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ACROSS AUSTRALIA
FROM TEACHER TO TEACHER

ACTIVITIES IN A SMALL REMOTE SCHOOL



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How can teachers in small remote schools develop a meaningful and attractive program for their pupils and for the Community? How can they help their pupils to develop self-confidence and self-esteem?

In the following article, Mr. Manwarring puts forward a number of very insightful suggestions.

We see our task as providing a better, a more worthwhile and a more meaningful education for the children of Enngonia. The children who attend Enngonia Primary School require specialized teaching, firstly because of their isolation - Enngonia is situated sixty-three miles north of Bourke. Some of the children travel long distances to the school over rough roads from outlying stations in the district. The majority of the children come from the Aboriginal Reserve and enjoy none of the conveniences of modern living such as electricity, adequate furnishings or, indeed, the books, toys and equipment that form the basis of the normal Australian child's pre-school education. Even the homes in the village itself provide little stimulation for the children.

In the past three years we have endeavoured to raise the standards of academic work within the school to an acceptable level so that the children will be employable outside the depressed rural economy of our district should they wish to make this choice themselves on leaving school. However, it is most difficult for adolescents from this isolated district, both Aboriginal and European, to cut off the strong ties with their distinctive way of life and launch into the world outside with any of the self-confidence that is required of them to do so. It is our aim to build this self-confidence by any means possible so that the potential of these children shall not be lost.

Within the village itself there are no community associations such as Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, Church Youth Groups or Junior sports facilities, so that the school is the sole institution of an educational or recreational nature for its children. Films are held in the local hall on certain Saturday nights and in summer European children can enjoy the privately owned swimming pool in the hotel - however, neither of these activities is available to the Aboriginal child.

The school has endeavoured to develop better community relations in the immediate community by holding functions at the school such as concerts, barbeques, films, games nights, art, craft and dancing displays to which all members of the community are invited. Besides the enjoyment involved and the improved image of the school in the eyes of the community, these activities are planned with the more elusive goal of raising the image of self in the eyes of the child, for the majority of the children are extremely withdrawn and place a ridiculously low estimate on their own potential. The past has treated many of these families with disdain and contempt and we feel that it is the role of the school as an institution to ensure that their future is more meaningful and worthwhile. We see the school in this context as having a far greater potential than it is able to fulfill at present. Many activities commenced at school such as vegetable gardening, where the boys grew many of the essential ingredients that are lacking from their diet, have been continued at home where the proud parents showed interest and commenced gardens for their families. At present the older pupils are working with copper and enamelling jewellery and many parents have expressed an interest in taking part in this activity as well, at night.

Naturally, as with any program that aims at social change - no matter how minute that change may be or how carefully and slowly that change is executed - we have many problems to encounter and, we believe, to overcome. The greatest tangible problem is lack of equipment and lack of finance!*

**Additional equipment has been provided through the Directorate of Aboriginal Welfare and the Department of Education.*

We would like to introduce many more activities into our school curriculum and would like the school to play a greater role in community advancement. We have found in the past that, far from detracting from the academic aspect of their education, the introduction of more and varied activities seems to spur both the children and ourselves on to greater achievement on the academic side of the curriculum. These artistic and creative pursuits make school a far more interesting place to be. They make it a place where the qualities that make these children so unique and often so enchanting can be expressed. For many of the children, expression is the aspect in which they are most wanting. However, when provided with the necessary equipment, they are able to discover a means of self-expression which they find most satisfying; and this satisfaction is also expressed in ways that relate positively to all areas of their school and community life.

The establishment of a well equipped library would be of immeasurable use both to the schoolchildren and to the community as a whole. Our present collection of books and pictures is totally inadequate, and the nearest library is situated in Bourke. The library could be established under the present classroom block and could be used for many school and community activities. For children who have been brought up in largely illiterate homes, these children have a surprising and insatiable love of books and pictures. The younger children, especially those first entering kindergarten, need books and equipment at their own developmental level, and pictures do show them the things which older children accept as part of the environment, but which to them are quite foreign.

Because there has been so much interest shown on the part of the Aboriginal parents it is quite feasible to plan in the future for some evening activity in the field of adult education, commencing in the areas of cooking, sewing, mending, craft work, carpentry, gardening and general home repairs. From this basis, improved literacy standards could be developed in the adults if they expressed an interest in doing so, because even now the children of nine or ten are more literate than many of the parents. We feel that this could help the parents in the improvement of their own self-confidence and self-esteem.

A second area could be converted to a Home Science and Sewing area, equipped with stoves, kitchen furniture and sewing machines, where all children, especially the older girls, could

enjoy cooking and allied activities.

A third area could be developed as a woodwork section, where the boys could commence this activity with much enthusiasm and vigour.

The school is soon to be provided with a television set with a videotape attachment. A videotape machine would enable us to tape suitable programs for use at a convenient time. We feel that the discussion of suitable current affairs orientated programs would be most beneficial because, for most of the children, and indeed for most of the community, the world commences at Cunnamulla and reaches only as far as Bourke, Brewarrina and Walgett. The concept that they could become viable members of the greater world outside these narrow confines and become active community members could be fostered and encouraged by these means.

As the establishment of any new craft is its most expensive phase, a fund for this purpose would be most beneficial, as Parents and Citizens support for these activities is restricted owing to other more pressing commitments. The constant provision of materials and equipment for the primary girls' sewing is also a drain on the meagre, hard earned Parents and Citizens funds. Usually six older girls make two or three garments per year, such as slack suits or dresses, and in keeping with our general policy they use quality materials; only the younger and less adept use the cheaper fabrics such as corduroy, with the older girls graduating to the use of more expensive wool and woollen blends as they become more adept.

Proper gardening equipment, such as spades, hoes, rakes, forks, handforks, cultivators and fertilizers would be a tremendous benefit in this field.

Most of this equipment is orientated towards the older children. The younger children require both outdoor and indoor creative play equipment, language development kits, dressing up equipment, toys, blocks and musical instruments such as chime bars, and physical education equipment of the fixed, outdoor variety.

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