



# The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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programs. This article has focussed on the formal induction process implemented by the South Australian Department of Education.

This South Australian model is one which has proved successful. Importantly, adequate time has been allocated to the program to ensure its success. The support of the recruitment/induction officer is invaluable to the program and the participants. The aspect of allowing appointees to visit their appointed school for a week prior to commencing duties needs to be duplicated throughout Australia. It is far better to know what lies ahead, instead of remaining blindfolded to possible future frustrations that often reflect individual perception.

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### ALIVE AND WELL:

## Aboriginal Education in South Australia

\*Ken Darvall

During a four-week period in March and April, 1990, I had the opportunity to visit several Aboriginal and mainstream public schools in South Australia as part of a Fellowship sponsored by the New South Wales Department of School Education.

The selection of South Australia as a location to visit was recommended to the author by various colleagues in Aboriginal education who considered that "many fine things were happening" in South Australia in the area of Aboriginal education. My impressions confirmed what I had been told by others.

This article will outline some of the outstanding features of Aboriginal education in South Australia from an outsider's perspective. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the cooperation, support and goodwill from the following schools which ensured a most personal and professional educational experience: the Port Augusta schools; Maitland Area School; Point Pierce Aboriginal School; Yalata Aboriginal School; Koonibba Aboriginal School; Indulkana Aboriginal School; Amata Aboriginal School; and Pipalyatjara Aboriginal School.

## FEATURES

### *Departmental Commitment to Aboriginal Education*

Perhaps the most striking feature of Aboriginal education in South Australia is the high priority which the South Australian Department of Education places on Aboriginal education.

Priority can take on various meanings dependent upon the situation in which it is used. Frequently, the word is used as a polite way of saying that the need is justified, however, limited funds preclude assistance.

In this instance, the Department of Education has placed a clear emphasis on communicating operational plans and priorities. Starting with the Department's Three Year Plan through to the various Area and individual school plans, the commitment to Aboriginal education is very much in evidence. Significantly, suitable and appropriate funding has been allocated to Aboriginal education to ensure that priorities and specific goals are achievable. Examples of this significant funding allocation will be evident as other features are outlined in this article.

The Department's priorities for Aboriginal education for the triennium 1990-1993 are:

- To improve the capacity of the Aboriginal Education Section to anticipate and respond to change;
- To improve the capacity of the Aboriginal Education Section to provide advice to the Education Department and the Government on the implementation of Government policy;
- To provide a curriculum appropriate to the requirements of the 21st century;
- To further develop primary education for Aboriginal students with special emphasis on R-4;
- To further develop secondary education with emphasis for Aboriginal students on the middle years of schooling;
- To gather accurate information about educational processes and outcomes for Aboriginal students at a systems level;
- To develop within the framework of the above priorities in particular, the following focus areas of Literacy, Maths, LOTE and Aboriginal Studies;
- To continue the development of Aboriginal Studies for all students R-12, including for Aboriginal students.
- Improved classroom practice for teaching of Aboriginal students and Aboriginal Studies;
- To promote equality of educational opportunity for students.

- To provide appropriate support services for Aboriginal students under the Social Justice Strategy in particular for Aboriginal students;
- To establish and maintain Area and District Aboriginal Education and Aboriginal Studies Teams;
- To strengthen school discipline to provide effective learning environments for all Aboriginal Education;
- To improve support for school councils and parent participation;
- To develop a comprehensive approach to the management of human resources in Aboriginal Education
- To develop policies and processes for Aboriginal Education employee appointment, transfer and mobility; and,
- To provide safe, healthy work environments free from discrimination and harassment.

Sufficient evidence appeared around the State that appropriate action plans were being prepared, if not being implemented, in order to achieve each of the above goals. It was obvious that the Aboriginal Education Unit was providing the necessary dynamic leadership that was required.

#### *Aboriginal Education Support Teams*

A strong and positive feature of Aboriginal Education in South Australia is the support network that has been established within the educational hierarchy. First, there is the Aboriginal Education, under the leadership of Paul Hughes, which is based at Enfield in Adelaide. Second, there is the Supervisor of Aboriginal Schools who is based at the Port Augusta Area Office. Third, there are the Area and District Aboriginal Education and Aboriginal Studies Teams. Finally, at the school level, there are the invaluable Aboriginal Education Workers and the Aboriginal Education Resource Teachers. This support network provides the necessary assistance to schools to ensure that appropriate and relevant action plans in Aboriginal education are developed and then implemented.

