



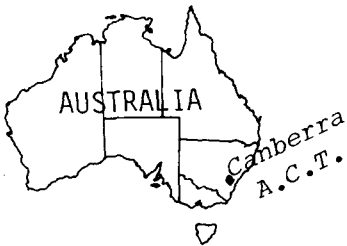
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ABORIGINAL VIEWS:

*ABORIGINAL STUDIES

DEFINITION OF ABORIGINAL STUDIES

"Aboriginal Studies is essentially a study of the cultures and history of the indigenous peoples of Australia. Such studies also involve those issues which are of contemporary or historic interest to Aboriginal society and consequently to the total Australian community".

BACKGROUND

"The NAEC adopts the view expressed in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which reads in part:-

Everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

For Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, as a minority indigenous group, these two communities in which they are desirous of participating, namely, their own and that of the wider Australian community." (P5. *Submission to the National Inquiry into Teacher Education*).

The Aboriginal Consultative Group to the Schools Commission in their report *Education for Aborigines* states that:-

"We believe that every child has a right to be brought up as a member of his own culture.

This does not mean he must be prevented from learning about (and learning from) other cultures, but simply for survival the individual must be firmly rooted in his past and (perhaps more than his present) in his culture."

* A draft statement on Aboriginal Studies developed by the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the Commonwealth Working Party on Aboriginal Studies. NAEC invites readers to comment on the statement and a selection of responses will be printed in their next "NEWSLETTER" - P.O.Box 826, Woden, ACT. 2606.

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Aboriginal Studies must start with the knowledge and understanding that prior to colonisation Aboriginal people lived satisfying lives well adapted to their environment. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' existence in this country dates back to at least 40,000 years. During this time, unique cultures evolved which enabled Aborigines to achieve complete harmony with the land.

Traditional Aboriginal life was and still is rich, spiritual, complex and meaningful. It was not merely an inheritance of myth and ritual that gave order and value to the Aboriginal existence, but rather an interpretation of the environment and a consciousness of the interdependence, the relatedness of things in the world. The patterns of the relationships are central to Aboriginal spirituality and the study of Aboriginal spiritual life reveals a deep sensitivity and subtlety which is beyond the knowledge of most non-Aborigines.

Through extensive knowledge of and spiritual ties with the land, the traditional Aborigine became skilful in the art of survival, approaching the land and its surroundings in a scientific manner. This enabled them to develop an expert knowledge of their land, its seasons, animals and plant life and the rocks and mountains which featured significantly throughout daily life.

Traditional Aboriginal education aimed at preparing a person to function effectively in a society which does not emphasise material values but those community values of responsibility and obligations which are an important part of an extended family group.

European colonisation stimulated revolutionary changes within the traditional societies; it also created the major challenges and problems facing these societies today. *The failure to examine this history has led to the failure of white Australians to understand these problems of culture clash acculturation.*

Changes caused through contact with other cultural groups has had an impact on contemporary Aboriginal society. The NAEC supports the Aboriginal Consultative Group to the Schools Commission when they say:-

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture should be retained and that Aboriginal identity should be actively developed through education. It is accepted that some parts of Aboriginal culture and folklore associated with survival in pre-European times should now be replaced with those skills which will allow the Aboriginal people to participate equally in the trade and professional areas of the Australian economy.

Furthermore,

"We are not prepared, however, to sacrifice social values such as responsibility for the well-being of others, sharing and non-destructive competition. These are a fundamental part of our identity. Such values should in no way exclude Aboriginal...people from acquisition of vocational and professional skills which will allow them the same level of achievement in the monetary economy of the non-Aboriginal Australian society."

Aborigines today wish to be part of mainstream Australian society but wish also to be recognised as the indigenous people of Australia with differing cultural values. Aborigines wish to be recognised and appreciated as a separate identity within the total Australian population. We seek the highest quality of education available with equality of opportunity and outcome in education. Such equality to be achieved through creating options.

Some Aborigines in contemporary society wish to be assimilated, others integrated, while others wish to retain their tribal values and customs. Movement then into Australian society should be as one desires.

Aboriginal Studies should not only promote Aboriginal culture values but also investigate the historical aspects and the cultural conflicts which have influenced the lifestyle of present day Aboriginal society.

IMPLEMENTATION

Aboriginal Studies is the study of the indigenous people of Australia and as such plays an integral role in the history of Australia. Aboriginal Studies should therefore be an integrated part of every Australian child's education.

Aboriginal Studies should never be seen as a simple unit of work which will be presented and completed in a given period. The area of Aboriginal Studies must be seen as a continuous one which will involve all teachers and subject areas from early childhood education to tertiary. While specific sections of work on Aboriginal Studies may be undertaken at various times it should never be presented as a complete unit of work but always as part of an ongoing program.

Aboriginal Studies has two important components. It should

- a) develop an appreciation and understanding of cultural values;
- b) explore the impact of the historical and cross-cultural contact and the effects this has had on contemporary Aboriginal life.

Aborigines are better able to understand and communicate their cultural values and history. The teaching of Aboriginal Studies should be carried out by teamwork between Aboriginal people and teachers. Those cultural elements of a religious nature such as sacred ceremonies or rites should be taught by the various communities.

"This requires that Aborigines be given the responsibility for the assessment of the suitability of all materials and approaches in Aboriginal Studies.

In practical terms, it is essential that Aboriginal people at the local level be consulted and involved in organisation and implementation of Aboriginal Studies programs. Wherever there is more than one community, *all* groups need to be consulted.

Where there are no Aboriginal groups within the school community, then the NAEC and/or State Aboriginal Consultative Groups in education should be consulted." (p.134 *National Aboriginal Studies Seminar Report, 1978*)

In teaching historical aspects in Aboriginal Studies, consideration needs to be given to incorporating an Aboriginal viewpoint. Collection of history with an Aboriginal point of view will achieve a historical balance.

Aborigines can best develop such historical perspectives.

Because of the diverse nature of Aboriginal society in relation to cultural knowledge and compliance with cultural beliefs and customs, the teaching about traditional Aborigines should be done so in varying degrees and at the discretion of community demands.

Above all, it should be remembered that Aboriginal Studies plays an integral part in history of Australia and should be taught to all children in all schools at all levels.

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