

A
Submission
to the
House of Representatives Standing Committee
on Indigenous Affairs Inquiry into
Educational Opportunities for Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander students.

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Introduction

This submission initially examines critical aspects of education services and programs that are delivered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, the submission also incorporates comments against each identified terms of reference of the Inquiry and where appropriate recommended actions will be offered.

The argument is advanced that the existing systems of education continue to struggle in respect to improving learning experiences and elevating educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This is not to suggest that some level of positive change and transformation has not occurred, it has and indeed there are many success stories. However, in acknowledging success it should also be a time to declare that much more needs to be accomplished.

Any study of education experience for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students must avoid a rush to a deficit model. If deficiency does exist it resides in the realm of systems and bureaucracies for it is they who fail Indigenous students and their communities rather than the other way around.

The pages of Australian education history are littered with irrefutable evidence graphically illustrating that Aboriginal peoples have been and continue to be failed by non-Aboriginal education systems. The failure of Australian education systems to provide culturally responsive and relevant education acts of genocide, massacres, racism and other atrocities suffered by Indigenous Australians haunt the Australian psyche and will continue do so until the past is acknowledged and an honourable restitution made.

The events of the past have shaped the present and the current generation of non-Aboriginal Australians, whilst not being directly responsible for the crimes of their ancestors, are nevertheless the beneficiaries of the policies and practices of their forebears and have a moral responsibility, if nothing else, to remedy the deleterious legacies of history.

Aboriginal people have consistently argued the right for equal access to and participation in the social and political institutions of western society, including education. The struggle of Indigenous Australians for equity and for social and political justice are rooted in the principles of cultural maintenance and survival and are inextricably linked to the assertion by Aboriginal people that the most fundamental of all human rights is the right of Aboriginal people to be Aboriginal. In general terms this involves the right to education and the participation in western society but not at the expense of Aboriginal cultural values and traditions, including heritage and identity.

This sentiment was captured by the authors of the Aboriginal manifesto (26th January, 1938) that was adopted in 1938 to protest the coming of colonialism to Australia. The manifesto argued:

"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 on 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 yourself 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 opportunity, equal wages, equal rights to possess property, or to be our own masters - in two words: equal citizenship.... Give us the same chances as yourselves, and we will prove ourselves to be just as good, if not better, Australians, than you! Keep your charity! We only want justice."

Clearly this statement was more than an expression of concern and a call for justice. Aboriginal leaders in fact were then, and have consistently, called for equality without compromising cultural identity and values. The call by Aboriginal people for equal opportunity to the full range of benefits and rights that are available to all citizens in any democratic society did not then, nor does it now, mean that Aboriginal people aspire to and want to be the same as non-Aboriginal peoples.

A fundamental truth emerges in any examination of the continuing failure of 'Aboriginal education', that truth is that a pedagogical and epistemological approach that is devoid of content and processes that speaks to the cultures and identities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is a recipe for failure. More profound engagement with and successful participation of Indigenous students in education will only occur when cultural relevance and meaning is embedded in both curriculum and teaching methodologies. The poverty stricken and socially marginalised circumstance of the vast majority of Indigenous students and the communities from which they are drawn is also of critical importance.

Negative learning experiences and outcomes for Aboriginal students are alarmingly disproportionate when compared with all other Australian students. Various factors including: *the lack of parental involvement; low student self esteem; inappropriate curricula; poor teaching methods; inadequate and/or inappropriate teacher training and development; and poor attendance patterns, and poor health and housing conditions* factors have all been cited over the years to explain the continuing failure of 'Aboriginal education'.

A specific and sustainable research funding allocation should be built into the funding agreements with a select number of Universities and their Indigenous Centres/Institutes to conduct the critical research to examine and develop remedies to the various factors identified above.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy was endorsed by all Australian governments in 1989 and with the agreement of both major parties it was adopted as the Commonwealth policy on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education on January 1, 1990.

The Australian Government state that “the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy aims to improve the availability, responsiveness and effectiveness of education services as a means of achieving equity of access to and participation in education, and equitable and appropriate educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.”

