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REPORT: THE ARMIDALE ABORIGINAL EDUCATION, HEALTH AND WELFARE CONFERENCE, 1978

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The Armidale Aboriginal Education, Health and Welfare Conference, 1978, was held at Mary White College, University of New England, from Thursday, 30th November to Saturday, 2nd December, 1978. The conference was convened by Margaret Wells and Jane Purkiss, with the assistance of Ross Bell from Duval High School, Armidale. The conference was granted in-service status by the New South Wales Department of Education, and teachers attended from schools within North West Region. Academics and teachers, health and welfare workers attended and a large representation came from the Aboriginal community of Armidale.

The conference, which was funded jointly by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Armidale College of Advanced Education, dealt with : Aboriginal Teaching Assistants' courses; Aboriginal housing; participation in decision making by Aboriginal communities; use of Aboriginal personnel; support for Aboriginal Health Centres; and District Aboriginal Education Committees. Workshops were also held on various aspects of Aboriginal education, health and welfare.

Key speakers at the conference included Professor Colin Tatz, Professor of Politics, University of New England, who discussed various aspects of race relations and their relevance to the classroom, and Stephen Albert, Chairman of the National Aboriginal Education Committee, who outlined guidelines which have been formulated by the Committee on Aboriginal education, and have been distributed for comment. They recommend that Aboriginal community members be included in decision making in areas concerning Aboriginal education. The Committee also recommends that local Aboriginal Education Committees, all Aboriginal in membership, be established for advisory and consultative purposes. Local District Aboriginal Education Committees would also have an advisory function for the National Aboriginal Education Committee.

Marji Hill, co-author with Alex Barlow of *Black Australia*, (1978) discussed the literature on Aborigines to be found in school libraries. Things to be wary of, such as stereotyping Aborigines, and in some cases wrong information about them, were discussed.

Black Australia - an Annotated Bibliography and Teacher's Guide to Resources on Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, arranges books and resources in categories and briefly outlines their content and relevance. In this way the teacher can easily identify books for the level he or she desires. The book should be of great value to teachers.

Miss June Barton of Mirrawinni Aboriginal School, near Kempsey, presented the merits of all-Aboriginal schools in developing a positive self-concept for the children. Mr Ben Isaac, Education Consultant (Aboriginal Services), Division of Guidance and Special Education, New South Wales Department of Education, discussed the role of the State Government in Aboriginal education and the emphasis being placed on school-based curriculum development programs and inter-cultural studies.

Other speakers discussed housing, health and welfare in Aboriginal communities. One noticeable aspect of the conference was the large number of Aboriginal people present and contributing, both as speakers and in workshop discussions. Guests included Mr W. Summers, District Inspector of Schools, Armidale, and Mr.W.McCarthy, local Member of the Legislative Assembly.

From the Plenary Session the following resolutions were passed:

1. That an Aboriginal Teaching Assistants' Course which would include a Remedial Reading and Mathematics component be set up at Armidale College of Advanced Education.
2. That support be given to moves from the Aboriginal community for urgent investigation of Aboriginal housing at Tingha, Walcha, Uralla, Armidale and Guyra so that improvements can be instituted, using Aboriginal labour where possible.
3. That there is need for greater participation by Aboriginal communities in the type of and selection for houses.
4. That there should be provision by the New South Wales Department of Education of a Curriculum Consultant to establish and support Aboriginal Studies in schools.
5. That Aboriginal personnel should be used, where possible, to assist in the presentation of Aboriginal Studies.
6. That there is urgent need to lift all restrictions on the times tutorials for Aboriginal students can take place. Tutorials are funded by the Commonwealth Department of

Education and, except in Armidale, can only take place out of school hours. This has proved most ineffective.

7. That there is a need for the Aboriginal Health Centre in Armidale to be staffed by a nursing sister for two days instead of one day per week, with particular emphasis on Infant Welfare.
8. That an all-Aboriginal Education Committee for Armidale and District should be set up to advise the National Aboriginal Education Committee of local needs in Aboriginal education.
9. That there is a need for an Aboriginal Education, Health and Welfare Conference to be held annually in the North and North-West area of New South Wales.

The Armidale Aboriginal Education, Health and Welfare Conference, 1979, is being planned to follow on from the 1978 conference.

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Reference

Hill, Marji and Barlow, Alex.: *Black Australia - an Annotated Bibliography and Teacher's Guide to Resources on Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders*. Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1978.

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