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ACROSS AUSTRALIA.....

FROM TEACHER TO TEACHER

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN ABORIGINAL SCHOOLS

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A Human Resource Development Program is badly needed for Aboriginal schools - a program that is going to -

- cater for all groups of people connected with the school;
- allow for real and consistent participant decision making about priorities and programs;
- be developmental in its structure.

I propose the following model as a program that can achieve more fully Human Resource Development than is currently happening.

A. GROUPS AND THEIR NEEDS

1. PARENTS need an understanding of the aims of the school and their own potential input.

2. COMMUNITY COUNCIL - this is representative of the parents, and needs to understand the operation of the Education Department and the community educational aspirations, so that it can discuss these with the school.

3. TEACHERS need to -

- Improve their teaching skills within their cultural environment.
- Develop curriculum specific to that cultural environment.
- Have an understanding of the way children think and act.
- Help formulate the goals of the school in conjunction with the parents.

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4. ABORIGINAL ASSISTANTS need to -

- Develop their teaching skills.
- Understand something of the non-Aboriginal culture.
- Understand and help formulate the goals of the school in conjunction with the parents.
- Develop the curriculum specific to their environment.

It must be accepted that the Education Department has limited funds for providing inservice work. Any proposal needs to take this into account. Many people, however, have a great deal to offer and, properly organised, these resources cost very little. In other words, we must make the best of what we have.

B. METHODS

PARENTS should have contact with school in the following ways:

- Through the family community council representative, who should discuss education matters from the parent point of view, and from the school point of view. (More will be said about this later.)

- By open days at school, either for the whole school or, preferably, just for a particular class. During these open days teachers and the principal should spend time showing samples of work and explaining exactly what is aimed at in the class. It should also be pointed out just where that class fits in the overall scheme of the school.

- Twice a year, a child's teacher should visit that family to discuss the child's progress. This is far more preferable to asking the parents to come individually to school, which is a threatening environment for many, although open days certainly are desirable.

- Whenever an activity is undertaken that parents may assist in, particularly a local excursion, as many parents as possible should be invited. In this way teachers can informally talk with them about school. Parents' own extensive bush skills can be used as a teaching exercise showing them that they are very much an important part of a child's education. It also shows that the school has a healthy respect for the child's culture.

COUNCIL - This is the official decision making body for the community and it is important to work through it. Obviously, all that is said about parents holds good for the community council. In addition, the following formal activities should be organised:

- The school aims, as discussed by the staff, should be presented to an annual special council meeting by the principal and the most senior Aboriginal assistant in the school. Discussion and questions should be encouraged.

- The council should have special monthly 'school days' in which they visit classrooms and have a pre-organised talk from the principal or other staff member about an aspect of education within the school, for example, bilingual theory, the aims of environmental science.

- To give the council a broader perspective of education, the school should arrange a visit by members to another school, preferably one quite different, or at least show a video tape of another school in action.

ABORIGINAL TEACHING ASSISTANTS are often untrained and unsure of what school is about, and yet are enthusiastic and often very professional in their sense of responsibilities. They need the following input:

- A daily planning session with the trained teacher, who discusses the various aspects of teaching and classroom management, strengths and weaknesses as they occurred during the day, and the lesson plans for the next day. Some of the most important aspects of this session are - learning how to plan from a curriculum document, how to write programs or lesson notes, how to record check-lists, and how to follow a timetable.

- There should also be daily periods without pupils where formal teaching methodology is taught. These sessions should be taught by experienced teachers who can be released from class duty for that time, for example, the principal, teacher/linguist.

- Some time during the week should be given over to the Aboriginal staff developing their own skills in literacy and numeracy.

- A short weekly session should focus on non-Aboriginal culture in Australia, explaining how and why Europeans behave as they do.

• All other activities for teachers, as outlined below, should include the Aboriginal staff, except where it obviously is not applicable to them. For example, if no Aboriginal teacher teaches Oral English, there is no point in including them in such discussions, unless they show a particular interest and wish to be involved.

