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Aboriginal views on education

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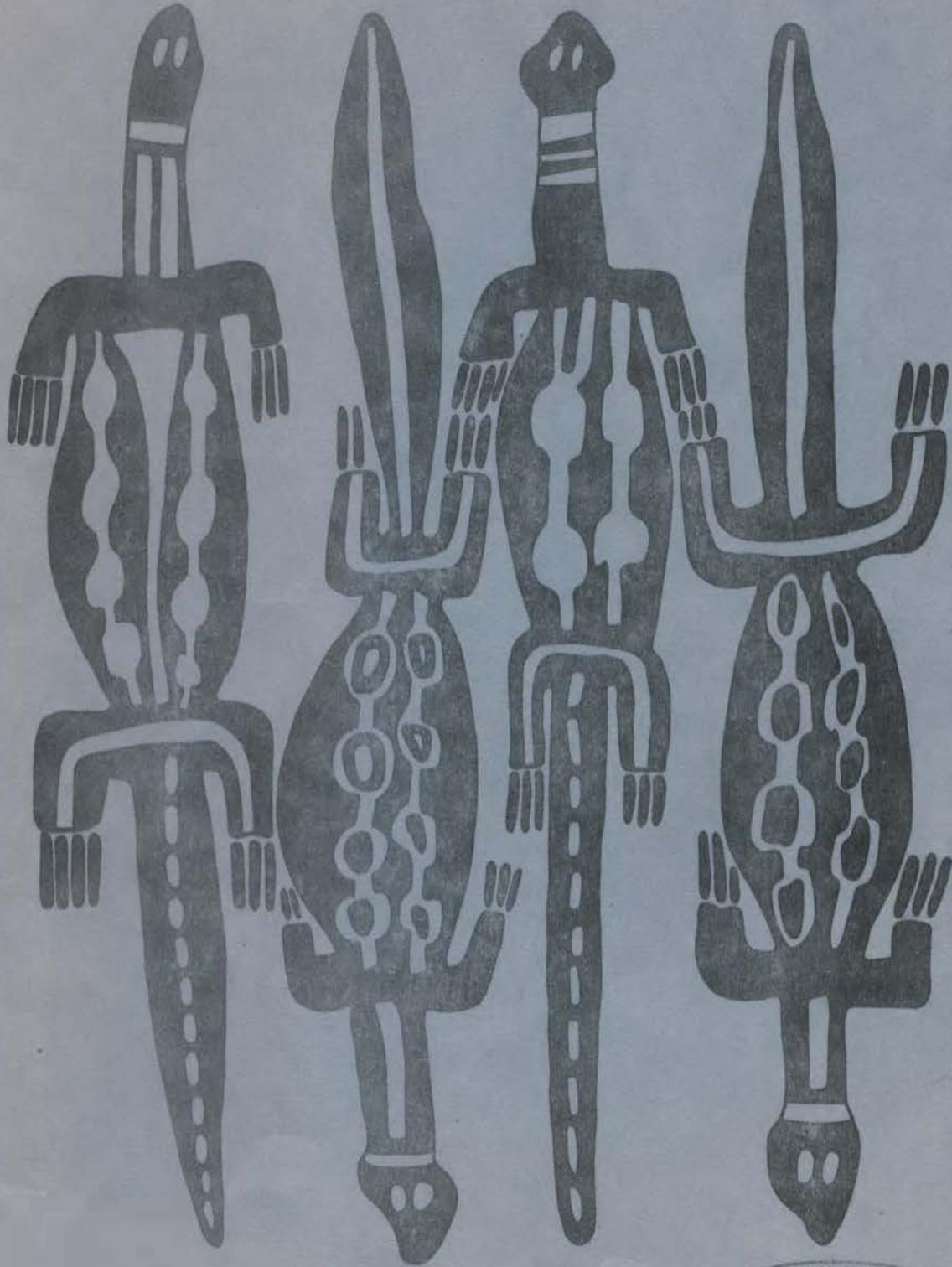
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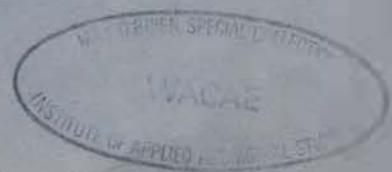
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ABORIGINAL VIEWS ON EDUCATION



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INTRODUCTION

This collection of articles represents the views of a number of students from the Adult Aboriginal Education section of the Perth Technical College on what European teachers should know before teaching Aboriginals. They are most interesting and informative articles based mostly on personal experiences.

I would like to extend our appreciation to Mr Jim Sieler, staff, and students who made our first contact possible and so beneficial.

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I am sure your efforts will contribute to graduate teachers understanding of problems pertaining to Aboriginal education.

