



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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SECONDARY SCHOOL ABORIGINAL GIRLS FASHION PARADE AT MAITLAND



Eric D. Howlett,
Headmaster,
Maitland Area School, S.A.

The Maitland Area School on central Yorke Peninsula, about one hundred miles from Adelaide, caters for students aged from five to sixteen or seventeen years. Of the five hundred and seventy students who attend, approximately eighty are part-Aboriginal children from the Point Pearce community some twelve miles away. About half of these are secondary students.

Two years ago a secondary student from Point Pearce spent a year at a Maori college in New Zealand and then returned to Maitland to complete his fourth year P.E.B. Certificate. He is now undertaking his matriculation studies in Adelaide. Because of the obvious success of this project, the scheme is being continued this year. Although some very generous support has been given by various airline companies and other organizations, the Point Pearce Aboriginal community has a major responsibility in raising funds to cover the cost of the student's board and other general living requirements.

Earlier this year, in April, as a result of an idea of one of the school staff members, it was decided to arrange a public fashion parade by the secondary Aboriginal girls as a fund-raising activity for the New Zealand project. The girls and their parents liked the idea and planning commenced.

1. There was to be a modelling course to last approximately six weeks; this program would include deportment, make-up, health education, hair care and social graces.
2. Visiting speakers and experts would address and train the girls during one evening session per week at Point Pearce.
3. At the end of the course a public fashion parade would be held in the Maitland District Hall.
4. Two women staff members were to plan and coordinate the above program in consultation with the girls and their parents.

The first session in the Point Pearce Community Hall on June 7 was perhaps the most difficult, for its success would determine whether the girls would maintain interest and persevere with the course to its conclusion.

The Dean of Women and a lecturer in health education at the Torrens College of Advanced Education in Adelaide launched the course that evening. Diet foods, exercise and deportment, drugs, smoking, sex and boy-girl relationships were among some of the initial topics to be discussed. This was followed by exercises, illustrations on the overhead projector and demonstrations of basic modelling techniques. The older girls, in particular, were very interested, quickly overcame earlier embarrassment and stayed to ask questions.

At the conclusion of the evening, all concerned were very pleased with its obvious success.

Two important sessions in make-up and hair care were very competently conducted by several women from Maitland and again were most successful. Equally important was the resultant good public relations exercise between the Maitland white community and the Point Pearce Aboriginal community.

Mrs. Reta Moriarty from the Department of Labour assisted with another session. Being Aboriginal herself, and having spoken to some of the girls previously in her capacity as a careers counsellor, Mrs. Moriarty's involvement was most valuable.

At about this time the school received confirmation of an earlier request that the newly-formed Adelaide Aboriginal Orchestra would be able to participate to provide entertainment during the fashion parade. This news was particularly welcome as it guaranteed a varied evening of all-Aboriginal entertainment.

Some four weeks after the commencement of the course the girls requested lunch-time practices at the school. This was very encouraging, particularly as several were beginning to show an obvious flair for modelling.

On July 18, following earlier negotiation, a film crew from the ABC television program *This Day Tonight* arrived to prepare a segment on the fashion parade.

The film crew first went to Point Pearce to interview several parents and later returned to the school to complete their segment. This was subsequently shown on the evening before the fashion parade. The school and Point Pearce community were very pleased with the positive presentation of the fashion parade by the ABC.

A leading professional model (for whose services we paid) from Adelaide was at the school the same day as the film crew to explain and demonstrate to the girls some of the finer points of modelling clothes. Her husband, a well-known league football personality, talked with the Aboriginal boys and showed them films.

About a week before the scheduled date of the parade the school was informed that the clothes which had been promised by a leading wholesaler in Adelaide were no longer available. Fortunately, one of the large department stores in Adelaide responded to our emergency situation and was able to supply an excellent range of fashions for the parade.

A pleasing feature of the final preparation for the fashion parade was a very real interest and support from various people in Maitland. One of the mothers of the Welfare Club decorated the hall with flowers while others spent all Saturday preparing the cat-walk and stage, and organizing music and lighting.

The Adelaide Aboriginal Orchestra arrived about 5.45 pm. and went to the school for tea; this had been especially arranged by the Welfare Club. Arrangements had been made to billet the orchestra members at Point Pearce for the night.

Quite a number of Point Pearce mothers arrived early to help with the dressing and make-up. Understandably, the girls were very nervous.

Miss Lillian Holt, a charming Aboriginal woman from Sydney, compered the evening and Professor Kennedy, a Black American at Flinders University, gave the prizes and speech at the end.

The evening proved to be an outstanding success for the following reasons:

BEFORE

1. The general worthwhileness of the six-week course and the involvement of the girls and their parents with teachers and other people who contributed.
2. The keenness of the girls to do well.

DURING

1. Every seat in the hall was filled.
2. The audience consisted of about equal numbers of white and Aboriginal people. Seating arrangements were such that the two groups were mixed throughout the hall.
3. The evening, apart from the part played by a Maitland woman who described the fashions, was one of all-Aboriginal entertainment.
4. The girls looked particularly attractive and modelled splendidly.
5. The audience was most warm and responsive in its applause and acknowledgement of each girl's effort.
6. The Point Pearce people were obviously very proud of the girls and the response from the Maitland people.

AFTER

1. The Point Pearce people were thrilled at what had been "one of the greatest occasions ever for their people".
2. The Maitland white community was impressed with the achievement of the Aboriginal girls and responded with many extremely positive comments.
3. Despite fairly high expenses, a very satisfactory profit was realized. This was another very important indicator of success to the girls and their parents.
4. Somewhat closer ties between the two communities - this was the first time that the Aboriginal community had ever presented such a performance in Maitland.

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