



# The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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THE NEW CHAIRMAN OF THE  
NATIONAL ABORIGINAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE

MR JOHN BUDBY

*Mr Budby's appointment as the new Chairman of the NAEC was announced on the 9th April by the Minister for Education The Hon. W. Fife.*

*We were delighted when Mr Budby agreed to be interviewed and speak directly to the readers of the journal. The interview is followed by the address which he delivered at the National Aboriginal Education Conference held at the University of Queensland in December 1979. Ed.*

*First of all John, could you tell us something about your background as an educator?*

I probably had better start with giving you some idea of the education that I've had. I completed Senior at Mackay State High School in 1964. After completing Senior, I moved to Brisbane and worked as a clerk with the Brisbane City Council for twelve months. During my period in Brisbane I learned about the Australian School of Pacific Administration which was based at Middle Head, Mossman, (Sydney) and which trained teachers to teach either primary children in the Northern Territory or secondary students in Papua New Guinea, in the late '60s early '70s. I applied for a position to do teacher training through the Australian School of Pacific Administration, sometimes called ASOPA, and did a two year course there in 1966 and 1967. I then taught in Papua New Guinea secondary schools from '68 through to '74. The types of schools in which I taught were Bugandi High in Lae, which was a boys' boarding school - I taught there for three years; Maprik in the Sepik, which was a boys' and girls' boarding school - I taught there for twelve months; and then I taught at Kila Kila High in Port Moresby, which was a day school - I taught there for three years.

In 1975 I returned to Australia and taught at Emerald High School in Central Queensland - I taught there actually for only two terms. At the beginning of 1976 I was appointed as an advisory

teacher to the Queensland Department of Education. One of my roles as advisory teacher was to be executive officer of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Committee to the Director-General of Education, which was established in August 1976 and had its first official meeting in December of the same year. I remained an advisory teacher until 1979. In June of that year I was appointed education officer with the Department of Education. My role as advisory teacher ranged across quite a few areas. I was adviser to the Education Department on Aboriginal education, I was executive officer of the Queensland Consultative Committee and therefore played a dual role, one of organizing meetings and the other of communicating concerns raised by the Consultative Committee to the Department of Education. I was, as advisory teacher, also departmental representative on many committees which were set up to discuss Aboriginal education and these three roles kept me rather busy. My role as education officer was similar to that of advisory teacher.

In 1977 I was appointed to the National Aboriginal Education Committee and therefore was a foundation member of that group. I have been a member and executive member of that committee from '77 right through to the present time. I have had actually two terms on the national committee.

*Going back to your experience in Papua New Guinea, John, can you think of any similarities or differences in the situation that existed there compared with what you now find in Australia?*

Probably the situation in many ways is very similar in that, to some extent, the Papua New Guinean people did not have English or standard English as their first language, and even in urban Brisbane there is an Aboriginal English spoken which is different from the standard English form. So many of the problems related to educating people whose mother tongue is not English are similar both in Papua New Guinea and in Australia. I sometimes wonder though, whether the same programs would be as effective as they were in Papua New Guinea.

I was fortunate I suppose, through my Papua New Guinea experience, in seeing a country develop from one that was underdeveloped to one that reached independence in 1975 - that was a very exciting experience and the way in which they did it, I think, is one way in which Aboriginal society and Aboriginal communities can develop also, namely, the localisation program which was an under-study type program - that is, individuals were selected to be trained

to take over jobs held by the expatriate person and over a period of three or four years the local Papua New Guinea person was trained in the skills that he would require to actually function in new positions and positions held by expatriates. Some academic study was also required. In this way, positions held by expatriate Australians could be filled by local people.

*Did this apply in the education system?  
Are there, for example, a lot of Papua  
New Guinea teachers now working in the  
system?*

Yes, while I was there, there were successful moves to localize the primary schools and I think by '74 at least 80 to 90% of primary schools were administered and controlled by Papua New Guineans. In the secondary area, which is my area, I had the honour and privilege of training two Papua New Guineans to become senior subject masters at Kila Kila High School. They worked with me for a period of twelve months and then did some further studies in Australia - actually at the Australian School of Pacific Administration - which by that stage had been changed into an administration training college rather than a teacher training college. Of the two people that I trained, one is now principal of a large high school in Lae while the other is working in administration with the Education Department in a senior administrative position.

