

ISOLATION—THE TYRANNY OF DISTANCE IN QUEENSLAND EDUCATION

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In preparing this paper, I am reminded of Abraham Lincoln's famous book review; "for people who like that sort of book," he wrote, "that's the sort of book they'll like." Lincoln at first sight, seems to be stating the obvious, and it is obvious to any student of Queensland history that distance, spatial relationships if you like, have played an enormous part in shaping the history and thinking of this State.

In this paper, I will attempt to describe the influence of isolation on education, concentrating my attention on the period 1870-1920. In setting these limits I do not want to suggest that after 1920 we are suddenly delivered from the tyranny of distance. Even today the problem plays a major part in our educational planning. You will bear with me I am sure, however, in my interest as an administrator in this crucial period, 1870-1920.

This was a time when the foundations of the Department were being laid, when decisions were made, the consequences of which are still being felt. As you will see, too, the 1920s mark the end of one phase in the problem of bringing education to isolated families.

The title of Professor Geoffrey Blainey's study, *The Tyranny of Distance*, summarises the general problem of establishing, maintaining, and unifying European settlement in Australia. Queensland suffered more than most of the States under this tyranny. We might remember that the first settlement at Moreton Bay was established only because this place was at a comfortable remove from Sydney Cove. As the State borders were ultimately drawn, however, Brisbane was to be closer to Sydney, even closer to Melbourne, than to isolated population centres in the north.

In 1859 Queensland's white population numbered only

25,000, most of them in the rough townships of Brisbane and Ipswich. Settlement of a kind had spread through the Darling Downs, the Burnett Valley, and even into the barely-explored reaches of the south-west and north-east. Droveing sheep and cattle into the wilderness, squatters established a tenuous claim over vast areas of land. Settlement was thinly spread, and bore the mark of the frontier.

It is interesting to notice in early descriptions of the State, the interpretation placed on the sheer physical size of the Colony. Administrators noticed that Queensland was "equal in size to France and Germany combined," or more frequently, was "seven times the size of Britain." Those statements were not made by way of boasting, or of anticipation or self-congratulation. There is no sense of the unparalleled opportunity and bounty of the wilderness—the kind of feeling that so animated nineteenth century American writers about "the west". Instead there was a much more solid and sober awareness that a tiny population, spread over hundreds of thousands of square miles, brought enormous problems of administration, government and supply.

EVOLVING A PHILOSOPHY

The problem of distance affected every phase of public service. In the provision of educational facilities, however, problems were made more difficult by the need to evolve a philosophy and practice of education appropriate to the new environment. The first schools in the Colony, you might recall, were wholly funded by the Colonial Government but administered by the Anglican Church. In time, other churches also established schools, and Colonial administrators were forced to decide where their educational priorities would be. They could follow the English example of funding those schools organised by the Established Church (that is, the Church of England). Or, they could fund *all* the denominational schools, regardless of their sponsoring denomination. Again, they could find some less expensive, more efficient, means of promoting education in the colony, independent of the old, ecclesiastic connection.

In 1845 the New South Wales Government chose this last alternative. It established a Board of National Education to promote State funded, State controlled primary schools. For a time the churches were able to exert sufficient pressure on the government to ensure that their schools retained financial assistance. A government Board of Denominational Education was established as a concession to the churches, to allay their



Old-time small country school

fears of incipient secularism. The new State of Queensland, however, confirmed in 1860 that national education, as it was called, would be the established pattern of government-promoted schools. No denominational board was set up in this State.

The first national schools in Queensland, however, barely came to terms with the problem of providing education in the context of a vast, sparsely-settled colony. Their major short-coming proved to be a misplaced optimism in the value of local initiative and control. To build a national school, the local community was required to raise one-third of the cost of a building, and to pay an undetermined amount per year to the teacher in fees. The onus was thus firmly shifted to the local community, with the fond hope that districts would be willing to pay high fees to retain the services of a schoolmaster they trusted.

