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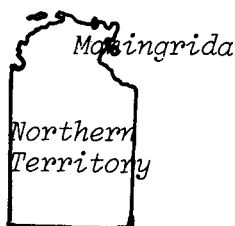
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ACROSS AUSTRALIA.....

FROM TEACHER TO TEACHER



*HOMELAND CENTRES EDUCATION IN THE MANINGRIDA (N.T.) DISTRICT

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SYNOPSIS

The decentralizing movement away from large, multi-tribal settlements and missions over the last half decade is one of the most significant Aboriginal initiated movements since the beginning of the European invasion.

Initially the movement required and requested nothing from Europeans. Gradually requests have been made for assistance in the areas of specific foods, health and education services.

In establishing an educational program for the homeland centre schools, it is essential that a situation is not created whereby Europeans saturate/dampen the initiative of the Aboriginal people; and so a program aimed at basic numeracy and literacy (as requested by the groups) has been devised aimed at *supporting* Aboriginal teachers.

HISTORY OF MANINGRIDA SETTLEMENT

Maningrida settlement was established as a medical control and trading centre for the tribes of the Liverpool River on the North-Central Arnhem Land coast. The settlement officially began on 9th May, 1957 with the landing of the boat Temora which carried four Aboriginal patrol assistants and four Europeans.

Although there were (and still are) a number of distinct cultural and linguistic groups in the Liverpool-Blyth district, it appears in the main to be separate from the two major cultural groups - North East and North West Arnhem Land - between which it lies.

* This article outlines attempts (up to early 1977) to provide meaningful schooling for Aboriginal groups living away from a central settlement.

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Mission work had been carried out for many years by the Methodist Overseas Mission at Milingimbi, Elcho Island (Galiwinku), Yirrkala and Goulburn Island, whilst the Church Mission Society operated at Oenpelli. No comparable work had ever been undertaken in the central area between the North East and North West areas. This contributed to the choice of the site.

Maningrida is the tribal country of the Gunibidji group, but only a small number of these people still live in the area, the great majority having moved westward to Darwin and the Coburg Peninsula. Those remaining suffer greatly from being a suppressed group, in spite of land claims.

The people along the coast, through working in trepang beds, moving to established missions and by finding their way into army control camps, had considerable contact with balandas (non-Aboriginals). Following the war, a great number had drifted into Darwin. By 1955 the large numbers involved prompted the settlement to be established among a lush rain forest which had ample supplies of water.

MANINGRIDA TODAY

The number of Aboriginals and Europeans has varied greatly over its short history. Today there are between 600 and 1000 Aboriginals basically comprising people of the Burarra, Gunabidji, Gunwingu, Nakara, Gunardba, Rembarranga tribes, as well as a large group who have moved away from the "mission" at Milingimbi. There are about 130 Europeans who work in various Council operations - Health, Education, Police services and the Progress and Housing Associations.

The number fluctuates considerably, contributing factors being ceremonies, mass movement to Darwin and Nhulunbuy, the seasons, and most importantly, the return to tribal lands - a movement which was originally called the Outstation Movement and now is officially, I believe, the Movement to Homeland Centres.

DECENTRALISED COMMUNITIES

Decentralised communities (homeland areas) have been and are being set up in many parts of Northern Australia by Aboriginal communities. These communities are being set up in response to the Aboriginal desire to return to a more traditional way of life in their own territories. Many of the large settlements like Maningrida are, as already stated, populated by members of many tribal and

language groups who, because they are forced into close proximity to each other, find the tensions of living in the settlement too great. Others want to remove themselves from the source of problems, especially alcohol.

