



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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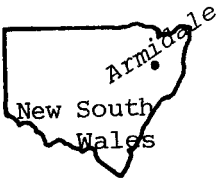
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involved with throughout the school and the community.

Although I am based at the Swin Hill Technical School, I work with three other Aboriginal educators and one home visitor in Swan Hill. The three educators are David Tournier, Caroline Steel and John Kennedy and the home visitor is Dolly Maher. Every Wednesday we have Aboriginal educator training at the Aboriginal Learning Centre at Swan Hill North. We learn all different subjects which we think will help us with our jobs. Our resource teacher, Ms Jill Pattenden, is also the co-ordinator for our training day. All of the educators in Swan Hill have had experience in teaching a course on Aboriginal Studies to primary level. We also have large discussions with secondary level students. The training days that we attend prepare us for teaching. It is also a good time for us to get together and give each other ideas.

We, as Aboriginal educators, report to our Aboriginal Education Committee once every fortnight. We hand in a written report to the committee to show what work we have been doing to help our people.

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MY NEW LIFESTYLE

*P. Dixon

It is twenty-five years since I left school. At the moment I'm doing an eighteen month training program to be an Addiction Worker. As part of the evaluation of the training program I have been asked to write down my thoughts and feelings about my training.

Some people involved in the program have suggested to me that teachers might be interested in my early childhood experiences - growing up on a reserve and going to an all Aboriginal school.

* Mrs Pat Dixon, Trainee Addiction Worker, Armidale & New England Hospital, Dependency Resource Unit, Armidale NSW.

As I look at it now, I think that education is so important to Aboriginal people. I have one son attending primary school and one has just left high school. I hope my story will help teachers understand why it is hard sometimes for Aboriginal parents to communicate with them.

I was born in Kempsey and raised on Bellbrook Reserve. I lived there with my family (eight sisters and three brothers) and most of my aunts and uncles also lived there at that time. I had a good, happy upbringing, my family were all very close. In my school days my teachers were kind but didn't really teach me much. A lot of what I'm learning now I should have learnt then. The teachers in those days were getting paid for doing nothing. That makes me angry now - the teachers, especially on the reserve (unless the government had a policy not to teach us) didn't think it was worth teaching Aboriginal kids.

The teacher on the reserve was also the manager, and his wife the matron. They didn't want to let us learn anything - we had to do everything for them (washing, cleaning, carting wood) but they never wanted to show us how to do things for ourselves.

Bellbrook was a prejudiced town. There were lots of things we weren't allowed to do - we had to always sit at the front of the pictures - not mix with the white kids. We weren't allowed to go to the pub, we weren't allowed to walk around free. If we did they used to think we were up to something - always put us down.

When I got to fourteen I realised I was doing nothing at school. I stayed in sixth class for four years just doing the same old thing. I decided to leave school and go to Sydney. The Welfare used to get us domestic live-in jobs. I was upset to leave Bellbrook and the rest of my family but I still wanted to go mainly because four of my sisters were living in Sydney. My first job was terrible. I was just a servant -- I was even accused of stealing money. I was frightened, very scared and shy but I stayed on for about six months.

The welfare worker got me another job with people who treated me like one of the family. That was good and I stayed there a long time. I had other live-in jobs with people I really liked working for but at that time I met my husband and I left.

The jobs I had taught me a lot - to take pride in things, that it was easy to waste money, and I learnt a lot about food and cooking. But I never ever (before my training) looked so much at

myself. I knew I was important to my family and I was always proud of being an Aboriginal, but I never really valued myself as I do now.

My husband was from Coonamble - he used to pick up work here and there. My life changed again. I wasn't used to travelling so much - we moved from family to family and never really knew what married life was all about until my second son was born.

