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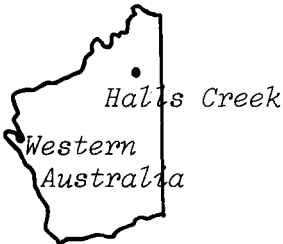
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FROM TEACHER TO TEACHER -

ACROSS AUSTRALIA

A THREE YEAR PROJECT COURSE PROGRAM FOR
LOW-ACHIEVING SECONDARY AGED GIRLS -
HALLS CREEK, WESTERN AUSTRALIA.



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Educationalists over the years have tended to ignore the thought that there could be any need for a 'different' type of educational program for Aborigines. Ian Mitchell, writing in *Aboriginal Education* - "A Teacher's Role", says -

"My superintendents had differing opinions. One said, 'While recognizing your dedication I cannot raise your status when you have not produced results - the children did not know their twelve times table.' Another said, 'You're wasting your time in this type of school.' "

That was back in the late 1950's. By 1967 there had been a dramatic change in attitude towards Aboriginal education, and in that year a conference in Sydney discussed -

"the special difficulties faced by Aboriginal people entering, and already in, our European orientated education system."

By 1971 it was acknowledged by the Western Australian Education Department that -

"In any one year, a total of about 45 students in the Kimberley and about 30 in the Pilbara would be expected to be not obtaining any success, even with

"the modified syllabuses which have been introduced in the primary schools in the area concerned. These students have failed, because of health or other reasons, to make an easy adjustment to education as we know it, and are not adequately prepared to participate in a normal secondary programme."

The question then arose of how to adequately cater for the needs of these children who -

"although they are aged between 13 and 15 years their attainment is generally not beyond Grade 3 level in skills of expression, number and reading."

So the concept of Project Education was evolved. The aim was to keep these children in their natural environment of either the Pilbara or Kimberleys, and in 1973 the Eastern Goldfields area, and yet continue their education, as much as possible outdoors where they were happiest to a degree where they could be gainfully employed.

A most important aim was to make learning interesting for the child who had previously suffered extreme frustrations due to his complete failure in traditional formal learning situations. While he was absorbed in this interesting learning situation he would be developing self-confidence, and then with self-esteem created, he would be able to -

"develop into a good citizen able to be integrated into the Australian community."

To be able to 'fit' into the Australian community and to be employable, an Aboriginal must be able to communicate, so a command and understanding of English and the basics of reading and writing were essential in any education scheme involving students who would enter the Australian work force. District Superintendent Quinn (1971-72)* emphasised the need for language development when he wrote

"A teacher who can help the Aboriginal develop a sound command of English presents him with one of the greatest gifts of his life." (1971)

This program is carried on largely in outdoor situations where the children become much freer in their actions and words. The Project

* Now Acting Director Primary Education, May 1976.

Education Program, too, takes place in largely outdoor situations or in surroundings totally unlike any 'ordinary' school room. In Halls Creek, Derby, Karratha, Hedland and Fitzroy Crossing there is a workshop for the boys, a gemmology shed (Halls Creek) and various projects such as vegetable gardens, poultry runs, and for the girls the 'cottage', all in outdoor situations. Much of the allied school subjects work in Maths, English or Social Studies is done 'on the job', and only a very minimal amount of time is spent inside at all.

The personnel who teach these 'Project' boys and girls are not specially trained for the positions, and come from the Primary Service mainly. In bigger centres such as Port Hedland, the 'Project' students go as a group to different high school teachers for such subjects as Home Economics and Manual Arts, and to the Cottage or Workshop to 'special' instructors at other times. For English, Maths, etcetera they are taught by their 'home' secondary-trained teacher. The 'special' instructors in Hedland are - a trained mechanic employed at the Centre to instruct the boys in car maintenance, welding, etc., and a married woman, often of part-Aboriginal descent, who, in the Cottage instructs and supervises the girls in house cleaning, washing and interior decoration.