The NATSIEP has at its core, a substantial level of funding but most of the policy’s goals are concerned with matters of educational access rather than educational transformation in that the policy is largely a set of financial arrangements between the Commonwealth and state education providers. It can be argued that the NATSIEP has led to a small measure of improved enrolment and retention patterns of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students but overwhelmingly all available data suggest that little if any improvement has been achieved in terms of meaningful educational outcomes.

The NATSIEP is couched in terms that promote an illusory and profoundly flawed homogeneity amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and thereby denies the depth and richness of diversity that exist in and between Indigenous nations. The failure to acknowledge this diversity limits the capacity for the NATSIEP to adequately address broad community based issues of need especially those needs and aspirations that seek to create alternatives to existing educational systems and practices.

The political and bureaucratic message seems to be that Aboriginal people must have faith in the existing systems and their willingness and capacity to correct and transform themselves. Aboriginal people know only too well that change and betterment to their social, political and economic status has only been possible when Aboriginal people themselves have taken political, legislative and/or judicial action.

It is acknowledged and respected that some Aboriginal people will seek and pursue their future in non-Aboriginal social and political systems. Most of these people, it is argued, have very tenuous alignment with and connection to country and culture. Their identity is informed by heritage rather than culture and for all intents and purposes they have embraced the assimilationist imperatives of mainstream society. This is not the experience of the vast number of Aboriginal people but it is acknowledged and respected that it is an option for some.

Individual Indigenous people have a right to pursue life choices that they believe best suits their aspirations but what is argued here is that provision must also be made for those who seek a path that leads to scholarly achievement within the context of cultural affirmation. The existing systems of education, and those who control them, obviously view these two fundamentals as being mutually exclusive and therefore considered unattainable. Australian and international research demonstrates that it is not.

Factors Contributing to Failure

One of the pivotal factors underscoring the failure of non-Aboriginal education systems to meet and accommodate the educational aspirations of the great majority of Aboriginal people, is the assimilationist imperatives that are embedded, both implicitly and explicitly, in successive government policy and programming approaches to Aboriginal education.

Whenever Aboriginal people have advocated educational equity, non-Aboriginal people, who are largely responsible for government policy development, have interpreted this as a call for “sameness”. The response has usually been the development and introduction of policies that are designed to facilitate access, a flawed strategy which merely opens doors wider to institutions and systems that have historically failed, frustrated and marginalised most Aboriginal people. The access model incorporates a “guest relationship” within which non-Aboriginal people create and administer the terms and conditions regulating Aboriginal involvement and participation.

A new model of engagement is required; a model based on principles of partnership and shared responsibility. Such a model would involve a negotiated set of principles governing the nature and scope of the educational services Aboriginal students participate in. The partnership model also provides for the negotiated development of a learning/teaching environment that is both “culturally diverse and contextual” as opposed to being simply culturally inclusive. Cultural inclusivity denotes a model wherein intrinsic matters of Aboriginal culture and worldview are fused onto non-Aboriginal knowledge systems rather than being centred in Aboriginal ontology, knowledge, philosophy and culture and that exist in their own right.

‘Aboriginal education’ as it is commonly referred to, is simply a set of access strategies that are design to achieve greater Aboriginal participation in non-Aboriginal systems of education. Issues of cultural affirmation and social justice are rarely incorporated into government Aboriginal education policies. The philosophy of the “access paradigm” is especially evident at the schooling level of education.

Notwithstanding the marginal improvement in the participation and retention rates of Aboriginal students in school-based education, there is ample evidence to show that *the system is continuing to fail many Aboriginal students in terms of positive academic outcomes*. One of the tragic outcomes of this failure is the alarming rates of Aboriginal youth coming in contact with the juvenile justice system.

One of the great ironies of the failure of Aboriginal schooling, is that many of the students who have been failed by the schooling system and who appear statistically as drop-out (push-out) of knowledge systems, invariably find their way into higher education studies, often achieving scholarly excellence leading, in some cases, to distinguished careers in their chosen field of expertise. This clearly demonstrates that there is nothing wrong with the capacity of Aboriginal students to deal with the academic depth and rigour that is so valued in the western intellectual domain. The challenge is to develop and provide education that is both academically rigorous and culturally affirming and contextual.

