



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*.

In 2022 *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* transitioned to fully Open Access and this article is available for use under the license conditions below.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER AIDES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

J. Budby & F. Young,
Dept. of Education,
Queensland.

John Budby is an Aboriginal Advisory teacher in the Queensland Department of Education working in the area of education of Indigenous Children, both primary and secondary. Frank Young is an Inspector of Schools (Secondary).

There are at present sixteen Aboriginal and Islander teacher aides employed in secondary schools in Queensland. They are employed under the same conditions as all teacher aides in Queensland, but six are funded by grants from the Commonwealth. They perform the usual aide duties within the school, but have a further very important role: they provide an adult Aboriginal or Islander presence within the school having contact with both students and staff. This allows for students to relate with them so that situations and activities can be discussed in maybe a freer way than with the teaching staff. It also provides teachers with the opportunity to discuss any matter relating to their students with the aides. The school administration team can use the aides to assist with advice on situations which arise involving students, and as advisors in deliberations on school matters.

In May, 1976, a five day seminar was held in Brisbane for the aides. The seminar had two aims -

1. To provide some specific skill training in the school areas in which the aides worked.
2. To present an overview of -
 - a) general Aboriginal development across Australia in terms of identity and involvement in the decision-making process;
and
 - b) education and schools.

The aims were planned to be met in the following ways :

1. SPECIFIC SKILL TRAINING

Aides are used in the following areas : Home Economics, Library, Audio-visual, Manual Arts, General Duties, Counselling and Classroom Assistance.

Three hours were spent with all aides on basic audio-visual techniques involving preparation of stencils and transparencies and the use and care of the spirit duplicator and overhead projector. Aides then spent two days in specific areas as follows :

- Home Economics : This included basic macrame work; the use and care of both the automatic and non-automatic sewing machines; work on pattern making; techniques of flannelgraph and games, material preparation, and observation of general filing. The general aim was to give the aides as many experiences as possible that might be encountered in their roles as aides in the Home Economics classroom and as assistants to the teacher.
- Library : All the activities of a library aide were covered including all aspects of preparing books, record keeping, processing and basic cataloguing techniques. A visit to a school library was included to cover presentation and display of library resources.
- Audio-visual Use, care and simple maintenance of all basic school equipment was covered. This included 16mm movie and 35mm slide and film strip projectors; audio taping, reproduction, dubbing etc; using the visual maker kit for making slides, and production of slides without a camera.
- Manual Arts Visits were made to two Technical Colleges. The first day was spent dealing with woodwork and included use, care and simple maintenance of the circular saw and band saw; some work on tool care and sharpening, and the basic principle of cutting of wood as related to school materials. The second day included discussion and work in the areas of fibre-glass techniques, welding, panel beating and general mechanics.
- Counselling This involved a discussion with two urban aides who had been involved in a parent contact program, and

time spent with the Guidance and Counselling Team at Inala High School. Aides were made aware of the possibilities of student counselling, parent contact, teacher contact and parent meetings.

2 a) OVERVIEW OF IDENTITY AND INVOLVEMENT IN THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS

This section covered three sessions and Aboriginal speakers conducted each session.

Senator Bonner gave an address which focused on the education of Aboriginals. He discussed factors which operate to hinder Aboriginal students achieving to their potential in schools. These included socio-economic factors, racial and cultural factors, teaching methods, language, absenteeism, curriculum, and parental attitude.

Senator Bonner then discussed possible improvements to establish the perceived primary aim of a schooling system which has meaning for the Aboriginal population :

"The primary need would seem to be the creation of a schooling system which has meaning for the Aboriginal population. To achieve this the following developments would seem desirable:

i. Teacher training in -

- a) Aboriginal culture (that which is good of Aboriginal culture) and, if possible, language.
- b) The methods of instruction of culturally and socially deprived minority groups.

This may lead to a change in teacher attitudes, as it may give a greater understanding of the contribution which Aboriginal children can make to the school, and of the special problems they face.

- ii. The encouragement of parent and community involvement so that the schools are not regarded as separate white institutions. Very importantly the involvement of parents in decision making, and in school activities, would be necessary, together with some form of continuing education of adults.
- iii. Language enrichment programs to help overcome difficulties in expression and comprehension. Abundant reading material

"of a suitable kind, material with non-racist emphasis is needed, for home as well as school.

- iv. In certain areas the use of Aboriginal languages, particularly in pre-school, could assist the child's transition to formal schooling. Aboriginal teachers and teaching aides could play an important role here.
- v. Emphasis is needed in the schools on personal guidance rather than competition; on positive achievements rather than on failures. Minimum discipline and flexible programs are also very desirable.
- vi. It would seem preferable, where possible, that children should attend local schools rather than be sent to hostels and boarding schools, where they miss the support of their kinship group (kinship system being a priority factor of Aboriginal culture retained by us all).
- vii. Finally, children (and parents) need to be made aware of the rewards that education offers at various stages, in the form of self-development through the learning process, as well as in economic terms in their future careers."

