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Section D: Research

Where to Now? Cultural Liberation or Continued Subjugation

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- control of education
- community participation
- equity, access and participation
- economic rationalism and outcomes orientation
- introduction of Australian Indigenous studies.

Introduction — An Historical Perspective

Since the 1970s considerable human effort and fiscal resources have been expended on improving the provision of education for Australian Indigenous peoples. The success or failure of such efforts and resources allocations is not clear and requires research. What is clear is that there has been an impact on the educational outcomes of Australian Indigenous peoples during this time. Indeed, there have been enormous advances in some areas and minor in other.

This paper identifies initiatives which have had an impact on the direction of education and training, comments on their effectiveness to meet acceptable outcomes for Australian Indigenous students, particularly at the tertiary level and using the finding of a research project proposes a future scenario.

The initiatives worthy of mention include:

- community development

While it could be argued that these innovations had their roots in schooling there are also implications for other sectors of education and training.

Community development

Australian Indigenous groups and individuals and Federal, State and Territory governments have sought community development for Indigenous Australians. Essentially community development aimed at giving Australian Indigenous communities an opportunity to make decisions about the future of their communities, to implement strategies through the provision of resources, and to have responsibility for decisions, planning and redirection.

In many Australian Indigenous communities community development defined in terms of decision-making already existed. The intrusion of peoples from other cultures with their technology and attitudes and the culture clash that ensued resulted in the breakdown of many effective practices. Indeed, viewed from a culturally different

and relative perspective, Indigenous Australian communities were not developed.

Access to and achievement in education is viewed as one key to development regardless of how development is defined — whether as social and economic upward mobility within Australian society or recognised and acknowledged achievement within one's own cultural milieu or any points between these two extremes. True development is broader than access to education. One needs to consider development in all aspects of Australian Indigenous life such as in housing, health and employment, legal services and economic independence.

Control of educational services

Education in part has been the catalyst for community development. Indeed, Australian Indigenous community education organisations (Aboriginal Consultative Group to the Schools Commission [ACG], 1975; and the National Aboriginal Education Committee [NAEC], 1978 and individuals sought control of decisions about education service delivery. It was believed that, through influencing decisions about curriculum development and delivery, selection and appointment of staff and allocation of fiscal resources, an impact on the critical situation of Australian Indigenous education could be made (ACG, 1975: 7-34; NAEC, 1978: 3.5). This call for control was to be reiterated almost a decade later by the Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force (AEPTF) in 1988.

Demands for control ranged from the conservative view of the ACG of 'reasonable control' (ACG, 1975: in Letter) to the more radical view of the AEPTF of 'based on the principles of self-determination and able to influence the education of [Australian Indigenous] children' (AEPTF, 1988: 15), to community-controlled Australian Indigenous independent schools where decisions on school governance, staffing and the curriculum were made largely by the community within the constraints of State and Territory education systems.

Two reports, *Education for Aborigines* (ACG, 1975) and the *Report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force* (AEPTF, 1989) were developed by committees consisting wholly of informed Australian Indigenous peoples and individuals

who in sum represented a wide variety of socio-cultural, economic and linguistic communities. Each report, although not a rigorously argued philosophical account of educational theory at the time, was a blueprint for planning and instrumental in heightening awareness of the critical situation in which Australian Indigenous community access and opportunity to education were provided by the State. Each report espoused Indigenous Australian community participation in decision-making processes about education as necessary in improving education services and delivery. The ACG recommended the establishment of advisory committees to advise education bureaucracies, at the State, Territory and Commonwealth levels; the creating of Indigenous Australian Units within Education Department with responsibility for Australian Indigenous education and the employment of Australian Indigenous personnel in these Units (ACG, 1975: 8-12). The AEPTF Report was responsible, in part, for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NAEP).

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy (NAEP, 1989) — a joint statement of State and Territory and Commonwealth Education Ministers had as one of its four main purposes, '[t]o ensure Aboriginal involvement in decision-making' (NAEP, 1989: 1). A result of this policy has been the implementation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) Program culminating in the establishment of Australian Indigenous community committees as advisory groups to schools and tertiary institutions. ASSPA committees have been established in the majority of schools that have an Australian Indigenous student population. Australian Indigenous Advisory/Management Committees exist in all Australian universities which have Australian Indigenous Studies Units/Centres or Faculties.

The issue of Australian Indigenous control of the provision of education remains unresolved. However, in keeping with Commonwealth demands for increased community participation, most Australian States and Territories, if not all, have undertaken reviews of their educational systems culminating in restructures and relocation of authority. Perhaps increased community participation may lead to increased control although

there are issues of teacher professionalism and autonomy and political intervention which need to be considered.