However, in Halls Creek, the Centre where I taught, the position is somewhat different, as the Project Course is part of a Primary School, and there are no Home Economics or Manual Arts teachers as such. The boys' Project teacher is a fitter and turner by trade. He has done a one year teacher's course at a training college, and was assisted by the Principal for certain subjects.

As far as the girls are concerned, they were taught by the one teacher - myself - at all times, except when they went to the Cottage. This is a transitional-type Aboriginal house which has been erected in the school grounds, and was supervised by a married woman working to a program which corresponds to the program I followed at our Project 'centre'.

I am a four-year trained teacher (Primary) as well as being a wife, mother and housekeeper. When I entered the field of Project Education in 1973, apart from a Course Outline Book, there were no guidelines to follow, and no pattern of continuity which extended over a one year course, let alone a three year course.

Bearing in mind that the girls entering the Project Course have completely failed and experienced only frustration in a school situation, it seemed vital to me to establish goals to work towards

so that they could feel a sense of achievement. Professor Watts believes that -

"because they (disadvantaged children and Aboriginals are amongst this group) do not feel confident in the school situation, and because the cumulative nature of school learning leads them to expect further failure, in time they come to expect *only* failure."

The first goals would necessarily have to be easy to achieve, and the easiest of all was to give the girls a pride in themselves. These girls felt they had failed hopelessly. The 'others' - the brighter, academic stream girls - had gone to Perth to attend State Secondary High Schools, and to fit themselves out for interesting careers. All that was left for this group to do was stay at school until the first opportunity came to get out to a station. As Professor Watts says -

"They see no relevance to school success in their career aspirations and expectations. They see little connection between school on the one hand and jobs such as stockman, station housegirl or truck driver on the other."

The girls were measured up for uniforms, and our first discussions were conducted under a big tree on the lawn, working out the sort of uniform they wanted - colour, style etcetera. We looked through old magazines and catalogues, and finally the best 'artist' drew a pattern which we sent off to a uniform manufacturer in Perth, with a colour sample (pink) to be matched in a cotton material.

As it was the first week back at school after two months' absence, the lice problem was rife, so we went up to the hospital for instruction on hair treatment and were given some medicine. After doing their own heads, the girls suggested that they should help the Public Health Sisters with the rest of the school. That was the beginning of our personal grooming and community health course.

The uniforms were the answer to many problems of dressing, as the girls came from such a variety of homes that their clothes were a hotch-potch of what they could find in the morning. The exceptions were the Hostel girls who wore a blue uniform and white blouse.

We scrubbed out and painted a long-disused ablution block and provided the girls with a brightly-coloured towel each. So began

the daily shower routine with hot water, which was a luxury after the cold showers on the reserve. They had toilet soap in the shower-room, and on their dressing-tables in our work-room they were provided with deodorant (which I showed them how to use and told them why), sweet-smelling oil for their hands and legs to avoid dry skin cracking, combs and hair-clips. The combs had their own names on them, and their towels, also named, were put on their own name hanger. So began the personal grooming routine, which not only made the girls *feel* good, but they really *looked* good too, and the rest of the school began to regard the hitherto 'dumb ones' as something rather special. They were always neat and clean, they had *hot* water showers, a hair-dresser came and cut their hair and showed them how to set it. They sometimes did very special things, like when they catered for lunch for 100 people in the Shire Hall when the then Governor, Sir Douglas Kendrew and Lady Kendrew came to the town. In the short space of one term we had begun to realize, as Professor Watts put it -

"that many disadvantaged children are 'thing-oriented' rather than 'idea-oriented', that they learn better through physical manipulation and doing, than through abstract language."

The foregoing is a brief description of how the girls project group in Halls Creek became an integrated, interested and finally a vocal part of the school population. Before outlining the three year course on which we have embarked, it is interesting to note that at the beginning of 1973 the girls chronological ages ranged from 12+ to 15+, and their reading ages from -5 years to 10+ years.