With the continued exploration for a possible exploitation of minerals in these areas, there is also the desire to protect traditional sites from encroachment by non-Aboriginals. Some, learning our ways, realize that actually living on your land, and using it, will have more validity before the courts when pursuing ownership rights, than a claim through traditional and religious applications. The Labor Government supported these groups by providing grants for the setting up of their communities with the view of becoming economically self-sufficient (mainly through manufacture of artefacts or agriculture.) (The current government has not opposed this policy). Each group is attempting to do this in its own way. There is still need, however, for much support from non-Aboriginals, especially in the areas of:

- 1) health and education services;
- 2) basic building materials;
- 3) transportation and food items such as carbohydrates.

The amount of assistance each group expects varies quite considerably. There are at least 29 established homeland centres in the Maningrida area. Specifically I shall deal with those mentioned on the map as having schools.

MANINGRIDA OUTSTATIONS AND SCHOOLS

From Maningrida many groups began moving out during 1973 and this reached dramatic proportions during 1974 and 1975. The numbers leaving the settlement began to dwindle during 1976. Some of these groups were quite large (120 or so) whilst others are small (less than 20). The numbers depend largely upon the weather conditions, habitation, water and ceremony. There have been over 300 people living at Kopunga for three to four months during a series of ceremonies in the 'dry', whereas normally there are about 60.

Most adult Aboriginals see a real need to have their children receive some European-type schooling - hence the establishment of outstation schools.

An outstation school is one which has been requested by the group *actually living* in the outstation. After a request for a

school, the principal from the settlement school visits the group to establish why a school is seen to be needed, what sort of school is wanted, what teachers are required, and what should be taught at the school. The answers to these questions vary from group to group and every attempt is made to meet their recognized needs. The settlement school is then faced with helping to supply most of these needs.

Each group selects one or more of its own people to be the teacher to work equally with a European. The people chosen tend to have little or no experience in the field of education and the assistance of a non-Aboriginal teacher from the settlement is requested as it is recognized that they have had certain training etc.

At the start of 1977 there were nine schools established in the Maningrida area, working with various degrees of success.

Before discussing the attempts made at suitable progress during the three years the outstation schools have been in existence, I would like to outline some general characteristics of each outstation.

Kopunga:

Situated on the mouth of the Blyth River, Kopunga is accessible by road for a very limited time of the year only, and by boat for the rest of the year. The boat trip takes between two and a half and five hours; by road it is only 70km. It is inhabited by the Anbarra people who speak one of the two recorded languages in the area - Burara (pronounced 'Burada').

Although, in my opinion, the least attractive, it has been the most constantly inhabited outstation in the area. There is an abundance of food, especially shell-fish. During the dry season water is often a problem and has to be obtained from wells. In the 'wet' the area surrounding the houses (which show a mixture of traditional and European designs and materials) is a swamp and the home of 'too much mosquito.'

Kopunga is a sort of base camp for the Anbarra and Madai who live in the area. It is here that the 'shop' calls, and the people from Moganara, Jamuda, Manakodo and Manangajiri come to get their supplies. At various stages the Kopunga group(s), if the need arises, adds to the income of pensions etc by manufacture and sale of artefacts. They have, for example, earned \$2,049.70 between August 1974

and January 1975. They have also 'exported' shellfish to Maningrida, for example, 1,500 lbs in *one* consignment of crab, shells and fish.

The school is made up of a timber frame with a tarpaulin roof. The walls are beautifully made of large strips of paper-bark. This was done entirely by the community before any formal request for help was made to the hub-school.

The Aboriginal teacher is a man of about 30 who has had a little training. He is a particularly important person to the group. At times over 60 children attend the school but the average number is in the low 20's.

Moganara:

Situated between the Blyth and the sea near False Point, its people are very closely linked with those at Kopunga. The group tends to move both as a whole and in parts between camps on the sand dunes, alongside a billabong or next to a plateau some way inland. Therefore there is no established 'school' building and, like Kopunga, the teacher is a man in his 30's. This was the last school established in 1976, and has an average of 32 children.

