



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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ABORIGINAL EDUCATION POLICY*

1. THE RATIONALE OF ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

- 1.1 An Aborigine is a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island descent, who identifies and is accepted as such by the community with which he or she is associated.
- 1.2 Aboriginal education in N.S.W. is concerned with:
 - 1.2.1 all educational services affecting the education of Aboriginal children;
 - 1.2.2 programs which will enhance self-esteem and cultural identity for Aboriginal children;
 - 1.2.3 the education of all children in respect of contemporary and traditional Aboriginal society.
- 1.3 The curriculum organization of the school should take account of the specific educational needs, interests and strengths of Aboriginal children.
- 1.4 Aboriginal communities should be involved, through consultation and participation, in making the learning environment and the school curriculum relevant to the needs of their children.
- 1.5 Awareness and acceptance of the bilcultural needs of the child, and self-esteem are essential to the success of Aboriginal children in schools.
- 1.6 Conflict between the values of home and school is destructive of self-concept, motivation and personal achievement.
- 1.7 Cultural differences should be perceived with sensitivity and interest so that the teacher, child and parent form a mutually supportive relationship.
- 1.8 Aboriginal mores, oral history and philosophical attitudes play a significant part in forming the views of the Aboriginal child.

* New South Wales, Department of Education, Directorate of Special Programs, 1982. Reprinted with permission.

- 1.9 The Aboriginal child's early and continuing education in some homes is based on communication which may place more emphasis on non-verbal learning than is found in the wider community.

2. THE AIMS OF ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

The aims of Aboriginal Education are to:

- 2.1 develop in Aboriginal children an enhanced sense of personal worth through the acceptance and appreciation not only of their specific Aboriginal identity, but also of their role in the wider Australian community;
- 2.2 provide classroom opportunities for all children to examine, compare and clarify the values, attitudes and beliefs that they have assumed about their own culture and about other cultures;
- 2.3 encourage in all children acceptance of the rights of different people to hold different values, attitudes and beliefs;
- 2.4 provide, for Aboriginal children, opportunities to gain a knowledge of how Australian society and other societies function;
- 2.5 ensure that the school curriculum contains an Aboriginal perspective;
- 2.6 encourage in all children the development of knowledge, understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal heritage and cultures;
- 2.7 encourage administrators and teachers at all levels to promote communication between schools and Aboriginal communities and to involve those communities in the education of their children;
- 2.8 encourage positive attitudes in Aboriginal parents and children towards the school and education as a means of gaining the knowledge and skills needed for effective participation in society generally;
- 2.9 encourage teachers to develop knowledge and understanding of the educational needs of Aboriginal children, and to provide opportunities for Aboriginal children to contribute freely to and experience success in school life.

- 2.10 assist Aboriginal children to be competent in all living skills;
- 2.11 provide opportunities, where appropriate and approved by relevant Aboriginal communities, for the maintenance and development of Aboriginal languages;
- 2.12 ensure an awareness and respect for Aboriginal English when developing competency in standard English;
- 2.13 provide an educational environment and educational experiences through which Aboriginal children will be helped to choose a life style which is personally satisfying in the context of a multicultural Australian society.

3. IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 Considerations for the Individual Child

- 3.1.1 Competence in skills is a basic need for each child. Aboriginal children may, for a variety of reasons, have language patterns that are different from those used for instruction, and teachers will be most successful where their teaching reflects an understanding of these language patterns. There is a need, therefore, for schools to emphasise and develop those skills through the implementation of relevant teaching strategies and educational programs which build on the language, instructional and social needs and experiences of children.
- 3.1.2 Aboriginal communities recognise the importance of the social skills used within the wider society. Contemporary Aboriginal culture has inherited cultural patterns of traditional Aboriginal society. Furthermore, the values, attitudes and beliefs of Aboriginal people today owe more to this tradition than to the way of life in the wider society. As Aboriginal children live in a multicultural society, schools should provide them with the social skills and strategies needed in the wider society while preserving their Aboriginality and personal identity.
- 3.1.3 Because many resources available to schools have been negative or misleading, schools should adopt a positive approach and ensure that accurate information is

provided about Aboriginal history, identity and culture throughout the curriculum.

3.2 Considerations for the Teacher

- 3.2.1 The teacher's attitude in valuing other cultural traditions is crucial if there is to be an effective effort to understand the Aboriginal child. It is important that all teachers who are involved in the education of Aboriginal children learn about and recognise the values and traditions of the Aboriginal community.
- 3.2.2 It is important for the teacher to respond to initiatives taken by the child in order that the child experiences early success. Early reward by the teacher of abilities the child demonstrates will assist in achievement and acceptance.
- 3.2.3 Where the home teaching/learning methods are markedly non-verbal in nature, there may be a consequent need for teachers to modify and adapt their teaching strategies accordingly.

3.3. Considerations for the School

- 3.3.1 There is a need for schools to develop, in all children, the ability to relate to each other in a way which takes account of their various cultural backgrounds.
- 3.3.2 It is important for the school to realise that Aboriginal children have unique needs which are influenced by the attitudes, values and beliefs of Aboriginal society.
- 3.3.3 In presenting the history of this nation, the identification and examination of Aboriginal participation and contributions would be a significant development in enhancing an Aboriginal relevance to the school curriculum.
- 3.3.4 Aboriginal Studies merits attention in its own right, and may include:

- 3.3.4.1. contemporary Aboriginal situations - traditional rural and urban communities, in consultation with local Aboriginal communities where possible;
- 3.3.4.2 traditional, environmental, spiritual, and historical concepts which sustained a complex society for at least 40-50,000 years prior to European settlement, in consultation with local Aboriginal communities where possible;
- 3.3.4.3 the breakdown of the complex society which followed the advent of European settlement, because of conflicting interests and differing attitudes towards the land;
- 3.3.4.4. efforts to retain or regain Aboriginality through land rights, respect and equality;
- 3.3.4.5 examination of Aboriginal values and the students' own attitudes towards Aborigines;
- 3.3.4.6 examination of community values from all view-points. The involvement of all children in genuine cultural experiences is an essential component in developing cultural awareness and appreciation.

3.4 Considerations for the Community

- 3.4.1 Aboriginal citizens view education as a major strategy for self-determination.
- 3.4.2 Community education is necessary to bring home and school close together so that Aboriginal children in particular can gain maximum benefit from education. In the process of education, parent and home realities are powerful forces; and schools which are aware of sociological factors will be better able to provide for the specific needs of Aboriginal children.
- 3.4.3 Aboriginal children can be expected to perceive the school recognises and accommodates to the needs of the Aboriginal community. Children will derive most

benefit where the school and its community work co-operatively towards the attainment of agreed goals.

- 3.4.4 Aboriginal people should be encouraged to play a major part in the development and management of those services affecting them. To ensure such involvement, Aboriginal children need to be given opportunities to develop a knowledge and understanding of society, its institutions and its decision-making processes.
- 3.4.5 Aboriginal communities differ from one another, even though there are similarities, and so do Aboriginal children. The greatest need of Aboriginal children, and Aboriginal communities, is to be responded to as individuals, and as individual communities. This can be achieved by involving communities in the formal education of the child. Structures need to be established so that the Aboriginal community may become involved.

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DID YOU KNOW?

The National Aboriginal Education Committee is publishing a Newsletter which is designed to bring news and information to as many Aboriginal communities as possible, particularly those in isolated and outback areas. Copies were originally distributed to Aboriginal organizations and communities, State and Commonwealth Education Departments.

If you would like to make further enquiries regarding the N.A.E.C. Newsletter, the contact address is:

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