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NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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In Vol.16 No.3, p.37, we published an article by Mr Kerr entitled "A Metaplan Approach to Needs Assessment". This was an outline of an approach used by the Aboriginal Education Unit, Kalgoorlie Education Centre, W.A. to determine the educational needs of Aboriginal Communities. One of the target groups selected for this program was a group of traditional Aboriginal people from the remote community of Coonana. Mr Kerr now writes:

"As a result of the program at Coonana, we were again asked to return to help the community re-assess their needs and to formulate some ideas on how they could tackle a few of the other identified key areas. We used a similar approach to the year before, putting topic headings onto a large sheet of paper and then getting people to write down ideas on how to achieve progress in this area. The response from these people was magnificent, and again I reiterate the point of how often have we seen non-Aboriginal people go into Aboriginal communities to tell them that they know best, and make no attempt to listen to or solicit the Aboriginal viewpoint."

The following is a copy of the report on the project sent to the Coonana School.

PREAMBLE

In 1988 a team from the Kalgoorlie District Office conducted a needs assment in the Coonana Community. This needs assessment identified the following areas which the school, in conjunction with the community, could develop:

- canteen
- kindergarten
- adult education
- Aboriginal culture
- school subjects
- community areas
- recreation
- self determination
- pre pre school

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Of these areas the community identified a canteen as having the highest priority. It was envisaged that a properly run and managed school canteen would not only influence the school population by introducing nutrition etc., but would also give secondary aged children hands-on experience in operating and managing a small business venture. The canteen could also have obvious spinoffs in the general school curriculum. It was also envisaged that a school canteen could also supply the means by which a comprehensive meals on wheels program could be mounted for the older people in the Coonana Community.

Twelve months down the track it is evident that the community and the school have made enormous progress in establishing and operating a canteen service. The canteen has significantly increased community input into the school and has maximised the use of the new secondary facilities. It has also provided a focus for classroom activities in the school and, most importantly, has shown the community that they have the ability to identify key areas for development and the enthusiasm and support to achieve set objectives.

In August of 1989 the Kalgoorlie District Office again went to Coonana to review the work done over a twelve month period and to redefine and reassess other areas for development. The response was again magnificent, with in excess of forty community people coming to the school to develop some ideas on some of the areas identified in 1988.

The facilitators of the meeting briefly revised the work the community and school had done over a twelve month period, concentrating on the success of the canteen concept.

The group was then posed the topic of ADULT EDUCATION and was asked to identify how and what could be achieved in this area. Their responses were as follows:

- Night school needed for adults
- Learning to read and write in Wangatja
- Need a teacher for adults
- Video Production - making own news bulletins
- Learning to read and write (2)
- Learning about kids
- Learning how to look after old people
- Have Aboriginal teachers
- Basic skills that will stimulate pride in community
- More buildings (3)

- A trade person in the community who can double up as a TAFE teacher
- Learning job skills
- Cooking and Sewing
- Computing (3)
- Batik
- Arc Welding (2)
- Plumbing
- Painting
- House Maintenance (2)
- Gardening (2)
- Mechanics (3)
- Panel Beating
- Art/Craft
- Carpentry
- Sewing
- Cooking (2)
- Accounting
- Trade Teaching

It was obvious from the responses that the people of Coonambi see an obvious need for a wide range of TAFE type courses to be set up. The community and the school have the facilities to run programs but lack the necessary organizational skills and support to get comprehensive TAFE type programs up and running.

The group were then given the heading of Aboriginal Culture to comment on how and if it could be implemented into the school. The responses were as follows:

- * more participation by parents and community people at school (2)
- * more time to go bush (4)
- * take teachers and children to Tjuntyunltjarra (an outstation)
- * have children taught by the old people
- * employ a teacher familiar with language, culture and customs
- * take children bush to learn about language, dancing etc., (2)
- * teach kids about bush tucker
- * take a trip to desert to see culturally important places
- * get the old people to teach everybody about bush cooking

- * use the school to teach Aboriginal culture
- * go out hunting
- * talk to the old people
- * watch the old people and learn from them
- * set aside a day each week for cultural activities.

This topic created a great deal of discussion and it seems the people of Coonana are willing to expand their interest in the school by formally introducing many of their traditional skills and practices.

The next topic introduced was Kindergarten and the following responses were given:

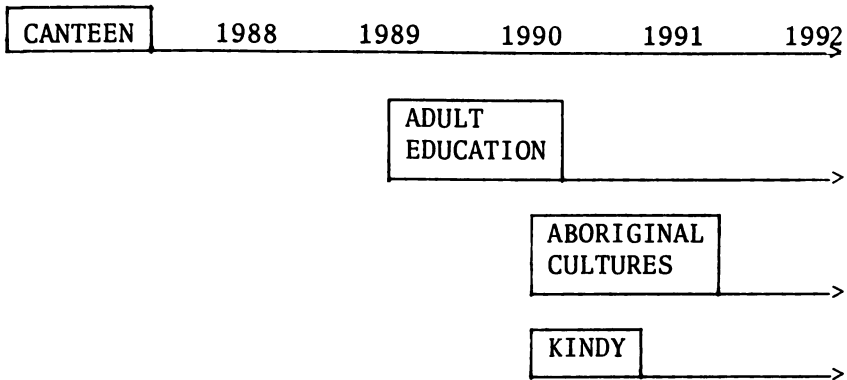
- * need for playground equipment (2)
- * need a kindy bus
- * a shade area for little kids
- * set the kindy up at the Homemakers' Centre
- * Aboriginal people to run the kindy (2)
- * teachers trained from the community
- * have a proper kindy place
- * a kindergarten needs to be well organized
- * need stable people to run the kindergarten every day
- * need a program with lots of different activities
- * happy with the current playgroup set-up
- * a proper preschool teacher needs to come to the community to set up a kindy and to teach local people how to run it
- * use the library as a pre-school centre and get a teacher and women from the community to run it in the mornings.
- * Aboriginal Education Workers to teach K-2

