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ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER VIEWS

HOME VISITING PROGRAM

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I was interviewed for the position of home visitor at Garbutt State School by the then Principal, Mr Parnell. To my complete astonishment I was selected for the position.

I started work here on the 12th of April*. The first days were spent in meeting the staff and getting used to the place. The next few weeks I went with the other aide and just helped where I could. This was a good opportunity to get to know the children that I would be visiting later on at their homes. I found that I knew most of the children's parents, which was a surprise because I did think I would know very few of them. I tried to organize a timetable amongst the teachers on the infants' wing, but I think they (the teachers) adopted a "wait and see" attitude.

After the May vacation, during which I attended an Aides' seminar in Brisbane, I started to visit the parents. What I did was to draw up a diary for the fortnight. This way I could be sure that I had every family's name on the visiting list. Then I sent out a note at least two days before, asking if it was convenient for me to visit on that day. Everyone answered my notes and I found that there were a couple of families that I had to visit on the same day each time I called. This was because of their work commitments. I usually manage to visit each family at least once a fortnight. These children are all from grades one and two. This is a total of about eleven families. Most families have children in higher grades as well.

On each visit I take a game, which I show the parents how to play, so that they can help the child to play it. Also I take a toy for the child to just play with. These toys and games are part of a resource library which we have acquired. This library also contains a few books for adults too. I also took, on my very first visit, a progress report on each child from the teacher. But now I just ask the teacher if they have anything that they wish me to tell to the parents. I think that this informal way of conveying information is

* 1976 # See also p.46From Teacher to Teacher

much more preferred by both teacher and parents. The home visiting has prompted at least one parent to come up and sit in the class with her child, to see how the teacher taught a particular sort of maths. I have catalogued the resource library so that I know what's out, who has it, and when it has been returned.

Every parent I have visited has told me they think it is a good idea to have a home visitor. I usually do my visiting in the afternoons when I walk home with the children. I tried visiting during the day once to see how it would be. But I feel visiting while the children are home is much better. Anyhow, since a new principal was appointed to the school I was asked to draw up a definite timetable just like the other aides. This time I found the teachers were only too willing to have me take groups from their classes. It seems that they have accepted that I am capable of doing what they ask of me. I also feel that I get on well with the staff as a whole.

After the August vacation I have visited the children in the Grade 7 families. I adopted the same procedure as I did in visiting the infants' families. I also acquired a set of career pamphlets for the children to look through. I left one set with one of the Grade 7 teachers, so that they would be available to every child in the classes. They told me that the children have shown a lot of interest in them. I also get the teachers to fill in a progress report to take home with me. I have another set of career pamphlets which I take home to show the parents. I feel that the parents are glad of any extra information that they receive to help with their children's transition from primary to high school.

As the school year draws to a close, I feel that the job has been a very rewarding one. I think that I have become a welcome visitor to the families because now I sometimes forget to send a note home before visiting, but I am still made to feel that I am welcome if I just drop in unexpectedly. At school the children seem to identify with me - some of the little ones even call me "Aunty" rather than Mrs Kennedy. I also get on very well with a lot of the white children. On the whole, I feel that there should be more home visitors. I think that it provides a link between the school and home. I have often been asked to convey messages between school and home and vice versa. A couple of times tension has been relieved when I informed the teacher of the home situation at that particular time. I am thoroughly looking forward to next year. I hope to expand on a few ideas and meet the old families and perhaps a few new ones at the start of the new school year.

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