Community participation

Education, it seems, is as much a political exercise as it is a socialisation process and a transmission of a culture. That governments can control the provision of education is certainly evident during the period of education change in Australia since 1970. With increased Commonwealth government intervention, education goals moved away from the principle of equality of opportunity to equity, social justice and equality of outcomes in the 1980s to the present. These educational changes heralded a call echoed by Australian Indigenous community organisations and individuals for community participation in education reflected in less centralised control—indeed, devolution of decision-making to schools in consultation with parents (Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Training [The Karmel Report], 1973: 9).

Through the Commonwealth Schools Commission, Commonwealth funding was directed towards increasing community participation. School systems needed to be restructured to accommodate this idea. Within the Australian Indigenous education context State, Territory and Commonwealth advisory committees and a consultation network to government were established and were viewed as a means of addressing issues associated with the education of Australian Indigenous peoples. The degree to which these committees were effective in changing the direction of Australian Indigenous education is not clear, but is worthy of study.

Johnson (in Simpson, 1984: 7) recognised that 'increasing participation in education of all sectors of society is a genuine attempt to increase equity and justice and harmony in Australia'. A major Australian study (Moore, 1988) concluded that when the values of the home and the school clashed, students were more likely to opt for the home for resolution. Other studies (Schiff, 1976; Stearnes, 1973) discovered that when parents participate in the school, attendance improves, children study better and they acquire basic skills more quickly. These findings were endorsed by the Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER) in their

Making Schools More Effective: Report of the Australian Effective Schools Project (McGaw et al., 1993: 10).

That community participation can improve school performance and student achievement has been the rationale for establishing such an approach. The concept of community participation has advanced from window-dressing and soothing or co-opting activities to collaboration and delegation or transfer of control activities to democratic governance and participative practices of the 1990s. Community participation required restructuring of administrative operations within the States and Territories.

Equity, access and participation

Equity of access to and participation in education became a significant catch-cry in the latter part of the 1970s and throughout the 1980s. Much financial and personal effort was expended. The principles of equity and access within an Indigenous Australian context seemed to refer to the provision of services aimed at dealing with the critical educational, socio-cultural, political, linguistic and spiritual situation within which the original inhabitants of this country find themselves. Indigenous Australians, even with an influx of Commonwealth and State government financial resources, numerous policies and practices and immeasurable amounts of goodwill, still remain, in terms of non-Indigenous Australian society, severely disadvantaged. Most are locked in a cycle of poverty with a welfare dependency syndrome. Achieving equity before the arrival of the twenty-first century seems an impossible dream.

To achieve equity, emphasis has been placed on employment, education and training. It is believed that appropriate education and training outcomes lend themselves to an improvement in employment status which, amongst other things, can assist in Australian Indigenous liberation from oppression, subjugation and abuse. Suitable employment can supplement the establishment of an economic base through the recognition of prior ownership of this continent through land rights legislation and the combatting of racism currently prevalent across all facets of Australian life and society. The individual and group initiatives already demonstrated by some Indigenous Australians evidenced by their entrepreneurialism, willingness

and ability to function adequately within a technologically sophisticated and highly economically conservative Australia and an Indigenous Australian society deeply rooted in cultural norms which restrict a break away from community low expectations, are aspects of employment which need to be promoted in order to make advances — advances which do not deny one's rich cultural heritage.

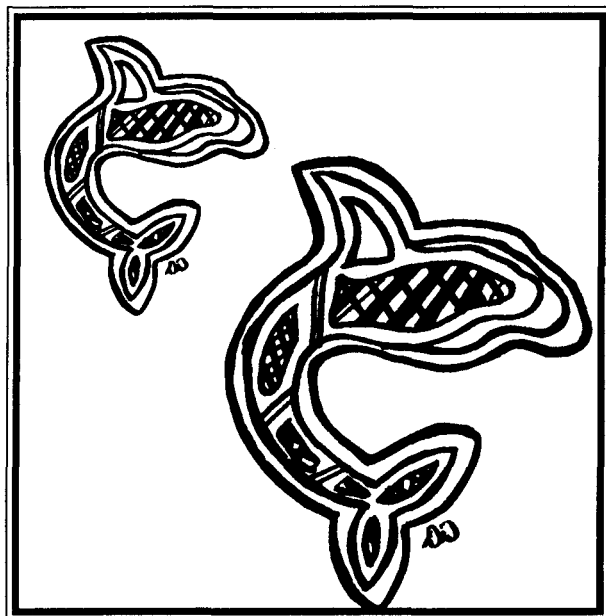
Economic rationalism and outcomes orientation

Strategic planning has been the driving force in the 1990s, with funds being allocated on the basis of improved performance in retention, completion and achievement rates, and focusing on the achievement of targets negotiated between the Commonwealth and State or Territory educational institutions.

