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§ RATIONALE, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

FOR ABORIGINAL EDUCATION IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Prepared by - the South Australian Aboriginal Education Consultative Committee, June 1983

FOREWORD

This document represents the views of many people and groups who have been involved in Aboriginal education. It represents particularly the combined work of all the Aboriginal people who have been members of the South Australian Aboriginal Education Consultative Committee. For over twelve months we have been developing the content of this document to the extent where we believe that we have accurately reflected the views of our community.

We further acknowledge our connections to the the South Australian Education Department and the South Australian Institute of Teachers along with various non-Aboriginal Ministers and educationalists with whom we have spent many hours in earnest debate and discussion. The above has led us to believe that the statements we have made are both urgent and necessary as reflections of an Aboriginal viewpoint.

While this document has a particularly South Australian relevance we have had an involvement with statements made by the National Aboriginal Education Committee and our statements reflect the national view also. We also acknowledge the work done by the N.S.W. Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and the N.S.W. Education Department for we have drawn upon these documents in our statements.

Finally, we acknowledge our parents and grandparents who have had to endure many difficulties in education and who have been speaking of the inappropriateness of the services for many years. It is our belief that in preparing this document we are using our skills to honour our obligations to our society.

Peter Zweckl
Chairman '83

Paul Hughes
Chairman '79 - '82

I. SOUTH AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL EDUCATION CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

INTRODUCTION

The S.A.A.E.C.C. is an all Aboriginal committee beginning firstly from an interim committee of 5 members in September 1977, with a grant from the Commonwealth Schools Commission, to a 12 member consultative committee established in May 1978. The Committee is now funded through the Ministry of Education with 14 members.

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ASSUMPTIONS

There are several assumptions which underlie the establishment and operations of the committee:

1. The establishment of philosophies and purposes for Aboriginal education are a necessary foundation for Aboriginal social and community development. These philosophies and purposes can best be established by regular consultation and review by Aboriginal people, communities and professionals.
2. A Consultative Committee represents the most appropriate mechanism for providing the link between Aboriginal communities and the institutions providing educational services.
3. The work of the Committee will have two basic orientations:
 - i) Information collection, research and dissemination, and
 - ii) Policy and planning.
4. The State department of Education and Statutory bodies will develop and support the annual programmes with the advice of the S.A.A.E.C.C. in the context of overall policies with respect to Aboriginal Affairs.
5. The Committee must have sufficient financial support by way of an internal operating budget to carry out its functions effectively.

6. The Committee must be closely linked to the policy and administrative dimensions of education decision making.

7. A State Committee will be involved at field level with providing and facilitating local Aboriginal input into new initiatives or existing programmes.

II. THE RATIONALE FOR ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

The South Australian Aboriginal Education Committee has developed this document because we have an intense personal interest in the future of our society. It is our belief that the provisions to date in education services to Aborigines has not resulted in significant success.

Historically the lack of positive attitudes in Australia towards Aborigines has meant that the provision of state education services has been a recent occurrence.

We acknowledge that there are external factors that work against education. Despite those factors, education systems have failed to encourage and reinforce in Aboriginal students positive feelings of pride in their heritage and cultural identity. Education systems have not produced significant numbers of Aboriginal students with the necessary skills to succeed in the mainstream society.

We contend that the theories and methodologies used in education are designed by and for middle class Australians of Anglo-Saxon extraction.

We assert that education has failed to recognise that Aboriginal society is significantly different to Western non-Aboriginal society. Aboriginal cultural values and languages are very different in many ways to those of non-Aboriginals.

Therefore these theories and methodologies are largely inappropriate and this also contributes to a lack of success for Aboriginal students. The end result of this is institutionalised racism and assimilation albeit unintentional and unconscious.

We reject the belief that it is our society's fault that we have not succeeded. That thinking is a classic 'deficit hypothesis'. We warn that unless educational authorities professionally recognise and take action upon the issues we have raised the current inadequate situation for Aborigines in education will be perpetuated. The

South Australian Aboriginal Education Consultative Committee asserts that our people deserve the right to their own Aboriginal identity as well as being able to achieve academic success.

Only when educators are able to provide an education system suited to our needs will we be able to take our place with dignity as the original inhabitants in this state and country.

III. THE AIMS OF ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

DEFINITION OF AN ABORIGINAL PERSON

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.

