

The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Aboriginal Education

House of Representatives
Select Committee on
Aboriginal Education
September 1985

Australian Government Publishing Service
Canberra 1985

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ISBN 0 644 04452 7

Typeset by Graphicset Pty Ltd, Mitcham, Victoria
Printed by Pirie Printers, Canberra. 80 5410

Members of the Committee

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32nd Parliament

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Mr G.E.J. Tambling, M.P.
Mr C.W. Tuckey, M.P.

Secretary to the Committee: Mr P.F. Bergin

* Mr I.M.D. Cameron, M.P. was nominated to the Committee on 8 September 1982, in place of the Hon. I.L. Robinson, M.P.

** Mr J.L. Scott, M.P. was nominated to the Committee on 8 September 1981, in place of Mr J.S. Dawkins, M.P.

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Inquiry Staff: Mr P. Stephens
Mrs M. Cranswick

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Summary and Recommendations

The following is a broad summary of the Committee's report together with the recommendations made by the Committee.

THE CONTEXT OF ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

The Committee has concluded from available evidence that Aboriginal educational attainments remain significantly below those of the non-Aboriginal community even though there have been improvements in Aboriginal educational attainments in the last decade or so following the introduction of a range of special education programs for Aboriginals. However, the Committee considers that there is a need for more detailed information about Aboriginal involvement and educational attainments at all levels of the education system to provide an accurate data base from which programs can be developed. The Committee has therefore recommended that:

- 1 *the National Aboriginal Education Committee in consultation with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, the Department of Education, the Commonwealth Schools Commission, the Tertiary Education Commission and State and Territory governments and Aboriginal Educational Consultative Groups develop a co-ordinated approach to the collection of statistics in Aboriginal education with a view to improving the data base for decision-making; and*
- 2 *a research study be undertaken into the standards of educational attainment of Aboriginal people at all levels of the educational system, including the impact of Aboriginal educational programs introduced in the last decade or so, on these educational standards.*

(Paragraph 1.58)

Education in Australia has as its central tenet the attainment of greater equality of educational opportunities and outcomes. Such equality does not yet exist for Aboriginal people and the Committee has concluded that there is a continuing need for special educational programs for Aboriginal people to enable improved educational attainments to be achieved.

ABORIGINAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The Committee considers that Aboriginal people are best equipped to define their own educational needs and that, to the greatest extent possible, Aboriginal people should be involved in establishing the aims and objectives of Aboriginal educational policies and programs. However, because of the tremendous diversity of Aboriginal society, the detail of Aboriginal educational needs will also be diverse and local Aboriginal communities will therefore need to have a substantial role in specifying what their particular educational needs are. The Committee therefore recommends that:

- 3 *the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups be consulted by their respective governments on the preparation and revision of broad statements of objectives in Aboriginal education by providing advice on current Aboriginal educational needs; and*

- 4 *Aboriginal communities, in consultation with their local schools, establish local Aboriginal educational, training and skills needs and the sorts of programs that will need to be introduced at the local level to meet those needs.*

(Paragraph 2.46)

While the Committee has emphasised the need to involve Aboriginal people in deciding what their educational needs are, there was virtually universal agreement in submissions made to the Committee about the fundamental objectives of Aboriginal education. These objectives were that Aboriginal people be able to obtain an education which allows them to function without disadvantage in the wider community while at the same time being able to retain their Aboriginal identity and lifestyle. The Committee endorses these as fundamental aims in Aboriginal education.

CO-ORDINATION AND FUNDING

The Committee has found a lack of co-ordination in the policy development and funding of Aboriginal education. There is a plethora of organisations and agencies involved in policy development, funding and service delivery in Aboriginal education and this has led to a lack of overall direction in Aboriginal education and the possibility of duplication and waste in the provision of services. The existence of many funding agencies in Aboriginal education has created confusion among Aboriginal people and organisations seeking assistance to establish educational programs and has led to a haphazard development of programs.

The Committee concludes that there is a need to significantly improve the co-ordination and funding arrangements in Aboriginal education. The Committee sees this being achieved by a rationalisation of arrangements at the Commonwealth level prior to the Commonwealth Government assuming a major role in co-ordinating, setting overall objectives and funding programs in Aboriginal education. The rationalisation involves a transfer of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs' Aboriginal education funding to the Education Portfolio to be administered by agencies of the Portfolio on the advice of the National Aboriginal Education Committee. The Committee sees the network of national, State and local Aboriginal education consultative committees and groups as the major means of co-ordinating Aboriginal education from the national to the local level. The concentration of funding in the Commonwealth Education Portfolio will allow this co-ordination to be achieved through the significantly increased role of the National Aboriginal Education Committee. This concentration of funding within the Education Portfolio will also enable the existing co-ordinating mechanisms between the Commonwealth and States in education generally to be used for the benefit of Aboriginal education. It will also greatly simplify the approach of institutions and organisations seeking educational funding if one agency at the Commonwealth level has primary responsibility.

If Aboriginal educational outcomes are to be greatly improved the additional programs and initiatives recommended by the Committee in this report will need to be implemented. This will require substantial funding support by governments. In keeping with the increased co-ordinating and policy role which the Committee sees the Commonwealth taking in Aboriginal education, the Committee also sees the Commonwealth Government assuming a significant funding responsibility for new and innovative programs. However, State and Territory governments should also be funding continuing programs of proven worth. This will free up further Commonwealth funding which can be used to support additional programs.

To achieve these new arrangements in Aboriginal education the Committee has recommended that:

- 5 *the Department of Aboriginal Affairs' Aboriginal education funding for continuing and innovative programs be transferred to the Commonwealth Education Portfolio and be administered by the Commonwealth Department of Education, the Commonwealth Schools Commission and the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission acting on the advice of the National Aboriginal Education Committee;*
- 6 *the National Aboriginal Education Committee be formally recognised as the Commonwealth Government's principal adviser on Aboriginal education and as the co-ordinator of Aboriginal education within the Education Portfolio;*
- 7 *the Department of Aboriginal Affairs retain a small element of funds to provide emergency assistance to Aboriginal education projects which require it. Once these projects become established they should be considered for funding by the Education Portfolio or by State and Territory governments; and*
- 8 *the Department of Aboriginal Affairs have a formal role in providing advice to the Education Portfolio about Aboriginal educational policy and programs.*

(Paragraph 3.88)