Anecdotal data would suggest that the post schooling education experience for Aboriginal people is more amenable to concepts of “cultural diversity and contextual learning” and therefore it is better able to provide access for students to knowledge and skills that enhances their cultural identity and heritage rather than diminish it. It is stressed at this point that no Australian education system, either at the schooling or post schooling level, is adequately addressing the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal

students. As with schools, post-schooling institutions, including universities, still have a long way to go before it could be argued that they operate in a culturally diverse and contextually responsive framework.

Redefining Aboriginal Education

Dr Eber Hampton, President, Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, (Canada) in his seminal paper “ A Redefinition of Indian Education “ (1996) has identified five categories of Indian education and with some minor adjustments, parallels can be found in most global Indigenous societies who have suffered the impact of colonialism. According to Hampton the five defining categories of Indian education are:

i. Traditional Indian Education

Involves Elders in the teaching of oral histories, teaching stories, ceremonies, apprenticeships, learning games and tag-along teaching (Buffalohead 1976), in contexts that were "within cultural settings that were characterized by subsistence economies, in context learning, personal and kinship relations between teachers and students, and ample opportunities for students to observe adult role models who exemplified the knowledge, skill, and values being taught.

ii. Schooling for Self - Determination

The establishment of Indian schools which were primarily non - Indian schools in origin and character, incorporating the use of native languages, positive attitudes towards native cultures, good school and community relations, and emphasis on self - determination rather than assimilation.

Hampton argues further that these schools; “had high success rates in literacy and educational attainment, (Oleks and Dauenhauer 1982) but were all closed by the unilateral action of government”.

iii. Schooling for Assimilation

Hampton asserts that education for Indian people both historically and in modern contexts, is carried out by “anglos using Anglo models to satisfy Anglo purposes”, (American Indian Policy Review Commission 1976), and that schooling for assimilation in contrast to schooling for self -determination is “characterized by high failures rates in literacy and educational attainment, having assimilation rather than self-determination as goals, poor school-community relations, negative attitudes towards native cultures, and prohibition or non-use of native languages (Olehsa and Dauenhauer 1982).

iv. Education by Indians

Hampton defines Education by Indians as “the control of the education of Indian people by Indian people. Emanating in the early 1970s with the enactment of the Indian Education Act (1972) in the United States and the proclamation of the National Indian Brotherhood in Canada of the policy document titled "Indian Control of Indian Education" (1973). Hampton adds; “that whilst there has been positive moves toward the establishment of education sites and processes that are identifiably Indian, most of these initiatives retain assimilation goals, lack native language instruction, and have high failure rates". Hampton suggests that this is "because even with native control, most of the structures, methods, content, and faculty remain predominantly non-native. Native languages have declined, and non- native standards are usually used to evaluate native schools and native teachers".

v. Indian Education Sui Generis

Indian education sui generis according to Hampton is, “Indian education as 'a thing of its own kind', a self-determined Indian education using models of education structured and informed by Indian cultures, traditions and worldview. Indian education sui generis incorporates the development of native teaching methods and native structures for education as well as native content and native personnel. The recognition of the uniqueness of Indian education and the contribution it has to make to society does not imply a kind of segregation.

Most native cultures have tended towards inclusiveness and have valued diversity (Deloria 1970). Indian parents and educators want Indian children to learn everything that education has to offer, as well as their own cultures (Bradley 1980). The recognition of Indian education as distinctive, indicates a legitimate desire of Indian people to be self-defining, to have their way of life respected, and to teach their children in a manner that enhances consciousness of being Indian”.

Dr Hampton’s depiction of the history and the contemporary challenge for Indian education is also the history and challenge for Aboriginal education in Australia. Indeed what Hampton describes is mirrored in the experience of most Indigenous peoples across the globe.