The group at this stage were beginning to disperse as the process had taken a considerable amount of time. The three areas that were covered were top priority areas from the needs assessment conducted in 1988 and as such were given priority to be further expanded upon in this needs analysis.

CONCLUSION

It would seem that the school and community now have four major focus areas which can be developed in depth. In fact, they could form the basis of an excellent five year community/school development plan. I believe that as a group the people of Coonana have now given a firm indication of where the community and school should be headed and some strategies to implement the

four key areas. The canteen is still in a development phase and what is needed over the next twelve months is for one of the other three areas to be brought on as a key area.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- That the canteen proposal, given its success, be still given top priority with a view to expanding the facilities.
- That a submission using this research be developed that will ensure a TAFE-type person is on-site by the beginning of 1990.

It is obvious from the responses given that this area is a top priority and that a position within the school/community should be made available. Adult education could sustain a person full time and would have an enormous impact on the community.

- That an area be set aside in the school grounds where older Aboriginal people can practise and be seen to practise their traditional crafts.
- That a day be set aside on a regular basis whereby "tradition" becomes the predominant mode of learning in the school.
- That further research be conducted into the concept of pre-school with a view to expanding school and community input into this area.

SUMMARY

Given that two comprehensive sessions based around the needs analysis approach have now been conducted in the Coonana community, it is obvious that this is a valid approach to

planning and priority area development. The enthusiasm by which the community has responded to this method of needs analysis indicates that Aboriginal people have an enormous amount to offer. I have no doubt that the Aboriginal people of Coonana have demonstrated conclusively that not only are they prepared to set goals and directions but they are also willing to provide the backup and support needed to ensure the designated priority areas are developed to their fullest potential. The success of this project so far has provided an exciting basis for future development. The enthusiasm by which the school and community have embraced the project augurs well for future analysis. The overriding feature of this program is that all the impetus for it has come from the community and the school. They have ownership of it, and it is not something that is being imposed on them. This is a very important feature of the whole program. From the point of view of the Kalgoorlie District Education Office the program is providing valuable information on goal setting and implementation. It has already provided a workable model which other communities and schools could take up.

It is planned that every year similar sessions will be conducted to redefine goals and to give the community and school the necessary support to ensure they continually go forward.

This annual audit procedure will also help refine the process and validate work done.

The Coonana community and school are to be congratulated for showing initiative, but more importantly, for putting in the time and energy that I believe will ensure a better quality of life in the years to come.

As a prelude to the needs analysis revision program conducted at Coonana in July 1989, the secondary students were surveyed by the school staff using a metaplan approach. The first question posed was "Things that will make school better", and the responses were:

- . growing trees
- . more sport
- . painting the bins
- . painting the tennis courts
- . making sure the place looks nice
- . bring back the cane
- . gardening

- . looking after the school
- . more kids to come to school
- . being kind to kids at school
- . detention in school

These responses indicated that the students were influenced by the environment they were in and saw a need for schools to be looked after and improved in a physical sense.

"Things to make school a better place"

- . Cooking (20)
- . Camping (3)
- . Video nights
- . Sports
- . Work experience
- . Jobs in community
- . Planting trees
- . Sewing
- . Welding
- . Mechanic
- . Panel beating
- . Driving the bus

"Things I hate about school"

- . Swearing (7)
- . Fighting in class (2)
- . Being told off by others
- . Tuck shop
- . Ladies doing lunch
- . Maths
- . Coming to school
- . People throwing things in class (2)
- . Stealing (3)
- . Other kids coming to school late (3)
- . People growling
- . Doing hard work
- . People coming into our class
- . People shouting

These responses indicated that the children appreciated school and understood its operating principles. They did not like being disrupted from this routine although the responses that indicated this could have come about as a result of the students giving responses expected of them.

"Favourite Subjects"

- . Food awareness/cooking (5)
- . Cake stall (2)
- . Sewing (3)
- . Work experience (2)
- . Vocational education (2)
- . Video nights
- . Swimming
- . Spelling
- . English
- . Typing
- . Welding (3)
- . Sport (2)
- . Camping (3)
- . Picnic days (2)
- . Maths (2)
- . Excursions
- . Diaries
- . Jobs

SUMMARY

The highlight of the metaplan process is the eagerness with which the students embraced it. It is obvious that they are willing contributors and that they are prepared to have their say. They are prevocationally oriented which lends further weight to the argument of implementing job creation programs in the community and the establishment of post schooling training programs.

It would be a worthwhile exercise to pursue some of the points raised by the students and a good starting point would be in the area of school care and maintenance. The information derived from the survey conducted should also give school staff direction and confidence in determining school programs and direction.

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