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A METAPLAN APPROACH TO NEEDS ASSESSMENT

This paper outlines an approach used by the Aboriginal Education Unit - Kalgoorlie Education Centre, W.A., to determine the educational needs of Aboriginal Communities. The team that carried out this program were: Mr Billy Kerr, Aboriginal Education Officer, Kalgoorlie D.E.C.; Mr Billy Vincent, Aboriginal Liaison Officer, Kalgoorlie D.E.C.; Mr Neil Darby, Priority Country Areas Program Field Officer, Kalgoorlie D.E.C.; Mr Ted Penny, Community/Schools Liaison Unit, Ministry of Education; Mr Lex Leslie, Principal, Yintarri School, Coonana.

The West Australian Ministry of Education is in the process of change. Whilst this change is directed at all schools within the system, some doubt exists as to the effect these changes will have on special interest groups such as Aboriginal people.

Change and new ideas are wonderful, but where do they leave groups like Aboriginal people who still do not feel comfortable in the current school setting. Too many people have in the past made educational assumptions on behalf of Aboriginal people assuming that they had greater knowledge than Aboriginal people and therefore had a mandate to determine their educational needs.

Our team set ourselves the task to develop a model that would accurately portray the educational needs of Aboriginal people and, in particular, those people with a traditional base.

The first stage was to assemble a small team that had credibility amongst Aboriginal people and the skills necessary to run an effective needs assessment program.

The second stage was to select and/or develop a management model that would be both effective, non-threatening and accurate. The model chosen was a model called the *Metaplan Approach to Needs Assessment*. This model basically involves people working in small groups and responding to a series of questions. Individuals within these groups write their responses/ideas on cards which are then collated into like groups and given single headings. These headings are then placed on a masterboard and each participant is then able to vote on the headings they see as most important. Individuals are given three votes, with a stipulation that a maximum of two votes can only be given to one title by each person. In other words, a person with three votes may choose to give three titles one vote each, or give one title two votes and another title one vote. The title with the most number of votes is deemed to have top priority,

although it must be stressed that all contributions are seen as being important.

The first target group selected for this program was a group of urban Aboriginal parents from Kalgoorlie. Twelve parents turned up and they were broken into two groups. To warm them up and to make sure they felt at ease, the co-ordinator of the program brainstormed the question "What things happen at school?". The Aboriginal parents were asked to call out all those things that happen in schools. Reading, maths, spelling, phys.ed., excursions, etc., all made an appearance on the whiteboard. Three questions were then posed, one at a time.

QUESTION 1 : *What are the good things that are happening at your school?*

The following responses were given: *Parents helping with kids; teaching kids road safely; school uniforms; teachers talking to parents and kids.* These responses were grouped under the heading CARE.

Personal care; typing; sewing (boys & girls); music; computing for parents; more options available. These responses were grouped under the heading of OPTIONS.

Luncheons for kids; farm classes; certificate presentations; school assemblies. These responses were grouped under the heading of COMMUNICATIONS.

Equality; more subject areas; freedom of choice; more choice of sports. These responses were grouped under the heading of CHOICE.

Driver training; excursions; work experience; personal care. These responses were grouped under the heading of PREPARING FOR LIFE SKILLS.

Parents were responsible for grouping their responses and giving them a title. If they got stuck, each group had a facilitator to give them a hand. They were not required to vote on headings associated with Question 1, as this was a warm up exercise.

QUESTION 2 : *What things are happening at your school that need to improve?*

Cultural studies; more Aboriginal studies for students; student counselling; use of local Aboriginal languages in schools; teachers learning more about Aboriginal people; videos of Aboriginal issues;

better training for teachers; breaking down cultural barriers; Aboriginal studies. These responses were grouped under the heading of CULTURAL AWARENESS.

More parent involvement; Aboriginal Education workers in schools; Advisory committee on Aboriginal issues. These responses were grouped under the heading of INVOLVEMENT.

Health awareness; students with special disabilities; grooming and deportment. These responses were grouped under the heading of HEALTH AND HYGIENE.

Parent/teacher communications; communications; White/Black relationships within schools; teachers to learn about Aboriginal children; Aboriginal parent/teacher group; role models; teacher/student relations. These responses were grouped under the heading of COMMUNICATIONS.

