



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.

ADMINISTRATION IN ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

*A paper delivered at the 4th National Aboriginal Education Conference, University of Queensland, St. Lucia, Brisbane, Qld
3-7 December, 1979*

*J.R. Budby

INTRODUCTION

Administration of Aboriginal education can perhaps be defined as the 'management of affairs' associated with education for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. Such management is placed in the hands of individuals who form part of a system, an entity that seeks to meet the needs and aspirations in education of the indigenous people of this country. The task therefore for the administrator is a massive one and involves a tremendous amount of responsibility. Administrators in education for indigenous Australians are the catalyst in an environment embracing all school-age Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander children - children of all ages, mentalities, skills, talents and aspirations.

Administrators have the power to make decisions concerning immediate needs; future needs; changing values and educational methods. To perform these duties adequately, the administrator must be aware of the rapidly changing education scene caused by technological, political, economic, and value changes within a particular society. This applies particularly to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society which is undergoing continual change and development.

Over the last few decades there have been changes within the indigenous Australian society affecting both the individual and the society as a whole. A greater sense of pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity has evolved. An increased awareness of the value of, as well as an understanding and appreciation

* Mr John Budby, Education Officer, Queensland Education Department. Executive Officer, Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Committee. Member of the National Aboriginal Education Committee - (*appointed Chairman, April, 1980*).

of education has occurred. An increased number of children attending schools is noticeable.

All of these changes could have been because of the work of administrators who have the unenviable level of authority and responsibility.

The role of administrators within education is therefore quite extensive. They are the educators, the professionals the field practitioners, and the policy developers, makers and implementers. They assess the needs and aspirations of the indigenous child in an ever-changing world, an ever more aware society and an ever more clearly demanding society.

In some instances, the services provided in education are not necessarily a reflection of the function of the administration. The system itself can create barriers. Change within the system does not occur as rapidly as the change in society. An analogy can be drawn between Australian society and the education system and the horse and buggy. The horse (society) decides the direction in which the buggy (education) goes. The buggy, however, never really catches up with the horse (unless because of an accident).

LEVELS OF ADMINISTRATION

The decision-making power of the individual depends largely upon the position that person holds within the educational system. In both private and public school administration there appears to be four levels of administration within all Australian states. These are at national, state, regional and school levels. Figure 1 outlines the administrative structure in the national, state, regional levels. The administrator in the school is the principal and his/her support staff.

Figure 1 shows quite clearly that there is a large number of support services in education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, all of which have administrative structures. Decision-making is done independently and therefore it is quite possible that duplication of services is a feature of such a complexity of individuals/groups responsible for the educational delivery of services.

The principal and support staff within a school have the power to make daily decisions on the management of his school. He is, however, controlled by the hierarchical structure of administrators above him. This causes some frustration and confusion.

FIGURE 1
NATIONAL-STATE-REGIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES

