



# The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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normal teaching and academic skills. So the staff are asked to look at the education process with no preconceived notions of what education is and what are absolute standards of excellence. This creates many problems especially as the College has to rely on a large part-time staff to provide the range of activities and experiences necessary to meet individual needs and interests.

Added to this there is as yet inadequate knowledge of how learning takes place, of how the thought processes or problem solving techniques of Aboriginal people differ from those of other cultural groups, and of what are the most effective media for teaching and learning. And, in order to provide the diversity of individualized materials needed, there is a need for extensive sets of programmed learning materials culturally biased towards Aboriginal society, especially in the common core and basic skills courses.

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### AN ABORIGINAL VIEWPOINT

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The creation of the College of Aboriginal Education, within the Torrens College of Advanced Education, is to me, one of the most meaningful adventures undertaken within Aboriginal society ever. I would place its importance as equal to, if not above, the success of Senator Neville Bonner, the appointment of Charles Perkins, together with the creation and formation of the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee.

Almost every other program and plan within the framework of Aboriginality is dogged by the criterion of having a measure of success

within the eyes of the mainstream of society, which has not and perhaps cannot understand the vein of Aboriginal thinking. This has prevented many good Aboriginal men from adding their two bits of expertise to a successful future within Aboriginality. The College has no prerequisite for entry into the College apart from a strong desire to attend the College for reasons important only to the person applying.

We within the College maintain that the so-called educational level of Aboriginal peoples coupled with the drop out rate of Aboriginal High Schoolers is not so much a reflection on the Aboriginals as a condemnation of the system and its educators.

There are things which stand out like Ayers Rock on the desert in this respect :

1. So much of what has, and is, being taught to Aboriginals today has no meaning to their life style, their future, and the reality of where they are now.
2. Those things which do have a relationship to their betterment and advancement are taught in negative terms. Far too many of my people have never been taught the value and importance of such objects. This has resulted in creating semi-introverts.

The normal education system has produced over the years nothing more than parrots. To be a success in education today does not depend on how persons can learn to think for themselves, but on how much they can repeat the philosophy of their lecturers or teachers. On this basis depends high marks and nothing else. To reinforce the values of the educationist and inflate his ego is not self-development nor is it education.

The College of Aboriginal Education is well aware of the few above-mentioned pitfalls. We are not in the business of creating a mob of repetitionists, but in encouraging gifted people to be individual free thinking people able to determine their own destinies.

Aboriginal Culture, Music, Traditional Art and Language play a big part within the College. Every child in this country from kindergarten and pre-school age is taught Euro-Australian culture, the history of his culture, the music of his culture, and an appreciation of the art of his culture. At a very early age he develops an appreciation of his culture in total. Every child that is, except

the Aboriginal child. He is taught a foreign culture, a foreign language, foreign art. When school is over for the day, the humpys, the reserves, the tribal camps scream out to these children - "No relationships! no relationships!" The value system in school is reversed.

This College seeks to help the Aboriginal rediscover for himself the heritage rightly his as an Aboriginal. We are concerned about pride of race, pride of place within the wider Australian Society. Aborigines can and will hold their heads high in society as a result of the College of Aboriginal Education.

This College operates on the basis of the traditional Aboriginal education system, which in a nutshell is *involvement*. Students are involved from the very beginning with setting out their own individual programs; advice is available on request for help in doing this. Students do studies only on subjects which have a direct bearing on their aims and ambitions, henceforth they carry no dead load through their highly intensified studies.

Involvement and a sense of awareness are created towards all things relevant to Aboriginal people. Students are encouraged to be aware of the National scene Aboriginal-wise. Visits to primary schools are made on a regular basis to talk with children about Aboriginal culture in the hope of promoting better relationships between black/white in the coming generation, simply because the extremely commendable aspects of Aboriginal culture are imparted to children during their impressionable years instead of the bigoted one-sided slop continually dished up by a seemingly racist Education Board which allows books with racist attitudes within our multi-racial schools. Is it any wonder the scene in Australia is what it is today?

Students are involved in the management of the College at its highest level of management. Past students are followed up and invited back to the College to be made aware of changes within the College, and are given the opportunity to comment on these changes; also suggestions for its improvement are welcomed by the staff of the College. Aboriginal people do not belong to the College - rather the College belongs to them.

Comments from our students today show the effectiveness of such a place run on the lines the College now takes. And I quote -

- a) "For the first time in my life I am not ashamed of being an Aboriginal."

- b) "I can now walk down the street and hold my head high."
- c) "I am no longer a nobody."

Many such comments can be given; however, the above, simple as they appear, contain deep rooted ingrained feelings which have contributed to the overall scene as it exists today among Aboriginal people. This is what the College is all about - *we are interested in PEOPLE.*

The greater percentage of last year's students are now involved in the employment of their choice: no longer labourers, no longer the pick and shovel men, but in schools, in offices, in apprenticeships, in government employment, in teacher training programs, in further training for social welfare and residential care work. These are people who were labelled 'drop outs', 'useless has beens'. These gifted people who need a fresh and more realistic approach to themselves and their abilities.

In closing, I reiterate that this College is the most meaningful adventure ever in the field of Aboriginality. This is because it operates at the grass roots level, excluding no one but offering encouragement to all.

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*NOTE*

In recent years several Colleges of Advanced Education have been offering courses in Aboriginal Studies.

In 1974 the School of Arts at the Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education, with a grant from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, commenced a ten week course in Aboriginal Studies. The aim of the course, offered to third year trainee teachers, was to broaden the outlook of prospective teachers of Aboriginal children.

Topics covered during the course included an examination of the nature of race and racism; the historical context of Aboriginal-white relations; and the contemporary situation of urban and tribal Aboriginal Australians.