



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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THIS IS WEIPA

John Farnham,
Head Teacher,
State School,
Weipa South, Q'ld.

Mr. Farnham describes the setting of one of Queensland's schools for Aboriginal pupils. Would other teachers like to write in descriptions of their settings? As well as being of interest to teachers, such descriptions would, I am sure, stimulate Aboriginal pupils.

GEOGRAPHY

Weipa is isolated from the rest of Queensland. The only land access is a track from Cairns which becomes impassable in the 'wet' season. People arrive in Weipa by air, and materials come by air or sea. The flight of about 360 miles from Cairns passes over dense rain forest and high ranges until the land spreads flatly away towards low-lying shores and mangrove estuaries. The tidal influence of these rivers extends up to thirty miles inland.

Only about 12° below the equator, Weipa has a monsoonal climate with an average of about 67 inches, most of which falls during the four months, December to March. Temperatures range from 21°C to 37°C.

INDUSTRY

"I kept thinking that, if all this was bauxite, then there must be something the matter with it, otherwise it would have been discovered long ago." These words are from the diary of H.J. Evans, geologist, October, 1955. Before Evans, Captain Matthew Flinders had written in 1802, "This land ... is remarkable for having some reddish cliffs and deep water near the shore ..."

Today, Comalco holds long-term contracts for the supply of 222.6 million tons of bauxite between 1971 and 1997, with options that cover a further 264.3 million tons up to the year 2041. Weipa alone is the raw material base for about 15% of world aluminium production, and it now holds the astonishing position of supplying well over 50% of all Japanese bauxite imports under long-term contracts.

TOWN AND SCHOOL

Weipa is situated in one of the most sparsely settled areas in Australia, occupied by a few large cattle stations with some Aboriginal communities near the coast. The nearest of these, virtually forming part of Weipa, is Weipa South. This is only eight miles from Weipa North which is also referred to as Rocky Point. The Aboriginal community has a population of approximately five hundred. One hundred and forty of these attend the Weipa South State Primary School.

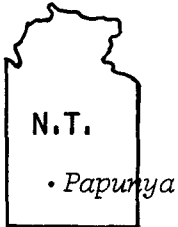
The school has a staff of six teachers who care for the educational needs of the children in six teaching groups based mainly on ability, with consideration being given to age and physical development, as well as peer group relations. The ages of children range from 5 to 13 years. Special efforts were initiated in 1973, with the limited facilities available, to cater for the special needs of the children in the older group. The course we are continuing with this year contains sections on sewing, laundry work, housework, personal hygiene, hair and fingernail care, personal and family relationships, handling of money, budgetting, ironing and some mothercraft. The cooking segment is held up for want of the necessary equipment. A keen interest is being shown in the course by the children.

With the exception of the Principal, all teachers from Weipa South stay in Weipa North, as do the Principal and teachers from Weipa North State Primary School. They have available to them all the facilities provided by the mining company, Comalco. Here the teachers live in three or four bedroom homes built from local brick and equipped with flyscreens, fluorescent lighting and ceiling fans.

Modern facilities at Weipa include a hospital, airconditioned shopping centre, golf course, club rooms, library, tennis courts, swimming pool, motorcycling tracks, picture theatre, bowling

greens, cricket, basketball/volleyball, A.B.C. video television and a modern hotel/motel. In addition there is amply opportunity for boating and rewarding fishing. There is an active Lions Club and a wide variety of committees and organizations for the community minded person.

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THE PAPUNYA SCHOOL PROGRAM

Val Petering,
Papunya School, N.T.

I visited Papunya School in March and found the staff enthusiastic and excited. They are working out a school program so that they can utilize fully, for the children's benefit, the diverse skill and talents of the teachers.

An exciting program is in progress at the Papunya School. This year we had a big changeover in staff, and found, to our joy, that each teacher was trained in, or had developed in, a certain area or was willing to help support our program. So, to utilize all this talent and ability, each teacher teaches their own topic in the afternoons, so that by the end of the week, every class has rotated through the seven-fold system. The children also are keen on these topics, and look forward to them, whilst the teachers enjoy specializing in the area they know. It also gives the teachers an essential knowledge of every child in the school.

The subjects taught are art and craft, Special Training for Deaf children, sports, remedial reading, music, sewing and library.

The children enjoy their art and craft program, where different and new materials are being used in a creative way. This also provides a tremendous opportunity for oral language development.