



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*.

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ISSUES IN ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER EDUCATION

YATHA CONFERENCE

(Yatha; coming together to discuss)

Aboriginal Studies and how to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were the focus of the Queensland *Yatha* Conference.

Held in Caloundra (Qld) in June 1993 the conference made recommendations for teacher training with the goal that education become an effective tool in the reconciliation process.

Reconciliation has been on the agenda for Aboriginal people since the 1960's. The 1992 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody made recommendations that The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation be established. The Report suggested that the Council should 'play a leading role in the educative process' (Yatha, 1993:7) and stated the following:

The recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody emphasised the importance of education as the basis for long-term change, and the need to educate non-Aboriginal Australians about the cultures of Australia's indigenous peoples and the causes of division, discord and injustice.

Included in the section of the report, 'Educating for the Future', were recommendations which stated the need for school and teacher education curricula to reflect the fact that Australia has an Aboriginal history and Aboriginal viewpoints on social, cultural and historical matters. It was recommended

that schools seek the support and participation of the local Aboriginal community and Aboriginal organisations in the development and implementation of programs which incorporate Aboriginal views, and the Aboriginal people should be involved in preservice and inservice teacher education courses (Yatha, 1993:7-8).

Among the speakers opening the *Yatha* conference were The Hon. Robert Tickner MP, Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and The Hon. Pat Comben MLA, Queensland Minister for Education.

In his opening address, Mr Comben outlined two main goals of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in Queensland. The first is to ensure that *all* children receive legitimate and informed understandings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island cultures and an *accurate* knowledge of Australia's history. The second is to determine how Aboriginal Studies can effectively be taught in the state's schools.

Mr Comben stated that Aboriginal studies would be offered to students in Years 11 and 12 in 1995 and would be trialed in Queensland schools during 1994.

Mr Comben also said that effectively teaching this subject is a complex issue which requires consultation with universities to ensure appropriate units are included in teacher training courses.

While many teachers may want to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander materials in their teaching, as a consequence of their own

education they may not be equipped to do so effectively. For this reason the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies and how to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, must be included as a compulsory component of teacher training.

As Mr Tickner remarked:

...most non-indigenous Australians alive today, including people in the State of Queensland, received an abysmal education about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture. And not only did our education not tell us things that were important to understand, a great many other things including the depth and the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture, but in many ways our own text books and our education taught us to be prejudiced.

...Education plays a crucial role if the reconciliation process is to mean anything...We must have a national approach that ensures that *every* child going to school in this country has the opportunity to have a proper basis of understanding about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture. And...we need to teach the teachers, because a great many teachers are like me, at school they didn't have the opportunity to develop any proper basis of understanding of the very things they have to teach in the years ahead (Yatha, 1993:13-14).

YATHA CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. PRESERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

1. That from no later than 1996 all preservice teacher education programs

include core Aboriginal studies and the Torres Strait Islander studies for all teacher education students.

2. That the content of such core studies include:

- social justice and equity issues
- historical/sociological/political identity aspects of Aboriginal communities and Torres Strait Islander communities (rural/urban/isolated)
- the nature of an inclusive curriculum
- awareness of Aboriginal teaching and learning styles and Torres Strait Islander teaching and learning styles
- cross cultural awareness

3. That these core units be supported by the integration of:

- Aboriginal perspectives and Torres Strait Islander perspectives
- appropriate strategies for teaching Aboriginal children and Torres Strait Islander children
- appropriate strategies for teaching Aboriginal studies and Torres Strait Islander studies in the school curriculum

into both:

- studies of teaching and learning
- curriculum studies, especially those dealing with the eight key learning areas

4. That culturally inclusive teaching and learning strategies be adopted in the implementation of preservice teacher education courses.

5. So that Aboriginal perspectives and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are adequately reflected in courses, that members of Aboriginal communities and Torres Strait Islander communities (for example, representatives of

QATSIECC, Aboriginal elders) be involved in the development, implementation and evaluation of Aboriginal studies and Torres Strait Islander studies in preservice teacher education courses.