The most informative and instructive characterisation of Indian education by Hampton is perhaps that which he defines as “Indian education sui generis”. Aboriginal people, like other Indigenous peoples internationally, have rejected the assimilationist models of education and are actively engaged in the struggle of dismantling and recreating education systems beyond those that currently exists (and fails) Aboriginal students. In the Aboriginal context, communities are striving to develop and implement an education system that embraces their cultural identity and distinctiveness by incorporating and celebrating Aboriginal cultural values and traditions and asserting their right to shape and influence the nature and scope of education available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that whilst achievement is important and celebrated by Aboriginal communities, there appears to be a very strong expectation of community that successful scholarship must also involve holding firm to Aboriginal identity and culture. Put another way, education and the skills derived from education systems, are only viewed as relevant and valued by Aboriginal communities when those who successfully complete formal education processes can demonstrate that the nature of their education also keeps them connected to country, the values and traditions that defines their identity and that they engage with others in a culturally respectful and meaningful manner.

Schooling for Indigenous Australian students continues to be an experience in educational failure and negative life defining outcomes that are alarmingly disproportionate to all other Australian students. Various reasons and excuses for this failure have been offered over the years including: lack of parental involvement; low student self esteem; inappropriate curricula; poor teaching methods; inadequate teacher training and development; and poor attendance patterns. And the list goes on. Whatever the reasons, various reports and studies graphically illustrate the continuing failure of schooling systems to adequately respond to and accommodate Indigenous student learning and development.

Various policies, at both federal and state levels, have been formulated and some advances have been made yet the gap between Aboriginal student achievement levels and non-Aboriginal levels appears at best to be stagnant. Culturally affirming and academically enabling education is fundamental to

effectively redressing the socioeconomic conditions that continue to confine Aboriginal people to the margins of Australian society.

A fundamental argument in this submission is that there appears to be no lack of opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student to access schooling. So if access is no the primary reason why Aboriginal students are failed by schooling systems then there must be other factors at play. In this context it is specifically argued that there is no limitation on the educational opportunities that are currently available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Rather, it is argued, it is the pedagogical focus of the systems as well as the paucity of Aboriginal curriculum content as well as the lack of parental and community involvement that must be considered.

The submission will conclude by recommending a series of actions and policy shifts that are considered essential to effect genuine and sustainable change and transformation in education services provided to students drawn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Comment against specific terms of reference.

This section will provide commentary against specific focus areas especially those identified in the terms of reference of the inquiry.

Access to, participation in and outcomes of pre-schooling.

Comment

All available evidence suggests that the provision of meaningful learning and development education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pre-school, especially those in remote and isolated circumstances remain problematic. The provision of pre-school education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students living in remote or isolated communities is one of the targets identified in the Commonwealth Government's 'Closing the Gap' strategy.

Specifically the target is to "Ensure access for all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities to early childhood education". The 2015 Prime Minister's Report on the Closing the Gap targets reported that the target had not been met showing that only 85 per cent of a target of 95 per cent had in fact been achieved.

The importance of pre-school education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, as indeed for all students, cannot be over estimated. In fact the 2015 Prime Minister's Report correctly argues that: "Quality early childhood education is critical to ensure young children have opportunities for early childhood development and preparation for their later schooling. Early childhood is a time of growth in physical health and wellbeing, language and cognitive skills, social skills and general knowledge."

It is not disputed that access and participation is critical to positive education learning experiences and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. However access should not be the primary focus in respect to better understanding what may influence Aboriginal participation in and outcomes from Eurocentric education systems. As argued above, the primary factor is more a fundamental absence

of cultural relevance and significance in the curriculum and teaching methodologies prevalent in most Eurocentric education systems.

Indigenous students also need to see that their people are acknowledged and respected by mainstream society. A better understanding of the ongoing social and political marginalisation of Aboriginal people, chronic unemployment and ill health, poor or inadequate housing, and other factors are all critical to developing a better understanding.

The provision of boarding school education and its outcomes.

Comment

There is no empirically definitive study of the benefits or otherwise of boarding school and education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. However, anecdotally it appears that there may be some value for some students who attend boarding schools.

