

SURVEY OF ABORIGINAL PARENTS IN DARWIN

*Djuwandayngu Wunungmurra

INTRODUCTION

Aboriginal people from various communities come into urban centres and take up permanent residence. They then enrol their school age children at urban schools, the same as other parents of different backgrounds.

The reasons why Aboriginal families come into urban areas are:

- they can mix with different people,
- they like their children to get a high standard of education.

However, Aboriginal children are not attending urban schools regularly.

To find out what parents felt about sending their children to urban schools, I conducted a brief survey of seven parents while I was working as an Education Curriculum Trainee Officer. These parents live in different parts of Darwin and their children attend different schools.

PROCEDURE

For the survey I used the following questions:

- How many of your children attend an urban school?
- At which levels are your children?
- Are your children having any problems?
- Are your children having any difficulties in any subject area?
- What are some of the good things about your children attending urban schools?
- How can the school or the Department of Education help your children?

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Next, I personally interviewed the mothers and wrote down the answers as they talked about the questions. Most parents are really concerned about their children's education. The results of the survey are summarised below.

SURVEY RESULTS

Number of children attending school

The seven parents interviewed have a total of ten children. Three parents have two children attending schools.

Levels at school

The children are at primary school. Five children are in early childhood classes, and five in middle/upper primary classes.

Problems

General - Most parents said that teasing was the main problem. The other problems were - shyness, loneliness, and feeling frightened.

Difficulties in Subject Areas - Most parents said that the main problems children find in subject areas were - understanding English and Maths.

Good things about children attending urban schools

Most of the parents' comments were about children's relationships towards teachers, principals and other children.

If the principals and teachers are helpful and understand Aboriginal culture, then the children feel contented at school. The parents said it was good for the Aboriginal children to play and make friends with other children. One mother said that the Aboriginal unit at Ludmilla was a good idea.

How can the school or the Department of Education help?

The parents made a lot of suggestions. They were:

1. Employ Aboriginal teaching assistants.
2. Have Aboriginal literature in school libraries.
3. Involve Aboriginal parents talking to teacher and principals.

4. Provide homework in subject areas where children have difficulties.
5. Provide permanent ESL teachers to help children who have Aboriginal home languages.
6. Employ Aboriginal home liaison officers to consult with parents and school staff.
7. Employ *itinerant* teachers who are literate in Aboriginal languages to help children continue their literacy development in their own languages (because the children of the same language background are attending different schools).

CONCLUSION

This is the result of the survey I did, but it was a small study and there is a need to consult more parents.

Some children do not go to school because they are teased and have difficulties with school work, but we need to get more information from parents about why Aboriginal children do not attend urban schools regularly, so there is a need to conduct a survey with a larger number of parents to find out more reasons why children are not going to school.

APPENDIX - SURVEY RESULTS

SURVEY OF ABORIGINAL PARENTS IN DARWIN - OCTOBER 1986

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|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1. How many of your children attend an urban school? | 2. At which levels are your children? |
| A. 2 | A. T-3 4-7 |
| B. 1 | B. T-3 |
| C. 2 | C. T-3 4-7 |
| D. 1 | D. 4-7 |
| E. 1 | E. 4-7 |
| F. 2 | F. T-3 4-7 |
| G. 1 | G. T-3 |

TOTAL - 10

3. Are your children having any problems?

3.1 What are they?

- A. -
- B. - Feeling frightened. Shyness.
- C. - Teasing: calling names.
- D. - Teasing: calling names.
- E. - Teasing: calling names.
- F. - Teasing: calling names. Loneliness. Shyness.
Feeling frightened.
- G. -

3.2 Are your children having any difficulties in any subject area?

- A. - Maths and understanding English.
- B. - Problems in understanding English.
- C. - Some problems in multiplication and division.
- D. - Problems in maths and understanding of English.
- E. - -
- F. - Maths, reading and writing English.
- G. - -

4. What are some of the good things about your children attending urban schools?

- A. - Aboriginal unit: good teachers with experience in teaching Aboriginal children.
- B. - Playing with friendly children at school.
- C. - Knowing teachers. Good neighbours. Lots of friends.

- D. - Learning very quickly. Good helpful teachers.
- E. - -
- F. - Friendly children. Helpful teachers.
- G. - Friendly and good relationship with most children in schools. An experienced principal who knows more about Aboriginal children's background and reaction towards schools in an urban setting and understands the cultural background.

5. How can the school, or the Department of Education help your children?

- A. - Employ an Aboriginal teaching assistant. Have Aboriginal language books in school libraries.
- B. - Aboriginal teaching assistant in Early Childhood area to help children understand or improve their English.
- C. - Involve Aboriginal parents in talking to teachers/principals. (This could happen after school; set a day and time to meet with the teachers).
- D. - Principal or teachers could consult the parents of the Aboriginal children when in trouble.
- E. - Have Aboriginal language books in urban school libraries.
- F. - Classroom teachers should provide homework in subject areas that children have difficulties in, especially maths and English.

Classroom teachers are responsible for setting up a time to help children improve their English.
- G. - A need to employ an Aboriginal teacher/teaching assistant in urban schools.

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