The South Australian Aboriginal Education Committee is concerned with:

- all educational services affecting the education of Aboriginal children and adults;
- programs that will enhance self-esteem and cultural identity for Aboriginal children and adults;
- the education of all people in South Australia, particularly children, in respect of contemporary and traditional Aboriginal society.

The aim of Aboriginal education should therefore be to:

- ensure that the curriculum organisation of the education institution take account of the specific education needs, interests and strengths of Aboriginal students;
- involve Aboriginal communities through consultation and participation, in making the learning environment and the curriculum relevant to the needs of their students;
- ensure that teachers/lecturers are aware of and accept that the self-esteem and bicultural needs of Aboriginal students are essential for student success;
- ensure an awareness and respect for Aboriginal English as a legitimate dialect when developing competency in 'standard' English;
- perceive cultural values and differences with sensitivity and interest so that the teacher, student and parent form a mutually supportive relationship;

- recognise that Aboriginal mores, oral history and philosophical attitudes play a significant part in forming the views of the Aboriginal student;
- recognise that 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;
- develop in Aboriginal students 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;
- provide classroom opportunities for all students to examine, compare and clarify the values, attitudes and beliefs that they have assumed about their own culture and about other cultures;
- encourage in all students the development of knowledge, understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal heritage and culture;
- encourage administrators and teachers at all levels to promote communication between education agencies and Aboriginal communities in the education of their students;
- encourage teachers to develop knowledge and understanding of the educational needs of Aboriginal children, and to provide opportunities for Aboriginal children to experience success in school life;
- provide opportunities, where appropriate and approved by relevant Aboriginal communities, for the maintenance and development of Aboriginal languages.

The Committee provides the following information on particular areas.

CONSULTATION WITH THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY

We consider it absolutely essential that all future developments in Aboriginal Education must occur with the involvement of Aboriginal people. At this point in time our community does not have sufficient numbers employed in the various sectors of education processes to allow for Aboriginal involvement on a regular and easily accessible basis.

It is therefore essential that local, regional and state consultative committees gain active support and be recognised as groups

which reflect the view of the Aboriginal community and can provide a means of a formal working partnership for educational agencies.

Our community chooses to involve people from all sections of our society as well as those in education. Whilst this can lead to a variety of opinion it also provides a diversity of information upon which to base education decisions.

We also maintain that our state systems of committees should link into the National Aboriginal Education Committee. Aboriginal society in Australia is bonded together in kinship and concern for each other irrespective of the ambiguities and separation sometimes shown in State and Commonwealth relationships.

EDUCATION IN TRADITIONAL AREAS OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The Pitjantjatjara Lands in the North West of the state and Yalata are the traditional areas of South Australia. As the people living in these areas still hold to and live by the values and culture in the traditional way their needs in education vary greatly from those areas where Aboriginal people are minority groups.

This committee believes that education in traditional areas must be an integral part of the community. What is taught and the methods used for teaching should be an extension of the current knowledge and values of the community. Accordingly the selection of informed education personnel is absolutely essential. Ideally this should involve Aboriginal people.

We accept that the provision of educational services in these locations are recent but we feel that much more needs to be done particularly in the area of a greater communication between the educational agencies and the community. This communication is essential if traditional culture is to be respected as a living thing.

EDUCATION IN NON-TRADITIONAL AREAS

There are a number of Aboriginal communities where the community no longer live in the traditional manner. Communities such as Nepabunna, Point Pearce, Point McLeay and Koonibba. Successive Government policies have resulted in these communities being deprived of resources and services. Much damage has been done over the years by oppressive attitudes to these areas.

The role of educational services in these areas needs extensive action and support. The Committee believes that each of these

communities needs access to T.A.F.E. services on-site on a continuous basis to enable the adults of these communities the opportunity to make up the education deprivation.

The schooling service should pay attention to the needs of Aboriginal students and work towards developing appropriate curriculum and methodology.

The Committee believes that on some communities a secondary program to year 10 could viably operate. This would make use of Aboriginal community support, particularly positive peer group support. We believe that this could lead to more students remaining at school and better prepared to enter years 11 and 12 when at an age to cope in mixed situations and not be dispersed and hidden throughout the secondary system.

In all aspects of education consultation with the Aboriginal community is essential.

EDUCATION IN URBAN AREAS

A significant percentage of our people live in minority urban situations in the city and large country towns. Most of these people have moved to these situations and have suffered the same oppression as people in the non-traditional communities.

