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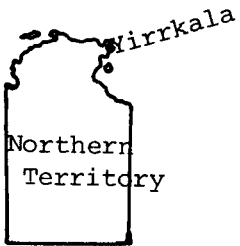
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ACROSS AUSTRALIA.....

FROM TEACHER TO TEACHER



OUTSTATION SCHOOLS AT YIRRKALA

*B. Yunupingu

During 1973 the outstation movement at Yirrkala was going in full force. Aboriginal people were moving from Yirrkala to start up their own communities consisting of numbers of their own clan. During that time Aboriginal people asked many questions about school. So in 1975 the outstation schools were established and were serviced by two visiting teachers from the central school.

The names of the communities and the clans that established their outstations in terms of houses and school are these:

Garrthalala (Djapu)
Gurumuru (Dhalwayu)
Gangan (Dhalwayu)
Baniyala (Madampa)

Since the above places got established and had a school going the communities listed below got started and are presently operating:

Dhalinybuy (Wangurri)
Wandawuy (Djapu)

and Bawaka (Gumatj) and Biranybirany (Gumatj) are talking about starting a school.

The main reasons for the outstation movement were centred on land rights and the federal government's policy of self-determination. The people of Yirrkala had already experienced the struggle for land rights and were frightened that the same thing would happen as at Yirrkala where mining is taking place on Gumatj and Rirratjingu land.

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Because of what might happen on the other clans' land other than the Gumatj and the Rirratjingu, the people were living too far away from their own traditional land, and the fright of mining prompted the outstation movement.

Also, I think that the social organisation wasn't as strong within the clans other than the Gumatj and the Rirratjingu so they wanted to move out and re-establish their clans' social organisational structure.

In each outstation community the school is structured so that the people are running their own school. The main ways in which they influence the school are through the selection of their teachers and what is to be taught.

Some communities were hasty in selecting their teachers. They didn't get the right advice in the first place. In this I feel that some teachers were disadvantaged because they were illiterate and some were put there because of their social position within the community. If given the time to do ground work with the outstation leaders, they would have come up with something better. The qualities needed are: respected person in the community and strong enough in literacy to be able to lead the children.

In 1981 I was working alongside my balanda (white) counterpart, Trevor Stockley, as visiting outstation teacher. We encountered difficulties in the schools and the communities. Some of the difficulties that we faced were that communities weren't thinking about long term issues that were going to affect them in the school area. The biggest problem was getting the communities organised to start thinking for themselves and be happy about what decisions they come up with. Whether it was a decision that they made for school or the community we didn't care as long as their decision was right and fitted in with development of the school and the community at large.

When the outstations were established and the communities were stable, people thought that their jobs were done and that they could sit back and see the world go by. But that wasn't the case. People needed to make money and they started to talk about setting up their own gardens for the outstations that were inland and a fishing industry for the outstations that were situated along the coast.

As far as the fishing industry was concerned the communities that were given government assistance were Dhalnybuy and Baniyala. The other outstations that were talking about market gardens were given assistance by the people who work in the Community Development

office at Yirrkala who were farming specialists and knew a lot about agriculture. There is only one community that is growing and selling sweet potatoes, and the fishing industry started and fell because the people were experiencing difficulties in maintaining the diesel motors and the freezers.

This was a clear example of how the government works with the Aboriginal people in not carefully doing the ground work first before action, and in this case they should have started with a smaller diesel and smaller freezer to be able to build up to where they could start using the big ones. We all make mistakes and we learn from making mistakes. But it is far more sensible to learn from things that cost the government a small amount rather than learning from mistakes that cost the government heaps of money.

Children are aware of what is going on in the community and the parents and the relatives must start to give good examples so that the children have an opportunity to learn and perhaps make the right judgements if they are ever going to become potential leaders.

One thing that Trevor and I agreed on before we even started working for the outstations was that we wanted to build up within the minds of the Aboriginal people out of the outstations "Aboriginal autonomy". The outstation people have a better chance of exercising Aboriginal autonomy without any balanda influence. Trevor and I felt that this was a big task for us and often we would have lengthy discussions with the community about how they saw outstation schools operating with the community in control of the school.

I think that the Aboriginal people at the outstations need to start controlling money and spending it wisely for the interest of the clan. We found out that some outstation schools were not using the money that was supposed to be for the children wisely and not within the interest of the school. We found out that the account was always kept by the leader of the community and he had access to it anytime. At some outstations the people never used to have meetings to determine where they wanted their money spent. As soon as they got the money or cheque they would spend it straight away and not think about the future of the school.

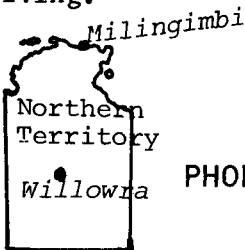
We helped to organise the communities to use the Isolated Children's Allowance in a better way. We called a meeting at every outstation and talked thoroughly about money that the school could be using to a better cause so that the community could be benefiting from it.

We got the people thinking about employing a second teacher and suggested that the community use I.C.A. money to pay the second teacher. All outstations agreed and it was a big start for budgeting for the communities, and a big step for the young people to start using balanda skills to an extent where they can start talking for themselves and their communities.

To have a good relationship with the outstations we always worked closely with the Yirrkala Community Development staff. Whenever we came up with something big we always went to them to seek advice and they in return used to come up to us to seek out advice. We were both called liars and unprofessional by one or two people at one of the outstations. Rather than making these people unhappy and making bad relationships with them, we would always share problems of that nature with the Community Development staff. They were most helpful towards problems that we were faced with and that we couldn't solve.

CONCLUSIONS

I think that the outstations are right because I feel that the people want it there, so that they can determine their own destiny. I feel that the Aboriginal way of living will always be there and the community will have to start expanding their ideas in staffing their schools, developing curriculum, teacher training and so on. I think that the people out at the outstations will be a proud group of people because I envisage that they will get a chance that no Aboriginal people in Australia got in determining their own way of living.



PHONICS FOR THE ABORIGINAL CLASSROOM

* M.A. Gale

Much has been said and written by the reading specialists about the way children learn to read and how teachers should be facilitators in this natural process. Frank Smith says that phonics need not be taught in the classroom; in fact he says it makes the learning to read process more difficult for children (Smith 1973, p.185).

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