PROGRAM OUTLINE

I think the overall effect of the program is better seen using a thematic approach. I have therefore set out the Project Course subjects first, followed by the curriculum subjects, Reading, Mathematics and Social Studies.

COOKING

In the first year the cooking course is directed towards individual involvement - what is the sort of breakfast *you* should be having? What should *you* have for a hot weather breakfast; a cold weather breakfast? The food values are taken as the five groups in an illustrated folder issued by the Dairy Board, and each meal should have something from each group in it. Proteins etc. are not mentioned until Second Year.

The notes and explanations are given in the workroom. All the articles are then priced at the local shops and purchased. The teacher supervises the breakfast preparation in the workroom using a gas stove, then the girls, as they take their turn in the cottage on a three weeks' rotation basis, prepare hot and cold weather breakfasts on a wood stove. They also cook one breakfast using an open-air situation as occurs in the bush.

Term I is Breakfast, Term II is Lunch and Term III is Dinner. Morning and Afternoon Teas are fitted into Terms II and III.

Term I is taken up with establishing (First Year) or re-establishing (Second and Third Year) Cottage routines. As well as the normal meal cooking, the girls are responsible for the Canteen, and during the year we have pies, pasties, (heated on a gas stove in the workroom) fish-fingers (cooked in pan on wood stove in Cottage, or in electric frypan in Cottage), milk ice-blocks (prepared in the workroom) and fruit (which is sent up from Perth). In cold weather the Cottage girls also prepare hot soup or milo, and in hot weather the workroom girls prepare ice-cold cordial.

During Terms II and III the Cottage Assistant worked all day from Monday to Friday. A meal was prepared for a family and eaten as such by the Cottage Assistant and her small child, the girls at the Cottage, and either the Cottage Assistant's husband or the Project Officer. During this time the setting of tables, the correct use of cutlery, and table manners were emphasised.

Each year, before our trip away, (see Social Studies Program) the girls cooked a full three course meal for the boys going on the trip one day, and for girls the next day. Both Project teachers supervised, checking table manners, correct use of cutlery etcetera.

Once a year, the girls were also responsible for catering for a town function. In 1973 they catered for 100 people in the Shire Hall for a luncheon for the Governor, Sir Douglas Kendrew and Lady Kendrew on their farewell visit to the town. In 1974 they catered for a luncheon, again for 100 people, on the lawns of the school for the Western Australian Minister for Education, Mr. McKinnon and his party. These occasions provided the opportunity for planning, cooking, ordering (from Kununurra and Perth) and setting out large quantities of food. The girls got a great thrill out of these occasions, and took pleasure in a job well done. It was a wonderful opportunity to mix socially as well.

Year II cooking was aimed at the *home* and so emphasis was placed on the utensils needed for cooking in a home or in the bush. The girls made table-cloths, tea towels and pot-holders etc. to fit in with this section, and the meals were aimed at cooking for young children or babies. As part of this course food was prepared in the Cottage and taken down to the Reserve, where the young children and the babies were fed. This is a very popular section. Again Term I was breakfast (for the young child or baby) Term II was lunch and Term III dinner.

Year III had as its central theme the *family*, and so cooking for a family was emphasised, including the special nutritional needs of a sick person, a very old person and a pregnant mother. At this stage we talked not only of the five food groups mentioned in Year I but of proteins etc. The girls learned the value of vitamins, and special attention was given to cooking in all sorts of interesting ways the vegetables grown in the school garden. This was to try to encourage them to break away from the monotony of beef and potato stews. Economical use of gas, electricity and wood was also taught. For example, when cooking a meal on top of the stove, put a batch of biscuits, a cake or scones and a pudding *in* the oven at the same time. Again Term I was breakfast, Term II lunch and Term III was dinner. Amounts and budgeting were carefully noted. A menu was prepared for the three groups mentioned and in addition, a family from the Reserve was invited to the Cottage for a meal.

