



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*.

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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

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

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ABORIGINAL CULTURE IN A VICTORIAN SCHOOL



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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.

It would hardly be overstating the case to say that the Aboriginal families would not have accepted the houses that they did, if they had not been in dire straits financially. The houses generally were small, cold, and inadequately furnished.

During their first winter at the school, the children were absent for much of the time, due to illnesses that were almost certainly related to the quality of the housing. The long breaks in the children's attendances, however, were also indicative of a negative attitude to school, an attitude that proved very difficult to change as the children were away so often.

The situation didn't really begin to improve until Pam Pederson arrived at the school to work as a teacher aide. Pam filled a crucial liaison role between the school and the Aboriginal families, as well as being a focal point of support for the Aboriginal children within the school.

Several programs have now been established to cater specifically for the Aboriginal children's needs. A lunch time nutrition program is aimed at improving the children's general health and resistance to infection. An art/craft program operates to foster a positive sense of Aboriginality in the children. Certainly not all the problems have been solved, but without doubt the situation is vastly improved.

Money for Jungai Day, needed mainly for costs related to the hire of a marquee and payment of artists and performers, was raised from a dozen different sources. Other people and organizations contributed in ways that were vital to the success of the day, for example, catering and the provision of sound equipment.

The day's activities included dancing and some traditional "in the ground" cooking by members of the Bwung Gul Culture Group. Also, as part of their lunch, children had damper cooked by some of the Aboriginal mothers. Aboriginal children from other schools in the area attended the school for the afternoon performances. We had arranged with the Education Department's Audio Visual Centre for a short T.V. cassette to be produced on the day, and copies are now available for loan.

A most pleasing feature of the whole exercise was the enthusiasm with which the Jungai Day proposal was received and supported by the school staff, the children and the general community. For the six weeks prior to July 7, all the children at the school were involved in programs about Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal people.

The efforts made by teachers in this regard were magnificent.

Like most similar activities, I suppose, Jungai Day did not run completely according to plan and there were some disappointments. I think more work needs to be done to give non-Aboriginal children an understanding and appreciation of the richness of the Aboriginal heritage. Nevertheless, Jungai Day was an occasion that the children at Bell Primary School will remember for the rest of their lives, and remember with positive attitudes towards Aborigines.

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Statement from Australian Pre-school Association Incorporated, ACT.

PRE-SCHOOL AIDES

HELPING TO BRIDGE THE MULTI-CULTURAL GAP

Organizations providing care and education for young children are being encouraged to employ 'ethnic aides' to help bridge the gaps between Australian children of many different cultural backgrounds.

In the December issue of the *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, Dr Marie O'Neill of Adelaide, proposes greater use of Aboriginal aides, who contribute important cultural identity and continuity. She says that in some areas "kindergartens are becoming community meeting houses...part of the 'territory'...of settled and transient populations." This approach has been effectively used at the Davenport Reserve in Port Augusta, where the Kindergarten Director visited Aboriginal homes to encourage attendance, then used the centre as a 'base' only, preferring the natural environment of the sand hills and salt pans to provide learning experiences for the children. Coupled with the 'link' provided by the Aboriginal Aide, this has led to more regular attendance, greater interest in detail and increased ability to concentrate.

Another multi-cultural approach is described by Sally Lee, a kindergarten director and ethnic program co-ordinator. Ethnic assistants from the Greek and Italian communities in an area of Adelaide, are employed to cater for the needs of both children and parents. (*continued on page 25*).