Gochanjinjirra:

Usually referred to as Cadell Gardens. The Gunardba people live on the banks of the Cadell River just over 40 km from Maningrida, on an all-weather road. The Gunardbas are rather unique amongst Aboriginals as they have taken to gardening as a way of life and have established a most impressive fruit and vegetable garden, with the help of a Tongan horticulturist. After some six or seven years, this venture is now on the verge of being a viable industry. The school here was established in July (mid-dry season) 1974. The building was constructed of galvanised iron and old timber. It was too small for the 35 children who attended, and so the infant group were taken outside. Later this was superseded by a caravan school set up with one caravan as a classroom and one as a teacher's residence. These were requested by the Aboriginal group.

Cadell is unique, not only because of the garden but also because it is the only outstation which requested, and now has, brick 'balanda' style houses. The group is extremely mobile, having a number of Toyotas at their disposal, and commute regularly with Maningrida - often a trouble when it comes to school (both from Maningrida school and the Aboriginal teacher at Cadell).

The elected Aboriginal teacher is a young lady who, although most intelligent, has had very little formal training. She is the wife of the most influential man of this group.

Many of the problems discussed later in relation to out-station education tend not to apply quite so much here, for without doubt, Cadell is a satellite settlement of Maningrida, and as such demands all the sophistication of the larger settlement. In keeping with this, the school will be taught on more formal lines when the Tongan's wife (a trained teacher) takes over the caravan school early in 1977. Some bilingual work in Burrara is being attempted at all the outstation schools so far mentioned. In these and all other camps, however, there is not a great deal of enthusiasm for any language except English to be attempted in the school situation.

There are two main Gunwinggu groups in the area. Most of the Gunwinggu people centre about Oenpelli. However, the groups at Maragulidban, Momega tend to relate to the Maningrida settlement and their request for help in relation to school was to that settlement. Gunwinggu is a recorded language and some work in bi-lingual education will be possible once the orthography is finalized and primers etc. made available.

Maragulidban:

Situated on a tributary of the Liverpool River, was the first of these to really get a school established. It is about 100 km by road from Maningrida and may be reached by road with only minor hassles during the dry season. Access in the wet is by boat, followed by a walk of about 10 km. The camp itself was initially the prettiest of all the ones I visited. The camp site was well cleared and the houses were beautifully made from bark, using both traditional and European designs. There was a clear division of moieties in the camp, which had about 50 to 60 people living in it. There is an obvious patriach who uses his influence in a wide range of activities - even to the extreme of arranging for a man to be so uncomfortable in the camp (on land he has quite considerable claim to) that he moved to Maningrida. The camp is no longer as attractive as it was when first established. The proximity of the main access road to Darwin and the 'border store', are major influences in the decline.

Barramundi abound in both the Liverpool River some 8 km away and Maragulidban Creek, about 1 km away, and from time to time very great quantities have been sent to Maningrida for export. It is also a large producer of artefacts and some of the best mats, baskets and paintings come from this group. The 'old man' Marawanga, is

becoming one of the most sought after painters in Arnhem Land. In the period August 1974 to January 1975, \$1,639.25 was earned through artefacts and since then Maragulidban has become a major producer.

The school, catering for about 24 children, is made from a paperbark frame with tarpaulin stretched over it. The floor is made from ant-bed. The Aboriginal teacher is a young woman who, like many of the others, has had very little experience or formal learning.

Momega :

Another Gunwinggu camp on the Mann River about 80 km from Maningrida. Access is by boat in the wet, with a 16 km walk at the end of an hour's boat trip. It is in a particularly attractive setting. The school, similar to that of Maragulidban, is taught by an extremely capable woman who had worked for three or four years in Maningrida school (also at Bagot in Darwin) before working in the bush.

