NOTICE OF ORDINARY MEETING

The next meeting will be held in the Museum Education Building, North Terrace, Adelaide at

8.00 p.m. on MONDAY, 28 AUGUST 1972

AGENDA

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of 24 July, 1972 Meeting
3. Tabling of Papers and Journals
4. Announcement of New Members
5. Rev. Rod J. Jepsen, B.A., Litt.B., Assistant Minister, Scots Church, North Terrace, Adelaide will give an address entitled:

"CULTURAL FACTORS AFFECTING ABORIGINAL EDUCATION IN WALGETT, N.S.W."

6. Date of next meeting: Monday, 25th September, 1972

R.D.J. Weathersbee
Honorary Secretary,
C/- S.A. Museum,
North Terrace,
ADELAIDE.  S.A.  5000.
Although considerable time and money is expended on research associated with Aboriginal Welfare there is little evidence of the implementation in education of its findings. There are of course many reasons for this. This paper is based on my experience with regard to South Australian Schools. It is purposely critical in an effort to provoke discussion which may provide constructive outcomes. Some personal suggestions are also submitted.

In South Australia there are:-

a) Special Aboriginal Schools in the tribally oriented areas. A few non-Aboriginal children are enrolled at some of these schools.

b) Special Aboriginal Schools situated on the Southern Reserves.

c) Special Aboriginal Schools which contain a high percentage of Aboriginal enrolments.

d) Schools in which only a few Aborigines are enrolled.

The teachers who have chosen to work in the field of Aboriginal education are dedicated, sincere and are giving a great deal of themselves in their work. They are in the difficult position of embarking on a programme for which there is no precedent. As with other teachers their problem is essentially one of human relations, a problem which presents challenges which are more difficult for them because Aborigines are a minority group in our society. Although the future of the Aborigines will be governed in large part by what is done in our schools not enough is known of the problems as it applies to the Aboriginal in our society. It is the duty of the administrator, assisted by research, to see that teachers do not fail because of the lack of relevant information.

It is a fact that during recent years major advances have taken place in the education of Aborigines which have assisted them to match the pace and direction of their life
"THE TEACHERS OF ABORIGINAL CHILDREN - RESEARCH AND ITS TRANSLATION" (CONT'D.)

in relation to our own. Our teachers deserve a great deal of credit for what has been achieved largely due to their own initiative.

We have been asking our teachers as front line educators to work in new ways, keeping in mind Aboriginal value systems, but have not given them the training backed by sound research to carry out their duties in keeping with the needs of Aboriginal education. Teacher advisers have assumed that all that is needed to effect advances in Aboriginal education is a re-organisation of the school system, a reform of methodology and procedures, changes of syllabus and the introduction of modern aids; but deeper issues associated with human relations have been neglected.

The work of the teachers of Aboriginal children is considerably more complex than that of other teachers because in addition to the fact that they have to be aware of the general principles of teaching, they have to be able to make allowances for the wide cultural chasm which exists between Aborigines and non-Aborigines, especially with the problem of language differences. Also a great number have to work and live in isolation in harsh environments. The teachers have had to adjust their techniques and have not had the supportive assistance from research that they require.

Although this paper is directed towards the assistance that research can give teachers, it is realised that research does not provide the ultimate solutions to all teachers' problems. Research endeavours to ascertain the facts of the situation in response to the needs as seen by the teachers, but teachers have to operate in a changing and complex society in which all the facts relevant to the situation at any one time can never be known. A blending of research and action is all that can be hoped for.

In this paper the following points are highlighted in relation to the assistance research can give to the teacher of Aboriginal children:-

(1) There is a need to consider the rights of the Aborigines.

(2) There is a need for closer contact between those organising research procedures, the research person and the teacher.

(3) In view of the vast amount of work to be done research should be purposive.
"THE TEACHERS OF ABORIGINAL CHILDREN - RESEARCH AND ITS TRANSLATION" (Cont'd.)

(4) If research and development work is to become as pertinent for Aboriginal education as it has been for technological progress those concerned with such work must understand the work of the classroom practitioners.

1. There is a need to consider the rights of the Aborigines:

Last year it was evident from reports received from schools that Aboriginal children especially those in mixed classes were often embarrassed by the type of attention which was given to them. It could be fairly stated that in too many cases the rights of the Aborigines were not being considered.

