



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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BOOK REVIEWS

NOTICE OF NEW PUBLICATION

Kearney, G.E., De Lacey, P.R. and Davidson, G.R. (Eds) *The Psychology of Aboriginal Australians*. John Wiley and Sons Asia. Pty. Ltd. 1973.

This book of readings has just been released and a review of it will appear in the July issue of the Journal. The readings cover a wide range of issues: early studies of Aborigines, intelligence testing, concept development, deprivation and intervention, psycholinguistic studies, culture contact and adjustment, motivation, mental health and traditional culture.

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Fuchs, Estelle and Havighurst, Robert J.; *To Live on This Earth - American Indian Education*. Doubleday & co. Inc. New York; (390 pages - Hard Cover; \$10.85)

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of Education.

This book draws heavily upon the *National Study of American Indian Education*, funded to the extent of \$515,000 by the U.S. Office of Education and carried out during 1967-71 under the direction of the authors. The primary aim of the study was to make a comprehensive examination of the present state of Indian education.

The result is a comprehensive, scholarly, well-documented, and thoroughly readable account of the present day position of the American Indian, of the forces that have brought him to his present position, and of his options for the future. The book reveals striking similarities between the situation of the American Indians and the Australian Aborigines.

The major themes of the book are perhaps best summarised in a statement made by President Nixon to Congress on July 8, 1970.

"The time has come to break decisively with the past and to create the conditions for a new era in which the Indian future is determined by Indian acts and Indian decisions (p.1.)... The Federal government needs Indian energies and Indian leadership if its assistance is to be effective in improving the conditions of Indian life ... (We should) explicitly affirm the integrity and right to continued existence of all Indian tribes ..., recognizing that cultural pluralism is a source of national strength." (p.18.)

The authors recognize that *"in making judgements about the quality of education of Indians, researchers are frustrated by the fact that the goals of Indian education are not clearly stated or clearly agreed upon. One goal is competence in the contemporary economy; another goal is self-respect and self-confidence; another is a secure attachment to an Indian culture. To move closer to all three goals at once requires a kind of education which cannot be clearly defined"*. (p.353) People working in the field of Aboriginal education will undoubtedly recognize the dilemma.

Their study of the wide variety of educational situations in which Indian children find themselves leads the authors to conclude that *"with minor exceptions the history of Indian education had been primarily the transmission of white American education, little altered, to the Indian child as a one-way process ... its goals primarily aimed at removing the child from his Aboriginal culture and assimilating him into the dominant white culture. Whether coercive or persuasive this assimilationist goal of schooling has been minimally effective with Indian children, as indicated by their record of absenteeism, retardation, and high drop-out rates."* (p.19) However the authors note that the schools are now moving away from a narrow assimilationist goal to goals which aim *"to enlarge the area of choice and self-determination of Indian people and to respect the value of cultural diversity."* (p.20) They see the *"problem"* in Indian education today as the need to re-evaluate goals in terms defined by Indian people themselves; how to better the quality of the educational environment; how to make the school more responsive to the diversity of Indian peoples and their needs; how to define more clearly the roles of federal, state, and tribal governments in supporting the educational enterprise; and how to improve participation of the Indian communities in educational decision making.

Examining the wide variety of schools and schooling provided for the Indian children and youth the authors reveal the widespread failure of the school to respect the vast basic differences among Indian peoples as well as between Indians and whites and its failure to respect those aspects of their cultural identity which Indians still value. Although there is now more flexibility, the curriculum offered generally differs little from that provided for non-Indian children. Although attempts are being made to use culturally suitable reading and pictorial matter, there is generally a lack of culturally sensitive material available. Although libraries often contain culturally suitable material, much of this is too difficult for the children themselves to handle. A high proportion of the children face language problems. Indian languages, spoken in the home, are now allowed in the schools, but as yet there are few bilingual programs. Teachers in these schools generally have received no special or preparatory training for cross-cultural teaching. Staff turnover is high. Teachers face housing problems and social isolation. They have little out-of-school contact with their pupils or their parents (especially where their accommodation

on reservations is situated in a compound). They often remain in a low state of culture shock and move out of the school before they really understand the people. Frequent changes of administrators make long range planning difficult. There is often a two-way lack of communication between the school and its community, although attempts are being made to overcome this. Parents often lack awareness of the school's goals and academic program and of their own child's performance. There is a shortage of Indian teachers although increasing use is now being made of Indian teacher aides.

