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CONFERENCE REPORT:

"THE ABORIGINAL CHILD AT SCHOOL"



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On Friday, June 23, 1978, between 9 a.m. and 4.30 p.m., an Education Department Staff In-service Conference, organised by Port Augusta's Central Primary School, was held at the Davenport Aboriginal Adult Training Centre (DAATC), on Davenport Aboriginal Reserve, Port Augusta.

The conference was called, and largely organised by the principal of Port Augusta's Central Primary School, Mr Ian Westley, with the co-operation of the students and staff of the DAATC, and the Davenport Cultural Club. It was chaired by Ms Catherine Guinness, Lecturer in Aboriginal Studies at Torrens College of Advanced Education. Attending were the staff of Central Primary, the students and staff of DAATC, the students of the Aboriginal Pre-vocational Course at Port Augusta College of Further Education, representatives of all public primary and secondary schools in Port Augusta, representatives from the Adelaide Head Office of the Education Department, as well as visitors from Hawker and Adelaide. In all, between 50 and 60 people were present.

The conference was divided into parts, separated by lunch provided by the Davenport Cultural Club. The first part was taken up by talks given mainly by Aboriginal people, and the second part was for the teachers present to discuss the problems they had teaching Aboriginal pupils, with a summing-up by Mr Ian Westley and Ms Catherine Guinness.

The opening talk was given by Mr Clifford Coulthard, Adjnamathanha Trainee Ranger with the Aboriginal and Historic Relics Administration (AHRA), on the work to preserve and maintain the Adjnamathanha culture, and how this should be of benefit to schools. In Adelaide, exhibits visit the schools and it would be good if this could happen in the Port Augusta region. If the work with the Adjnamathanha culture was successful, similar projects to preserve the cultures of other tribes might take place. Mr Coulthard argued strongly the benefits of Aboriginal people teaching black and white students about Aboriginal culture, and hoped that AHRA work would assist this.

Brief reports on the Aboriginal language courses running in Port Augusta were given by Ms Christine Jericho and Ms Rosalie Sluggett, with comments from the Aboriginal teachers, Mr Walter Coulthard, Mrs Lallie Lennon and Mrs Nora Wilton. Courses are being conducted in Adnamathanha at Augusta Park High School, in Pitjantjatjara at Central, and in both these languages at the Aboriginal Resources Centre. The courses are of great benefit in understanding the Aboriginal approach to life, as well as the language. Mrs Lennon and Mr Coulthard spoke to the conference in several Aboriginal languages, and some children's songs in Pitjantjatjara and Adnamathanha were sung by a group of Aboriginal and European teachers.

Mrs Julia Groves, DAATC teacher aide, spoke about the large number of Aboriginal tribes in Port Augusta. These include Kokada (West Coast), Arabana (Far North), Aranda (Alice Springs) Adnamathanha (Flinders Ranges), Pitjantjatjara (Central Western Desert), Antagurinya (Coober Pedy), Narranga (Yorke Peninsula), Pankala (the local tribe) and Narrinjori (Murray River), of which Mrs Groves is a member. There were members of many other tribes in Port Augusta too, including Aborigines from the different states of the Commonwealth. Teachers had to be careful in what they said about tribal customs, and what pictures and artifacts they used in lessons, because things that were not sacred to one tribe, could be very sacred to another.

The experience of living in "extended" families, including the good and bad points, was the subject of the talk from their experiences, given by Ms Esther Williams, Aboriginal teacher aide, Central Primary, and Ms Pat Kartinyeri, a student of DAATC. The "extended" family was what some people called the big Aboriginal families that included husband, wife and kids, as well as grandmother, grandfather, brothers, sisters, cousins, uncles, aunts, friends and others who might drop in from time to time. These big families shared everything, looked after each other, and were one of the best things about being an Aborigine. With the coming of the white man and the destruction of so much Aboriginal culture, the "extended" family still hung on, because it is so important to the Aboriginal people.

Plans for *National Aborigines Week*, 10-17 July, were given by Ms Veronica Milora, Secretary, Davenport Community Council. Davenport Reserve would be thrown open all week for visitors to inspect and discuss, including DAATC, as would be most, if not all, Aboriginal organisations in Port Augusta. The schools were invited to take part in National Aborigines Week, if they wished, including the march on the morning of July 14.

After lunch, the conference resumed with individual teachers putting their problems and asking for discussion on different points about the Aboriginal child at school. Matters discussed included:

- . discipline
- . the use of speech skills
- . getting to know Aboriginal parents
- . what Aboriginal people thought about schooling
- . children getting to know who they are
- . Aborigines being forced to see things through "white eyes"
- . home visits by teachers
- . distrust of teachers
- . the use of Aboriginal teacher aides in the Aboriginal community
- . Aboriginal people to teach the culture
- . absenteeism
- . support for Aboriginal parents
- . nutrition
- . co-ordination by Government Departments in providing services to the Aboriginal community.

Mr Ian Westley and Mr Chris Charlesworth explained the set-up for teaching Aboriginal Studies and languages in their schools.

The Conference expressed the hope that teams of Aboriginal people, with the time to prepare themselves properly, on a full-time, professional basis, could be formed to teach Aboriginal Studies in the schools. It was especially hoped that a team might be formed in the Port Augusta region, perhaps with the aid of the AHRA.

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Erratum: Vol.6 No.4, 1978, p. 25, first paragraph should read July 1825.

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