For example, Australian universities are encouraged to develop a mission statement which outlines their intentions and sets the boundaries for the provision of services to their student population. In keeping with Commonwealth government requirements, each university has an Equity Plan which aims at promoting equity and improving access and participation for identified target groups within the community.

Introduction of Australian Indigenous studies

The introduction of studies about Australian Indigenous peoples and their languages in school and tertiary institutions was, it seems, a way of information all Australians of the complex nature of:



- Australian Indigenous knowledge, sociology, ideology, technology and languages
- Australian history
- the role Australian Indigenous peoples have played in Australia as Australians.

Australian Indigenous studies and language teaching has also provided for Australian Indigenous youth an opportunity to reaffirm their heritage and identity, but has also led to cultural alienation and confusion.

Although many school and tertiary institutions offer units in Australian Indigenous studies and language teaching as either an elective or a core subject, there are unresolved issues relating to instruction, pedagogy and the role that non-Indigenous Australian peoples should play. The issue is particularly pertinent in tertiary institutions where academics have been given knowledge by the Australian Indigenous communities for purposes of research and study. Does academic licence apply in these circumstances, or are Elder members of the Australian Indigenous communities the custodians of knowledge and the ones who should approve its sharing across other cultures? Should teachers and lecturers be social activists whereby they give the Australian Indigenous community the instruments to enact change, or are they social constructors — redefiners of the social nature of Australian Indigenous societies?

The quality of delivery of Australian Indigenous studies programs is also a contentious issue, as is the interest demonstrated by teachers and lecturers in wanting to teach the subject, or at least to have Australian Indigenous perspectives within their area of instruction.

Lampert and Lilley (1996) in a survey of 251 lecturers from The University of Queensland found in relation to Australian Indigenous studies that:

- 54.5% of lecturers interviewed said that teaching Australian Indigenous studies is at least somewhat important in the subjects they teach
- 33.5% identify themselves as teaching some Australian Indigenous studies; another 13% may refer to Australian Indigenous content on occasions

- some of the difficulties in teaching it include the sensitive nature of the material, lack of resources, time and workload constraints, lack of knowledge, lack of right to teach the material and difficulties in knowing how to teach the content
- 87% of those interviewed said it is at least somewhat important to be teaching Australian Indigenous studies at university; the majority of respondents said it is most important to include it where it is related to the course
- 44.6% of lecturers who currently teach some Australian Indigenous studies said that their non-Indigenous students respond positively; in other cases there may be mixed reaction. Of the lecturers who teach Australian Indigenous studies content and have Australian Indigenous peoples in their classrooms, 31% said these students always respond positively to the content.

An analysis of these findings gives an indication that there is little recognition of the depth of Australian Indigenous knowledge, and that Australian Indigenous knowledge transcends all other knowledge. Reasons for Australian Indigenous studies not being highly regarded requires further research.

Acceptable Outcomes for Indigenous Australian Tertiary students

Australian tertiary institutions have a responsibility to meet the needs of their students. Australian Indigenous tertiary students have needs and aspirations similar to those of all Australians. There is, however, an additional dimension — knowledge and skills to operate in their own communities. Outlined below are generally accepted outcomes.

Indigenous Australian expectations

- A quality education which allows socio-cultural and intellectual empowerment to decide their own future.
- Knowledge and skills development in order to function within a wider Australian society. 'Aboriginal parents have expressed the desire for their children to be able to function in both their own culture and the wider Australian community' (NAEC, 1980: 4).

- Equity as defined by the authors of the manifesto which was released on the sesqui-centennial of the 26 January 1788 (see below).

University expectations

- Academic and research excellence.
- Employability which could improve the low employment status of Australian Indigenous peoples at all levels of industry and the professions, and in so doing address participation, social justice and economic development principles.

The Sesqui-centennial Definition of Equity

We do not wish to be regarded with sentimental sympathy, or to be preserved, like the koala bears, as exhibits; but we do ask for your real sympathy and understanding of our plight.

We do not wish to be studied as scientific or anthropological curiosities. All such efforts in your behalf are wasted. We have no desire to go back to the primitive conditions of the Stone Age. We ask you to teach our children to live in the Modern Age, as modern citizens.

Our people are very good and quick learners. Why do you deliberately keep us backward? Is it merely to give yourselves the pleasure of feeling superior? Give our children the same chances as your own and they will do as well as your children!

We ask for equal education, equal opportunities, equal wages, equal rights to possess property, or to be our own masters — equal citizenship ... Give us the same chances as yourselves to be just as good or better Australians than you! Keep your charity! We only want justice.