6. That all teacher education institutions work with local Aboriginal communities and Torres Strait Islander communities to provide opportunities for students to undertake culturally appropriate practical experiences in Aboriginal settings and Torres Strait Islander settings, to participate actively in an Aboriginal community or Torres Strait Islander community and to gain skills to work with Aboriginal education workers and Torres Strait Islander education workers and Aboriginal communities and Torres Strait Islander communities.

7. That, in addition to the above core studies, preservice teacher education courses offer the opportunity to take elective units and/or to take a major in Aboriginal studies and Torres Strait Islander studies, and/or Aboriginal education and Torres Strait Islander education.

8. That the Board of Teacher Registration review its Guidelines on the Acceptability of Teacher Education Programs for Teacher Registration Purposes to include appropriate reference to Aboriginal studies and Torres Strait Islander studies.

B. INSERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

9. That there be appropriate induction and systems of support for beginning Aboriginal teachers and Torres Strait Islander teachers, for beginning teach-

ers teaching Aboriginal students or Torres Strait Islander students, and for all beginning teachers teaching Aboriginal studies and Torres Strait Islander studies.

10. That teacher employing authorities and universities develop, implement, review and evaluate, professional development in Aboriginal studies and Torres Strait Islander studies for teachers, especially principals, and for teacher educators, including:

- cross-cultural awareness
- community involvement
- curriculum leadership
- Aboriginal pedagogy
- Torres Strait Islander pedagogy.

11. That members of Aboriginal communities and Torres Strait Islander communities (for example representatives of QATSIECC, Aboriginal elders) be involved in the development, implementation and evaluation of Aboriginal studies and Torres Strait Islander studies in inservice teacher education courses.

C. RESEARCH IN TEACHER EDUCATION

12. That teacher education institutions initiate and support research into Aboriginal pedagogy and Torres Strait Islander pedagogy from a practical perspective that caters for diversity within cultural groups and communities.

13. That the Queensland Higher Education Forum develop a policy on research ethics in the areas of Aboriginal studies and Torres Strait Islander studies, and Aboriginal pedagogy, for adoption by all higher education institutions.

D. REPRESENTATION ON DECISION-MAKING BODIES

14. That there be a representative of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders on the Board of Teacher Registration.

E. SELECTION, RECRUITMENT AND PROMOTION

Complementing the recommendations concerning preservice and inservice teacher education were a number of recommendations with implications for selection and employment. These focused on the issues summarised below:

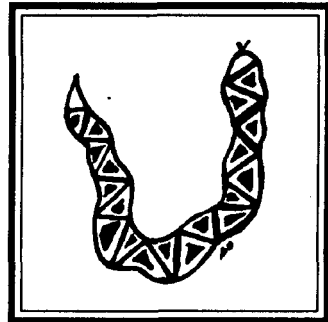
- increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates employed in schools;
- employing only graduates with appropriate qualifications and experience in locations with significant indigenous populations;
- including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives (e.g., nominees of QATSIECC) on interview panels;
- ensuring that Aboriginal perspectives and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are taken into account in selection criteria and in selection processes;
- including an understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island cultures and of educating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the selection criteria for the selection of AST another promotional positions;
- developing appropriate programs and career structures for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workers, including community teachers and teacher aides;
- appointing Aboriginal and/or Torres

Strait Islander education officers to all school support centres.

F. OTHER

A number of recommendations pertaining to school curriculum, community involvement in schools and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in schools were also made and these are included in the full listing of group recommendations in Appendix 4 of the Yatha conference proceedings document.

(These recommendations have been reprinted as they appear in the *Yatha* Conference Proceedings document produced by the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration, Toowong, December 1993)



Errors and omissions:

Please note that the following errors which appeared in Kel Dummett's article: A school Reading Support Program, in Volume 21, No 5, 1993 occurred during the production of the journal and were in no way the fault of the author;

-cloze incorrectly spelt close

-Kel Dummett's name was also incorrectly spelt Dummmatt.

The Editors apologise for any inconvenience caused by these typographical errors.