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HISTORY OF ABORIGINAL EDUCATION  
and  
CAPE YORK PENINSULA : A CASE STUDY

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of comparative studies in education is to improve our understanding of our own problems of education at the national level. In the words of Phillip E. Jones (1973:24), "Comparative education can lead us to understanding, sympathy and tolerance". More than that, it is hoped that it can lead to improved circumstances for Australia's most disadvantaged minority group - the Aborigines.

The Aborigines were the first people to have a social system in Australia. That system, however, has undergone dramatic change in the last 200 years at the hands of 'white' migrants. Changes in educational policy in Australia have been largely a reaction to what the ruling majority has regarded as the 'Aboriginal problem'. Schooling for Aborigines thus moved, early this century, from an era of mission schools and reserves to 'formal' schooling which was introduced in the 1960's. Policies then shifted in turn from 'assimilation' to 'integrationism' to 'self-determination' and self-government' for the Aborigines. 'Multiculturalism' and 'biculturalism' then became the 'in-thing'. It was therefore only a decade ago that the languages, values and customs of such minority groups began to be recognised in educational and wider political terms.

Unfortunately, these aspects of ethnicity have only really been dealt with in a somewhat ad hoc fashion in schools and, in reality, policies and practices in force today remain highly discriminatory.

Equal opportunity for education for all is a movement to which governments have found themselves increasingly committed by the march of social events. To be sure, this involvement has solved many problems, but others are still only solved in part and new ones are constantly arising.

(Jones 1973:2)

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\* Weipa, Queensland

Indeed, in the case of education for all Australians, some are found to be 'more equal' than others, a view supported by Williamson (1979:20) "Inequality is maintained and legitimated through education."

It is therefore not surprising that, despite intensive formal education activity for nearly 30 years, the academic achievements of Aboriginal people remain severely depressed. In this paper I hope to highlight the complexity of the issue and to outline some of the reasons for the so-called 'failure' of Aborigines in education.

## HISTORY OF ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

The first Australians are believed to have numbered over 300,000 prior to the 'white invasion'. Their numbers, however, have dropped dramatically since then (see Tables 1. A & B).

Table 1(A) - Changes in Aboriginal population 1788-1981

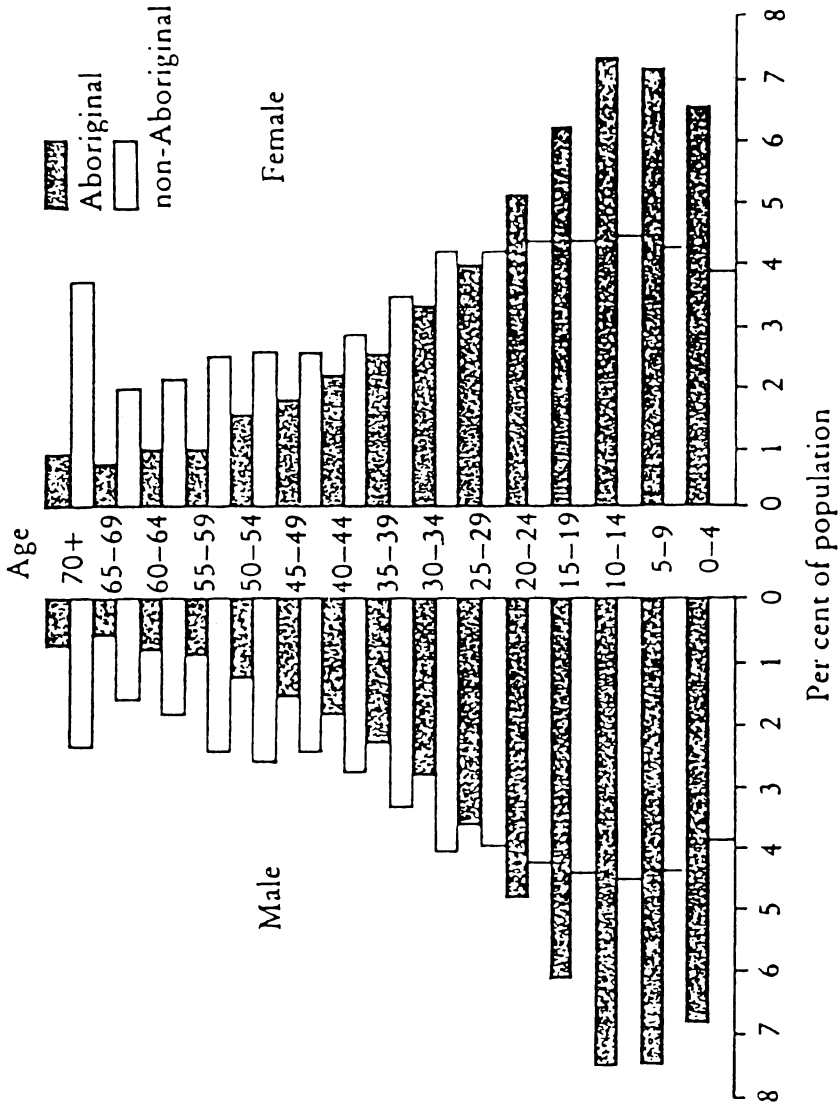
Year	Estimated population
1788	314,500
1881	131,366
1901	94,598
1933	67,314
1954	75,567
1966	121,697
1976	156,556
1981	171,151

Table 1(B) - Distribution of Aboriginal populations among States and Territories, 1981

State or Territory	Estimated population
Qld	46,819
NSW	39,879
WA	31,347
NT	29,086
SA	9,830
Vic	10,439
Tas	2,936
ACT	815
	<u>171,151</u>

Source: Hugo, G. (1986, pp.259 & 261)

Figure 1. Age structure of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations, 1981



Source: Hugo, G. (1986:259)

The decline in numbers was accompanied by large scale destruction of the social order of the Aborigines. Willmot (1986:3) claims this was within fifty years of European arrival. The Australian Aboriginal population was estimated to number approximately 159,897, or 1% of the total population in the 1981 census (Hugo, 1986:257). This drop in figures may be attributable to disease and the effects of on-going clashes between the Aborigines and the new inhabitants. Rowland (1962:101) describes them as "power political factors".

