



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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REPORT - from the Bernard van Leer Foundation *Newsletter*,
Number 48, October 1987.

The Aboriginal Training and Cultural Institute (ATCI) is carrying out a program with Foundation support on Leadership and Management for Aboriginal early childhood education. During the first year of operations (1986/87) three communities participated in workshops and discussions to identify their problems and resources and to plan activities for the future. One of the workshops concentrated on building a basic understanding of appropriate and nutritious food for the healthy development of young children.*

By tradition food was hunted and gathered and the move towards bought food is a contributing factor in the decline in health standards.

The workshop's aim was to awaken people to the need for more consciousness about their dietary cooking, and hygienic habits related to their children and their own physical well being. During the workshop we asked the group to categorise food into their own frame of reference. They were able in most instances to group foods into the commonly used categories, even though they were not always able to label each of them so.

In many cases, the food intake of most families was not nutritionally sound. There was an over usage of breads, cereals and rice, and meat either in tins or frozen, prepacked and imported from distances far to the south in Melbourne. Fresh vegetables in most diets were very rare, and tinned foods were commonly used. This was not always due to the unavailability of fresh foods. Financial limitations play an important part in the type of diet of each family.

The community based workshop provided us with a good opportunity to examine closely the conditions under which food is prepared and cooked.

The over use of tinned foods is an example of the types of food available in abundance in the stores in each of the communities. It is also an example of the extent to which the lifestyle of a group of people who were essentially hunter gatherers has changed and the way in which Aboriginal people have adapted not by choice but because they have not been in control of their own development in these situations.

* 14 Jane Street, Balmain, NSW 2041.

Part of the program has been to teach them that they can make positive changes. For example, we had the group look at their own community stores and had them examine the types of food in each of them. Then we had them categorise foods. They came to realise that there was an imbalance of those foods which, when eaten in quantity, showed that their diet was not nutritionally sound.

So throughout the workshop we examined the need to have a balanced diet, eating foods from the store but also that which they could gather from their bush environment.

In areas such as Bathurst Island and Hope Vale a greater variety of traditional plant and animal food life is available. However, at Turkey Creek the main bush foods that are available are in the 'berry' or small plant category. Wild fowl and animal life are not as abundant as once before in Turkey Creek, not does the food gathering activity have the same intensity amongst the younger and more able people.

The need for nutritional education is also evident in the disease, illnesses and health problems being encountered in each community. Many children are often left to feed themselves, and a staple diet for them is bread and various spreads or tin meats. Their food intake and quality is not closely monitored by the parents. In the workshop we examined the need for parents to monitor and maintain a nutritional diet for themselves and their children.

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DID YOU KNOW?

The Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs' National Video Unit, which is based in Brisbane, is currently producing videos which are distributed to Aboriginal communities throughout Australia. These tapes are also available to schools and other interested organisations.

The video programs are taped and edited by Aboriginal staff and are part of a community program to foster an information flow between Aborigines and the broad community.

Enquiries should be directed to:-

National Video Unit
Department of Aboriginal Affairs
GPO Box 2453
Brisbane 4001.