



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

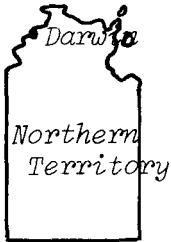
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STUDENT RECORDS -
ARE THEY OF VALUE?



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At the 1977 Small Schools Conference in the Northern Territory a great deal of concern was expressed by representatives from all over the Territory about the lack of continuity in small schools. One manifestation of this was the absence, in many cases, of meaningful student records that allow a new teacher to immediately make some valid assessment of the attainment levels of his students that he is about to meet for the first time. Allied to this problem is the lack of old programs to show the new teacher what has been done in the past. Teachers coming into such a situation are therefore likely to suffer drastically from the "what am I doing here" syndrome. And in the middle of the bush, 400km from one's immediate superior, help is *NOT* as close as the telephone.

It was, I think, the consensus of the Conference that the Department should stipulate a minimum standard for the keeping of educational records (as distinct from stock records, stamp records, maintenance and repair records, and other types of administritivia too numerous to mention which are the bane of the small school teacher's existence, and are probably one of the reasons adequate educational records are not kept anyway) to ensure that new teachers coming into the area do not have to spend the first six months trying to determine what the children know or don't know, what tools are available to fill the lamentable gaps, and devising methods to put these into operation. And if the teacher is only at the schools for one year, it doesn't leave much time for teaching anything new to the children.

It occurs to me that this problem of continuity need not necessarily be confined to the smaller schools. If the larger schools have a nucleus of stayers, particularly among the senior ranks, the new chum should be able to get some practical assistance in sending him along the right track. But even so, I don't think anyone would deny that adequate records of children's previous progress would be anything but an advantage.

And what if it is a new principal who comes to the school and insists on doing things his way. Wouldn't it be satisfying to be able to hand him the student records and the teachers' programs and say, "This is what we have been doing, and our records show that it worked." Of course, if the records don't show this it may be wiser to be silent: perhaps his 'way' is better after all.

So, having established that there is a need for keeping adequate records, I would like to briefly describe the system that we have established at Nangalala which seems to satisfy our needs, and which I hope will prove beneficial to teachers who may come after us.

We have been fortunate enough to have been able to procure filing cabinets and suspension filing sets, so our first task was to establish files for every child in the school. Every two months we put into this file examples of the child's work. These samples include spelling 'tests', written expression, vocabulary and sentence construction exercises. In addition, anything that may be regarded as a breakthrough (e.g. an Infant's pupil writing his name unaided for the first time) is also dated and put into the files. This file therefore serves a dual purpose: it lets the present teacher see if each individual child is making progress, thus indicating whether the level of work is too hard or too easy, or if the child is having some specific problem that the teacher could help overcome; and allows the new teacher to see what each child is capable of and the nature of the work that has gone before.

One aspect of the language work that we haven't tackled yet is the child's facility with oral English. Tapes recording the child in general conversation, reading aloud, or answering specific questions could (and I hope will) be used to overcome this deficiency. However, one of the most exciting aspects of oral English development is the spontaneous conversations that the children are now having with us outside the formal classroom situation. I fear this will go unrecorded, except for perhaps a note on the file, as to say to the child, "Hang on while I go and get the cassette player," may do much to destroy the magic of the moment.

Maths records are somewhat easier to keep, especially for children in the middle and upper primary grades, as we use two structured programs which allow us to see from day to day where the individual child is up to. However, it is surprising how

often one particular child will escape the teacher's notice, so we maintain the two-monthly checks here also. The precise point where the child is up to, and any difficulties he may be having, are noted. We are then able to ascertain if the child is indeed making progress, and if not, why not. I believe these checks assist us greatly in keeping our programs dynamic, and therefore of benefit to the children as well as the teachers.

For the Infants and Lower Primary groups, the maths record keeping system operates in much the same way as the language program, that is, examples of children's work are collected at regular intervals.

I would point out that our filing system applies to Pre-school children as well. As we are under no pressure to move children up from grade to grade, examples of work and teachers' comments are invaluable in deciding whether children should be able to cope with Infant's work.

In the language area, we have also decided to use some standardized tests. Last year we used the ACER Lower Grades Reading Test, the ACER Primary Reading Survey Tests, the Schonell Word Recognition Test, and the Cloze Reading Comprehension Test for Aboriginal Children in the Northern Territory. The first three tests are probably somewhat inadequate as measures of attainment for Aboriginal children, but they do allow us to see objectively whether the children have made progress in some areas of the basic skills. The Schonell Word Recognition Test is the only one we have used two years in a row so far, and the results were enlightening, and in most cases, encouraging. We do not use these tests to grade children according to standardized norms. We use them only to determine each child's attainment over a twelve month period.

Two other ideas for record keeping:-

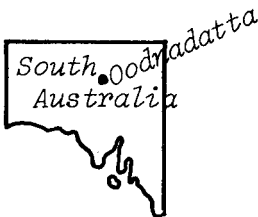
The teacher keeps a small exercise book for each child in her drawer, in which she notes comments about each child's day to day performance and activity. I have tried this and I think it can be valuable for recording periods of enlightenment or, conversely, times of difficulty and frustration, and hence a more complete pattern of the child's school life may emerge. The only danger here is that a teacher may become engrossed in writing those daily annals and forget to teach. A cardinal sin!

An alternative to the filing system is for each child to have a special book - 'the green book' we used to call it in Canberra - in which all written work on one day of the week or month is entered. This may be simpler than the filing system, but is less flexible, especially in the lower grades where work cannot be confined to books.

Although our record keeping system is still relatively new, I believe it is workable and provides a worthwhile, in fact, an essential part of the school. The major task is setting up the files in the first place. Once that is achieved, the amount of time required to keep the record system going is minimal. It helps us to maintain our awareness of each child, it should help new teachers find their feet in this strange but exciting environment, and therefore it must benefit the children.

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OODNADATTA SCHOOL/COMMUNITY LIBRARY



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Oodnadatta Aboriginal School has for a considerable time involved the community in its activities. From this liaison has grown several services to the community by the school which have become an indispensable part of the way of life in this most northern town in South Australia. Apart from comprehensive self-improvement and recreational courses offered through the Department of Further Education, the school offers a library service to the town and district.

Early in 1976, I, an avid reader myself, set about to overcome the void created by a total lack of community library facilities other than the Country Lending service. The school already had a comprehensive library available and the obvious move was to establish a community library. A committee was formed, representing the school staff, the school council and the local Progress Association. However, it was felt that to establish a library