- 9 *a review be undertaken of the new administrative arrangements proposed in the recommendations above after the conclusion of the 1988-90 Triennium.*

(Paragraph 3.91)

- 10 *the State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups be formally recognised by their respective governments as their principal advisers in Aboriginal education and participate in all decisions made in relation to Aboriginal education in their respective States and Territories.*

(Paragraph 3.95)

- 11 *following the transfer of funding from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs to the Commonwealth Education Portfolio, the agencies of the Portfolio negotiate with State and Territory education departments on their accepting responsibility for continuing programs currently funded by the Commonwealth.*

(Paragraph 3.99)

- 12 *other organisations and agencies involved in Aboriginal education be encouraged to establish links with the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups.*

(Paragraph 3.102)

ABORIGINAL SELF-DETERMINATION AND EDUCATION

There have been significant improvements in the last 10 years in the participation of Aboriginals in the development and delivery of Aboriginal education programs at all levels, though much remains to be done. Of particular significance has been the creation of a national Aboriginal voice in education through the establishment of the National Aboriginal Education Committee, and through the establishment of State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups to advise State and Territory education departments on Aboriginal education matters. The Committee considers the role of these advisory committees needs to be expanded and that they need to be adequately supported. There is also the need to ensure that they reflect the views of the Aboriginal community. The Committee recommends that:

13 *formal mechanisms be established to ensure the involvement of the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups in policy decision-making at the highest level in their respective governments.*

(Paragraph 4.13)

14 *the Commonwealth Government provide adequate resource support to the National Aboriginal Education Committee and, on an interim basis, to the State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups to enable them to meet the demands placed on them by their increasing involvement in decision-making in Aboriginal education; and*

15 *State and Territory governments, which currently do not provide funding for their State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups, progressively assume full funding responsibility for these Groups over a period of three years.*

(Paragraph 4.19)

16 *a representative of each State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Group be a member of the National Aboriginal Education Committee.*

(Paragraph 4.22)

17 *the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups consult widely with Aboriginal groups and organisations involved in areas other than education.*

(Paragraph 4.24)

The achievement of Aboriginal participation in education at a local level has probably been less significant. Some regional and local Aboriginal education committees and Aboriginal school councils have been established but the general picture is one of inadequate involvement. The reasons for this are complex including unwillingness of Aboriginal people to become involved, lack of support from schools and teachers for Aboriginals to become involved and a lack of knowledge on the part of Aboriginal parents of the schooling system and how they can be involved. Given the tremendous diversity of Aboriginal society, it is at the local level that Aboriginal self-determination can be most significant. Local Aboriginal involvement will ensure that Aboriginal educational programs are tailored to meet the local community's needs. To enable a greater local Aboriginal involvement in Aboriginal education the Committee has recommended that:

18 *the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups encourage the establishment of regional and local education advisory committees where they do not already exist;*

19 *the regional and local Aboriginal education committees be consulted by State and Territory Consultative Groups and the National Aboriginal Education Committee about all aspects of Aboriginal education; and*

20 *the regional and local Aboriginal education committees be recognised by State and Territory governments as the regional and local advisers on Aboriginal education. Regional educational administrators, school inspectors and school principals should consult with the regional and local Aboriginal education committees on all aspects of Aboriginal education.*

(Paragraph 4.36)

21 *State and Territory education authorities encourage the establishment of representative School Advisory Committees in schools with a majority Aboriginal population and these Advisory Committees be given significant powers and responsibilities over staffing, policy, planning and curriculum development within their schools.*

(Paragraph 4.50)

22 *State and Territory education authorities encourage the establishment of Aboriginal School Advisory Committees in schools with significant minority Aboriginal population and these Advisory Committees be given significant powers in relation to the specifically Aboriginal components of the school program as well as providing general advice to the schools about Aboriginal educational needs; and*

23 *school principals encourage Aboriginal parents to join Parents and Citizens Associations.*

(Paragraph 4.52)

Aboriginal employment in Aboriginal education branches is also limited. Strategies of identification of relevant positions; encouragement of Aboriginal people to be involved in educational administration and provision of appropriate training programs should be developed as ways of increasing Aboriginal involvement in the administration and policy areas of Aboriginal education. The Committee recommends that:

24 *Commonwealth, State and Territory governments identify positions in Aboriginal education requiring an understanding of Aboriginal culture and/or an ability to communicate with Aboriginal people, to be predominately filled by Aboriginal people; and*

25 *Commonwealth, State and Territory governments create a number of understudy positions in their Aboriginal education branches or units in which Aboriginal people would receive on-the-job and academic training to enable them to acquire the necessary qualifications and experience to assume senior positions in Aboriginal education.*

(Paragraph 4.61)

The totality of the strategy which the Committee has recommended in Aboriginal involvement in Aboriginal education is one of Aboriginalisation of the process of education for Aboriginal people. It is only when this process is complete that one will be able to talk in a meaningful sense of Aboriginal self-determination in education. The Committee considers that further moves towards achieving this aim are urgently required.

EARLY CHILDHOOD AND PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

The Committee considers that pre-school and early childhood programs provide an important means of assisting Aboriginal children's transition to early primary school thus preventing some of the difficulties which can arise for Aboriginal children in the early stages of formal schooling. The Committee urges those involved in the provision of early childhood programs for Aboriginal children to expand the programs to enable all Aboriginal children to have access to early childhood and pre-school education. In providing these programs for Aboriginal children it is essential that the programs cater to the particular needs and values of Aboriginal children. The greater participation of Aboriginal parents in early childhood education is a major way of ensuring that the programs meet Aboriginal needs. The Committee recommends that:

26 *funding be provided to make pre-school education available and accessible to all Aboriginal children by providing pre-schools in all communities and by improving transport accessibility to these pre-schools.*

(Paragraph 5.33)

27 *consideration be given to establishing predominately Aboriginal pre-schools where the need exists.*

(Paragraph 5.37)

28 *funding assistance be provided to enable the development of pre-schooling resource material with an Aboriginal content.*

(Paragraph 5.40)

29 *pre-schools give particular attention to the development of ways of increasing the participation of Aboriginal parents in their activities.*

(Paragraph 5.50)

30 *health and nutritional programs be provided to Aboriginal children attending pre-schools.*

(Paragraph 5.54)

31 *State and Territory education departments and pre-school organisations co-operate to develop transition programs for Aboriginal children moving from pre-school into junior primary school.*

(Paragraph 5.57)

PRIMARY SCHOOLING

The Committee has emphasised that primary schooling should provide a grounding for Aboriginal students in basic skills which will prepare them for successful later studies. Often the schooling system has failed to provide these skills to Aboriginal children although the Committee has pointed to areas where considerable success has been achieved.

