



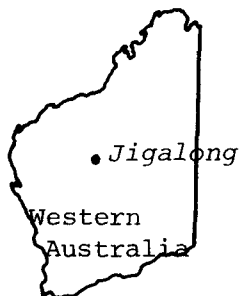
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WORK-EXPERIENCE PROGRAMS - JIGALONG

*E.A. O'Keefe

Jigalong is an Aboriginal Community some 180 kilometres by road from the large mining centre of Newman in Western Australia's Pilbara area. Originally an Apostolic Church mission, it is now an incorporated Aboriginal Community. The Community owns and operates a cattle station which is a large employer of workers from the Community. Nearby stations also employ Jigalong people as workers. The Community is made up of about 350 people who originally came from the Western Desert Region of Western Australia.

I am in my second year of teaching at Jigalong. During this time I have attempted to establish a program which suits 14 to 18 year-old boys and is designed to help these boys find work in the local pastoral industry. It is hoped that some of the ideas developed in this article will be of interest to others when they find themselves posted to a remote Aboriginal community.

GET TO KNOW THE COMMUNITY

In many cases teachers posted to remote areas leave their travelling until the last possible moment. It is much easier in the long run if the teacher arrives at the Community at least a couple of days before the commencement of the school term. This gives time to get used to the place before the pressures of school commence. It also gives the Community time to get used to you. If you get the impression everything you do is being watched, it is! Get used to it! Be open - don't lock yourself up in the house. Traditionally, Aborigines knew everything that was happening in a camp. They distrust people who keep out of view.

Show an interest in the people you see often. The people are your hosts and will be for the duration of your stay. Aboriginal people have a great sense of community, and if you become accepted as a community member, you will find people wanting to help you.

* Mr Tim O'Keefe, Jigalong School, via Newman, W.A.

It is necessary to become a part of the community in which one teaches. By involving him/herself in the community the teacher can gain the trust of the children's parents and learn something of the Aboriginal culture. The teacher must make a commitment to the community and not just regard his/her stay in an Aboriginal community as a necessary evil in his/her teaching career.

(O'Keefe, 1981, p.45)

Your job will require you to speak with parents, children and community leaders. Get used to it and get them used to speaking with you. Aborigines need time to get to know someone and time to learn how to react to someone.

When the teacher's character and personality are known, then the children will know how to respond to him... Aboriginal people have very highly developed social abilities and distrust a person who seems unwilling to communicate with them.

(Hart, 1974, p.37)

WHAT JOBS ARE AVAILABLE?

Once settled into the community, the teacher who is preparing students for a smooth school-to-work transition needs to ascertain the job aspirations of the students, the parents and the community. Some communities want the young men and women to stay in the community. Often they have definite ideas about which youths will do certain jobs. It is the teacher's task to ascertain these intentions and try to implement them.

At Jigalong the areas of employment are easily defined:

1. Office workers - clerks, typists, bookkeepers.
2. Pastoral workers - fencing workers, windmill men, jackeroos.
3. Community maintenance workers- mechanics, plumbers, builders.
4. Store workers - shop assistants, managerial assistants.
5. School workers - cleaners, aides, gardeners.
6. Health clinic - cleaners, health workers, camp nurses.
7. Cottage industries - as established.

The next step is to devise a program to develop the skills which will help the students carry out the jobs competently.

The school morning is devoted to broadly based core subjects such as literacy and numeracy. Wherever possible the content is oriented towards various employment areas. Every afternoon the periods of extended work experience are devoted to the teaching of practical skills. These practical skills are developed through the various projects undertaken, such as: erection and maintenance of a windmill; tanning of cattle skins; yarding, branding and castrating cattle.

METHODS OF TEACHING

In many of the job areas you may not feel competent to teach the practical skills. Discover who is carrying out these jobs and ask them to help you. In most cases they can teach you as well as the students. Once they know you are interested, they are often very keen to help.

Always be prepared to learn yourself. It is appreciated by the students as well as the adults. They love to see the teacher in the role of a learner, and many friendships can be made whilst mustering cattle and building fences. Also, the literacy and oracy output which results from seeing the teacher thrown from a horse or kicked by a cow is quite extensive.

Don't forget cottage industries. Some of the local people may have a specific skill which they can pass on to the students. Such cottage industries could include: skin tanning, leather work, canvas work, market gardening, artefact manufacture.

Find markets for goods produced - in many cases people in the nearest large centre will be only too willing to purchase quality-made products, and fresh vegetables are often highly prized.

Use Traditional Aboriginal Methods of Education. The traditional Aboriginal methods of education are understood by the children and they respond to them. If taught by an Aboriginal person, all to the good. At times a teacher in this field of education has to admit that he is unsure and is not the font of all knowledge. Don't worry about it. An Aboriginal stockman can probably teach the students to shoe a horse quicker, better and more efficiently (using his own language) than you can. Let him. Get the students to tell you what is happening and what he has said. Use it as an Oracy lesson.

What are the traditional modes of education? Dr R. McKeich (1977) sees them, in part, as:

1. Informal, incidental, on the spot, situational, immediate.
2. Not oriented towards specific goals, rewards or achievements. There are no prizes.
3. Not competitive. People learn because they need to know, not to pass exams or to be top of the class.
4. Related to total living within a community and not, as in school, mainly directed towards only one facet of life, an economic future.
5. Imparted by many 'teachers' who are relatives.
6. Communicated by direct experience or through sacred or secular stories.
7. An out-of-doors experience, often around a fire, and not in the 'artificial' environment of a classroom of desks.

SUPERVISION OF WORK EXPERIENCE

Any practical activity can be potentially dangerous. Anticipate the dangers and point them out to the students. Know the students. Very often a few quiet words before any practical activity are far better than many loud ones when something goes wrong. Above all, allow the students to work at their own pace and they will move along when they are confident. This also goes for the Aboriginal people assisting you - give them credit for knowing the task and allow them to teach both your students and yourself. Treat them as you would a professional colleague.

If possible, observe the students working and write comments on their progress. Time spent just watching is not wasted. If the students want to tackle a task, let them - allow them to make mistakes - they will learn from them.

DON'T FORGET EMPLOYERS OUTSIDE THE COMMUNITY

Learn who has employed people from the community in the past and contact them. Find out how you could better prepare their workers of the future. You will receive some negative comments but persist. After contacting several previous employers around Jigalong, it was found that they wanted the following skills developed: windmill maintenance, preventive vehicle maintenance, saddle and

riding gear maintenance. The school was able to help them by including these in practical work programs. The employers helped with donations of old saddlery gear, advice to teachers and by taking students for two weeks' work-experience programs.

POSSIBLE SOURCES OF FUNDING

1. Commonwealth Education - speak with your local Education Officer and find out how they can help.
2. Commonwealth/State School to Work Transition Scheme. Guidelines vary - details are available from both Commonwealth and State Education Departments.
3. Parents will often assist with small sums if they believe in the program.
4. Junk Drives - look around the community. Old car batteries and radiators are worth \$'s.
5. Start a market garden as a project and sell the produce.

In giving secondary school Aboriginal students vocational training, the teacher (as I see it) must be innovative, supportive, demanding, understanding. He/she must extend the students whilst not letting them get out of their depth. But, above all, he/she must believe in the students and that what he/she is doing is worthwhile.

The teacher, in even the smallest community, has a wealth of experience and people with skills to draw on; it is a matter of finding out who has them and getting them to help teach the students.

With the support and trust of the local Aboriginal community the teacher's task is made much easier. By working in tandem with the community, the teacher can make a worthwhile contribution to the students and to the community as a whole.

References

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