



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.

GOOD VISION AND THE TEACHER



G.R. Jaunay,
Principal,
Ramco School,
Ramco, S.A.

Most teachers of Aboriginal children are aware that to teach reading to their students they have to jump significant hurdles, some of which are so high they appear as barriers to progress along the learning trail. We are often faced with substantial hearing losses, and/or poor health. Often Aboriginal children's motivation to improve is poor, because of their poor health. More often than not, response is poor, due to the home environment and attitude towards learning. Employment prospects must dampen much enthusiasm for learning. All these social and health factors are reasonably well documented and teachers are aware of their implications and program their teaching accordingly. However, taking into account all these factors, we still have non-achievement, in the field of reading in particular. Several children appear healthy - and this status has been confirmed by medical personnel - appear to be positively motivated with all the teacher and parental encouragement needed to succeed, and yet, despite significant remedial efforts, reading development is extremely slow and tedious. Why?

Almost without exception we have found that the non-attaining Aboriginal children who for all intents and purposes should have been progressing, especially in reading, exhibited visual problems, most of which appear to stem from poor eye muscular control. These children have good *sight*, which is the ability to see, but lack good *vision*, which is the ability to use one's sight correctly.

If these problems are not overcome, then the sight will deteriorate, or most likely, in the case of Aboriginal children who have little inducement to excel in reading, the child will 'give up'.

Appended to this article is a check list, developed by the Optometric Extension Program Foundation, which alerts teachers to vision problems. Teachers are often in the best position to identify such problems, which are, in effect, cancelling all their efforts in the classroom. Teachers will note there are five identified areas:

- 1) Eye Movement; 2) Eye Teaming; 3) Eye-Hand Co-ordination;
- 4) Visual Form Perception; 5) Refractive Status.

The first four, the subject of this article, are areas of skill in muscle control which usually can be developed. The final one, Refractive Status, includes near-sightedness, far-sightedness, focus problems etc., and requires the attention of a professional. Often, with advice, the former can be overcome with simple exercises. There are also many simple exercises which classroom teachers can undertake as part of the normal everyday classroom program. Many of these exercises will assist all children, especially younger students, to develop their visionary skills. Good eye movement is an essential prerequisite for reading. The eyes must be able to scan the text efficiently. Eyes that skip, jump, stutter or lose their place, place handicaps on the reader. Difficulties in this area can readily be picked up by an observant teacher or aide.

Eye teaming is the skill to use both eyes as a pair and is essential to give vision any depth. Often Aboriginal children are not aware of this deficiency until they come to school and are confronted by a whole range of strange written symbols, which on reading, may appear to lack clarity or even may be doubled in appearance. This often expresses itself in extremely poor written work. Clumsiness may also be evident.

Eye-hand co-ordination is the ability to use eyes and hands as one. Often children who cannot keep within lines when colouring, or seem to be overdependent on use of hands when sight would normally suffice, are children who are having problems in this area.

'Poor memory', or 'careless about details', are often labels attached to children with difficulties in visual form perception. These children confuse similar symbols and words, reverse letters and words and/or do not appear to notice slight differences in words.

These skills are somewhat essential for every student to process. Difficulties experienced in any area place significant barriers to learning. In the case of most Aboriginal children, barriers to learning are significant enough, and if we can remove any by improving the lot of the individual, then it is our responsibility to act. By watching out for warning signals, as indicated in the following checklist, we can give our students a better chance to succeed at school and eventually in adulthood.

Many simple exercises used in school readiness programs are ideal for developing these visionary skills, where difficulty is experienced because of lack of development of the pupil's eye control. Some of these include:

threading beads	finding differences
tracing activities	connecting dots to make pictures
finger puppetry	finding objects hidden within pictures
lacing & weaving with thick material	using buttons, zips, buckles and laces
colouring	recalling details in pictures or objects on a tray
waterplay with various shaped vessels	picking up various small objects using tongs only
sand play with various types of equipment	any exercise involving hitting a target
matching shapes and symbols	
playing television games	

APPENDIX

*EDUCATOR'S CHECKLIST OBSERVABLE CLUES TO CLASSROOM VISION PROBLEMS

1. Appearance of Eyes:

One eye turns in or out at any time.
Reddened eyes or lids.
Eyes tear excessively,
Encrusted eyelids.
Frequent styes on lids.

