



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

This article was originally published in printed form. The journal began in 1973 and was titled *The Aboriginal Child at School*. In 1996 the journal was transformed to an internationally peer-reviewed publication and renamed *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*.

In 2022 *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* transitioned to fully Open Access and this article is available for use under the license conditions below.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

BOOKS

Source Book: Teaching Aborigines and Islanders in Urban/Rural Areas, Queensland. Queensland Department of Education, 1984.

The Education of Aborigines and Islanders: Queensland Programs and Provisions, 1984. Queensland Department of Education.

The Queensland Department of Education has recently published two booklets for teachers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. While specifically designed for the Queensland setting, both are of interest and potential value to all teachers.

The first, *Source Book: Teaching Aborigines and Islanders in Urban/Rural Areas, Queensland*, provides relevant background information for teachers. This booklet contains a series of articles written by people with different insights into aspects of Aboriginal and Islander schooling, as well as lists of available support services, and further reading. Overall, the material is positive and constructive and is a valuable source book for all Queensland schools for curriculum development and implementation.

The second book, *The Education of Aborigines and Islanders: Queensland Programs and Provisions - 1984*, describes programs and provisions in Aboriginal and Islander education as serviced by the Queensland Department of Education, with some description of measures. It covers pre-school to tertiary and remote community to urban settings. The Foreword (and Introduction) provide an encapsulation of the philosophy underlying the education provisions described, and is here reproduced in full:

Over the last decade, significant developments have occurred in the provision of educational services for Aborigines and Islanders. These developments have been as a result of the recognition by education planners, administrators, teachers and the Aboriginal community of the critical situation of education for Aborigines and Islanders in this country. A greater understanding and appreciation of the needs of Aborigines and Islanders; the allocation of a considerable amount of financial resources; and, increased opportunity for Aborigines to effectively participate in the decision making process and in expressing views on education needs of themselves and their children, have all contributed to the betterment of education for Aboriginal and Islander people and of their development.

A greater understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal and Islander needs is reflected in the increase of sensitised people employed in this area of education. Increase in manpower has meant that more emphasis has had to be placed in providing more resources. With more resources, increased numbers of professional people are showing interest in the plight of Aborigines and Islanders. This has meant that improved programs have eventuated, all for the potential of better educational services.

An important aspect of increased resources has been finance. The National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) is aware that some \$326 million, over the decade 1971-80 has been spent on Aboriginal education by the Commonwealth Government through its State Grants program and its Grants-in-Aid program. The State Governments have also provided considerable funds, in staffing and in in-service and enrichment programs for teachers and administrators. In Queensland considerably more funds have been expended than in any other state, on Aboriginal Education Services.

Increased Aboriginal and Islander involvement is demonstrated in the establishment of national, state, regional and local advisory committees consisting wholly of Aborigines and Islanders. The NAEC which is the official advisor on Aboriginal and Islander education to the Commonwealth Minister of Education and the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Committee to the Director-General of Education (QATSICC) are examples of this. QATSICC is working towards its own restructure and to the establishment of local and regional committees. Once the consultancy framework which is being set up is completed and formalised, Aborigines and Islanders at the local level will be able to contribute to the decision-making process more than they currently do.

While developments in program and project provisions can be described, hence this publication, improvement in achievement of Aboriginal and Islander children is not easily identified. Furthermore, even though Aboriginal and Islander students are staying longer at secondary school, their performance (although there is little research evidence one way or the other) is not improving at the same rate as retention. Even with increased expenditure and some concerted effort in the past, the situation of education for Aborigines and Islanders remains critical and will become more so with the technological changes and increasing unemployment likely to occur.

Perhaps the greatest lack has been the distinct paucity of written educational policy and philosophy, recommended practices and even the lack of a clear and concise statement on the aims and objectives which would be pursued in the name of Aborigines and Islanders.

Traditionally, there are at least three purposes for schooling that can be identified as being adopted for all Australians. These are:-

- i) to give the individual the opportunity to reach their academic potential;
- ii) to promote a broad general education and an appropriate vocational preparation so that at whatever stage a child emerges from the process the individual will have a thorough grounding of the essentials to survive in society; and,
- iii) to develop citizenship by giving the individual an understanding and appreciation of the values of the society in which the child lives.

Furthermore, the student who emerges from schooling at the end of the process (Year 12) should be confident in their ability to commit themselves to any activity that they wish to pursue; have enquiring minds so that they question objectively, new concepts and experiences and make judgements about their relevance to themselves; have a strong self-concept; and skills and knowledge which they can use to achieve self-actualisation, be it in relation to employment, further education or satisfaction of personal goals.

The child who exits before year 12 should emerge with a basic education to enable survival within Australian society.

The majority of Aboriginal and Islander parents want their child to gain the skills and knowledge required to survive within a highly bureaucratic and technologically sophisticated Australia while still maintaining a strong cultural identity (and gaining a knowledge of their heritage) as Aborigines or Islanders. In considering citizenship then, the school should promote a dual focus. Attempts within the schooling process should be made not to denigrate Aboriginal and Islander cultural values through an over emphasis on westernised cultural views, neglect and negative teaching, about the indigenous population of this country. In the past the Aboriginal and Islander population has been forced to assimilate into the wider Australian society without being able to maintain their

own values and customs. Missionary/paternalistic attitudes have been the demise of much of what was sacred to Aborigines and Islanders. Even with all the negative forces, however, parts of Aboriginal and Islander values and customs remain. The Indigenous population still has a living culture which in some situation has changed to accommodate external forces such as other cultures. This must be remembered by teachers and educators.