Success of Efforts

Regardless of all of the initiatives that have been implemented on behalf of Australian Indigenous peoples, this section of the Australian community remains disadvantaged. There have been advances. The emergence of an economically independent middle class of Australian Indigenous peoples is evidence. But still community development in terms of equitable educational access, participation

and outcomes; of better housing, health and employment; of legal services and economic independence. Australian Indigenous peoples still remain subjugated by an imposed 'white' value system which denies heritage, past atrocities and land ownership. Until non-Indigenous Australians are prepared to change their superior attitudes, this situation of oppression will not change. Acceptable outcomes will not be achieved.

Access, participation and outcomes

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs recently presented a report, *Access and Equity: Rhetoric or Reality?*, which dealt with the way in which mainstream programs are meeting the needs of Indigenous Australian peoples. The Committee found that there are still considerable barriers for Australian Indigenous peoples in gaining full access to, and equitable treatment in, the range of government services available. These barriers include racism, language, culture, inappropriately designed and delivered services, and a lack of services in many areas. Australian Indigenous women, older people, people with disability, and youth face particular additional disadvantage (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission [ATSIC], 1994: 11).

Tertiary support centres and culturally appropriate learning environment

Evidence exists (ATSIC, 1994; ABS, 1994) that participation has increased as a result of access, but that outcomes are improving slowly and have a long way to go to be commensurate with the amount of funding allotted to universities under the guise of student support. Nor is the level of support provided to Indigenous Australian students through the Indigenous Australian Centres or Units located in all Australian universities reflected in this expenditure. However, student enrolment, participation and retention rates are improving and will continue to do so provided that the effective and efficient academic and socio-cultural support is provided to Indigenous Australian students.

As well as support systems, however, it is important that high standards of achievement for Indigenous Australian students are maintained in keeping with an appropriate cultural orientation. The establishment of a culturally appropriate learning environment may require changes to existing methods of higher education planning, resource

allocation, course delivery, student recruitment, admission and assessment.

Indigenous Australians are faced with an environment within universities which denies their different cultural orientation from other Australians. Indigenous Australian still have an uphill battle to achieve equity, particularly in relation to their intellectual standing. This is despite the introduction of Australian Indigenous Studies and language teaching.

The introduction of the teaching of Australian Indigenous Studies and languages in Australian schools and tertiary institutions has had an adverse effect on educational outcomes for Australian Indigenous peoples. While increasing school and tertiary student numbers, the recognition of the socio-cultural benefits for all Australians has not been forthcoming (Lampert and Lilley, 1996).

The majority of tertiary students who undertake Australian Indigenous Studies electives tend to be from overseas. Students forced to undertake compulsory units do so initially with apprehension, but soon warm to the academic nature of the subjects.

The Evidence — The Research

Introduction

Previous research (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 1995; Lampert and Lilley, 1996) in the area of student support for Indigenous Australian students within the university sector revealed a disparity between the academic concept of what constituted 'support' within the enclave of Indigenous Australian Student Support Units, and the actual 'need' of the Indigenous Australian students.

At one end of the paradigm, academic staff were focusing on the provision of numeracy and literacy support, utilising ATAS to meet these shortcomings as the priority in support; yet the student body sought other forms of support, summarised as:

- **housekeeping skills** (time management, how to study, how to organise study, study techniques or routines within their own cultural paradigm)
- **life skills** (survival skills in the university environment, skills in dealing with staff and the university system, self-esteem — the

perceived need for access to Indigenous counsellors)

- **financial skills** (how to budget, how to manage Abstudy) (Foley, 1996).

In the previous study, 85% of students interviewed who had discontinued studies stated that they did not feel that it was a lack of academic ability that forced them to discontinue; rather it was a mixture of personal or situational problems combined with trying to survive in what they deemed was an inhospitable environment, i.e. the Eurocentric university bureaucracy. The findings of this initial research went on to become the foundations of the Indigenous Australian Recruitment and Career Development Strategy in that institution. The students' comments were used to identify areas of the university, and the delivery of university services that needed Indigenous sensitivity, involvement or content.

Purpose of this research

Three years on, at a different institution within a different institutional culture, is the situation similar? is there a continuing disparity in the academic concept of what constituted student support within the enclave of Indigenous Australian Student Support Units and the actual 'need' of the Indigenous Australian students? We need to revisit the students' needs and look at the cultural orientation of the students and the institution.

Client group

Indigenous Australian students enrolled at the university, both full-time and part-time, who had received a grade of 3 or less in semester one 1998 (4 being a pass on a scale of 1-7).

Methodology

Our methodology in obtaining the following data was to randomly interview students enrolled and studying at the main city campus. (The city campus has the highest enrolment of Indigenous students.)

Telephone interviews and face-to-face interviews when appropriate were used, set in a non-threatening, totally confidential environment. The random selection of these students including students continuing in their studies, students who had withdrawn from study (including deferment) and students who had permanently discontinued their studies.

