



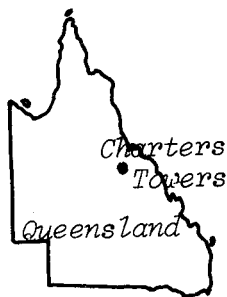
The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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PARENT COUNSELLING

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The main objectives of the parent counselling program are:

1. To come to know parents of learning problem children at our school on an informal basis.
2. To show parents what is happening at the school, so that they become familiar and conversant with what is happening.
3. To develop in the parents feelings that they are involved, in fact, by involving them.
4. To get the parents involved in areas concerning the schooling of their children.
5. To get students motivated and co-operating at school.
6. To show parents how they can help their children both in direct and indirect terms, for example, by helping them complete a maths problem and by giving them encouragement.

The counselling was initiated to cater for two different groups:

Group I - European Parents

This group consists of parents of children who are slow learners and have specific disabilities. The group comprises approximately 10 parents. However, only five have attended regularly so far. I decided to go on with the meetings in the hope of helping a few, rather than none at all.

Group II - Aboriginal Parents

This group is different, in that it consists of parents of any Aboriginal children, whether they have a learning difficulty or not.

The first group was initiated as a result of a need to do something different from withdrawal from the classroom. It is

hoped to benefit the learning of the children by counselling the parent. The sessions are based on a scheme carried out in Adelaide and reported in the *Australian Journal of Reading*, June 1978.

The second group was initiated due to interchanges which had occurred through the year. After the appointment of Mrs V. Alberts as Aboriginal counsellor and a trip to Bamaga, followed by a meeting with the Aboriginal Education Advisory team, I thought it would be prudent to have something continuing and beneficial.

The meetings were initiated on a suggestion to parents that we have meetings to answer such questions as:

- . How can I help my child to do the work if I don't know it myself?
- . Why are a lot of our children not doing well at our school?
- . Why are children put up to the next grade if they cannot do the work of the grade they are in?

The program involves fortnightly sessions of one hour duration. Parents are notified by letter or home visit prior to each meeting, and the meetings are fairly informal to allow for interaction between the parents and the convenor. Each meeting ends with tea and biscuits and informal discussion.

Topics discussed so far for Group I, since commencing on the 10th of October, 1978, have been:

1. What does your child do at school?
2. Homework.
3. Introduction of a course designed to increase language skills in English.
4. Report cards and assessment of students.

For Group II, topics 1, 2, and 4 have been discussed. A discussion on careers took place at the 3rd meeting when Mrs Iris Glenbar, Aboriginal vocational officer with the Department of Employment and Youth Affairs, came to speak to parents and students about careers and the ways and means available to realize their aspirations.

As an offshoot from the first meeting with Group II, deportment and make-up classes were commenced.

PARTS OF THE PROGRAM

What does your child do at school?

Firstly, the parents were shown around the school and shown equipment used in teaching nowadays. They also viewed samples of work from, mainly, English and home economics. Use of equipment such as listening posts, slides, carrels, tapes, and filmstrips was demonstrated.

How can you help your child?

These are suggestions that were made to the parents:

1. Show an interest in what the child does at school. Your interest will encourage the student to work harder and to enjoy school life.
2. Talk about or ask about what your son/daughter does in schoolwork.
3. With slow readers, be interested in what the child is reading; talk about it or read aloud together three to five times per week, but avoid clashing too much with other interests, if possible. The period of reading should be short, about 15 to 20 minutes. Try to make the sessions enjoyable.
4. Encourage your child to join the library and ensure you visit together, particularly when the child is fairly young. The librarian will give guidance on books which are suitable. Fact and fiction stories and books on hobbies or interests are all available.
5. Application cards are made available to those interested in joining the Town Library.

At the first meeting the students were given a bookmark as a symbol standing for the need to read. The bookmarks were those issued for National Library Week. The students were also given a school timetable and booklet entitled *How to Make It*. The parents received a booklet *Parents Are Important in Education*. Both these books came from a Deputy Principals Seminar, and Mr R. Topping, the Deputy Principal, had copies made for every parent and student. Topics have been chosen from both these guides to have something there to refer to.

During the informal discussion, it was pointed out that showing interest involved:

- giving encouragement
- finding out about work or problems
- helping and showing, where possible
- praise for effort or success
- confidence building, and developing initiative and motivation.

Homework was discussed though not exhaustively. The following summarizes what was discussed:

Homework - what is it?

1. Extra work needed that night, for something learned that day, to give practice and to reinforce it or make it stick.
2. Work on an assignment or project due at a later date.
3. In later years, work which the student sets himself or herself. Some Grade 9 and 10 students do this, and a few Grade 8 are mature enough to set themselves work.

Into this discussion came the aspects of having an area at home which is suitable, that is, without distractions and not too noisy.

I also mentioned the use of a homework notebook and how it can help the student be a bit more organized. The value in signing homework, completed or attempted, was stressed. Both the guides have sections on setting up a study timetable at home, and I showed how a student could fit in time before and/or after tea.

The only other topic discussed was the Aboriginal Studies course being planned for next year. Parents were informed as to what would be studied, and asked to indicate their feelings for or against, and to make further suggestions so that the course may be suited to their needs and wishes.

Language Course

Group I have had a course introduced which involves a build-up of language skills in areas of spelling, reading, writing, vocabulary and aural or listening ability.

The course involves completion of units by the students at home, rather than in the English class, under the guidance of the

parents where possible. The student is expected to spend 15 minutes per night on the self-programmed course. I have not been able, at this early stage, to make estimations of the success of this course.

CONCLUSION

So far I have found the parent meetings successful, and have been quite ready to continue. There are some areas still in need of discussion and there are some parents who, unfortunately, do not attend. Nevertheless, I feel the success of the program is dependent, to some extent, on the size of the group, which I limit to 10, as previously mentioned.

Other areas for discussion at some stage are:

1. Behaviour/discipline/manners.
2. Memory/concentration/listening
3. Writing/letters/diaries/notes
4. Arithmetic/posting letters/telegrams/cards/presents/shopping
5. School year/events/etc.
6. Meeting teachers
7. Parent involvement at school.

As offshoots, it is hoped to get parents involved in some way in school life in different areas:

Tuck-shop

Aide work on a voluntary basis

Adult education classes

Adult reading course.

It is hard at times to see the wood for the trees, but with more staff becoming interested in the program, and the co-operation of the parents (which has so far been impressive) continuing, many ideals will, I hope, be realized.

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