Hearing and eye problems; wider variety of food in canteens; equal discipline for Black/White kids; more help for less able kids; smaller schools; remedial classes; smaller classes. These responses were grouped under the heading of CARE.

Offer students more practical skills; creative writing. These were given groups of their own.

The above headings were placed on a master board and the group was then given the final question.

QUESTION 3: *What things are not happening at your school that should be happening?"*

Teachers coming to Aboriginal meetings; Aboriginal Liaison Officer at schools; parents visiting schools; teachers visiting parents; forming a parent support group; a forum to discuss student progress. These responses were grouped under the heading of PARENT/TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS.

Cultural awareness for teachers and kids; Aboriginal Studies for all teachers; Aboriginal Studies for all kids; Invite Aboriginal speakers to school; These responses were grouped under the heading of CULTURAL AWARENESS.

More Aboriginal teachers; more Aboriginal Education workers. These responses were grouped under the heading of MORE AEW's & AB TEACHERS.

Dental care; check all kids' hair (Black & White) for nits; check eyes, ears, etc. These responses were grouped under the heading of HEALTH.

More practical subjects for less able kids; school policy development (parent involvement). These were given groups of their own.

The headings for Q. 2 & Q. 3 were then placed on the master board. The master board consisted of the TWO voting questions plus all the group headings. The participants were then given three votes for each question asked. The results were as follows:

MASTERBOARD

1. What things are happening at your school that need to improve?

2. What is not happening that should be happening at your school?

<u>Group Heading</u>	<u>No of Votes</u>
Cultural awareness	10
Communications	6
Care	5
Health and hygiene	2
Involvement	2
Creative writing	1
More practical skills	1

<u>Group Heading</u>	<u>No of Votes</u>
More AEW's and Aboriginal teachers	8
School policy development (parent involvement)	6
More practical subjects for less able kids	5
Cultural awareness	4
Parent/teacher relationships	2
Health	2

The Kalgoorlie Aboriginal parents' group, whilst small in number, was very enthusiastic and very vocal. At the conclusion of the program they made comments like:

"It's the first time we have been asked for our opinion."

"It's one of the only meetings we have been to where we actually actively participate."

"Will the schools take any notice of what we are saying?"

The results clearly showed that urban based Aboriginal people had a wide range of concerns and priorities. It was clear that Aboriginal people saw more Aboriginal involvement in schools and the heightening of awareness of Aboriginal issues as top priorities.

It was significant that they wanted to become more involved in schools but didn't really know how to go about it, and again it comes back to people willing to respond to stated concerns. The Aboriginal Education Unit based at the Kalgoorlie District Education Office needs to now make sure that schools within this District are informed of the results of this program.

The most important thing to come out of this part of the exercise was that Aboriginal parents do have a very important message for our schools, and need support in ensuring that their needs are catered for.

The second target group selected for this program was a group of traditional Aboriginal people from the remote community of Coonana. Whilst the Metaplan approach had been successful with urban Aboriginal people in Kalgoorlie, we weren't quite sure how it would go with traditional people. Our main worries centred around whether people would or could write their ideas down and whether they would clearly understand what we were trying to find out. Many of them had only limited schooling, but we did not want to preclude them from offering ideas. Many, we thought, would not understand that much more went on in school than reading and writing. All of this meant that we were a little nervous about the prospect of this needs assessment model working. If it did not work, we would be faced with the prospect of developing a whole new approach that could be used to ascertain the needs and priorities of traditional Aboriginal groups. Our fears were quickly allayed by the response we received from the Coonana community.

Forty-five parents arrived for the meeting, plus eight high school students. The adults ranged from those who had been to school to those old people who had never been to school, but again this did not prove to be a problem.

Each group had at least three people in it who could write, so that anybody who had an idea but could not write it down could ask someone else to do it for him/her.

The first session was again centred around a brainstorming session on the question - *What do you think goes on in your school?* The people responded very well, showing that they had a good knowledge of the workings of the school.

The first major question posed to the group was - *What kind of schooling is important?*

The following responses were given: *Social Studies; science; painting; scripture; English; maths; writing; singing; music; learning; speaking English properly; computers are most important; parents supporting teachers.* These responses were grouped under the heading of SCHOOL SUBJECTS.

