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at the least cost. We cannot ignore the gains to be achieved in increased interest, relevance, and achievement in all aspects of the school program.

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PROJECT EDUCATION AT DERBY JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL A COURSE FOR ABORIGINAL STUDENTS*



Most Australian states have expressed concern about effective ways in which they can meet the educational needs of Aboriginal adolescents who are not oriented to a formal academic high school program. Western Australia has for some years experimented with one particular approach and I am sure that teachers in other states will find much of interest in the following report.

Project education is a particular method of education designed to assist students who are unable to cope with the traditional classroom instruction. It is used mainly in the education of some Aboriginal children who, by the time they are old enough to attend secondary school, have not progressed beyond Grade 3 or 4 level. The fundamental aim of project education is to improve communication skills through practical activities and this is achieved by involving students in projects outside the classroom. These practical activities are designed to stimulate interest and so provide a motivation for the more formal classroom learning of communication skills.

Boys undertake projects such as vehicle maintenance and driving, rearing poultry, carpentry and farm handyman activities, and the girls take part in projects involving the home, shopping, parentcraft and suchlike.

Students spend part of their time outdoors or in special workshops and cottages doing practical projects and the remainder

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of the time doing more formal school work. Currently, project courses are conducted at a number of schools - Fitzroy Crossing, Onslow and Hall's Creek Primary Schools; Derby, Norseman, Pingelly, Boddington and Mullewa Junior High Schools; and Hedland, Karratha, Carnarvon and Eastern Goldfields Senior High Schools. Although there are certain basic courses followed in these schools, each school is free to introduce projects suited to its own local needs.

BACKGROUND TO PROJECT COURSES

A project course was first introduced at Derby in the early 1960's for Aboriginal boys as a means of developing communication skills through practical work. This proved so successful that the idea was extended later to other centres. The scope of the courses was expanded and courses for girls were introduced. Project education became an established part of our education system and grants were made to provide the special facilities and materials needed for this kind of education.

In the Kimberleys and Pilbara it has been possible to gather selected Aboriginal students (who have experienced difficulty with primary education and who cannot cope with normal secondary schooling) at centres where hostel accommodation is available. This grouping has permitted sufficient numbers of these students to be assembled to justify special classes and the provision of adequate facilities and equipment.

LACK OF EXPERIENCE

Many Aboriginal children are severely handicapped in the school situation because they have not had the range of experience of materials and situations relevant to progress in schools.

Even though primary syllabuses are often modified to cater for these difficulties, there are still some students who cannot adjust to education as we know it. Many of them experience extreme frustration due to their failure in traditional formal learning and this manifests itself in antagonism, apathy and truancy. Also, they tend often to have a deleterious effect on the school work of younger Aboriginal students.

The project courses have been designed to meet the needs and interests of the Aboriginal students who are of secondary school

age but have not progressed beyond Grade 3 or 4 in their development of reading, written communication and calculating skills. Project courses give these children an opportunity to continue the development of their literacy skills in conjunction with outside activities.

The reading development necessary for a student to cope with a basic level Achievement Certificate Course is considered to be about Grade 5 level. For a student who has attained this level of reading development, a decision has to be made as to whether the Project Course or the Achievement Certificate Course caters best for his needs.

Because of the wide range in ability of the students participating in project courses, the needs of each person are taken into account when planning courses. At the conclusion of the course, the students do not have to measure up to any pre-determined standards of attainment in practical or classroom skills. What is expected is that the individual should have benefitted from his participation, even though many of the gains will be intangible. Conditions in different localities also influence the content of any course designed to help students.

The projects undertaken form the basis for all subsequent work done in the school. They provide the motivation for students. In most cases the students like the type of work they do in their projects and by closely linking the outside work with the classroom work, so that the practical activities provide the basis for classroom work, a student's interest is carried over into the classroom. The student now has something within his experience to talk about and write about, and he has reasons for reading and for acquiring basic mathematical skills.

While project courses develop useful skills which assist students to fit into the community, the courses are not designed to provide direct vocational preparation. The practical work skills developed while engaged in projects are but a means to an end. They provide the motivation for further education in language, number, citizenship and personal development of the student. Naturally, the student benefits from the skills and knowledge developed, but more importantly he is given an opportunity to express himself and to develop himself, regardless of the actual standards achieved in the practical work.

PROJECT COURSE AT DERBY

Many students from outback stations attend the Derby Junior High School, and included among these, and among other students at the school, are a number of Aboriginal boys and girls who, because they cannot cope with the normal school work, have been provided with a Project Course.

PROJECTS FOR BOYS

The project workshop is the centre for the boy's activities. This is a large workshop in which most of the project course equipment and supplies are stored and it is where much of the work is done, and the base from which most other outside activities operate.

Efficient management of the workshop is itself one aspect of their work. For example, tools are kept on a shadow board and the boys are instructed in the correct procedures for selection and replacement of tools, and how to keep records of them. The following are some of the other activities undertaken by the boys.

