



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.

6. A person who wants to really *teach* children.
7. A person who will spend more time, studying and learning.

.....

"WHEN CAN WE PUT ON THE PLAY?"



Mrs D. Slater
Forster Primary School,
Forster, N.S.W.

The idea of producing a play started when I mentioned to a young Aboriginal lass named Venita Bolt that it would be great if the Aboriginal children could do something in front of the whole school. Venita went around telling all the Aboriginal children that they were putting on a play in front of the school. All the children came back to me asking when could they put the play on.

Knowing the interest I had caused in these children, I went to see the assistant principal, Mr Woolbank, to see if my children could put on the play. Mr Woolbank gave me permission to go ahead.

Secondly I asked the children what type of play they wanted. They surprised me by wanting to put on a Corroboree. Being the Aboriginal children they are, and not as proud as they should be of their race, I did not expect this from them.

I then called them together as a group for a discussion on what type of Corroboree they wanted. The children had a few disagreements, but these were soon overcome as the suggestions were put forward.

I asked the children not to put their parents to any expense. I borrowed some books from our school library to give me some ideas

on what to do and how to go about it. The books were Aboriginal legends, the Dreamtime, and Aboriginal Craft (for designs).

I then set about teaching the children the dancing, how to keep in step with each other and also the hand movements which were necessary. We were given permission to use the library for rehearsals, which took an hour each afternoon after school for two weeks.

We called the play "Corroboree".

It was a re-enactment of the day's hunting of kangaroos and other animals and the gathering of wild potatoes, yams and witchetty grubs.

The costumes used in the play were swimming costumes. The paint supplied by the school was red, yellow and white. A teacher and an Aboriginal parent helped with the painting of the children. One of the girls made some tapping sticks out of the rungs of a broken chair. These were carved and painted by the children.

One of the boys learned how to play the didgeridoo which I had given to me while in Sydney.

The play was presented in the library, with all the other children and many Aboriginal parents present. The performers were arranged in a half circle so that all the children could sit and stand comfortably. The smallest children were in the front row. The back row had the bigger children in the centre, going down to the smallest child at the edge. The three main dancers were at the very front of the group. The dancers movement gave the order for the remainder of the group to stand individually.

When all the children were standing, the three main dancers did a Corroboree around the fire and the remainder stomped their feet and hummed, while some played the tapping sticks and one boy played the didgeridoo. This ensured that the dancers did not get out of step.

When this section was over the three main dancers pointed to the other dancers to let the group know it was time to sit and eat. After the feast the dancers performed again. At the end, all the children knelt in a worshipping position to let the audience know that the play was ended.

The response we received from the audience of students, teachers and parents was wonderful. After all the excitement, I

had a few of the European students come and ask me if they could put on a play similar to the one that they saw. They wanted it to be the same type that had been so successful with my Aboriginal children. I said that I would like to, but I had to go back to the University for my own training.

The parents in particular were very pleased with what the children had done in a very short time.

All of the dancing and playing group had their photograph taken for the local paper, "The Cape Hawke Advocate". This photograph appeared on the front page where all the townspeople and others could see it.

The responses I received from the children, I am sure were sincere, and there were feelings of proudness, as this was the first time they had ever put on a play in front of the school. They also made me very proud and happy to be the person working with them.

There is a lot to be said about Aboriginal children. It is amazing what they can do when they put their heart and mind into it. These children need people to take an interest in them. As Aborigines they are gifted with unique feelings. They are able to sense things without being told.

Being Aboriginal myself, I am able to understand these feelings without them being spoken.

.....