The students were asked two questions:

- In the student's opinion, what were the contributing factor or factors that led to their poor performance? (They were then asked to validate their comments by giving examples.)
- What can be improved to help you perform at your potential?

Outcomes/findings

From a target population of 44, we obtained 19 replies, or a 43% response rate. The results for question one are:

- 63% advised that their problems in travelling were a contributing factor.
- 47% advised that lack of money was a contributing factor. (Interestingly there is a strong correlation with travel, money and family issues. Students found they both had to work to support their family commitments and had no money for transport costs, which severely reduced their actual time on campus.)
- 47% advised that family pressures and demands occupied a major part of their allocated study time, which severely affected their performance.
- 32% experienced medical problems of a long-term nature that affected performance.
- 26% stated that the poor standard of lecturing and subject delivery turned them off the subject, making the workload tedious and boring. Their inability to manage this resulted in poor performance. Students also mentioned their disappointment in enrolling in what they thought were Indigenous subjects, but which were invariably taught from a non-Indigenous perspective.
- 21% concluded that their ATAS tutor, or lack of a tutor, or slow appointment of a tutor had a negative effect on their performance.
- 16% thought that their overall lack of self-esteem, their shyness, being scared to go to lectures, inhibited them.
- 11% had too high a subject load, which reduced their overall performance.
- 5% had no study skills. (An interestingly low result when compared to the 1995 study which is possibly an indicator of the difference in student ability between the two institutions.)
- 5% expressed their opinion that the racial and sexual harassment they had experienced in

class prohibited a satisfactory academic performance.

The replies to the second question were as follows.

- 84% requested after-hours access to computers.
- 53% requested access to computers and printers that worked.
- 47% requested an Indigenous Australian Social Worker on staff, to assist them.
- 26% requested access to an after-hours Indigenous Australian Counsellor.
- 26% stated that there needs to be increased communication between the Unit staff and the students, so the students know what's going on.
- 21% requested a female Indigenous Australian Student Support Officer.
- 5% requested access to an emergency food fund, as periodically students went without food to pay for fares to attend university, or ate and didn't attend.

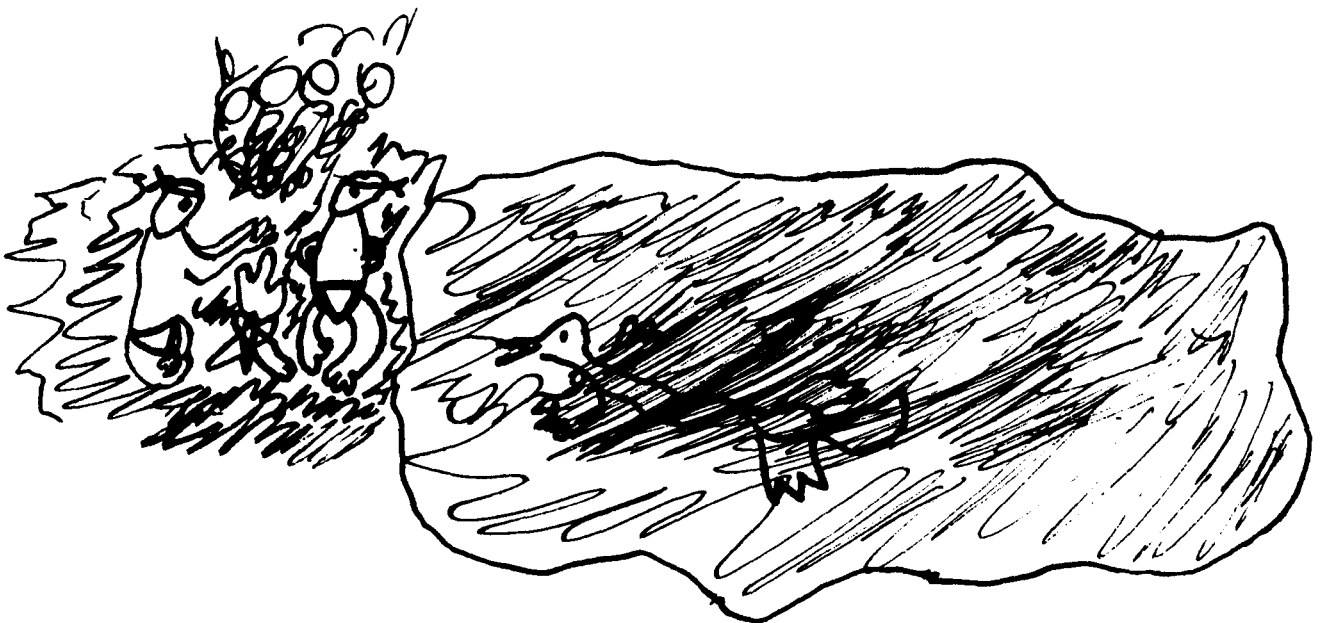
Conclusions

In the comparison of the two sets of findings from 1995 to 1998 there appears to be a shift in the socio-economic problems of the students. The means testing of Abstudy and the reduction of Abstudy entitlements was mentioned by the majority of the students as a concern when their initial responses were probed. The 1995 results showed only a 30% inability to manage financially. The current

findings indicate that 63% of students experience difficulty in meeting the costs of travel to get to a campus which is serviced by City Council bus and ferry services, and a short walk from a government rail service.

