



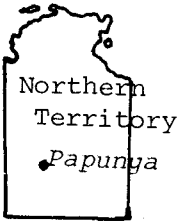
The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

This article was originally published in printed form. The journal began in 1973 and was titled *The Aboriginal Child at School*. In 1996 the journal was transformed to an internationally peer-reviewed publication and renamed *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*.

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OUTSTATION EDUCATION : WESTERN DESERT STYLE

*N. Coutts

PREAMBLE

Papunya settlement is located some 250km west of Alice Springs on the Haasts Bluff Aboriginal Reserve. Originally commenced in 1958 as an alternative for the growing numbers of people living at the old Finke River Mission ration depot of Haasts Bluff, it became the centre of the Luritja language group. These people were traditionally Mayutjara, Ngalia or Pintupi. There are some other languages spoken at Papunya but this is almost exclusively by adults who have married into the Luritja group. A large number of traditional Pintupi people who have lived at or near Papunya are now located on what are known as the Western Outstations.

The present education complex at Papunya is a diverse one to cater for the varying community aspirations. There are three distinct educational approaches:

- a) The English First Language strand, which caters for the children of white settlement staff and those Aboriginal children who do not have vernacular as a first language.
- b) The 2nd Language strand, which is used by the majority of the central school.
- c) The Bilingual strand, utilised on outstations who have requested this.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE PAPUNYA WESTERN OUTSTATION MOVEMENT

During the 1960s, the Western Desert Pintupi people began to filter into Papunya for a variety of reasons - ceremonial, curiosity, visits to relatives, etc. The harsh, extended drought through the early and mid-1960s, forced government agencies into relocating significant numbers of these nomadic desert dwellers into the nearest

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government settlement to their traditional lands - Papunya. Papunya rapidly became a melting pot of social unrest. Many of the problems of this era were attributed to the unsophisticated Pintupi people. The more institutionalised Papunya groups generally regarded their desert relatives as "bush myalls" and fair game for proportioning the blame for most social disturbance.

Dissatisfaction with their position grew among the Pintupis. The inability of the older generation to compete and cope with their more sophisticated settlement-dwelling relatives in matters of council control and day-to-day parochial decision-making, together with the more obvious effects of alcohol on the young, led to a general desire to move back to traditional land. The years of access to the readily available facilities at Papunya (water, package foods, etc.) governed the extent of early moves to a great degree.

The first homeland movements consisted merely of clan/family groups of Pintupi people living relatively close to, but west of Papunya. In the early 1970s, a mini community of some 300 Pintupis grouped together at Kakali Bore on Yayayi Creek. With the availability of financial aid from Aboriginal Benefit Trust Fund for establishing homeland groups and for a number of other reasons, the Yayayi community dispersed after a three year period.

The next few years saw a proliferation of small outstation groups established. Despite the sinking of bores and in some cases the erection of mills and tanks, viability and stability were very seasonal. These groups were still very much dependent on the established Papunya institutions for stores, maintenance, health and social security payments, etc. The nearest outstation to traditional land was established at Yilbili, some 150km west of Papunya - this was considered as the limit of distance for support services. The majority of groups settled from distances varying from 10km to 90km west of the settlement.

In mid-1981, the awaited move back to traditional land was made by the Pintupis. Bores had been sunk at the Kintore Ranges some 350km west of Papunya. The Pintupi from the closer outstation and western camp of Papunya began moving there with promises of support. By February 1982, some 300 of the desert dwellers had returned to their country. The Kintore Community has its own incorporated council and operates a small ration store. A weekly plane service and a road grading program have improved access.

EDUCATION

The first attempt to provide an educational service to the Pintupi outstation people was at Yayayi, approximately 50km west of Papunya. A number of discussions on educational aspirations were held with this community in 1972. The people's basic concerns were seen as "reading and writing, both in English and vernacular and some detailed knowledge of money calculations..."¹

The Northern Territory Department of Education had recently sanctioned the innovative Bilingual Education Program in select communities of the Northern Territory. This act, together with the on-site availability of two S.I.L. linguists, K. & L. Hansen, who had been working with the Pintupis for a number of years, led to the development of a trial Bilingual Education program at Yayayi. A one-teacher caravan school was established. The Hansens, in co-operation with the Department, developed a series of vernacular Primer readers for use in the school. Yayayi school remained functional for some 2½ years, finally closing as the Pintupis dispersed to establish smaller outstation groups.

