



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*.

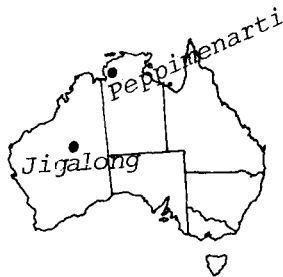
In 2022 *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* transitioned to fully Open Access and this article is available for use under the license conditions below.



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.

WHAT DO YOU THINK? -- COMMENTS

In Vol.9 No.3 we presented an article by Mr C.N.MacNeill, the principal of Roebourne Primary School in Western Australia, in which he outlined what he considered to be desirable characteristics for teachers who work with Aboriginal children. In this issue we are pleased to present comments from two readers who responded to Mr MacNeill's article. The first response is from Tim O'Keefe who is in his first year of teaching at Jigalong School in Western Australia. The second reply is from Doug and Sue Thompson who are in their third year of teaching at Peppimenarti School in the Northern Territory. Peppimenarti is an isolated, traditionally oriented community situated between Daly River and Port Keats. It is an Aboriginal run cattle station with a population of approximately 330 people. The Thompsons point out that "for long periods of time we have been the only white people in this community and obviously this has had an effect on the types of qualities that we consider desirable in teachers of Aboriginal children".



1. Tim O'Keefe, Jigalong

Although I agree with MacNeill's "Profile", I feel there are two more points which could be added to his list. They are:

1. *The Ability to Observe Children*

During my Diploma of Teaching course, in which I majored in Aboriginal Education, I received experience in teaching Aboriginal children but not a lot of time in passive observation. It is well known that, traditionally, Aborigines learned much from observation. Maybe we can learn more about the children by observing them. If we can spend time just "child watching" we can learn more of the child's needs and abilities. Herbert Kohl writes:

I am convinced that the teacher must be an observer of his class as well as a member of it...Teachers consider the children's gym or free playtime their free time, too, and usually turn their backs on the children when they have most to learn from them.

(Kohl, 1977, p.21)

As soon as the child enters the classroom he/she alters his/her behaviour to what he/she thinks is required; this is not always what the teacher would like. The boisterous become quiet, the bright and cheeky become subdued and silent. By observing the children at play out of the classroom we can learn much of their true character. We can use the information gained from such observation to cater for the child's individual needs.

2. Community Participation

It is necessary to become a part of the community in which one teaches. By involving oneself in the community the teacher can gain the trust of the children's parents and learn something of the Aboriginal culture. The teacher must make a commitment to the community and not just regard his/her stay in an Aboriginal community as a necessary evil in his/her teaching career. Max Hart writes in *Kulila* :

When the teacher's character and personality are known, then the children will know just how to respond to him. One teacher who had been teaching for two years in an Aboriginal school admitted that she had never been into the housing area two hundred yards away from her classroom and had never met any of the parents except the occasional one who had come to the school. This very impersonal and unsociable attitude may be part of city and suburban life but Aboriginal people have very highly developed social abilities and distrust a person who seems unwilling to communicate with them.

(Hart, 1974, p.37)

I feel these two ideas have made my first year of teaching more fulfilling and certainly more educational.

REFERENCES

- Hart, M., 1974: *Kulila*. A.N.Z. Book Co., Sydney.
- Kohl, H., 1977: *36 Children*. Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth, Middlesex, U.K.