There is no evidence, however, to suggest that those hopes were ever more than a convenient fiction. While education remained a *voluntary* activity, dependent on local initiative, the problem of bringing education to the frontier remained unresolved. In 1872 the general inspector, Randall McDonnell, noted in his annual report:

“In many places, unhappily, parents are constrained to see . . . their children) . . . grow up in ignorance because there is no school in their neighbourhood to which to send them. . . . The Board has not been able as yet to accomplish anything for the more thinly-peopled districts of the Colony.”¹

In the following year, MacDonnell gave some indication of the extent of the problem in "the thinly-peopled districts of the Colony":

"The inspector, after journeying from Leyburn to Goondiwindi to examine the school in that border township finds that he has another journey of ten days or a fortnight's duration before he can visit the next school on his list, viz., that at Roma. In the same way the inspector in the north must travel from Westwood to Springsure or Clermont, say two hundred miles in either case, not to speak of the return journey, without meeting the face of a school boy."²

ONE-TEACHER SCHOOLS

In the absence of adequate road and rail services, the location of schools in many areas was governed by the distance a child could reasonably be expected to walk to school. So it was that in places like the Brisbane Valley, the Downs and the Burnett, we seem to find a small, one-teacher school every six miles. In less populated areas, of course, schools were more scattered and attendance consequently less regular.

It was not simply that people were sparsely settled over vast areas. This was headache enough, and we shall look shortly at the measures the Department took to remedy the situation. In the period from 1870 to 1910, population over much of northern and western Queensland could shift dramatically following the elusive search for gold from the "rush" to another. Towns of ten- to fifteen-thousand people could spring up in a few weeks, without the slightest town planning, provision for a school or for other services. These settlements invariably began with great expectations—"every new mining camp would prosper into another Charters Towers", the Department was advised, and only the infernal red-tape seemed to prevent the Government from providing a school fitting to the area. That, at least, was how the local people saw the situation.

Now, as we are finding more than ever today, if we want quality education, we must be prepared to pay for it. Administrations in the nineteenth century found, however, that if they wanted *any* kind of education on the goldfields they must be prepared to pay dearly. It was simply a matter of supply and demand. Robert Ferguson, the Superintendent of School Buildings, wrote to the Under-Secretary of the Department in 1882 to point out the inherent problems of building a school during the frenzied gold rush. In the far north:

"I have now the honour to report that builders cannot depend upon a supply of local timber of a quality that

would be approved for public buildings, and in consequence, tender prices at which the material can be procured from Maryborough and carried by dray 36 miles from the railway terminus. Labour in the northern parts was never so high in my long experience. Carpenters that I would not allow to work on public buildings in the south are readily employed at 16/- per day. I have been informed that orders sent to Maryborough for timber six months ago have yet to come to hand.”³

To haul freight from the port at Cooktown to the Palmer River in 1873 cost £110 per ton.⁴ Even given this extraordinary situation, it was still cheaper in some instances to prefabricate school buildings in Brisbane and ship them north ready to assemble.

COST-OF-LIVING FACTOR

For the teachers shipped north to staff the gold rush towns, the achievement of just getting there was only the beginning of their troubles. The cost of living on the northern diggings was a considerable burden. Teacher's salaries, never generous in the nineteenth century, were hopelessly out of touch with the economic realities of gold-inflated prices. When unskilled carpenters could command 16/- per day and flour was selling at 2/- a pound, the teacher at the Provisional School at Thornborough on the Palmer River could look forward to a salary of only £100 p.a.⁵ Teachers shared in the rough living conditions, poor accommodation and unhealthy surroundings. Many of them had received little formal training, and their security of tenure often depended on the gold “keeping up”.

