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ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER VIEWS

REPORT:

FIFTH NATIONAL ABORIGINAL EDUCATION CONFERENCE

In the following pages we are pleased to present extracts from the report of the Fifth National Aboriginal Education Conference held at Medlow Bath between August 31 and September 5, 1980. We are grateful to the National Aboriginal Education Committee for allowing us to reproduce the extracts, the first of which is a presentation by representatives of Year 12 Aboriginal secondary students and the second, a presentation delivered by Aboriginal parents.

STUDENTS' PRESENTATION

We, as representatives of Year 12 Aboriginal secondary students on a national basis, would like to express what we feel are the positive and negative aspects about our present day education system. During the course of the past two days we have collectively identified some of the features of the education system which both please and disturb us.

Some of the pleasing features of the education system include: employment of Aboriginal teachers; employment of Aboriginal teacher aides; presence of Aboriginal student councillors; more opportunities open for Aboriginal students; visits by education officers (support and encouragement); financial support from Government; improved school facilities; parental support and awareness; better relations with senior students; courses enabling you to find out about new developments in areas like science and about people's philosophies through books; work experience for school leavers; Aboriginal seminars create awareness of opportunities for school leavers; conferences enable the exchange of views between the States.

However, having recognised some of the pleasing aspects of the education system it must now be said that there exist a number of areas which profoundly disturb us. We wish to identify some of these areas of concern for your consideration:

- . a limited syllabus results in limited opportunities for those who aren't intellectually inclined;
- . differing standards of education within a State;
- . hierarchy in schools creates barriers between students;

- . lack of courses in higher levels of secondary education which prepare students for life beyond school;
- . negative attitudes by non-Aboriginal teachers and students towards Aborigines obtaining grants;
- . there is a lack of male and female councillors in proportion to students;
- . grants should be accessible to higher primary children too;
- . history textbooks on Aboriginals are racist;
- . failure of non-Aboriginals to be aware of the different culture and background of Aboriginal students.

Due to the above we feel that there is a need for the introduction of Aboriginal Studies into our secondary curriculum and teachers' colleges, to create a realistic perspective on Aboriginal culture and heritage for non-Aboriginals and Aborigines themselves. This would incorporate the teaching of an Aboriginal language as a compulsory subject in all schools.

Perhaps the fact that formal education was given to Aboriginals around the 1940s (dates vary as per State) and that education beforehand was by missionaries lends itself to explaining our inequality of education.

Student representatives felt the following initiatives should be taken in Aboriginal education:

- . there is a need for the employment of more Aboriginal people within the education system at all levels;
- . Aboriginal liaison officers should be appointed at schools with large Aboriginal enrolments;
- . Aboriginal studies courses should include culture and language. They should be taught to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in a supportive and encouraging atmosphere;
- . textbooks should be changed to give a proper perspective to the history of Australia. This should start at pre-school continuing through primary and secondary schools to tertiary institutions, e.g. teachers colleges, medical training, etc.;
- . the education system should not only provide students with basic skills, but should be more aware of the individual;
- . from pre-school onwards, students should be given the responsibility and encouragement to voice their opinions and make decisions. By increasing their responsibility for decision

making as they get older, students would be more prepared for adult life;

- . a wider choice of syllabus should be available with more areas open to those not academically inclined. Students should be encouraged to study areas they are interested in, such as music while still maintaining general studies. Also a detailed domestic education program should be developed in transitional areas;
- . more parental involvement in communications with the school and students with the parent organisations to be set up for liaison, consultation, State conferences and seminars involving students, parents, teachers and the general community should be held in order to increase public awareness of the educational needs of Aboriginal people;
- . Aboriginal study grants need to be increased to more realistic levels for disadvantaged families especially those who have a pattern of unemployment and a large number of children.

In order to create a uniform standard of education throughout Australia, facilities and equipment must be upgraded in disadvantaged areas.

The Aboriginal students were greatly concerned by these matters. They felt their recommendations should be implemented as soon as possible not only to guarantee our future but that of succeeding generations.

EMPLOYMENT OF ABORIGINES IN POLICY MAKING AREAS - WHAT CAN STUDENTS DO?

We recommend there be a national Aboriginal student body to be involved with influencing education decisions from pre-school right through to tertiary levels. This should involve senior school and tertiary students. This body could work to create employment of Aborigines in policy making areas by advising on changes needed in:
a) Curriculum; b) Teacher education; c) Increased funding.