Travel time was a contributing factor; however, the majority mentioned the cost of travel as a major deterrent. Adding the direct response of 'lack of income' as a prohibiting factor in attendance and performance, we have a doubling effect of lack of finances as a major contributing factor. When we also include the comments of family pressures and the resultant burden of working to support family obligations, the overall effect of financial pressure on the student is without doubt the most significant contributing factor in student's poor attendance and resultant performance. This is before we look at the environment of the institution.

The general poverty of the student community is a concern. This is highlighted by the request for an emergency food fund, having to juggle the implication of not eating and travelling to university, or eating and having no bus fare to attend. The number of responses requesting after-hours access to computers and the heavy reliance on Unit-provided computers is another indicator of the poverty within the Indigenous student population. We are advised that the majority of non-Indigenous Australian students at this university possess their own computers. All of



these issues, it would seem, are not recognised by the institution.

Poverty in the Indigenous community has been resistant to numerous government programs in the past. This raises the question of the current implications of reduced government funding. Is this trend within the student body going to increase? The Indigenous people of Australia are the poorest, highest unemployed and under-educated group in Australian society (Pollard, 1988).

Government report after report confirms this absurd level of social injustice; yet ten years after Pollard's work, the research outcomes stated highlight that the situation could in fact be deteriorating.

The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Mr John Heron's discussion paper of March this year, 'Removing the Welfare Shackles' mentions that for Indigenous peoples to break away from welfare dependency there needs to be an improvement in areas such as employment, housing, health and the criminal justice system. He omits education. Without education there is no employment; without employment there is no housing or income for good food and thus better health. It would appear that the reduction in emphasis on Indigenous education could exacerbate the current increase in student poverty. Without Indigenous content in the limited education remaining, the possible outcomes are difficult to accept.

The lack of Indigenous Australian support mechanisms for the students by way of Indigenous counselling staff, and the lack of Indigenous Australian participation in subject content and delivery are another major concern. Over one-quarter of students outlined problems with subject content — the lack of Indigenous issues, delivery and objectivity. As one student stated, she 'enrolled in an Indigenous Australian anthropology subject, only to be taught by a white-fella, from a white-fella view'. Some 37% of students noted that their subject load and lack of self-esteem put them at a disadvantage in the university structure in comparison (in their eyes) to non-Indigenous students.

Where to Now? — Cultural liberation or continued subjugation

The central feature of any university wishing to improve higher educational outcomes for Australian Indigenous students is the establishment of a cultural identity which releases them from subjugation by the white cultural values.

Australian Indigenous students have to perform academically and socially within a culture which acts against Australian Indigenous identity construction. The cultural values of white Australians is at times in conflict with that of the Australian Indigenous population. Every effort needs to be made to provide a culturally sensitive environment for students.

One means of doing this is to establish a cultural identity within the school or tertiary institution. In a previous paper (Budby 1993) a model was constructed which defined how a cultural identity could be implemented within a university community situation. The concepts raised in that paper have relevance here and will be outlined and used to suggest strategies and actions for consideration in maximising educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

All societies have cultural knowledge and experiences, rules, regulations, obligations and codes of behaviour which influence responses to a given situation, thinking and philosophy. Kickett (1992) defines these cultural characteristics from which are derived, validated and practised Aboriginal standards as Aboriginal terms of reference and are applicable for all Indigenous Australians. These terms of reference which vary, depending upon the life experiences and situation of any individual or community, constitute guidelines for the establishment of an appropriate cultural orientation for Indigenous Australians.