#### *Publications*

There has been a recent emphasis on the publication of appropriate materials pertinent to Aboriginal education. These publications are top quality productions and are proving to be

valuable references for staff, students and parents. Importantly, sufficient supplies have been distributed to schools, so that the sharing of ideas is enhanced throughout the State. The publications on literacy and the Aboriginal Studies programs were extremely impressive.

#### *Action Research*

Action research has a high priority in Aboriginal education in South Australia. Action research, otherwise known as classroom investigation or teacher inquiry, is defined as "a systematic process whereby practitioners voluntarily engage in a spiral of reflection, documentation and action in order to understand more fully the nature and/or consequences of aspects of their practice with a view to shaping further action or changing their situation, preferably in collaboration with colleagues" (Davis, 1985).

Evidence of valuable action research projects in the areas of literacy and numeracy was seen in some of the Port Augusta schools. Perhaps the most exciting aspect of action research is that it provides current data for classroom situations in need of change. By documenting the results of these action research projects, classroom practitioners are able to professionally develop themselves, in addition to providing colleagues with important data for further development. Action research is definitely an area that requires further encouragement so that it becomes an important aspect of each classroom situation.

#### *Aboriginal Teacher Education Program*

The Anangu Teacher Education Program (ANTEP) is an affirmative action program designed to train Aborigines as teachers. It is a five year program that caters for the needs of interested Aborigines so that most of the teacher training program can be undertaken within the local community. The short term benefit is the provision of positive role models within schools in their local communities. The long term benefit is more Aboriginal teachers. ANTEP coordinators are appointed within school staffs to assist with the program.

#### *Literacy Resource Centres*

The provision of teacher-linguists and literacy resource centres found in several areas are a valuable resource to the local school and community as well as neighbouring schools. The

productions from the centres visited were excellent. The publications that were being produced from these literacy resource centres were proving to be invaluable to teachers in their classrooms.

*Recruitment and Induction*

A very positive feature of Aboriginal education in South Australia is the recruitment and induction program for new appointees to Aboriginal schools. An officer with specific responsibilities for recruitment and induction is attached to the Aboriginal Education Unit. The induction program which is initially conducted over a period of four weeks is one that needs to be duplicated elsewhere throughout Australia. (Please refer to my separate article on the South Australian induction program.)\*

*Technology*

It was exciting to see the use of technology to break down the barriers of isolation and the tyranny of distance. The availability of school facsimile machines ensured immediate links to district, area and head offices. The use of laser printers resulted in superior quality productions at literacy resource centres. New technology was also being used in area schools to combine new approaches to learning with the traditional face-to-face, correspondence and School of the Air methods of teaching.

CONCLUSION

Two issues will need to be resolved in the near future. First, bilingualism needs to be re-examined. Its importance within local communities varies. Perhaps it is time to evaluate bilingualism as it occurs in schools and the role that it should play in schools according to community wishes. This aspect ensures a lengthy debate and will require sufficient consultation if the program is to be effective. Second, the new trend of rolling staffing in schools, where staff are appointed whenever the vacancy occurs and the selection processes are completed, may provide some instability in schools as the process is implemented. There are many benefits in rolling staffing. However, the Department needs to ensure that isolated Aboriginal schools are not disadvantaged by the process.

It would appear that giant steps forward are being made in Aboriginal education in South Australia. In terms of the advances

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\* See pp 3-9.

and progress being made in South Australia, it must be remembered that such successes in Aboriginal education result from the sum of all its parts. Within the Department of Education is a dedicated team which is actively pursuing and supporting a progressive Aboriginal education policy. The "team" concept is very much in evidence throughout the department and its schools. Importantly, there is active support for Aboriginal education throughout the departmental hierarchy which augurs well for a positive future.

It is now time that these ideas and successes are shared elsewhere.

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All enquiries to Howard Groome, SACAE, Holbrooks Road,  
Underdale SA 5032.  
Ph: (08) 354 6446