One of the concepts explored during the 2003 NSW Department of Education and Training's Review of Aboriginal Education was the notion of Aboriginal Leadership Colleges. A stimulus paper was prepared for the review that essentially argued that ALC's, if established, would serve to enhance Aboriginal education excellence, both in terms of learning experiences and outcomes, build and strengthen community and parental capacity and assist with the development of a more culturally responsive pedagogy.

The correlation of poor schooling experiences and outcomes for Aboriginal students and their encounter with juvenile justice systems has been well documented especially in the context of the work carried out in relation to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody so clearly methods to improve Aboriginal learning experiences and outcomes must be a dedicated feature of any new approach.

The concept of Aboriginal Leadership Colleges (ALCs) should be considered and further investigated as a possible option to improve education experiences and outcomes for Aboriginal students. Aboriginal Leadership Colleges (ALCs) could be structured to maximise academic, sporting and career pathway possibilities.

An important feature of the concept of Aboriginal Leadership Colleges (ALCs) is the involvement of parents and caregivers. One of the criticisms of the existing boarding school model is the absence of parents and caregivers in the educational journey of their children. A critical component of ALCs would be a program to enhance the skill and knowledge of parents and caregivers so that they can more effectively support their children as they participate in learning programs provided by ALCs.

Access to, participation in, and benefits of different school models for Indigenous students in different parts of Australia.

Comment

The diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and societies is often misunderstood and unappreciated in terms of the design and development of public policies and programs, including those designed to address the learning needs and aspirations of Aboriginal students.

Extending the theme identified in the previous section on boarding schools, consideration should be given to a more creative and innovative curriculum approach, including the potential role of new technology, to address and respond to Indigenous student learning needs and aspirations located in various parts of Australia.

Specifically, research should be funded to gauge the potential of the new Internet and information technology and how it could be utilised to deliver positive learning experiences and outcomes for Indigenous students.

Engagement and achievement of students in remote areas.

Comment

The challenges of designing and delivering academically enriching and culturally affirming education to Indigenous students in remote area are immense but not impossible. Specifically dedicated funding should be available for schools located in remote regions to enable them to fund programs to enhance Indigenous student engagement and achievement.

A Career and Cultural affirmation Program (CAP) aligned to career and employment pathways should be an identified feature of a dedicated remote area-funding model. Such a program would allow schools located in geographically remote and isolated regions to plan and implement excursions to larger centres where employment and career opportunities could be explored.

Impacts on, and support for, families and communities whose children experience different models of educational services.

The involvement of parents and other carers is critical to design and development of strategies to improve Aboriginal student education engagement and outcomes. Funding under the Australian government's Parent and Community Engagement (PaCE) program was seen as a pivotal policy and programming development by many parents, communities and education providers. A number of impressive programs were developed and there was a measure of success. However, the arbitrary nature of funding approval and the absence of a sustained funding commitment meant that the long-term benefits of many PaCE funded programs were stifled. Clearly if change and transformation is to occur in Indigenous education funding must be better targeted and sustainable.

The Australian government should reassess its commitment to PaCE type programs so that they are better targeted to support families and communities in the education of their children. There is no single model

The Wollotuka Institute is working on a plan to develop a Aboriginal Parents as First Teachers Program. The program seeks to enhance the knowledge and skills of Aboriginal parents and carers so that they are better positioned to support and assist their children with achieving more positive learning experiences and educational outcomes. The plan is to design a number of innovative and creative culturally contextual learning and teaching tools that will be shared with Aboriginal parents and other community members in structured learning and sharing circles. The plan will incorporate a number of inactive and interrelated objectives including:

- ✚ The design and development of parent focused tools to increase parental awareness and understanding of their pivotal role as “first teachers” in the education process; and the general education process. Exposure to certain skills and knowledge that may assist parents in supporting their child’s education experience and outcome will be provided.
- ✚ Additionally student focused strategies will be developed to address identified student learning needs and life aspirations so as to assist with improving the potential for academic success and fulfillment of those students and their parents/care givers who actively engage with the project.