At primary school there is a particular need for appropriate curricula which stress the development of literacy and numeracy and additional tutorial assistance to ensure that the programs are successful. The Committee's report gives attention to strengthening programs to provide basic skills at an early stage of schooling for Aboriginal children.

But the Committee also believes the teaching needs to take place in an atmosphere which Aboriginal children find comfortable and which does not destroy their identity as Aboriginals. The employment of Aboriginal teachers and teaching assistants in schools will significantly improve the success of the normal schooling system for Aboriginal students. A greater awareness of, and involvement in, schooling by Aboriginal parents and communities will also assist in making the normal schooling system relevant and successful for Aboriginal students. There is also a need for non-Aboriginal teachers who are sensitive to Aboriginal educational needs and who are equipped with the skills necessary to teach Aboriginal children effectively.

Attention also needs to be paid to programs which address the educational effects of the often poor socio-economic circumstances of Aboriginal children. In particular, the Committee has highlighted the need for more school-based health and nutrition programs. Poor health and poor nutrition can have a dramatic impact on educational success and additional programs to address these problems among Aboriginal students are urgently needed.

Little will probably be achieved if the programs to cater for the educational needs of Aboriginal students in primary schools are implemented singly, divorced from the other programs which are essential to support them. The Committee believes that the allocation of additional resources to develop, in an integrative way, programs in the primary school area will enable significant success to be achieved. In the primary school area the Committee has recommended that:

32 *funding be provided to ensure the development and introduction of innovative non-bilingual language programs for Aboriginal students and to ensure that those programs which have been established and have demonstrated their success are extended to other schools with Aboriginal students;*

33 *more pre-service and in-service training programs in teaching English as a second language be provided for teacher trainees and teachers; and*

34 *teachers with English as a second language training be employed in schools with large proportions of Aboriginal students who do not have standard English as their first language to assist the students in developing English language and literacy skills.*

(Paragraph 6.21)

35 *support be provided for the development of appropriate curriculum materials which will enable greater Aboriginal educational success, particularly in literacy and numeracy.*

(Paragraph 6.36)

36 *funding be provided through the Schools Commission, acting on the advice of the National Aboriginal Education Committee, to extend nutritional and health programs to those schools with Aboriginal students in need of such programs and which do not currently possess such programs; and*

37 *support be provided for special education programs and equipment to assist Aboriginal children suffering from deafness.*

(Paragraph 6.58)

38 *the Minister for Education evaluate alternatives and introduce an effective program to provide tutorial assistance and educational support to students in the last two years of primary school.*

(Paragraph 6.62)

39 *training programs be developed for the unqualified Torres Strait Island teaching assistants to enable them to become fully qualified teachers.*

(Paragraph 6.77)

The major program operating in primary schools in traditional areas is bilingual/bicultural education. The evidence available to the Committee is that the achievements of the bilingual program are very significant and promising. The academic performance, particularly in English literacy and numeracy, of students involved in bilingual programs is significantly better than that of students in non-bilingual schools.

To enable the bilingual programs to achieve all they might, difficulties currently facing the programs need to be overcome. Bilingual education is a complex and sophisticated educational program which needs strong support, financially, administratively and philosophically, if it is to be fully successful. This support must be provided to the bilingual programs. The Committee also considers that as bilingual programs have achieved such evident success in improving the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students, there would be value in extending bilingual education to those communities which request it. The Committee recommends that:

40 *Commonwealth, State and Territory governments ensure that the bilingual education programs are provided with sufficient administrative and financial resources to enable them to achieve their full potential;*

41 *the Aboriginal communities in which bilingual education programs are operating be closely consulted about the aims and implementation of the programs; and*

42 *bilingual education programs be extended to other communities which give a clear indication that they want bilingual education to be introduced and where there are sufficient language speakers to justify establishing a bilingual program.*

(Paragraph 7.25)

HOMELAND CENTRES EDUCATION

In an effort to reassert control over their lives a significant number of Aboriginal people in northern Australia have moved back to their traditional country and established homeland centre communities. The task of providing educational services to these usually small and remote communities is a difficult and expensive one. However, as many of these communities want an education service to be provided to them the Committee considers that ways must be found for this to be done without destroying the autonomy of the communities. It is essential that education in these communities be provided on the communities' terms. Because of the significant cost of providing education services to the communities the Commonwealth will have to assume a significant role in funding the services. The Committee recommends that:

43 *the Commonwealth Schools Commission develop broad policies and procedures for the provision of education services to homeland centres, in consultation with the National Aboriginal Education Committee and State and Territory governments and Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups.*

(Paragraph 8.16)

44 *the Commonwealth Schools Commission in consultation with the National Aboriginal Education Committee make homeland centre education an important area of focus for Aboriginal education funding.*

(Paragraph 8.25)

45 *educational services should not be provided to homeland centres which do not make requests for them; and*

46 *where homeland centres make requests for educational services, the community should make all the important decisions in relation to the establishment of the service.*

(Paragraph 8.30)

SECONDARY SCHOOLING

The low rate of participation and of success of Aboriginal students at secondary school was a matter of great concern to Aboriginal communities and to the Committee. In urban and rural areas, where Aboriginal students form a small minority of the school population, secondary schooling is often a difficult and depressing experience for Aboriginals. The development of enclaves and other school-based initiatives in secondary schools will contribute significantly to overcoming the isolation of many Aboriginal secondary students. The greater involvement of Aboriginal people in the schools through employment as teachers, home/school liaison officers and counsellors will also assist in making secondary schools a more comfortable place for Aboriginal students. The Committee recommends that:

47 *the Participation and Equity Program, in relation to Aboriginal students in secondary schools, be strongly supported by the Commonwealth Government until a significant impact is made on the retention rate of Aboriginal students in secondary schools.*

(Paragraph 9.15)

48 *Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments urgently give consideration to increasing the number of Aboriginal Home/School Liaison Officers and Counsellors.*

(Paragraph 9.22)

49 *where appropriate, schools consider providing a transition or bridging program between primary and secondary school.*