Based on the principle that once individuals know how to learn, their peaceful liberation from oppression becomes a reality within their own world and within their own timeframe, Kickett (1992) constructs guiding principles which are observed in Australian Indigenous terms of

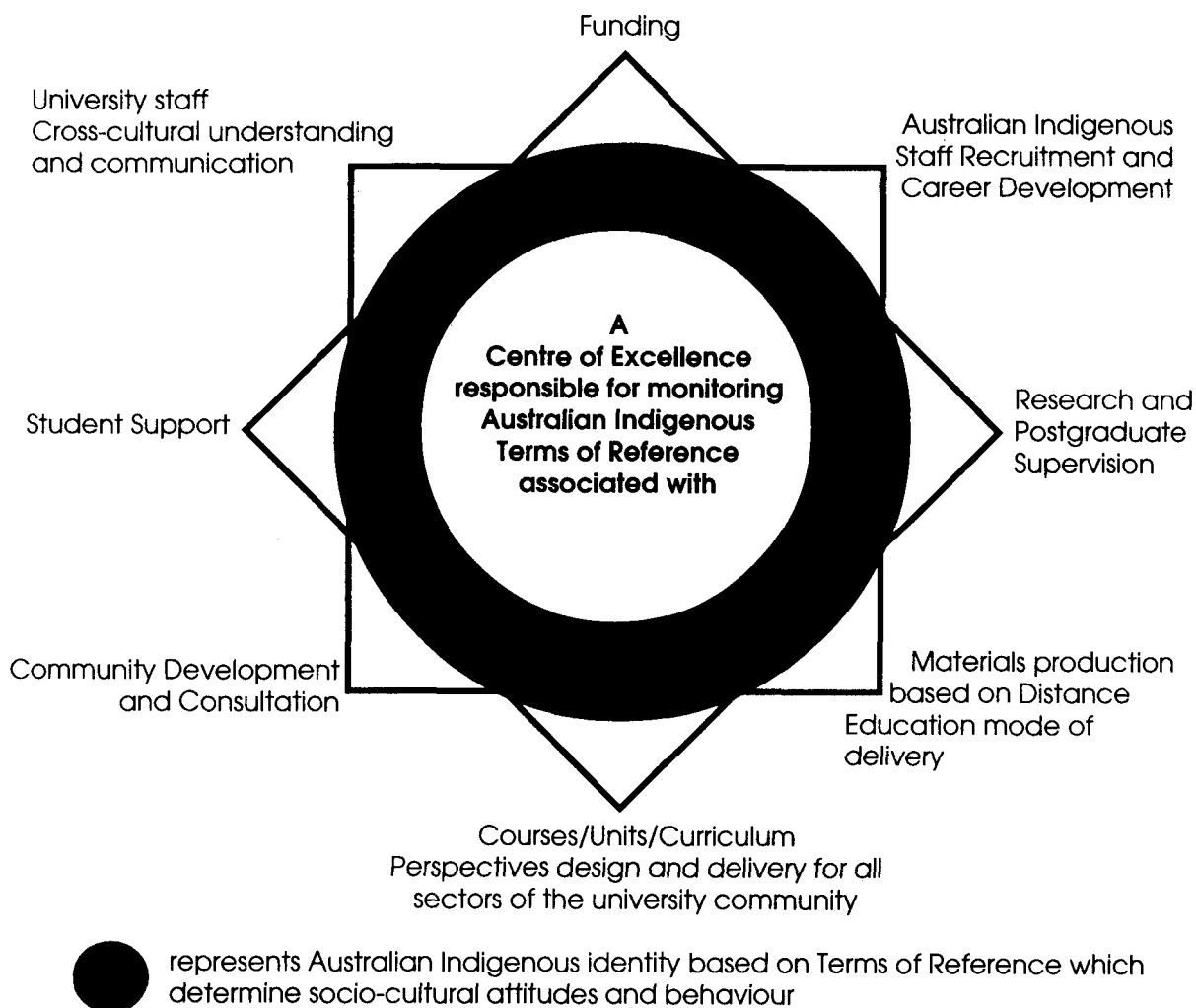
reference. That encompasses the cultural knowledge, understanding and experiences that are associated with a commitment to Aboriginal ways of thinking, working and reflecting, and incorporates specific and implicit cultural values, beliefs and priorities from which Aboriginal standards are derived, validated and practised. These standards will and can vary according to the diverse range of cultural values, beliefs, needs and priorities from within local settings or specific contexts.

Hughes and More (1993) and Hughes and Andrews (1988) propose the existence of an Indigenous Australian pedagogy based on the Indigenous Australian worldview and cultural norms as the catalyst to understanding how learning occurs amongst culturally different peoples. Further research, however, is being undertaken to clarify this position.

For Indigenous Australians, however, a distinct paucity of recognition of any appropriate cultural orientation or terms of reference has resulted in a denial or limited access to a quality education and positive educational outcomes. A knowledge and understanding of these concepts can assist educators in the provision of quality higher education programs and in turn improve the participation, achievement and retention levels of Aboriginal students.

Catering for cultural difference through recognition of a cultural orientation or Indigenous Australian terms of reference does not necessarily mean a downgrading of standards. In fact, it means that students and staff will have their lives enriched through gaining a knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the cultures and values of a society other than their own.