Mangalod:

Is the home of the legendary artist, Mandarrg, and is on the edge of the Stone Country (escarpment). It is about 170 km from Maningrida with quite a good road, giving access for all but the middle of the wet. The people here have close ties with Oenpelli, and Gunwinggu is understood by most, although most claim to actually be Rembarranga. (The old men are Dadgon). The school does not have a special building and is taught by two young women who have had some experience working in either Maningrida or Oenpelli. There are at times 35 children, although usually about 15 attend.

Bulu' Gardaru, Botgardi and Gamedì:

These are all smaller and newer groups having no physical place for schools. They are taught by young women. Gamedì - the smallest, with only eight children - is proving to be very successful.

Obviously there were very few precedents to follow when beginning to plan a program for these schools, and so, although we tended to "plan" carefully, we found ourselves very much involved in an 'ad hoc' situation with probably only two consistent aims or objectives: one, attempting to fulfil the request of the group and the second to be flexible!

An extremely important consideration in attempting any educational program is the education experiences of the community in which the program is to be attempted. The Aboriginal groups on the outstations had only one experience in education and that was the ultra-conservative, European-style school offered by the settlement in the late 50's up to the mid-60's. This was typical of Aboriginal education, aimed at squashing all Aboriginality and encouraging good English, good reading, good manners, good health etc. etc.

It was considered that a European teacher had to do all the teaching and so the general request was to have a 'balanda' living in the outstation.

Because of staffing problems it became impossible, at first, to provide a full-time European teacher for the schools as requested, and so, to improvise, a roster system was established whereby teachers volunteered to go and spend two or three weeks living in the outstation whilst their class at Maningrida was looked after either by team teaching, use of specialists, for example, art or domestic science teacher, or by the principal or one of the assistant principals. Obviously this had disadvantages, but it did serve in the first few months of the movement, to show the Aboriginal groups that the school was prepared to make a real attempt to meet their wishes. It also provided the settlement teachers with an opportunity to see Aboriginal groups in a situation much closer to the traditional one, and so learn much and get to know families better. Of course, it did show that no matter how much Europeans 'love the bush' from the comforts of the armchair in the lounge room, it is a lot harder to adjust to living and working out in it full-time. In fact, only *one* of the volunteers opted to do a similar job the following year.

So, having solved the problem of personnel, what to do next? It was decided that the European teacher would live in a tent, and so these were bought out of school funds. The old man of the camps thought that, for safety, it was best for the 'balanda' to live in the middle of the camp. The setting up of the school was something of a problem for it was felt that desks and chairs etc. were not really 'the' thing. However, we could not come up, at that stage, with any real alternative, and as the Aboriginals had specifically stated they wanted buildings, desks, chairs, cupboards, chalk-boards, exercise books and so on, they were dutifully lugged out. Having done all this, school was ready to start. The above was the initial procedure for Maragulidban, Kopunga, Momega and Cadell; the later schools were different.

A general formula was established for a timetable and program which, because of the change over of teachers, tended to be a sort of prototype. To offer all that would be done at the settlement school, subjects such as Art, Physical Education, Music etc. were included. It quickly became evident to all - especially the community - that these activities could be best done by the Aboriginal leaders and so after only a few weeks the community agreed to a suggestion by the principal that, if they were going hunting or whatever, the children should go and join in. It was imperative that 'school' did not interfere, any more than was absolutely necessary, with normal camp life.

And so, the children tended to spend a solid two hours in the morning concentrating basically on the 3 R's, using, as much as possible, puzzles, games and similar equipment. The rest of the day tapered off in the amount of formal education and by lunch time no formalities were expected.

The schools were sort of bi-lingual with the Aboriginal teacher giving instructions in the local language and the visiting teacher providing English.

It was the time between lunch and supper that pupils and teachers gained the greatest educational values; swimming, dancing, fishing and traditional skills provided wonderful opportunities for oral work, and a whole host of worthwhile informal learning situations. In the case of traditional skills the community itself provided the teachers, and the visiting teacher had a chance to learn from the community.