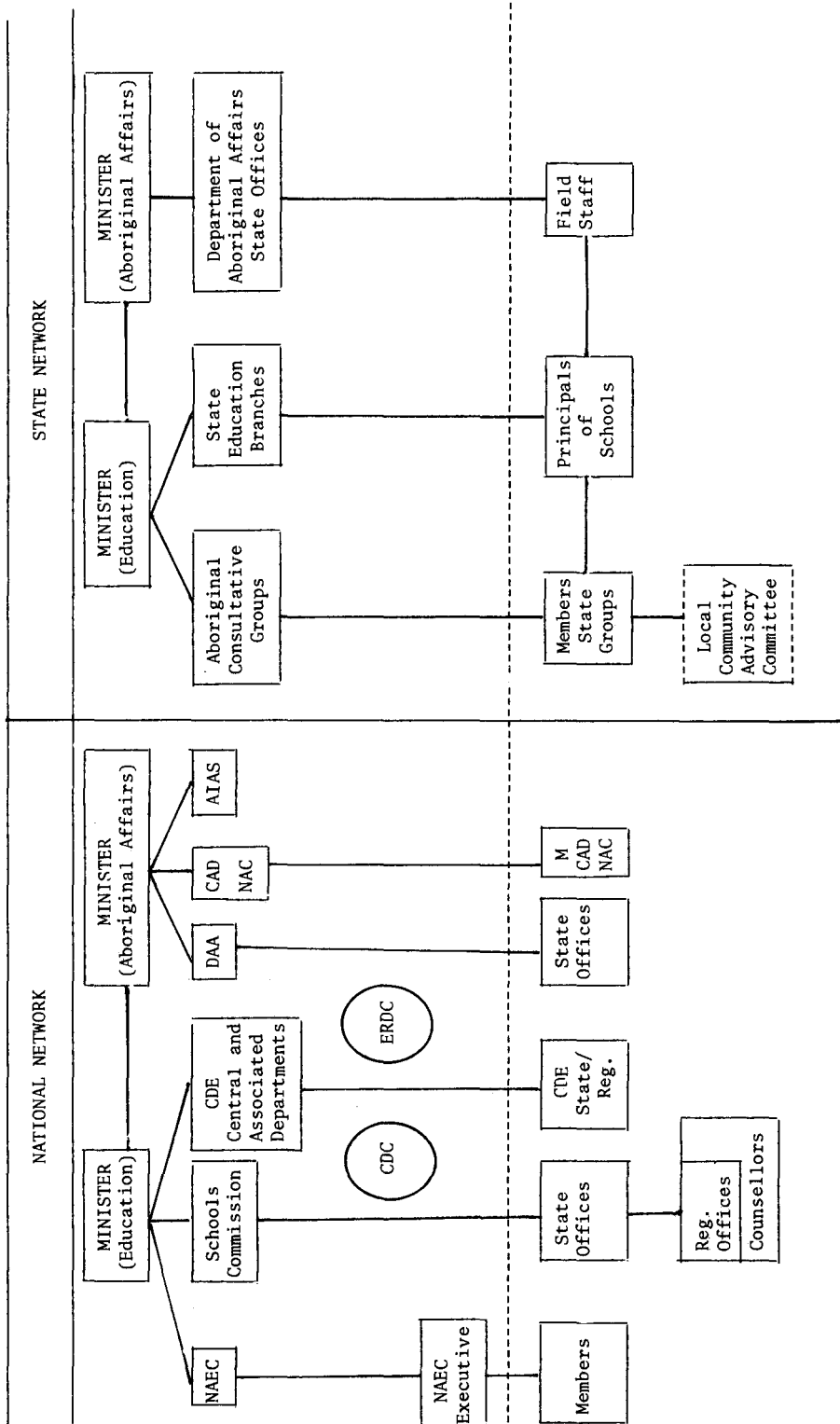
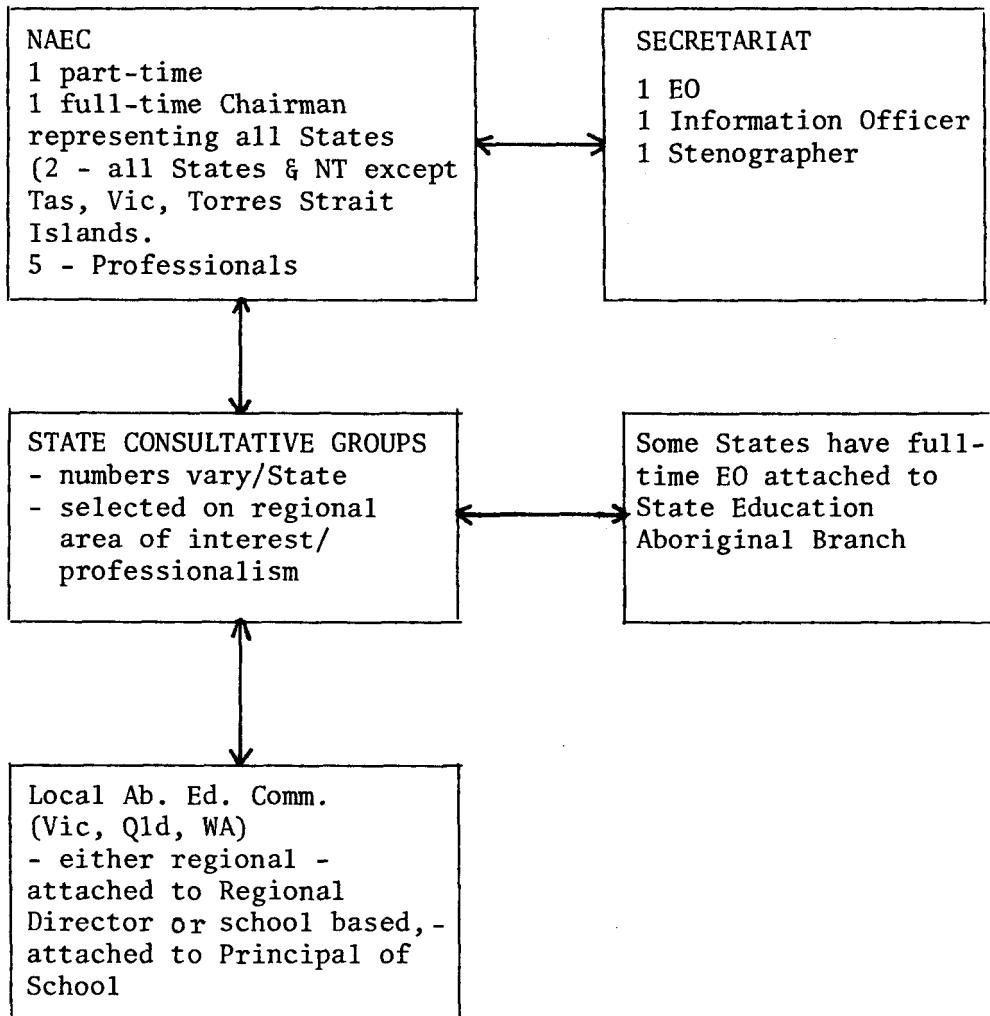


