



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

This article was originally published in printed form. The journal began in 1973 and was titled *The Aboriginal Child at School*. In 1996 the journal was transformed to an internationally peer-reviewed publication and renamed *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*.

In 2022 *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* transitioned to fully Open Access and this article is available for use under the license conditions below.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

42.

THE PARENT'S VIEW

AN INTERVIEW WITH ABORIGINAL PARENT EDUCATORS IN BRISBANE.

An action-research program currently going on at the University of Queensland is seeking to help Aboriginal mothers extend their vital role as primary educators of their own children. A number of parent educators are working at home with the mothers on ways in which they can introduce their children to basic concepts they will need at school. Three of the parent educators, themselves Aboriginal mothers, talk here about what they think schools can do for their children.

Question: I think the teachers would be interested to know what Aboriginal parents would like for their children from education. I wonder if you'd like to make some comments?

Mrs. Collins: Well, I've found that Edward has done well since we've had the parent educators coming around. It's made a lot of difference to him and I wish they could have had this with the older ones, because I found that my girls were kept back; they repeated the first grade because they couldn't grasp the first year's work. The boys seem to have done well. But maths seems to trick Nancy. I've gone up to the teacher and I've asked him how they do it, and she caught on to the maths and is doing well.

Question: Does that please her when you go up to the school?

Mrs. Collins: Oh yes, and it's made a lot of difference to her. Now she seems to be able to cope with it quite easily.

Mrs. Coolwell: Leanne goes to the opportunity school and they're trying to build up her confidence so that when she goes into the primary school she's able to cope.

Question: Where did you go to school yourself?

Mrs. Coolwell: In the country. We had a good educational system, it's only that I was too stubborn to learn.

Question: Why were you stubborn?

Mrs. Coolwell: I was doing well at school coming first and fifth in the class but I wasn't getting any praise and my

younger sister was getting all the praise, and I felt that if I wasn't getting any why should I do all the work.

Question: Was she doing well at school?

Mrs. Coolwell: She did well at school. Both of us were always in the first ten at school and then when I got older, I just gave up and left when I was in sixth grade because I wasn't getting any praise and she was getting a pat on the back all the time. I feel that it's not really what the teacher can do, I think you need more help at home, more praise coming from home.

Mrs. Rayment: I've got lots of brothers and sisters going to school. Since the parent educators have been coming around there's been a marked improvement in Darcy's work. Also this year he can pick up a newspaper and pick out words from it and if he doesn't know, he'll ask me, and I'll explain what the word is. But I think teachers today, if they could spend more time with the Aboriginal children in the schools, even if it's fifteen minutes during a lunch break, the children would appreciate it.

Question: What sort of things would you like to see the teachers doing with the Aboriginal children?

Mrs. Rayment: Grades 1, 2 and 3 are their basic years for learning. This is where they learn maths and English and they've got to have this knowledge to go on. If they haven't this knowledge they cannot cope in later years. If they passed Grade 1 with flying colours they'd have no problems in Grades 2 or 3.

Question: Let me ask you one more question each. How do your youngsters feel about going to school?

Mrs. Collins: They like it, but I think they'd like to be doing more sports. This year they don't seem to be having any sports at all. I think sport helps build up confidence and togetherness. I feel they should have more sports and have a lecture to explain the things to them and why.

Question: What sort of things are you thinking about?

Mrs. Collins: The maths, and why they work and words and their soundings. Because when I was at school, it wasn't until I got to Grade 4 that the teacher used to talk to us about things. He used to take a lot of time but once he explained them and had that talk to us, we caught on quickly.

Mrs. Rayment: They like going to school. It's not the study, but the friends. There are a lot of children there of different nationalities and it's not so much the schooling they enjoy, but mixing with people. There are no problems at all because they can mix and talk to people. It's a good thing about the schools because the children do mix, and if they're mixing that often with different nationalities there wouldn't be any problem at all. Now instead of sending them written reports they like the parents to go up and be interviewed by the teachers. The parents are one community; they're more close together and if the children can see this, the children will want to study. If the children see this they know their parents have an interest in them and they have confidence in the teacher and they'll be looking forward to doing work at school.

Mrs. Coolwell: Some Aboriginal parents feel that they're of a lower standard and that they shouldn't go up to the school and bother the teacher.

Mrs. Rayment: I think there's still a barrier between the white and the Aboriginal. If the mothers can understand that it's for the child's best interests and if the mother goes up to see the teachers it could break the barrier.

Question: You all stress this idea of getting confidence in themselves. Do you think dark children need this more than white children?

Mrs. Rayment: Yes, because they feel as if they're on a lower level to the white children. In fact they're not. It's just the way their parents have brought them up by saying, "Oh you're dark you stand back and let everybody else go forward". Not in our house. We were taught to stand up for what's right. If we didn't we'd get a good clip under the ear.

Question: Now tell me how can teachers help Aboriginal youngster to feel more confidence in themselves?

Mrs. Collins: It would help them to have more assignments. Rebecca was secretary of the students' council last year. She gave the Anzac Day speech and there were a few distinguished visitors there and they were quite pleased at how well she spoke.

Question: Have you got any more ideas on this? How the teachers can help the Aboriginal youngsters to feel more confidence in themselves?

Mrs. Coclwell: I still think it comes from home, first. The parents themselves have to give the child a bit of confidence and go up and front the teachers and show the child that Mummy is taking an interest in what they are doing.

Mrs. Rayment: If teachers can make the studies more interesting instead of the child just going to school and doing studies. If instead of the teacher saying, "I want you to draw a map of New Zealand and name twenty places", they can lay it out in a special way, saying, "I'd like to see how well you can do this map. You did very well last time, I think you can do even better". Praise the child THERE, so that he's looking forward to going home and doing the homework, not coming home saying, "Oh Mum, I've got a map to do so I just don't feel like doing it", and Mum saying, "You'd better do it". The child comes home saying, "Oh I want to do it". He's happy about doing it and it's all the better for home and at school.

Question: There are suggestions now that there ought to be more in school studies about Aboriginal culture and histories.

Mrs. Collins: Well why not? The Aborigines are quite a good race; they weren't a really savage race like the American Indians and many other races on earth.

Question: Do you know much about it?

Mrs. Collins: No. Even if white kids learnt about them at school it would make the white kids understand us much better.

Mrs. Coclwell: They're learning everybody else's cultures, the Chinese, the European.

Mrs. Rayment: It would be a good thing to have in the schools because most dark children don't even know why a corroboree is done. I don't even know myself. I hear all the time it's just a dance, but it's a special dance for hunting and different ceremonies. If they can learn about their ancestors they can appreciate what their colour is, why they are dark instead of saying, "Oh why were we born dark and somebody was born white? Well why did it happen to us?" They can learn and appreciate why this has come about and they can turn around to anybody and say, "I've got an Aboriginal ancestor who used to do corroboree and hunt kangaroos and eat lizards", or whatever, and he's proud to say that.