The approach adopted in 1974 was more or less continued during 1975, with the exception being that the Department had provided the school with four special teachers to be used as outstation teachers. These teachers adapted their own techniques in regard to time spent out in the bush, modified programs, and involved the Aboriginal teachers in some teacher training. These teachers also created a series of games and aids which could utilize the local environment.

Difficulties at this stage were numerous but perhaps the major ones were:

1. The unsuitability of school buildings in strong winds, rain, and against dogs
2. The getting of visiting teachers to and from the outstation, especially during the wet season.

3. The difficulties in actually getting some sort of meaningful program. The Aboriginals were attempting to ask for what they wanted, yet found it hard to request something which had not been experienced by them in the larger settlement. Of course, much of that was irrelevant for the new situation.

The Europeans were placed in an awkward position because, not being Aboriginal and not speaking any Aboriginal language fluently, they did not know what was wanted, and tended to avoid making suggestions for fear of becoming too influential and thus imposing a system which, like so many, would be meaningless.

4. The Aboriginal teachers were often called upon by the local community to handle general correspondence, business accounts and liaison work with government agencies. These duties placed extra responsibilities upon them and eroded their time and energy for school matters.
5. The visiting teacher must camp out and work in very different conditions from those usually regarded as normal school situations. Being involved with the community *all* the time required personal adjustment - especially in relation to a loss of privacy.
6. Finally, the enormous age and achievement ranges of the children. Some children of 10 had never attended formal school, whilst some seven year olds had already had two years of formal education.

There were, however, some encouraging aspects. Perhaps the degree to which each local community had taken responsibility for its school was the most encouraging. They all made important decisions in the actual setting up of the school and also continued to support it once it had started. The parents were beginning to become aware that their children were going to *their own* school, and so were more inclined to make comment, suggest change, and of course, ensure regular attendance. They also provided the cultural aspects, which are such an essential part of Aboriginal life, as well as showing a high degree of concern for the European teachers by, for example, providing them with food.

The daily diaries which were kept by the teachers, under both systems, proved to be a valuable resource and help in the future

planning and the understanding of Aboriginal life - for example:

31st July 1974 :

Children wanted to do my washing for me. Whenever I go to the creek some women or girls come with me on instructions from Peter Marawanga, if they don't come of their own accord. I think they're afraid I'll get lost. Possibly too, there are secret places around they don't want me to go near.

At school, Hamish and Crusoe (both about 12) very reluctant to talk or learn. Eventually I got angry with Hamish... ..

Talk around fire (after little kids had their tea) of kinship, my skin, bush tucker, and devils; the curlew call is supposed to be a devil; they know too about the thylacence (devil dog). They are afraid of shooting stars. They also talked of the morning star, which they like and is of great significance to them.

Fishing boat returned about 10.30p.m. and Curly and Silas came to talk to me.

In an attempt to adapt to the life style of the people, the Maningrida school abolished the traditional three term school year and divided the year into two, with a long holiday of eight weeks in the 'dry' season - a time of ceremony, hunting etc. At the recommencement of school after the dry in 1975, all four of the four outstation teachers had, for various personal reasons, resigned or would do so in the near future.

This was not quite as traumatic as may be expected, for it was felt that there was too much reliance put upon the visiting teacher and a dropping off of initiative taken by the group. Also, 'new' outstations were asking for schools.

The next step was to use one of the assistant principals (who already had charge of the secondary section of the Maningrida School) to co-ordinate the work of the Aboriginal teacher and visit each school to advise and train, as often as possible. This system was carried out for the second half of 1975 and the first five months of 1976.

It was generally not at all successful. Probably the main

reason for this was that there had been 'imposed' responsibility on a group of young people who had no, or very little experience, in the tasks assigned to them. They found the support of only one person (sometimes two) at irregular intervals, too infrequent. Also, during this time, there was considerable political upheaval throughout the area - in particular in relation to Maningrida.