(Paragraph 9.29)

50 *the National Aboriginal Education Committee develop proposals for the establishment of enclave programs for Aboriginal students in secondary schools, identify a small number of schools in which the programs may have the most impact, and submit these programs for funding to the Commonwealth Schools Commission.*

(Paragraph 9.34)

51 *a comprehensive review, initiated by the Minister for Education in consultation with the National Aboriginal Education Committee, be undertaken of the Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme to determine whether the scheme is the most effective program for retaining Aboriginal students at secondary school and whether the grant should be subject to a means test.*

(Paragraph 9.87)

In relation to the remote communities, priority should be given, over the longer term, to providing them with secondary education facilities. This will be an expensive but effective way of ensuring that Aboriginals have greater equality of access to secondary education. All secondary education programs in Aboriginal communities ought to provide Aboriginals with the sort of skills and knowledge required which will enable them to pursue further studies should they so desire. At the same time, Aboriginal secondary education should also cater for those students who wish to achieve the grounding in skills which will enable them to manage their own communities. The sort of secondary schooling provided then will need to be flexible and cater to educational needs as articulated by the particular communities. An evaluation should also be made of the future role of the Aboriginal residential colleges in the Northern Territory. The Committee recommends that:

52 *a comprehensive review be undertaken of Yirara and Kormilda Colleges in the Northern Territory to investigate the overall effectiveness and the future role of the colleges.*

(Paragraph 9.52)

53 *the capital funding program for education facilities in predominantly Aboriginal communities continue with increased funding so that greater priority can be given to providing secondary school facilities.*

(Paragraph 9.65)

ABORIGINAL INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Some Aboriginal parents and communities have seen the general education system as being irrelevant to their children's needs and have consequently established Aboriginal independent schools. In these schools Aboriginal parents have been able to make the major decisions on the educational programs offered in the school so that the programs accord with Aboriginal cultural values and lifestyle. The establishment of Aboriginal independent schools is an important initiative of the Aboriginal community and should be supported by government. To enable this to be achieved the Committee recommends that:

54 *Aboriginal independent schools should be funded through the Commonwealth Schools Commission general recurrent program for non-government schools to enable them to operate at acceptable resource standards;*

55 *the Commonwealth Schools Commission's capital grants program for non-government schools with majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments give attention to the needs of Aboriginal independent schools; and*

56 *these programs be developed in close consultation with the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the Aboriginal communities concerned.*

(Paragraph 10.39)

57 *the schools be provided with curriculum advice and funding to assist them to obtain registration as independent schools; and*

58 *the National Aboriginal Education Committee or the relevant State or Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Group be involved with the schools at an early stage to act as co-ordinator for advice provided to the school and as mediator with the authorities responsible for registration.*

(Paragraph 10.41)

However, the Committee concludes from its discussions with Aboriginal communities that the schooling of children in Aboriginal independent schools is not the desire of many Aboriginal parents and that, therefore, there is a great need to make the general schooling system more relevant to, and successful for, Aboriginal children. Many of the recommendations made in this report are designed to achieve that aim.

POST-SCHOOLING

The provision of appropriate post-schooling programs for Aboriginal people is vital to the achievement of Aboriginal self-management and self-sufficiency. While post-schooling has been an important area of focus of government, and a number of programs in this area have tended to cater well to Aboriginal needs, more programs must be provided and in some cases will have to be tailored better to meet Aboriginal needs.

Bridging education programs have filled a particular need among Aboriginal people because of the failure of the normal schooling system to provide Aboriginals with the necessary qualifications to undertake further study or gain anything but unskilled employment. These programs have been developed to overcome the perceived shortcomings of the normal schooling system which has led to Aboriginal failure. While the general schooling system continues to fail Aboriginal people, these programs will be required. The Committee recommends that:

59 *Commonwealth, State and Territory governments provide funding support to Aboriginal educational colleges which enable adult Aboriginal people to upgrade their educational qualifications.*

(Paragraph 11.22)

Special tertiary education programs designed for Aboriginal people have been successful in improving the appallingly low level of access of Aboriginals to tertiary education. As the desire of Aboriginal people to gain professional and tertiary qualifications will grow, these special programs will have to be maintained and extended to provide for the demand. The Committee recommends that:

60 *all tertiary education institutions implement a policy of positive discrimination in terms of standards for Aboriginal student entry, where these do not already exist.*

(Paragraph 11.28)

61 *other universities develop bridging courses and enclaves for Aboriginal students to enable them to gain entry to a wide range of university courses.*

(Paragraph 11.32)

62 *tertiary institutions develop further enclave programs, or existing enclaves be expanded, with associated special entry provisions and bridging courses for Aboriginal students;*

63 *enclave programs give attention to the needs of Aboriginal students in areas other than teacher education; and*

64 *enclave programs and associated bridging courses be funded as part of the overall funding provided to the tertiary institution concerned.*

(Paragraph 11.38)

65 *tertiary institutions provide off-campus programs in courses other than teacher education where there are sufficient numbers of Aboriginal students who wish to undertake tertiary courses. The demand for such courses could be assessed by the State and Territory Aboriginal Educational Consultative Groups; and*

66 *tertiary institutions with significant external studies programs adapt these programs in ways which will make them more accessible to Aboriginal students.*

(Paragraph 11.42)

The Committee considers that the funding of programs in the post-schooling area should be incorporated into a Tertiary Education Program for Aboriginals located within the Education Portfolio. This will concentrate Commonwealth funding for post-schooling programs basically under a single authority and will ensure that the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the Aboriginal education consultative network have significant input into policies and programs in the post-schooling area. Finally, it will allow longer term funding of programs which is essential for adequate planning of post-schooling programs. The Committee recommends that:

67 *following the transfer of Aboriginal education funding from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs to the Education Portfolio, a Tertiary Education Program for Aboriginals should be established administered by the Commonwealth Department of Education in consultation with the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission and the National Aboriginal Education Committee;*

68 *the proposed Tertiary Education Program for Aboriginals fund post-schooling programs for at least a three year period and on a calendar rather than financial year basis so that the funding provided is consistent with the triennial funding of the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission; and*

69 *the Commonwealth Government provide significant additional funding to the proposed Tertiary Education Program for Aboriginals to enable the establishment of a number of new initiatives in the post-schooling area as recommended in this report.*

(Paragraph 11.50)

