



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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ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER VIEWS:



ABORIGINAL SUNDAY*

**S. Albert,
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This is the twenty-third year in which a special day for Aboriginal Australians has been organised. Pastor Doug Nichols (now Sir Douglas Nichols) held the first *Aboriginal Sunday* at his small chapel in Fitzroy, Melbourne in 1957. His original intention was to publicise and aim for recognition of the prior-ownership by Aborigines of Australia.

Aboriginal Sunday has now become *National Aborigines Week* (July 9-15), with Friday, July 13, designated National Aborigines Day this year.

A National Aborigines Day Observance Committee (NADOC) from Melbourne co-ordinates events, ranging from a Ball at the Lakeside International Hotel, Canberra, to displays by local schools around this year's theme, *What About Our Kids?*

This article looks at changes in the educational area, and asks the question, "Where to now?"

SCHOOL PROBLEM

Twenty-three years ago, figures on Aborigines in the formal education system were poorly kept and inaccurate and assessments of the situation were generally negative.

For example, Dr Ruth Fink, then lecturer in anthropology at the Australian School of Pacific Administration, said in 1962 at a Summer School in Sydney:

There is mounting evidence to show that Aboriginal children are not deriving much from the schooling which they receive.

* Reproduced with permission from *The Catholic Leader*, No.3521, July 15, 1979.

** Mr Stephen Albert, Chairman, National Aboriginal Education Cttee, P.O.Box 826, Canberra.

In addition, although some changes had occurred in 1957, the 1948 statement of one of the earliest researchers in the area, P.W. Beckenham could be taken as still generally true:

It may be said safely that scattered throughout the Commonwealth there are large numbers of Aborigines and a lesser number of part-Aborigines, whose children receive no education whatever from the white masters of their land. (Australian Council of Educational Research Monograph.)

In its draft document *Rationale, Aims and Objectives of Aboriginal Education*, the recently formed National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) said:

Since 1788 the Aborigines of Australia have been subjected in varying degrees to an education system which has aimed to rationalise their dispossession from the land, deprecate their culture and, in general, endeavor to make the indigenous people of this country lose their own rich cultural background and think, act and hold the same values as middle-class Europeans.

After more than 180 years of this type of education, we have now reached a position where non-Aborigines have become a little more aware of some of the problems that have been festering in the Aboriginal community.

The National Poverty Inquiry Report of 1975 states that in every conceivable comparison the Aborigines and Islanders -

stand in stark contrast to the general Australian society and also to other ethnic groups, whether defined on the basis of race, nationality, birthplace, language or religion.

They probably have the highest deathrate, the worst health and housing and the worst legal status of any identifiable section of the Australian population.

The Australian Schools Commission Report 1975 adds:

They also have the least schooling.

Has nothing then been achieved in recent times, despite the great increase in public attention to the position of Aborigines?

Funding, as reflected in the following figures, has certainly increased, but many question the various initiatives and refer to them as mere palliatives.

In 1978, the latest year for which figures are available, 15,500 Aboriginal students were assisted in their secondary studies by a Grants Scheme introduced in 1970.

About 4300 received assistance in their post-secondary studies under a Study Grant Scheme (introduced in 1968). Ten applicants were awarded overseas study awards in 1978.

Some belated recognition has been given to the uniqueness of Aboriginal culture and the need for learning situations to reflect this recognition.

"Community" has become the basis of funding by the Federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs in all areas.

In education the emphasis has shifted to the use of indigenous teachers and aides, encouragement of bilingual programs and the location of schools in areas with which the students feel affinity.

In 1977, for example, more than 600 Aboriginal teacher aides were employed in the mainland states and the Northern Territory.

The result of this shift in emphasis has been the encouragement of the Aboriginal people themselves to decide educational programs.

An important development in this area is the NAEC already referred to. This month, the NAEC is holding a National Workshop for Aboriginal teachers and teacher aides in Sydney, as part of their enquiry into existing teacher-training programs catering specifically for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. The Co-ordinator of the Steering Committee to this research project is Mr Paul Hughes, Aboriginal Education Consultant from South Australia.

While re-discovering their heritage and renewing their links with it, Aboriginal people are not turning their backs on European-type learning. Increasing numbers are completing technical, university and specialist courses and taking their place in the managerial and administrative structures of society.

Despite these significant gains, there is still much to be done in the field of education as in others.

Public understanding of the complexities of the problems to be solved has not necessarily kept up with changes in policy.

The Young Aboriginal Movement has recently sent a letter to the Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (Senator Chaney), setting out what it sees as the link between public education and the "solidarity, pride and dignity" of all Aborigines.

It has asked that through such events as National Aborigines Week:

- . Future NADOC funding be increased to an amount, which is sufficient for the presentation of a race relations program involving all Australians, about the true position of the indigenous people of this country.
- . That National Aborigines Day throughout Australia be declared a national holiday for all Australians in recognition of a shared Aboriginal heritage.
- . That a position be created within the Federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs for an Aboriginal person to organise, formulate and implement a program of activities during each National Aborigines Week.
- . Notification of funds available for National Aborigines Week activities, be given to those organisations concerned with the NADOC Committee at least six months prior to July.

NATIONAL INQUIRY

In calling for the establishment of a National Aboriginal Education Commission and a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island College of Advanced Education, the NAEC in their draft document calls for a National Inquiry into all aspects of Aboriginal education and for research involving majority Aboriginal representation in areas of decision-making.

As the fifth aim in its "Aims and Objectives" paper, the NAEC says:

The education services offered to Aboriginal people must aim for and be capable of developing Aborigines who are at ease in the knowledge of, and pride in, their own cultural heritage, as well as obtaining the academic and technological skills required of Aboriginal Australians today.

National Aborigines Week continues to be an important element in the process by which the original inhabitants of this land can recapture their heritage and thus fulfil their role in society.

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ABORIGINAL & ISLANDER STUDIES AT QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY

Aboriginal & Islander Studies are a major focus within the Anthropology program of the Department of Anthropology & Sociology at the University of Queensland. The basic introductory subject in the area is Aboriginal Australia, which provides a general, non-disciplinary introduction to Aboriginal & Islander Studies by examining the nature of contemporary Aboriginal and Islander society and placing it within the historical and present contexts of the broader Australian society. The course is open to all interested students from all departments and faculties.

Involved in the course this year is Mr Hiram Ryan, a Queensland Aboriginal, who is a mature age student at the University of Queensland, working towards an arts degree majoring in psychology, sociology and journalism. He is a course Co-convenor along with Professor Bruce Rigsby.

The course has been reorganized this year so that some Black perspectives will be presented on a number of topical issues: land rights, health, education and separatism. Mr Ryan will give some of the lectures, and other members of the Aboriginal and Islander community will participate as guest speakers and panelists.

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