They are now indeed a rather small but distinctive part of the total population. As Hugo (1986:257) points out, "the Aboriginal population still demographically represents a Third World sub-population within a dominant First World population". This is true of almost every demographic parameter, including those related to education. Figures in the 1970's showed that less than 10% of Aboriginal children in NSW progressed beyond second year high school (Duncan 1973, as cited in Nurcombe 1976:114). The National Population Inquiry supported this view in the 1975 summary when they wrote

In every conceivable comparison, the Aborigines and Islanders...stand in stark contrast to the general Australian society...They probably have the lowest education; occupational, economic, social and legal status of any identifiable section of the Australian population.

(Hugo 1986:260)

For a number of reasons, the Aboriginal population is a typically young one with 41% under the age of 15 years, compared with the total population where only 25% are in this age bracket (see Figure 1. p. 13). With such a high percentage of the Aboriginal population at school age, this has been an important target group for the implementation of changes in government policy towards the Aboriginal sector. As Nurcombe (1976:21) so clearly pointed out, "dominant peoples cannot but see themselves and their own cultures as on a pinnacle."

It follows then that the prevailing ethos of the 19th century saw Australian Aborigines as "Darwinian relics". (Nurcombe, 1976:22). The newcomers to the land knew nothing of Aboriginal spiritual relationships so atrocities committed against Aborigines were justified by this way of thinking and attributed to 'survival of the fittest'. Following a period of genocide, a more humanitarian movement aimed at "soothing the

pillow of a dying race" (Loos, as cited in Crump, 1985:12) led to the creation of missions and reserves which tried to separate the two races.

Father Leary from Daly River was quoted by Green (1982:138) as saying that "the degree of successful living by Aborigines in the future will depend on the nature of the compromises they make". Rev. J.N.Hay, a missionary on Cape York Peninsula for many years, obviously felt satisfied with the compromises made when he wrote "Little by little the neck of a savage people has bowed to receive the kindly yoke of Christian love and sympathy". (Hay, 1931:13).

Promoting religion and education among the natives meant that the Aboriginal people were forced to surrender their own ways and customs and often their own children. The dormitory system at the missions withdrew the children from the teachings of their parents. The unsuitable curriculum based on northern European cultures taught religion, morals, decency and industrious habits.

The failure of the mission schools led to the development of Aboriginal reserves. In general, the belief was

that judging of the future by the past, we cannot err in anticipating a progressive diminution of their numbers, and their eventual extinction...

(Tocqueville, as cited in Gale and Brookman, 1975:54)

While some such as Tocqueville thought they would eventually die out (and the figures at the time certainly indicated this - see Table 1.) others believe that reserves were set up to protect the Aborigines themselves (Sherwood, 1982). At this time Aboriginal children received little or no education and were refused entry into white schools.

Those who remained with their families were offered at best an inadequate school system seemingly designed to trap them in the lowest stratum of Australian society.

(McConnochie, 1982:23)

The Aborigines did not, as many expected, die out and following changes in Government policy saw the introduction of assimilation adopted as official policy in 1951, of which education then became the "preparation of natives for living in the

general community". (McConnochie, 1982:23). It was hoped that through education and intermarriage, all signs of Aboriginality would be 'absorbed' into the wider community. Loos (1983) described it as "further contamination to the white strain" (as cited in Crump, 1985:13). The price of assimilation which in itself was uncertain was the rejection of Aboriginal ways. This approach was eventually seen as a failure - Aboriginal children were not attending school or achieving as much as educationists had hoped. The root cause of this failure was not seen as the system itself but rather the fact that the Aborigines were so 'culturally deprived'.

Hence, the ideal of assimilation was made worse by the assumption of many that Aborigines would not be 'up to it'. "To the extent that the Aboriginal group differs from the mainstream white society, it is considered to be deficient." (McConnochie, 1982:27.) Aboriginal children were regarded as retarded in terms of cognitive development, thus leading to "educational retardation primarily caused by the home environment." (ibid p.78). Programs then attempted, somewhat naively, to make up for this 'deficit' and were typically ethnocentric in nature. They were based on what was called the 'deficit model'. Relatively small changes in policy led to 'integrationising'. The fundamental task of the school was still to minimise the differences between Aboriginal children and their white middle-class peers.

On the 27th May, 1967, Aborigines were finally granted citizenship. In an attempt to restore autonomy to the Aborigines, in the early 1970s the swing in policy was from 'assimilation' to 'self-management'.

The approaches developed included bilingual/bicultural education, the use of more informal Aboriginal learning styles in teaching and the incorporation of more Aboriginal cultural knowledge and values into the school curriculum.

(Report from House of Representatives  
Select Committee on Aboriginal Education  
1985:28).

By the mid 1970s it appears that Aboriginal Education was a growing area. Aborigines themselves began to be involved in educational decisions. For example, various committees were formed, Aboriginal teacher aides were employed, and the provision made for the training of Aborigines as fully qualified teachers (Sherwood, 1982:38). Some, including Sherwood, have construed these names as tokenism.

Table 2.  
Estimated Aboriginal Enrolments\* in Government Schools x % Aboriginal Enrolment x Size of School  
Qld, N.S.W., W.A., N.T., Vic., S.A.