Acceptance that Australia was before invasion and still is a multicultural nation needs to occur. Even though concerted efforts since the 1970s have been made to promote multiculturalism, little seems to be happening at the school and teaching levels to actualise the concept. For an harmonious Australian society, each group within Australia needs to understand and appreciate each other. One can better understand others if one understands oneself. Currently, the Aboriginal child exits from the schooling process without a strong self image. The child seems to be in conflict with the values (Western) imposed on him/her by the mainstream society.

While the school cannot be totally blamed for the lack of strong self image development amongst the indigenous population, it can perform an important and necessary role in enhancing personal development in cultural pride. Personal growth and development of confidence should lead to increased activation to partake of other activities after schooling. Such activities could include further study or of employment in line with their personal and academic qualities. However, this is not always the case. Invariably, the Aboriginal/Islander child faces discrimination and prejudice both in obtaining employment and once employed. During the last half decade, positive discrimination in employment has seen an increased participation of the indigenous population in once untouchable professions and careers. The dilemma, however, is that in times of economic restraint, positive discrimination tends to be a negative approach to solving the issue. The Aboriginal/Islander child then seems to be the 'meat in the sandwich'. Unless a child has a strong identity and self-esteem is he/she able to withstand these pressures placed upon them. More likely is the depressed and frustrated youth to become disgruntled with society and to seek refuge within the extended family structure or to react by seeking relief in alcohol and drug abuse, leading to law abuse. The large proportion of indigenous children in corrective institutions is an indicator of this occurrence. The school can be blamed partly for this.

Throughout the schooling process the Indigenous child is forced to learn about the heritage of the majority Anglo-Australian population and of the skills and knowledge of survival within that world. While one should not be too critical of this approach one must mention that insufficient and ineffective emphasis has been placed on the Aboriginal and Islander matters, both traditional and contemporary, but especially contemporary. The development of skills within their cultural milieu has not been appropriately handled.

The introduction of studies about Aborigines and Islanders is important and serves a dual purpose.

- a) It enriches cultural pride within the Indigenous school population
- b) It provides an avenue for non-Indigenous people to gain an understanding of the Indigenous Australian cultures, past and present.

Obviously the introduction of Studies about Aborigines into schools is dependent upon teacher preparation, human and material resources, curriculum development and community participation and interest whether that be Indigenous or other. Attempts have been made by this Department and by the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Committee to the Director-General of Education to improve the situation through programs as outlined in this document, however, much more needs to be done.

The participation of the Aboriginal and Islander Community is required in the development and collection of materials and in the implementation and evaluation of the programs. The Community could include, Aboriginal and Islander individuals, and community-based advisory committees such as QATSICC and the National Aboriginal Education Committee as well as the Aboriginal/Islander Education section of the Department's Planning and Special Programs Division. The Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies contains plenty of resource information for use in the development of programs. Two publications *Black Australia* and *Audio-visual Resource Materials : related to the Aboriginal Australians* are useful publications. The students themselves may possess skills that can be utilised in the classroom.

The Commonwealth Schools Commission, under their "Programs of National Significance", are prepared to fund the development and implementation of Aboriginal Studies Programs and courses.

The preparation of teachers is an important factor. The degree of sensitivity, interest and commitment with which a teacher approaches the teaching about Aborigines and Islanders is a determinant of effectiveness. Regular regional in-service programs or discussions with Aboriginal communities will enhance effectiveness.

The continued promotion of bilingual education by the department is seen as another avenue for enhancing cultural identity. In the future, however, consideration needs to be given to the extension of such programs into other Communities and especially to the Torres Strait Islands.

While statistics may show that our children are staying at school longer, there is little to indicate that they are achieving at an equivalent rate to that of their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Students who matriculate or who complete Secondary schooling enrol more in Certificate type courses than in conventional degree courses. Even those which opt for Degree courses elect for the lesser highly regarded professional courses. There is limited commitment to medicine, dentistry and the like. Efforts need to be made to entice and encourage our youth to partake of such studies. Factors such as the strict abidance to academically orientated schooling; inability to cater for cultural differences; poor health and housing; limited political influence; inappropriate testing such as culturally biased IQ testing and public examinations; no continuum programs from pre-school to tertiary; teacher low expectation and sensitivity; seemingly limited occupational opportunities after schooling because of prejudice and stereo-typing which stifles motivation; strict abidance of regulations by administrators which stifles innovation by teachers; and, inability of administrators to initiate change through innovation, all contribute to the failure of the Aboriginal child.

While efforts by the Queensland Education Department (as evidenced in this document) can be applauded, an increased planned effort is required by educational planners, administrators, teachers, Aboriginal Consultative Groups and the Aboriginal community at large in the near future to ensure that the indigenous peoples of this country may assume their rightful place within Australian society at their own reckoning. Aborigines and Islanders can make a contribution to Australian society - a contribution which can only enhance the development of Australia as a whole nation. Unless this is done, educational achievement in terms of non-Aboriginal values will not be satisfactorily attained by Aboriginal and Islander youth.

A concerted effort should be made in (to name but a few areas):-

- a) giving the Aboriginal Consultative groups and the Aboriginal Islander community a greater effective participation in the setting of priorities, the development of policy and the administration of such policy;
- b) the introduction of Aboriginal studies in schools and tertiary institutions;
- c) the development of appropriate curriculum and teaching resources;
- d) the in-service training of teachers and the teachers of teachers;
- e) employing more Aboriginal personnel in the educative process; and
- f) in the defining of aims and objectives in education for Aborigines and Islanders as well as a philosophy and policy direction for the future.

It is hoped that such effort occurs in the future.

J.R. Budby
Co-ordinator
Aboriginal & Torres Strait Island Education
January 1984.

The contact point for both booklets is -

The Administration Officer
Aboriginal Education
Box 33
NORTH QUAY Q 4000

.....