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WHAT EUROPEAN TEACHERS SHOULD BE TAUGHT BEFORE TEACHING ABORIGINALS

I think European teachers who would like to teach Aboriginal children, should have a lot of understanding about the Aboriginal's way of life. I also believe that the only way anyone can do this would be to work with Aboriginals for a period of time. This way you would have an opportunity to see their environment and how they live. Also if you saw the overcrowded homes, you read so frequently about in the papers, you might learn how this becomes so.

With white people, after a certain age, they leave home and find a good job and get themselves a flat with no worries. But the aboriginal, I think I can safely say, never really leaves his or her home. For the simple reason, that when he leaves home and tries to be independent, from the first step he takes into this white society, he is barricaded with obstacles of all sorts. Some of you would probably say "Well why doesn't he keep trying?" I think it's a question easier said than done. Would you keep coming back? Yes, maybe, but then again you aren't black are you? So do you wonder why we go back to our own community, perhaps a bit overcrowded, but nevertheless where we're not shunned. In the aboriginal community you will probably note that there are more younger aboriginals at home than older ones. The most obvious thought to cross your mind would be "Why are they wasting their lives?" Not realising that these same children, I hope you take note of the word children, have been through the mill. The prejudice and the uneducated minds of the whites are beyond my comprehension.

Some of you might detect feelings of resentment and hostility in our community. But if you know of the aboriginals struggle in life, as I am sure a lot of people do, and his continuous rejection because of his colour then you could understand. But with a little knowledge of our way of life, you might begin to understand about why we are wary of the white people and their so called promises. Are they really interested in us? Do they really want to help us? Questions like these accumulate in our minds making us vulnerable to all kinds of criticism. If you could begin to understand these aspects of the aboriginals' life, let's just say, you are on the way to making progress. Hopefully, if not for us, for our children.

WHAT EUROPEAN TEACHERS SHOULD BE TAUGHT BEFORE THEY
ARE ALLOWED TO TEACH ABORIGINAL CHILDREN

I never thought the day would come when Aboriginal people of my age and standard of schooling would be asked to express their views on what European Teachers should know before they are allowed to teach Aboriginal children. Even though this essay is only part of the school work I am required to do at Perth Tech, it just goes to show that society is beginning to change in its attitude to Aboriginal people and their views.

Firstly, I feel that student teachers should question themselves on why do they choose to teach Aboriginal children. If it is for the money, or as they say "the in-thing" of these times, or just wanting to be a goody-goody, then forget it. Have a go at teaching your own. Aboriginal people have had it up to the neck with these sort of people. After you have questioned your intentions and you still feel that teaching aboriginal children is something you really want to do, go right ahead. I, as an Aboriginal and a Mother, welcome you.

Many of the problems that the teachers of today are having to face concerning the aboriginal children, started two hundred years ago. One has only got to study the history of the aboriginal people and their position in society to see why the aboriginal children now have special needs. I think that during their training a time should be set aside for the student teacher to go out and visit aboriginal communities and talk with the people, men, women and children. They will see how the aborigines live, find out as much about their background as they can and obtain some idea of their hopes for the future. Aboriginal organisations in the City and Country centres, I'm sure, would be only too pleased to give the student any amount of assistance in their study.

Because there is now such a course, where teachers are trained specifically to teach aboriginal children and interest has been shown by the young people to do this course, I feel there is much hope that through education the younger generation of black and white people will become better equipped to communicate and hopefully correct many of the misunderstandings of the past.

Postscript

When our class was asked to write an essay on "What European Teachers should be taught before teaching Aboriginal Children", I was under the impression that our essays would be directed at trainee teachers who would be teaching only Aboriginal children.

ABORIGINAL CHILDREN IN SCHOOL

When I first started school the principal didn't seem to like aboriginal kids, because he would put us in a higher class where we couldn't understand the work because it was too hard to do. Then after that he would drop us down. This made us look silly because we could not do the work in a higher class. It also made the white kids call us names and sling off at us. That is why I think a European teacher should learn from the aboriginal community about what level of education the children have worked at, so it would make it easier for the children to understand. It would also help the teacher.

The teaching of a child in a country town is not so bad as in the city, because in the country the majority of the kids in the schools are sometimes black, but in the city the majority are white and this is where most of the kids get rubbished more. Sometimes it's just the ignorance of the teacher not treating all kids the same or they do not stop the white kids from calling them names.

I think with any profession, whether you are a teacher or a doctor, or anything else, you should not take notice of what people or books tell you, you should go and experiment for yourself. So I think a European, or any other teacher for that matter, should go out into the aboriginal community and learn of the aboriginal ways and try to understand them. Aboriginal children as they grow older are becoming more aware of the prejudices that their people have to endure. I think if one learns before hand of the hangups of the aborigines and why they feel this way, this understanding and help, would make the aboriginal a better person for himself. So do you wonder why we go back to our own community, because it's got a lot to do with the white kids and sometimes it's the teachers not treating all kids the same.

