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ALL RESPONSIBILITY WILL BE WITH PARENTS

OUTSTATION EDUCATION IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

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Q. Why do you want a school?

A. It is very important for our children to learn.

Q. What sort of teacher do you want?

A. First of all, Aboriginal teachers to start.

Q. How many teachers do you want?

A. One for a start.

Q. What do you want them to teach?

A. Counting, mathematics, reading, writing in English, Aboriginal culture.

Q. Do you want a school building?

A. We are thinking about an open-air one, a hut with bark and bush materials. Later on we may build a better school.

Another question concerned the degree of assistance required from Europeans.

A. Everything concerning schools will be run only by the local people, but we will appreciate the ideas and help of Europeans when we ask them. All responsibility will be with parents.

This conversation is extracted from a report by Maria Brandl¹, written in 1974. She was talking to a group of people who had started an Outstation in the Yirrkala area.

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The most significant feature of the responses is the clearly evident desire of the people to regain control of the education of their children. This statement summarises the basic problem of Outstation education. To suggest that the Aboriginal people involved with Outstations wish to "regain control of the education of their children" directly implies that they lost control. This in turn implies that the vast amount of money spent on developing settlement schools was to some extent wasted and that the formal European school structure which is imposed upon Aborigines in settlements, along with many undesirable features of settlement life, has been rejected.

To imply the above is to criticise Department of Education policy prior to the outstation movement and thus we have, I believe, the crux of the "for them or against them" division within the Department with few people indifferent to them.

I have always been surprised at the strong feelings that any discussion of outstations education arouses with, as I have said, few people indifferent. Attitudes of Department officers vary from, "They are a flash in the pan. They will never last", to the other extreme, "They are the salvation of the Aboriginal people. They are acting to save their culture". Though I do have a position in this debate, I must point out that it is irrelevant.

If we view the situation from a pragmatic point of view, we find that there are a number of isolated groups of children who receive no academic education and it is the responsibility of the Department of Education to supply the best quality of service possible for these children if their parents want it. And that really is all there is to it.

The quality of education service provided may not be academically as good as that provided in settlement schools but the parents may regard the total education of the outstation child as more important. The outstation child is healthier, better founded in his own culture and subject to greater parental control. He learns the basics of English and counting at the request of his parents. He "learns" his own culture because he is living it. This is the closest we have come to bi-cultural education and I see it as our responsibility to at least "hang on to the coat-tails" of the outstation movement, which is about all we have been doing up to now, keeping our policy as flexible as possible to meet the needs of the outstation people as they indicate them.

To assist with this the remainder of this article is an attempt to provide information on the present situation in outstations.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON OUTSTATIONS

Development of Outstations

Since the early 1970's there has been considerable movement of Aboriginal people away from mission and government settlements back to their traditional lands. This movement, which has reduced the Aboriginal population of some settlements by more than 50 per cent, is known as the 'Outstation Movement' and the communities established on traditional lands are known as 'homeland centres' or, more commonly as 'outstations'. It should be noted here that this movement was probably initiated by Aborigines who never left the traditional lands.

The Department of Aboriginal Affairs has neither discouraged nor encouraged this movement but has provided service and support facilities for outstations in the settlements.

The movement is very strong particularly in the northern region of the Northern Territory where there are now approximately 120 outstations with an approximate total population of 2800. Thirty-three of these (population 1300) have requested and have received an education service.

In the southern region the movement is less certain and the name 'homelands' is not applicable as the movement away from settlements is less commonly to traditional lands and more often to fringe camps close to settlements and to pastoral properties. However, an education service is provided to 27 places, whether outstations or fringe camps, with a total population of 750 people.

It should be noted here that the Department of Education has established formal schools on 37 pastoral properties, 12 in other rural centres and 27 on government and mission settlements and that the Aboriginal people involved in the outstation movement, while still maintaining an association with some of these schools, have rejected them along with the facilities and amenities provided by other government departments.

The Department of Aboriginal Affairs evolved a policy for outstations based upon reacting to 'felt needs' within the communities. (See Appendix 'A'). In other words, the only development

which has taken place has been at the initiative of the Aboriginal people. This policy has ensured that the people of the outstations have had control of their communities and that there has been no heavy handed input from government agencies. Outstations have thus maintained their individuality within their chosen context of Aboriginal culture.