SEWING

In Year I, as the emphasis was on *you*, the girls' measurements were taken and recorded. The use of all sewing equipment, machine, scissors, patterns etc. were taught, as well as caring for a machine. The girls used a treadle as well as an electric machine, as often no power is available on Reserves or Stations. Term II of each year was devoted to children's clothes. In Year I the girls made a layette of nightgown, jacket, bonnet, crawlers, sunsuit, sunfrock and yoked frock from the Public Health patterns which we obtained through our Mothercraft tutor in Perth. In Term II of Year II the girls made a nightgown, dress, shirt and bib from patterns which they drafted from Enid Gilchrist's books. In Year III they made a dress for a 3 year old, a 5 - 6 year old and a 7 - 8 year old, as well as a shirt and matching shorts (boys) for the same age groups. All the children's clothes made by the girls, as well as the drafted patterns, were kept at school along with table-cloths, table-mats, pot-holders and a set of curtains made in year II, until the end of the three year course. This is then a sort of 'trousseau'. In Term I of each

year, the girls made a frock for themselves - Year I a plain shift, Year II a bodice dress and Year III a dress made from a commercial pattern (each girl having selected a style and sent for the pattern), and so she added a pattern for herself to her 'trousseau'. In Term III of each year, as well as a skirt (Year I and II) and a skirt and blouse (Year III) the girls made a certain amount of children's clothes to sell at the hospital for the A I M.

In Year I, a set of doll's clothes was also made, in Year II a wall-hanging (felt) and in Year III a cushion and toys. At the Cottage, the girls made overalls for themselves as well as Cottage curtains and staff room curtains. Mending was also done at the Cottage.

HOME MANAGEMENT

This Home Management course dealt only with the very basic elements, except in the areas where it was possible for these girls to obtain employment. As Year I had its emphasis on *clothes*, the girls learned how to launder clothes both in a copper/trough situation at the Cottage and in the school washing machine in the work area. They also hand-washed their uniforms every afternoon after their shower and left them to drip-dry overnight. In Term II of Year I, the girls were taught how to iron clothes with an ordinary light-weight electric iron and with a steam and dry iron, using both boards and tables covered with a double blanket. Towards the end of Term II and for all of Term III of Year I they took in baskets of ironing from the town people at \$1 per basket. This meant they had to be very careful, had to know the feel of fabrics (see Social Studies Program, Year I) and how to damp down, iron, fold or hang a variety of garments.

In Year II, which focuses on the *home*, the girls learned to clean a room from the ceiling down to stripping, scrubbing and polishing a floor. They learned how to clean cutlery and brassware, windows and walls, basins and baths, a gas stove and a wood stove, and how to clean out cupboards, refrigerators and freezers. At the Cottage the routine of cleaning a home was carefully followed every day. The girls completely painted the Cottage inside and decorated the walls. They helped to dye their yellow uniforms orange when they got older so that they could dye curtains, bedspreads etc. in their own homes later on. They completed a baby's bassinet with trimmings for the cottage 'baby' (doll), and to end the year were sent 'on trust' to clean one specific room of a house in town from ceiling to floor.

In Year III, as the emphasis was on *family*, they were given many lessons in budgeting of money. They were given an amount at the Cottage to 'manage' with for one week, entering purchases in a book, the amount being equal to an unmarried mother's pension, plus child endowment for two children. The girls were also given experience in looking after a sick person, usually a child, up at the hospital, of preparing his meals there, keeping the room tidy, washing him and generally keeping him comfortable. In second and third terms of Year III the girls also go to various jobs in the town cafes, hospital, post office or private home, in preparation for permanent jobs. They go one day each week, and to the same job for two weeks in a row. The employer gives a full report to the school on each girl. Through special arrangement some Station girls may go back to their Stations for a week's work in the homestead.

