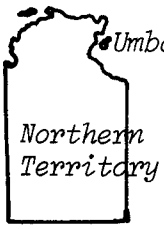
The Australian Journal of
INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

ACROSS AUSTRALIA .....

FROM TEACHER TO TEACHER



ENVIRONMENTALLY BASED CURRICULUM: ANOTHER APPROACH

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It has been the accepted view that children learn best when the learning experiences progress from the known to the unknown, from the concrete to the abstract, from the familiar to the unfamiliar.

Aboriginal people are, by tradition, very closely aligned with their environment. Therefore, it follows that Aboriginal children will have a basically intimate relationship with the environment in which they live. Their environment is the known; the skills in numeracy and literacy are the unknown. To wed these two aspects within a school learning situation can only result in a relevant, exciting and rewarding program of learning experience for Aboriginal children. Use of the known, the familiar and the concrete, to introduce the unknown, the unfamiliar and the abstract, will surely stimulate and motivate children to acquire literacy and numeracy skills in a school, and in the classroom.

Frequently teachers have taken children into the field and have been amazed by the vast stored knowledge even a young child has, of the environment.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAM - UMBAKUMBA SCHOOL 1979

AIMS:

1. To take the resources available in the local area and draw on the knowledge accumulated by the children in their early years as the basis of a meaningful and relevant learning program.

2. To motivate interest in literacy and numeracy through the use of environmental research and discovery.

3. To give the children an understanding of their environment as seen through the eyes of a non-local person, and in so doing, develop a pride in their environment.

4. To use the pride developed in 3 as a sound basis for dissemination of information to the community at large, and by so doing, develop written and oral communication skills.

5. To involve the community in the program of learning experiences, and thus foster a greater interest in education and the learning of the children - the future adults and leaders in the community.

6. To allow the learned factors of the environment to facilitate the acquisition of unknown skills, that is, the teaching of literacy and numeracy based on the meaningful factors of the child's immediate known environment.

7. To stimulate further interest in other than local environments.

SPECIFIC APPROACH

Post Primary Section of the School:

In this section of the school it is hoped that the students will do actual research in the environment via field trips and recording of findings. The accumulated field notes will then be processed in the classroom situation and will form the basis for literacy and numeracy programs. It is hoped that much of the information gathered will be edited into book form and used as part of the over all reading program in the school. In this way, the students will not only progress from the known to the unknown, but also will create and develop a library of materials which will be locally relevant and meaningful. (See appendix A)

Primary Section of the School:

The initial approach in this section of the school will need to be more spontaneous and less formal.

It is hoped that the children will make frequent short field trips in which there will be a discovery type of approach, and the discoveries will then be elaborated in the classroom, and again books will be edited and created. It is also hoped that the post-primary section of the school will feed in information to this

section of the school, and the primary students will then be able to learn skills of re-evaluating information and learn the skills of research. Stimulation and motivation in this way will be channelled from the upper sections of the school to the primary section. (See Appendix A)

Early Childhood Section of the School:

The approach here will be almost entirely spontaneous, making use of the interests of the children on a day-to-day basis. Most lessons, it is hoped, will be structured around the interests of the children in the local environment. Day-to-day gathering of food, flowering plants and small fauna will be the foundation of the programs in this section. There should be an encouragement of animal life preservation within this section.

Immediate and Future Development of the Program:

As with the development of all new programs, the program needs to be trialled. It has been decided that the entire school should attempt to trial this program and maintain comprehensive notes on it.

