



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*.

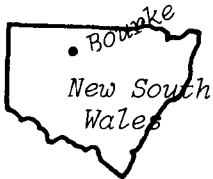
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5. Parents understand school more. Because the mothers have been 'in' on the reasons for doing certain things at Family Education, they seem to have more of an understanding that there are reasons for the things that are done at 'the big school'. I have noticed that children who have had an absentee problem have improved in their attendance at school since their mothers have been coming to Family Education with a smaller sibling.

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BLACK SCHOOLS : A STEP FORWARD OR BACK?

*D.Huggonson

Some radical Aborigines are currently advocating the establishment of Black Independent Schools because they are dissatisfied with the education and treatment which Aboriginal children are receiving in New South Wales Government Schools. It must be pointed out that every survey of Aboriginal education since the Department of Education became completely responsible for the education of all Aboriginal children in 1940, has reiterated the fact that the system is failing to adequately educate Aboriginal children. However, many older Aborigines and some conservative Aboriginal parents fear a return to substandard Mission Schools if separate Black Schools are widely established. They also fear that Black Schools would give white parents and school administrators a means of excluding Aboriginal children from regular Government Schools.

Most improvements in the system of education for Aborigines have been initiated and financed by the Commonwealth Government over the past ten years. The Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme designed to assist families in keeping their children at high school and the 60 Aboriginal teachers' aides in New South Wales are both Commonwealth-funded programs.

The NSW Department of Education seems content to co-operate with Commonwealth departments but to take no initiative themselves. What then can, and should the NSW Department do to improve the quality of education that Aboriginal children receive?

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Firstly, the number of Aboriginal teachers aides should be drastically increased and their placement should be determined on a needs basis by the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group. The membership of this group is wholly Aboriginal and is elected on a regional basis. Furthermore, the salaries of Aboriginal aides should be increased, so that males are attracted to the positions. There is one case in this state where an Aboriginal male aide earns less in wages than he would if he were receiving Social Security benefits. While on the subject of auxiliary jobs in schools, the Department could make principals aware of their responsibilities under the Public Service Boards' Equal Employment directive, whereby a percentage of jobs such as cleaners, general assistants and clerical assistants should be allocated to Aborigines. This is particularly important in schools with a significant Aboriginal enrolment and where unemployment rates in many Aboriginal communities are ten times higher than the white rate. The more Aboriginal adults that schools can employ, the greater the number of positive role models Aboriginal students will have to identify with, and relate to. Also schools will become less fearful places for Aboriginal parents if they know a member of their community works there.

The problems of Aboriginal education are exacerbated when schools are situated in isolated areas such as the Far-West of New South Wales. The Department currently gives prospective teachers no background briefing as to the conditions and problems in outback schools prior to their appointment. Consequently, many teachers feel that they will be eligible for a transfer to their North-Coast "NIRVANA" after two years' service. This 'mushroom -club' approach does nothing toward solving the real problems that exist in multi-racial isolated schools.

Who then can blame the Aboriginal radicals for wanting to establish Black Schools? At least in these schools, in times of high teachers' unemployment, the Aboriginal parents could select staff who like Aboriginal children and wish to make a career teaching them. The radicals also advocate that in Black Schools Aboriginal culture should be taught by Aborigines who are not necessarily qualified to do so under the white education system. The radicals hope that in Black Schools the children would feel that they belong and were not merely being treated as second-class citizens.

The Aboriginalization of schools with high Aboriginal enrolment must become the goal of the NSW Department of Education over the next five years or the system will continue to be alien to Aboriginal children.

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