine on the train and then that prevents them from getting a licence and the fine grows from 50 to 70 when they don't pay it and from 70 to...

(Staff interview B, 2004)

Encouragingly, the questionnaire data from students indicated that the majority of those responding felt that they had support from parents/guardians for their participation in football. 24 (56%) indicated that they strongly agreed that their parents / guardian supported them playing football, 15 (35%) agreed, and 2 (5%) disagreed. As shown in Table 2, the students also all either strongly agreed or agreed that they highly valued Aboriginal culture and have a positive outlook in relation to their potential to enter employment from Clontarf. The student data is thus encouraging in relation to the social and lifestyle goals of the Academy.

...what we're trying to do is raise the bar, to lift their vision a little bit so they see yeah, I can get a job, I can own a house, I can be successful, I can be a leader in the Aboriginal community, all those sorts of things...

(Staff interview C, 2004)

Increasingly, there are instances in which the social and personal advances made by students and their enhanced visions of what they might achieve, are becoming evident in what they are doing. Senior members of the Football Academy are now conducting football clinics at other schools. They are becoming role models within the College and beyond it and undoubtedly, have a significant part to play in extending the impact of the Academy.

## **8. Conclusion: Progress and prospects**

The preceding section has identified major development challenges for the Academy, the College, its students and wider community. All have a part to play in the pursuit of new opportunities and better futures for these young people. At Clontarf, sport, and specifically, football, is being used to great effect in this endeavour. The initial success and growth in interest in the programme has prompted expansion to two new locations within Western Australia, Kalgoorlie and most recently, Geraldton. The data from both staff and students at Clontarf has reaffirmed very significant achievements thus far, while also identifying areas to target in ongoing development work. How to utilise the 'engaging potential' of football to significantly advance students' progress in learning across the curriculum, and how to ensure that the social and lifestyle outcomes achieved while at the Academy are sustained, are arguably key challenges for all stakeholders to now focus attention upon.

Finally, it is appropriate to note that while this case study has focused on what may appear to be a very unique school, striving to address the educational

needs of a very unique group of young people, in many respects it draws attention to issues for all schools and all communities. Clontarf is not alone in having to make decisions about how best to utilise sport in endeavouring to enhance students' current and future lives. The focus and clarity in the outcomes being pursued at the Academy is arguably all too rare in physical education and school sport, and to be applauded. Undoubtedly, the story thus far is encouraging but incomplete. There is a need for close and continued monitoring of developments in the years ahead. The observation from the 'Sporting Future for All' Implementation group in England has international applicability and is particularly relevant to this case study:

...research should be undertaken to support the claims that sport makes a significant contribution to social inclusion, health, crime-reduction, neighbourhood renewal and other cross-cutting agendas.

(*'A Sporting future for All'* Implementation Group, 2000)

It is therefore encouraging that the research reported here is ongoing<sup>5</sup>.

---

<sup>5</sup> Funding support from Kurungkurl Katitjin, the School of Indigenous Australian Studies at Edith Cowan University is gratefully acknowledged as enabling the continuation of the research.

## References

- A Sporting Future For All* Implementation Group (2000). *A Sporting Future for All: Action Plan. Report to DCMS & DFEE*, London: DCMS.
- Clontarf Aboriginal College (2003). *Learning for Life. Student Handbook*, 2003. Perth, WA: Clontarf Aboriginal College.
- Clontarf Foundation (n.d.). *From Little Things Big things Grow*. Information leaflet. Western Australia: The Clontarf Foundation.
- Clontarf Foundation (2004) Information Memorandum 2004. Western Australia: The Clontarf Foundation.
- Curriculum Council (1998) *The Curriculum Framework for Kindergarten to Year 12 in Western Australia*. Perth, W.A. : The Curriculum Council.
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) (2001). *A Sporting Future for All. The Government's Plan for Sport*, London: DCMS.
- Department for Education and Skills (2003). *A New Specialist System: Transforming Secondary Education*, London: DfES.
- Goddard,D. (1995). *Specialist Sport Programs in Western Australian Schools*. Perth, WA: Ministry of Sport & Recreation.
- Howard,J. & Nelson,B. (2004). The Australian Government's Agenda for Schools. Achievement through choice and opportunity. DEST *Media Release*, 28/04/06.
- Houlihan, B. (2000). 'Sporting Excellence, schools and sports development: The politics of crowded policy spaces', *European Physical Education Review* 6 (2), 171-193.
- Penney,D. (2004). Policy tensions being played out in practice. The Specialist Schools initiative in England. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 2, 1; <<http://www.jceps.com/?pageID=article&articleID=26>>
- Thompson,I. & Fairweather, D. (1999). Sports Schools in Finland. Report of a Study Visit, September, 1999. Edinburgh: sportscotland.
- Youth Sport Trust (2002). *Best practice in Sports Colleges. A Guide to school improvement*, Loughborough, U.K.: YST.



## APPENDIX 1

### THE WESTERN AUSTRALIA CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK OVERARCHING OUTCOMES

1. Students use language to understand, develop and communicate ideas and information and interact with others.
2. Students select, integrate and apply numerical and spatial concepts and techniques.
3. Students recognise when and what information is needed, locate and obtain it from a range of sources and evaluate, use and share it with others.
4. Students select, use and adapt technologies.
5. Students describe and reason about patterns, structures and relationships in order to understand, interpret, justify and make predictions.
6. Students visualise consequences, think laterally, recognise opportunity and potential and are prepared to test options.
7. Students understand and appreciate the physical, biological and technological world and have the knowledge and skills to make decisions in relation to it.
8. Students understand their cultural, geographic and historical contexts and have the knowledge, skills and values necessary for active participation in life in Australia.
9. Students interact with people and cultures other than their own and are equipped to contribute to the global community.
10. Students participate in creative activity of their own and understand and engage with the artistic, cultural and intellectual work of others.
11. Students value and implement practices that promote personal growth and well-being.
12. Students are self-motivated and confident in their approach to learning and are able to work individually and collaboratively.
13. Students recognise that everyone has the right to feel valued and be safe, and, in this regard, understand their rights and obligations and behave responsibly.

<http://www.curriculum.wa.edu.au/pages/framework/framework03e.htm>  
(accessed 24/02/04)



200370

Australian Council for Educational Research Limited  
19 Prospect Hill Road, (Private Bag 55), Camberwell, VIC 3124, Australia  
T +61 3 9277 5555 F +61 3 9277 5500 W [www.acer.edu.au](http://www.acer.edu.au)