



# The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

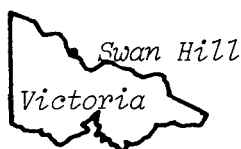
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## ABORIGINAL HOME VISITOR PROGRAM IN SWAN HILL



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Some Aboriginal children come to school with skills that are different from those obtained by most middle-class children. This means that they are disadvantaged for several years in the present education system. Many of these children have little experience of reading, writing, standard English, both written and spoken, and the use of books. Since the school is based on this form of learning, their ability to achieve is severely handicapped.

Many Aboriginal families use different linguistic styles and approaches and this means the children must learn a new area of language before they can begin school learning. The Aboriginal Consultative Group to the Schools Commission, 1975, has said :

The child should nevertheless be educated in such a way that he is able to function successfully in both his own culture and the wider Australian Society if he so desires.

To this end, there needs to be some work done in the area of school preparation even if it is mainly communication with the parents and an opportunity for the parents to gain a wider knowledge of the school system. Hopefully, this may lead to greater confidence in the parents' own ability to cope with the system and an attempt by the parents to prepare their own children without destroying their Aboriginality.

## AIMS OF THE PROJECT

1. To recognize the parents' primary responsibility and centrality in the early development of the child.
2. To assist Aboriginal parents to understand and participate with confidence in the education system.
3. To enable children to be fully prepared for school entry.

4. To enable children to cope more adequately with the education system, including primary, secondary and tertiary levels.
5. To help parents realize their aspirations for their children's education.
6. To encourage and help parents use the pre-school and its resources.
7. To help the wider community change its attitudes towards Aboriginal people.

#### DESCRIPTION AND PLAN OF PROJECT

The home visitor will be employed by the committee on a part-time basis and will be responsible to that committee. The initial time will be spent in training and orientation by both teachers and Aboriginal people. The home visitor will work from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. each school day, visiting parents and families who have indicated their willingness to be involved in such a project. The home visitor would discuss with the parents their own ideas on education and any school problems they may have.

The home visitor would encourage the parents to become involved in various practices within the home. These would have been selected by the committee, for example, reading of books, joining the library, providing suitable play things, development of language patterns, learning basic practical skills. Any liaison needed between parents and school would also be provided by the home visitor.

The committee consists of three Aboriginal people nominated by the local Community, an experienced teacher, a financial adviser and the local resource teacher.

#### HOME VISITOR TRAINING PROGRAM

##### AIMS:

1. Provide as much practical experience and firsthand knowledge of schools and other community facilities as possible.
2. Give background knowledge in the areas of

- a) Child development.
  - b) Child health.
  - c) School entrance needs.
  - d) How schools function and their demands on children.
  - e) Opportunities offered by high schools and technical schools.
  - f) Benefits provided by the use of community facilities.
  - g) How to encourage your child to reach his/her potential.
  - h) Members of the Aboriginal race who have succeeded in the present system.
  - i) Aboriginal crafts and skills that forerun the skills taught in schools.
- 3. Encourage the home visitor to use her talents
  - 4. Encourage the home visitor to realize her potential and that of her race.

#### THE PROGRAM:

The program will consist of 20 sessions initially, after which the committee, in conjunction with the home visitor, will determine the need or necessity for more. Each session will be supervised by a member of the committee. Most sessions will be conducted within schools or other community facilities.

Home visits will not commence until the committee and home visitor are confident that the preparation has been adequate. Length of each session will be determined by the supervising committee.

#### BEGINNING THE PROJECT

This submission was accepted by the Schools Commission and a grant was obtained from them in February, 1979.

The Aboriginal home visitor began the training program in Term 2, 1979. Because this particular person had much experience in Community affairs and Aboriginal organizations, and had highly developed skills in public relations, reading and writing, we adapted the program accordingly.

During Week 1, she was introduced to the base school so that the teachers felt they were part of the whole scheme and understood its implications and reasons for its inception. The plan was based on the development of the child, so the first step was to look at local resources involved in the early stages - ante-natal classes, maternity ward, children's ward and hospital facilities.

In Week 2, lectures were given in child development from conception. Other activities included discussions with Aboriginal health workers, Aboriginal members of the committee and consultation with infant welfare personnel.

In the third week of training, lectures were given in child development - the pre-school years, and physical, social and cognitive development. This was supplemented by observation in play groups, child care centre and pre-schools.

There are many people for the home visitor to meet and much time is taken making sure that she understands the role of each resource person.

The program will continue in this way with extensive observation and discussion on all aspects of the education system. Teachers will be introduced and strategies planned for development of the role of the home visitor. A long period will be needed for extensive home visiting before any attempt is made to provide any structured exchange of knowledge. The Aboriginal home visitor will make decisions when she has established a confident relationship with each family group. Unfortunately, 15 hours a week is not long enough each week for needs to be met, both amongst Aboriginal families and the school system, but we felt that it was better to spread the grant over three years rather than have the scheme finish after twelve months.

The Aboriginal Community has expressed the wish that the home visitor will not have her work restricted to the Black members of the town but will be able to work with Whites as well.

Perhaps some authority will see the value of the project and be motivated to employ a full-time home visitor.

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