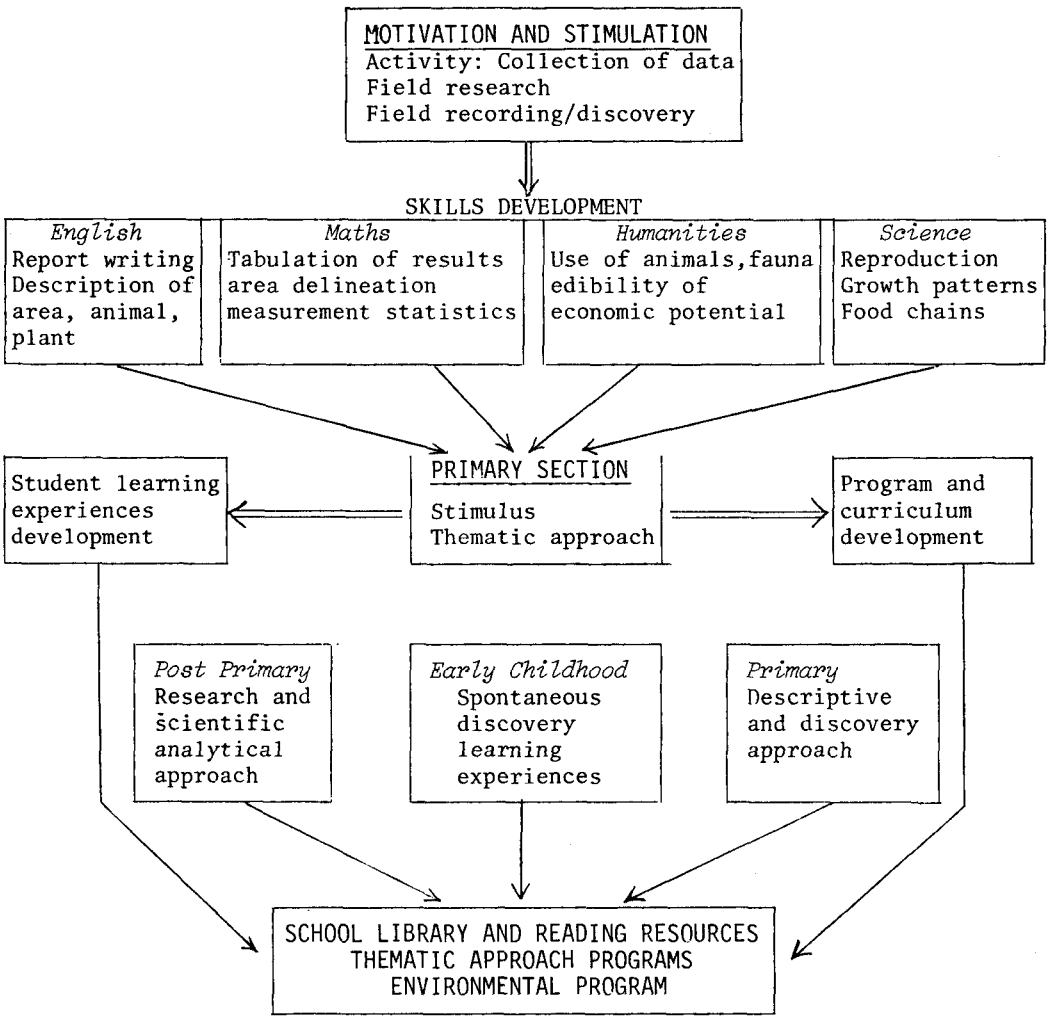
The Aboriginal teachers will play a major part in the program, as informants and co-programmers, as the program will be based on Aboriginal knowledge and not the knowledge of the European teachers.

The program will need to be developed almost week by week, and will need to be based on known sequential concept learning. This is the most onerous task of the European teacher. As the program takes shape and develops, it is the responsibility of the school staff to continuously assess and re-assess the learning experiences and teaching situations.

Pre-planning:

Pre-planning is, without a doubt, one of the most important aspects of a teacher's programming. However, as this is a developing program, it may well be almost impossible to pre-plan the environmental occurrences. Thus the teacher will need to skilfully pre-plan the conceptual content of all lessons yet allow sufficient flexibility in the programming to allow adaptation to the environmental happenings.

APPENDIX A. Approach Flow Diagram



The development of this type of program depends entirely on the corporate functioning of the staff and the school as a whole. All staff will need to show enthusiasm in the program and accept that perhaps many of the staff will need, in some way, to carry a little more duty than if a pre-devised program were to be used.

All staff will need to co-operate to the fullest degree, and those skilled at record keeping may like to develop the paper work and recording involved.

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E.R.D.C. Research Training Fellowships 1980-81 (*ctd. from p.42)*

The academic training can be undertaken at most Universities within Australia. Applicants must be qualified to gain admission to the appropriate Master's course at the respective institutions, and should demonstrate an aptitude for educational research. Experience in the field of education, though desirable, is not essential. Persons who have already completed part of a Master's degree in Education or who hold a higher degree in another discipline are eligible to apply for these Fellowships.

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