During the mid-1970s, some trial work was undertaken with outstation groups. Warrawiya community, approximately 30km west, was visited on a fairly regular basis by the one visiting teacher appointed to Papunya. In an attempt to overcome the lack of success in attracting local Pintupi children from the western camps to the central school, efforts were made to take classes in nearby camps.

Following major departmental surveys in 1977 (J. Heffernan) and 1978 (E. Murtagh Report), a trial Bilingual program for the Western outstations was adopted. The appointment of visiting teachers, the transfer of roneo-duplicating equipment from the defunct Yayayi School and the securing of two suitable 4-wheel-drive Toyotas, together with the appointment of a teacher/linguist and production supervisor, saw considerable efforts put into the initial stages of the trial. The establishment of schooling at the more stable outstations commenced.

In 1979 and 1980, financial grants were secured from various government agencies to set up a well-equipped production centre with offset machinery and dark room facilities. A major step up in vernacular production was then possible. Three visiting teachers with

¹ Hansen, K. & L. Unpublished papers presented to N.T. Dept. of Education, 12/7/72.

on-site Aboriginal assistants provided a regular and consistent bilingual service to up to six homeland groups.

In 1982, following the major move of Pintupi people to the Kintore Ranges, a visiting teacher program commenced there, in response to Community demands. The program is for a 12 month trial period, when further reviews will be undertaken. Two visiting teachers are involved camping on-site for two weeks out of every three. They are assisted by four on-site Aboriginal assistants. Currently, this program involves approximately 60 children, most of whom were previously taught on the outstations closer to Papunya.

A further 30 children at Mt Liebig and Warren Creek outstations approximately 90 km from Papunya also have a visiting teacher program. These children are not of Pintupi descent and are mainly taught in an English only approach utilising the N.T. Education Department's School of the Bush series.

THE PAPUNYA OUTSTATIONS BILINGUAL APPROACH

Faced with a high degree of mobility between outstation classes and with the relatively unsophisticated Aboriginal assistant teachers on site, a conscious decision was taken to produce a simplified, ordered approach with clearly defined progression in the vernacular literacy area. The production of teaching kits that the assistant teachers could capably handle with minimum of training and supervision was justifiably seen as a priority.

THE CURRICULUM

The three core areas of teaching adopted are: Language, that is vernacular reading and writing, Oral English (coupled with incidental English story reading) and Maths. These three areas are treated on an intensive basis daily. For post Year 5 children an English reading and writing approach is adopted (in accordance with standard Bilingual practice).

1. Language

a) *Reading.* A series of four Primers in Pintupi, called *Wangka Walytja*, were first developed in 1973 by linguists Ken and Lesley Hansen in co-operation with the N.T. Department of Education. These were first used at Yayayi School. A handbook for teachers for each Primer was also incorporated. This series forms the basis of the vernacular reading program in use today.

Each Primer has been divided into 26 units with an optimum usage of one unit per week. After each 7th unit, a supplementary reader is introduced. Current production by the Bilingual Resource Development Unit is refining the original series by producing new workbooks which include extra revision exercises, the appropriate Primer page, and reinforcement exercises. There are 26 workbooks for each of the four levels.

Every workbook details the appropriate Primer page and necessary drill work and exercises. These are supplemented through the first level by the use of locally produced syllable cards for word and sentence building along the Breakthrough to Literacy style of reading program. The production and use of flash cards and sentence charts for each unit completes the reading kit.

Each of the 26 units then, consists of a kit comprising workbooks for each child, word and sentence building package for each child, flash cards and a large class-sized Primer chart.

A workbook series on pre-reading exercises has also been produced to cater for the pre-reading readiness stage.

The reading approach adopted is an analytical one (phonetic based) modelled on the method developed by Sarah Gudschinsky of Queensland.

b) *Writing*. A series of local writing work books from pre-writing stage to full upper/lower case printing have been produced in the vernacular, using the adopted Pintupi orthography. A further series introducing cursive writing is at the production stage.

2. Oral English

This area is strictly the responsibility of the visiting teacher. The N.T. Department of Education's Oral English Guidelines form the basis of the oral English core. Some selective use has occurred in adapting various units into situational themes etc.