The problems in bringing education to the north were replicated in the far west, with the additional problems of poor food, drought and loneliness. Even after the building of railways into the west, enormous difficulties remained in reaching isolated settlements and families. Birdsville, some fifteen hundred kilometers from Brisbane, was a three-week journey away in the 1890s: the easiest way for a teacher to reach the school there was by steamer to Adelaide, then coach north to the desert, completing the last stage of the journey by pack horse or camel. In many areas, of course, families were separated by long distances; others were forced to move frequently from job to job. For these families there was no school, nor the hope of employing the governors or tutor that was commonly attached to the larger stations. The children of the rural poor often went unlettered.

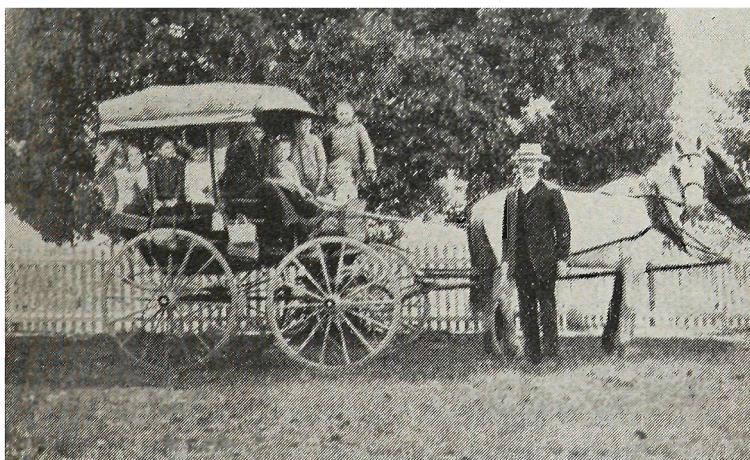
After the settlers in the north and west, a third group of isolated families in Queensland are often forgotten by the his-

torians. They are the families of men employed at lighthouses and stations along the Queensland coast. At Moreton Island, Bustard Head, Lady Elliot Island, and Sandy Cape, the Department maintained small schools for those families willing to sacrifice the comforts of society for the responsibility of lighthouse service.

It was a tough lonely life. Teachers sent to staff the tiny schools in those settlements were usually of two types. There were young, untrained women anxious to secure any teaching position, and old and infirm teachers who could not afford to retire. I might remind you that pension schemes and superannuation were almost unknown in the nineteenth century. Letters from these teachers to the Department frequently mention poor food, bad accommodation, and the constant feuding of the few families thrown together in those beautiful, but lonely places of exile. I am afraid that the Archives files on the lighthouse schools rather give the lie to the romantic idea of every settler on the frontier pulling together for the common good.

PATTERN OF ISOLATION

Summing up then, in the north, the west and along the eastern coast, in short, across the State, we can discern a pattern of isolated families, cut off from easy contact with the rest of the State's people, but still very much a *part* of the economic and social development of the State. The west, for all its vast distance and poor transport, was not an independent, inward-looking region. It was bound firmly into the State's economic system through the sheep and cattle industries. We



Conveying country children to school early this century.

see them same situation in the northern mineral fields and sugar cane plantations. Despite the distance, the isolation and the bush, Queensland, as Australia, retained a curious homogeneity derived from its common cultural background.

I have explained how the national system of education was adapted in Queensland in 1860, and how it was found unequal to the task of bringing education to the peculiar form of settlement that developed here. It is fascinating to notice, in the later nineteenth century, the growth and development of more flexible initiatives in overcoming the problems of isolation and distance. I do not use the word "fascinating" lightly. I think it is possible to discern in the developments affecting education in Queensland after 1870, some of the spirit that was invigorating a new approach, a new understanding of the peculiar form of settlement in Australia, and the *wider* experience of culture itself in the continent.

