



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*.

In 2022 *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* transitioned to fully Open Access and this article is available for use under the license conditions below.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

ABORIGINAL VIEWS

AN ABORIGINAL TEACHER-AIDE IN A
LARGE METROPOLITAN SCHOOL*

J. Barney,
State School,
Richlands East,
Inala, Qld.

I wanted to become a teacher-aide after I heard of an experimental project in a Brisbane school where Aboriginal people were asked to be part of the school and part of the classrooms to help the Aboriginal children attending the school. I applied at three schools in the Inala district because I live in this district, my children go to school here, and my sister-in-law is a teacher-aide at one of the schools in the district.

I thought it would be really great if I could get a job like that. I could be at the school with my two children and work the same hours as them. After I found out that I had got the job at the same school that my children attend, I didn't have a clue what work I'd be doing. My sister-in-law told me a few things, and after I had been for an interview, I had a better idea. But I still didn't expect to be working with the children - doing sums and reading.

My present program includes preparation for teachers every morning, and at least one and a half hours a day supervising groups of children. Since I've been working with these different groups, I feel I've been making the break-through of the century. The children have accepted me as "their" teacher-aide. They say "hello" to me every time they walk past my table, and whenever I'm on playground duty or when I'm doing my shopping. There are nine other aides at this school, and I've been accepted by everyone, especially those I work with in the Infant Section. I feel really proud that some of the children ask me to peel their oranges, tie their shoe laces, undo their lunch boxes, and be a referee in their arguments. My own two children couldn't be more happy than to have me here. I also feel I'm doing good for the other Aboriginal children too.

.....

*Richlands East is a large primary school in Brisbane with an enrolment of 1063 children, of whom a small percentage is Aboriginal.

I know most of them, and just by their smile when they see me, I know they're glad that an Aboriginal can be one of the teacher-aides at their school, and yet be the same as them.

Since I've been at this school, I have learnt more about the teachers and how they go about teaching. My youngest is a bit slow and sometimes the teachers just mention that she doesn't understand how things are done, and I sit with her when we get home and help her. That's another thing I'm thankful for. I can always find out how my children are doing.

There are some trouble spots too. My daughter has been called all the names the other children can think of and she always gets upset. Previously, I always took a day off work to come to the school and see the teachers about this, but it always happens, again and again. Now that I'm here at the school all the time, I can have a little talk to the children, and tell them that this makes my children very unhappy and explain why. I feel really great to think that I've been able to speak to them. I feel that I've been accepted by the bigger children as well as by the children I mainly work with in the Infant Section. The children in my daughter's class all say their "hello's". There are some of them I know, but a lot I don't know. However, I still say "hello" to them. I'm sure the nine other aides feel the same way as I do about our job, but I must say I'm a little bit prouder than the others, to know that I can do just as good a job as the next one. I feel that I can act as a sort of stepping stone between our children and the other children in the school, and also between our children and the teachers.

.....