



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*.

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day care falls short of the two criteria of a comprehensive program and parent involvement.

Grotberg concludes that Head Start is the only model which meets both criteria, while most of the models provide some valuable ideas concerning administrative organization, locus of responsibility, philosophy of services and/or relevant program components. Models being considered for adaptation should be concerned with the total child, parent involvement and the needs of the particular group.

Educators of young Aboriginal Australians should consider Grotberg's conclusions, as these would be highly relevant to the local situation.

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Lippman, L., : *Words or Blows : Racial Attitudes in Australia*. Penguin, 1973. (pp.216 - paperback; \$1.55)

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Referring to C.D. Rowley's three volumed *Aboriginal Policy and Practice* Lorna Lippman characterizes the work as "notable for its compassion and insight" (p.37). Lippman brings to her own more limited but equally effective study a similar humanity. Or should one say sense of justice? The book is divided into two parts. The first section is designed to place her sociological survey of four country towns (Part II of the book) into the broader setting of Australian race relations. It consists mainly of a careful collation of material from books and speeches which demonstrates fairly conclusively that Australia was and still is a racist country. The cruder manifestations are gone (hunting parties, poisoning, blatant detestation) but the more subtle forms linger on. Indeed as Lippman shows in Chaper Five (*Racism and the Extreme Right*) the forms are not always so subtle.(p.58). Merely recognizing the fact is not enough; in fact mere recognition could be quite harmful. If we all accept guilt, argues Lippman, no one is responsible; if all are prejudiced no one is to blame. (p.14).

For this reason the writer focuses on specific aspects of race relations in four country towns in South East Australia. The survey is important in that it carefully delineates "the interaction of black and white citizens in their daily life", (p.73) and

suggests ways in which such interaction might be improved.

Lorna Lippman writes clearly and with confidence. Her book is of particular importance for teachers of part-Aboriginal children. It can provide them with an understanding of a sub-culture that has positive virtues. Most whites are obliged to recognize the richness of tribal custom and culture but few are prepared to accept the existence of qualities such as mutual aid and not acquisitiveness as cultural characteristics of part-Aboriginal society. Lippman refers to an instance of a school teacher who did display genuine interest and respect in an Aboriginal student's culture. His action elicited a warm response which took the form of increased interest and cooperation in schoolwork.

Although her book is not primarily concerned with education Lippman provides some valuable insights into why Aboriginal children do badly at school. So often educationalists list off deficiencies in home environment, lack of motivation etc., as explanations for poor performance. Few are prepared to admit that the inadequacy may lie in the school institution itself. Little wonder says Lippman, that the Aboriginal child rejects school when its values and those of his family are in opposition. (p.93).

The school in many respects is a microcosmic reflection of the larger white society. It is highly competitive, hierarchically structured and serves to perpetuate the lie of equal opportunity and the possibility of success for all. In fact, as Lippman notes, it merely reinforces the pupil's sense of failure. One way for the child to combat this is not to try so that no one can accuse him of failure.

Lippman suggests some positive ways of breaking this vicious circle:

"Instead of building educational programs around deficits (on the basis that the Aboriginal child is likely to be deficient in the intricacies of middle class language, for instance) they can be built on strengths."

She points out that the Aboriginal child often responds better to visual and auditory techniques (which he is used to) than the abstract verbal mode of the middle class.

"If he is allowed to follow his own path of learning he can make use of the cooperative methods to which he is accustomed rather than the competitive ones of the examination system with its inbuilt fear of failure."

The suggestion is a valuable one but is concerned mainly with teaching method.

What of her more fundamental criticism of the actual institution of school? In a rare instance of imprecise prose Lippman states, in regard to education for Aborigines,

"As with the Australian education system as a whole, it is not so much a question of repairing an antiquated edifice by patching it with more of the same bricks but by taking an analytic look at the structure as it stands and using it to the greater advantage of the individual student."

Is she suggesting a real alternative? What does she mean by an "analytic look"? The findings of her own research suggest, that, from an Aboriginal point of view, the building is not to be looked at but demolished. What to put in its place is the real question. One possibility is an Aboriginal community "school" where Aboriginal culture and history could be taught. The idea has already been suggested by urban Blacks and could work if the initiative was Aboriginal.

Words or Blows is a sensitively written book. One hopes that Lorna Lippman's concern and obvious respect for the Aborigines she writes about rubs off on her readers.

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Banks, J.A. and Joyce, William W., : *Teaching Social Studies to Culturally Different Children*. Addison Wesley, 1971.

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One of the major problems facing the teacher of the culturally different child is the child's lack of a positive "self-image". The task of remedying this falls heavily on the Social Studies teacher. In the words of Banks and Joyce,