So by the end of 1975 a system had to be devised whereby most of the actual schooling/teaching would be carried out by the Aboriginal teachers. We had to provide suitable aids and props to enable them to carry on by themselves as much as possible. It had, by this time, become clear that the basic educational needs of these communities was to have a grasp of basic numeracy and literacy along with the ability to communicate in English. The reasons for these requests varied from group to group. For example, Cadell saw a need to be able to order parts for machinery used in the garden, Maragulidban a need to communicate with the government about land claims, especially with a view to mineral exploration and so on.

Further, it was realized that the groups were quite mobile within a clearly defined area and so 'school' had to become mobile. Also, because of mobility and living conditions, the wet became most impractical for outstation schooling, and so the Aboriginal groups agreed to their teachers coming into Maningrida for periods of training in teaching techniques and ideas during this season.

There were now two visiting teachers and so it was impossible to revert back to the 'live in' type of system. Four schools were chosen to trial a possible solution - contract booklets. The groups were chosen because they had :

- a) an Aboriginal teacher who had shown a reasonable degree of competence and initiative;
- b) a relatively stable group of people/children, that is, stable in persons, not necessarily position;
- c) two outstations to visit regularly, which was enough for a visiting teacher to really cater for as well as prepare booklets, tests, etc.

The booklets were designed to cater for the basics in numeracy, literacy and handwriting at a number of levels. The instructions for each 'page' were kept to a minimum, thus enabling the Aboriginal teacher to administer them. The visiting teachers visit two days every fortnight to discuss the booklets and to give out the next stage. They spend time explaining why each activity is

set, how the kids should do it and how to mark it. The visiting teachers also give a 'test sheet' during their visit. This is done to determine whether the concepts set have been grasped by teacher and students. If not, some evaluation has to be made of the booklets - for it is felt there is a greater chance of error in the presentation than in the ability of the people involved. In the case of one or two children not getting the concept, a parallel set of booklets is to be designed to enable new learning. Revision booklets are also to be made.

The booklets are designed in units which give students two hours formal work for six days of the fortnight. In actual fact, there is evidence to suggest that in most cases school occurs on more than six expected days.

To enable a child to 'progress', an attempt is made to make each level equivalent to six months work - not 12 as in the larger school. Hence Level 4 is at about the standard of the second half of a Year 2 student at Maningrida school. This is relatively important, as often the kids from the bush come into Maningrida and come along to school. With the above system it is a simple matter to look up the master record sheet kept by the visiting teacher to see what work the child has been attempting in the bush.

The booklets are designed to cater for six levels, that is, up to the end of Year 3. After this stage, children use the Arithmetic and English course made up by the Correspondence School of the South Australian Education Department for Special Secondary Students. The work level begins at about Year 4 but is aimed at adolescent interests.

No provision for social and creative subjects is made, except to give the community some art materials (some of which are much appreciated by the adult bark painters) and a softball bat and ball or football, etc. There is no doubt the social and creative side of education is more than adequately catered for by the Aboriginal adults.

There has been a mixed reaction to the booklets from the children and the teachers. Generally though, they are done well, and most children are able to achieve satisfactorily on the revision test given by the visiting teacher.

There are obvious deficiencies and weaknesses in the booklets. One is the way they are structured. What exactly should we teach to deal with the basics needed? The people planning the booklets

lacked the experience, expertise and confidence to do this adequately. Trial and error, experience, and perhaps some support from curriculum experts, however, may well solve these problems.

What then of the future?

At the end of the 1976 school year, a meeting of the school hierarchy, outstation teachers, and Aboriginal teachers was held at Maningrida. The recommendations made were:

Aims: To provide school for children in outstations who request same.

To develop programs which may be taught by the Aboriginal teacher.

To develop a sense of job responsibility in outstation teachers.