The Department of Education has also adhered to this policy in providing education services only to outstations which have requested them and only at the level which has been requested. The Department of Education at the beginning of 1979 transferred the responsibility for outstation schools from the then Special Projects Branch of the Department to Schools Branch, now called Programs, and thereby recognised that outstation schools are a part of the settlement school. Outstation pupils are now counted on the enrolment of settlement schools.

The officers immediately responsible for outstation education are one Education Adviser in each of Darwin and Alice Springs and an Education Adviser Curriculum, who is still attached to the Bilingual section.

Reasons for the Outstation Movement

The reasons for the movement to outstations are difficult to formally identify as they appear to be basic to the 'felt needs' of Aboriginal people and are rarely expressed. However, Department of Aboriginal Affairs personnel, anthropologists, teachers and linguists who have close relationships with Aboriginal people summarise the main reasons as follows.

- . To re-establish the gerontocratic authority basic to the Aboriginal way of life and thereby found children soundly in Aboriginal law and culture.

- . To remove Aboriginal people from the degrading effects of settlement life. (The Department of Health has indicated that outstation people are healthier and better fed than those on settlements).²

- . To facilitate lands rights claims.

- . To protect sacred sites.

- . Simply to get away from Europeans and their influence.

It is realized that those reasons are subject to debate and that others can be given but irrespective of reasons the movement has taken place and is still growing.

Variations in Outstation Development

An understanding of the manner in which outstations develop is basic to the comprehension of their structure.

Outstations vary greatly in their stages of development, present circumstances, survival techniques, relationships with outsiders, attitudes of the people, and in their aspirations.

Examination of outstation development reveals that the period of time that an outstation has been in existence has little bearing on the development which has taken place. However, one easily recognised common factor, which is consistent with the stated policy of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, is that outstations have developed according to the needs of the people in them, as they identify their needs given the controls of priorities and budgetary restrictions of the government departments which supply the means to meet the needs. Thus some outstations are much more 'advanced' than others.

No matter what level of development an outstation has achieved, the Department of Education is geared to respond to the requests of the outstation without over-long delays and having assessed the request, using specified criteria, to respond positively or to reject it.

CURRENT SITUATION WITH REFERENCE TO THE SUPPLY OF EDUCATION SERVICES TO OUTSTATIONS

Initially settlement schools were, to a great extent, left to develop their own methods for supplying education services to communities which requested these³ but over a number of years, a basic common method, detailed below, evolved.

In outstation schools at the present time the 'teacher' is, in all but a few places, an untrained teaching assistant selected by the people from their own group. Although certain basic educational standards are laid down the level of academic achievement of such teaching assistants naturally varies greatly. A qualified teacher from the settlement school visits the outstation on a regular basis, weekly or fortnightly, and delivers pupils work booklets for the teaching assistant to distribute to his charges. The teaching assistant must ensure that the pupils complete the work in the booklets and gives the completed work books to the visiting teacher on his return, receiving in turn the new work books for the next week or fortnight.

This system has obvious disadvantages but it evolved through practical experience as the best method to use in what can only be regarded as the developmental period for outstations. Though difficult to assess, the optimum aim would appear to be to have a one or two teacher school in the charge of a qualified Aboriginal teacher on each outstation, but it will be some time before this happens.

The system also obviously places considerable onus upon the untrained teaching assistant. As the 'felt need' expressed by Aboriginal people is for 'English and Mathematics' to be taught, a great emphasis has been placed upon the basic subjects and, though this to some extent simplifies the task for the local teaching assistant, it must be borne in mind that some of these, by the nature of their selection, are barely literate.

Support for the on-site teaching assistant is obviously a pre-requisite and over a period of years has developed considerably. The support methods used are as follows:

The Visiting Teacher:

The role of the visiting teacher has changed since the inception of the Outstation movement.³ Initially teachers were recruited specifically for the task with a marked lack of response. Attempts were made by some of these teachers to live on Outstations for lengthy periods. This proved overly onerous for the teachers involved as the cultural dichotomy was too great. Now it is the procedure for settlement schools to regard Outstations schools as an inherent part of their school structure; school staff are allocated to one or two Outstations at most, while also being responsible for Outstation children from the same areas who attend the settlement school. Thus these teachers are responsible for what has become known as 'extended classes'.