Cement and concrete work. This is a major activity in which the boys cart the sand and metal, learn the correct proportions of material for particular jobs, set up the form work, mix the materials, pour the mix, and apply the topping and finish. Included in this work have been concrete driveways into each bay of the workshop, a concrete cricket pitch and the making of plain bricks and fancy bricks from moulds.

Tank stand. The boys have constructed a stand for a tank from which water is reticulated to the gardens and market garden areas. A windmill is used to pump water to the tank, and the maintenance of the mill is carried out by the boys.

Installing water pipes. The planning, preparation and laying of the water pipe from the tank to the gardens and the fitting of upright sprinklers, was also undertaken by the boys.

Ploughing. The Christmas vacation falls during the 'wet', a time when the grass grows profusely, so one of the first tasks at the commencement of the school year is to plough the grass. This is part of the boys' project course and they are instructed in the use of the project courses' tractor and the rotovator, with the instructor demonstrating ploughing techniques and the safety precautions which must be observed.

Plant nursery. The plant nursery provides a variety of activities, ranging from the building of benches to the planting and care of seedlings, their separation from boxes into individual bags and, finally, the planting of seedlings into the gardens. This project, together with other projects, is worked in conjunction with classroom lessons so that, as far as possible, the students have an understanding between the theoretical considerations and practical applications.

Fencing. This is a very necessary task on stations and the students are taught the fundamentals of this activity by building and repairing fences around the school.

Painting. The boys employ their artistic talents in decorating items for the primary school, as well as in painting fence posts, bins, etc.

Welding. Students are instructed in welding procedures and they employ this skill in constructing various items for other projects, and in carrying out general repairs. For example, they made laying boxes for the poultry project by welding four-gallon drums onto old tubular chair frames.

Car mechanics. The students learn the mechanics of motor vehicles, and of small motors and mowers.

Driver training. Driving instruction is given in the Project Course utility. However, before receiving any practical instruction, the students first learn the driving rules and regulations. Each student keeps a record of his progress.

JOINT PROJECTS

Some projects at the school involve joint participation by boys and girls.

Poultry keeping. The boys are responsible for feeding and watering the fowls, and the girls collect the eggs and place them in cartons ready for use in the homemaking course or ready for sale if they are surplus to requirements. Graphs of daily egg production are kept. Orders are made up and receipts issued for money received for eggs that are sold. Simple forms of book-keeping are maintained by the students. Students are rostered each week for the various duties.

Market garden. While the boys were responsible for the construction of the market garden, and they undertake the digging and watering, the girls assist in the lighter duties. All the students are delighted and greatly encouraged when they see successful results of their work in the garden.

PROJECTS FOR GIRLS

The girls' main project is centered in the model home, a small cottage which is an adaptation of a type of home provided on Reserves. There, the girls receive instruction in many aspects of home management, including the following activities:

Receiving visitors. Preparation of morning teas for visitors or teachers, the reception of visitors and the correct presentation of morning teas.

Cooking. Provision and preparation of essential foods. Primary school children are invited to meals prepared by the girls, and the girls themselves enjoy a family meal while providing for the younger ones.

Cleanliness. The students learn the necessity for cleanliness, not only in food preparation but personal cleanliness as well. The girls help keep the younger children clean and tidy, too, by cutting and cleaning their nails, attending to cuts and sores, and sewing on buttons and mending clothing.

THE SCHOOL CANTEEN

The girls help run the school canteen, which is open at recess and lunch breaks.

- They provide children with fruit, drinks, glucose sweets, and school pens and pencils.
- They make pies, pasties, sausage rolls and bread rolls during their home economics periods and these, too, are sold in their canteen.
- At the close of the canteen, the girls count the takings, record the amount and then complete a bank deposit slip and bank the money. Cheques are made out for goods purchased and simple book-keeping is carried out.

WORK EXPERIENCE

During the final term various businesses and Government departments cooperate with the school to provide opportunities for Third Year students to experience actual work conditions. Students are employed as storemen, telegram messengers, and office workers.

The hospitals, too, have been very helpful, providing both boys and girls with employment. Some girls assist in hospital duties. The girls also receive instruction on baby care and handling.

In this way, both boys and girls are able to experience at first hand some of the opportunities that are available in their areas of ability.

OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT COURSE

A command of the English language is of importance to these students if they are to be integrated into the society. Generally, to be acceptable for employment, the young Aboriginal must be able to speak and comprehend English, have a satisfactory appearance and possess satisfactory social adjustment. Project Course education aims to do just that.

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Extracts from the Diaries of two South Australian teachers of Aboriginal children:

Monday, 11th. February.

The children and I spent quite a bit of time drawing a plan of Oodnadatta on the blackboard. The children although still a little shy to involve themselves actively, showed that they have a good knowledge of what's where.

Thursday, 21st. February.

The children enjoyed working out the people who live in Oodnadatta and their jobs. I was surprised to discover that there are approximately 100 whites and about the same Aboriginal and part-Aboriginal people. Someone had once told me there were about 60 of each, and I hadn't questioned it.

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