Funding should be provided to allow the Wollotuka Institute to fully develop its Aboriginal Parents as First Teachers Program. Incorporated into this funding should be a component to explore and define how such a program could be utilised in various Indigenous contexts.

Best practice models, both domestically and internationally.

Comment

It is difficult to definitively identify and quantify best practice models both domestically and internationally especially if it is assumed that these models will and can be automatically applied to Indigenous education experiences in Australia. The need for cultural and geographic context is critical to the design and development of more effective education models to address the learning needs and aspirations of Australian Indigenous students.

Consideration must be given to cultural matters, the socioeconomic circumstances of Indigenous people in other countries, the nature of the relationship that Indigenous people have with governments and education providers, i.e. treaty rights as well as other challenges identified elsewhere in this submission.

In the absence of specific details of domestic and international models, it is perhaps instructive to list and consider some of the principles that shape and influence Indigenous education models. Parental and community involvement is one of the most important principles and practices incorporated into successful Indigenous education models. Adequately preparing teachers during their training is also important to success.

Carol Barnhardt from the Centre for Cross-Cultural Studies at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, Alaska illustrates the importance of teachers being aware of and sensitive to cultural difference when teaching in Indigenous contexts. Barnhardt reported:

“Since 1794, when the Russians first established settlements on Kodiak Island, schools have been a permanent fixture in Alaska. With the schools have come a wide variety and large number of teachers who have journeyed far from their own homes to teach in Alaska's schools. Missionary zeal, the lure of high salaries, or a quest for adventure have often been the motivating forces responsible for the steady influx of teachers to Alaska from Outside. Today, nearly 200 years after the first schools opened, the vast majority of teachers in Alaska's rural communities continue to come from places other than Alaska.

The importation of teachers from outside the state has had its advantages and disadvantages. Teachers from somewhere also usually bring with them new perspectives, new ideas, and very often a great deal of enthusiasm. However, these qualities are almost invariably dampened by the reality of long harsh winters and the prolonged isolation from familiar people, places and goods.

Adjustments to the physical environment are minor, however, compared to the complications that are created by the fact that Alaska is composed of diverse groups of people whose cultural backgrounds often differ radically from those of teachers from Outside. It doesn't take teachers long to discover that their own value systems, life styles and ways of teaching and learning are often not shared or even appreciated by the students and families in the communities they are trying to serve. This discovery can quickly lead to feelings of frustration, anger, inadequacy and anxiety for teachers and students, which in turn often leads to dropping out -- by teachers and students.”

What Barnhardt describes in the Alaskan context is replicated in the Australian Indigenous context. Education and training for teachers assigned to or electing to work in Indigenous communities or schools with significant Indigenous enrolments must incorporate measures beyond mere cultural awareness or cultural competency. Barnhardt identifies that the overwhelming number of teachers who work in Alaskan native education are from ‘outside’, meaning that they are from places other than Alaskan. The scenario that Barnhardt describes also applies to the Australian Indigenous education situation. This is the current situation and perhaps will always be.

The More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSITI) is a valuable measure to “to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people entering and remaining in professional teaching positions in Australian schools.” The MATSITI project was funded as a four-year project, operating from 2011 to 2015. The project has developed a number of impressive strategies and resources and will hopefully help with increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students being recruited to and being retained in the Australian teaching profession.

Given that the vast majority of teachers who work with and in Indigenous education contexts are predominantly non-Indigenous teachers, consideration should be given to establishing a project similar to that of MATSITI, to help teacher training institution to train non-Indigenous teachers so that they can be more effective working with Indigenous students and their communities.

Collaboration with the Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) should be initiated to consider and define the specific scope of such an initiative.

An initiative such as that recommended could assist with the development of a more effective model of teacher education for teachers working in Indigenous contexts. Such an initiative must be cognisant of the need to consider the adoption of the concept of cultural safety in teacher education programs. Cultural safety extends beyond awareness by requiring systems to examine their own limitations and barriers to effective and respectful community and cultural engagement.