Driving lessons; homemaking; counting money; helping each other; typing; health working; mechanics; self management; cooking; office skills; self supporting communities; learning about money; learning to read and write in our own language; nursing; job skills; adult learning; drug abuse. These responses were grouped under the heading of LOOKING AFTER OURSELVES.

Bush food; culture; artifacts; Aboriginal art; language. These responses were grouped under the heading of ABORIGINAL CULTURE.

How to be sportsmen and women; picnics; exercise; sports; basketball; football; training; softball. These responses were grouped under the heading of RECREATION.

Club nights; hunting; cleaning schools; picnics and excursions; sharing. These responses were grouped under the heading of SAFETY AND SOCIAL SKILLS.

Kindergarten - This was given a heading of its own.

The second major question posed to the group was : *What do you think your school needs?.*

The following responses were given:

Kindergarten; kindergarten playground; kindergarten teacher; Pre-school. These responses were grouped under the heading of PRE SCHOOL.

Woodwork; adult education; adult reading; first aid lessons; night school for adults. These responses were grouped under the heading of ADULT EDUCATION.

Art teacher; music teacher; craft teacher; mechanics teacher; bilingual education. These responses were grouped under the heading of SPECIALIST TEACHERS.

Adult education; leatherwork; music lessons. These responses were grouped under the heading of EXTRA CLASSES.

Woodwork room; place to learn mechanics; music room; metalwork room; cooking room; shed for the school bus. These responses were grouped under the heading of MORE ROOMS.

Grassed area; more recreation; a safety driving track. These responses were grouped under the heading of COMMUNITY AREAS.

Play equipment; musical instruments; weight lifting equipment; first aid equipment. These responses were grouped under the heading of EQUIPMENT.

School canteen - This was given its own heading.

It is important to note at this stage that contributions had been made by a wide variety of community members. Whilst many of the people who couldn't read or write quickly adapted, there were several people who were quite embarrassed. They desperately wanted to write down their ideas and were getting a little agitated. It took a while to convince them that they could make a valuable contribution orally.

After all group headings were placed on the master board under their respective headings, the vote was carried out. The participants were given only one vote per question. The results were as follows:

MASTERBOARD

Group Heading	No of Votes	Group Heading	No of Votes
School subjects	19	School canteen	12
Looking after ourselves	7	Adult education	5
Kindergarten	6	Extra classes (more subject areas)	3
Aboriginal culture	3	Equipment	2
Safety & social skills	3	Specialist teachers	2
Recreation	1	More rooms	
		Community areas	
		Pre School	

SUMMARY

The response from traditional Aboriginal people was extraordinary, and it exceeded our wildest expectations. At the conclusion of the program many people were excited by the number of ideas they had put forward.

Our decision to give each person only one vote per question was, in hindsight, restrictive as it did not give participants enough choice.

The results clearly showed that traditional people were vitally interested in schools doing what they were meant to do, and that was teaching "SUBJECTS". Putting that aside, it is interesting to look at where the other priorities lay. They saw the provision of a school canteen run by the community as being very important. It not only allowed the community to monitor nutrition amongst their young but it also would give them important management skills, which was reflected in the high rating they gave to the heading "Looking after ourselves."

Pre-school and adult education also featured prominently, which again is indicative of a group of people searching for a degree of dependency.

As was originally intended, the whole point of this exercise was to develop a model that could find out what Aboriginal people required in the way of education. The Metaplan approach, with relatively minor modifications, proved that it could be used with great success. Again it is worthwhile pointing out that much of the success of this program can be directly attributed to the team that ran the program. All team members were readily acceptable to Aboriginal people, and this point cannot be underestimated. It has been remiss of educationists in the past to have adopted the attitude of "we know best", and to ignore what Aboriginal people have been saying. The response that we had from supposedly 'illiterate' traditional Aboriginal people also firmly lays to rest the theory that these people do not have the capacity to contribute to such a broad area as education. In fact, it is their contribution that will determine their future.

The West Australian Ministry of Education had advocated change and is in the process of implementing this change, but a word of warning to those who suggest this change can be brought about quickly and in a centrally controlled manner. Change in the mode and delivery of education services in Aboriginal communities is one which will need to follow a process approach and one that may take more time than the Ministry will allow.

An essential part of this process will be to determine exactly what Aboriginal people want from the education system and the order and priority they want it in. The approach developed by our team may well form the basis of determining what Aboriginal people are really saying.