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ABORIGINAL PRE-PRE-SCHOOL



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The Aboriginal Social Club of Port Augusta has been operating a pre-pre-school for Aboriginal children for the past six months or more. The idea behind this venture was to enable Aboriginal children between the ages of $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 4 years to come together in a playgroup situation where they could experience the social contacts and educational experiences which many middle-class children already experience in the home. Such experiences prepare the children for kindergarten which they attend between the ages of 4 and 5 years.

The director and assistants, all of whom are Aboriginal themselves, conduct two sessions a day during the week, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, which are similar to the kindergarten sessions. However, they are of shorter duration as the children are younger. The morning session runs from 9 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. and the afternoon session operates from 1.30 until 3.30. A bus owned by the Aboriginal Social Club collects the children and takes them home. This bus service for these children operates around the town as well as bringing children in from the Reserve. The kindergarten is situated in the town centre opposite the offices of the Aboriginal Social Club, hence is very conveniently located. Once a week the parents meet with the staff of the pre-pre-school and discuss the activities as well as carry out any mending or maintenance required. On some occasions the kindergarten directors also attend these meetings to meet the parents of children who will be attending their respective kindergartens, and the Aboriginal children concerned.

The children are taken on visits to the different kindergartens in the town to help them become used to the kindergarten situation. Also, exchange visits are arranged so that the Aboriginal children become less shy of mixing with the Euro-Australian children. Groups of about six children from the kindergartens usually spend most of a session with the pre-pre-school children so that each group becomes used to the other both at the kindergarten and in the Aboriginal pre-pre-school. This exchange has assisted the Aboriginal children to settle into the Kindergarten much more readily. The Aboriginal children start

attending kindergarten as soon as convenient after their fourth birthday. The staff of the pre-pre-school also visit and spend whole sessions at the kindergartens so enabling each group to understand the other.

The basic program of the pre-pre-school is modelled on the kindergarten style, so that the children become accustomed to this type of procedure. Roll call is carried out first so that the children learn their names and learn the names of the others in the group. Then follows a picture discussion about the topic for the week. The children are then free to pursue the various activities set out for them. During this period groups are taken for informal word or number games, the emphasis being on hearing and seeing rather than on learning, so that when the children attend kindergarten, many words, numbers or the letters of the alphabet will not be unfamiliar to them. Recently the children have commenced the sessions with singing as it was found they enjoyed doing this first. Originally only one activity was introduced during free time to help the children settle and learn to work in groups. This later expanded to cover many activities and so helped the children to overcome their shyness and adapt to the new experience. Story time follows the activity time, then fruit is given out, and the session finishes with games and other activities.

Aboriginal culture, which includes picture discussions, legends, music and other cultural developments, is conducted about three times a week. The children have been building up a group project which shows Aboriginal achievements and cultural activities on one side, and white, western culture and activities on the other. This helps the child relate to the multi-cultural environment which exists in Port Augusta, as well as giving him a pride in being Aboriginal.

The whole idea of this pre-pre-school is to provide activities, experiences and a stimulating learning situation so that these children do not commence kindergarten, and later school, without prior knowledge which other children normally have.

The number attending the sessions has grown rapidly, so that at present twenty-two children attend in the morning and twenty in the afternoon. It is hoped that in the future, as the pre-pre-school expands, a wider variety of activities will be made available. Also, it is hoped the Aboriginal culture section will include the languages of the different groups in the area, with the use of indigenous people from the community to instruct the children.

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