*John, you have written and spoken a great  
deal about the importance of parent and  
community involvement - could you suggest  
some ways in which parents and the community  
could become more effectively involved in  
the educational process?*

I see the parents and the community playing a major role in education. I see that there are really four areas that need to be attacked to improve education for Aborigines and Islanders, and these are :

1. a greater increase in parental involvement
2. curriculum
3. teacher awareness
4. student interest.

The approach being taken up by the Queensland Education Department is probably an important way of involving parents a great deal more. What is happening is that a network of local advisory committees, consisting of Aboriginal parents, is being established. There are two types of these -

- . One which is attached to the principal of a school and which advises the principal. These are situated in schools which are on Aboriginal communities.
- . The other one is a regional based type of set-up in which the advisory group has representatives from each of the high schools in an area as representatives on the advisory group. At the regional level the group is responsible to the regional director for that region.

Now once these particular committees have been established there are two things they could do. The first one is that they work towards selecting a person to be an Aboriginal student counsellor. The role of the student counsellor is to work principally with the students in the first instance, in terms of making them aware of the sort of courses they need to do to achieve their goals, to assist them in their studies, to develop their study skills and to show a general interest in their education. Student counsellors could also work fairly extensively with the parents by visiting them or organizing parent meetings and therefore assisting parents in making them aware of the issues associated with schooling.

The parents' role then, and this is getting back to the advisory committee, and the role they perform as members of a local advisory group could be -

- a) in terms of influencing the curriculum being used in the respective schools or region;
- b) running in-service training programs for teachers new to the school to assist them in being able to cater for the differing needs and aspirations of the Aboriginal and Islander child in the school;
- c) Selecting of staff.

So through the establishment of local advisory committees of Aboriginal parents and interested adults you could have a greater involvement in the education of Aboriginal and Islander children. A larger

number of parents could therefore gain an increased knowledge of the value of education and henceforth provide a more informed viewpoint.

*John, what do you believe have been the most significant developments in Aboriginal education during the past decade?*

There have probably been two that are fairly outstanding. The first one has been an increase in involvement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in the decision policy making area. In each state in Australia now, except for Western Australia, there has been established an Aboriginal consultative group attached to the respective education departments. Western Australia has established regional based consultative groups but at this stage has not set up a state one. The role of these state consultative groups is to advise their respective ministers or directors-general of education on the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal children, to advise the respective education departments on specific programs that are required and to be aware of all the programs that are being established in their own state.

The second major factor of course, has been the greater number of Aboriginal children now entering high school and continuing beyond Year 10 in their education. In the past, statistics had indicated that Aboriginal children tend to leave school either at Year 10 or at age 15, whichever comes first, but in the last five years at least there has been a greater number of Aboriginal children attending school beyond Year 10, and this has been a very important factor which needs to be followed through in the next few years.

*Why do you think there are so many more students now continuing beyond the Year 10 level?*

I think, to a large extent, it's because parents are becoming more and more aware of the value of education. In the past their educational experience generally has not been one of very much success, and so they are reluctant to have a great deal of confidence in the education system. However, because of the particular support systems that have been established by state education departments, both the parents and the children are coming to realise that secondary education is important to satisfactorily cope with the dominant mainstream Australian society and its values and beliefs. For example, in Queensland there is an inspector of schools, whose responsibility, besides other things, is improving and providing support

for secondary students and their parents. He has working with him a team of advisory teachers who advise or develop or assist teachers in developing curricula for the school which caters specifically for the Aboriginal needs and aspirations. The advisory teachers are directly or indirectly advised by Aborigines and Islanders. I consider that as an outcome of such support services, more children are remaining at school after Year 10. Support services as established also encourage students toward further study by making them aware of all the occupational opportunities available for them. The Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme as administered by the Commonwealth Department of Education has also assisted in increasing numbers attending secondary schools. Previously, the low socio-economic status of Aboriginal/Islander society has meant that parents had to encourage Aboriginal/Islander students to leave school early and obtain employment to assist the rest of the family. ABSEG has meant largely that this is not now necessary.