Let me explain this point more precisely. The early settlers in Australia saw the country as a place of exile. Thousands of miles of ocean separated Australia from the comforts of culture and society in England. By the 1870s, and more particularly the 1880s, many Australians had come to see those thousands of miles of ocean as a blessing—a positive good, separating Australia from the corruption and decadence of the old world. This was a *new* place, a place where a different society could be developed, more egalitarian, more liberal, and more honestly rewarding than the class-ridden, industrial wastelands of "Home". This period saw many of these ideas enshrined in the political thinking of liberals like Charles Lilley, and the early socialists, who laid the foundation of the Labor movement. As well, we can see in the work of the Heidelberg painters in the 1880s and 90s—Fred McCubbin, Tom Roberts, Charles Conder and Arthur Streeton—a loving acceptance of the Australian landscape as it was. Their paintings are a celebration of life in a "new" land, a testimony to the vitality of life in town and country. At the same time, *The Bulletin* was publishing some of A. B. Paterson's and Henry Lawson's best early work; the literary world had also found the bush. And, in the period 1870 to 1900, this cultural star-burst coincides with the development of major new initiatives in the field of educational administration. Ideas like equality of opportunity, and commitment to the new settlement, find their expression in many facets of our experience at this particular time, surely one of the most creative and crucial in our history.

QUICKENING NATIONAL SPIRIT

I am suggesting that the reform of our education system after 1870, and the growth of a vigorous Australian cultural out-

look, are both related to this quickening spirit of national development. Isolation, the problem of distance, was seen as a major enemy of the general desire for a more egalitarian society. I do not know whether Queensland's chief educational administrators of that period, John Anderson and David Ewart, read *The Bulletin* or appreciated the new wave of painters and poets. I rather suspect that many of Queensland's politicians were more interested in promoting their own regional interests than in advancing the national good. But administrators, politicians and artists seem to have shared a common sympathy for those people who were building a new society in the isolated outback.

The importance of the State in this whole question of isolation, centralism and equality, deserves more careful consideration. Several Australian historians point to this issue as being central in the development of our national outback. They have demonstrated, for example, that all major political groups, from the early socialists to the squatter magnates, agreed that the *State* should be the major opponent of the bush and isolation. The State, they said, should intervene to make the struggle with nature more equal. Now these groups part company of course, on the exact way in which this is to be achieved. So is it to be a complex system of State-funded railways to the west, and north, providing cheap transport for the export of wool and the import of consumer products? Or is it to be achieved through a government tariff which keeps the cost of manufactured goods in Australia artificially high while maintaining full employment? Even the most conservative political groups in the nineteenth and early twentieth century accorded government a role beyond the traditional, liberal ideal of the State as policeman and protector of property. The American writer, Henri Thoreau, expresses this traditional ideal neatly in his classic description of liberal government—"that government which governs best, is the government which governs least". The Queensland economy, as much as the education system, could not survive long on such an idea.

Quite simply, the department of public instruction realised that if schools were to be built in geographically disadvantaged areas, then it must be through *State*, not local patronage. If all the State's children, no matter what their location or economic background were to receive an equal start in the race, then the State would need to marshal the limited human and financial resources available as carefully as possible. It was to the department's great credit that it kept this ideal of equality obstinately before it.

Local initiative had failed, the demand for new schools seemed insatiable, while the supply of teachers and money seemed pathetically inadequate, yet from 1871 to 1880 the number of schools rose from 325 to 989. "We are in the business," wrote the Chief Inspector, "of supplying teachers where there are children requiring education—not in finding teachers attractive and pleasant places in which to teach." As an administrator today, looking back at the meagre resources with which our education system was founded, it seems impossible that so much was accomplished with so little.

EQUALITY—AT A PRICE

Equality was bought at a price, however. The involvement of the State in the field of education brought with it the centralisation of decision-making in the Brisbane office—a centralism that reached into every corner of the school's day to day life. Curriculum was determined by the administration; so too were teaching strategies, as far as they could be controlled, through inspection. Young teachers were valued for their tractability, not their creativity. In time, ironically, the Department could even make a virtue of a necessity. A former Director-General of Education could say with satisfaction, "it is half past nine—every Grade V class, all over the State, is now doing mental arithmetic." In the period after 1880 we can see, then, a weakness developing in the strength of this drive for equality in educational opportunity. There is, however, a clear sense of democratic purpose in the practice of educational administration.

