



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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Editorial

For many years the Aboriginal “learning styles” debate has dominated the practice of Indigenous education. Jan Stewart’s paper attempts to move on from that debate, questioning the validity of a canon that could be accused of merely perpetuating colonial paradigms and failing to acknowledge the integrity of the individual. She states that where established, and often unchallenged, anthropological descriptions of Indigenous peoples have dominated educational thinking concerning life experiences, it is now time to adopt a different perspective on the use of the cultural discourse and how it affects individual students.

Her work discusses learning styles and cultural traits that are often then used to marginalise and alienate Indigenous students within mainstream education. This highlights the importance of educational stakeholders being aware of the role of culture in Indigenous students’ lives and the influence this may have in determining the quality of education they receive. The main theme is that cultural awareness can be used appropriately to further the effectiveness of communication.

Stuart Dwyer shares some experiences working within a remote school educational environment. He examines different programs and initiatives adopted by teachers and community members to establish a community school that was both culturally inclusive as well as educationally valuable.

In the beginning he shows that community involvement in education is integral for achieving positive outcomes for students, teachers and schools. This concept was adopted by the school to help create an environment that reflected cultural values and assisted the teachers to understand the context in which they were teaching.

Currently across Australia there is a growing national awareness of the significance of parental participation and the need for decision-making processes in schools. His school began exploring how the concept of community involvement could become a vehicle that allowed the school and wider community to foster and implement effective educational programs.

Why Indigenous students stay at or leave school is a question which has been asked constantly. In order to investigate why, Damien Howard’s paper considers comments made by Indigenous adults returning to school about their earlier experiences. They were written by Indigenous people who have chosen to return to education in the Northern Territory after leaving school early.

Fifty-two Indigenous students wrote comments on their earlier school experiences. They came from all around Australia and ranged in age from late teens to early forties. What they experienced at different places and at different times were remarkably similar. Overt discrimination was more prominent in times past and has become subtler in recent times.

Relationships provided the motivation to be at school, helped the enjoyment of being there and was the medium of learning. The most important influence in people’s motivation in staying at school was family support. Friends, problems with other students, regrets, and confidence were also asked about.

The final paper of Simon Leonard’s is primarily an analysis of a children’s book, which he was given as a young child. He found that many of his understandings and assumptions about Aboriginal society and race relations originate from this book regardless of what he had learned later in Australian history. He states that the reality of most teachers working with Aboriginal students is that

their assumptions about Aboriginal students are based on what they have worked out as children. These concepts can be useful or may not be accurate. He attempts here to unearth some of them.

He believes that the book was ahead of its time. The critique is written with the benefit of a further twenty years of scholarship and debate.

As this will be Vivien Royle's last edition of the journal we would all like to thank her for her commitment and support throughout her involvement. We wish her every success in her new business.

Michael Williams
Executive Editor

Jackie Huggins
Guest Editor