Aboriginal enrolment Size of school	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)		(5)					
	50-100%		20-49%		10-19%		Totals Cols 1,2,3		Total estimated Aboriginal pupils					
	<100	100-299	300-599	600+	<100	100-299	300-599	600+						
Qld	778	1 723	1 221	0	399	685	680	0	184	366	1 252	606	7 894	13 319
No. of pupils	24	10	4	0	31	14	7	0	21	16	23	7	157	
No. of schools														
N.S.W.	479	314	551	0	111	786	620	397	0	270	1 012	493	5 033	11 000
No. of pupils	12	3	2	0	5	14	5	3	0	9	16	6	75	
No. of schools														
W.A.	1 084	1 102	129	0	205	343	493	14	39	196	166	222	3 993	8 292
No. of pupils	25	9	1	0	12	6	4	1	4	6	3	2	73	
No. of schools														
N.T.†	1 952	3 515	1 304	0	73	168	168	0	4	169	361	549	8 263	10 993
No. of pupils	53	20	4	0	6	3	2	0	1	4	6	5	104	
No. of schools														
Vic.	35	0	0	0	19	0	0	0	16	0	136	0	206	1 975
No. of pupils	1	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	5	0	2	0	12	
No. of schools														
S.A.	410	455	0	0	35	209	90	0	15	110	327	0	1 651	3 213
No. of pupils	9	3	0	0	4	33	1	0	2	4	6	0	32	
No. of schools														
TOTALS	4 738	7 109	3 205	0	842	2 191	2 051	411	258	1 111	3 254	1 870	27 040	48 792
Pupils	124	45	11	0	62	40	19	4	33	39	56	20	453	
Schools														

Source: Watts (1985) Report of House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education (1985:32)

Aboriginal Education was actually excluded from many government 'multicultural' programs. This is disturbing if we consider that approximately 45% of Aboriginal students attend schools in which they form less than 10 per cent of the student population (see Table 2, p.17). The bilingual programs in fact only catered for 7 to 8 per cent of the Aboriginal children (Report of House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education 1985-28). Problems inherent in this approach related to, among other things, a lack of resources and materials. Furthermore, if only one language was chosen in a community of several, this could also be divisive.

As for the other approaches outlined by the Committee, there seems little evidence that they are in use in mainstream schools for, as Sherwood (1982:41) pointed out, "teachers have no real preparation for teaching Aboriginal pupils or for teaching about Aboriginal Australians". According to Budby (1982), the teaching of Aboriginal culture "is mainly taken on an ad hoc basis, according to teacher interest" (as cited in Biggs and Telfer, 1987:344). Value systems have always been transmitted via the teacher's communication with students and via classroom materials such as textbooks. Spalding (1974, as cited in Biggs & Telfer, 1987:337) found some interesting examples of racial bias in social studies textbooks only recently used in Australian schools - for example:

People who live together in tribes like the early Aborigines are called PRIMITIVE people.

(Lloyd, 1970:49)

Over the 25 years during which the Australian natives occupied our land before the coming of the white man, they never advanced beyond the stone age or hunting stage of development.

(Sparkes *et al*, 1970:52)

So studies have shown that classrooms have remained very culturally biased. Studies carried out by Budby have shown that only approximately 6% of schools actually claim to have a school policy or set of aims or objectives for Aboriginal Studies (Budby, 1982:43).

With regard to adult education, Nurcombe (1976:52) claims that the government was forthcoming with financial support and provided opportunities for Aborigines to go on to further education, but "pitifully few Aborigines today have the motivation

and competence to benefit from formal education" (ibid. p.114). In fact, by 1973 fewer than ten Aborigines had graduated from University in Australia (ibid, p.52).

Clearly the entire system has been failing in its objectives and failing the Aboriginal people in the process. The evidence seems to point overwhelmingly to the inadequacies of the system as the root cause. These inadequacies essentially relate to the differences between Aboriginal and 'European' learners.

## THE ABORIGINAL CHILD AT SCHOOL

It is important to recognise that education is not necessarily equated with schooling. It is evident from the available literature that the idea of 'education' is not new to the Aborigines. The passing on of skills and knowledge was part of their effective and efficient traditional social system. The kinship system was an important part of Aboriginal culture, whilst 'European' cultures are taught largely via the formal education system.

Each Aboriginal community has experienced a different state of culture contact and interracial relations, so generalisations may not always apply to other communities. However, Harris (1984) states that observations from many communities, including Aurukun on 'The Cape', indicate that traditionally oriented Aboriginal people all over Australia do have similar learning styles (Bell, 1988:11) i.e. children's learning styles are enculturated. This view is supported by Davies and McGlade (1982:95) who wrote

...While the Aboriginal population is highly diverse  
...a number of values...appear to have remained constant  
within the diversity.

While there are a number of differences that can be seen between Aboriginal and 'European' learners, space permits only a sample to be included in this paper. Shimpo (1978) believes the first and foremost concern of today's Aborigines is land rights. Then come health, housing, etc., with formal 'white' schooling very low on the list (as cited in Henderson (Ed.) 1981:36).

Western school systems encourage and even insist that students use planning and forethought in their lives and the main aim of students is to work towards future employment.

Aborigines, however, have little motivation for preoccupation with future job prospects and are traditionally present or past time oriented. The notion of learning skills today which may (or may not) be useful in the future is difficult to accept. The influence of social background means that

Aboriginal children expect to learn 'the real thing' rather than to practise in a contrived setting for some future application.

(Harris, 1982:146)

The Aboriginal approach to learning, generally speaking, is to attempt the whole or end product and then to learn by 'successive approximations' to this through persistence. Piecemeal, context-free learning is difficult for Aboriginal children. Witkin & Berry, 1975, (as cited in Davies & McGlade, 1982:97) describe this association with elements in context as 'field-dependence'. The white school system often deals with the restructuring of elements out of context, i.e., it encourages abstract, divergent thinking.

Aboriginal children also learn by responding to situations. It depends, however, on the individual teacher as to whether or not they take advantage of incidental learning opportunities. Responses to the past, in the form of reports, story-books, etc., are very significant to these children. Aboriginal children, then, do not generally display epistemic curiosity traits, so activities must be designed which are relevant and meaningful to the students. Teachers also need to take care with preparation and delivery, with objectives presented in such a way that makes sense to students.

