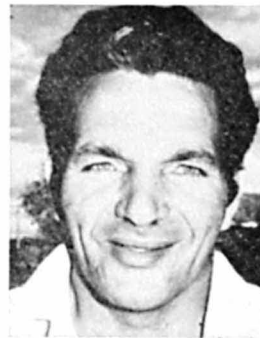


Aborigines and Education



Abel Morgan

(The following is a speech delivered by Pastor Abel Morgan at the last Walgett Teachers' Conference on Aboriginal Education. Pastor Morgan was until recently the President of the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs at Walgett. This month he takes up a full time organizing position based in Condobolin for the Aborigines Inland Mission).

The Aboriginal people largely regard the school as somewhere where our children have to go and if we don't send them then we get a summons. But we also want to see our children get a better education. We have a lot of children staying at home and a lot of children and parents who don't regard the school as theirs.

I think we could overcome this if, say, once a month each school, the primary schools and high schools where Aboriginal children are involved, if the teachers would send home a letter or something saying to the parents that it is terribly important that you play your part—give us all the support you can in educating your children and place some of the responsibility on them. Say it is up to you.

Because you're only wasting your time here if the parents themselves are not doing their part. Don't ask the parents to start writing you a list of things saying this is all the things you ought to do. What the teachers ought to say to the parents is that, because it is so important for the education of your child we would like you to do something. I am not suggesting that you suggest too many duties. What I am saying is place the emphasis back on them.

Secondly, if a lot of our Aboriginal people could get involved in the school's activities. Now I don't know what's been done locally or further afield in inviting Aboriginal parents to join the parents and citizens clubs, or anything like this. If you want them to play their part you have got to see that they are in it, that they feel important.

How many schools are going along to Aboriginal people and saying we would like you to come to the parents and citizens meetings? This would make them see this is important. People can communicate from here and learn things. If this is not being done, it ought to be done.

The third thing I would like to say is very important to me personally—the learning of our own language. What that would have done to me and would now do to a lot of our Aboriginal people

is that it would give us confidence to have a language of our own. Now speaking an Aboriginal language won't get me a job at the local shop, I know that. But what it will do is that it will give us something of our own.

Aboriginal people are the only people who haven't got a flag and now we are fast losing our language. And if we want to build a confidence in our people I think this is something to be considered. The learning of our language is very, very valuable.

I am very concerned about education and first and foremost I am very concerned about the education of Aboriginal children. I am concerned because I am an Aborigine. But because I am an Aborigine—and by the way I'll say this: if you are a Aborigine you can't be anything else—all the things that concern the Aborigine people are very important to me. I'm concerned because these are my people.

I am concerned because I know what an opportunity it is to be able to read and write. You know, I only began to set my mind to learning to read and write when I was twenty-seven because my father didn't send me to school. In fact, I only went for about 2 years. And up until 27 years of age all I could spell was little things like "cat" and so on. And as much as I can read today I am self-taught.

But I hope and pray—and I have often wished and I've often longed—to have the privilege of the people today. And when I look at what I am and realize that I can't be any more than what I am, my heart just goes out to some of these people and says "now listen, get with it, you children, take advantage of the opportunities you've got because you know, you can get somewhere".