



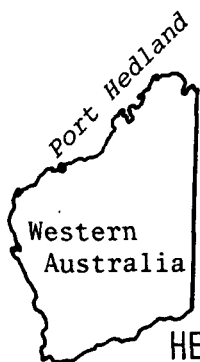
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ACROSS AUSTRALIA.....

FROM TEACHER TO TEACHER

*John Crawshaw and
Eric Hayward

HEDLAND COLLEGE GIVES A PRACTICAL LESSON

Is there a teacher in Australia who hasn't, at some time or other, had a class who were bored and uninterested? While the students might find the lessons tedious, it's certainly no fun for the teacher to be confronted with students who are listless, restless and convinced that what you have to say isn't worth listening to.

In the Admission Studies course for Aborigines, the students were required to learn about meeting procedures. Very few of the students had ever been to a formal meeting and it is probably fair to say that they regarded the subject as dull, pointless and irrelevant. Eric Hayward was the Aboriginal lecturer who was trying to teach this subject in a formal manner. He wasn't succeeding - both he and the students were frustrated and little progress was being made. As a consequence the lecturer gave a great deal of thought about how the teaching of meeting procedure might be made more relevant to the students. He wanted to provide the difficult terminology with practical meaning and set the learning in a real world context. While these goals were quite clear, it took some time to decide on the teaching methodology which should be employed. A method was needed which would make the lessons more interesting and relevant to the students. The method adopted had to ensure the students learnt about meetings and how they are formally conducted.

It was realised that without the commitment of the students no teaching method or strategy was likely to succeed. Consequently the lecturer decided to negotiate the method employed with the students. It was considered vital for the students to share responsibility for the course. The lecturer made a proposal to the class: if they would start a student group with specific goals and hold formal meetings in class, then he would change his teaching style. It was proposed that the lecturing part of the lesson would be reduced; the practical component of the lesson would be at least half of the two-hour lesson; and at the end of the semester an

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excursion would be planned, organised and run by the students. It was an attractive offer indeed. Another essential element of the proposal was that the students had to raise funds to pay for the excursion. The students readily agreed to this proposal, probably not realising the hard work and effort which were entailed.

The students decided to call their group the 'Yarrie' student group. Office bearers were elected. Students were now keen to know all of the duties of each position. There were so many questions that a series of mini lessons had to be given on the role of the office bearers, the need to write down motions, etc. While some of this material had been taught previously, students were now interested in learning. They now had an immediate and practical reason to learn.

There was a lot of discussion between the lecturer and the students on how to raise funds. It was eventually decided to run a Quiz night, after the lecturer explained the things that had to be done. As well, one other college lecturer came in to talk about Quiz nights and to give the students encouragement. The students were confronted with all of the questions associated with organising the kind of function they selected. They had to consider:

1. Where should it be held?
2. What's the best date to hold it?
3. Who should be the compere?
4. How do we approach people for donations?
5. Will local businesses give donations?
6. How will we advertise the event?
7. Who will put posters up?
8. How much should tickets be?
9. How much money do we need to raise?

These questions had to be discussed in the class meetings. A meeting of 30 people can't deal with every issue and it became obvious that subcommittees were needed. When the meeting decided to put up posters around the town, or ask for donations for the Quiz night, tasks had to be allocated. The lecturer was able to guide the students and teach them something about planning strategies and allocating tasks. He attempted to allocate tasks fairly and to make the students aware that they would achieve their goals if they operated as a cohesive team - all contributing to the best of their ability.

Some students lacked confidence. They were apprehensive when approaching local businesses for support. They felt that business people had a negative stereotype image of Aborigines. Because the lecturer was Aboriginal he could identify and understand their feelings and he was able to give the students confidence. He encouraged students to make phone calls, write letters, discuss their plans with members of the community, and to seek business support. Despite all of the encouragement, some students lacked the confidence to equally share in these activities, but other students coped very well, developed greater self confidence and felt good about the results of their efforts. Students approached approximately one hundred businesses for support. They were stunned and delighted when they found that more than 50 businesses donated something.

At each meeting groups of students were encouraged to report what they had achieved. As in any organisation or committee, some people contribute a lot and some people contribute very little. The lecturer made no attempt to pressure students to work hard. Instead there was praise for those who were working hard and an emphasis that success is only guaranteed when everyone in a team contributes.

The Quiz night made the local Aboriginal community a little bit more aware of what the college was doing. The actual night went quite smoothly. Students collected and sold tickets at the door, arranged the furniture, handed out the prizes, and one student thanked the audience for coming. Students of the college's Hospitality Course served drinks and put sandwiches on each table.

Because the students were successful in raising money, they were able to run an excursion at the end of the semester. As a group they decided to hire a bus and go to Point Samson (about 200 kms south). They also wanted to challenge the students at Roebourne to a game of softball. The excursion and the sporting match were very enjoyable and on the trip there was a feeling of unity, cohesiveness and satisfaction. Their work had been successful and their ideas had been put into effect.

It would be misleading to suggest that all of the students gained a lot from the course. Some students became very keen, active and outspoken, while others didn't put in much effort. Those who accepted the challenge learnt about organising, dealing with people, effectively communicating their ideas by letter, phone and in person. They definitely learnt a lot about meeting procedure and team work.

At Hedland College we aren't pretending that we have all of the answers. Students still wanted the lecturer to provide the leadership and they didn't always understand that he was trying to foster their independence and self direction. In some areas students were reluctant to take responsibility, e.g., finance. What we are saying is that in one area of the curriculum our 'practical lessons' worked. We believe that we have established a firm foundation for future student activities. The students are now keen to run dances and they will have plenty of support from the college staff. Students are no longer saying, "they should do something". Now they are saying, "we can do it". Students are now realising that they can contribute energy, work and ideas to produce practical benefits for, not only themselves, but for their community.

Health Warning : This teaching method can be very draining.

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