2. Complaints when Using Eyes at Desk:

Headaches in forehead or temples.
Burning or itching after reading or desk work.
Nausea or dizziness.
Print blurs after reading a short time.

3. Behavioural Signs of Visual Problems

A. *Eye Movement Abilities (Ocular Motility)*

Head turns as reads across page.
Loses place often during reading.
Needs finger or marker to keep place.
Displays short attention span in reading or copying.
Too frequently omits words.
Repeatedly omits 'small' words.
Writes up or down hill on paper.
Rereads or skips lines unknowingly.
Orients drawings poorly on page.

B. *Eye Teaming Abilities (Binocularity)*

Complains of seeing double (diplopia).
Repeats letters within words.
Omits letters, numbers or phrases.
Misaligns digits in number columns.
Squints, closes or covers one eye.
Tilts head extremely while working at desk.
Consistently shows gross postural deviations
at all desk activities.

C. *Eye-Hand Co-ordination Abilities*

Must feel things to assist in any interpretation
required.
Eyes not used to 'steer' hand movements (extreme lack
of orientation, placement of words or drawings on page).
Writes crookedly, poorly spaced: cannot stay on
ruled lines.
Misaligns both horizontal and vertical series of numbers.
Uses his hand or fingers to keep his place on the page.
Uses other hand as 'spacer' to control spacing and
alignment on page.
Repeatedly confuses left-right directions.

D. *Visual Form Perception (Visual Comparison, Visual Imagery, Visualization)*

- Mistakes words with same or similar beginnings.
- Fails to recognize same word in next sentence.
- Reverses letters and/or words in writing and copying.
- Confuses likeness and minor differences.
- Confuses same word in same sentence.
- Repeatedly confuses similar beginnings and endings of words.
- Fails to visualize what is read either silently or orally.
- Whispers to self for reinforcement while reading silently.
- Returns to 'drawing with fingers' to decide likes and differences.

E. *Refractive Status (Nearsightedness, Farsightedness Focus Problems etc.)*

- Comprehension reduces as reading continued; loses interest too quickly.
- Mispronounces similar words as continues reading.
- Blinks excessively at desk tasks and/or reading; not elsewhere.
- Holds book too closely; face too close to desk surface.
- Avoids all possible near-centered tasks.
- Complains of discomfort in tasks that demand visual interpretation.
- Closes or covers one eye when reading or doing desk work.
- Makes errors in copying from chalkboard to paper on desk.
- Makes errors in copying from reference book to notebook.
- Squints to see chalkboard, or requests to move nearer.

Rubs eyes during or after short periods of visual activity.

Fatigues easily; blinks to make chalkboard clear up after desk task.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Edwards, P.: *Reading Problems : Identification and Treatment*. Primary Education (Publishing); Melbourne, 1976.

Moyle, D.: *The Teaching of Reading* (4th ed.) Hollen Street Press, London, 1976.

Ball, F.: *The Development of Reading Skills : A Book of Resources for Teachers*. Primary Education (Publishing), Melb., 1977.

D.Drummond/E.Wignell (Eds): *Reading: A Source Book*. Primary Education (Publishing), Melb., 1975.

.....

ABORIGINAL CULTURE IN A VICTORIAN SCHOOL



G. Barry,
Resource Teacher
Melbourne

On Friday July 7, Jungai Day was held at Bell Primary School, Preston, to mark the beginning of N.A.D.O.C. week for 1978. Bell has an enrolment of just under 500 and has a high and expanding migrant population.

In early 1977, the first Aboriginal child arrived at the school, to add to the already complex nature of the school's ethnic structure. Children from other Aboriginal families soon followed as the Housing Commission pursued its policy of providing houses that would match the finances of Aboriginal people.

The Aboriginal children made an immediate impact on the school. For some teachers and children, it was their first encounter with Aboriginal people. The children also brought their own problems, apart from those usually faced by any child starting at a new school.