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SONGS

Pintapinta (Kookaburra)

Yaltji Mama (Where is Pinkie?)

Tunki, tunki (The Wheels of the Bus)

Docker River by Isaac Yamma of Aeryonga

Pitjantjatjara Song (Docker River Tune.)

Kata Alipiri muti tjina

Kapata balaba mbara ingka (Head, shoulders, knees and toes.)



PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT, ENDEAVOURS TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN MENINGIE AREA SCHOOL AND THE PT.MCLEAY COMMUNITY IN THE PERIOD 1973-4.

Meningie Area School,
S.A.

Meningie Area School, situated on the shores of Lake Albert, 28 miles from Pt. McLeay Aboriginal Settlement and 100 miles from Adelaide, has nearly 400 students (primary and secondary) of whom 50 are Aboriginal students. The majority of the latter travel to school daily by bus from Pt. McLeay.

Following the Project Officer's summary of endeavours to improve home/school communication over the past two years, there is reproduced part of a seminar report.

This residential conference, or seminar, was unique in that possibly for the first time a staff of a bi-cultural school met with both Aboriginal and white parents and representatives of the various administrative and ancillary bodies concerned to discuss mutual problems. The weekend seminar was held at the Raywood In-Service Centre.

At the beginning of 1973 there was a noticeable need for the up-grading of communications between the school and Pt.McLeay.

The principal had occasional contact with the Pt. McLeay community in relation to specific events (e.g. funerals). On rare occasions, parents were contacted when the school behaviour of one of their children warranted such action. Apart from these, the only contact was through the medium of circulars to all parents, and student reports. The parental feedback was almost non-existent.

The development of communications was inhibited by a few factors. Firstly, as Pt. McLeay is thirty miles from Meningie, any visit by a teacher to Pt. McLeay takes at least two hours for a conversation of half an hour. No teacher had the time available, and a principal cannot afford to be away from the school for half a day every week. Traditionally, Pt. McLeay people turn to Tailem Bend and Murray Bridge for their service requirements. Consequently they have little need to visit Meningie, let alone the school.

The appointment of the project assistant in 1973 allowed time for a teacher to visit Pt. McLeay regularly. The first phase in the program was for the project assistant to visit the Pt. McLeay administration centre and answer queries regarding the pre-employment trip to Port Lincoln and later the school camps. Phase two, the visiting of parents in their homes, followed immediately from this. In 1974, the newly appointed student liaison officer took over the weekly home visits after a phasing in period of half a year. Overall, these weekly visits have opened communications with Pt. McLeay considerably. We now know and can contact any parent, and the parents are familiar with some of the staff. I regard these visits as an essential prerequisite for any further development of communications: without them, the parent could not be expected to move into the alien area of the school.

At various times staff members have accompanied the project assistant and student liaison officer to Pt. McLeay. Although a timetable makes such visits difficult, I feel that they have been valuable in that the parents have met more teachers, and teachers no longer regard Pt. McLeay as *unknown territory*.

In May, 1974, several Aboriginal and white parents were invited to live-in at the residential conference for the Meningie Area School staff and parents, held at Raywood on June 7th, 8th and 9th, 1974. A general invitation was extended to all other Aboriginal and white parents to attend any sessions on Saturday. Three Aboriginal parents from Port McLeay attended: one married couple and another mother. Communication with these people has improved considerably.

Invitations have been extended to Aboriginal people on many occasions for a variety of purposes. The welfare club has extended invitations to meetings on several occasions, but has not yet seen a positive response even though several parents have on occasion expressed a willingness to attend. Parents were invited to the Open Night in 1973, and three adults from Pt. McCleay attended. Invitations will again be sent for 1974. Invitations to Speech Night in 1973 brought no response. A few parents have attended Sports Days at the school in the last two years, with one parent accepting a ride to the interschool sports at Coomandook this year.

In July, 1974, the staff of Meningie Area School received an invitation to the celebrations associated with the hand over of Pt. McLeay from the Department for Community Welfare to the Pt. McLeay Council. Three staff members and their wives attended some of the functions.

After the visit of the Minister of Education to Meningie in April, 1974, it was decided to set up a liaison sub-committee of the school council. The aim of this committee was to discuss and arrange functions for the mutual benefit of the Meningie and Pt. McLeay communities. The committee consists of three members of the school council, and three members of the Pt. McLeay Council. They were to meet alternately at each centre. To date the committee has not arranged any functions, although they have discussed several possibilities.

Before this committee was established, the school council had invited the Pt. McLeay Council to nominate one member to join the school council. This was done, and an Aboriginal representative has been appointed to the school council since March 1974. The first nominee resigned in May, and a second nominee was subsequently appointed.

In August 1974, the people of Pt. McLeay were asked to contribute to the Swimming Pool Fund, (the pool to be constructed at Meningie Area School) by conducting a paper drive at Pt. McLeay. Over half a bale of paper was collected.

All of these factors have contributed to the development of communications between the school and Pt. McLeay. Without doubt, they have assisted the school in handling discipline problems. In case of difficulties, the headmaster can and does telephone parents to present the opinion of the school. Thus the parent better understands the position of the school. On occasions now, parents

visit the school to discuss their child's progress, but these occasions are usually restricted to discipline problems and are rarer than we would like.

In general, the situation is looking better. Recently, (September, 1974) the parents of Pt. McLeay were invited to visit the school, see a video-tape of their children at work at Pt. McLeay Primary School, and at Meningie Area School, and stay for afternoon tea. The children of Pt. McLeay Primary School were also invited. The attendance of four mothers, three of whom had never visited the school before, was encouraging.