There is evidence, of course, that this egalitarian spirit was fostered by an economy which prospered over this time. Certainly, the 1870s and 1880s were years of pastoral and mineral bounty. The drive to bring equal educational opportunities to isolated settlers hardly faltered, however, during the catastrophe of the 1890s. Following the economic recession and disastrous floods of 1893, banks failed, social unrest intensified, and government spending was cut to the bone. Despite this, new schools continued to open, and established schools were maintained, if under straitened circumstances. After 1870, educational reforms reflect a determination to provide free education for all the State's children, no matter where their location or what their financial resources.

A major step in this direction came in 1869 with the introduction of *Provisional Schools*. The General Inspector, Randell MacDonnell, explained the purpose of these schools in the Board of Education's 1869 report:

“There are cases where the settlers are too few, too far apart, or too recently established in their new homes, to be able to comply with the regulation in regard to the average attendance, or the contribution to the cost of school building. In such places the people sometimes contrive, by their united labour, to erect a rough structure which for a time may serve either as a place of worship or a school house; and if they succeed in obtaining the services of a person moderately competent as an instructor, the Board may recognise the school provisionally, and grant a small stipend to the teacher, till the time comes when the residents are in a position to contribute their quota of the cost of funding a permanent vested school.”⁶

Those schools on the Palmer River goldfields which I have mentioned, were provisional schools; in many of them settlement withered away before the schools could become permanently established. Some of our large important schools—Bundaberg, Mount Gravatt, Cairns and Charleville—began humbly as rough Provisional Schools. Others, with picturesque names like ‘O.K., Blackfellow’s Creek, Bungewargaroi, Monkey Water-holes and True Blue, disappeared quietly as settlement shifted or one school district was incorporated into another.

The introduction of the Provision School system allowed for the kind of flexibility made necessary by the pattern of settlement in Queensland. The standard of school building, and the attainments of teachers employed, certainly left much to be desired; reading between the lines of the annual reports it is quite obvious that administrators had many misgivings about the “rough structures” and “persons moderately competent as teachers”. There is little evidence, however, that Provisional School buildings were sub-standard compared with the standard of construction in the areas they served. If we look with horror or amusement at earth floors, slab walls and sacking windows, we forget that this rough-and-ready construction was no better or no worse than most people in the community would afford to build. There were more rigorous standards, of course, for National Schools, and (after 1875) State schools. What we must not forget is that the Provisional School system brought education to centres with as few as fifteen or twelve children. We make a value judgment, too, when we assume that a local person “of moderate competence” will give less satisfactory instruction to twelve children than a fully-trained teacher in a city school will give to forty children. The system of Provisional Schools was maintained *and expanded* in the late nineteenth century—a time when teacher shortages were causing administrations tremendous problems of supply. The spirit in which

these schools were used well illustrates the determination of the Department to bring education to all corners of the State.

The next major development in our educational history is the object of our centenary celebrations this September. By the Education Act of 1875, primary education in Queensland was to be free, compulsory and secular. Even more importantly, it was to be under direct *State* control through a Minister of the Crown. Local initiative, even in the truncated form provided for under the Board of Education, was not enough. The people of Queensland looked to the State to provide the wherewithal to carry the ideals of the Education Act into reality. We have only now emerged from the age of the all-powerful Department—of decision-making, spending and supervision from a government office remote from the individual class teacher. Today, more than ever before, the central administration acts as a service—a specialist resource—for the classroom teacher.

EFFECTS ON LIFE STYLE

What effects did isolation have on the life style of teachers in the west and north? This is an important question, but one in which it is easy to be led astray into a discussion of clichés, like “rough conditions” and “lack of social life”. Obviously, teachers shared the life style of the community in which they taught, and we have already noticed that many Provisional School teachers were local people recruited to serve in their own area. Let me concentrate on several important points concerning this general question.