In addition, 'unity' is very important for traditionally-oriented Aborigines. In fact,

At the very heart of Aboriginal learning is unity, not individuality.

(Christie, 1988:4)

The white school curriculum, though, rarely has integrated subjects or classes. Students are separated into age or ability groupings, breaking down the idea of whole group interaction. The need for affiliation and acceptance means that Aborigines are not competitive in a Western sense. Bell (1988:5) wrote that an Aboriginal cultural imperative "is that one should not rise too high above one's fellows". On the other hand, the

values passed on to white children through formal education means that individual competitiveness is encouraged.

Independence, also encouraged in Aboriginal society, is eroded by mainstream teacher domination and the fact that students must keep up with the dictated pace. Compared with their white counterparts, Aboriginal children do not respond as much to, and may even resist forms of extrinsic motivation.

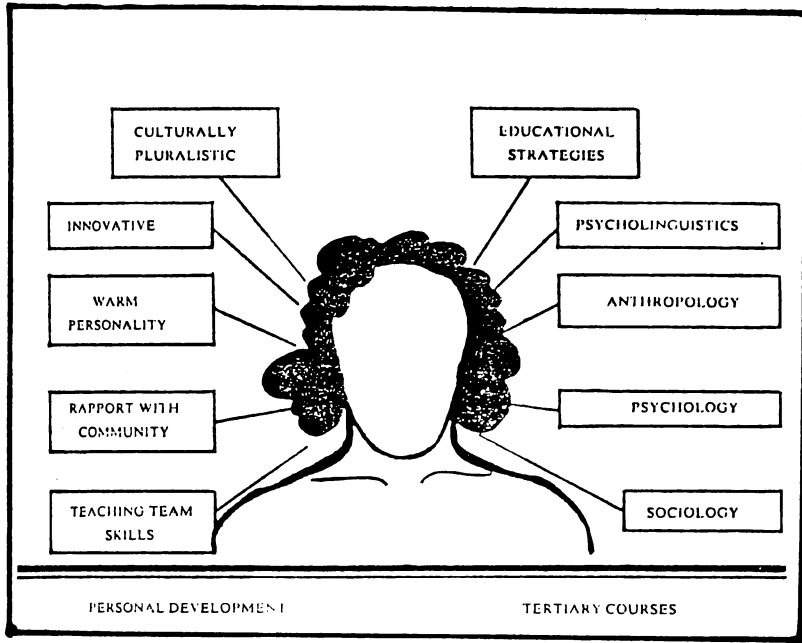
Aboriginal students will only learn  
if they are not being pushed by a  
teacher.

(Christie, 1988:13)

Criticism for poor performance is crushing for the Aboriginal child. Ridicule is an important element of social control in Aboriginal society. When teachers make children stand up in class for instance they are, perhaps unwittingly, drawing on cultural elements which serve to punish. Teachers of culturally different children should work in culturally sensitive contexts to avoid what they do in classrooms being perceived as mysterious static or as offensive or intimidating behaviour.

Unfortunately, there are usually conflicting perspectives and expectations between Aborigines and their teachers or peers. As one teacher wrote, "nothing in my training prepared me for a situation such as this" (Green, 1982:114). Teachers often respond by devising programs or activities which require a bare minimum of academic involvement on the part of the Aboriginal child. Teacher expectations, in turn, affect the achievement, behaviour and status of students. The curriculum, both hidden and explicit, can be a potent force for perpetuating racism. In the social-analytical model suggested by MacDonald (1986) for work with Aboriginal students, the role of the teacher is quite demanding. Teachers usually represent a conservative section of the Australian society but, from a personal and professional view, should live with respect for other value systems or cultures, i.e., particular views of the world have to be open to alternative perspectives. This is described anthropologically as a liminal role. Effective teachers of Aboriginal students should be demanding, yet warm and supportive; stimulating, responsible and organised (Fanshawe, 1976, as cited in Eckermann 1988:13). Hart, (1974, as cited in Green 1982:122) has attempted to define some of the characteristics of an ideal crosscultural teacher. Included would be a sound background of Aboriginal studies (see Figure 2.).

Figure 2. Suggested combination of personal and scholarly qualities in the ideal teacher of Aborigines



Source: Green, N. (1982:123)

In view of ethical and sociological considerations, teachers should adopt wherever practicable, for example, in terms of time made available, Aboriginal learning process with Aboriginal students (Harris, 1982:136). Christie (1988) warns us against only addressing our efforts to changing the context of education. This would be erroneous because, in effect, we would still be attempting to assimilate students by our methods. In other words, "the medium is the message." (Christie, 1988:3)

Teachers also have expectations of their students based upon their use of 'standard' Australian English. Depending on their social background, Aboriginal children may bring a traditional language, or more likely a creole or 'Aboriginal English' to the classroom. These are languages in their own right and should be valued as such. Most linguists would object strongly to the notion of any language being 'inferior' but, "language is not everywhere equivalent in role and value: speech may have different scope and functional load in the communicative economics of different societies ." (Hymes, 1974, as cited in

Qukawoot, 1988:39). Teachers need to be aware that restrictive speech output is not a product of syntactical restraints but rather of social constraints (Davies & McGlade, 1982:100). Aboriginal children, more so it seems than white, can't understand why teachers, for instance, ask them seemingly futile questions. It is a 'Western' aspect of teaching that employs the question/answer technique. Standard forms of English should be taught to afford students future choices in life, but without denigration and sarcasm.

In general, the apparent poor performance of children who use non-standard English is a reflection of situational (testing) constraints and the demands of a particular language, rather than an indication of linguistic capabilities.

(DiVesta & Palermo, 1974, as cited in Biggs & Telfer, 1987:273)

Unfortunately, standardised tests are used to assess levels of attainment and are usually culturally and linguistically biased. It is not surprising then that "at every age Aborigines lag behind their white peers" (McConnochie, 1982:18). Linguists contend that minority groups are prevented from fully expressing their competence because they are unfamiliar with test and school situations.

