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ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER VIEWS

NATURE OF ABORIGINAL CHILDREN

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Miss Ungunmerr has graciously consented to our publication of the following extracts from "Nature of Aboriginal Children", the manuscript of which she is preparing for publication by the Northern Territory Education Department.

" Aboriginal children go to school and learn the white ways. And Aborigines that have left school are working with you and you teach them things. And the older ones that have been to school and the ones that haven't been to school are learning to do things too. And they are being taught by a white person. You teach them everything you know and not all the things you teach them sink in, but they've experienced it. They might have to use it later on in life in a situation where they have to. But, are you learning things from them as much as they are learning from you? Did you stop to think that what's inside them is good?

What's inside them is as important to them as much as the things you have and teach are important to you. We would like you to learn from us too."

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" If you have a child in the classroom who is better at his work than the others in the class, and it isn't because he's brighter than the others that he doesn't want to do it, it's because everybody in the village is equal to everyone else. If there are some who think and act as if they're better than the others, they are not accepted. Therefore it's the same in the school. The same goes for those who have had a good education. He knows that he has to do the things that are expected of him by his people that are normally done in the village or when out bush hunting and the people accept what is expected of him when he's with white people - like an Aboriginal teacher in a classroom - the other teachers accept this, but when it comes to having a staff meeting, they don't say much or only one turns up.

" Singling out an Aboriginal child for praise above a group is an embarrassment. The praised child may feel he has let the others down and so lower his performance. Group praise fits their feeling of group identity much better. It all comes into the tribal relationship. Some people can't talk to others and they keep quiet. Nobody in the village is different from anybody else. If some one is different and he acts it, then his people don't accept him. Then he tries to mix in a lot with white people and finds he's not happy there because they really don't accept him even though he's been taught how to live like a white person. So what he has to do is do what his people expect him to do when he's with them and he knows how to change again when he's with white people."

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" Aboriginal children are shy especially with people that they don't know or who are new. They stay like this for two or three weeks or maybe a month before you get them to say anything and look you in the eye. Sometimes they don't say anything, just nod. If you're talking to them and you want them to say "yes" they don't say anything.

If you push yourself they won't respond if they think that they themselves aren't ready. So they keep to themselves a bit longer, especially the girls. All that time they aren't saying anything. It's not that they don't want to know you, it's just that they are studying you. You will find them looking at you many times."

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" The reason why some children take longer to talk to you is because they want to know you properly first before they start talking. I know white people talk a lot to each other before they know each other properly.

Aboriginal people use their eyes a lot and they listen, and when they are sure in their own quiet way, they will talk, probably just "yes" or "no" at first. Children could be more open in some places. Do not push yourself towards them, and be yourself."

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