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TOWNSVILLE'S ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM

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Historically, universities and colleges have been preoccupied with studying Aborigines, and to a much lesser extent Islanders, doing research on them, and teaching about them. In the mid 1970s, however, the then Mt Lawley, Townsville, and Torrens Colleges of Advanced Education independently launched special entry, indigenous teacher education programs. By providing personal, social and academic support for an enclave of Aborigines and Islanders within white institutions, it was hoped that students would be able to learn to cope with the demands of tertiary education and graduate with the same qualifications as other students in the colleges. With varying degrees of success, this has happened, such that this enclave support model has been adopted in a number of other colleges and in universities, and is now the most important single reason for the increased number of Aboriginal and Islander students in tertiary education.

Perhaps the two most important factors underlying the apparent success of the enclaves in attracting and graduating students have been the support offered to the students by enclave staff and the support the students offer to each other as they face similar challenges together. In a very short time, Aboriginal and Islander students realised that most of those admitted to the programs had enough ability to graduate. They realised that the high attrition rate resulted from a multitude of personal, social, and economic factors, and that lack of academic potential to cope with tertiary education was rarely the major reason for a student's 'dropping out' or being squeezed out. In short, success in tertiary education, at least in the area of teacher education, has become a part of contemporary Aboriginal and Islander cultures.

THE TOWNSVILLE EXPERIENCE

Townsville, like the other colleges that first began offering affirmative action programs for Aboriginal and Islander people, had previously developed an interest and expertise in the area of Aboriginal education. Townsville College of Advanced Education (now integrated into the School of Education at James Cook University)

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had entered the field in 1974 by developing a compulsory or core subject in race relations for third year student teachers to sensitise them in the areas of Black-White relations, including the degree of racial prejudice within the Australian community and the role of the teacher in improving community relations. Later this subject was expanded to incorporate the relevance of the concept of multiculturalism to teacher education. In 1975, a Graduate Diploma in Aboriginal Education was launched. It is designed to meet one immediate, urgent need of Aboriginal and Islander people: the provision of skilled, qualified teachers with not only an understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies before and since European colonisation but also a sensitive awareness of evolving needs. This course is based upon the belief that effective educational provision depends heavily upon teachers' understanding of the cultural systems of the children entrusted to them. The widespread failure of Aboriginal and Islander children to achieve in our schools reflects in part the culture-specific nature of much of what occurs within our schools, colleges and universities. I shall return to this point later in this paper.

In 1977, the Aboriginal and Islander Teacher Education Program (AITEP) was introduced to provide access to the teaching profession of Aborigines and Islanders whose educational achievements would not give them direct tertiary entrance. The award is the same Diploma of Teaching as other students receive; however, the first year is stretched over three semesters, and additional courses in Study Skills, Communication, Introductory Maths, and Introductory Science are introduced. As well, extensive tutorial support is available. We explain to the applicants when we are interviewing them, and later as part of the successful applicants' orientation program, that the additional courses and tutorial support offered in their first 18 months (the first academic year) is compulsory: that it is part of a contract they are willingly entering into with the university (previously the college) so that they can cope with the same subjects, the same lectures, and the same assessment program as other students. When the students reach second year, their special entry status ceases. Special tutorials are provided in the core subjects in second year but they are not regarded as compulsory by the enclave support staff or students, although generally well attended. These extra tutorials are similar to those provided to students in some halls of residence. AITEP students are expected to be as autonomous as other students before they enter second year. Some have achieved this before the end of their first semester; a few need special help during their second year but, increasingly, these students are becoming the exception.

I have appended to this paper an overview of the retention and graduation rate (Appendix A) and an analysis of the students' results for second semester 1983 (Appendix B). You will see from the students' results that these provisional entry students are not just getting passes. Indeed one of the students admitted to the Diploma of Teaching through AITEP has graduated with distinction, gaining the fourth highest pass of all the graduating students in her year. It is important to realise that such a provisional entry group of Aborigines and Islanders are capable of achieving such results once they have found their feet in a tertiary institution and become aware of their potential. We have to realise that it is their historical experience in general and their school experience in particular that have masked their ability, stunted their potential and eroded their confidence in themselves. Indeed, one of the most important things an enclave program does is give the students confidence in their own ability.

TERTIARY EDUCATION AND IDENTITY

From the outset, we have been concerned lest Aborigines and Islanders be socialised and professionalised away from their people. Before we set up our enclave, at various times there were one or two Aboriginal students in the teacher education program. We had come to realise how alien and friendless most of them had felt and how irrelevant to their cultural experience tertiary education had seemed. Most quietly withdrew. We believed that, if the the enclave program was going to be successful - however that might be defined - we needed a large enough Aboriginal and Islander student body for the students to be able to support one another right through to graduation, despite withdrawals and failures. We believed that this was one of the most important preconditions to enable indigenous students to affirm their identity. We also thought that they would find the institution a happier place to work in.