A visiting teacher thus teaches his Outstation children in the settlement school for three or four days per week and visits his Outstation school on one or two days. As teachers in these situations usually team teach with one other qualified teacher in the settlement school, continuity is maintained.

Outstation children on their visits to settlements go to the classroom of their visiting teacher.

Not all schools use this method. The commonest variation is for a teacher or group of teachers to deal exclusively with Outstation schools and the remaining staff to operate a school 'normally' in the settlement.

Duties teachers perform on visits to Outstations are listed below:

1. Check through pupils workbooks with the children and teaching assistant.
2. Test children on work done.
3. Discuss test results and special and common errors with the teaching assistant.
4. Teach an E.S.L. lesson.
5. Introduce new workbooks to teaching assistant pointing out likely problems and advising on teaching approaches.
6. Teach one lesson based on the new workbooks.
7. Teach a second E.S.L. lesson.

The above is best achieved if the teacher stays at the Outstation overnight and, at present, opinion is being sought as to the best method of visiting and to the optimum frequency of visits. As can be seen from the list of duties, the onus placed upon the visiting teacher, in his support of the untrained teaching assistant, is considerable. The visiting teacher must establish a good working rapport with the teaching assistant and this is perhaps the keystone of the approach. This, combined with the dual role of teacher and teacher trainer, is sometimes beyond the young teachers to whom falls the lot of 'visiting teacher', and consideration is being given to methods which might be used to attract more experienced teachers to these positions.

Pupils' Workbooks:

Pupils' workbooks were introduced in 1976 at the suggestion of Maria Brandl, as the best method of ensuring that a basic core curriculum was covered in the Outstation schools to comply with the requests of the people there. The visiting teacher had the responsibility of preparing these booklets.

Since that time the quality of the workbooks has been considerably upgraded until in a massive exercise in 1979, which involved Outstation teaching staff and personnel from Curriculum Branch, workbooks which had originally been developed in schools were rewritten and upgraded. These will be available in schools in January 1980.

The booklets are in six levels with eighteen units or workbooks per level. They include instructions for teaching assistants.

A child who follows this course will have completed the equivalent of Year 4 in the core subjects in primary school. It is intended to trial and revise these workbooks in 1980 in preparation for the production of a 'finished' (in so far as it will ever be finished) version in 1982.

Apart from relieving the visiting teacher of the heavy responsibility of preparing them, these workbooks are seen as essential to the teaching assistant. They provide him with a core of material to be taught in the basic subjects, instructions on how to present the material and ensure continuity of teaching method and material.

This formal, prescribed approach is seen as essential in the present circumstances though obviously it has disadvantages. Not the least of these is the teaching of, and children's experience of, the English language.

However, in this developmental period, what has been achieved is the upgrading of the quality of education which can be provided, using basically distance teaching techniques applied from a resource centre through the medium of an untrained teaching assistant.

Teaching Assistant Training:

The visiting teacher is engaged in training the on-site teaching assistant. Various courses have also been organised in settlement schools for the outstation teaching assistants. Both of these methods have the drawback of providing training without accreditation.

Some settlement schools have had approval to commence accredited teacher training courses in conjunction with those provided at Batchelor teaching training college. These courses have been well received by the Aboriginal teaching assistants in the areas involved, but getting the outstation teaching assistants to attend the courses presents problems. The most obvious problem is that if the outstation teaching assistant does attend the training course at the settlement school, a replacement must be found, from the outstation group, to continue with the task of teaching the children. This is never easy and can lead to even more problems. Some outstation people have nominated younger members of their group for teacher training with the aim of having the young person as the outstation teacher on completion of training. This is the most desirable method but at present not enough outstation groups have

either the foresight or suitably educated young people to do this. However, the training of a member of the outstation group as a teacher is the obvious solution to the provision of education services to outstations and at present much consideration is being given to the development of suitable programs to accomplish this.