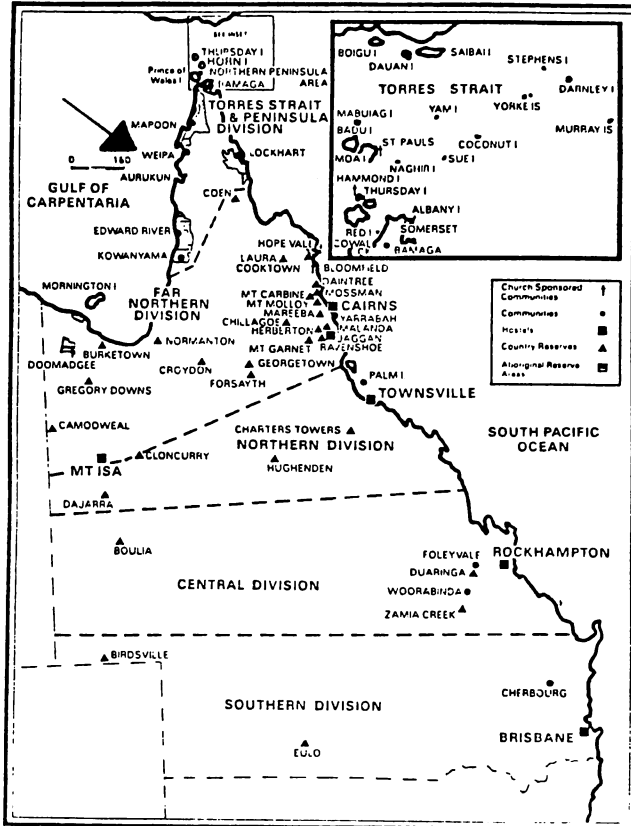
Realistically speaking then, formal school attendance is not an attractive proposition for young Aborigines. Davies & McGlade (1982:95) pointed out that Aborigines respond to the rigid school system "by producing low standards of work, by absenteeism, by early drop out..." Coombs (1970) wrote that "as well as being less likely to attend school, Aboriginal children are likely to begin school later than their white peers and leave earlier" (as cited in McConnochie 1982:18). To this, the view of Penny (1980:26) could be added, "If one holds the view that schooling of the present kind does more harm than good, then compulsion to attend is not only repugnant, it is tyrannical and wicked."

## SCHOOLS ON CAPE YORK PENINSULA : A CASE IN POINT

The Presbyterian church first established a chain of mission stations on Cape York Peninsula to 'protect' the Aborigines from the people involved in the pearling, pastoral and fishing industries developing in the area. Mapoon Mission

opened in 1891, followed by Weipa in 1898 and Aurukun in 1904 (see Figure 3.).

Figure 3: Map showing Weipa, Mapoon and Aurukun



Source: Wilson, P. (1982:6)

The Rev. J.N. Hey at the Mapoon mission spoke of the 'Australian savage' and wrote that their task was difficult as "many of the savage blacks...sank into yet deeper degradation by periodical intercourse with vicious and ungodly white and yellow individuals..." (Hey, 1931:10). Attention to language and the 'absence of a sense of sin' were at the top of a list of educational priorities. In addition, the boys were taught gardening, carpentry and milking, and the girls domestic science and all kinds of housework. Some provision was made to 'accommodate' the Aborigines at Aurukun mission. Mrs MacKenzie, who ran the school from the 1920s to the 1960s, actually developed a set of

readers based on the children's interests. As for the school day, "we found to attempt to keep 'southern' times for the little, tropical, bush Aborigines did not produce the best academic results" (MacKenzie, 1981:144). So, instead of having a long break at Christmas, the long vacation was in May and June when the rains were over.

Ex-pupils of the local mission schools, now living at Weipa, have positive feelings about the mission days generally. As children they were surrounded by their families and so culture per se was taught out of school. During the wet season supply boats couldn't run and so they ate and supplied the mission with bush food. They appreciated the fact that they could learn useful skills, such as sewing and mending. Their Aboriginal teachers were less fortunate and had been brought from other areas and educated in the dormitory system. Children were also from outlying areas and taken to Mapoon. These Aborigines were all 'adopted' by local families however. The biggest criticism the locals have is that they lost their traditional languages. As their parents and grandparents came from different places, the common language became Aboriginal English, and that is what has been passed on in the last few generations. Some, though, have bitter memories of being forced to leave Mapoon when it was closed.

Interests and actions of mining companies, churches and government bodies eventuated in Aborigines from different areas and various Islanders being brought to and settled at Weipa. Approximately two dozen families make up the population of around 300 people. Wilson (1982:1) speaking of Weipa South, wrote : "People of differing tribes and from various areas mix with each other in an atmosphere of derision and violence."

There are two State primary schools and pre-schools in Weipa. One in the predominantly white Weipa North settlement (population 2,700) mainly of children of Comalco employees, and one in the Aboriginal settlement of Weipa South, approximately 14 kms away. Teachers and aides at the Weipa South pre-school are Aboriginal women from the local community and programs are responsive to community needs. Most Aboriginal children then attend the Weipa South school, which was opened in July 1967. In 1979, attendance was calculated at 77% and enrolments were high. Total enrolments for 1989 are 101 students and only 60%, approximately, of these attend regularly. Attendance does appear to relate to changes or events in the community and

changes in staffing. "When the wet season is over many local families move to either Mapoon, Bamaga or Aurukun. It is unknown if they attend school in these places..." (Previous Weipa principal). In the past, tough measures were taken against truancy. In the 1970s, fines of \$50 'per day absent' were imposed on families by the council. They obviously refused to pay and a lot of resentment resulted.