In 1978, we developed a special major study sequence, *Australian Society: the Aboriginal and Islander Experience*, to allow Aboriginal and Islander students and interested white students to explore the cultural experience of indigenous Australians. Most, but by no means all of the Aboriginal and Islander students choose this major study. The number of white students varies but has been as high as half the class group in third year. The students who take this sequence to third year - the first and second year subjects can be taken as electives - seem to derive a great deal of satisfaction from it and have said they felt more confident in their identity because of it. We have produced several publications containing

work, mainly by the third year students, and used these as an incentive to students to express themselves. As well, they inform the wider Aboriginal and Islander community of our program and make them more aware of their own potentialities. This provides another opportunity for students to affirm their identity.

The presence of a large group of Aborigines and Islanders in a small tertiary institution has produced changes in other subjects that allow the students to explore further their cultural experience. In subjects as diverse as history, geography, English language and literature, music, drama, the sociology of education, exceptional children, and some of the curriculum areas, Aboriginal and Islander students have used class discussion, individual projects, and other assignments to extend their interests, knowledge, or expertise. In the process they have often taken their lecturers along with them.

There are a number of other ways that have been designed to allow students to explore and affirm their identity. A deliberate attempt is made within the additional courses and tutorials to develop group cohesiveness and to establish rapport between the AITEP support staff and the students. The students have a small common room where they can relax and work and be themselves. This is one small part of a large white institution that they can call their own.

James Cook University has also incorporated within the practising school program the possibility of students doing two of their teaching practices (nine weeks in all) in Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities. As very few of our students have lived in communities, this experience is not only professionally beneficial, it also confronts many of them for the first time with the challenges facing so many of their people who have been segregated and institutionalised. Throughout their course they have Aboriginal and Islander guest lecturers and films of various aspects of traditionally oriented and urban Aboriginal and Islander life. They will have read and written about minority group issues in Australia and overseas; but, for many, living on a reserve, even if it is for only three weeks, is the most memorable part of their course. In Queensland, the reserve is still, today, at the heart of the Aboriginal and Islander experience.

A major organizational modification we introduced to facilitate the offering of programmed assistance to the students in their first eighteen months and to provide them with an easier entry into tertiary education has been important in fostering group cohesion and identity. In their first semester the students are taught almost

completely as a separate class group. In their second and third semesters they are partially integrated with other students so that by third semester they are working with direct entry students for approximately 30% of their time. When they enter second year such grouping ceases, although we try to ensure that an Aboriginal or Islander student is not needlessly isolated in a seminar, tutorial or workshop group.

Despite the opportunities that occur for Aborigines and Islanders to explore their identity, we cannot be sure that we are not "whitealising" the students. This is a term used by an Islander educationist, Koiki Mabo, for what he believes is happening to Blacks in tertiary institutions. We are concerned as he is and have commenced a major research project that is aimed at finding out what happens to our students as a result of their socialisation into a tertiary institution and subsequently into the teaching profession. It may be that "whitealisation" is, at least in part, another name for rapid culture change that some members of the Black community find unsettling.

In 1984, James Cook University established a course to lead to a Diploma of Teaching in Early Childhood Education for Aborigines and Islanders whose formal educational experience would not give them direct entry tertiary acceptance. At present, each intake has an enrolment of approximately twenty-five students. AITEP thus had two strands: AITEP Primary, encompassing grades one to seven, and AITEP Early Childhood Education (ECE), encompassing kindergarten, preschool, grades 1-3. Each year we enrol approximately forty to fifty new students. AITEP (ECE) is modelled on AITEP Primary and has incorporated some of the general or liberal studies subjects offered for the existing Diploma of Teaching. There is, however, one very important difference: AITEP Primary is a way of providing entry to the existing James Cook University Diploma of Teaching. As yet, James Cook does not offer a Diploma of Teaching (ECE) although it proposes to do so in 1988. Consequently, we were able to design the new diploma free of the restrictions imposed by existing staff and content. We believe we have created a course that is genuinely bicultural, such that graduates will be able to teach competently in Townsville or Brisbane, Aurukun or Palm Island. We hope that, when the direct entry diploma is developed, it will profit from the already existing strand and produce graduates competent to teach in Aboriginal and Islander communities as well as in what have been termed "mainstream" schools.

Our experience to date in offering an affirmative action program for Aboriginal and Islander students has been a very positive one, enriching for staff and students, Blacks and Whites. I have not tried in this paper to elaborate upon and analyse all of either the benefits or the problems - and we have had our share of both - but I doubt if you would find any members of staff who would want to turn back the clock.