The need for relevant curricula and methodology for students taught by sensitive and informed educators apply to both traditional and urban communities.

Adult education opportunities are also a paramount need particularly in the 15-20 year old group.

Our people in urban areas are dispersed through the wider community. We consider it necessary that opportunities be made to allow our children of secondary age to come together as a group for schooling. This would make constructive use of Aboriginal community support and also particularly positive reinforcement amongst the Aboriginal student peer group.

PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

The Committee believes that pre-schooling should provide a positive experience which will contribute to the child's total development as an Aborigine. This means that the curricula and methodology employed should be flexible to cater for the differing

cultural values of the child. Pre-schools must be an extension of the child's home, building on the skills the child has and providing the best learning situation with both staff and parents involved.

Appropriate pre-school programmes are vital for the successful transition from pre-school to primary schooling.

PRIMARY EDUCATION

Primary schooling should provide for the continued development of the Aboriginal child's identity. It should also allow for the child to develop the primary academic skills by using the appropriate methodology in a way that is culturally compatible.

We maintain that the differences in Aboriginal culture, values and language apply also in children in urban areas. The successful provision of primary schooling is absolutely essential to the future of our people. Our society will no longer accept the inadequate low level of achievement at primary school.

We believe that the provision of appropriate primary schooling will do much to assist the situation currently in secondary schooling.

SECONDARY SCHOOLING

The success rate of our children at secondary level is appalling and such lack of success would not be acceptable to other Australians. It is not acceptable to us. Until such time as pre-schools and primary education are able to produce standards acceptable to us we believe that making constructive use of Aboriginal peer groups in secondary school is worthy of consideration even to the point of all-Aboriginal classes. The development of appropriate curricula and methodology is necessary as well as the implementation of Aboriginal Studies programmes.

TECHNICAL AND FURTHER EDUCATION

T.A.F.E. programmes must provide opportunities for Aborigines to acquire education skills on a recurrent basis. They should also provide an educational environment to allow Aborigines to choose a lifestyle which is personally satisfying.

T.A.F.E. programmes must respond to the requests of the community to meet their needs in literacy and numeracy, employment training, leisure programmes and certificate programmes.

The provision of on-going education should be made available to all Aboriginal people in South Australia. The Committee believes that programmes developed by the School of Aboriginal Education should be accredited to allow for recurrent education opportunities to occur. For this to succeed it is necessary for the state to offer permanent positions to lecturers in Aboriginal education.

TERTIARY EDUCATION

Aboriginal society is grossly under-represented in the professions. It is essential that opportunities for access to tertiary programmes be made available to allow our students to achieve the qualifications necessary for entry to the various professions. For programmes to be successful it is necessary that institutions provide enclave support services to these students.

At this point in time we endorse the National Aboriginal Education Committee policy of teacher education for Aborigines as a priority. There is an urgent need for at least 200 Aboriginal teachers in South Australia by the year 2000 as our students urgently need Aboriginal people in the school systems. It is essential that this training proceed and employment be offered to graduates.

This Committee urges that, as tertiary graduates emerge, policies of positive discrimination be developed to allow for these people to take over positions of leadership and administration in Aboriginal Affairs and Education.

ABORIGINAL RESOURCE PEOPLE

Aboriginal people as Aboriginal Education Workers, specialist advisers and Home School Visitors are an essential and integral part of Aboriginal Education in this state. It is vital that these roles be given appropriate status, tenure, salary, and recognition. They should therefore be permanent employees of the Education Department. It is these people who provide the immediate interface between the school, its students and the community.

ABORIGINAL STUDIES

Aboriginal Studies within schools in South Australia must be taught as a distinct subject within the school curriculum and be an essential aspect of the learning process for all children, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal (K-12). This, however, does not exclude integration of aspects about Aborigines in other subject areas as this is also needed.

It is of paramount importance that teaching takes place which is accurate and produces an appreciation of the culture of people, both traditional and contemporary.

To achieve this children should be made aware of:

- Traditional life
- The extent and nature of the Aboriginal presence in this country.
- The extent of the culture clash after European contact.
- The differing lifestyle within the Aboriginal Community today.
- Aboriginal languages.

Pre and in-service training programmes need to be provided for teachers involved in the area of Aboriginal Studies.

Aboriginal studies courses should ideally be locally based - beginning with a study of the traditional life practised by the people living in the area of the school. The use of local Aborigines as resource people is essential.