TEACHERS. Because a very large percentage of teachers in Aboriginal Schools are very inexperienced, this group needs a wide-ranging program, the actual details of which can only be decided by individual schools and depends upon the size and location. Although the following activities are suggested for the larger Aboriginal Schools, it is recommended that the small schools are given the same activities, but co-ordinated from the Regional Office. To be involved in the full program it means that teachers would have to agree to committing a great deal of time and energy to it. This initial discussion would become, in fact, the beginning of the program.

INITIAL DISCUSSIONS from a presentation of the possibilities of activities for teacher development. From this can be worked out the extent to which the program can be utilised.

TEACHING SKILLS should be developed from a variety of sources. *The specific needs to be developed should be those expressed to be important by the teachers involved.*

- a) Videos of good classroom teachers in operation from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal schools;
- b) Teacher exchanges from bush schools to town schools to give inexperienced teachers an idea of the conditions and responsibilities of teachers in such situations. (Note - bush schools equate with Aboriginal schools)
- c) Observation of good teachers in both town and bush schools.
- d) Demonstration lessons by experienced peer teachers, senior staff and visiting advisers.

SCHOOL POLICY and *GOAL SETTING* should be set in two phases:

- a) At the beginning of the school year when the long term aims are reset in conjunction with the parents and the council. These aims should be a staff-community consensus.

- b) The staff should come together every quarter semester (five weeks) to discuss the school's short term goals for immediate focus.
- c) This could be extended further into a full Organisational Development program.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT should begin by the formulation of a school curriculum development policy, or model, so there is uniformity of approach and document presentation. From that point on, specific curriculum areas should be worked on by -

- a) Teachers being involved in action-research of both materials and methods. This gives a more professional basis for what is put into classrooms. The organised analysis is an excellent basis for teacher development.
- b) Each of the main curriculum areas should have one contact teacher in the school who specialises in knowledge of that field. It is this teacher's job to help others organise developments in this field; to contact other schools in the area for information exchange and to have an on-going dialogue with the subject area adviser; to have changes monitored by an outside observer. These advisers should visit the school as frequently as possible to discuss developments with all concerned.
- c) It would also be extremely valuable for the school specialists from one area, for example language group, to meet together to discuss and exchange developments.

TEACHING PROBLEMS are best tackled at round table staff discussions. Teachers really are a wealth of ideas and this resource should not be wasted. There should be regular "problem airing" sessions where each teacher in turn presents his/her most pressing problems. An extension of this is the grouping of teachers from a particular area according to their level taught. For example, all the early childhood teachers from the Arnhem Region could meet for two days for a problem/solution exchange. I feel this is an exceptionally valuable form of teacher development.

DEVELOPMENT OF UNDERSTANDING OF ABORIGINAL CULTURE, and cross-cultural education, is of paramount importance to a successful education program. Teachers must appreciate the validity of the culture of their pupils, and support each child's developing identity. This can be done again by round table discussions at two levels:

- a) Teacher's own topics of interest to be discussed by others with a free voicing of points of view.
- b) Discussions of talks by guest speakers (e.g. community adviser, resident linguist); presentation of papers and ideas by those with a particular interest or knowledge.

This is a most important section of H.R.D., and sessions should be held regularly. It must also cover those areas which are of most interest to teachers, and give them plenty of opportunity for discussion

To summarise - H.R.D. is a long-neglected priority in schools in general, and particularly in Aboriginal schools. Teachers, principals and administrators need to study which groups interact with and within schools, and what are the basic needs of each group. Once these have been identified, a long-range co-ordinated program needs to be presented - one that is consistent and developing. It must answer the needs of the participants and make the school more efficient. We are morally and professionally obliged to do all we can to improve the quality of education in Aboriginal schools. I believe that, by engaging in programs similar to those outlined in the proposal, the quality of education *will* improve.

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We have received two interesting publications - *A Study of Traditional Aboriginal Society* - a Social Studies Unit Curriculum Guide and Resources, Years 4 - 8, and *Bush Tucker*, a bush food list of the Murray - Mallee Region.

The books were compiled and produced by the Aboriginal Educators who work in the Swan Hill area, Victoria.

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