FIGURE 2

ABORIGINAL INVOLVEMENT



Administration depends to a large extent on the attitudes of the people holding the most senior position within the system. Administrators at this level often find it necessary to abandon old attitudes and values and assume new ones. Administrators at this level, and perhaps at all levels, face the continuous need for acquiring new abilities, new techniques and new concepts. This they can do through keeping abreast with societal changes and new philosophies and policies in education.

THE PRESENT SITUATION

Figure 1 gives some indication of the present administrative structure of the delivery of services in education for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. It should be noted at this stage that within this structure a limited amount of involvement of the indigenous people of Australia occurs.

Figure 2 gives an outline of the Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander involvement. Perhaps the unfortunate feature of such a structure is that the majority of indigenous individuals and groups within the structure are advisers/consultants. They influence, but do not have, in real terms, any decision-making powers.

The administration of education for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders is largely in the hands of non-Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islanders, a factor which needs to be rectified.

ISSUES WITHIN THE PRESENT STRUCTURE.

It should be noted that throughout Australia, because of the realisation and recognition that Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders can best reflect the needs and aspirations of their people, positive attempts have been made to involve indigenous Australian individuals/groups in the decision-making process. It is apparent, however, that there is some reluctance by senior administrators to actually permit Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders to make the final decisions.

In cases where individuals have been employed to advise senior administrators, they have become figureheads rather than real decision-makers. Authority and responsibility are rarely accredited to these individuals. Criticism levelled against the individual is in terms of whether one Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander person can actually reflect the needs and aspirations of the whole society, yet it is accepted that one non-indigenous person can.

Another escape that administrators use in creating a wall preventing Aboriginal people as individuals from assuming decision-making status, is the factor that there are not enough trained Aboriginal people. This I consider a feeble argument because surely if one were committed to a cause then planned academic study and understudy training could be organised. If this were done, then within a period of five to ten years the administration of education services for the indigenous people of this country could be satisfactorily controlled by Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

The education system which does not prevent changes in the status quo is also an issue that needs to be considered. Development of understudy positions depends to a large extent on the employment of people in administrative training positions. Staff ceilings as set by the Public Service Board make it difficult for new positions to be created. Administrators attempting to create such positions must be committed and prepared to negotiate strongly for the creation of positions for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. It probably could be said that the Public Service Board is an avenue in which minority groups can seek employment. For the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, education has been one branch of the Public Service which they have been able to enter. Once entered the Public Service, however, the indigenous people of this country should be trained, if they so wish, to assume administrative positions.

The group or departmental structures as outlined in Figures 1 and 2 are not satisfactorily co-ordinated. Consultation between and within each administrative structure is not adequate. It is apparent that there are far too many groups providing services. There is a need, perhaps, for a single governing body to administer this structure.

