

NARRABUNDAH EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CENTRE.

MULTICULTURAL PROJECT

by Bernice Caldwell.

This project, successfully funded in 1979, was planned to provide social, cultural and language development for families attending Narrabundah Early Childhood Education Centre (NECEC).

The Centre is set in a neighbourhood which has a high percentage of children whose parents' first language is not English. We felt there was a need -

- . to assist these people who are thrust into a new cultural environment;
- . to provide the opportunity for them to retain their own connection with their inherited culture;
- . to draw awareness of the English speaking community to the cultural diversity of the families living beside them.

The project was designed to offer the following for children and their parents.

- . a multi-cultural experience.
- . a family/community/parent-child experience.
- . an ethnic language involvement.

All activities, although focused on the children, would include a high degree of parent participation so they could share in the learning situation and be more effective teachers of their children.

The attempts to integrate the Multi-cultural emphasis into the four to five year old children's programs in 1980 were hindered by many staff changes but with stability in 1981, more effective planning and continuity of experiences throughout the Centre was evident.

The equipment supplied from the grant has been most supportive to the project. Particular value has been derived from -

- . cooking equipment and stove for cooking experience with children and parents of many cultures;
- . camera and film for photographing special events and recording of project information;

- . duplicator for preparation of recipe book, notices, newsletters and information to parents and community and material for development of children's language skills;
- . overhead projector for talks to parents and community groups;
- . sewing machine for demonstration and parent activities;
- . cassettes of ethnic stories, poems and music used with children and parents.

Hidden costs include food items for ethnic cooking and equipment maintenance - these costs have been covered by NECEC Parent Association.

The enrolment of families in NECEC were from 14 different nationalities in 1980 - the major representation being from the Yugoslavian and Indo-Chinese groups. All parents of children enrolled in the Centre were briefed on the Multi-cultural Program and how it is integrated into the children's regular programs. All parents were receptive to this information and stated they would be willing to participate.

There was early evidence of some antagonism between ethnic groups within the Narrabundah community so it was necessary to avoid placing an obvious emphasis on one culture. Decisions were made to integrate cultural and language aspects of all representative groups into displays, music, song, cooking and festive occasions.

Activities and experiences presented during 1980 and 1981 included:-

- . Vietnamese cooking and recipe handouts;
- . Vietnamese dancing by primary school children and display of cultural pictures;
- . translation of stories by parents;
- . reading stories to children in different languages by parents;
- . interest displays and learning experiences incorporating all languages;
- . Anglo-Australian presentation on nutritious foods in form of a "Family Breakfast" with a follow up of "Lunches for School and Home.";
- . parents of different cultures sharing information on child rearing practices;

- . afternoon for Macedonian parents with an interpreter to discuss the centre's organisation and children's programs and values of activities, e.g. water play, outdoor learning;
- . children and parents plugged into a "Listening Post" to hear tapes of stories, poems and songs in different languages;
- . use of national costume, pictures for discussion and display;
- . teachers, parents and children together learning words in other languages.

Observations and comments made by staff indicate:

- . that parents generally showed interest in and commented on displays and the use of words in other languages;
- . that some difficulty has been encountered when asking parents to read a translated story to children - inability to read, lack of confidence and rejection of mother tongue within a school setting are some problems;
- . that children have begun to show an interest in other languages and countries;
- . that children from Yugoslavian, Vietnamese and Laotian cultures have rejected use of tape translations of stories and poems - preference for English versions;
- . that Serbo-Croatian translations have not been acceptable to the Macedonian parents. Encouragement was given to parents to assist with translations and some success was forthcoming but once again problems existed revealing lack of confidence and education and parents viewing of the school as a place for children to learn English.

It is however already apparent that there is an increase in the feelings of acceptance into the community by persons of different ethnic backgrounds. Attitudes of staff - in developing awareness and knowledge of cultural variants - have often been transferred to the Anglo-Australian families who have expressed concerns to staff about community favouritism to other cultures. Overall sensitisation and intermixing of all cultures have always been a priority for the Centre.