

adults to mislead a jury. This will provide useful material for practitioners who, in trying to argue the case that a particular child is not lying, have seemed doctrinaire and unconvincing in their assertions.

The author argues that there is little research evidence to support the pre-occupation of those child protective workers who seek to reorganise the court room. However, a number of helpful suggestions are offered by way of preparing children for court.

Another chapter explores the pros and cons of legal intervention in parent and

child conflict. The author concludes that while such legislation is playing a number of different roles in the three Australian states where it is employed, counselling and mediation are nevertheless the most effective way to deal with parent-child breakdown.

The final chapter in the book will provide practitioners with a rights and advocacy framework against which they can examine their practice. This author includes brief reference to some current initiatives in the provision of advocacy for children and young people who are caught up in the protective system.

Despite some shortcomings this will prove a useful book for practitioners and there should be enough new ideas to spark discussion and take us just a little further along the path of understanding the complexities and contradictions inherent in the practice of child protection.

*Reviewer: Robin Clark
Regional Director Community Services
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Services Department.*

Take This Child ... from Kahlin Compound to the Retta Dixon Children's Home by Barbara Cummings.

Aboriginal Studies Press : Canberra. 1990

The name and work of Albert Namatjira is known throughout Australia and beyond. His grand-nephew recently opened an exhibition of his famous predecessor's artwork at the National Gallery of Victoria. In his speech, Mr Williams referred to his own past in which he had been separated from his family - to be reunited only much later in life. For one with aspirations in the world of art, the reunion with a kinship network of which Namatjira was a member was of great significance. With no family contact in his earlier years, Mr Williams exemplified the fate of many Aboriginal Australians who were removed from their families and denied their heritage in the name of 'protection' and 'assimilation.' Barbara Cummings shared similar experiences and in her book *Take This Child...* she charts the movement of government policy, societal attitudes and personal experiences which surrounded the Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory from the early twentieth century to the present.

The author draws attention to the fact that Albert Namatjira was one of six Aborigines of full-descent in the Northern Territory to be exempt from

acquiring the status of 'ward' under the Welfare Act of 1953. Under this Act, people of mixed descent were intended to inherit a greater measure of independence from the government which had hitherto assumed the role of protector for these people. Barbara Cummings relates the development of government policy and its manifestations, beginning with the era of protection and segregation during which it was deemed necessary to create categories of Aborigines according to levels in the degree of descent. She recounts the effect on the earlier scene of figures such as Baldwin Spencer who reported on the situation of 'part-Aborigines' in the Northern Territory and made recommendations which advocated the separation of all Aboriginal people from the white population for fear of racial mixing. His theories of race reflected a consensual attitude in the early 1900s which assumed that people of mixed descent were of a lower intellectual capacity than Europeans and would isolate them from their full-blooded relatives (who were supposed to be of an even lower order of intellect) and white neighbours alike. The subsequent legislation and the shifts in emphasis and constitution it entailed directed the plight of what increasingly

became a misplaced, confused and restricted group of people.

The influence of missionaries on the lives of this group in the Northern Territory was considerable, and the author details this alongside the efforts of the government with regard to the 'half-caste problem'. The Retta Dixon Home is a central feature of the book: it was the backdrop for the childhood and youth of Barbara Cummings' own life.

As Director of the AIM (Aboriginal Inland Mission), Retta Dixon established accommodation firstly for Aboriginal children who were orphaned, and then, in line with the Aborigines Act of 1910 and the Aborigines Ordinance of 1911, for Aborigines of whom the Chief Protector had custody. It was believed by those such as Spencer that it was necessary for half-castes to remain isolated in order for them to interbreed and so cease to be a problem in an increasing white population. Hence the large numbers of children of mixed descent were taken from their mothers and families and placed under the protection of the government. The missions played a more formal role in these affairs when it was decided that they would act as suitable 'repositories' for a large portion

of the 'part-Aboriginal' population. As government policies altered in the favour of assimilation as opposed to mere protection, part-Aborigines continued to be institutionalised as the means of making them fit for absorption into the white population.

The situation in the Northern Territory was subject to the differing viewpoints of government administrators. Many young people were forced to shift from one place to another as their 'protectors' revised decisions and plans. The separation of vast numbers of children from their families created generations of people with virtually no control over their own destinies and the level of dependency imposed upon them was in many cases devastating. The increased call for a more equitable society gradually led to legislation in the 1950s which ostensibly allowed people of Aboriginal descent greater autonomy. However the 'cycle of dependency' created by earlier policies rendered such reforms less than successful.

Barbara Cummings documents the plight of her people with case studies which are revealing and often disturbing. In

Take This Child..., the experiences of some young people fostered by southern families are told, including the confusion and sometimes abuse they lived through and the difficulties many faced upon returning to the Northern Territory. The book also recounts the cruelty and hardship that was commonly the lot of young people in institutions such as the Retta Dixon Home, established in 1947 and closed as recently as 1980. Importantly, it describes the tangled identities of a people subjected to European and Christian values who were forced to live in relative isolation and devoid of equal rights and opportunities. Barbara Cummings reveals the problem of parenting for the successive generations who had been deprived of their own kinship networks and raised in the style thought most appropriate by missionaries and government.

Take This Child... provides a detailed account of the effects of institutionalisation on Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. Its analysis through the case studies of the actors in this custody play is not sentimental but poignant in its realism. This work would

provide valuable, informed insight for those interested in the history of the welfare of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory and particularly those of mixed descent in that region.

The book is punctuated by detailed reference to government and other source material which adds weight to the author's own well-articulated comments. Further support comes from the accounts of residents of the institution in which she was raised. The reader is also presented with a series of photographs of the subjects at the homes over a period of time.

Take This Child... places in the hands of the practitioner and lay reader alike concise, readable information from an interesting and dynamic source and can be thoroughly recommended. This work highlights the legacy of a turbulent and disturbing period in the history of the Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory and should have important ramifications for those interested and involved in the welfare of people of Aboriginal descent today.

Reviewer:

Jane Owen B.A. Dip. Ed.

***The Arguing Edibles* by Pilawuk, Rosemary Markotic & Ray Forrest. Illustrated by Jodie Scott.**

Magabala Books Aboriginal Corporation : Broome W.A. 32 pp. \$19.92

Growing from a Pea to a Pumpkin, deciding on the best fill for a pie, a decision between nutrition and taste – this Aboriginal storybook for children touches on all these areas.

The storyline is based on vegetables, and with its rhyming text, is very easy to read and enjoy. The outline of the story is based on giving children some knowledge of the variety of vegetables available and at the same time revealing that some are healthier whereas others taste better. For example:

"Oh, what rot!"
Shrieked a shapely shallot,
"Taste is more important,
nutrition is not."

Although this children's book does not incorporate traditional drawings, the illustrations by Jodie Scott are very bright, colourful and distinctive, and very relevant to the storyline.

I believe the theme is exciting and has an unexpected finish, also encouraging children to eat their vegetables, like this passage for instance:

With a swoop of the hand,
now who would it be?
They all sat up so proudly
crying softly, "Pick me, Pick me!"

This seems to be telling the children that the vegetables all want to be eaten, which creates an image to children that it is good to eat their vegetables.

Overall, with a colourful presentation and easy rhyming text, *The Arguing Edibles* is a pleasure to read for all ages, but is more suited to the primary school age. Parents and teachers would get much pleasure out of presenting this book to children.

Reviewer:

Joanne Riseley