Despite a high mortality rate, the 1967 Indian birth rate was twice that of the total population so that Indians are a rapidly growing and youthful population and more and more of them are moving to the cities for employment, education, and "*excitement*". Consequently, increasing numbers of Indians are moving into schools where they are part of a small ethnic minority group. Curriculum relevance becomes an acute problem aggravated by the fact that many teachers are not even aware of the presence of their Indian students, let alone the importance of the "*Indianness*". The apparent egalitarianism of teachers who "*see children not colour*", and who thus give the same sort of attention to all children, often leads to unintended discrimination through inattention to the needs and problems of the minority group. This apparent invisibility is evidenced by the inability of administrators to estimate the number of Indian children in big city school systems.

Accordingly the *National Study* recommended that special programs be set up in all cities with one hundred or more Indian children and youth of school age. There should be two target groups. For the 12-18 years group special education programs staffed by Indian teachers and aides should be devised to provide the equivalent of a high school course, but including special courses in Indian arts and crafts, history and culture, and work experience which leads to employment and income. These courses would be made available in one or two high schools which could be chosen by Indian youth as an alternative to the regular program provided in the neighbourhood school. An added advantage of such a scheme would be the potential it provides for parent participation.

The second target group should be the kindergarten and primary aged children and their mothers. Indian community aides should be trained to visit the mothers and encourage their involvement with the school. A special teacher should be appointed in any school with 40 pupils in this age range. Such a teacher would assist the regular classroom teachers in their work with Indian pupils and their mothers. A variety of innovations could be tried out, stimulated by a supervisor from the State department. Again there is considerable potential for Indian participation.

The authors argue that the widely supported claim that, as a result of a prolonged history of school failure, many Indians have

a poor self-concept and low levels of self-esteem, is a misconception; their studies show that adolescent Indians have about the same level of self-esteem as non-Indians do. They enjoy life. They rate their future more positively than their present situation. They have an active and rewarding peer group life. They are not depressed, anxious, paranoid, or alienated as a group. They can make use of educational and economic opportunities. They have the same problems as youth of any other low income group. What self-doubt they do have is based on a realistic view of their disadvantages in competing for jobs and income.

However, if it is agreed that the "*self*" is defined for the individual by his perceptions of how he is seen and responded to by significant others, then it is not surprising to note that Indian children showed higher self-esteem in elementary schools with a majority of their peers and displayed a decrease in self-esteem in the more heterogeneous social environment of the high school, or of the large elementary school, in which they were a member of a small ethnic minority group.

Interestingly, despite the obvious shortcomings of many of the schools, the authors note that Indian students and parents generally give mild approval to both schools and teachers. "*This mixture of mildly favourable attitudes toward school and apathy toward academic achievement needs some study.*" (p. 158) The authors suggest that it may be a function of the socially rewarding peer group in the school, of "*being where the action is*", and of not seeing *clearly* achievement, as such, as related to future opportunity or success. Where there is criticism of the schools this tends to come from pupils and parents in "*high contact*" situations, particularly where the Indian children are a minority in the school. (This again indicates a need for concern for the special problems of Indian education in integrated urban settings.) Parents of these children worry about the lack of electives, lax discipline, and prejudice. They want all the standard subjects but also more vocational training, art, music, tribal history and culture.

Indian community leaders are often more critical of the schools serving Indians. Most want the local Indian community to have a more meaningful voice in the operation of the school. They are overwhelmingly in favour of the schools teaching tribal culture, but they also want it to prepare their children to take a place in the dominant economic society. The "*man of two cultures*" position clearly dominates.