Curriculum changes will bring about a higher level of education and understanding towards the Aboriginal community. We see the main ones being the introduction of Aboriginal studies and upgrading of the education system.

There is a need to educate non-Aboriginal teachers about the problems and differences Aboriginal students face.

Increased funding will help Aboriginal students to obtain a higher level of education. This funding could be used for individual student assistance and to mount new programs.

In order for these changes to occur the Ministers for Education and Aboriginal Affairs and all Aboriginal bodies involved with education must recognise and endorse these priorities.

WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO TO ENSURE THE EMPLOYMENT OF ABORIGINES IN POLICY MAKING AREAS

University staff members should encourage the training of Aboriginal professionals through pressure for special entry schemes, e.g. doctors, lawyers and social workers. There is a need for more professionally trained Aborigines in the community because Aboriginal workers have a better understanding of the problems faced by Aborigines.

TEACHER TRAINING

Aborigines need to be employed/involved in teacher training programs for Aboriginals and non-Aboriginal teachers, e.g. Aboriginal studies, cross-cultural studies and race relations. Staff of teacher training institutions should support and encourage Aboriginal teacher trainees e.g., special entry enclave support programs. There is a need for teacher training institutions to produce more Aboriginal teachers. Most Aboriginal students can identify with Aboriginal teachers because they know that the teacher has experienced the problems that they are facing.

EMPLOYMENT OF ABORIGINES - TEACHERS' ROLE

Teachers should encourage Aboriginal parents to join school councils. Teachers should endeavour to have teacher unions develop a policy to increase the numbers of Aboriginal teachers and Aboriginal school visitors. Principals need to be sensitive to the needs of the local Aboriginal community and involve them in sensitization programs for the teachers.

ACTION REQUIRED BY STATE AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENTS

N.A.E.C. Aim 5 says

The immediate implementation of steps to increase, substantially and quickly, Aboriginal involvement, influence and participation in education programs at all levels offered to Aboriginal people throughout Australia. This will require the provision of large scale training programs, manpower planning, understudy

and planned academic study. Preparation of Aborigines for participation in these ways should include Aboriginal education, philosophy and community influenced curriculum content.

Advancement in Aboriginal education will become a reality when the following aim is achieved.

The establishment of a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander College of Advanced Education with campuses located in several areas of Australia. The NATSICAE could offer a wide variety of courses at all levels.

If achieved this aim would place Aborigines in a more advantageous position in terms of having equal opportunity in the areas of education, employment, training, and community development.

STATE CONSULTATIVE GROUPS

The State Consultative Groups in all States need to lobby for teacher training and special entry to tertiary institutions enabling further education of Aboriginal students leading to a higher level of future employment. Also that the State Consultative Groups apply pressure to the Education Departments to have Aboriginal resource teachers replaced immediately with Aboriginal teachers when they have qualified and completed training.

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL CONFERENCE

The National Aboriginal Conference respectively should follow up and actively support the aims set by the NAEC and SCG's by putting forth recommendations to the respective Federal Ministers.

On a State basis the National Aboriginal Conference should make recommendations to the Premiers requesting staff funding for the employment of Aborigines in Departments of Education, Health and Community Welfare.

In order to create the necessary changes in curriculum, teacher education and gain increased funding, the employment of Aborigines in policy making areas is essential. The cooperation of Ministers at both State and Commonwealth levels (e.g. Education, Aboriginal Affairs) as well as all Aboriginal bodies involved in education such as the National Aboriginal Education Committee and State Consultative Groups, will ensure that these changes eventuate.

CURRICULUM

It has become obvious from discussions that there is a need for curricula reform because the present curriculum does not appear to recognise the presence of Aborigines in this country. Curricula reform including Aboriginal Studies would mean support, and better communication between Aborigines and non-Aborigines. It would make schooling relevant and interesting to Aborigines in that it would provide an awareness of Aboriginal heritage and culture, thus enabling the survival of Aboriginal Studies as a reflection of Australian history.

The curriculum in Australian schools should be an accurate record of the development of Australian history. In any attempt to develop suitable orientated curriculum dealing with Aboriginal Studies, it is essential that we, as Aboriginal students be involved in its development. Through this Conference we are able to present our views about the organization of the curriculum.

