



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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rolling around a tin can filled with sand, on a piece of wire. Why not get some piping (for the axle), cement (it won't run out the holes), cans and wire and make a superior version of this toy in the craft session at school? Other practical ideas include making fishing poles, kites, percussion instruments, windvanes, toy guns, canoes (the old sheet of iron type), paddles, etc.

If you want to do silk printing, then at least make sure the children have the opportunity to print their own T shirts.

These are just isolated examples of what I am trying to say about teaching Aboriginal children. The concept of "seeing is understanding", is not a unique educational idea but with reference to Aboriginal education I believe it is crucially important. If one seeks wherever possible, in all subject areas, a means of explanation which is not just verbal, then I believe a much better understanding is assured.

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ABORIGINAL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLING : ROEBOURNE

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In 1980 a study was made of Aboriginal parental involvement in education at Roebourne Primary School. Parental involvement, while important in 'white' middle-class schools, is considerably more important when considering the aims and strategies of education to be used in schools with a large proportion of Aboriginal students.

In the multicultural ethos which is being promoted at present, it is easy to forget the callous bigotry so prevalent in Western Australian education policy until the mid-1950s. 'White' Australian pressure, particularly from those benefitting most from the Aborigines' uneducated state, had effectively prevented Aborigines receiving government education in the Pilbara.

The history of the Roebourne area which has moulded the Aboriginal people's personalities and lowered their self-esteem has had an important effect upon their willingness to approach the bastion of European culture - the school. The extended family situation which dilutes parental responsibilities too has had an important effect in

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the more traditional families because there is no single person responsible for the children's education.

It was decided that the real measure of Aboriginal parental involvement would be the recording of the number of Aboriginal parents who entered the school and who contacted a teacher or the principal of their own volition. In the ten month period of recording, ten parents entered the school, several on a number of occasions. This gave a voluntary attendance rate of 5.1 per cent. Also, unlike their European counterparts, not one Aboriginal parent telephoned the school.

While this result is depressing, the situation was salvaged by the operation of the Aboriginal school liaison officer who visited approximately nine parents every school day and who had visited every parent/guardian at least once in the ten month research period. The role of the Aboriginal school liaison officer was recognized by 80.4 per cent of the Aboriginal school children who, in a survey, stated that their parents would be more likely to see the Aboriginal school liaison officer than to come to the school.

Another factor which has affected Aboriginal parental interest in the school and its curriculum is the operation of an Aboriginal Cultural Group in the senior primary school grades. Elders (senior initiated males) and elderly Aboriginal ladies enter the school and teach the Aboriginal children in Injibarndi those facets of traditional life they think are important. The Aboriginal Cultural Group also conducts a display at the school for National Aborigines Day, which attracts a large audience.

On National Aborigines Day (1980), the Education Department, through its Aboriginal consultant, Mrs May O'Brien, set up a regional Aboriginal Committee on Education. This committee should become the organized focal point for the educational opinion of Roebourne Aborigines and should serve an educational purpose itself by familiarizing the Aboriginal parents with meeting situations.

As a result of Aboriginal parental involvement, Roebourne Primary School seems to have moved part of the way towards an 'Alternative Education'. This evolution has been encouraged by the Education Department's policy of promoting school-based curricula and by the Regional Superintendent and Aboriginal Branch which actively support that policy.

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