Aboriginal people should be involved in all processes, such as:

- Production of resources - A.V.Kits
- Reviewing resources to librarians and teachers
- Promoting resources to librarians and teachers
- Teaching of Aboriginal Studies including languages.

IV. OBJECTIVES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The following statements refer particularly to school situations. This is not to deny that these points have relevance to the T.A.F.E. and Tertiary situations as well, but it is our view that if our future is to be assured the primary need now is in schools.

1. CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE INDIVIDUAL CHILD

- 1.1 Competence in skills is a basic need for each child. Aboriginal children may for a variety of reasons, have language patterns which differ 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 programmes which build on the language, instructional and social need and experiences of children.

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 society. Furthermore, the values, attitudes and beliefs of Aboriginal people today owe more to this tradition than to the life-style in the wider society. As Aboriginal children live in a multiracial society, schools should provide them with the social skills and strategies needed in the wider society while preserving their Aboriginality and personal identity.

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.

2. CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE TEACHER

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.

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 encouragement by the teacher of abilities the child demonstrates will assist in achievement and acceptance.

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. CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE SCHOOL

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.

- 3.2 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 In presenting the history of this nation, the identification and examination of Aboriginal participation and contributions prior to and after European settlement would enhance an Aboriginal relevance to the school curriculum.
- 3.4 Aboriginal Studies merits attention in its own right, and should include consultation with local Aboriginal communities in the following areas.
 - 3.4.1 contemporary Aboriginal situations - traditional rural and urban communities;
 - 3.4.2 traditional, environmental, spiritual, and historical concepts which sustained a complex society for at least 30-50,000 years prior to European settlement;
 - 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;
 - 3.4.4. examination of Aboriginal values and the students' own attitudes towards Aborigines;
 - 3.4.5 examination of community values from all viewpoints. The involvement of all children in genuine cultural experiences is an essential component in developing cultural awareness and appreciation.
4. CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE COMMUNITY
 - 4.1 We view education as a major strategy for self-determination.
 - 4.2 Community education is necessary to bring home and school close together so that Aboriginal children in particular can gain maximum benefits 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 our children.

- 4.3 Our children can be expected to perceive the school as important to them where the school recognises and accommodates the needs of the community. Children will derive most benefit where the school and its community work co-operatively towards the attainment of agreed goals.
- 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, our children need to be given opportunities to develop a knowledge and understanding of society, its institutions and its decision-making processes.
- 4.5 Our communities differ from one another, as do Aboriginal children, even though there are similarities. The greatest need of our children, and 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.

V. ABORIGINAL EDUCATION POLICY SUPPORT STATEMENT

There is a diversity of Aboriginal communities at state, regional and local levels. There is need for local community support for all programmes implemented for Aboriginal students. Where there is no local community, efforts should be made to contact the Local/Regional/State Aboriginal Education Consultative Committee or the Aboriginal Education Section for advice, assistance or support.

Implementation of the policy statement on Aboriginal Education requires attention to the following: the child, the teacher, the school and the community.

1. THE CHILD

Personal, instructional and curriculum needs are interrelated and the following sections emphasise particular aspects which are of relevance in other sections. These include:

- 1.1 acceptance as an Aborigine;
- 1.2 positive pupil-teacher-pupil relationships;
- 1.3 understanding by the school of the home background and respect for the values of the child;
- 1.4 fostering of self-esteem in the school/community environment;
- 1.5 self-concept development through activities which develop confidence and success;

1. 6 clearly explained and discrete units of work;
1. 7 learning based on activities to gain experience;
1. 8 balance between indoor and outdoor activities;
1. 9 early success through short activities;
- 1.10 specific language development programmes which expose children progressively to the words, the symbols and the concepts of the language of instruction in schools;
- 1.11 specific numeracy programmes;
- 1.12 praising groups rather than individuals;
- 1.13 team and group-work to build confidence.

2. INSTRUCTIONAL NEEDS

These include:

- 2.1 planning programmes based on the competencies the child has developed in the home, social and physical environments;
- 2.2 demonstrating for the child the learning activities involved;
- 2.3 support for the Aboriginal child's need to achieve whilst respecting Aboriginal attitudes towards achievement;
- 2.4 an active learning environment which fosters the curiosity of the Aboriginal child;
- 2.5 a consideration of different learning styles, especially those in the non-verbal mode;
- 2.6 attention to each individual child.