Figure 1: A future scenario for universities



A culturally appropriate environment also provides an essential support and catering role for Aboriginal people keen to re-enter and pursue further higher education studies, enabling the development of appropriate skills to allow achievement of economical independence with labour marketability, while still maintaining a strong Indigenous Australian.

The debate is whether such an orientation is based on Indigenous Australian identity or terms of reference, or based on life experiences.

For many Australian Indigenous students who have achieved well academically elsewhere or have met entry criteria enabling their enrolment at university, school and related life experiences may not have embraced a concentrated on Indigenous Australian identity or community worldview. Indeed, their cultural orientation may well be one which has situated them socio-economically, linguistically, politically and spiritually more within the wider Australian society than within their own Indigenous Australian identity. These students, although gaining entry through alternative entry measures, may not be in need of support from Units and Centres, as much as those who have retained their cultural identity. For the former students, the cultural orientation provided by the university or support units/centres may need to promote cultural identity.

Currently, in many instances, academic success at school rather than cultural knowledge is required.

It is through Indigenous Australian support units/centres/schools or faculties that Indigenous Australian initiatives are generated and promoted. Essentially the initiatives reflect community requirements and expressed educational needs. Implementation of any initiatives must, however, be the responsibility of and supported by the whole university community.

Indigenous Australian units/centres/schools/faculties perform a linkage role between the Indigenous Australian community and the university. These organisations are committed to higher education that furthers the advancement of Indigenous Australians in a manner that engenders Indigenous Australian values, control, and the achievement of equity through culturally appropriate programs.

Within each Australian university there exists an Indigenous Australian unit, centre, school or faculty which has responsibility for Indigenous Australian students. That these organisations exist should not deter other sections of a university community from taking some responsibility for Indigenous Australian student matters. It is our view, however, that these organisations must maintain a principal coordinating role, and assist other sections of the university with forward planning and implementation of activities related to Indigenous Australian students.

Indigenous Australian units, centres, schools or faculties can become a centre of excellence through:

- adequate responsiveness to university and community needs
- professional performance of operations
- employment of key personnel
- high student participation, retention and achievements levels
- provision of quality programs
- efficient utilisation of limited resources
- centre for research.

To varying degrees, many — if not all — of these qualities are already a feature of operations and are successful.

The university and the external community need a focal point for referral about up-to-date information on Indigenous Australian matters. Most existing units, centres, school or faculty require a specifically funded resource centre and research and development unit as part of their operations. A resource centre containing suitable up-to-date Indigenous Australian print and non-print materials, with links to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies could warehouse Indigenous Australian knowledge and be a source for easy access to the Indigenous Australian community. Such a resource centre could be utilised not only by university staff and students, but by the general community.

A Research and Development Unit could have responsibility for:

- preparing research submissions
- documenting Indigenous Australian terms of reference, pedagogy and ways of learning

- establishing principles for research associated with Aboriginal communities
- organising and conducting university and wider community cultural awareness programs
- identifying a body of Indigenous Australian knowledge appropriate for inclusion in the content of all university courses and units
- undertaking commissioned research.

Both the resource centre and the research and development unit could result in the gathering of a pool of skilled Aboriginal people who can solicit, gather and assess through research a body of knowledge and information which could be used by all sections of the Curtin University community. To achieve these ends, Indigenous units, centres, schools and faculties need to review their staff situations and develop flexible career structures for employees which cater for the diverse needs of students, and which are in accord with staff appointment tenure, career aspiration, training and professional development requirements. Funding should be allocated for research.

The study of Indigenous Australian societies 'presents a perspective of complex, diverse, but interrelated cultures and languages that are linked to the land and have undergone change'.

Aspects of Aboriginal societies can be used to explain concepts that would normally be made explicit through examples drawn from Western cultures. This knowledge is so well-developed that it constitutes a discipline. Bearing this in mind, it is appropriate that consideration be given to the incorporation of content into the content of all university courses. Indigenous Australian studies should be a component of the education of all higher education programs. The quality of a program can be measured by the degree to which Aboriginal participation is encouraged and occurs.

A paucity of Indigenous Australian perspectives exists in the curriculum/studies needed to address racism and to enhance increased understanding of the issues. If the Commonwealth policy of Reconciliation is to be achieved, then all Australian must gain knowledge about the Indigenous Australian population.

Acknowledging that intellectual ability can be measured in ways other than through the use of

the English language has implications for future assessment procedures. Multiple choice tests and essay writing examination may need to be replaced by oral examinations and representation of complex concepts through pictorial means. Assignment writing and presentations may need to be used to replace examinations, and so forth.

Implementation of the above ideas will result in improved educational outcomes for our peoples.

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