Discussion followed on the way teacher aides could help. Parent/community involvement and personal guidance were talked about as possible areas. The main thought from the session was: *How can Aboriginals help their children to get more from their schooling?*

A representative from the Aboriginal Consultative Group to the Schools Commission, Ms. N. McNamara, was a guest speaker for one session. The emphasis in this session was on Aboriginal involvement. Mention was made of the large number of different organizations which have been created to help Aboriginals. The importance of Aboriginal people making decisions, or advising those who do, was discussed.

The role of the N.A.C.C. was discussed, and the work of the Aboriginal Consultative Group to the Schools Commission was explained. How Aboriginals could have a say in the education of their children was seen as an important point. The possibilities of an Aboriginal Education Committee or of a group of advisers to work with schools and the Education Department were discussed. The appointment of Mr John Budby was seen as a significant step.

The main thought from the session was that Aboriginals can

become involved in deciding what happens to their children in schools.

Mrs. C. Archer (Aboriginal School Visitor) spoke about her experience talking with students in schools. She gave examples of prejudice and how she answered it. The need for Aboriginal students to understand their heritage so that they could have a solid base to use when faced with prejudice was discussed. Aides had a role in helping students find this base and also in talking with staff so that they understand Aboriginal students better. Examples of how difficulties arise through ignorance were given. This showed the need for aides to help.

Mr. J. Hamilton (Aboriginal School Visitor) talks at schools about Aboriginal culture. He stresses the deeper side of culture but covers weapons, hunting, housing, etcetera, also. He asked aides to consider the need to give Aboriginal students their own culture. If it isn't given to them in schools then it could be lost.

Group discussion followed. The members of the seminar were divided into urban and community groups. Mrs. Archer when discussing prejudice in secondary schools, stressed the need for rational comparative thinking. Mr. Hamilton spoke about the dangers of losing a culture and asked the aides to ensure that the culture which still flourishes in their areas is not allowed to be lost.

A considerable amount of informal discussion occurred between the aides and these visiting speakers. The importance of this background information was appreciated by many aides but a change in format and more direct relating to the school situation then, rather than later in the week, would have increased the effectiveness of the unit.

2 b) OVERVIEW OF EDUCATION AND SCHOOLS

This was covered in three sessions including Secondary Grants, the Inala Project, and Child Development.

The Secondary and Study Grants were covered in full so that aides were aware of the benefits available (not only for school students but for themselves if they wish to continue their own education). The situation in schools as seen by visiting Education Officers was discussed. Mention was made of two areas where aides could assist -

- to help parents understand what the different courses and subjects at the school mean;
- to work with teachers to help them better understand their Aboriginal students.

The four members of the Inala Project team spoke about their roles. They are involved in career education, home/school liaison, cultural awareness, and follow-up of students who have left school. The two Aboriginal aides in the team feel that they have seen successes in their work.

A brief look at child development was taken to develop an understanding of what is involved in learning at school. Discussions took place on the differences between primary and secondary schools, and how the environment can prevent a child from achieving to potential. This unit provided background information about education and schools, but may have had more effect if conducted in the form of activity workshops.

The fifth day involved two sessions of review and suggestions. It became obvious that there are many important areas in which aides can be involved. Professor Watts helped to identify the following areas -

- .. Explaining to parents what different subjects and courses mean;
- .. interpreting school reports to parents;
- .. helping parents to understand school policy;
- .. helping students 'fit in' to secondary schools.

In order to do this, the aides themselves would have to understand everything about subjects, courses, report cards, school policy. They could learn this at their school.

Other areas where aides might be able to help students could be in liaison with Guidance Officers, Commonwealth Education Officers, Commonwealth Employment Service, and various other departments.

During one session, the aides were asked to think about the usefulness of aides now and in four years' time. Almost all saw an improvement, and discussion on how this could occur was started and followed up later in the week. Everyone felt that a plan was needed and that it might include -

- a) working out the roles of aides;
- b) providing specific training to develop skills;
- c) Principals and staff knowing the roles of the aides in the school to which they are transferred;
- d) advisory visits to help aides.

SEMINAR FOLLOW-UP

Because of the difference in schools and the variety of areas in which aides work, there must be a diversity of roles, and these can only be effectively worked out in the school. When these roles are defined there will be varying needs for further training. This training could involve a period of some weeks to gain the necessary skills, and would be conducted away from the school. Other training would be best carried out in the school and a plan will be needed to ensure this is able to be done effectively.

It is hoped to consider these areas of definition and training in the immediate future. The Seminar was effective in allowing aides to share their experiences and in bringing many relevant topics to them for consideration. The real effectiveness will, of course, be in the work of the aides after their role definition and training is completed, and a report will be made on this in the future.

.....

(continued from page 24)

The project has clearly shown that, with appropriate training, supervision and support by professionals and sufficient motivation by the mothers, they can develop considerable skill and competence in providing play/learning situations for children who would otherwise have little opportunity of benefitting from any kind of pre-school provision.

In addition, the training in this sphere provides the starting point for a general development of confidence and self-esteem in women who benefited little from their own experiences in the formal education system. The more diffuse effects of this development on families and on the community should not be underestimated.

.....