We propose that the success of the curriculum would rely upon the co-operation and active participation of the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC), the Schools Commission, the State Education Departments, and other non-Aborigines.

Guidelines could be established by the NAEC with the CDC developing those guidelines in close consultation with relevant Aboriginal people. The participation of the Aboriginal people could occur at every stage in the curriculum's development.

There could be a National Aboriginal Studies Program that could involve the simultaneous participation of every State. Therefore curriculum reform would involve State Education Departments so that they, too, realize the importance and need for a greater awareness of Aboriginal cultures. It is also necessary to have the support of the Schools Commission because it may be able to finance some of the Aboriginal Studies programs.

In future years, an Aboriginal Curriculum Unit could be established and in line with the NAEC and SCG's, aim for Aborigines having a say in the development of curriculum.

Teachers when developing curriculum should recognise and support the need to introduce Aboriginal Studies into school curriculum either through individual awareness or through the involvement of the Aboriginal School Visitor.

Teachers in their first-year need to have an awareness of:

1. Student - teacher relationship across cultural boundaries.
2. Aboriginal history and culture.
3. Particular disadvantages Aboriginal children face.

Teachers should recognise and utilise the experience Aboriginal Teacher Assistants offer in their capacity as para-professionals.

It has become apparent from our Students Workshop that there is a need for curriculum reform because the present curriculum has not included Aboriginal history.

Today Australian society prides itself as being advanced - but, it has offered very little to the advancement of its Aboriginal peoples. Non-Aboriginal history reflects the hypocrisy of this society in its degrading treatment of Aborigines, therefore each and every Australian must make a conscious effort to rectify the present situation.

Aboriginal Studies is an integral part of the education of students in relation to the history of Australia.

WHAT CAN RELEVANT ABORIGINAL GROUPS (NAC, NAEC, SCG) DO?

We, as a student body, commented on the following Aboriginal organizations: *National Aboriginal Conference*, *National Aboriginal Education Committee* and the *State Consultative Groups*, on how they could benefit Aborigines.

Aboriginal bodies such as these should reflect the needs of the Aboriginal communities in accordance with the curriculum available to all students throughout Australia. This would enable both Aborigines and non-Aborigines to have a better insight into what problems arise in Aboriginal society and how to cope with them.

Also Aboriginal bodies should be responsible to the Aboriginal community through a central co-ordinating unit. This unit would give the individual community a closer understanding of how they function. It would also give a sense of unification which is important to the Aboriginal development.

Organisations should work on a basis of accountability as these are the committee's that hold the communities interest in Aboriginal curriculum.

Aboriginal bodies should not accept only an advisory role. They should take on a policy role, that is, designed to develop the curriculum relevant to Aboriginals.

These committees should provide information in the form of: newsletter, information sheets, leaflets, and pamphlets on curriculum and differences between various Aboriginal communities.

In the interest of Aboriginal communities these groups should pressure government bodies that have the influence and the ability to introduce a new curriculum that includes Aboriginal Studies.

Some of the major considerations that should be looked at are the needs of isolated Aboriginal communities. Often the one teacher is expected to teach a group of students ranging from grade 1 through to grade 10 in the same classroom. Therefore, the students are often left behind academically. To aid teachers in this predicament it would be quite feasible to introduce teaching resources such as audio visual equipment for individual work. This should also be available to economically disadvantaged metropolitan schools.

Encouragement from these departments would hasten the acceptance of Aboriginal Studies into the Australian curriculum. Another major consideration is that Aboriginals are best able to determine their own educational needs and curriculum through these departments to acquire a sense of self achievement.

In order to carry out Aboriginal research for a suitable curriculum it is most necessary that Aboriginals gain constructive support and a great deal of financial assistance from these departments.

A greater advantage would be gained by the Aboriginal community if the Education Departments were to ensure that teachers who have participated in Aboriginal Studies should have priority in employment over teachers who have not done so. An advantage would be gained by the Aboriginal community in a way that there would be a better student/teacher relationship. This would enable both parties to overcome cultural barriers and achieve greater vocations.

Concerning curriculum development and Aboriginal acceptance in this field it was suggested by the student body that Aboriginals be employed as understudies to non-Aboriginals holding senior positions in policy making areas. This is a means by which Aboriginals can gain the necessary qualifications to fill such a position.