*Looking towards the future now, John, what do you see as the major needs to be tackled in the future?*

I see basically there is really only one need which will affect the whole of the other needs and that would be the setting up of an Aboriginal Education Commission. It would be designed very similarly to the Schools Commission which has been set up. The variations, of course, would be that the Commission would be staffed, administered and directed largely by Aboriginal people. Such a commission would have a lot of contact with the already established state consultative groups as well as the intended establishment of your local regional bodies. Through this consultation network the spending of monies allocated to Aboriginal education would be wholly and solely in the hands of Aboriginal people. In the initial stages some non-Aboriginal/Islander expertise may be required. To make sure that this is an effective process it would be important that a large number of Aboriginal and Islander teachers, and personnel or professionals who have worked in the educational area for a fair period of time, be people that are appointed to the Commission.

*How do you think we can ensure that more Aboriginal teachers and professionals enter the field?*

I think that each state department needs to actually work out its own philosophies and its own plan of actions on how they can

increase the number of Aboriginal and Islander people entering teacher training. Another thing the states need to do, and this should apply particularly in the short term (the next four or five years) is for state education departments to guarantee the employment of people presently undergoing teacher training. Once that sort of guarantee is given then I think the number of Aboriginal/Islander people undergoing training to become teachers would increase.

I think another way of increasing the numbers of Aboriginal teachers is to look at the source that has already been established in the area of teacher aides/teacher assistants. At present there are about 600 of these employed in schools throughout the whole of Australia, and because of their experience of the community and their experience as teacher aides or assistants within the schools, they are a group of people from which education departments and teacher training authorities can draw. In some instances, in Queensland for example, we have people employed as Aboriginal teacher aides who have had extensive experience in the classroom. Unfortunately it is not possible at this stage for these people, if they so wished, to become teachers. The system says that they have to undergo formalized teacher training at a recognized institution and this of course prevents a lot of the mature-aged people from actually undertaking teacher training courses. Many of them obviously would have families and a move from their homeland to the urban areas where most of the teacher colleges exist would be a major disruption to their whole social life and existence. Not only that, the present financial assistance given to mature-aged people is not adequate for them to be enticed into teacher training - it's more feasible for them to attempt to get jobs rather than to undergo studies.

If we are going to look at people already in the field, such as the teacher aides/teacher assistants, we need then to negotiate not only with colleges of teacher education to encourage them to make some allowance for the practical experience of our present teacher aide force and provide some sort of bridging enrichment courses to assist them to become teachers, but also improve financial assistance to such people. It must be noted at this stage, that not all people presently employed as teacher aides and teacher assistants see themselves becoming teachers, and this is an important factor that needs to be considered.

*Is there any likelihood that these bridging courses and other avenues will be opened up within the near future?*

One of the main recommendations of the NAEC's research team's enquiry into teacher education was in the teacher aide area (or the people employed as teacher aides). The recommendation suggests that some sort of program be developed for teacher aides to become teachers, and I think it's one of the moves that I, as Chairman of the NAEC, would like to investigate further, or to move further towards achieving. I consider as I have had an incredible amount of involvement with teacher aides and their training in Queensland, that many of them would make tremendous teachers if the emphasis on the academic theoretical side of teacher training could be varied, and greater emphasis placed on the practical side. If teacher training becomes more a practical type of thing than what it is at present - a very theoretical investigation of education - many mature-age Aborigines/ Islanders could become teachers.

*Have you any further ideas at this stage about what you would like to be achieved by the NAEC during your term as chairman?*

Well, as I said earlier, I think the establishment of an Aboriginal Education Commission is the major thing. I feel once the power of decision-making in terms of funding is placed in the hands of Aboriginal people then many of the other issues can be overcome. I also am a little bit concerned at the Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme. At present many Aboriginal children in secondary schools are being placed under a great deal of pressure because of the introduction of the Secondary Grants Scheme. In my experience as an advisory teacher, in which I travelled around most of Queensland and talked to many secondary teachers, some of them seemed to believe falsely that because you get paid to come to school you should be able to learn. The logic behind such a statement is really quite invalid. But, there are problems in the Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme. I would like to see it extended to include non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of the same low socio-economic group that the present Aboriginal and Islander community is in. I would also like to increase the grant for the most disadvantaged groups in the Aboriginal/Islander society.