Another thing would be good, that is to teach them the history of the aboriginals. Also it would be good if they would respect and celebrate National Aboriginals Day. You could also tell them of how the blacks were treated in the early days and what the whites did to them. Another thing is that the teacher should teach the white kids to have a bit of respect for the aboriginal kids and their ways and traditions, because usually it's the other way around.

EUROPEAN TEACHERS

The European teachers should be taught to know about the Aboriginal community, their ways of living, language and identity. Then when faced with questions about aborigines they will know instead of asking the children.

These questions will embarrass the children and they will find it hard to communicate, answer because the aboriginal children think there is prejudice amongst the teachers.

They also should be more concerned about both colours instead of one, and if they pay attention to the aboriginal children they will take more interest in their schoolwork. If this attention isn't paid then they will find that the aboriginal children will not cope with their schoolwork, and will wonder around. They will not attend school regularly because they lack confidence in themselves and they think they aren't learning anything at school so why should they attend. Also the teacher should be told of the aboriginal culture because the children have been educated in their way of life. They often find it very difficult to understand the teachers' dialect.

WHAT TEACHERS SHOULD BE TAUGHT ABOUT ABORIGINAL
CHILDREN

First of all European teachers should be taught about how the Aboriginal families live and the problems that arise in their households. Also the teachers ought to be able to take more notice of the Aboriginal children and help them more in their school work. The teacher should be taught how Aboriginal children may feel toward certain things, so that they may come to enjoy their schooling. Most teachers generally never stop and think whether what the Aboriginal children are thinking may be different to what the white children are thinking.

Up north there is sometimes a language barrier which prevents a vital sense of communication between the Aboriginal children and European teachers.

The Aboriginal people are what you would call close-knit because of kinship ties and this is a very important aspect that European teachers should know. Once they come to know the ways of Aborigines then there is a much clearer understanding between them.

For instance, when aboriginal children want questions and problems solved they are more likely not to ask, because of their shyness. A good solution for this problem is that the idea of kindergarten be emphasized more in the Aboriginal community. If the shyness is overcome in the early stages of life then they are more likely to speak up for themselves. So if the right guide-lines are used for these children then undoubtedly there will be a lot more co-operation and initiative from them.

**WHAT EUROPEAN TEACHERS SHOULD KNOW BEFORE TEACHING
ABORIGINALS**

A European teacher in order to teach Aboriginal children in an Aboriginal Community should first try to learn an Aboriginal language so that he can communicate. Secondly he should mix with Aboriginals and learn their customs and understand their way of life.

He will find that Aboriginal children are very shy with European people, but if the teacher can speak their language, know their customs and understand them, the children will feel at ease, settle down to study and learn fast.

The teacher must also understand the children have lived their way of life which is different from the Europeans. That is why when a European teacher walks into the classroom, starts to teach them in a different language, tells them their clothes are not the right clothes to wear to school and that their hair is too long, the children will feel ill at ease and find it hard to settle down and study. They will go home where there is no confusion and not go to school at all.

I know some Aboriginal children who went through Primary School with the idea that if they are Aboriginal there is something wrong with them. They have gone on to High School, got their Achievement Certificate then gone out to get jobs and still get this same treatment. So until the European people learn to overcome their fear of the colour of Aboriginal skin the Aboriginal won't be able to achieve anything.

ABORIGINALS AT SCHOOL

In the society of today, as well as that of the past, aborigines have been kept down in all respects. The main problem relating to the position at hand is education. In the past decades aboriginal children attending schools, found life very difficult. They had to cope with the uneducated, as far as white standards are concerned, adults about them in a situation some would not call homely. With the normal hardships students suffer and the prejudice the aboriginal children face combined, they tend to make life very hectic.

Aborigines are a shy sensitive race. Due to the position forced upon them with the so-called help the government gave, it made them feel inferior and a useless race. This feeling is handed down from generation to generation. A few assimilated aborigines have made it but I can imagine the hardships they have gone through. It probably meant turning his back on his own people. As they say, you have to be white to get on in life.

Aboriginal children should be made to realise that they come from a once very proud race. Not only the aboriginal children but the white students as well, should be taught to respect the tradition and culture of the first Australian.

So I will say that the main thing is to understand the aboriginal child and give him the feeling of usefulness. Respect was one thing lacking throughout the years and with respect along will come confidence

EUROPEAN TEACHERS

The aboriginal people have many hurdles to overcome before they are fully accepted by the white society. Most problems start in early childhood due to the unstable and shocking living conditions which were imposed on us by the white people. Even today things are well below standard, particularly in the north-west, north-east, and eastern areas due to the lack of communication with the Aboriginal people.