First, isolation created a group of teachers almost completely insulated from professional contact and encouragement. In the cities and larger towns there were libraries, discussion groups, and the encouragement and sharing that comes with professional intercourse. In one-teacher schools, there were none of these, and few chances for teachers to study towards classification examinations—a point repeated often by young teachers in letters to the Department requesting a transfer. Without professional encouragement, and with a modicum of training, many teachers looked desperately to the Department for direction in a host of administrative and professional roles. It is easy to see how the State’s physical situation contributed to the building of a paternalistic administration.

The teacher’s intellectual isolation in the community was his loss, but in a way the district’s gain. Often, he or she was the only public servant for miles around and the only individual educated in the intricate branches of learning involved in filling-in forms, writing important letters, or working out the amount of seed required for the planting of a field. Sometimes

the teacher was the only local musician—often the school was the only public building suitable for holding a dance, an electioneering rally, or a wedding reception. A teacher could become a significant influence in the district, particularly when he remained in his school for a number of years. Until recently it was not uncommon for the one teacher to have taught two generations in the same school house. He became a loved and respected member of the community.

Thomas Hanger, who taught in small schools at Jericho and Mt. Chalmers, put the situation this way:

“. . . Often the bush school is to the bush township what the monastery was to the English village in medieval society, what the parsonage may be in some English country places today. Wasn't it Dr. Johnson who wrote encouraging a young clergyman to do his best in the parish to which he had just been appointed, 'a very savage parish was once civilised by a decayed gentlewoman, who came among them to open a petty school'. The school is the meeting place of those who wish to foster any movement to gratify the herd instinct in humanity, the centre to which those make their way who wish to promote any movements for the social or cultural growth of the district, whether it is the debating club, the ambulance class, the choir or the progress association. And the teacher, particularly the young man . . . is often the mainspring of those movements: he can be, if he chooses, and is prudent, general advisor to the community, and he is certainly the intellectual leader.”⁷

To counter this image, there is abundant evidence that teachers as a breed are no better and no worse than other members of the community. There are numerous examples of teachers who never fitted into their community, who found life in the west enervating and alien. Yet there are as many other cases of teachers who put down roots in areas where they had first gone as young teachers. Women, after the way of their kind, often married into local society. Their children were then raised with a mother's expectation of greater educational opportunities—perhaps a grammar school scholarship or entry into a church school. It is fitting, in International Women's Year, to pay tribute to the pioneering women who brought education to the west.

THE ITINERANT TEACHERS

Probably the most picturesque evidence of the Department's concern with isolation is the appointment of itinerant teachers to tour the remote areas of Queensland. Beginning in 1901



Itinerant teacher, 1909.

with one teacher in the Balonne electorate, south-west Queensland, the system was gradually expanded until, by 1920, 17 itinerant or “travelling” teachers were working in districts from the New South Wales border north to the Gulf of Carpentaria. Let me quote from the Department’s 1915 publication *Education in Queensland*:

“The travelling teacher traverses districts in which the families are so isolated that groups of schools cannot be formed. It is the duty of the teacher to reach every family in his district in which there is a child to be educated . . . (He) is expected to visit each family in his district at least four times a year: he stays as long as possible at each visit; teaches the children, revises the work . . . which has been done since his last visit; outlines the work which is to be done before his return, cheers, reproves, and passes on. . . . We do not pretend to produce university graduates under this system, but we are teaching these children to read, to write, and to count.”⁸

The itinerant teacher’s pupils were the children of the rural poor—those families we know so well through the writings of Steele Rudd and Henry Lawson. Here were boundary riders, fence menders, stockmen, selectors, station hands, marsupial shooters and dingo trappers. The first itinerant teacher, Mr. Thomas Johnston, reported in 1901 that he had met families of eight and nine children who had never attended school.