The Committee sees the need for the continuation of the Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme. The Scheme has enabled the access of Aboriginal people to post-schooling programs to be greatly improved. There are a number of issues raised about the Scheme in the evaluation recently completed. These issues should be resolved so that the Scheme can continue to make an important contribution to the post-schooling needs of Aboriginal people. The Committee recommends that:

70 *the Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme be maintained; and*

71 *the Abstudy allowance for students in formal courses of at least a year's duration be increased to approximately the level of the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations' formal training allowances, with the necessary adjustments made for the differences between the administrative operation of the two Schemes.*
(Paragraph 11.66)

72 *more Aboriginal people be trained and recruited to Education Officer positions within the Abstudy Scheme.*
(Paragraph 11.68)

73 *adequate resources be provided to Aboriginal Hostels Ltd to enable it to meet the accommodation needs of Aboriginal students undertaking educational programs away from home; and*

74 *the Commonwealth Education Portfolio liaise with Aboriginal Hostels Ltd about new programs in Aboriginal education which will require the support of a hostel to provide accommodation for students.*
(Paragraph 11.74)

There is an urgent need for the TAFE system to provide more, and appropriate, programs for Aboriginals. As yet the resources of TAFE have been inadequately tapped to provide educational programs for Aboriginal people. TAFE has the potential to provide a wide range of programs to Aboriginals in a wide variety of circumstances, from pre-vocational and training programs for Aboriginal people seeking to participate in the wider society, to literacy and self-management skills to Aboriginals in remote communities. To provide such a wide range of programs will require greater flexibility and responsiveness to Aboriginal needs on the part of TAFE, and also the provision of additional funding by government.

The provision of educational services to adult Aboriginals in the remote communities has received inadequate attention by government despite policies for the self-management and self-sufficiency of the communities. If these policies are to be given effect to, rather than being espoused as mere rhetoric, then the extension of appropriate adult educational programs to the remote communities to teach skills for community self-management and development will be essential. This must be seen as a major priority in the post-schooling area. While TAFE, provided in flexible ways, will be able to meet this need to some extent, other organisations such as the Institute for Aboriginal Development can make an important contribution. The Committee recommends that:

75 *the Technical and Further Education system adapt its mainstream programs to cater for differing Aboriginal educational needs in the TAFE area;*

76 *Commonwealth, State and Territory governments develop policy statements on TAFE for Aboriginals in consultation with the National Aboriginal Education Committee and State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups;*

77 *the Technical and Further Education Council of the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission establish an Aboriginal advisory unit on policy in TAFE for Aboriginals at the Commonwealth level;*

78 *each State and Territory government, which has not already done so, establish an Aboriginal Education Unit in TAFE to adapt and develop TAFE policies and programs within their respective State or Territory in the TAFE area;*

79 *when developing policies and programs for TAFE, Aboriginal communities be consulted closely about their specific needs in the TAFE area;*

80 *Commonwealth, State and Territory governments provide adequate resources to TAFE so that programs can be adapted and developed to meet Aboriginal needs; and*

81 *Commonwealth funding in TAFE be directed through the Tertiary Education Program for Aboriginals (TEPA) administered by the Commonwealth Department of Education in consultation with the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission and the National Aboriginal Education Committee.*

(Paragraph 12.31)

82 *a particular area of attention of TAFE for Aboriginals be on the provision of appropriate programs for the remote and traditionally-oriented Aboriginal communities; and*

83 *the communities concerned be closely consulted about the sort of technical and further education they wish to receive.*

(Paragraph 12.37)

ABORIGINAL STUDIES

The Committee considers that the introduction of Aboriginal studies units into schools and other educational institutions would have significant beneficial effects for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students: for Aboriginal students it would assist in making school more meaningful to them; for non-Aboriginal students it would break down the prejudice and lack of understanding of Aboriginal people in society which can exist. The Committee recommends that:

84 *State and Territory departments of education, in conjunction with their Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups, develop guidelines on the teaching of Aboriginal studies in schools. These guidelines should include a contemporary perspective of Aboriginal society.*

(Paragraph 13.17)

85 *State and Territory curriculum development units devise curriculum material for Aboriginal studies programs to be used in schools in conjunction with the local Aboriginal community through the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group;*

86 *greater use be made of the resources at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies in the preparation of curriculum material for Aboriginal studies programs;*

87 *teachers involve members of the local Aboriginal community, as far as possible, in the development and teaching of Aboriginal studies programs; and*

88 *the Aboriginal Arts Board, and other relevant Commonwealth departments and authorities provide support to Aboriginal authors to write and publish children's and other literature suitable for use in Aboriginal studies courses.*

(Paragraph 13.22)

ABORIGINAL TEACHERS AND TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Every effort should be made to meet the target identified by the National Aboriginal Education Committee of having 1000 trained Aboriginal teachers employed in schools by 1990. It is important that as many Aboriginal teachers as possible are trained to work in Australian schools. Their presence is essential to raise the confidence of young Aboriginal students and to exemplify the possibility of success in the wider society for Aboriginal students. They can also provide the necessary bridge, which is often lacking, between the school and the Aboriginal community. It is the enormous gulf between the cultural and social values of schooling programs and the cultural and social values of Aboriginal society which has caused great difficulties in effectively educating Aboriginal children.

Expansion of enclave support schemes and bridging courses to facilitate the entry of Aboriginal students to courses, and their successful completion of them should proceed. There should also be an expansion of the off-campus teacher training programs such as the one operating in Broome. Aboriginal adults currently working in schools should be assisted to undertake full-time studies in teacher education. To do this, financial assistance will be needed so that those people with family responsibilities can participate. In this connection the special teaching training awards are an important initiative and should be expanded. The Committee recommends that:

89 *a target of training 1000 Aboriginal teachers for employment in schools by 1990 be adopted by Commonwealth, State and Territory governments.*

(Paragraph 14.7)

90 *State and Territory governments consult with relevant teacher training institutions about establishing at least one off-campus teacher education program within their States which incorporates special assistance for Aboriginals.*

(Paragraph 14.23)

91 *the Commonwealth Government provide 200 special teacher training awards per year to mature-aged Aboriginal people who wish to train as teachers until the demand among Aboriginals to train as teachers declines.*

(Paragraph 14.46)

