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THE TRANSITIONAL PRE-SCHOOL AT KATHERINE

*Mrs J. Litchfield

Katherine, in the Northern Territory, is a country town with a population of approximately 3,500. The main industries are cattle and tourism, and the meatworks employ many people. The town is situated on the Katherine River, which has many magnificent picnic spots. The Katherine Gorge attracts many tourists. There are two community pre-schools, two primary schools, a high school which caters up to matriculation, and a rural education college.

The Katherine Transitional Pre-school was established ten years ago. It was set up for Aboriginal children and parents. Most of the children came from camps around town.

We now have a staff of five, so we consider ourselves very lucky. There are two trained teachers, a one-year-trained teaching assistant, a teacher aide, and a janitor/driver. (We are also very lucky to have our own bus - used to pick up children, and for excursions.) All the staff in 1981, except the teacher-in-charge, are Aboriginal.

In recent years non-Aboriginal children have been included in the program if, for any reason, they have a need for pre-school before they are four. The setting is a building in grounds of our own, with a large playground. We are situated right next door to the community health centre and we work very closely with the sister and health workers.

The program is run on a full day basis, and the children enjoy all the usual pre-school activities - pasting, painting, dough, blocks, puzzles, water-play, sand-play, climbing, bikes, etc. The mums come in and do the washing, and often use the showers. Billies of tea are made and cups of tea enjoyed. On average we have eight extra adults daily, and some of these adults are young single unemployed girls who come regularly. They help with the children and often look after the babies. They also read and relax among themselves.

* Mrs Jackie Litchfield, Teacher-in-Charge, Transitional Pre-school, Katherine, N.T. 5780.

The aims of the pre-school are still similar to those set down ten years ago, as the needs appear to be the same. They are:

1. To provide an educational program which will involve parents as well as children.
2. To create a happy atmosphere in the pre-school in which Aboriginal and disadvantaged families feel sufficiently at ease to become involved in the many activities provided.
3. To provide an environment in which Aboriginal families feel totally accepted.
4. To offer Aboriginal families the opportunity to become familiar with many experiences we take for granted in a non-Aboriginal community.
5. To promote interest in Aboriginal culture - and so help them to raise their self-esteem.
6. To give children under four years the opportunity to become familiar with a different way of life.
7. To provide experiences for the child which will enable him to enter pre-school and infant classes without disadvantage.
8. To provide children with the conditions for intellectual development and "learning to learn" stimulation found in favourable home environments.
9. To guide the language development of children and help them to develop an extensive and accurate vocabulary.
10. To provide a balanced daily meal and snacks, and to *ensure the well-being of the child in every possible way.*

The Transitional Pre-school certainly runs on a pre-school and community centre basis, and this works very well.

The children stay for a full day - from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.- and have lunch prepared by the aide and mothers. The children then have a sleep on little stretchers.

Bobby, our janitor/driver, plays a big role in the program. The children all hop willingly onto the bus, as they all know "Uncle Bobby"

Last year he began a big vegetable garden in the corner of the playground, and grew tomatoes, lettuce, cabbage, capsicums, carrots, onions, chilies (which the adults love), corn and spinach. This made our lunches very cheap, and varied and nutritious. Cooking was done with the mums to show how these vegetables could be used. He also planted many banana trees and we now have three big bunches of bananas ripening. Bobby is also building a fowl-house - so soon we will be eating our own fresh eggs. (A fair sum of money was raised by selling the surplus vegetables to locals.)

The teaching aide and assistant are local women, and play a big role in helping to ensure all parents and children realize the pre-school is available for them. They are very aware of local problems. The teacher aide, Sally Mumbin, has been at the pre-school for ten years!

Our Aboriginal teacher is also a local girl, who returned to Katherine after training down south. Her local knowledge is invaluable, and because most people know her it is very easy for parents to approach her.

Attendance is now right up, with an average of 32 children attending daily.

Some days are "messy", some are very noisy, and many days flow smoothly along - but all days are happy and relaxed.

The staff, children and parents at this pre-school are Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal and all work and play together in a busy, happy and relaxed manner.



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THE NEED FOR COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION

Ms P.A. Mortensen,
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The charge is frequently made that the education provided for minority groups throughout the world is not designed to educate all of the minority group people but merely a carefully chosen few, in an attempt, not always deliberate or even conscious, to maintain the oppressive *status quo*. On any nationally applied indicator of success, such as the number of tertiary graduates or the expressed