In conclusion, we, as representatives of the Senior Aboriginal Students wish to stress the following:

- . There needs to be a complete investigation into the effectiveness of the existing education system in its catering for the educational needs of Aboriginal students.
- . We have listed a number of points which have both pleased us and disturbed us. We would like to believe that you, as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, concerned with our educational development, will not only listen but in fact hear a voice which has been too long ignored. That being the voice of Aboriginal students.
- . We recognise the value of education in terms of our development as individuals, and as members of the Aboriginal community. We welcome and appreciate the opportunity you have given us to voice our opinion in the area which mainly concerns us.

PARENTS' PRESENTATION

At the fifth N.A.E.C. National Conference, Aboriginal parents have been given the opportunity of presenting first hand, their impressions and ideas on education of Aboriginal children in Australia. This initiative was well received by the parents who seized the opportunity and openly gave informed and relevant comments.

Many important issues were discussed during the two day plenary session held immediately prior to the main conference. Good points in education were raised and encouraged as well as providing possible solutions to the never ending educational problems that Aboriginal children face in schools and the wider community.

During group discussions two vital areas of concern were raised. The two main areas of concern dealt with in this paper are:

1. Techniques to change negative teacher attitudes about Aborigines.
2. Ways of increasing Aboriginal involvement to develop relevant Aboriginal education programs.

Several favourable initiatives have been taken by individuals, groups or Education Departments in the field of education over the past years. The recognition of the many difficulties that Aboriginal children face have been recognised with the introduction of specialist

Aboriginal resource people in schools, i.e. Aboriginal Teacher Aides, A.T.A.'s Home School Liaison Officers, trained Aboriginal Teachers and Aboriginal Resource people.

Financial support has also been provided to Aboriginal communities in the form of Aboriginal Study Grants, Secondary Grants and Schools Commission Innovations and special Project Grants.

Some isolated instances of teacher training and sensitization has also occurred over the last few years which has helped develop better understanding of the Aboriginal child at school.

These positive developments have been good, but parents felt that these developments have been far too slow and much too isolated to create the necessary changes in education for Aboriginal children. Projects and programs of this type are merely 'band aid' approaches to a far more extensive and real problem faced in education.

Much frustration and anxiety was expressed in several areas in education. These are:

1. Lack of opportunity to determine the educational functions of our children because of
 - a) Excessive, ultimate powers of principals.
 - b) Lack of control of funds.
 - c) Poor lines of communication between schools and Aboriginal communities.
2. Limited human and physical resources, i.e. relevant texts, libraries, specialist Aboriginal teachers, e.g. counsellors, vocational officers and ineffective use of A.T.A.'s.
3. Irrelevant curriculum which does not cater for the individual and group needs of Aborigines.
4. The inadequate training of teachers to cope with Aborigines in the classroom which could be remedied through effective in-service and pre-service training. Many Aboriginal children change schools frequently and the standardisation of syllabus and curriculum throughout Australia would assist their educational development.

Parent and community involvement in all schools is essential for the social, cultural and academic development of Aboriginal children. It will enable parents to become aware of the educational

needs of their children. Parental involvement will allow parents to support and encourage their children. This will lead to higher motivation of children in their academic pursuits. This can be achieved by parents being on school committees, local, State and Aboriginal Education Committees.

Parents felt that the following initiatives should be taken in the schools:

1. Aboriginal parents should be represented on educational committees dealing with these children.
2. Aboriginal Studies should be introduced in schools and related to individual regions.
3. Development of positive self-esteem in Aboriginal students and communities. This will be achieved by encouraging elders to participate in local community based Aboriginal based curriculum.
4. Community should select teaching assistance in their own area. Having a local community member as a teaching assistant would have more knowledge of the students' background, capabilities, etc. thus creating a positive learning environment.
5. Stimulate activities within the community by involving the parents.

By the schools allowing better use of school facilities e.g. library, halls, gymnasiums by the local Aboriginal community. This can create a family atmosphere and a positive relationship between parent and teachers and helps to prepare the way for pre-school children.