Almost everywhere the itinerant teacher was welcomed as a friend. Parents were grateful that their children were at last

receiving some instruction, and for the children, the teacher was a link with another world. Here is how one person recalled in later life the arrival of the itinerant teacher at her home in Trekelano Mine, in the far north near Duchess:

"I believe the teacher's name was Mr. MacKenzie. He was a tall young man, full of life, and was very enthusiastic about his job. We were a little afraid at first, we had not met anyone just like him. The men we knew were mostly miners who lived hard and worked hard and talked hard. So someone with nice manners and speech, and clean and tidy dress made us very shy. But not for long. After the first day we were eager to learn and to please him. He had that way with him.

"He would spend the morning at our place showing us our work, then set us work for the afternoon. He would go to another family for the afternoon . . .

"Mr. MacKenzie would set us more work to do when he was away, and we would work like mad to be able to know it and do it when he returned.

"With Mr. MacKenzie we would wash and comb our hair, put on clean clothes, *and our boots*, clean our nails—all unheard of with us bush kids. The only time we did that was when we went to Duchess, not often. I have always been very grateful for Mr. MacKenzie. He made me want to learn and I found there was another world outside our little settlement."⁹

Itinerant teachers refer frequently to the bright intelligence of bush children and their willingness to learn. They also notice their limited experience and lack of worldly wisdom. Wrote one teacher:

"The teacher has to deal with real raw material with nothing to elevate their minds above horses and cattle, or prospecting, and no ambition to broaden it further. Their ideas of such things as a steamboat or a large city are very amusing."¹⁰

The first itinerant teachers were equipped with horse and buggy to make their visits, travelling over miles of often trackless plain or bush, making their way from one small settlement to the next. In time, the Department experimented with motor cars and motor cycles—even noting in 1915:

"The Department is anxiously awaiting the perfection of aeroplanes: the transit difficulties will be reduced to a minimum, and sand and black soil and hills and torrential streams shall trouble us no more."¹¹

It was not uncommon for an itinerant teacher to be responsible for an area of some 37,000 square miles or to travel

almost six thousand miles in a single year. One teacher notes with satisfaction in 1914 that travelling by motor cycle rather than buggy had meant, and I quote:

“A decided increase in the number of miles travelled and time spent teaching. Not more than thirty miles per day could be done with the buggy and this would be considered fast travelling. On the other hand, with the motor (bike) an average of ten miles per hour can be maintained on a fair road.”¹²

CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL

By 1920, however, the Department was forced to recognise that despite the introduction of the motor bike, despite the appointment of more travelling teachers, despite the earnestness and determination of the teachers themselves, the system was less than successful. Most isolated families could be visited only two or three times a year—little more than a week’s teaching time. In 1922 a new attempt was made to come to terms with the problem of isolation through the development of graded correspondence lessons. This allowed for more frequent, and individual attention to each child, and the correspondence school quickly proved itself a success. The travelling teachers were quietly withdrawn, the last one being retired in 1931.

Quite obviously, the most successful weapons against distance and isolation have been improved transport facilities. It was only when better road and rail links had been built into the west and north that an efficient mail service could be provided to isolated areas. An efficient mail service, of course, meant that correspondence lessons could replace the itinerant teacher’s infrequent visit. Motor cars and houses have allowed many of the small one-teacher schools to be consolidated into more viable units—a process which was initiated as early as the 1920s. Radio communication had made it possible for the Schools of the Air to supplement the correspondence lessons of hundreds of Queensland children. And today we are still exploring ways of coping with isolation. A correspondence pre-school scheme, for example, is now reaching some 450 isolated children throughout Queensland.

Let me conclude with the words of Chief Inspector, David Ewart: “We are in the business of supplying teachers where there are children requiring education.” His summary of the Department’s function is more than a defence of centralism, more than an insight into Colonial efforts to make do with what was available in the circumstances. It is rather a testimony

to the egalitarian spirit so evident in the Department's approach to the problem of isolation.

In this present day, other educational questions seem equally daunting and widespread. The administrators who come after me will face the problem of making education more open to all age groups, of making education more responsive to the needs of a society growing more complex and restless. We are still in the business of supplying education where it is needed. We do well to keep the confidence and commitment of the nineteenth century before us.

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