Courses for Post-Primary Pupils:

The present approach has placed an emphasis on the development of teaching materials for primary-age children. So far little has been done for the post-primary student, but attempts are now being made to develop unit courses of short duration on extremely practical lines, for example, service and maintenance of outboard engines, driving instruction courses, registering as a voter and voting etc. There is a wealth of material available from other countries on these lines and the Adult Education section of the department has produced a considerable amount of similar material.

It is not expected that on-site untrained teaching assistants will teach these courses, but the courses will be available in the future should the people request them. What is hoped is that the teaching assistant will be able to advise the people of what is available and will help to organise the presentation of such courses.

Teaching Assistant Positions:

The greatest single problem opposing the development of outstation schools is the lack of teaching assistant positions. When a community approaches the principal of a settlement school requesting an education service, and with a suitable nominee for the teaching assistant position, the principal faces the problem of finding a means of payment for the teaching assistant. Due to externally imposed ceilings on the employment of ancillary staff, no positions exist. The principal, therefore, has to find some other means of payment or refuse to start a school. Principals have, in the past, displayed considerable ingenuity in finding ways and means of paying teaching assistants so that outstation schools can commence. This should not be necessary.

Teaching assistants have worked (and still do) for periods of up to two years without payment of any kind so that outstation schools can continue. In view of stated government policy, this situation is invidious.

Funding of Outstation Schools:

Outstation schools are presently funded on the basis of \$500 on consumables, \$500 on plant and equipment to start each outstation school. After this initial funding children at outstation schools are counted on the enrolment of settlement schools and are funded on the normal per capita grant given to these schools.

Further Considerations:

The basic tenets of 'request' - 'response' have been stated and should be easy enough to appreciate in their simplest forms. In reality the exercise is a more complex one, and a factor which is important to the understanding of Outstation education is the extreme mobility of the Outstation child. An Outstation is not necessarily a permanent bush village with a stable population. Sometimes a site is abandoned and a new one chosen. Traditional food gathering cycles can account for a lot of movement around a 'homeland', while attendance at various ceremonies may involve a community in travelling considerable distances. This situation implies a double responsibility on the part of visiting teachers:

1. To be aware of such movements and to develop a good communications system with the Outstation people.
2. To be flexible in their planning.

Whilst flexibility is desirable, any changes in visiting routines will involve a number of other factors such as the condition of the roads, numbers of children at various locations, availability of transport, reception class organisation and so on. The breaking of established routine is in itself a factor to be considered.

There is also movement to and from established settlements. This may be a general movement (as seen during the wet season in the Top End) or simply a short term supply run. Whatever the reason, it is at this time that the Outstation pupils can attend reception classes at the settlement school. Each child will know the teacher and be known to the teacher. Each child will have the opportunity to consolidate his or her English language and number skills and to progress in these areas under the more intensive teaching of the settlement school.

In this context the Outstation program can be seen as part of an educative process and not as an isolated function.

CONCLUSION

I hope this article has assisted in creating a better understanding of outstation education services without causing too much of what has regrettably come to be regarded as 'inevitable' reaction. 'Education is kids', someone once said, and that is what outstation education is about. There are groups of children for whom their parents desire a form of academic education and who live in isolated areas. It is our responsibility to provide the best education service we can manage for these children while at the same time striving always to improve that service. I think that is what we are doing but I would feel more encouraged about succeeding if everyone felt the same way and if we could clear away the bias, from both sides, which exists with regard to outstations and regard them simply as places where there are children who want to be taught some of the things we teach well.

APPENDIX 1

DAA GOVERNMENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO ABORIGINALS 1980-81 - MINISTERIAL DIRECTIVE EDUCATION

OBJECTIVES

1. To ensure that Aboriginals are assisted and enabled to utilize available educational opportunities at all levels and that such opportunities for Aboriginals are in no way inferior to those available to the rest of the community.
2. To enable Aboriginals to overcome educational disadvantages they may suffer, including those created where existing educational services are inappropriate or inaccessible to them for economic, social or cultural reasons, by the provision of special educational facilities.
3. To ensure that Aboriginals receive an education which is in harmony with their cultural values and chosen lifestyle in order to enable them to have pride in their identity and enable them to acquire the skills they desire.
4. To promote education within the whole Australian community in the cultures and lifestyles of Aboriginal people.