The Committee considers that the needs of the traditional communities for teacher training calls for a creative and flexible response which recognises the real needs of the communities. The Northern Territory Government is responding to those needs through the expansion of the Remote Area Teacher Education Program and through consideration of the establishment of an annexe of Batchelor College in the southern region. The Committee strongly supports both these responses. The Committee also considers that programs such as the Anangu Teacher Education Program offer the opportunity to respond to the needs of the traditional communities in an innovative way. There is an urgent need to extend similar programs to Western Australia and Queensland. The Committee recommends that:

92 *the Northern Territory Government extend the Remote Area Teacher Education Program to the second year of teacher training and consider extending it to the third year as soon as practicable;*

93 *the Northern Territory Government provide all the resources necessary to the Remote Area Teacher Education Program to enable it to operate successfully; and*

94 *the Northern Territory Government establish an annexe of Batchelor College in the southern region of the Northern Territory.*

(Paragraph 14.34)

95 *on-site teacher training programs which recognise the needs of traditionally-oriented Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people be established as a matter of urgency in Queensland and Western Australia. In Queensland priority should be given to the development of a program to serve the Torres Strait Islands.*

(Paragraph 14.43)

The employment of Aboriginal teaching assistants and teacher aides, and other support staff, has been an important initiative in Aboriginal education. Evidence suggests that it is from the ranks of para-professionals that many future teachers will come. Schemes for training teacher assistants and support staff are required. A career structure for teaching assistants, with opportunities provided for them to upgrade their qualifications are also needed.

The Committee considers these improvements can best be achieved by Aboriginal teaching assistants and teacher aides becoming an integral part of the normal establishment of schools and funded by State and Territory governments in the way other personnel in the school are. It is only by being integrated into the school that conditions of service can be made permanent and that a career structure can be provided.

Opportunities for Aboriginal teaching assistants to upgrade their qualifications in a manner so that they can improve their career prospects is also an important way of improving the circumstances of teaching assistants. Those teacher training programs which provide an integration of training and a career structure should become the models for ways of providing better opportunities to teaching assistants. The Committee recommends that:

96 *the relevant Commonwealth departments have discussions with State and Territory governments about effecting a transfer of responsibility for funding Aboriginal teaching assistant and teacher aide positions from the Commonwealth to the States and Territories;*

97 *on assuming responsibility for these positions, the State and Territory governments significantly upgrade the conditions of appointment (including permanency of employment and salary levels) of Aboriginal teaching assistants and teacher aides and provide them with an appropriate career structure; and*

98 *State and Territory governments provide encouragement to, and suitable programs for, Aboriginal teaching assistants and teacher aides to train as teachers.*

(Paragraph 14.58)

RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING OF NON-ABORIGINAL TEACHERS

The Committee concludes that the school-based strategies recommended in this report to overcome the disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal children in the education system, will only be effective if appropriately trained and committed teachers are posted to schools with significant Aboriginal enrolment. The nature of the training needed will vary depending on the environment of the school. Thus schools in remote and traditional areas have very specific requirements and should be staffed by experienced teachers who have undergone specialist training in linguistics, TESL and Aboriginal studies, and who have,

in addition, demonstrated a commitment to Aboriginal education. A specialist Aboriginal teaching service would provide a pool of appropriately trained teachers to make appointments to these schools.

In rural and urban schools with significant minority Aboriginal populations the Committee has emphasised the need to appoint principals and senior staff with an understanding of Aboriginal educational needs. It has also recommended the appointment of appropriately trained resource teachers in Aboriginal education who would provide curriculum teaching advice and in-service programs to other teachers in the school.

The Committee considers that all teachers should be adequately prepared as part of their initial training to appreciate the special needs of Aboriginal education. However, those teachers selected to work intensively with Aboriginal children should have specialist qualifications in Aboriginal education undertaken in accredited courses conducted in institutions throughout Australia. The Committee recommends that:

- 99 *all teachers should be adequately prepared by pre-service training to appreciate the special needs of Aboriginal students. This should include general background in Aboriginal culture, the history of Aboriginal people and their place in modern Australian society. This presentation should aim to ensure that future teachers are trained to function sensitively and knowledgeably in cross-cultural situations;*
- 100 *an advisory committee should be established in each State and Territory chaired by a nominee of the National Aboriginal Education Committee. Its membership should be broadly based to represent the Aboriginal community, teachers' unions, school systems and teacher training institutions. This committee should evaluate existing programs on Aboriginal education in the State and Territory and make recommendations for accreditation of courses. Only such courses as are accredited should be recognised as providing specialist qualifications in Aboriginal education; and*
- 101 *education authorities in each State and Territory should establish a core of Aboriginal education teachers, qualified in the accredited courses in Aboriginal education, for deployment to schools with significant numbers of Aboriginal students.*

(Paragraph 15.23)

- 102 *the proposal for establishment of a National Aboriginal Teaching Service be further investigated by the Commonwealth Department of Education and the National Aboriginal Education Committee acting in consultation with State and Territory Governments, Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups and Teacher Unions.*

(Paragraph 15.35)

- 103 *the advisory committees proposed in recommendation 100 should identify schools in the States and Territories requiring special Aboriginal education support and report to their respective governments their assessment of the schools in the State or Territory; and*
- 104 *State and Territory education authorities deploy appropriately trained teachers to these schools.*

(Paragraph 15.37)

- 105 *appropriately trained teachers be deployed as Aboriginal education resource teachers in schools with significant minority Aboriginal student populations identified by the advisory committees proposed in recommendation 100; and*
- 106 *the resource teachers should conduct in-service training courses for other members of the school staff.*

(Paragraph 15.41)

Conduct of the Inquiry

THE COMMITTEE

The Inquiry into Aboriginal Education was initially referred to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs on 25 March 1981 in the 32nd Parliament by the then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Senator the Hon. P.E. Baume. It was referred to the Standing Committee again in the 33rd Parliament by the incoming Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Hon. A.C. Holding, M.P.. The Inquiry has, therefore, continued for a much longer period than is desirable. In both previous Parliaments it was being conducted simultaneously with two other Inquiries which, for a variety of reasons, were accorded greater urgency by the Standing Committee. In the 32nd Parliament the Standing Committee reported on *Strategies to Help Overcome the Problems of Aboriginal Town Camps* and, in October 1984 in the 33rd Parliament, on the *Effects of Asbestos Mining on the Baryulgil Community*. By the time the 33rd Parliament was dissolved in October 1984, the Standing Committee had made considerable progress with the Education Inquiry.