The third thing that I would like to see, and this again is sort of the major part of the Commission, would be the improvement in the consultation process between state consultative groups and the National Aboriginal Education Committee. At this stage there are problems with commonality in membership, decision-making powers and so forth, and I hope that by the end of the three years I will have established at least within the Aboriginal community a fairly

extensive consultation process, almost a federalistic one, which leads from your local communities to your national committee.

*Given that there is presently a shortage of Aboriginal teachers and the fact that many Aboriginal children will be taught by non-Aboriginal teachers, how do you think we can increase the sensitivity of the non-Aboriginal teachers to the needs of Aboriginal children.*

Well, obviously one way of doing it is to develop intensive in-service training programs. I would see one method of this being achieved is through the establishment, as I said earlier, of your local Aboriginal education committees. These groups of people could run weekend seminars, or workshops, and attempt to convince or to get across to non-Aboriginal teachers some of the needs, or the issues, associated with teaching Aboriginal and Islander children. I think once a process of consultation between the school and the community occurs then many of the problems will be overcome.

Another area that I see needs to be attacked is the pre-service training area. At present many teacher education institutions regard the consideration of teaching of Aboriginal children as an option in the course content. I consider it fairly important that teachers have some exposure to Aboriginal needs - and to Aboriginal people themselves - during their teacher training. Ways for this to be a reality are for teacher institutions to start to employ Aboriginal people as lecturers or to invite Aboriginal people to be guest speakers at their respective colleges. One of the realities of the present Australian society is that a teacher, regardless of where he undergoes training, will at some stage be confronted with a class in which there are some Aboriginal students - not only Aboriginal but also people from other cultural groups. Teachers who teach culturally different children whose home language is not standard English will be confronted with many educational issues. I think it is important then for teacher education institutions to consider multicultural courses of which one part of the multicultural course is education of Aboriginal and Islander people.

*Looking ahead to the year 2000, what are the things you would like to see achieved by then?*

Well, obviously I would like to see more Aboriginal teachers and administrators. Because there are only about 72 Aboriginal teachers at present there needs to be a tremendous drive to encourage Aboriginal and Islander people to go into teacher training. I think that once Aborigines/Islanders become teachers then there need to be further programs to ensure that they don't stay as teachers but that they become administrators from the principal level to the inspector of schools level or beyond. By the year 2000 I am hoping that all the policy and decision-making is largely in the hands of Aborigines. Informed Aborigines and Islanders can better decide their own destinies.

And the last one: I would hope that a proportionate number of Aboriginal children attending schools, both primary and secondary, are achieving as well as, if not better than, non-Aborigines throughout Australia.

*Finally John, have you any special thoughts you would like to send to the readers of The Aboriginal Child at School?*

I believe that the Aboriginalization of educational services for Aboriginals and Islanders is essential to ensure the improvement of education for my people. My definition of Aboriginalization does not mean the total take-over of services by Aboriginal and Island people, for I see a need for interested non-Aborigines to be involved also. However, I see that there is great scope within Australian education for Aboriginal people to be given opportunities to undertake policy decision-making and be more greatly involved in the implementation of services. For example, as I said previously, the Commission itself could be a great move towards improving education. The Commission would be solely Aboriginal. Maybe, in the first instance, there would need to be some non-Aboriginal people that could support the Commission and provide their expertise, but finally the Commission would be totally directed by Aborigines with non-Aboriginal/Islander consultants. I see for the improvement of Aboriginal education to be a reality then, the total Australian population needs to understand and appreciate Aboriginal people in their own right and the total population needs to work with Aboriginal and Islander people towards overcoming the many issues that are associated.

*Thank you John.*

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