There are many things that must be taken into consideration when an aboriginal child is first starting school. Urbanised aborigines are becoming more prominent in preparing children for schooling, but there's still a lot to be done. I think all aboriginal families should be encouraged more to send their children to pre-school kindergartens, because this helps them from an early age to mix and be accepted in the right manner by the white society. Young families in particular should be encouraged to this and this will help the parents when the child starts school. If any problems arise at school the parents will then feel more free to approach teachers and discuss their child.

In the past, and still at present, the aboriginal children have had an inferiority complex about their living conditions and personal appearance. This is not only a problem among aborigines but among other nationalities as well. I think the Education Department should maintain strict ruling concerning school dress, a uniform should be formal at all times. This would stop not so well off school children feeling inferior.

When publicised problems arise in the aboriginal communities, it all reflects back on the school children and once again they have this inferior feeling.

One of the biggest problems to overcome in the north eastern and eastern areas where a child lives on stations, settlements, missions and various other aboriginal communities, is that young children learn many things in their own culture and tradition. This makes them very intelligent, yet is not taken into consideration by European teachers.

When they start school, it is very hard for them to change their ideas because of the vast difference between the societies. Young white children are taught many pre-school things by their parents, whereas the aboriginal child is taught his culture and traditions. This gives them a big start on our aboriginal children being taught the European way.

They also have different dialects and different pronunciations which makes things very hard for them to learn. European teachers should therefore be made to visit all the major outback areas to encourage better understanding between themselves and their aboriginal pupils.

WHAT EUROPEAN TEACHERS SHOULD KNOW BEFORE TEACHING ABORIGINALS

European teachers must learn the fundamentals about the people they are going to teach. Also they should look again at how the history of Australia is written. From the time that Australia was first colonised the Aboriginal has been victimised and made to feel inferior. This was perhaps because they were so easily conquered by the first Europeans who settled Australia. The Aboriginals, even today, are still being exploited. So we must start to change this and the only way this can be done is in the schoolroom.

One way is by teaching the children from primary school up, that they are a worthwhile people who can contribute something to society. Before the children can be taught, the teachers must learn something about them and their culture. Teachers, while they are still students, should be sent out for a certain length of time to places like New Era Aboriginal Fellowship Centre, the Aboriginal Advancement Council, Aboriginal Medical Service and Community Health bases to accompany Community Health staff on their visits. Then they could see the homes of people not just Aboriginals. They could see from what types of homes some children come from and have to go back to every day. If possible take the student teachers to places like Widgee Road, Lockridge, Saunders Street, Upper Swan and other such places to see for themselves some of the appalling conditions that aboriginal children live under. Even then they can be amongst the brightest children in the school. Too often, teachers are sent out actually knowing very little about the conditions they are going to find in the schools.

Also they don't know enough about the different ethnic backgrounds that they will encounter.

WHAT EUROPEAN TEACHERS SHOULD KNOW

The European teacher should be taught many things about the Aboriginal children before being allowed to teach them.

Firstly they should realise that Aboriginal children are very shy and not so easy to communicate with. They should try their best to help them overcome this shyness in the early stages of school.

They face more problems than white children. Their parents can't help them to do homework because they haven't been to school or haven't learnt much when they did go. Therefore teachers should not expect too much from them. They could teach them a little extra on the side. If they gain their confidence the children will confide in them and tell the teacher when they can't understand or do something.

Their background is not the same as Europeans. They come from homes which are sometimes over-crowded. They also have problems with parents and relatives who stay with them who have problems with alcohol. The aboriginal children have to go through this sort of life. They should help them so that they don't feel left out of anything. Then it would make them feel important which would benefit them along with kindness and understanding.



WHAT EUROPEAN TEACHERS SHOULD BE TAUGHT

A European teacher should be taught everything in their own country about the Aboriginal Community before coming out and teaching them, because it could be a very difficult situation, with no experience.

Firstly, they would have to learn their language, which would make it easier for them to communicate with the children. Then another point is that they should mix together with the aboriginal children to learn their customs better.

The Aboriginal children are very shy because they won't come forward whereas a European child can relate to the teacher because they have the same colour.

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I think that to better the relationship between the Aboriginal students and teachers is for the teacher to take more interest in the Aboriginal students studies. Because his illiteracy is well below that of other students, a lot of attention should be paid to his English and vocabulary speech. He should be able to join in more group discussions to overcome his shyness. Most of all see that you (the teacher) do not in any way make him become the target of being called the teachers "pet". This would make the student less interested in his studies. The failure in his studies due to pressures from white students calling him names etc would leave everyone asking why he has failed.

It would also be helpful to introduce Aboriginal languages and Aboriginal crafts into the school programs. This can benefit white students so that they can become fully aware of the Aboriginal people, their culture, their lives and their way of thinking. It would also be beneficial to print books for all students with an Aboriginal cultural story for first year to around fifth year students.