The school is still regarded as a white controlled institution by virtue of the fact that each of the teachers is bound to conform to Departmental policy. The trust and respect of white staff in the community is essential. In 1982 the principal at Weipa South wrote, "in retribution for my actions I have been subjected to the most foul personal abuse and threats, including rock throwing and knife attacks." It is important to note that "a key person in setting the tone of a school is the principal" (Biggs & Telfer, 1987:366). The school day at Weipa South now incorporates a large morning session and finishes at 2.15 to facilitate attendance. "Better to have a short half day of thorough teaching-learning than five or six hours of the kind that takes them only to the present level of achievement" (Penny, 1980-50). Literacy and numeracy form the main part of the curriculum. Indigenous classroom assistants have an important role in the 'Van Leer Language Development Project' which is implemented at the school.

As environmental literacy creeps further into the community and increased options become apparent, the local Aborigines can see the need for acquiring competency in the Western skills of literacy and numeracy. However, of at least equal importance to the elders is the need for children to learn their own culture, language and heritage. These people believe this is still the role of the family, which is rapidly being undermined. The youth of the community are now tied up in an 'alcohol and video culture' with less effort being spent on preserving Aboriginal ways. Those who have status positions in the community encourage their children to go to school. It is true to say, however, that "if they failed themselves at school they can see schooling as a waste of time and not support their children in school" (Report of House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education, 1985:75). As a Weipa South principal of 1985 wrote, "children of families who worry a little bit more about the children's education attend Weipa North."

Not many Weipa South Aborigines attend the white primary school, mainly because they are discouraged directly or indirectly

from doing so. School records for 1989 showed a total of 40% enrolments, with only 23 from Weipa South. A small number of Aborigines have parents working in the Weipa North community.

All students must attend the one high school and Napranum (Weipa South) community members have had, until this year, little to do with the structure, function or staffing arrangements there. Grade 8 students were previously streamed with Weipa South Aborigines in one class and Weipa North students in the other two. These groupings led to further segregation and resentment. From the statistics we could deduce that the ratio of Weipa South to Weipa North students is reduced successively through the grades and through the school year. The 'wastage' rate of Weipa South students is high, especially in 2nd semester (see Appendix). Weipa South students feel they are encouraged by teachers to drop out. Figures in the graphs (Appendix) conform with findings of the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty (1976) that "less than two out of every 100 Aborigines has attended Year 10" (Green, 1982:107). Attendance in the high school may be as much attributable to social and cultural obligations as disinterest or inability to cope. Figures also support the view of local students that Aborigines living in the white community cope better and have less pressure placed on them to drop out.

Studies, such as those done by Rosenthal and Jacobsen, have shown that teacher's expectations have bearing on child performance. In Weipa North, prejudice is widely accepted and practised, and teachers expectations generally reflect those of the community. They tend, therefore, to have higher expectations of Weipa North Aboriginal students. Unfortunately, these students also reject their Weipa South associates. They see themselves as being better off but, largely because of the colour of their skin, are still not really accepted by the community with which they are now associated. The national definition of an Aborigine is "a person of Aboriginal descent who identifies as an Aborigine and *is accepted as such by the community with which he is associated.*" (own emphasis). Unfortunately for these people in particular, they are "caught between two worlds and part of neither" (Matysek, 1987:20).

1989 has seen some initiatives take place. A Weipa South Advisory Committee has been formed to look specifically at improving education in the area. Official backing is being sought to enable innovations to be on-going and lasting. An Aboriginal counsellor from Napranum is being appointed to the

high school, and more interaction between schools is occurring. The P&C groups are enjoying more power and are lobbying for continuity of teacher service, important at a time when no adequate pre-service or induction is being given to community teachers. This year's Grade 8 students can be moved for each subject according to performance - their grades are not fixed. Some say "children, regardless of abilities, will opt for a class which has a large number of Aboriginal children. In most cases this is the low stream class" (National Aboriginal Education Committee 1985:43). This remains to be seen. The high school is also running a pre-vocational course in conjunction with Comalco which, if attended, will be recognised as six months towards an apprenticeship. This added 'purpose' in education has led to enrolments in senior classes of Weipa South students this year (see Appendix).

## WHAT NOW? Future developments in Education

"Like the faded dots of confetti strewn along a path from the altar to the car, lie the skeletal remains of a cession of Australian education programs." This is how Fesl (1983, as cited in Biggs & Telfer 1987:345) described the state of Aboriginal education in Australia. It is important to recognise that the 'failure' of Aboriginal students in schools is not a reflection of the people themselves but of the inadequacies and inappropriateness of the system. In principle, it is the system which should change, not as a reactionary measure, but with forethought and planning and involving the Aboriginal people themselves in the decision-making process. The Aboriginal people must be given opportunity to contribute to the education of their young. Chief Inspector of Schools, John Dwyer, said the Department was "strongly supportive" of innovations involving Aborigines in teaching and policy making (The Bulletin, March 21, 1989)

