



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

This article was originally published in printed form. The journal began in 1973 and was titled *The Aboriginal Child at School*. In 1996 the journal was transformed to an internationally peer-reviewed publication and renamed *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*.

In 2022 *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* transitioned to fully Open Access and this article is available for use under the license conditions below.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

CAREER CAMPS

M.Skehan, J.Smyth,
P.Rendall, R.Morris,
Dept.of Education,
Townsville Q.

Why Career Camps?

Students receiving benefits under the Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme are visited by Education Officers of the Commonwealth Department of Education two or three times each year. It has become clear to the Education Officers that many Aboriginal secondary students in our region:

- i) had not sought or been provided with sufficient information or experiences with which they could form sound vocational judgments;
- ii) had not made a clear vocational choice during their school career.

There are a number of possible outcomes of the above. Firstly, that students' motivation for school progress is affected because of the lack of clearly defined goals. Secondly, that the students' courses of study are not oriented towards particular careers. Thirdly, that as school leavers they are inadequately prepared to find entry into the employment field. As a result we decided to explore approaches that might lead to some improvement of the situation.

It was decided to hold camps because:

- a) the students would be in a relaxed informal atmosphere.
- b) we could draw upon a greater range of resources and use them more effectively if we had school leavers together as a group;
- c) there was a need to stimulate discussion and encourage students to compare ideas, experiences, and expectations so that information we provided would be meaningful.

The Camps

Four camps have been held since 1976, two in Townsville, one in Mackay, and one in Mt Isa. The numbers of students who attended varied from 82 to 30. The camps started as 1½ day ventures but gradually extended to 4 days. A certain component of the camp allowed for settling in, social and recreational activities.

The career component involved:

- a) visiting speakers representing Commonwealth Employment Service, Army, RAAF, Navy Transport Services, Mt Isa Mines, TAA, Ansett, Telecom, Police, Health, Nursing, DAIA and Woolworths.
- b) student activities, small group discussion, role-playing, simulated interviews, letter writing, form filling, viewing films, slides and video-tape activities.

In the later camps there was an attempt to maintain development throughout the program by means of small group sessions. The groups and their leaders remained constant throughout and followed a progression of steps from exploring individual abilities and interests as they related to vocational aims, to applying for jobs, selection of interviewees, and finally to simulated job interviews.

The last camp differed from the others in that there was greater parent participation. At a parents' meeting in Mackay prior to the camp a number of parents agreed to handle catering and cooking arrangements. This gave a more homely and comfortable atmosphere than previous camps. On the last evening of the camp there was a very successful barbecue and film showing which parents attended.

Results

1. In most of the camps there was a relaxed and informal atmosphere which was conducive to student participation and involvement.
2. Student feedback at the conclusion of the camps indicated that they had picked up certain information and skills that they did not have prior to the camp.

3. Student action subsequent to the camp indicated that there were positive outcomes. Some students wrote letters applying for jobs, others requested more information concerning jobs they heard about during the camp.

Conclusions

- 1) Numbers of students need to be limited to at the most 12 per group leader. As well as enabling Education Officer/Student communication to develop, the smaller group encouraged greater student participation in all activities.
- 2) The role and number of visitors has to be carefully considered. From our experience younger speakers created most interest, especially if they were Aboriginal or Islander. Students could relate well to these speakers and so participate in effective and productive discussion.
- 3) By placing the major emphasis on the dissemination of career information, the student role becomes a passive one. Activities such as role playing and group discussions help to overcome this, but as much time as possible should be devoted to student-chosen activities. Where students are sufficiently motivated they should have freedom to watch a film, listen to a tape or read career material of their own choice.
- 4) Parent involvement is possible and desirable. Parents have a direct interest and concern in their children's future and welcome the opportunity to take some role in activities related to career programs. We are only starting to involve parents, but the signs are so encouraging that we would aim to expand this aspect of the program in the future.
- 5) Organisations, companies and government departments are willing to provide valuable support in the form of speakers or personnel staff as well as printed literature.

- 6) Although there is an urgent need for vocational guidance to school leavers, it may be acting with greater foresight to start with secondary students earlier. Working with Grade 8 students in a more general way would build a better foundation for subsequent efforts by Commonwealth Education Officers and Vocational Officers in the State Education Department.

What the Students Thought

We enjoyed the camp but it was hard work.

Too few social activities such as dances.

I learned a lot of things about careers.

We should be able to mix with people we don't know.

I learned more about what you have to say when you're looking for a job or being interviewed by someone...

I didn't know there were so many different types of jobs.

I enjoyed myself...it wasn't a waste of time...I hope I can attend next year.

Should have been longer...a new experience.

Finally decided what I wanted to be.

Not sufficient free time between formal sessions...

Didn't think anything was slack...

Talks from young Aborigines were interesting - gave me ideas...

.....