



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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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Mr C.N. MacNeill, the principal of Roebourne Primary School in Western Australia, has provided the following profile of what he considers to be a good teacher of Aboriginal pupils. Do you agree with him? What characteristics would you stress as most desirable in teachers who work with Aboriginal children? Write to us letting us know your views and we will publish your response in a future issue of the journal.*

A PROFILE OF A GOOD TEACHER OF ABORIGINAL PUPILS

Without a doubt the situation and communities which teachers serve are many and varied. However, I am inclined to think that it is possible to enumerate the characteristics of a teacher who will be good in all situations. These factors are -

- a) *Empathy* - this is of the utmost importance because without empathy for Aboriginal children the teacher will be ineffective. Aboriginal children and parents can sense insincerity from experience and if the Aboriginal child cannot relate to the teacher, the school experiences a high degree of absenteeism. The children often register the teacher's effectiveness with their feet! If I had to use a sole criterion on which to appoint staff, empathy would be chosen. However, a missionary zeal is not enough by itself.
- b) *Skills in teaching the core subjects* - because Aboriginal children have special learning problems teachers need to have both the skills and patience of remedial teachers.
- c) *Communication skills* - although a component of empathy, communication skills need special emphasis. Body language is an integral part of communicating. A smile is often more meaningful than flowery eulogies.
- d) *Perseverance and initiative* - Aboriginal education is often conducted in the remoter areas of the state which poses particular difficulties in living conditions, professional support and contact and so on. A teacher must be prepared to face and overcome these difficulties.

* Please write to us within one month of receiving your journal, giving your name and school address.

The point being made, albeit briefly, is that the teacher's *personality* is of paramount importance, but *good basic teaching skills* are also needed. To any person appointed to a school with Aboriginal students my advice would be to look forward to the challenge and don't worry - if you have these two attributes you will serve your children well.

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