Concurrent with these developments and in line with departmental policy, we have appointed Aboriginal teacher aides whenever suitable applicants have been available. In the two year period, a total of seven aides have been appointed for varying lengths of time, with never more than three aides at once. Undoubtedly, these appointments have increased communications between the school and Pt. McLeay. All aides so far were living at Pt. McLeay when appointed, and have taken part in the Pt. McLeay community activities. On several occasions, the Pt. McLeay Council has called upon them to present their views on student behaviour at school and on the bus. Thus a less biased picture of school activities has been reaching parents from a source not directly involved in the teaching process. In addition, the aides have been able to provide staff with a better understanding of the Pt. McLeay environment. Unfortunately, several tended to disparage the people of Pt. McLeay, and painted a rather too dismal picture, sometimes to the detriment of Aboriginal students.

The link in communications provided by Aboriginal aides is a valuable one. We would like to find a person willing to take appointment for a longer period of time, and thus expand this link into a more effective chain. Our endeavour will continue undiminished.

I feel that no efforts in the field of parent involvement are wasted. In the long term, it is the sum total of all efforts which brings results. Regardless, the pre-requisite for the involvement of parents is the initial involvement of teachers with the community concerned.

A.M. Nankivell,
Project Assistant,
Meningie Area School
October, 1974.

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS ARISING FROM GROUP DISCUSSION OF THE EIGHT
MAJOR PROBLEMS AT MENINGIE. CAPITAL LETTERS REFER TO THE DIFFERENT GROUPS.

PROBLEM	SYMPTOMS	WHOSE PROBLEM	ACTION
1. Inexperienced staff, high turnover.	A. Discipline troubles, lessons suffer.	C.A.E.	C.A.E.- more teaching, less theory - intern year.
	B. Discipline problems. Approach problems. Poor living conditions. Cultural desert. School reputation.	Staff Community	Courses for staff and community organized by the community.
	C. Unsettled unsure kids because of variable standards among teachers.	C.A.E. Staffing Officer School admin.	C.A.E.- teachers needed, not educated people. School inservice program - staff meetings - conferences. Staff incentives scheme to encourage staff to stay.
	D.	Admin. problem	
	E.	-	
2. Staff unprepared for culture value differences.	A. Student's academic failure. Antagonism between pupils and between teacher and pupil.		Earlier notification of teacher appointments. Inservice conference early in year for whole school staff.
	B. Discipline problems. Lack of trust leading to aggression.	Staff Community	Courses for staff and community organized by the community.
	C., D., E.	-	

NOTES : GROUP A: Primary Teachers. B,C : Secondary Teachers. D: Parents. E: Other Personnel (from various govt. depts.

PROBLEM	SYMPTOMS	WHOSE PROBLEM	ACTION
3. Lack of communication between staff, children and parents	A. Misunderstandings. Lack of co-operation	School	Staff to go out from school. More staff-parent social contacts. Personal contact with parents - meetings and social occasions.
	B. Teacher-parent-student tensions.	School	
	D. Friction between students and staff. Lack of proper understanding of school problems (by parents).	Staff and Parents	Use parents as resource personnel. Staff to make a physical visit to individual parents. Community contact would <i>open doors</i> to staff.
	E. Swearing, aggression against teachers.	Part of the problem is the isolation of Port McLeay.	ADDENDUM: Students to be involved in community.
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4. Curriculum not relevant or methods unsatisfactory.	B. Boredom, disinterest.	School. Education Dept. - resources. - personnel. - buildings. - material aids.	Definite aims of school related to - pupil needs. - parent expectations. - employer requirements. - tertiary institution requirements.
	D. Disinterest, boredom.	Staff	Provision of activities pertinent to our mixed community.

PROBLEM	SYMPTOMS	WHOSE PROBLEM	ACTION
5. Reading Problems.	A. Inability to cope with basic texts. Inability to work by oneself. Disinterest. B. Books beyond understanding, so students <i>turn off</i>.	School Community School	Specialist Teacher - to help student. - to help teacher (regular inservice in school). Full time reading teacher. Wider range of resources. ADDENDUM: Proper training by C.A.E.
6. Lack of self-discipline in students.	B. Students look for opportunities to <i>play up</i>. They rely on external discipline. D. Disinterest	Home Staff Home Environment	Home needs to be made aware of student's behaviour. Proper counselling from teachers + home environment. Student-teacher involvement. ALL students responsible for <i>problem</i> students.
7. Cultural deprivation in Meningie+district.	C. Narrow view of life. Boredom. Minor vandalism. Apathy - lack of involvement.	School - it must accept responsibility, although the community is responsible on the whole.	Continue staff involvement in community clubs etc. Continue provision of films, socials, and also arrange transport to same for Pt. McLeay students. (Change regulations for use of E.D. bus if necessary). Exchange trips with other schools. Longer term trips.

PROBLEM	SYMPTOMS	WHOSE PROBLEM	ACTION
7. (Continued)	D. Lack of appreciation. Narrowness of view.	Staff, Parents, Students.	Provision of Adelaide trips. Groups to visit Meningie. Visits by Aboriginal leaders re Aboriginal culture.
8. Lack of jobs.	C. Lack of direction in students, lack of interest. Rapid exodus from town of successful students. D. Late leavers from school. Social problems. E. No motivation.	Teacher School Community Community	Community involvement (local work projects). Careers Studies. Liaison with Dept. of Labour. <i>Direct</i> experience in employ- ment (not always in Adelaide). The future employment situation in Pt. McLeay seems secure. All key people to get together to work out possibilities. Ask community for support with pre-employment. Teaching to be geared for job opportunities.

NOTES FROM DISCUSSION.

1. Re problem 3. Teacher could work flexible hours so that he has time to communicate with parents at the best time for parents.
2. Re problem 5. A particular person from a school could be released for training as a specialist teacher, and a replacement could be sent for that teacher. However, a specialist teacher of reading would not be directly appointed by the department.