COMMUNITY HEALTH AND INVOLVEMENT

In Years I, II and III weekly visits were made to the hospital. We took 'our' baby (see Mothercraft notes) to the Clinic every week, and the Public Health Sister gave the girls a talk on any current health problems such as scabies, impetigo, hookworm, lice infestation, etc. The girls also took turns at going out to a Station with the Sister to assist her there. At the yearly School Medical Examination the girls assisted and also helped on the Reserve Kindergarten days. They also had a turn at helping with the school lunch program in the town. They took children with sores to the hospital daily and assisted in treating them. These activities gave them first-hand knowledge of the health problem in the Halls Creek area.

MOTHERCRAFT

In Years I, II and III we did the Mothercraft Course by correspondence from Perth. This was an excellent course and had a great deal of information such as food, clothes, looking after children, etc. which we linked up with our other subjects. In 1974 we 'adopted' a baby - the new baby sister of one of the girls, and we followed her progress throughout the year. We took her to the Clinic, and kept a clinic book - we visited her on the Reserve and spoke to her mother about feeding, etc. and saw her bathed. We made clothes for her and reported her progress to our tutor Sister in Perth. Our Cottage 'baby' (doll) was bathed, and we had the Assistant's own child (aged 2) and a Grade I child as well at the Cottage to be cared for. The girls bathed them, washed their hair, washed and mended their clothes, fixed up sores and supervised their play. Visits to the Kindergarten in the town were also made so that we could see how much benefit was gained by pre-school education. Care of pregnant and

nursing mothers was also a vital part of the Year III Mothercraft Course.

In 1975 we had a baby at school for First and Second Terms, and looked after her every day. The girls assisted the mother with the baby's daily routine. This was of tremendous practical value to the girls.

PERSONAL GROOMING

This was the first avenue of success with the girls, and has continued to be the main incentive in keeping the girls well groomed, spotlessly clean and well dressed. The daily routine of shower, change into clean uniforms, hang own clothes in wardrobe, towel on own hanger, comb hair, use deodorant, oil on legs and hands, thongs on, became a real habit, as did the afternoon shower and laundering of uniforms. Hair was shampooed every Monday, nails cut and shaped. In Year I, as the emphasis was on *you* and *clothes*, the girls were taught hair cutting and setting, clothes care, the sort of clothes to suit a particular figure, etc. In Year II the emphasis was on *you* and the *home*, so care of soiled clothes (in a basket etc.) treatment of stains, personal hygiene and personal problems were discussed in a weekly session. In Year III community diseases such as v.d. were discussed with a nursing sister, as was contraception, etc. This was a weekly discussion session.

READING

The girls took part in the school cross-graded scheme. A reading test (done in 1974) showed how low their reading ages were. This had to be constantly borne in mind when preparing a program. The average reading age was 7.4 years and the average chronological age was 13 years. We always had 'bush books' in the workroom. We purchased the 'Women's Weekly' and a pattern book, and had at least one period a week reading in the library. Recipes and note-taking were kept to a minimum, and vocabulary was often simplified. Illustrations helped the girls to know what the notes were about. When they left school they took their 'trousseau' of sewing; a cooking notebook with basic recipes in simple words, as well as cleaning hints; a sewing notebook on the costing of articles made, where and how to purchase patterns; banking procedure, and a mothercraft file containing the lessons in Mothercraft very carefully illustrated for simplicity of understanding.

MATHEMATICS

As well as exercises in addition, subtraction, multiplication and division for accuracy practice, the girls learnt about maths in a very practical way which would be helpful to them later on. They worked out Canteen orders, money taken and spent in the Cottage and their own pocket money; cheques were banked fortnightly and a spending amount withdrawn. When they went on their trip each year they had a sum of their own to spend which they had saved themselves. They worked out the cost of the clothes they made and how much they saved by making them for themselves rather than purchasing them locally, which was very expensive. They learned to look up catalogues and order from them, and learned the cost of sending telegrams, ringing up, and sending mail. They did all the school mail and soon became acquainted with charges for sea and air mail. They learned about C.O.D. orders, money orders and postal notes. In Year III, budgeting for a real home on a given amount was a very important feature of their work. The costs involved in supplying food for a 'big' party (for example, Governor's luncheon) were carefully kept in mind when working out wages paid. The money collected for ironing was divided evenly amongst the girls (they did this as a division sum) and they were paid for cleaning according to the standard of work. They learned how to count change quickly and to know the value of currency to avoid being 'taken down'. They were taught to be realistic about money, for example, why would a mother give \$3.00 for a child's lunch when she can provide a home-made lunch for the *whole* family for \$3.00.