5. To increase the numbers of Aboriginals with professional expertise in all aspects of the planning, conduct, and management of education programs.

Guidelines

1. The direct participation of Aboriginals and Aboriginal education advisory bodies in the planning, conduct and management of education projects and related research at all levels should be emphasised and encouragement given to parental involvement (including Parents and Citizens Associations). Such participation should include areas such as curriculum, school system organisation and teaching methods, and Aboriginals should be enabled to take an active part in decision-making as distinct from merely advising.
2. Appropriate emphasis should be placed on programs in education preparing Aboriginals for work in a community, or in the general labour market, or for specific job training. Preference should accordingly be given to projects which:
 - a) seek to improve the basic skills of literacy and numeracy
 - b) prepare for post-school employment and activities especially ones relevant to local circumstances;
 - c) provide technical or commercial skills.
3. In addition to 2) above, preference should be given to:
 - a) projects for Aboriginal students which adopt school structures, personnel, content and teaching methods to take account of Aboriginal needs and be relevant to their culture, lifestyle and thinking;
 - b) community education schemes, based on community consultation and adult involvement;
 - c) projects to train Aboriginal teachers, other professional education staff, and teacher aides, including those which enable aides to become teachers;
 - d) introduction or extension of appropriate Aboriginal studies components in courses for current and future professional workers, especially in the fields of education, health and the law;

- e) teaching of Aboriginal language and culture, both to
Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals;
 - f) adult education, including programs to develop communication and practical self-sufficiency skills (e.g. nutrition, home-management);
 - g) projects providing for continuing and recurrent education especially where this includes flexible structural arrangements leading to recognised qualifications (e.g. bridging courses, programs broken into segments each one of which provides a recognised qualification);
 - h) the development of practical self-management skills, e.g. project management, bookkeeping, etc.
- 4. Regional Directors should, particularly through State Education Departments, encourage the development and introduction of meaningful courses in Aboriginal language and culture.
 - 5. Where support is sought for Aboriginal independent schools, State Departments and other relevant authorities should be consulted to establish, among other things, whether they can appropriately and effectively meet the needs of the community. Where support is considered after such consultation, finance and resources available through the Schools Commission and State Departments should be explored, with a view to joint support.
 - 6. Where DAA meets the cost of salaries in ongoing State educational programs, State Departments should be urged to take over this responsibility progressively (including the employment of Aboriginal teacher aides).
 - 7. Projects should not be supported without fully investigating the possibility of financing by an appropriate educational authority (e.g. Tertiary Education Commission, Office of Child Care, Schools Commission) or other sources of financial support (e.g. NEAT, Aboriginal Secondary and Study Grant Schemes). Where such projects are already receiving support, Regional Directors should examine the possibility of transfers.

APPENDIX 2

DAA POLICY ON OUTSTATIONS

OBJECTIVES

1. To ensure that Outstations are provided with services and supported, in respect of the basic necessities of life, in a manner that takes account of Aboriginal lifestyles and against a background of consultation between Departments (Commonwealth and State) and communities.

GUIDELINES

1. It is necessary to make clear to groups contemplating relocation that their movement does not commit the Government to providing support, and to draw their attention to implications such as any diminution or absence of services and amenities they may currently enjoy.
2. Emphasis should be placed on the provision of basic necessities, or the means of obtaining them, and these include water, supplies, shelter, communications, and transport.
3. Projects to be supported should not include capital works of a permanent nature (including housing) until it is clear that the community is there to stay at the particular location of their choice.
4. State, Territory and local authorities should be pressed, wherever possible, to undertake responsibility for the provision of essential services to Outstation communities. Within the constraints of available finance and other priorities, the Department may provide supplementary grants to States to encourage them to undertake this responsibility.
5. Where movement to Outstations is likely to entail claims on Commonwealth, State and Territory resources for long-term developments and services (e.g. schools, clinics, mobile medical services) the relevant functional authorities should be consulted before such projects are supported by DAA.

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