3. CURRICULUM NEEDS

These include:

- 3.1 a relevant curriculum which meets the needs of the Aboriginal child as a member of Aboriginal society and of the wider community;
- 3.2 effective methodologies for teaching literacy and numeracy;
- 3.3 books, stories and poems written by and/or about Aborigines and their way of life;
- 3.4 work experience;
- 3.5 transition education programmes;
- 3.6 health and nutrition programmes;

- 3. 7 personal development programmes;
- 3. 8 a supportive classroom structure which is flexible and secure;
- 3. 9 knowledge, skills, attitudes and values components which can further develop positive attitudes towards the Aboriginal child's own society, e.g. Aboriginal Studies;
- 3.10 consulting with the Aboriginal community to ensure that the needs of Aboriginal children are being met.

4. THE TEACHER

- 4. 1 Personal strategies and approaches may require an understanding of cultural difference and similarities and their impact on the processes of education, for example:
 - 4. 1.1 emphasis in the Aboriginal community on sharing and 'kin allegiance';
 - 4. 1.2 Aboriginal concept of duties and responsibilities;
 - 4. 1.3 how Aborigines view the past, present and future;
 - 4. 1.4 Aboriginal learning methods;
 - 4. 1.5 the differing competitive nature of Aboriginal society relevant to other societies and its respect for individual rights;
- 4. 2 awareness of one's own attitudes, and those of other teachers, towards Aboriginal society;
- 4. 3 the skills of home-school liaison;
- 4. 4 skills in developing relevant curricula and appropriate strategies in the learning/teaching situation to meet the needs of the Aboriginal child;
- 4. 5 knowledge of the effects that unemployment, poor housing, poor health and poverty have on children;
- 4. 6 appreciation of the need to involve parents and the Aboriginal community with, and within the school, in the education of their children;
- 4. 7 taking time to find a realistic base on which to begin academic work;
- 4. 9 talking with and listening to Aboriginal children;
- 4.10 mixing with *all* children in the playground.
- 4.11 being aware of the different concept of touching and bodily contact that Aborigines possess;

- 4.12 seeking advice from advisers, Aboriginal Education Workers, school counsellors, the local Aboriginal community and other relevant, experienced personnel;
- 4.13 attending to non-verbal cues;
- 4.15 encouraging early success through short activities;
- 4.16 understanding Aboriginal communication and response patterns including paralanguage;
- 4.17 respecting the privacy of students in dealing with problems;
- 4.18 participating in social interaction with Aboriginal children;
- 4.19 creating opportunities for Aboriginal children and non-Aboriginal children to interact positively;
- 4.20 creating opportunities for outdoor activities.

5. THE SCHOOL

Strategies and approaches include:

- 5. 1 introduction of Aboriginal Studies programmes;
- 5. 2 incorporation of the study of Aboriginal Arts and Crafts;
- 5. 3 exploration of Aboriginal traditional stories;
- 5. 4 study of poems and books by Aboriginal authors;
- 5. 5 use of Aboriginal resource people;
- 5. 6 study of the Aboriginal history of the local area;
- 5. 7 study of Aboriginal place names and their meanings;
- 5. 8 inclusion in the school library of crafts, paintings, novels and poems by and about Aborigines;
- 5. 9 use of visual aids about Aborigines;
- 5. 10 aspects of Aboriginal culture in appropriate subject areas.

6 THE COMMUNITY

Strategies and approaches include:

- 6. 1 discussion of school aims and policy with the Aboriginal community;
- 6. 2 consultation with members of the Aboriginal community particularly Aboriginal Education committees to assist in the development of curricula, and in extra-curricula activities;

6. 3 staff-parent meetings, both formal and informal;
6. 4 discussions with Aboriginal parents and groups about the education of their children;
6. 5 talks to school children by members of the Aboriginal community;
6. 6 production of a local Aboriginal community newsletter;
6. 7 use of school facilities for adult classes for Aborigines;
6. 8 involvement of Aboriginal adults in developing learning materials to be used at school;
6. 9 supervision of Aboriginal children in after-school homework/ study groups and other activities.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS - 1983

Peter Zweckl (C)	N.A.E.C.
Wendy Clinch	N.A.E.C.
Colin Weetra	Specialist
Trevor Adamson	North West
Alice Rigney	Specialist
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Errol Blucher	Eyre Peninsula
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Margaret Wilson	Specialist
George Trevorrow	South East
Raelene Hudson	Cooper Pedy
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