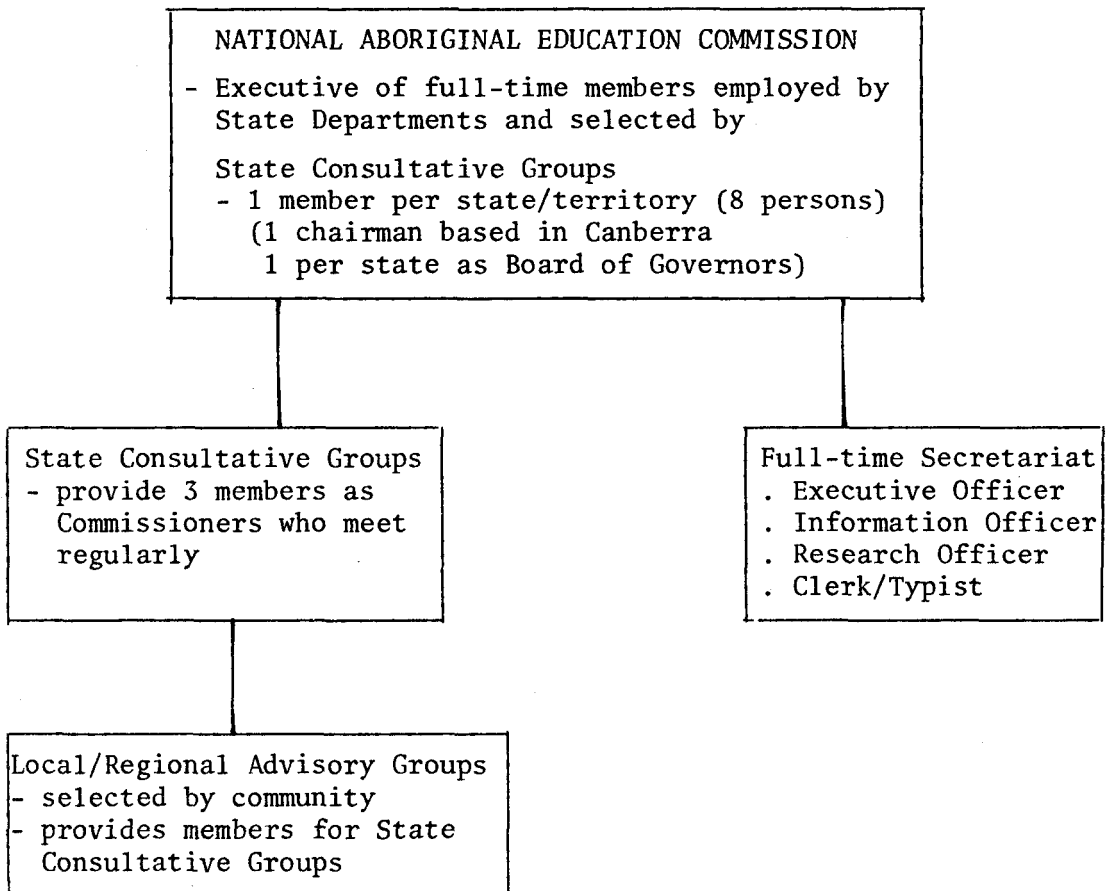
Another issue that needs to be raised is the apparent insensitivity of many administrators. Some tend to ignore advice given to them by the indigenous people. It is imperative that an increase in the number of suitably qualified Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders be given the responsibility and authority of administration.

Because of the diversity of Aboriginal society in terms of cultural embeddedness - (the NAEC Inquiry into Teacher Education located four categories) - it is essential that representatives from all sections of Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander society be given opportunities to be realistically involved in the administrative function of education for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. For this to occur manpower planning is essential.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS - FOR DISCUSSION

The National Aboriginal Education Committee has, as one of its aims, the establishment of a National Aboriginal Education Commission. Such a commission would be responsible for the total administration of education for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. It could be envisaged that such a commission would have decision-making powers on services in education provided by all other federal and state bodies involved in delivery of educational services and support. Because such a body would have national representation it probably would be necessary for the states to have some say in the structure of such a body. Figure 3 outlines a possible structure.

Figure 3



One of the important areas of decision-making in education has to do with the capacity to supply the trained manpower required. Each administrative body needs to consider the development of understudy positions. Figure 4 is one possibility.

Figure 4

	PERSONS A	PERSONS B	PERSONS C	PERSONS D
1980	Appointment as understudy as administrator			
1981	Suitable training	Appointment		
1982	Return to administrative position (regional)	Suitable training	Appointment	
1983	Further training (academic)	Return to administrative position (regional)	Suitable training	Appointment
1984	Senior administrative position	Further study		Suitable training

Senior Administrative Position

- * Appointment - trained teacher status preferable, but administrative skills considered. Position as understudy.
- * Training - teacher qualifications if necessary - training in school administration (Diploma).
- * Regional Office - broaden experiences.
- * Further training - to degree level if necessary - Education Administration.

Appointment to Senior Position -

Selection - Areas of education (pre-school to tertiary) as well as structure of Aboriginal society to be considered. Needs to be some balance.

Colleges of Advanced Education and other teacher training institutions have also a very important role in increasing enrolments for the indigenous people to undergo teacher training as well as providing courses in school administration so that the number of school administrators can be raised from below ten to a much larger amount, in proportion to the present teacher force and the Aboriginal community.

Provisions must be made for the creation of new administrative positions especially for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders within all Departments. Aboriginalisation of all education services is important. Aboriginalisation as I define it, does not necessarily mean the complete takeover of present services by indigenous Australians. It does, however, mean that an increased number of Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander people be given more power in decision-making. There will probably always be a need for non-Aborigines/Torres Strait Islanders to be a part of the education system of our people.

CONCLUSION

Because of the increased interest in education for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders it is imperative that the indigenous people of this country be given the opportunity to express/reflect and decide the directions education for our people should take in the next decade. This can only be achieved if they assume the senior positions within administration. Self-management can surely only become a reality if Aborigines are given the control of their own affairs.

To me, the present administrative structure in which Aborigines/Torres Strait Islanders are used in an advisory capacity is not sufficient. I consider that until the indigenous people are given responsibility and authority in the decision-making process, the betterment of education for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders will not be achieved.

.....