Then we decided to come to Armidale and settle down. We both got a permanent job and saved up for a home. Our life got good when we moved here. We were treated like real people and I had all my family around. Before my training started I worked here at the Armidale and New England Hospital for quite a while (about ten years) in the catering section. I enjoyed my work then but I didn't know any better, and all the time I was there I always thought I'd like to get a better job. The people I worked with were my friends. They thought I was 'soft' and 'kind', but I was quiet and I'd rather work than talk. Sometimes I felt very upset. I pretended not to be, especially when I had things said to me about other Aboriginals. I couldn't let it get the best end of me 'cause it would get me in a terrible state.

I was the Aboriginal on the staff the longest - most Aboriginal people used to come and go.

It was always in my mind to work with Aboriginal people, especially in health, because I always used to see them around the hospital sick, and I knew they'd never live long. That used to make me feel pretty sad. I saw a few people (white and Aboriginal) die, especially with alcohol - I saw some terrible deaths.

I heard about a job in addiction, and that one position was for a woman. So I took a chance and put in for it. I felt good when I got it. I didn't realise I had to do a training. I thought I would have to work along with someone helping people with alcohol problems.

When I started, I was thinking what did I let myself in for? It was different from what I expected. It was like going back to school again - more, because I never did those things in school. Everything was so different - things I'd never heard about before - especially words. I was pleased when I knew we had someone to help with literacy.

I worried a lot about whether I'd pass but as time went on I had more confidence in myself. At first there were lots of new things to learn. I didn't think I would be able to cope, but I took one day at a time and worked very hard.

I changed a lot - in ways my family didn't understand. I could see myself changing so much it really frightened me for a while. I tried to remember all the new things and I was worried that I wouldn't remember. But I worked things out in my way and I talked to Toni about it.

When I took the pressures of work home with me it caused quarrels and upsets. My family didn't realise what I was going through. That's changed now because I find I can talk it out, look at myself and just take things steadier.

Early in my training there were a few things I didn't like at first - like staff development meetings. I didn't realise that if I had become involved more it would have helped us all and eased the pressure on myself.

I didn't like role-play - I would sit in the background so I didn't have to get up and do things. Again I had no confidence in myself. As I look back on that now I see that it was meant to help us communicate better with clients.

Telling the Aboriginal community what we are doing at the Dependency Resource Unit is hard sometimes. Quite a few Aboriginal people would ask me to go out to the community and do something about their husband, brother or relation who was in grogstrife. I would invite them to come up to the Unit. The first thing they thought about was that the Dependency Unit was a rehabilitation place. So I would get frustrated trying to explain to my folks that I was only in training as an addiction worker. I always asked them if they would like to come up to the Unit to see Doctor O'Neill or Sister Toni Dowd. Today, I can explain my work better and what the Unit's got to offer. Some of my family and other people have come in to see what I do.

The whole time I'm going through this training, in the back of my mind I just keep thinking about: "Will I have a permanent job?" But I'm learning something every day and I enjoy what I'm doing. I very seldom get bored.

The most important thing I have got from my training is not to put myself down. I feel that with the new skills I am learning I really have something to contribute to Aboriginal health and welfare.

I can see now that training is so important to every Aboriginal person who's working in health.

My training has increased my self confidence and my communication skills have improved. I didn't realise there was so much work to be done to train people. It has taken me a whole year to see that, but I know Toni enjoys her work and likes teaching people; I have learned a lot.

It is a slow old process. But as time goes by I will have the knowledge and skills to help Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

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NEW PUBLICATION

Mills John : *Bilingual Education in Australian Schools*
ACER, Oct. 1982, 96 pages, ISBN: 0 85563 245 3

Price \$8.00

The publication is intended to provide an up-to-date commentary on the history and current status of bilingual education programs of all types, in each Australian state and territory.

By means of a review of the various types and styles of bilingual programs which are possible, and those which are at present being conducted in overseas countries with high migrant populations (USA; Federal Republic of Germany; Sweden), insight is given into the Australian programs for migrants and Aborigines.

The review will be of interest to all teacher-participants in such programs (for adults as well as for children), and to curriculum specialists in schools and departments who want an analysis and evaluation of existing bilingual programs. It should also prove of interest and value to those involved in teacher education (trainees and trainers) concerning the teaching of foreign languages, ESL and mother-tongue English.

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