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ACROSS AUSTRALIA

FROM TEACHER TO TEACHER

CENTRAL AUSTRALIAN EXCURSION **



Jill Kennedy,
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CEDUNA S.A.

In June this year a Central Australian excursion was organized by the Department of Labor and Ceduna Area School for seven of the school's secondary Aboriginal students. With the exception of Keith Peters, a first year student who had recently come to Ceduna from Yalata, the students had had very little contact with the tribal way of life. They were ignorant of Aboriginal customs and laws, and in some respects this ignorance had led to contempt or fear. Some of the boys were, for example, terrified that they could be taken and forcibly initiated, so that, when on the first evening of the trip we were stopped by some Yalata people on the road south of Coober Pedy, they begged us to drive on, and hid their faces under blankets in the back seat. The second night (Saturday June 21st) we camped out for the first time just north of the turn-off to Indulkana. Keith, a great comedian, but at this stage not well-known to, or accepted by, the others in the group, decided to stir them up by mentioning that there were "wild nungas" in the area. This raised considerable alarm and for the rest of the night few of the boys dared to leave the campfire without a strong stick and a friend as a bodyguard.

***Submitted by Mr. Craig Cameron, Principal, Ceduna Area School, who commented - "...The excursion was most successful and it has indicated to us that the detribalised Aboriginal students of this school have a very deep interest in their own culture and that we should be including a study of this nature in the curriculum. As a consequence we have arranged for the Pitjantjatjara language to be studied as part of the normal school curriculum for Aboriginal students, and we trust for any other interested students, and this should come into effect in the very near future."*

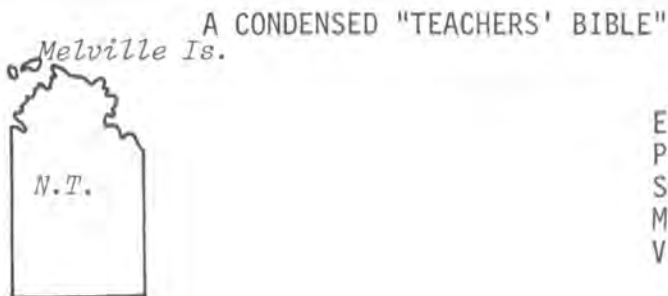
We reached Alice Springs on Sunday 22nd, and spent some of Monday at the Institute of Aboriginal Development. The students were shown white and Aboriginal people learning Aboriginal languages and studying Aboriginal culture. They saw Aboriginal people in high-status positions such as lecturer and social worker, and in qualified trades such as printing. During this visit several people spoke to Keith in his own language. This aroused the curiosity of the other students, and from then on to be able to speak and understand Pitjantjatjara became a status symbol. They began to ask questions about Aboriginal languages, and asked Keith or Barry Piltz (Department of Labor) to translate for them. We also took them to Yirara College where they were introduced to a fully-qualified Aboriginal teacher, and saw one of the Aboriginal teacher-aides at work. The aim of this exercise was to increase their self-respect. (It had been evident from their comments and reactions in the streets of Alice Springs that they generally dissociated themselves from and were ashamed of Aboriginals as a race.)

From Alice Springs we made a trip to Hermannsburg. The students seemed unimpressed, made unfavourable comparisons between there and Koonibba (where many of them had lived at one time or another), and remarked that they wouldn't like to live there. We travelled back towards Ayers Rock that afternoon, camping at the turn-off from the Coober Pedy road. The time we spent at the Rock was perhaps the most valuable experience of the whole trip. We arrived just after lunch and spent the afternoon climbing the Rock and exploring the caves around the bottom. After tea, a discussion about the Rock began, because some of the students wanted to go back to the caves in the dark. Keith would not go because he said there were spirits there and also the caves should not be seen by uninitiated men. The others began to question him about his beliefs and his experience of tribal life. Keith became, from then on, the leader of the group, and was frequently consulted about legends, laws, language etc. He became respected by the other students because of his greater knowledge of their own culture. The other students also acquired a respect for the culture itself.

From Ayers Rock, we went to Amata. This was again a valuable experience in promoting self-respect for the students. At Amata they saw and greatly admired Aboriginal stockmen at work breaking in horses. It was obvious here, too, that some of their fears about other Aboriginal people were breaking down, as they began to socialize with the people on the Reserve. This was also evident the next day at Indulkana. A visit to a once-sacred cave at Amata provoked further prolonged discussion about the structure and function of the tribe, a

discussion which continued intermittently for the rest of the trip, through Coober Pedy and back to Ceduna.

In my opinion the excursion was a most valuable exercise in that it increased the students' self-respect and respect for their own culture, and stimulated their interest in native languages. Further, they seem better motivated at school, possibly through seeing Aboriginal people who are succeeding in a white society.



E. M. Fisher,
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Via Darwin N.T.

I feel that there is an immediate need for teachers coming into contact with a new Aboriginal community to evaluate themselves not only professionally, but also socio-culturally.

The hazards and pitfalls of acculturation interchanges are too numerous and complicated to enumerate, and it is incumbent upon the new teacher to 'establish' himself (or herself) initially in the new environment. The community is only too cognizant of the behaviour and actions of a new member in its midst, and once the Aboriginals establish 'you' in their mental structure, then acceptance gradually comes. The reasons for culture conflict are manifold, and we, as teachers, must be careful not to use these as an excuse for indifference and neglect of our 'client' community.

Infusion of foreign ideas takes time and must necessarily come from intrinsic desires within the Aboriginals themselves. However, as an educating influence, we are in a position to present the alternatives in an impartial atmosphere, fostered by a genuine desire to mutually interpret and sympathetically understand the existing culture and its norms. Unless we do this, we are likely