Parents did not understand what was being attempted, and transmitted their hostility through the children.

In several cases the research workers could have been more tactful in their approach to the children. They did not appear to realise that their interest could have profound effects that could deeply affect the learning process of the children receiving their attention.

It is suggested that research workers should give more thought to these matters before commencing their programme. In some instances, it may be considered wise not to proceed with the programme after these matters have been considered in relation to the local situation.

2. There is a need for closer contact between those organising research procedures, the research person and the teacher:

This raises the following questions:-

What are the relative roles of the teachers, the Education Department, Universities and Teachers' Colleges in research projects? I consider that it would be advantageous if these roles could be clarified.

To what extent should teachers be consulted as to priorities in research? It is becoming increasingly
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It is evident that teachers have decided views about priorities in research; they are not always right but their ideas concerning their needs decrease recognition.

How do teachers evaluate research projects? They will judge the projects in practical terms. They will assess research results in the light of their own professional experiences rather than regarding them as detached evidence. They are likely to evaluate research in terms of effectiveness and success of projects in which they have participated, or about which they have knowledge.

Do research workers and teachers understand each other? Many teachers see little value in research and are antagonistic to it. This is because of the imperfect realisation of the roles of the teacher and the research worker. Teachers who have not had contact with the research workers find it hard to understand the constraints imposed by rigorous research design, the impossibility of attacking some of the teachers' major problems head on, the limitations of permissible generalisation from a single general enquiry and so on.

For research to be conducted in the closest collaboration with the teaching profession and educational administrators the teachers must understand the purpose of questionnaires, forms, etc. It is also important that teachers should be given the opportunity to study the outcomes of the surveys, in language they can understand.

It is also important for research workers to realise that teachers are working in a highly dynamic but confused situation where tensions, profound and sincere oppositions of opinion cut across professional affiliations and interests. Research personnel must have a sympathetic understanding of the feelings of teachers.

In an effort to develop the close contact between teachers and those who have carried out research, arrangements have been made for teachers of Aboriginal children in the metropolitan
area to meet a group of people on the 9th August who carried out research last year. This meeting should be the forerunner of other similar meetings where ideas can be freely exchanged.

Unless closer contact is achieved it is inevitable that the findings of much of the valuable research will either not be implemented or that its implementation will be delayed unnecessarily. The implementation of research findings is a vital corollary of research itself. It would be a salutary experience to all undertaking research if they could ascertain the extent to which research is getting through to teachers. In South Australia teachers and administrators have little knowledge of what has been done.

Unfortunately some teachers who have made an effort to seek assistance from the findings of research have found the writings incomprehensible, too long, phrased in tactless language, biased in presentation or of limited applicability.

In view of the vast amount of work to be done research should be purposive:

It is realised that the findings of research are not always usable. On the other hand for research to have meaning in the eyes of the teacher it should be purposive.

In too many cases teachers are being used to assist research students to gain research experience and academic status. Some thought could be given to ways and means by which these can be gained without using the time of the teacher especially with regard to lengthy questionnaires.

If research and development work is to become as pertinent for Aboriginal education as it has for technological progress those concerned with such work must understand the work of the classroom practitioners and those who are involved in administration:

Research should take into account the many imponderables of school life. It is doubtful whether research workers sufficiently recognise the subtle differences in local conditions in the uniqueness of each class teacher relationship. Also it is important that they should have an understanding of the problems associated with administration.
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Again this can only be achieved if research workers are prepared to devote time to the study of these as well as the topic of research.

In summary, I would like to emphasize the fact that teachers of Aboriginal children need a great deal of assistance from the findings of research. The need is so great that we cannot afford to waste either time or money. Every effort should be made to:

1. integrate research
2. make research findings available
3. study how these findings can be implemented in the classroom.

For my part, I would like to see the following outcome from the discussion associated with this paper:-

1. Improved communication between the classroom and research.
2. Greater consideration given to the personal feelings of the Aborigines who are being subjected to research.
3. Methods devised whereby research could be integrated and made more purposive.
4. Abstracts prepared and discussions held to enable more of the research findings to be available to the classroom teacher in a form that he can understand and implement.

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