CHANGE ATTITUDES OF NON-ABORIGINAL TEACHERS

1. (a) Teacher training courses should have more Aboriginal people as guest speakers to talk about the real Aboriginal way of life, (their ways) their different life styles and their way of thinking.
(b) More practical involvement with Aboriginal people, i.e. work in communities etc.
2. Teachers need to be aware of the day to day problems of students in their care:

- a) An empty stomach
- b) Lack of adequate sleep
- c) Hygiene and personal hygiene i.e. suitable clothing
- d) Home environment
- e) Communication with parents
- f) Suitable reading material on Aborigines - Censure some of the materials that are being written

3. Compulsory courses in Aboriginal Studies.

MORE ABORIGINAL TEACHERS

- 1. For betterment of education and one way of overcoming teacher attitudes is to have more Aboriginal teachers. Parents need to accept Aboriginal people as teachers. Aboriginal teachers need to be more involved in the interest of the Aboriginal people in the area. Aboriginal teachers need to know who they are and what they are employed for. They become too involved in the non-Aboriginal way of life.

THE ABORIGINAL TEACHER ASSISTANTS FOR MORE EFFECTIVE USE

- 2. A second method is to have more Aboriginal teacher assistants in every classroom and to ensure that they are effectively used in their classroom.

WHAT CAN THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT DO TO CHANGE TEACHER ATTITUDES?

Attitudes can be changed by the Department of Education by employing only students that have successfully completed an Aboriginal Studies course and by providing in-service training courses.

More Aboriginal Teacher Aides, Home-School Co-ordinators, Pre-school teachers and Vocational Officers should be employed by the Department to cater for the needs of Aboriginal children. This will certainly help to improve attitudes and racial relations.

Principals should communicate with Aboriginal communities and organisations so that they are aware of the Aboriginal needs.

Funding should be provided to carry out the above mentioned aims and funds also made available for in-service Aborigines to be released for field work, thus creating better relations between school and community.

WHAT CAN RELEVANT ABORIGINAL BODIES DO?

The national bodies have the responsibility for representing the needs of the Aboriginal people to the Commonwealth Ministers of Aboriginal Affairs and Education.

The N.A.E.C. believes that the Aboriginal people should be involved in the education of all Australian Aboriginal history and culture. This will bring about a better understanding of cultural differences. Teachers would be more aware of the Aboriginal child's needs in the class and other professional people would be able to relate more easily to the Aboriginal community.

The various bodies should communicate with teachers, teacher's unions (primary, secondary, tertiary). This could be implemented by attending their meetings, giving talks etc., to create awareness of the Aboriginal needs.

ABORIGINAL INVOLVEMENT

A. ABORIGINAL EDUCATION COMMITTEES

The establishment of a local Aboriginal Parents Committee could affect both the students' and parents' attitude to the school as well as the communities attitude to itself in education issues.

The Committee's membership would be made up of people not already working in the schools, such as teacher aides. The Committee should attract membership from the local community by calling together all interested parents to discuss general issues in the school and community. The local school principal or principals in larger towns, would be asked to accept that such a Committee is needed for the following reasons:

A.i. EFFECTS ON SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS

1. To encourage the involvement of parents in the schools and to advise the schools on special needs as they exist in the school.
2. To assist the school staff in developing a sensitivity towards the individual Aboriginal student.
3. To assist in the writing and content of relevant curriculum for Aboriginal students in school.
4. To support teachers who could assist Aboriginal students in the schools.

5. To give current information to schools on the special events or changes as they occur in the community.
6. To keep information or family information up to date so that schools can accommodate these changes.

A.ii. EFFECTS ON COMMUNITY

1. By being a member of an Education Committee of Aboriginal parents, members gain confidence in speaking on and being aware of education issues.
2. A committee working together as a solid body, could attract funds to support special programs for Aboriginal students and community groups.
3. The Committee can speak on behalf of individual students and parents who would feel confident enough to speak out on issues that affect them or their children.

B. TEACHERS

Through teachers becoming involved with Aboriginal parent groups, and in offering their support to these groups, programs that provide a positive learning situation in the schools may be developed.

1. Attend in-service education workshops run by parents of students in the school at the beginning of each school year.
2. Listen to Aboriginal parents and discuss the special needs of Aboriginal students at the local level.
3. Work together with Aboriginal parents during the year to encourage students to stay on at school by fostering a positive attitude to the school/learning environment.
4. Liaise with Aboriginal parents and community members in deciding on the content of Aboriginal studies programs, parents could give local information of foods, crafts, cooking, singing, dancing, painting, stories and other aspects of the local cultural setting.
5. Contact parents to assist them in gaining knowledge of Aboriginal families and the families and the family structures.
6. Help to train Aboriginal teacher aides in their training in the school situation.

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