



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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SPECIAL COURSES FOR ABORIGINALS

K. Campbell,
Co-ordinator,
Aboriginal Courses,
Sydney Technical College,
Broadway, N.S.W. 2007

Proposals for special training courses for Aborigines in New South Wales have been made intermittently over the last few years. It has been firmly established that Aborigines have not been acquiring trade skills, despite policies designed to provide equal opportunities for both Aborigines and white Australians. Aborigines have tended to gravitate towards unskilled, casual or labouring positions, while unemployment has been many times higher than of the general population. Although the educational system has attempted to prepare Aborigines for a European life style, they have nevertheless tended to fall into the low income/unskilled employment class.

It is generally conceded that Aborigines are disadvantaged in comparison to non-Aborigines in regard to open employment. The disadvantages stem from remoteness from employment opportunities, relatively low levels of education, lack of work skills and cultural differences.

And so, in 1972, an Interdepartmental Committee on Aboriginal Welfare took up the question and stated its support for special training courses for Aborigines. Attention was focused on a scheme in New Zealand, the Maori Trade Training Scheme. This scheme has been in operation since 1959. In New Zealand it had been found that Maoris constituted a disproportionately small section of the apprentices and tradesmen in the workforce. The Maori Trade Training Scheme was introduced to redress this imbalance. Since 1959, the scheme has expanded slowly but steadily until there is now an intake of about 300 Maoris into special apprenticeship courses each year. The completion and placement rates are very high, and over 3000 Maoris have participated in the scheme.

Other types of special courses for Maoris are conducted. These include short Pre-employment courses, longer Pre-employment courses based on job skills, such as Shorthand/Typing, Citizenship Courses, Agricultural Training Courses, Carving Training Courses, Introductory Nursing Courses, and other experimental courses.

Interest in special courses for Aborigines in New South Wales revived again in 1974, and an Interdepartmental group made a study tour of New Zealand to inspect the scheme in operation. Departments represented on the tour were :

Department of Technical Education,
Department of Aboriginal Affairs,
Department of Labour and Immigration,
and Representatives of Aboriginal Organizations.

On the basis of earlier knowledge of the New Zealand scheme, two Pre-vocational twelve week courses were conducted in second term, 1974, - one for Aboriginal boys in Industrial Skills, and one for Aboriginal girls in Basic Food Servicing. The boys' course was repeated in third term.

On the basis of the experience gained from these courses, and from the information gathered from New Zealand, it was decided to expand considerably the number of courses offered in 1975, including both Pre-trade (apprenticeship) courses, and Pre-vocational courses. At the last moment, a submission was made to run special classes for Aborigines in Day Matriculation and Certificate Entrance. This proposal was accepted.

FUNCTIONAL DEPARTMENTS AND ORGANIZATIONS

A high degree of co-operation between the Departments involved in the implementation of the special courses has been attained. This co-operation has been achieved through the energy and goodwill of many individuals, and by departmental commitments to the program as a matter of policy.

a) The Department of Technical and Further Education

The Department of Technical and Further Education conducts the courses. It makes teaching staff available, as well as classroom and workshop accommodation and college facilities generally. Particular care has been taken with the syllabus of each course, enabling a flexible approach to be taken but, where necessary, ensuring that the standard requirements of trade or general courses are maintained. In some cases, meetings and conferences of teachers have been held to exchange ideas and experiences. Recurrent staff development programs are envisaged.

A Co-ordinator for Aboriginal Courses has been appointed. The Co-ordinator acts as a liaison officer with other Departments and

organizations, co-ordinates the planning and development of future programs and the implementations of approved courses, and acts in an advisory capacity to teachers. The expansion of the program of special courses has created the need for staffing assistance for the Co-ordinator, and this is currently under consideration by the Department.

b) The Department of Aboriginal Affairs

The Department of Aboriginal Affairs funds the Department of Technical and Further Education for the cost of the courses. This is calculated on the basis of teachers' salaries, the salaries of support staff, and the cost of materials. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs also funds the salary and expenses of the Co-ordinator. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs has been most responsive to the needs of the courses, and has, moreover, made significant contributions to the development of an educational philosophy appropriate to the needs of the special courses.

c) The Department of Employment and Industrial Relations (formerly the Department of Labour and Immigration)

A vital functional role is played by the Aboriginal Employment Section of the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations. The Section has a network of Vocational Officers (V.O.'s) and Assistant Vocational Officers (A.V.O.'s), mostly Aboriginals, throughout New South Wales. Without the knowledge and expertise of officers such as these, the program of special courses could not continue. The Aboriginal Employment Section has the responsibility of finding, counselling, referring and partially selecting candidates for courses, as well as job placement and follow-up. Senior Vocational Officers from the Section are also involved in the final selection of students for a particular course. Where a college falls in the area covered by a V.O. or A.V.O., he has the responsibility of supervising a special course or group of courses at that teaching centre. The activities of these V.O.'s and A.V.O.'s have been commented on favourably by teaching staff in the colleges.

All students in these courses are paid allowances under the N.E.A.T. Scheme. The responsibility for the supervision of this aspect of the program also falls on the Aboriginal Employment Section. Allowances under the N.E.A.T. Scheme have recently been revised, and are as follows:

Under 18, \$47.70 p.w. gross; 18+, \$62.15 p.w. gross.