In the 34th Parliament the matter of Aboriginal education was referred to the House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education with the same terms of reference as the Inquiry being conducted by the Standing Committee in the previous two Parliaments. Many members of the Standing Committee in the 32nd and 33rd Parliaments were also members of the Select Committee in the 34th Parliament. This provided a continuity in understanding about the issues involved in Aboriginal education. Reference to the 'Committee' in the body of this report is to the Select Committee on Aboriginal Education appointed in the 34th Parliament.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The terms of reference of the Select Committee on Aboriginal Education are:

to inquire into and report on all aspects of Aboriginal education with particular reference to:

1. The educational needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people including the effect on these needs of environmental, social and cultural factors.
2. Means of promoting wider and more effective participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people at all levels in the development and implementation of appropriate programs and curricula.
3. The most effective methods of providing appropriate education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people at all levels, having regard to the expressed needs of the Aboriginal communities and organisations and to the respective responsibilities of —
 - a) the State, Northern Territory and Commonwealth Governments; and
 - b) Aboriginal communities and other agencies administering Aboriginal education programs.
4. The effectiveness of funding arrangements, including — a) whether the best use is made of available funds; and b) whether present priorities as between States Grants and Grants-in-Aid are appropriate.
5. The effectiveness of existing programs and special support schemes including —
 - a) Aboriginal student assistance schemes; b) enclave support schemes; c) indepen-

- dent Aboriginal schools; d) bilingual and bicultural education programs; and e) pre-employment and vocational training courses.
6. The recruitment and training of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers and teacher assistants.

CONDUCT OF THE INQUIRY

The Inquiry was advertised throughout Australia in both national and regional newspapers in early 1981. The Standing Committee sought written submissions from Commonwealth, State and Territory Government departments and agencies involved in the provision of education, from Aboriginal organisations and associations, from schools and educational institutions, and from other groups in the community. The Standing Committee also invited submissions from individuals involved in providing education services or with a particular interest in the field. As a result no fewer than 184 written submissions were received to the Inquiry. Many of these submissions were from Aboriginal organisations and individuals.

The Standing and Select Committees examined 201 witnesses in relation to their formal submissions at public hearings which were held in all State capitals, Darwin, Alice Springs, Rockhampton and Canberra. Their names, and the organisations they represented, are listed at Appendix I. A list of those who made submissions but did not give evidence at public hearings is at Appendix II. The formal record of the Inquiry, which includes each submission and the transcript of oral evidence taken at the public hearings, extends over 6,000 pages and is available for inspection at the House of Representatives Committee Office, the Australian National Library, and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library. The Committees also received a number of documents unsuitable for incorporation in the transcript. These documents were treated as exhibits and are listed at Appendix III.

As well as conducting formal public hearings the Standing and Select Committees travelled extensively throughout Australia, visiting each State and Territory at least once, holding discussions in schools and Aboriginal communities. A list of places visited by the Standing and Select Committees is included at Appendix IV. These trips enabled the Committee to come to grips with the wide range of issues and to meet many individuals concerned with the educational needs of Aboriginals. The visits and informal discussions were designed to cover the entire spectrum of the education process. In this regard, the Committees met with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers, Aboriginal teaching assistants, education administrators, students, academics from universities and colleges of advanced education, lecturers from schools of further education, parents, student counsellors and members of the community. Wherever possible, the Committees held discussions with local Aboriginal education consultative groups and with Aboriginal communities.

The co-operation and assistance given to the Standing and Select Committees during the course of the Inquiry needs to be mentioned. Thanks must be extended to all witnesses who gave evidence and other individuals and organisations who made submissions. The Committee is most grateful to members of Aboriginal communities and organisations who provided valuable information during informal discussions. The Committee wishes to thank all State and the Northern Territory Governments for their co-operation with this Inquiry. The Standing and Select Committees were also assisted by officers of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the National Aboriginal Education Committee. In particular, the Committee would like to thank the many Department of Aboriginal Affairs Area Officers for their assistance with the visits to Aboriginal communities and other townships and those members of the National Aboriginal Education Committee who accompanied Committee members on these trips.

Chapter 1

The Context of Aboriginal Education

Everyone has the right to education . . .

Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality . . . it shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all national, racial or religious groups.

(Article 26 Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Education of Aboriginal people in Australia occurs within the established educational structure. Most educational services are delivered by State and Territory Government departments, and services delivered outside the public sector are governed by State law. Under the Constitution the States are solely responsible for education. The increasing involvement of the Commonwealth has come about as a result of the provision of conditional grants which are paid to the States under Section 96 of the Constitution. The Inquiry into Education, Training and Employment reported in February 1977 that the proportion of public finance provided for education by the Commonwealth had risen from 2.6 per cent in 1957 to 42.1 per cent in 1977. According to the Commonwealth Schools Commission, the Commonwealth's significant involvement in the funding of schools resulted from widespread national concern at gross inequities and inadequacies in Australian schools during the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹

1.2 Until amendments to the Constitution obtained in 1967, laws respecting Aboriginal people were passed by State Governments. Since 1967 the Commonwealth has also had a legislative role in the field of Aboriginal affairs. The Commonwealth has not yet exercised its powers extensively, and State laws largely remain in force administered by State Government departments and instrumentalities. Through the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, however, the Commonwealth has taken important initiatives in regard to Aboriginal welfare. The Department makes a significant contribution in the area of Aboriginal education. Through the Department of Education the Commonwealth also has established important schemes of assistance for Aboriginal students.