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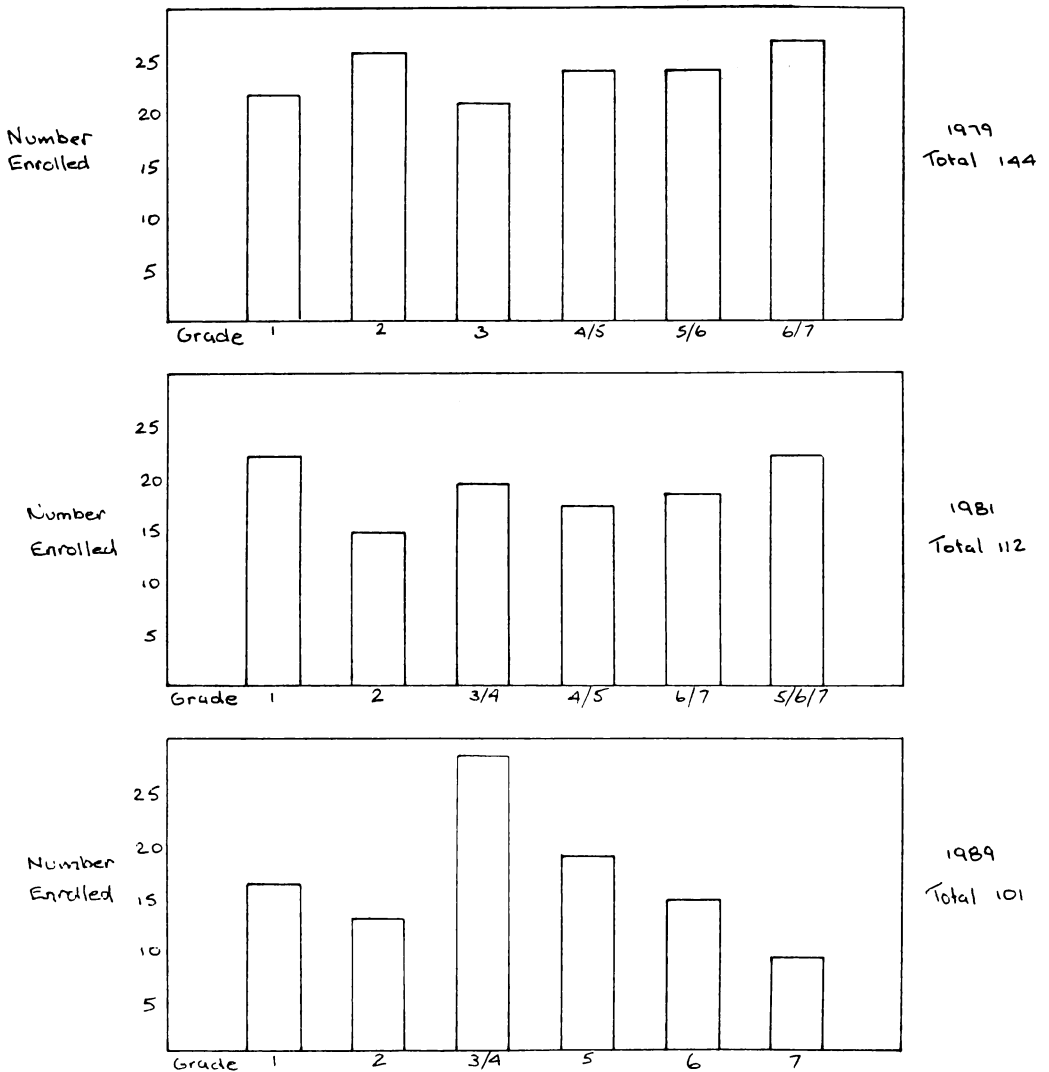
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APPENDIX

Figure 4.

Aboriginal and Islander enrollment, Jessica Point State School, Semester 1.



Source : Jessica Point School Records

Figure 5.

Weipa North Secondary School Enrollments.  
Semester 1. 1989.

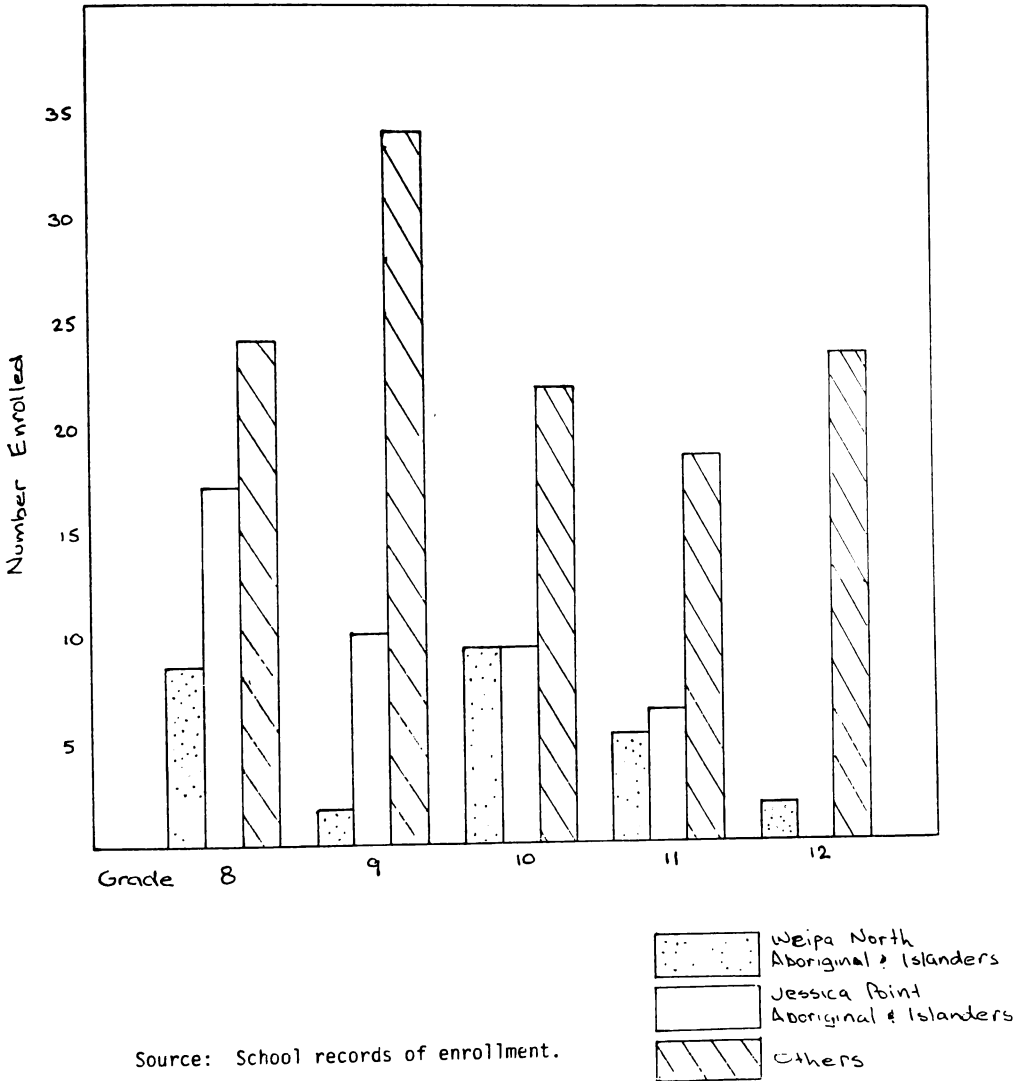


Figure 6. Weipa North Secondary School Enrollments. Semester 1. 1988.

