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- *Joy : *The Explorers*
- *Papps : *Aboriginal Words of Australia.*
- *Poignant : *Piccaninni Walkabout.* (Photos). Angus and Robertson.
- *Reed : *Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Life.* Reed.
(ESSENTIAL : but beware of generalizations)
- *Rose : *Ngari the Hunter.* (Central Australia) Collins.
- *Wallace : *Children of the Desert.* Nelson.
- The Aborigine Today.* Hamlyn.
- U.N.E.S.C.O. *Answering Your Questions on Aborigines.*
Australian Museum.

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Halls Creek

LANGUAGE AND READING

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Mr. Fleming reports on two approaches - one with a group of young children and one with a group of older non-readers.

The Halls Creek School in Western Australia is classified as a Special Native School because of the large complement of Aboriginal children in attendance (90% of 200 total school enrolment).

The children come from a variety of situations - reserve, cattle stations, transitional home areas and normal government housing quarters, but mainly from the first two mentioned areas.

Their knowledge of English is varied but on the whole their language competence is substantially below that of their European/Australian counterparts. There is a similar discrepancy in their knowledge/experience of the modern world and in fact any situation outside their own local environment.

We have, then, a serious problem to be overcome before formal learning can commence with the new beginner at school: an English language deficiency.

In addition to the language problem being experienced by the new beginner we have a reading problem in the 11-14 year group. Some of these children have failed to reach any standard of reading competence and coupled with this deficiency have a dislike for any form of reading at all.

These, then, were two of our more serious problems - the language deficiency of the younger children and the need for a creative motivation program with the older non-reader.

The language programs in both cases had to be designed from the limited vocabulary that they did know and based entirely on situations that were completely familiar to the children so that all learning was based on known experiences which were in turn used as the basis for developing new experiences.

Our limited experience with Aborigines gave us some grounds for formulating the opinion that Aboriginal children make use of their senses to far greater advantage than the European/Australian child; so we decided to work on his sight and aural observances.

We obtained for this work the following equipment:

1. An instamatic camera.
2. A Polaroid camera.
3. A language master.
4. A listening centre.

The language master is a recording machine that uses a card with a double magnetic tape across the bottom. Various size cards can be used and photographs and word cards can be attached to it either temporarily, so that the card may be used again, or permanently. The listening centre is a set of headphones and control box which can, in turn, be connected to the language master.

THE JUNIOR GROUP

The first series of photographs was of all the children in the groups, taken individually and in their own environment. Most

of the photographs were taken in the camp with the children standing near some possession of their own or their family.

"outside the camp",

"next to the fire",

"with their dogs".

The background is important because the more there is in each photograph the more scope there will be for eventual discussion. For example, one photograph provided this progression: -

John.

This is John.

John is near the tree.

The tree is big.

These words were all to be found in the vocabulary of the reading texts that were eventually selected for use when the children had progressed sufficiently to start formal learning. At no stage though did the children use the actual text; they used only their own work books and the class book made up by the teacher.

To begin with, each photograph was attached to the language master card with photo corners and the name of the child was printed on the card (Card A). We selected the larger card 11" x 8½" which gave us sufficient room for both the photograph and the printing. Later we found it just as easy to print the word or phrase on stiff paper and attach it to the card with a paper clip.

When the group selected to use the machine was ready, the teacher inserted the card onto the machine and by using a master key recorded her voice on the tape, clearly saying the word printed on the card. The children then listened to the playback and then each of them in turn recorded the word, played back the word and then listened to the teacher's recording again. We did not use the listening centre with this group, as it was to the advantage of the whole class that they could hear all that was going on.

As the children are normally shy and quiet, the amplification of the set gave the teacher a much louder voice pattern to listen to and she was able to detect and correct any sounds not being made or being made incorrectly.

Each child had a work book and as the words were introduced they were printed into the books by the teacher and various kinds of activity work used to consolidate the words.

When all the work on each photograph was expended on the language master it was removed from the card and put into a flash card and the most useful word groupings that had been used on the machine were printed on the card which was then used for revision work. (Card B).

For the next stage, the basic word vocabulary of the Janet and John series *Here We Go* was selected. There was no basis for selection other than that we could introduce each word orientated to the camp theme and photograph the children as close to that location as possible.

Words and phrases using the text vocabulary and other words already learned were printed on the master cards and the photographs attached. Recordings were then made and practised until the teacher was certain the children not only understood the meanings of the words but had mastered voice inflection and pronunciation. We considered this to be of major importance because besides being deficient in Standard English many children were deficient in sound discrimination. For example, even in their vernacular the single sounds d, e, f, h, t, v, do not exist, they can't pronounce "th", and do not differentiate between the sounds: p and b, k and g, d and t.

The equipment used with the group enabled us to teach from their experience, and for them to see and hear the words at the same time, thus using the two senses we selected from the beginning.

The photography created the material for discussion and language development, and the language master gave us the scope for analysing voice technique and correcting or teaching it where necessary.

By careful planning the teacher can have her class outside the school environment quite frequently while on photographic expeditions and can take the opportunity to meet the parents and in general explore the community. This, in turn, gives scope for experience learning in other subject areas such as art, drama, science and social studies.

THE SENIOR GROUP

The methods used by this group varied slightly from those used with the junior group as our aim here was to rekindle some enthusiasm for reading and language.

Our language master was again our main aid but it was used this time in conjunction with the listening centre and a Polaroid camera which gave us film prints immediately.

The children were first introduced to the language master and the listening centre and taught simple routines for using them both. Then the camera was used for the first series of photographs by the teacher while the children observed and posed for the photographs that were taken. The first series was the only one taken by the teacher. All the subsequent shots were taken by the children and they also chose how and where the photographs were to be taken; this created many situations for oral and written expression for the teacher to use.

To start the series the teacher chose the word "leg" and used this word in a variety of sentences matched with the children's names and words from the *Happy Venture - Introductory Book*, as far as apossible. The seven photographs in the series were as follows: -

Here is David's leg.

David fell on the leg.

Francis is by David's leg.

Don can see David's leg.

David is by the tree.

Greg is by the tree.

Frankie sits by the tree.

These seven stories were then master recorded on seven taped cards with the photograph and printed card of the story attached also. The photograph was attached with the photo corners and the story card with a paper clip so they could both be removed at any time. This is important as it means the card can be used again in another series and it allows the teacher to introduce matching games with the taped voice, the printed cards and the photographs.

The first subject chosen by the group and one that was found to be most successful was "travel" - the different ways of getting to Halls Creek. The preparation for this series included photographing a plane (and being taxied down the airstrip in it), photographing a truck and having a ride in that, photographing a caravan and having morning tea inside it with the owners, photographing a motor cycle and bicycle and riding on both of them.

In this manner the word lists of the texts *Endeavour Book I* and the *Introductory Book* of the *Happy Venture* series were introduced, all in story situations related to experiences and in areas of high interest to the children.

All the children in the group have developed a remarkable confidence in handling the equipment as well as a marked improvement in confidence in themselves and their reading.

I feel quite sure that the work done with this senior group has considerable application to remedial reading groups in any school situation. Teachers who see fit to experiment with this system will be astounded by the interest and improvement that their children will show towards reading and language development.

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Editorial Note:

Many of the schools in Australia, particularly in eastern Australia, have suffered damage in the recent extensive floods; many of the schools who are on our mailing list and who serve communities of Aboriginal students have been affected by these floods.

We would like to extend our sympathies to schools in flood areas and also to any teachers who were personally affected by the floods.
