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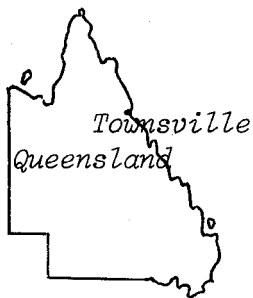
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POSSIBLE CONCLUSIONS

It is not certain which of several factors have indeed contributed most to the probable success of this system. Some of these factors may be :

1. That the 'freedom of choice' system is more acceptable to adolescents than the traditionally rigid timetable.
2. That the programs and projects offered are more varied than before.
3. That the excursions and recreational facilities offered are sufficient enticement in themselves.
4. That the personalities involved have helped to create a suitable atmosphere. The three teachers in the unit all work closely together, so that students are never in the position of having to relate to one teacher only.

Above I referred to the 'probable success' of the system - I say 'probable', because as yet it is not fully proven, despite the very large increase in numbers of students attending - this year has been experimental, and to claim complete success therefore, might be somewhat premature. The next twelve months will be a better indication of whether it has succeeded this year merely because of the novelty, or because the philosophy behind their freedom to choose is, in fact, a sound system for Aboriginal adolescents.



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HOME/SCHOOL AIDE PROGRAM - GAR BUTT, 1976

E.Kennedy and C.Ling,*
Garbutt, Townsville.

It is intended that this program will be in keeping with the recommendations of the Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group. In particular we refer to Recommendation 8 :-

"We recommend that a variety of means be examined for involving Aboriginal parents in their children's education."

*Chris Ling, Advisory Teacher, Department of Education, Townsville.

The aims of the program are :

1. To establish contact between Aboriginal parents and the teachers of their children.
2. Through this contact to sensitize teachers to the needs and cultural differences of their Aboriginal students.
3. To influence teacher's expectations for their Aboriginal pupils.
4. To improve parent's confidence in their contact with their children's school teachers.
5. To help parents realize the special value of their influence on their children's school progress.

OUTLINE OF PROGRAM

The first step taken was to familiarize both the Aboriginal parents of Garbutt and the staff of the school with the program. In order to ascertain the parents' opinions, I visited each of the families in company with Mrs Margaret Mullins (an Aboriginal teacher aide at Headstart Preschool.) We discussed the possibility of employing an Aboriginal aide with a special function of informing the parents about their children's school progress and ways in which parents can be of assistance. Every family felt this would be a good idea and gave approval for the project to go ahead.

At the same time I contacted the staff of the school in a like manner, explaining and seeking their approval for the project.

The position of Home/School Aide was advertised through the local Aboriginal Organisations and the appointment of Mrs Elsie Kennedy was made by the Headmaster in consultation with me.

TRAINING PERIOD

The first four weeks of employment were spent in frequent discussion and training sessions. These sessions involved

- 1) Reading of other projects of a similar nature, including *Focus on Parent/Child : Extending the teaching competence of Urban Aboriginal Mothers*, by Betty H. Wa Margaret Henry, which was a useful source of id....

- 2) Practice in preparation of teaching aids and games suitable for use by parents.
- 3) Experience in assisting in classrooms.
- 4) Familiarization with children to be visited.
- 5) Visit to Mundingburra Infant School.
- 6) Viewing films:-

Learning through Play
Concept Development in Outdoor Play
So You Have an Old Style Classroom
If at First You Don't Succeed.

- 7) Discussions of daily organization to suit home visiting.
- 8) Attendance at Seminar for Aboriginal Aides in Secondary Schools. This seminar was run by Mr John Budby and Mr Frank Young and included such topics as -
 - . the Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group, June 1975.
 - . the special value of Aboriginal Aides.
 - . use of media and equipment.
 - . discussion of approaches used by Jim Hamilton and Carolyn Archer in visiting schools.
 - . visit to Inala Guidance Centre (where some valuable experience was gained in home visiting).
 - . discussion of approaches to pre-vocational and career guidance.

STARTING VISITING

Following the seminar, Mrs Kennedy commenced a program of visiting one family each day. We felt it was important at first to make sure the visit would be a pleasant event and to avoid visiting with problems or complaints from the school. Prior to each visit discussion was held with the teachers of the children in that family and a report on each of the Aboriginal children in the infant grades was compiled by each teacher. Mrs Kennedy used this report in her discussions with parents and has always been careful to pass on the teacher's opinion to parents. On returning to school, Mrs Kennedy

informed the teachers of anything the parents wished to convey, that would be relevant to the children's education.

AT-SCHOOL INTERACTION

In the mornings Mrs Kennedy works as a Classroom Assistant with small groups from Grade 1 and 2. She does playground duty on a regular basis. These activities give her an opportunity to maintain contacts with the children she is visiting, as well as to build up a relationship with the other children at the school.

PREPARATION

Considerable time was spent initially in cataloguing the games etc for the Parent's Library. We also prepare individual games for children using ideas from "Workjobs" and the "Van Leer Program".

VISITING

An example of a typical visit is -

1. Send a note home about 2 to 5 days before hand.
2. Visit that child's class on the day of the visit and discuss the child's progress with the teacher.
3. Choose or prepare a suitable game to take.
4. Visit the family
 - . discuss teacher's opinion of child's progress
 - . game taken to play
 - . general news, note anything the parents wish to convey
 - . cup of tea
 - . encourage parents to visit school.

EVALUATION

We feel that Mrs Kennedy's personal contact with both parents and teachers is leading to more understanding between both groups. For example -

- .. The parents now feel that they and the children have someone they can relate to in the school.
- .. The teachers are now more aware of the parents interest in their children's school progress and are responding by sending information home.
- .. The parents want to know as much as possible about what's happening at school and now feel they have a better idea of what the school is about.
- .. Some of the teachers encourage the Aboriginal pupils to show their achievements to Mrs Kennedy.
- .. Some of the teachers enjoy discussing the children's progress informally with Mrs Kennedy.
- .. There have been some occasions when Mrs Kennedy has been able to relieve tension in the class by informing teachers of situations at home.

The little things that happen on a daily basis seem to us to be the most significant contribution Mrs Kennedy is making, for example, when Mrs Kennedy first started, it was thought that one child, Cherie, would repeat Grade 1 next year. Mrs Kennedy has encouraged Cherie's mother to visit the class and suggested encouragement of reading at home. Cherie has now been promoted to the B reading group and her chances of promotion to Grade 2 with her peers are now high.

Last year, before Mrs Kennedy started working at Garbutt, 50% of Aboriginal pupils admitted in 1975 were not promoted to Grade 2. At this stage it appears the percentage will not be nearly so high this year. Such a situation is obviously due to multiple factors, but the build up of home/school communication is probably one of these factors.

Finally, at this stage, while there has been an enormous increase in home/school communication, we feel that there is still a need for greater personal contact between the two groups and we are hoping to work on this aspect more next year.

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