



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

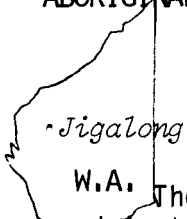
This article was originally published in printed form. The journal began in 1973 and was titled *The Aboriginal Child at School*. In 1996 the journal was transformed to an internationally peer-reviewed publication and renamed *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*.

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ABORIGINAL VIEWS

INTERVIEW WITH MISS JILL CHURNSIDE
KINDERGARTEN TEACHER, JIGALONG, W.A.

The kindergarten at Jigalong is a hall. It was a dormitory used in the mission days but now it's being used as a kindergarten. It's a very large hall and we have equipment which has been bought for us by the Kindergarten Association (or the PreSchool Education Board as it is now). We have twenty children attending. Actually there are twenty-five; which is only what we are allowed to have, probably because of the size of the building and for health reasons. The five children who don't attend are away on different stations where their mothers and fathers work. We also have four European children who come to kindergarten.

Jill, why do you think it's important for the children at Jigalong to go to kindergarten?

I think it's important for all children to attend kindergarten. Aboriginal children especially need it because they seem so far behind when they enter their first year at school; that is, if they haven't been to kindergarten before. You often hear teachers complain that the child doesn't seem to understand what the teacher is saying. If the child has been to kindergarten it makes it easier for the teacher to communicate with him. An example of this would be a teacher I know who was teaching in Roebourne. She told me that she had some children who hadn't been to kindergarten previously and she found it very hard to communicate with them; the following year she had children who had attended kindergarten and she found a great difference in schoolwork and communication.

Jill, tell me about some of the activities that you do in the preschool at Jigalong.

Perhaps one of the most popular activities that the children love doing at Jigalong is our Nature walks. This includes collecting beetles, lizards, children identifying small animal tracks, and gathering berries. Small insects are brought back and put in specimen jars and put out on the nature table. To me, this is a terrific way of learning from one another.

Another thing that happened which was very exciting was that the children staged a corroboree. They started by themselves and they were dancing around. We carried this on a bit further with my aide. I told her to give the children some tapping sticks and blocks so that they could tap together and produce sound. After this went on for awhile we took off the children's tops and put some bright coloured paints on them. The children thought this was marvellous and carried it off very well.

Jill, do you do anything in that kindergarten year to help them get ready for, say mathematics, when they go into Grade I?

Yes, we do have maths in very simple terms. For example, whilst we were out walking one day we found two berries on a tree. Seeing we had twenty children that day, it was a bit hard for everyone to have one each. We gave one each to a boy and a girl but then we asked them to give them back so that we could chop them up in bits so everyone could have a taste. Other things that are familiar to children are stones, from the creek; we use these for shapes, sizes and counting. For new interest we've started using shells; this attracts the children greatly because they do not often see things like this. Also there is the use of insects - butterflies, moths, beetles, and grass-hoppers - that the children know about best. This includes the colour, various shapes, counting of legs and so on.

Would you tell us what training you had as a kindergarten teacher and who is your aide and has she had any training?

I did a two year training course at Meerilinga Kindergarten Teachers College, in Perth, Western Australia. My aide's name is Jan Simpson and she hasn't had any training, except that she helped in the kindergarten here last year. Also I have my sister who is working with me this year, and going back to Perth next year to do the Child Care Certificate Course.

Was this course, Jill, just for Aboriginal kindergarten teachers or for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal kindergarten teachers?

This was a special course for Aboriginal girls wishing to become involved in working in kindergartens where there are Aboriginal children. Aboriginal girls and women are able to do this now through the Child Care Certificate (Triple C) Course.

You were saying before that you teach using some of your language and some of each of the children's languages and that you also use some English. How much English do you use to get them ready for going into Grade I where all their program is in English?

This was a large problem when I first came to Jigalong and started the kindergarten, because the children could not understand English. After some observation and hard listening, I found that some of their words were very similar and some the same as the languages I speak, which are Ngarluma and Injabarndi. There are two dialects at Jigalong: Mantjiltjara and Kartutjara. I mix my words up a bit; I use some of my dialect and some of theirs and I find that this way I can converse pretty well with the children. But there are one or two children who still can't understand English. For example. I have one little boy and I could say to him, "Phillip, would you please go and wash your hands as it's milk time now?" and he'll just sort of look at me because he doesn't understand what I've said to him. Then I'll say to him after a little while, "Philip pangkurrim marawashman". This he will do straight away because he understands this better than he can English.

It's pretty hard to know how much English to use, but I think in my position, I'm finding the last term of kindergarten ideal for more use of English. The children by now can speak much better English than they did at first.

It should be a must for Aboriginal children to attend kindergarten because these children do not get everyday experiences at home, as the European children do. I mean, where would you, in isolated areas such as Jigalong and other places, hear these children speaking English to each other, mothers singing songs to them and other such things that go on in many European households?

I'm a firm believer in holding the pre-preschool for the very young age group, where mothers come in and sit with the children and play with them. Not necessarily a well-organized group but where they can be free just to sit and relax with the children and watch to see how they play and learn. We have our little group here with the mothers and grandmothers who come and sit in the shade of the tree and play with the children. This is also important because it helps the child settle in and know what to expect when he or she attends kindergarten.