Extra allowances can be claimed by students with dependants, as they can by students living away from home. The living away from home allowance is deducted as board from those students living in hostels. The N.E.A.T. Scheme used in this way is, on occasion, somewhat clumsy to administer, but attempts are being made to make the system more flexible.

d) Aboriginal Hostels Ltd.

Hostel accommodation is provided, where required, by Aboriginal Hostels Ltd. This is most important for young students coming from rural areas to Sydney, or to a country town, for training. The hostels accommodate, usually, the 10 to 12 students in a particular course. Management is in the hands of 'House Parents' who attempt to develop a family atmosphere in the hostel. In 1975, students in five courses were accommodated in hostels. In 1976, ten courses are being served in this way. It is clear that this hostel accommodation is of great importance to the success of the special courses.

1975 RESULTS

A complete evaluation of the effectiveness of the courses is impossible at this stage, but indications are that the courses have been successful overall. The criteria for judging each course vary according to the objectives of each course, but one standard must be the number of students enrolled who complete the training period. Following is a list of the completion rates in each course, in each group of courses, and in all courses.

Pre-trade Courses:

Bricklaying, Newcastle, 36 weeks	11/12
Carpentry and Joinery, Granville, 36 weeks	12/13
Panelbeating/Vehicle Painting, Dubbo 36 weeks	12/12
Completion Rate	95%

Pre-vocational Courses:

Industrial Skills, Sydney. 12 weeks 1st Term	8/10
12 weeks 2nd Term	8/10
12 weeks 3rd Term	6/10

Basic Food Servicing, East Sydney, 12 weeks 1st term	5/8
Office Training, Dubbo. 18 weeks	13/16
Office Training, Nowra. 18 weeks	19/25
Completion Rate	75%

General Courses.

Day Matriculation Sydney	15/35
Certificate Entrance Sydney	10/30
Completion Rate	38%

Completion Rate for all Courses : 66%

Probably more important, however, are the placements which can be achieved after each course. Approximately 50% of Pre-trade course graduates have been placed in apprenticeships, and it is expected that this figure will eventually rise to perhaps 60%. The rest of the graduates will be placed in employment in the relevant industry. The Office Training courses vary as far as placements are concerned, depending on the employment situation in the area where the course is held. Ten of the thirteen girls from the Dubbo course have been placed in relevant employment. In Nowra, a smaller percentage of girls have been placed, but a number have returned to the College to enroll in the existing Day Secretarial course. The results obtained by students in the Day Matriculation and Certificate Entrance courses were not high, but one Day Matriculation student has proceeded to university studies, and four were accepted by Teachers Colleges. Complete information on graduates from 1975 courses has not yet been compiled, but the Aboriginal Employment Section, Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, is actively engaged on this, and the information should be available shortly.

THE 1976 PROGRAM

The following are the special courses for Aboriginals which are being conducted at Technical Colleges in 1976, and the approximate number of students in each.

Pre-trade

Carpentry and Joinery, Granville	36 weeks	12
Carpentry and Joinery, Dubbo	36 weeks	12
Bricklaying, Newcastle	36 weeks	12

Panelbeating/Vehicle Painting, Dubbo	36 weeks	12
Automotive Engineering, Sydney	36 weeks	12

Pre-vocational

Industrial Skills, Sydney	12 weeks	10 x 3
Industrial Skills, Newcastle	12 weeks	10 x 3
Office Training, Dubbo	18 weeks	15 x 2
Office Training, Nowra	18 weeks	15 (1st Semester)
Office Training, Kempsey	18 weeks	15 (2nd Semester)
Retail Sales, Newcastle	18 weeks	15 x 2

General Courses

Day Matriculation Sydney	36 weeks	20
Certificate Entrance Sydney	36 weeks	20

Total Students = 250

The experience gained in 1975, and more intensive preparation, have enabled the courses to commence much more smoothly in 1976. Despite the virtual absence of formal publicity for the courses, competition for entry was keen. Over 200 candidates were initially considered for the Pre-trade courses, and 120 were brought to Sydney from which the final 60 were chosen. Approximately 80 applicants were considered for the 40 places in the Day Matriculation and Certificate Entrance courses. The drop-out rate in these courses is, so far, negligible - a marked improvement on the situation at this time last year. At this early stage, there is reason to believe that the results from all courses will show an improvement on those of last year.

CONCLUSIONS

- 1. The program of special courses for Aborigines conducted by the New South Wales Department of Technical and Further Education is proving successful.*

This is indicated by the overall high proportion of students who complete their course. It is also shown by the increased employability of graduates of the courses, and by the fact that a supply of Aboriginal apprentices is now entering the workforce. Moreover, the high degree of acceptance of the courses by the Aboriginal community indicates that the courses are fulfilling a perceived educational and training need.

2. *With only minor additions to courses, 1976 is proving to be a year of consolidation of achievements gained in 1975.*

This has been necessary because the large expansion of courses in 1975 meant the introduction of some makeshift procedures, and highlighted some problems which were avoidable in retrospect. And so in 1976, efforts are being made to formalize procedures and to promote the smooth operation of the courses. It appears that this is being achieved.

3. *It is impossible to over-emphasize the need for continued co-operation between the functional bodies involved in the program of courses.*

The roles of the Departments and Aboriginal Hostels Ltd., mentioned earlier in this report, are complementary. Should any of the areas of functional responsibility be vacated, the success, indeed the existence of the program would be most doubtful.

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