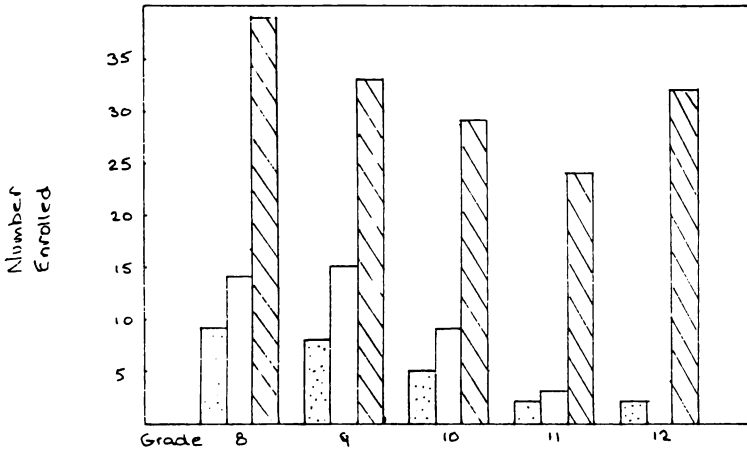
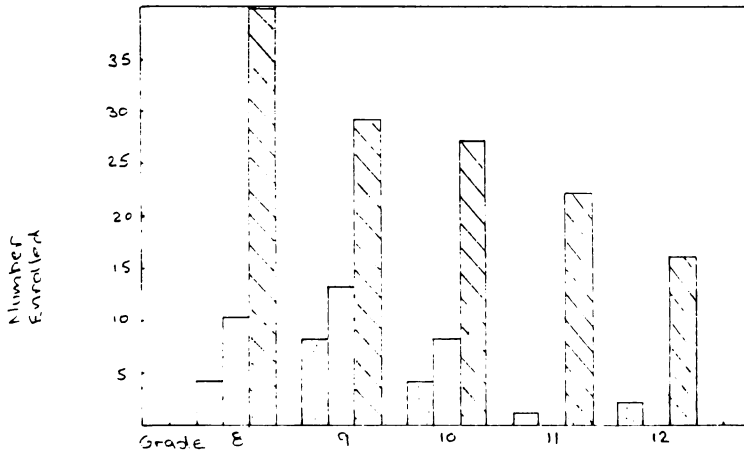


Figure 7. Weipa North Secondary School Enrollments. Semester 2. 1988.

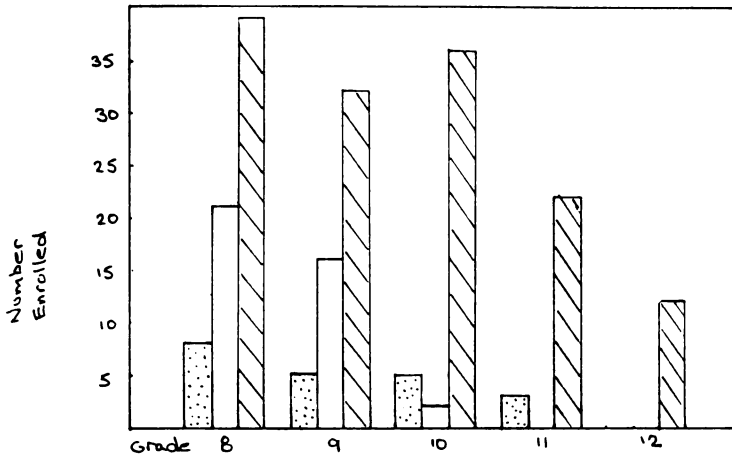


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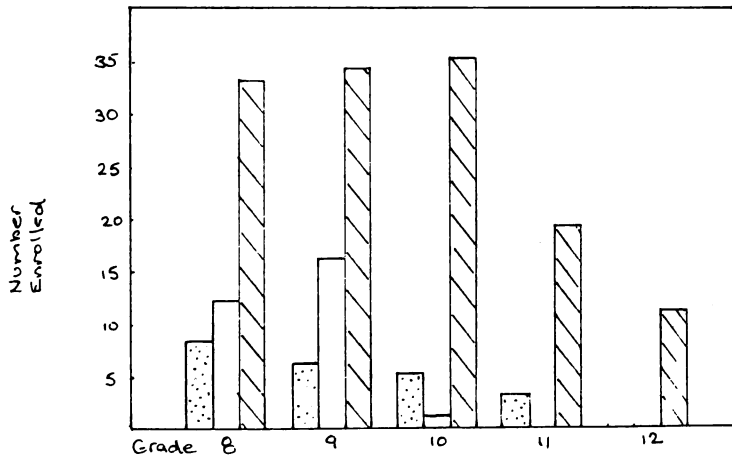
- Weipa North Aboriginal/Is's
- Jessica Rini Aboriginal/Is's
- Others

Source : School records of enrollment.




**Figure 8.** Weipa North Secondary School Enrollments.  
Semester 1. 1987.



**Figure 9.** Weipa North Secondary School Enrollments.  
Semester 2. 1987.



LEGEND

-  Weipa North Aboriginal/Is's
-  Jessica Point Aboriginal/Is's
-  Others

Source: School records of enrollments.