Duties of Visiting Teachers:

1. Complete booklets in six levels and begin making the more advanced levels more relevant.
2. Determine levels of children at outstations.
3. Distribute booklets.
4. Test children fortnightly.
5. Keep an up-to-date record of achievements and attendance.
6. Distribute pay cheques to Aboriginal outstation teachers. Hours to be calculated on the amount of work done in the booklets.
7. Liaise between the Maningrida community and outstation communities. This should involve a general knowledge of what is happening (including important gossip) and the ability to report to outstations.
8. Be aware of grants and facilities available for both outstation education and outstations generally.

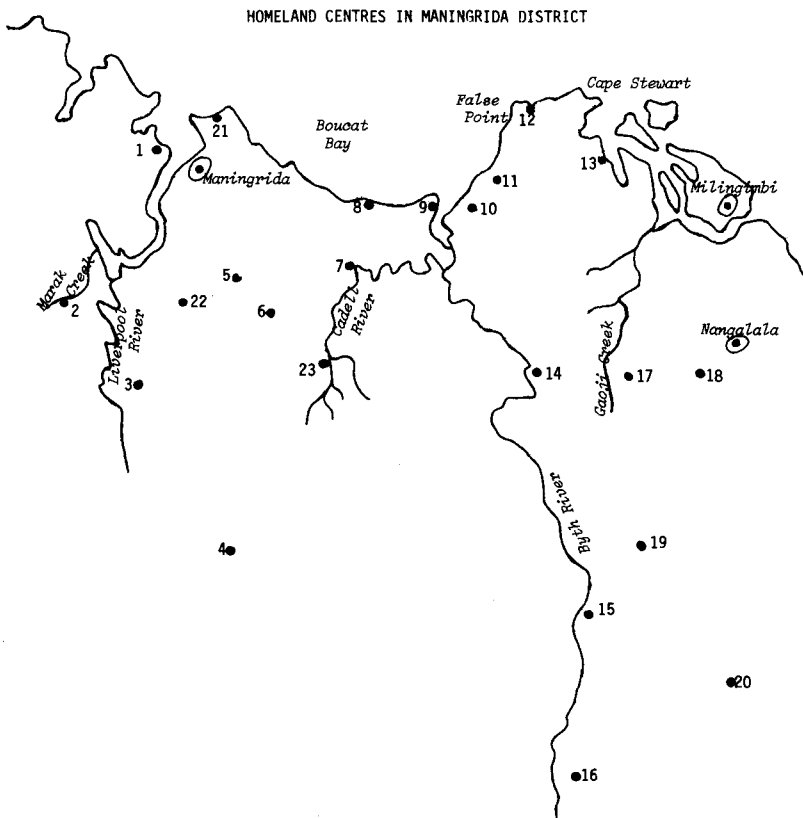
Aboriginal Outstation Teacher:

- 1) Have school on at least 6 days a fortnight.
- 2) See that booklets are finished in the fortnight (i.e. under normal circumstances).

- 3) Correct work *with* the children.
- 4) Give lessons when necessary, as advised by visiting teacher.
- 5) Comment on 'too hard' pages in booklets.
- 6) When in Maningrida, attend Maningrida school for training.
- 7) See that outstation children attend Maningrida school when at Maningrida.

A further vital recommendation concerned the payment of Aboriginal teachers.

So the future appears to be set on a course which will either prove or disprove the theory that the Contract Booklets system is *one* suitable answer to Outstation education.



- 1.Ngalarrumba 2.Maragulidban 3.Momega 4.Nunggala 5.Nangark 6.Guyun
 7.Gochanjinjirra (Cadell) 8.Nakalarnandarda 9.Kopunga 10.Manakadokadjirra
 11.Moganara 12.Ingangandua 13.Gurragaypol 14.Gamedi 15.Malyanangark
 16.Bambdi Bu 17.Gadji 18.Ramangining 19.Djakaladjrr parra 20.Mulgurram
 21.Djuda Point 22.Bulu'Gardaru 23.Botgardi