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SCHOOL EXCURSIONS:

A DISCUSSION OF THE ADVICE OF THE QUEENSLAND ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE TO THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF EDUCATION

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One of the benefits provided for in the Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme is funding for students to take part in school excursions. For students in remote areas, this provision is very necessary and important. Teachers very willingly plan and supervise excursions each year and the effort that they put in is commendable. However, not all excursions are eventually seen by teachers, students or parents as successful. It would appear therefore that some evaluation of excursions is warranted.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Committee to the Director General of Education has presented its first report, as a result of its meetings and investigations during 1977. A sub-section of that report follows:

4.2 SCHOOL EXCURSIONS

The Commonwealth Department of Education provides funds for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on ABSEG grants to go on excursions. These excursions are organised by individual schools. It is understood that parents, teachers and principals are involved in the planning of such excursions.

It has become apparent to this Committee, however, that many parents are not completely aware of the programmes, or of the value, of such excursions.

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ADVICE 46

The Department of Education ensure that organisers of excursions fully brief Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and involve them in the organisation of excursions and ensure the participation of parents in all excursions.

Many excursions involve children in too many activities. In most instances, Aboriginal and Islander children are exposed to too much city life. There is no educational basis for many excursions. More forethought is needed by organisers to plan excursions on sound educational bases. So often excursions are just tours rather than valuable learning opportunities for Aboriginal and Islander children.

ADVICE 47

The Department of Education, in consultation with this Committee, develop plans for excursions so that a more positive educational benefit for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is ensured.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait parents in Communities and remote areas want their children to become familiar with the skills needed for life in cities. Since most excursions involve visits by country children to urban areas this Committee wants survival skills taught in schools. Planned excursions will enable this to happen. Before going on excursions children should be given some background information about, and understanding of, what they will be seeing and studying. Use of telephones; use of transport; and the location of support services should be part of pre-excursion education. While on excursion, Aboriginal and Islander children should be asked to note important parts of their program. A follow-up series of lessons should take place after the excursion.

ADVICE 48

Provision for the teaching of survival skills in the city should be a feature of excursions.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents living in urban areas are concerned that not enough about their cultural heritage is being taught to their children. They are also concerned at the lack of interest shown by children as regards their own culture.

This Committee thinks teaching of culture could be done by Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in a country setting.

ADVICE 49

The Department of Education make funds available for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders to set up and manage camp sites where European, Aboriginal, and Torres Strait Islander children can visit and be taught something of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of life.

I feel that the Committee has raised a number of points which are significant and which should be pursued by schools organizing excursions:

1) PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE PLANNING OF ALL EXCURSIONS

It is not sufficient for schools to say, "Parents cannot be involved in the planning because they do not know what should be visited, how to hire buses, arrange tickets, etc. etc." and then to ignore them. Parents should be involved in deciding where students should travel, what types of activities they should take part in, what supervision should take place during the trip, what rules should apply, and other significant general areas of planning. The managerial side (ticketing, accommodation, bus hire etc.) and the professional side (preparation of work units, pre-teaching and post-teaching programs, conduct of study sessions during the excursion etc.) are quite definitely the role of the teacher. Teachers may feel apprehensive about parents being involved in formulating the rules that should apply during excursions. However, this should not be an area of concern - teachers and parents working together will arrive at a result which will be acceptable to both. Teachers have the responsibility of the

children on the excursion and parents will ensure that the rules are adequate to allow them to be in control of all situations. If agreement cannot be reached, I would consider that the idea of an excursion should be dropped, because it could only lead to problems. However, it is my experience that parents are fully aware of the need for adequate supervision and rules and if they know what is involved, they will add their support in ensuring that children respect the rules.

2) PARENT PARTICIPATION IN EXCURSIONS

This must follow if parents are truly to be involved. Parents should be involved as responsible leaders not just as enforcers of rules. The experiences that the adults have during the excursion will be a form of adult education for them - in exercising responsibility as a leader and in terms of the activities they participate in with the children. One added benefit from adult participation will be the contact this person will have with the people on their return. They will also be able to assure parents of the effectiveness of the visit.

3) EXCURSIONS SHOULD BE PLANNED FOR A POSITIVE EDUCATIONAL BENEFIT

It is true that any visit to another area, especially a town, is an educational experience for children who come from an isolated remote area. However, when the amount of money, time and effort involved is counted, it is essential that maximum returns should be expected. Many schools have organized excursions that form part of a work unit that allows children to maximize the benefit of their experiences in their own learning situation. The concern of the Committee that too many activities are sometimes packed in is worthy of consideration. There is a need for students to grasp what they are being shown and experiencing before they are plunged into new and further experiences.

4) PROVISION OF LEARNING SURVIVAL SKILLS IN THE CITY

This implies more than just a tourist excursion. It indicates a concern that students experience life in a town rather than be passive passengers in hired buses. The duration of the excursion will, of course, determine what can be achieved.

However, it should be possible to develop a program which does present the student with the opportunity to experience different aspects which need to be mastered to enable a person to live effectively in a town. This would involve the school in being committed to an effectively planned pre-excursion and post-excursion program. The importance and complexity of the experiences to be undertaken may mean that a City Education Centre (comparable to an Outdoor Education Centre) should be set up and staffed appropriately.

I feel that the advice of the Consultative Committee is worthy of serious consideration by all who are involved in this question.

One thing that would appear to be also worthy of consideration is developing a program of excursions for the different Grades within a school. In consultation with the Community, a series of excursions for each year of secondary schooling could be outlined indicating the general aims of the excursion, what objectives it should be designed to meet and a suggested format for meeting these objectives. In this way, even if a school experiences a large staff turnover, the students will have a planned program that will be designed to provide them and their Community with the maximum benefit from the service that is available to them. I feel that such a program in a school will help the professional teacher to provide the best continuing education for his students.

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