



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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THE SELF-IMAGE OF THE ABORIGINAL CHILD*

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Maria Lane has been running the preschool at Gerard for eighteen months, having had experience with playgroups in New Zealand and undertaken a year at the task force in Adelaide.

At the workshop, there was a variety of opinions about how much "Aboriginality" should be taken into account and which traces of traditional culture are still evident. Many Aboriginal women think their communities have opted to live like the larger white society and wish to educate their children as the rest of that society.

Mrs Lane believes strongly that even with the above opinion, Aboriginal children need active and special help in gaining self-confidence because of the negative image held not only by non-Aboriginals, but by some Aboriginal adults.

As an Aboriginal preschool teacher, living and teaching within the Gerard Aboriginal community, I am continually aware of the need to take into account the Aboriginal child's cultural background. Any teacher, black or white, should try to be aware of this; not just at the preschool level, but at every level of the child's education.

Almost every black child feels an intense alienation when subjected to white education. They convert this into hatred of education or self-contempt which must be replaced by the intense participation, thirsting for knowledge and the self-respect and self-awareness that our people had before the whites came. For Aboriginal children to develop a positive image, self-awareness and thirsting for knowledge, they must be presented with the correct positive images.

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* Reproduced with permission from "Preschool Workshop", Port Lincoln 1975, Education Department of South Australia.

I would like to quote an article written in Contrast (a Canadian magazine), by the executive director of the Black United Front:

"When you realize that attitudes play a big role in how people act and interact, it is important to try to counteract the negative stereotypes that non-Blacks have had, and Blacks have consequently come to accept about themselves. Because of the psychological conditioning Blacks have been subjected to for 200 years, they see themselves in very limited roles and in all kinds of negative ways."

He is talking about blacks in Canada, but what he says certainly applies in Australia to black people and white people.

A black teacher does not necessarily present a positive image for a black child. A black teacher or teacher aide who shows no initiative, who is prepared to take a secondary role to whites, who is aware of a child's different background, and does nothing to push for change to meet different cultural needs is as good as useless and is therefore a negative image.

Teachers at preschool level must be aware of their children's cultural backgrounds, and accept these cultural backgrounds as normal. I stress that it is important to make Aboriginal children know they are important as human beings, that their skin colour is normal, that they can be proud of who they are and that they belong to a big world where black people are a majority, and not a tiny minority in world terms.

You cannot develop this positive image in black children, develop an awareness, pride and confidence in the children, if every day they are confronted and bombarded from all fronts by alien images they cannot relate to.

White teachers at all levels of education find it hard enough to relate to black teachers and aides, let alone white children, how can you possibly expect black children to relate to white images?

Seeing positive images of our people as doctors, lawyers, dentists, accountants and in lots of other positions of influence

will react very strongly in black children's minds. The fostering of pride and confidence in the *fact* of blackness, and the belief that blackness is *not* a bad thing, is so vital.

What do I hope will be achieved in the future for my people? A generation of black children who will be leaders of their own communities, who will not desert their own people; who, with correct direction, will obtain important skills which can be used to build up our communities; children who will return to their communities to build up the next generation of leaders with honest skills.

This article has been written for all teachers teaching Aboriginal children with the hope that the teachers will be consciously aware of what they are teaching to the child. More importantly, it is up to the Aboriginal teachers and teacher aides to give a positive direction to the children, to stand no longer behind the European teacher, and to push for the changes in the field of education which Aboriginal children need so desperately. This is a long hard climb, but it is up to Aboriginal people to bring about these changes.

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Editor's Note -

We would like to publish in the next issue of the journal comments from readers on any aspect of the subject *Teacher Training for Teachers of Aboriginals*. Articles or comments from teachers who have undertaken - or are undertaking - courses in Aboriginal studies would be most welcome.

Articles should be received by the Editor before 20th September.

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