Suitable English story books from the Papunya Central School's library are read regularly to children by the visiting teacher. This aids in familiarising children with the cadence, intonation and flow of English language. Some songs are also taught in English to further reinforce the use of oral English.

3. Mathematics

The Maths core adopted to date has concentrated towards mastery of the four processes and the practical usage of these. One to one relationships, grouping, estimation and the measurement skills of time, space, length, etc., are taught through the use of concrete materials as much as possible (sticks, berries, etc.). Considerable work has yet to be done to upgrade the Maths program, particularly in its vernacular component. The numeracy program followed is correlated to the Oral English curriculum. Work has commenced on developing an environmental Maths approach.

ADULT LITERACY

On-site training of Aboriginal assistant teachers is an important facet of the visiting teacher's role. Most afternoons a session is conducted with the Aboriginal assistant on teaching methods and in upgrading basic academic skills. This on-going training is supplemented by a week's intensive inservice work at the central school each semester.

Adults are frequently included with school sessions. In some cases motivated by a desire to learn to read, or by mere curiosity, this interaction is encouraged. The open-air classroom is ideally suited for such involvement.

Further impetus towards education with the adult outstation members has been provided by the S.I.L. linguists who are now employed in teaching adult vernacular literacy.

The interest shown in monthly newspapers, information sheets and reading books produced in the vernacular by the local B.R.D.U. is very encouraging.

SUMMARY

The following points summarise the Western Outstation approach as I see it.

1. The program and philosophy is sufficiently flexible to allow for the variables inherent in this type of educational service.
2. There is a definite response to the needs of the community.

3. The development of teaching kits which are able to be used confidently by semi-literate Aboriginal assistants, reflects the positive thought and approach towards Aboriginal involvement.
4. A major factor in the success of our program to date has undoubtedly been the dedication and commitment of the personnel involved - visiting teachers, the local Bilingual Resource staff and the on-site assistant teachers.

THE OUTSTATION TEACHER

Perhaps the only way to understand the pressures and stresses involved with outstation teaching is to experience it first-hand. The frustrations of anyone engaged in long, continual cross-cultural contact, the struggle to adjust to a physical and mental state that can enable you to co-exist harmoniously in a gregarious society that knows no privacy as the 'whitefella' understands it, have to be experienced to be understood.

The physical demands of living days on end out of a swag, constant exposure to the elements, flies, dust and the added burden of being an unpaid advisor to the community, all take their toll. The mental stress of constant language exposure, of coping with a society that constantly asks and demands, (because that is *their* way) places the visiting teacher under immense pressures.

Yet the commitment remains. Why? Perhaps some quotes from our practising visiting teachers best sum up the other side of the coin.

"A little girl talked to me the other night and explained how she had sat at another outstation and she was *ngurrpa*, that is, 'did not know', and now she can read. She wants to go to Yirara College. Educated only on outstations yet she'll make it, I'm sure."

"A miserable night spent almost sleepless, huddled in the swag under inadequate shelter from the rain - I remember watching the sun rising in the east and asking myself what could compensate for this? Then two small school kids wrapped in blankets against the wet and cold, wandered over and lit my fire and put the billy on and said, 'Soon time for school Tjupurrula'."

"Who get you up? The kids! You get to school (a shady tree bounded by some corrugated iron to act as a wind break). You start

slowly. You are disorganised. The assistant teachers and the kids get you going, for there's no one else to do it. You begin to respond to the kids, to happy kids, to kids who feel left out, to kids who are down, to kids who give you a look that makes you feel alive. Then you forget about time and how long to smoko, and about the heat and wind and how tired you feel. You persevere because you feel wanted, needed, and you can see that you are achieving something - something that is valued by the community."

"You can learn me too, Tjupurrula. I don't know 'im that whitefella business (points to the story-book on Robin Hood I had just read to an avid group of kids, including his grandsons). Might be some day I'll have to talk with paper to gov'ment."

The rewards then, are an almost total commitment by the community towards schooling, a unique position in forming relationships and insights into a traditional living people and the pleasure of seeing worthwhile, realistic goals and aspirations being achieved.

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THE ABORIGINAL CHILD AT SCHOOL

A National Journal for Teachers of Aborigines

Published five times per year

Annual subscription rates within Australia:

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IT WOULD BE APPRECIATED IF 1983 SUBSCRIPTIONS COULD BE FORWARDED BEFORE THE FINISH OF THE SCHOOL YEAR,