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"FEAR AND LOATHING" in Communities.

*Clive Emby **

A look into aspects of the White psyche as it pertains to Aboriginal communities and the Aboriginal child at school.

Much has been written regarding Aboriginal culture and the difficulties 'Whites' have faced trying to introduce 'Western education systems, (and the difficulties Aborigines have had dealing with Whites). One facet that seems to have gained little attention is that of the White staff themselves as individuals and the influence that they have in either a successful or failing educational institution. This is quite separate from the issue of whether or not the person has good teaching or administration skills. There are other issues which are often far more relevant in their daily life. Ideally, communities should not have to rely upon White staff, but presently and for the foreseeable future, it is a necessity.

Aboriginal communities are places unique within themselves. However, many of them share certain characteristics that make them challenging for outsiders to come and work in. It is these challenges, or more accurately how they are met, that can decide the success or failure of the educational establishment. It is important that employers are aware of these issues and take them into consideration when selecting staff. This becomes more and more important as staffing moves away from education departments and into community councils.

One issue that causes problems is that of staff mobility. A successful institution requires some stability of staff to enable programmes to run from conception to completion.

A stable staff develops a link with the community, trust amongst the children and parents, working ties with Aboriginal staff and has an understanding of past events that have shaped the current situation.

* Clive Emby, Remote Areas Teachers Education (R.A.T.E.) Programme, Batchelor College N.T. 0845.

Staff take time to settle and to come to terms with the pace of the community and educational expectations. Aboriginal culture often views time in a different way to that of White staff. It may take years just to develop rapport and a feeling of trust. Every staff turnover must set the school programme back to some extent. Worse than this is the situation in which the whole school staff change after their 'two year stint'. The school and community must start from scratch again. It is not surprising that the communities can become somewhat laid-back at the efforts of the new 'gung ho' staff.

This can be dealt with in several ways. Firstly, there must be a transitional staff change-over so that the new staff can undergo some form of induction by staff remaining. Staff must also receive quality training or in-service about working with Aborigines and living in an Aboriginal community (preferably involving Aborigines).

The second focus is somewhat harder but worth working towards. That is, getting staff to stay for reasonable periods of time. Before this can be addressed it is necessary to look at why people are working in Aboriginal communities in the first place.

There is a common expression that refers to Whites working in Aboriginal communities as one of the **three 'M's**. This refers to either **missionaries, mercenaries or misfits**.

Whether this has any validity is uncertain, but people are there for some reason. Understanding this may lead towards strategies for employing staff that will stay for some period. The community can attempt to meet the needs of staff so that they are content to stay. Issues that the community, or education department, can look at include; quality housing, arrangements (splitting teachers up around community so that staff can get away from each other if they wish), air-conditioning, access to services, access to fresh food, access to good water, permanency (availability and assessment), immunisation, professional support (in and out of community), inservicing for the special nature of the position (E.S.L./bilingual), family support, access to vehicles (all staff!), recognition of skills developed within position, monetary reimbursement

for high cost of living, access to further study, ability for friends/relations to visit and stay, travelling allowances, access to communication services and other issues.

By addressing these issues staff are more likely to stay longer and be happier. Both of these have a direct link to the quality of education that is offered within communities.

Another staff employment strategy of critical importance is that of interviews. Educators, however good their background a qualifications, are not always suitable to work in an Aboriginal community. It is important that staff are screened to ensure that people who will have problems (or cause problems) are identified. In the past communities had little choice over selection of staff as it was difficult to attract people to remote positions. With the current employment crisis communities should be able to be more critical and selective.

This is even more relevant for administrative positions such as Principal/Head Teacher. The attitudes of these staff members will drive the school so it is imperative that their stance on Aboriginal input, Aboriginalization etc. be known. This becomes a real issue when people are taking up these positions as a promotion and view the posting as a step in their career ladder.

Such people may have a different agenda totally to that of the community. New Principals/ Head Teachers sometimes feel that they have to make their mark so that their efforts can be seen by others. This can lead to tension amongst the community, the staff and things being changed just for the sake of being seen to do something. Administrative staff should be viewed as other staff members and their ability to work in a close knit Aboriginal community be judged accordingly.

Staff who fear and loathe coming back from holiday or waking up in the morning are not doing justice to the Aboriginal child at school. Employers must be aware of what goes through the minds of White staff and deal with these issues proactively. By doing this community schools have a much better chance of being successful institutions and providing successful education.