Approximately 40% of those students accepted into the program have graduated, although not all have done so in minimum time. It would be a mistake to regard as failures those students who will never graduate as teachers. Some have moved on to other tertiary institutions. Some discovered that they did not want to be teachers. As AITEP was the only provisional entry program available in Queensland that encouraged Aboriginal and Islander students to attempt tertiary studies and to enter a profession, we obviously attracted some people who were not committed to teaching and some who discovered that they were not cut out to be teachers. Quite a few have gone on to Public Service and other jobs after completing one or two years of tertiary education and have thus profited from their tertiary experience. Some, women, have started families and, at least at this stage, have withdrawn from tertiary study. Some have had to leave because of other family obligations and some have simply decided that they did not wish to be tertiary students. In other words, despite ideological objection to using the term, a large number of students have willingly 'dropped out' and gone on to something else that they found more attractive. Some students have, of course, been advised to discontinue with the course because they were not coping and have accepted this advice. Some have failed themselves out (sometimes as an alternative to parental or other pressures) and some have been failed out. On some occasions, leaving the institution has been harrowing for the students; sometimes they have accepted this quite philosophically. It may be that their experience has conditioned Aboriginal and Islander people to accept "failure" in the white man's world equably; it may be that some do not attach the same status or prestige to such tertiary success. I suspect they think that the white staff's worry about admitting students who might fail is somewhat paternalistic and unrealistic. We have a policy not to admit students who do not have a prospect of success and we have achieved some expertise in determining which students could not possibly cope at their current level of competence. However, we have repeatedly found that Aboriginal and Islander members of our interview and selection panels have been willing to be much more courageous than white members of staff, if we have had places to fill and only marginal applicants available to fill them.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

We intend to extend affirmative action for Aborigines and Islanders into secondary teacher education. The various programs referred to previously have all emanated from the Advanced Education sector. The move into secondary education has been one of the benefits of amalgamation. If this move is funded, James Cook will have affirmative action programs for Aborigines and Islanders in the early childhood, primary, and secondary areas. This will not only offer the students enormous flexibility with regard to choice of subjects and the ability to transfer from one area to another, it will also create as yet unparalleled resources in student peer support and staff experience and expertise.

There are a number of other developments that I believe are needed not only at James Cook but also in other tertiary institutions throughout Australia. The first is an Aboriginal and Islander Education Leadership program. Increasingly, Aboriginal and Islander students are graduating as teachers. Serious consideration should be given to designing an MEd and/or MLit which would be relevant and attractive to Aboriginal and Islander graduates so that they could be considered for more senior and more responsible positions in the teaching profession and other areas.

The educational needs of Aboriginal and Islander communities will not be met until tertiary institutions take tertiary education to the communities through some form of off-campus operation, that is not merely the traditional external offering. This has already been done extensively in the United States and Canada, and been introduced in South Australia and Western Australia. If regional centres were set up in remote areas, tertiary education could be offered to white as well as black students, a proposal that should be politically attractive, as it would cater for another group that is disadvantaged as far as tertiary education is concerned. However, consideration should be given as well to taking tertiary education into remote areas where there may be only one or two students. A modification of the Open University model suggests itself.

There is also a need for critical analysis of the subject taught in institutions of higher education, at the undergraduate and postgraduate level, to see that they deal with and direct attention to the implications of that subject relevant to Aborigines and Islanders. Such subjects as Educational Psychology, History of Education, Curriculum and Instruction, Sociology of Education, Philosophy of Education, and the various curriculum subjects and

special areas (such as early childhood education) should be actively examined to see how the relevant research and conventional wisdom of that subject has dealt with the needs of indigenous people or has *not* dealt with them. The educational significance of indigenous people as a unique part of Australian society and culture should then be included within the conceptualisation of the subject and special attempts made to make available library and other resources for teacher education students. All teachers are potentially teachers of Aboriginal and Islander children; all teachers will be teachers about Aboriginal and Islander children, either directly or indirectly through their values and attitudes. Aboriginal and Islander education is mainstream, as mainstream as teacher expectations, individual differences and the professionalism and competence of the teaching service.

ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION MAKING

Paradoxically, probably the most dramatic development in Aboriginal and Islander education in tertiary education is the emergence of the reality of Aboriginal and Islander involvement - as real as the power of the purse. When Townsville first entered this area we taught about it as an ideal. We were conscious that we should be involved in meaningful consultation but found this very difficult to achieve. At first, we found by far the most useful Aboriginal and Islander members of our consultative committee were our own students. For a number of years we have had members of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Committee (QATSICC) and the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) on our consultative committee. We have also stipulated that at least one member of the AITEP support staff must be Aboriginal or Islander and that there should be Aboriginal or Islander representatives on selection panels for staff working primarily with AITEP students. We have had Aboriginal and Islander people on student admission, interview and selection panels, including representatives from the state consultative committee and the NAEC. However, there is little doubt that the Federal Labor Government has changed Aboriginal and Islander involvement from a *desideratum* graciously acceded to, to a *sine qua non* for involvement in the area of education for Aboriginal and Islander people.

Our experience to date has shown that working in partnership with Aboriginal and Islander people has been mutually enriching and rewarding - or at least that is our perspective. I think the concept of working in partnership must, however, be extended. The institutions of higher education will have to accept that they will

need to maintain links with their graduates to develop an ongoing dialogue concerning the effectiveness of their programs and the process of induction into the workforce. This will mean more effective links with the Aboriginal and Islander communities that many graduates will serve for at least part of their working life. The institutions of higher education will also have to accept the responsibility of employing Aboriginal and Islander staff and providing them with opportunities for undergoing further education so they can effectively occupy senior positions within these institutions. This may involve such modifications as more flexible study leave provisions and work experience programs. It will also involve accepting that various aspects of Aboriginal and Islander education and experience are relevant to tertiary education. Such areas will of course need to be identified and a procedure evolved for staff selection; however, the opportunity clearly presents itself for enriching the study and teaching of such subjects as anthropology, linguistics, music, art, religion, history, social welfare, education, and race relations, through the creation of a working partnership striving for relevance to Australian society and excellence.

Aboriginal and Islander people, through the NAEC and some state consultative committees and representatives on committees of campuses, are now beginning to demand changes to the structures and policies of institutions of higher education. There will inevitably be a creative tension which should be beneficial to the Aboriginal and Islander people advocating changes and the institutions trying to understand the proposals and the feasibility of introducing them.

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Sloper, D.W. (Ed.) 1985: Federal Guidelines and Equal Opportunity in Australian Higher Education: The Law, The People, The Issues.

Proceedings of the Higher Education Conference held at the University of New South Wales, 20-22 June 1984, Armidale: University of New England.)

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Appendix A

JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY OF NORTH QUEENSLAND, SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL STUDIES.

STATISTICAL OVERVIEW - AITEP (PRIMARY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION)

	July 1977	July 1978	July 1979	July 1980	July 1981	July 1982	July 1983	July* 1984	July 1985
New Students	23	22	22	21	25	23	28	Primary 15 ECE 23	Primary 21 ECE 21
Re-Admissions after Deferral	0	0	1	2	6	1	4	7	Primary 2
Continuing without deferral		19	25	31	33	49	57	56	Primary 48 ECE 21
Total students on campus	23	41	48	54	64	73	89	101	113
	July 77/78	July 78/79	July 79/80	July 80/81	July 81/82	July 82/83	July 83/84	July 84/85	July 85/
Withdrawals during year	4	7	7	13	10	11	11	11	Primary 7 ECE 4
				1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
Graduates				8	7	7	7	9	13

* E.C.E. Program began in 1984 with 23 students. All figures prior to this date refer to AITEP primary.

APPENDIX B

AITEP RESULTS - SEMESTER 2, 1983

GRADE	G7*	G6	2nd Year	3rd Year	TOTAL
HD	2	2			4
D	11	3	1	1	16
C	13	17	11	13	54
P	29	49	33	39	150
S	85	76	13	13	187
N (fail)	1	4	5	2	12
X**	5	1	3	4	13

* Does not include interim mark for ED100

** Does not include those seven students who deferred

Collation of Selective Results:

Student	Grade	Year	Student	Grade	Year
N.	1D, 3C, 1P, 1S	Third Year	I.D.	1D, 1C, 3S	First Year
B.	3C, 2P, 1S	Third Year	T.G.	3D, 3S	First Sem.
E.	3C, 2P, 1S	Third Year	M.	2C, 3S	" "
I.	1D, 2C, 1P, 1S	Second Year	K.	2C, 3S	" "
D.	3C, 1P, 1S	Second Year	L.	1D, 1C, 3S	" "
T.B.	3C, 1P, 4S	First Year	E.	1C, 3S	" "
M.B.	1D, 1C, 2P, 4S	Third Semester	S.	2D, 3S	" "
J.S.	1HD, 1D, 1C, 1P, 4S	" "	J.	1HD, 1C, 3S	" "
T.	1HD, 1C, 1P, 1S, 1X	" "	A.	2D, 3S	" "
			D.	2C, 3S	" "
			S.W.	1HD, 1D, 3S	" "

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