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THE ESTABLISHMENT OF REGIONAL ABORIGINAL COMMITTEES ON EDUCATION

M.L. O'Brien

It is a significant fact that in 150 years of European settlement there is still only a handful of Aborigines working in the field of education in this state. This means that Aboriginal parents have very little say in the educational policies and programs affecting their children and they are concerned about this. Because of the fact that many Aboriginal people have had little contact with the school situation, (in fact up till comparatively recently, many, as children, were actually excluded from attendance at school) they regard it as an alien institution, representing an academic world to which they do not belong. Consequently many Aboriginal people are hesitant to approach the school under any pretext, even for the purpose of enrolling their children. They need a corporate voice, an avenue of approach by which they can make contact with educational authorities, to make known their needs and aspirations, at whatever level necessary, and to feel assured that action will be taken in response to these needs.

With the object of providing a corporate voice for Aborigines in the educational scene in 1977 State Consultative Groups were set up in all states except Western Australia. Here in Western Australia, the need was seen by the Education Department to provide for organization at the grass roots level, and to plan for regional committees throughout the State. In September 1978, I was transferred from a classroom to the Aboriginal Education Branch as a community liaison officer, to instigate and facilitate the setting up of these committees, and to this date initial meetings have been held for this purpose in the following towns each serving a particular region: Bunbury, Kalgoorlie, Kellerberrin, Narrogin and Moora. At each meeting the keen response from the local Aboriginal community has indicated that this move to establish regional committees has their

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full approval and support. It is expected that by the end of 1980 a committee will have been established in each of the Education Department's regions.

Although it has been decided to allow for flexible membership to take into account the wide social developments or adaptation differentials evident in the various Aboriginal communities throughout the State, the following guidelines have been suggested:

- . N.A.C. member (or his representative)
- . N.A.E.C. member (if applicable) or his representative
- . Approximately 8 members representing the different Aboriginal organizations and communities.

The regional superintendent(s) or director(s) should be ex-officio members of the committee which has been established within the region of their particular education responsibility.

THE ROLE OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEES

It is expected that the role of the committee members will be fourfold and include the reflection of Aboriginal people in their respective regions, and to present these as accurately as possible to the regional authorities. It should also be the means of providing a reliable expression of informed Aboriginal views on the educational needs of the Aboriginal people and of appropriate methods for meeting these needs, thereby expressing views and exerting an influence at all levels of Aboriginal education. One of the main responsibilities of each committee will be to become informed on matters relating to the school and educational institutions in the area, and thereby to assist in liaising between school and parents. This liaison function is seen to be of great value to both school and community, providing a communication link in respect to matters of student placement, performance and progress as well as constituting a forum for the solving of individual problems where these arise. It is also hoped that through the activities of the committee Aboriginal parents will become more aware of the role and requirements of the school and thus assist their children better to fit into the scene. Through the Committee, Aboriginal parents will have support in their efforts to communicate with the school. On the other side, the committees will be available to support teachers in their contact with parents, thus fulfilling a need often expressed by teachers who, though willing, are unsure of themselves and hesitant about their approach. Regional superintendents will also benefit from the activity of the committee which can assist them to understand in more depth, the educational needs of the local community.

The development of Aboriginality in the school curriculum as well as educational programs and learning materials is an area in which the committees are ably fitted to contribute. I am sure the value of these regional committees is apparent to all concerned with the development of better opportunities in Aboriginal education and greater participation by Aborigines in their particular regions.

For some time at least, it will be necessary for educational authorities to build communication bridges to 'educate' people about schooling, to build up mutual trust and to allow for the authentic participation of Aborigines in the process of education. This will take time, patience, tolerance and understanding.

We are concerned with the education of our children, so that future generations of Aboriginal people will feel confident in the world of academics and able to express their views and participate actively in the educational scene without feelings of inferiority.

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NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Perth, W.A., August 1980

A National Conference on Child Development will be held at the University of Western Australia from 18-21 August, 1980. The Conference will provide an opportunity to consider current research in perceptual development, cognitive development, social development and the development of language and communication. It is envisaged that in each area there will be an invited address, a series of 30 minute papers describing current research, and a general discussion. The four invited speakers will be :

<i>Perceptual Development</i>	: Professor Ross Day (Monash University)
<i>Cognitive Development</i>	: Professor Gavin Seagram (ANU)
<i>Social Development</i>	: Professor Jacqueline Goodnow (Macquarie University)
<i>Development of Language and Communication</i>	: Dr Roger Wales (Melbourne University)

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