Although there is considerable argument as to whether the curriculum should emphasize vocational or academic goals, there is general agreement on the need for specially trained staff able to offer informed advice on career opportunities for Indian youth.

Respect for the dignity of Indian identity must pay dividends in the school. It will lead to better communication between teacher and pupils; to an acceptance of cultural difference; to a greater Indian voice in education; and to the presence of more Indian teachers and aides which must improve the climate of trust and concern. It will lead to the recognition, acceptance, and use of different learning styles. It may be possible to mobilize the powerful peer group to achieve the school's goals, especially if the teacher realizes that it is not an Indian cultural characteristic to be individualistic, competitive and anxious to win his approval.

Attention is currently being directed to the misconceptions, myths, inaccuracies, and stereotypes about Indians in textbooks and reading materials used in schools. Not only are these degrading to the Indian child but also they are harmful to the white child to the extent that they reinforce prejudices. There is concern also that little information is being provided about contemporary Indian life.

Although the teachers considered by the *National Study* generally enjoyed their job, a large number of them did not know or understand their pupils well. They often expressed conflicts over appropriate goals for their students. While most claimed to agree with the "*man of two cultures*" view many tended to see their school as being more assimilationist than they wished to be. Most agreed that Indian culture and history should be taught but they were aware of their lack of expertise in this field and their inadequate preparation for cross-cultural education. There is an obvious need for pre-service and in-service training in these areas.

What is to be the way ahead for American Indian Education? Pointing out that money *alone* is not the answer, the authors have suggested a practicable program built on two essential bases - Indian self-determination in education, and Indian economic development. Boarding schools, rural and small city day schools, and city school systems will all continue to play a part but they will all need improvements in curriculum and in the quality of teaching and the adequacy of teaching strategies. The city school system will be the next frontier for Indian education and so needs special attention now.

The school will need to take account of the social characteristics of Indian children and learn to work *with* and not *against* them. Teachers will thus need sociological training. The school must assist Indians to work *themselves* out of poverty states.

Indians will have to work out their own goals of Indian education for Indian youth as Indians. Schools, especially those on or near reservations, should follow the Indian voice.

There will need to be an appropriate increase in educational expenditure with the Federal government paying the increase.

Teachers and administrators will need to be enthusiastic and to exhibit favourable attitudes and expectations towards Indians. They will need systematic pre-service and in-service training in cultural awareness, linguistics and the study of Indian history and culture. The staff turnover rate must be reduced. Experimental classes need to be established to develop suitable teaching methods. Indian teachers and teacher aides will play a greater role, especially in language programs.

Schools must learn to cope with the language problem. Some form of bilingual education seems the most promising procedure at present. There is a need to develop suitable curriculum materials, especially for the teaching of Indian culture and history. Special attention must be paid to the high school curriculum.

The Indian voice should grow stronger with respect to education at local, state, and national levels. For too long Indians have been denied the right to be wrong. Flexibility and responsiveness to the heterogeneity of the Indian community are essential.

President Nixon has stated the theme. Let Navajo, Jack Jackson, state the dilemma.

"We are searching for how to change without destroying ourselves."
(p.268)

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Banks, J.A. and Joyce, W.W. (Eds); *Teaching Social Studies to Culturally Different Children*. Addison-Wesley Publishing Co, 1971. (396 pages)

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I was impressed by this book. It fills a very real need in that it focuses attention on problems that are present in our schools. The problems discussed have universal applications though the empirical material and case studies are restricted to the United States system specifically.

Case studies of the American Indian child have real relevance in that they can be applied with a great deal of transference to the Australian Aboriginal child. The discussions on the problems experienced by children from low socio-economic backgrounds are applicable to the Australian urban scene - particularly in areas with high migrant populations. Further there is an identifiable similarity between the case studies of children in rural areas, particularly the Mexican-American child, and the Australian child