ENGLISH

Again a very basic course. After capital letters and full stops were mastered, the proper form for letter writing was emphasised and practised frequently. The girls wrote to their Mothercraft tutor weekly, and to a friend fortnightly. Business letters were taught and constantly used for catalogue, C.O.D. or Canteen needs. Brevity of wording for telegrams was taught, and the completion of banking forms, money order applications and postal notes. A Cottage 'diary' was kept daily, and on trips away a daily diary was written up. Often free story writing about a picture or animal or own choice subjects was encouraged. Use of dictionaries was also taught. Literature was a favourite subject - Aboriginal centred stories, record stories, stories I taped, and simple ones they could read themselves.

SOCIAL STUDIES

We studied our own environment in Year I. Visits were made to

the Shire and all the other local places of interest, then their importance and the job they do for the community were discussed. A visit was made to a neighbouring town, Kununurra, and a comparison drawn between that town and its amenities and ours. Diaries were kept, photos taken, pamphlets gathered and discussed on our return. Then other towns in Western Australia were discussed. In Year II other states were discussed and a lead up made to Darwin, the city visited in Second Year. Information was sent for and places to visit were listed. An itinerary was worked out, letters written, travelling necessities listed and such things as toilet bags, etc. made. Finally cases were packed. The air trip was discussed and the whole experience of seeing things like Bagot Reserve (trees, lawn, cleanliness compared to ours), Woolworths Supermarket, Casuarina Shopping Centre, Darwin's new air-conditioned theatre, and having the privilege of staying at Kormilda College with other Aboriginal girls was something the girls will never forget. Eating in a restaurant, riding in a lift, seeing TV, swimming in a 'real' pool, seeing the wildlife at Fogg Dam, were subjects for conversation for the next year.

Then in Year III the trip was to Perth. We stayed at Beatty Lodge, swam in the ocean, went on board warships, had a boat trip, visited a look-out 16 floors up in a lift, visited Parliament House, the Zoo, the Aquatic Centre and Kings Park, shopped in the city and at Shopping Centres. A highlight was the train trip to a dairy farm in the South West. The girls came back to Halls Creek with the experience of a lifetime. This 'doing' Social Studies program culminated the whole three year project course. The girls were happy at school, they began to gain confidence in themselves and in their appearance, and they learned things which they felt would help them.

The Project Course followed in Halls Creek was not the total answer to the Education of lower-achieving secondary-aged girls, but was an attempt at showing that -

"the child does not have to be forced, or even requested to learn. If the environment is sufficiently interesting it will of itself, and without any prodding from the teacher "demand" that the child learn."

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(The following article has been reproduced from the Bernard Van Leer Foundation Newsletter No 17, Autumn 1975)

EXPERIMENTAL PARENT AND PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION PROGRAMME

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The project seeks to develop and improve the links between school, family and community in a Liverpool housing estate and to demonstrate to parents how they might participate more effectively in the education of their own children, from the pre-school level onwards.

A team of three, working from a comprehensive school in the Netherley housing estate on the outskirts of Liverpool, have trained local mothers to work with other families where there are pre-school children, using materials selected from specially compiled home education resource packages.

As the confidence of these 'educational helpers' grows they will adopt a general advisory role for families in their own block of flats or street. The team then withdraws to a more consultative capacity.

The project will concentrate on developing wider possibilities for better home/school links at all levels of the education system encouraging parents to provide a more stimulating environment for children in their own homes and to articulate their demands in terms of their children's education to teachers, schools and local education departments by the most appropriate means.

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