



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

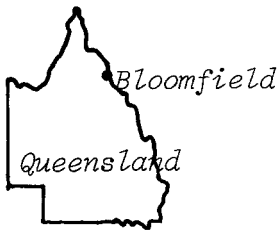
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GETTING TO KNOW YOUR COMMUNITY



Mrs A. Madsen,
Bloomfield River,
Queensland.

(Mrs Anne Madsen is an Aboriginal teacher aide at Bloomfield River. Originally she came from the Cairns area, and so writes from personal experience, of the importance of getting to know your community. She presented this paper in December 1977, at the Aboriginal Teacher Aide Conference, Gatton.)

The first two years at Bloomfield River were very busy ones for our family as we were building our house and improving our property so we didn't have much time for much else at this stage, but as time went on the Mission manager paid us a visit, and over a cup of tea he and his wife invited us over to the Mission to do our shopping and to church services, also just for a visit to have a talk and a cup of tea. My family and I accepted this invitation and we became very good friends. This helped quite a lot with the people also.

Helping people both ways

The people in the Mission are very friendly and helpful people and they have helped us a lot since we went to live at Bloomfield River, and it is very important that you help them in return, as this gives strength to your friendship in any community.

Showing fishing spots

My hobby is fishing and at that time we had a big boat. As these people like fishing they could show me all the good spots, and we took them out in our boat sometimes. I asked a lot of questions about fishing places, and I always accepted their answers. This is very important, as the people do know where all the best places are.

Swapping plants

Another very important thing I have found with these people - they do like to swap plants, and this is one of the first things I

did when I started my garden. It worked out very well.

Language

When I first met these people at the Community they spoke mostly in their own language. I could not speak their language, but I could speak English as spoken by the Aboriginal people, and I could understand some of the words of their language, so the people and I got along fine. Since then these people have accepted me as one of them. I am very grateful for this and it has made my job easier.

Relationship

The people had asked me a lot of questions about my parents and where they came from. I told them my father's name and where he came from and about his brothers, and we found, much to my happiness and their's, that we were related to about five families in the Community. This made a big difference to all.

Social functions

We have a P & C Association at our school which has been operating for three years, and we have films and concerts and barbeque. Most of these people attend these functions and try to do the best they can. They too have social functions at the Community and most of the time they invite all the teachers and some of the other people. I try to attend most of these socials at the Community. Also I attend all of the sad times like funerals, and they do invite the teachers to join in and go to the funerals.

Library aide, 1973

When I started work at the school as library aide, I got to know the children and the teachers better. I also got to know the parents and I could try to help in other ways. I worked as library aide for one year and I started to find out the way the school worked, what the children were doing at school and how the teachers were treating these children (mine included.)

Teacher aide, 1974 to 1977

I started working at the school as teacher aide three years ago and I liked the work very much. I got to know the children much better and I also got to know the teachers and how the school was run. This gave me the opportunity to get to know the people better and to try and help them understand what the school was all about. Also to try and get them interested, to encourage their children to come to school and learn as much as possible. I think

I have succeeded in this area. Now I can hand my job over to younger aides and give them the opportunity and responsibility of working at the school and furthering their own education.

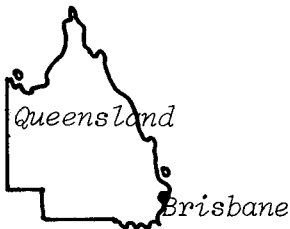
As a parent

As a parent, before I started work at the school I was always wondering about the school and the teachers and what work they did and how they went about it. I was suspicious too of what went on and I believed, like a lot of parents, that the teachers were not doing the right thing by the children, until I started working at the school. Then I found out for myself how the school worked and what the teachers are trying to do for the children, and I felt much happier. I am sure that if parents are encouraged to visit the school more often and allowed to take part in school work, and included in camping, taking the children bush walking and things of this nature, you will all have a happy time at these schools and will want to stay longer.

If you try to stay away from these people and not mix with them, then you are lost. A lot of teachers who go to these Communities to teach school make the excuse that the people won't accept them. But the sad thing is that the teachers don't try to make an effort to mix, and this is what they must try to do if you want them to help you.

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LETTER TO TEACHER AIDES



Mrs B. Coolwell,
Brisbane Central School,
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(In this contribution by Mrs Barbara Coolwell to a recent issue of *Bora**, the sharing of news and ideas about educative procedures, and the sharing too of a sense of the worthwhileness of the job, may suggest new avenues of communication to readers in other schools elsewhere in Australia)

Dear Girls,

As this is going to be my last newsletter from Brisbane Central, I thought I would bring you up to date on all the happenings this term.

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*Reprinted with permission. "Bora" is a newsletter for Aboriginal teacher aides in Brisbane, edited by Ms Lenise Schloss, Family Education Centre, Kittyhawk Avenue, Inala, Brisbane.