Comparisons of school models in the transition to further education and employment outcomes.

Comment

Notwithstanding the evidence that illustrates a strong link and correlation between attaining a year 12 certificate (or equivalent) and enhanced employment prospects much more work is needed on the development of models that can effectively transition Indigenous students from school to further education and employment.

Factors such as fear of being adversely judged, prejudice and discrimination and geography, particularly in relation to the location of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their proximity to further education and employment opportunities, must be acknowledged as significant barriers to improving school to work programs.

Also important is the fact that most Indigenous students are not retained to year 12 and therefore other models such as in-school traineeship and negotiated trainee partners must be a feature of school to work and further education and employment programs.

Some schools such as Menindee Central School in far western NSW have designed and negotiated a highly successful student traineeship with a variety of partners including Australia Post, the pastoral industry, catering and restaurants outlets to name but a few. This program is a supplementary program that provides senior students the opportunity to experience workplace culture whilst still studying at school.

Australian Government youth focused programs such as the Indigenous Youth Leadership Program (IYLP) and the Indigenous Youth Mobility Program (IYMP) provide a level of support that helps youth to transition from school to work. Whilst such programs are viewed as helpful they invariably require an element of relocation to gain the skills they need or aspire to so that they can transition to employment.

Conclusion

Methods to improve and remedy the education experiences and learning outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are as elusive as they are contested. Government inquiries, academic papers and analyses,

The continuing failure of Eurocentric education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student's must be considered in light of the ongoing struggle of Indigenous Australians for freedom and justice in post colonial Australia. Whilst the socio-political positioning of Indigenous people remains a contested space, the impact of racial bigotry, prejudice and discrimination cannot be underestimated. Indigenous people have little to motivate them to embrace or even have faith in the systems that have served to annihilate, disrespect and marginalise them to offer remedies or pathways to hope beyond despair.

The knowledge and skills that are derived from education is an acknowledged and powerful tool but if the nature of education and its systems simply serve to portray and perpetuate alienation and marginalisation Indigenous students and indeed their parents and community will not benefit from such education.

Australian systems of education must adapt to 21st century realities by acknowledging the past and incorporating Indigenous cultural values and traditions into the curriculum of education systems that Aboriginal and Torres students continue to access and participate in.

Commencing during the Whitlam era, successive Australian governments have allocated significant funding in an endeavour to remedy find a solution to 'Indigenous education' failure with limited success. New models must be developed, models that include Indigenous people in every phase of the design, development and delivery of education services.

As acknowledged elsewhere in this submission, there are indications of slow but definite improvements in Indigenous student participation in Eurocentric education systems. The rapid increase in the participation patterns and completion rates of Indigenous students in higher education studies is perhaps where improvements are the most profound but change and transformation still needs to occur at the schooling level of education.

Governments and their education bureaucracies must embrace new and sustainable ideas if real and long lasting improvements in opportunities for culturally grounded learning in school is to occur. This submission is dedicated to this ideal.

Recommendations

- 1 That specific and sustainable research funding allocation should be built into the funding agreements with a select number of Universities and their Indigenous Centres/Institutes to conduct the critical research to examine and develop remedies to the various factors impeding positive learning experiences and outcomes for school based 'Aboriginal education'.
- 2 That the concept of Aboriginal Leadership Colleges (ALCs) is investigated as a possible option to improve education experiences and outcomes for Aboriginal students. Aboriginal Leadership Colleges (ALCs) could be structured to maximise academic, sporting and career pathway possibilities.
- 3 That funding is provided to investigate, gauge and develop a model utilising Internet and information technology and how it could be utilised to deliver positive learning experiences and outcomes for Indigenous students in remote and isolated communities and elsewhere.
- 4 That designated funding is provided to allow the Wollotuka Institute to fully develop its Aboriginal Parents as First Teachers Program.
- 5 That a national project similar to that of MATSITI is established. The project would be designed to help teacher training institution to enhance the training and development of non-Indigenous teachers so that they can more effectively work with Indigenous students and their communities.