1.3 The Commonwealth Schools Commission and the Tertiary Education Commission, in consultation with the National Aboriginal Education Committee, are becoming increasingly involved in the administration and funding of Aboriginal educational programs. The Schools Commission has developed educational objectives and standards for all Australian children which provide the basis for its funding of programs. According to the Schools Commission:

Greater equality of educational opportunity and outcomes is accepted as a primary goal of school funding. This has followed recognition of the critical role which schooling plays in students' life chances. Rightly or wrongly, students' academic achievements, the perceived relative value of subjects studied and the length of schooling they undergo, continue to be used as means of selecting students for employment or further training . . . It is generally accepted that young people should have equal opportunities to develop their full intellectual, physical and aesthetic potential and to participate in the economic and social life of the nation regardless of the circumstances of their race, sex, first language, economic circumstances, location or social status. If education is critical to this opportunity to develop and to participate then, it has been argued, education should contribute to equalising such outcomes across groups of people.²

1.4 As for other Australians, the attainment of equality of educational opportunity and outcomes for Aboriginal people must be a primary objective of educational programs designed for them. Equality of educational opportunity implies, as noted in the Karmel Report on the *Quality of Education in Australia*, unequal provision of education services. This is because compensating assistance may have to be provided to schools and students which are perceived to be disadvantaged educationally because of socio-economic, cultural, ethnic, and other reasons in order to achieve equality of opportunity.³ The Schools Commission also notes that responding to educational disadvantage can depend upon a recognition that different strategies and approaches are required for the schooling of different student groups.⁴ Aboriginal people are such a group for whom different educational strategies and approaches are required.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENTS

1.5 Performance by Aboriginal people in the national education system is a cause of great concern. There is clear evidence that Aboriginal educational achievements are well below those of the general Australian community. The Commonwealth Department of Education told the Committee that Aboriginal education is still characterised by:

- lower levels of access;
- lower levels of achievement;
- lower retention rates, particularly at secondary school; and
- often inadequate or inappropriate curricula.⁵

The Department of Aboriginal Affairs reported to the Committee in 1984 that recent census statistics indicated that while less than 1 per cent of Australians not then at school had never attended school, the figure for the Aboriginal population was over 11 per cent. Fifty-six per cent of the total population had left school at the age of 15 or less, but in the case of Aboriginals over 68 per cent had left school at or before that age. Only 4.1 per cent of the Aboriginal population had post-secondary qualifications compared with 24.6 per cent of the total population.⁶ Information collected by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs area officers also indicated that there were 2,330 Aboriginal children aged 5–15 years still not attending school in 1983. The total number of Aboriginal children not attending school may be greater than this as the figure excluded Aboriginal children living in towns and cities with a population greater than 500.⁷

1.6 There have been a number of research studies indicating the poor levels of educational attainment of Aboriginal students.

WATTS' EVALUATION OF THE ABORIGINAL SECONDARY GRANTS SCHEME

1.7 In her evaluation of the Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme, Professor Watts concluded from studying the school records of a sample of grantees that:

It can reasonably be inferred that many of the students are not achieving satisfactory levels of academic achievement compared with the total Australian population of secondary school students. A minority is however doing extremely well and, as always, there is a sizeable group whose academic achievements are satisfactory within their systems, though not outstanding.⁸

DE LEMOS STUDY

1.8 Marion de Lemos tested all available Aboriginal children in Grades 2, 4 and 6 in Victorian schools with ten or more Aboriginal pupils enrolled (about half the Aboriginal

students in these grades in Victoria) and in her secondary school study tested all Aboriginal students in Victoria aged 14 years and 14 years 11 months at the beginning of 1973.

1.9 The results from de Lemos' study of primary school students indicated that there were significant differences between school achievements of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children. The Aboriginal children scored consistently lower on all the tests at all grade levels. A similar pattern of poor achievement was shown in de Lemos' study of secondary school Aboriginal students.⁹

BOURKE AND KEEVES STUDY

1.10 In their study of school performance in Australia, Bourke and Keeves concluded from their examination of the performance of Aboriginal students that:

... the differences in performance between the Aboriginal students and the overall Australian student samples are sufficiently large to make it clear that a problem exists. The results suggest that Aboriginal students are handicapped in their progress through the school system and that many are likely to be disadvantaged in their adult life.¹⁰

1.11 The study also noted differences in performance between Aboriginal students attending Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory and those who formed a small minority in schools throughout Australia. The report's conclusions about students in Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory were that they would be unable to lead a 'normal' life in Australian society without severe disadvantage. However the report stated that Aboriginal students who formed a small minority in schools:

... had a much higher level of performance than those at Aboriginal schools. For some tasks their level of performance approached that of the overall Australian samples, although on average their performance was 15-25 per cent below that of Australian students overall.¹¹

1.12 Professor Betty Watts believed that the small samples involved in this study, the use of standard English to conduct the tests and the content of items in the tests which are relatively unfamiliar to children in tribal or rural locations, could have distorted the test results.¹²

OTHER INDICATIONS OF EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS

1.13 These studies of Aboriginal school achievement present a generally depressing picture. However, the three studies are based on data collected in, or before, 1975.

1.14 Other more recent figures, while not clearly indicating whether there has been an improvement in the educational achievement of Aboriginal students at a particular level of schooling, do show that the level of schooling attained by Aboriginals is improving. The number of Aboriginals in secondary school has increased dramatically in the last 10 years. In 1973 the number of Aboriginals attending secondary school was 10,048 of whom 608 were in Years 11 and 12. In 1982 the total number of Aboriginals at secondary school had risen to 19,168, of whom 2,046 were in Years 11 and 12.¹³ However, the retention rates of Aboriginal students in the senior years of secondary school still remains low compared with the rest of the community. In 1979 the retention rates to Year 12 of Aboriginal students receiving Aboriginal Secondary Grants was 7.5 per cent. This increased to 9.9 per cent in 1982 and 13.1 per cent in 1984. However, this compares with a retention rate of 45 per cent for the whole student population in 1984.¹⁴

1.15 The dramatic increase in the numbers of Aboriginals receiving Aboriginal Study Grants to undertake a wide variety of courses, particularly in the last few years,

demonstrates the increased educational opportunities that are available to adult Aboriginal people. The number of Aboriginal Study Grant holders has increased from 115 in 1969 to 1,875 in 1975 to 9,861 in 1982 to 12,800 in 1984.¹⁵

1.16 Another positive trend is the steadily increasing rate of Aboriginal participation in courses in tertiary institutions over the past decade or so. The numbers of Aboriginal students in universities, colleges of advanced education and other tertiary institutions has increased from 18 in 1969 to 223 in 1975 to 881 in 1980.¹⁶ In 1983 there were 799 Aboriginal people enrolled in higher education award courses.¹⁷ The Commonwealth Department of Education, in its survey of Aboriginal access to tertiary education, claimed that the 'increasing rate of access would appear to be due in part to the proliferation of special programs within such institutions'.¹⁸

1.17 While the access of Aboriginals to tertiary education has been steadily improving, the level of participation by Aboriginals in tertiary education was still very low in comparison with the total Australian community. In 1980, 0.5 per cent of the Aboriginal population was undertaking courses located in universities or colleges of advanced education, compared with 2.2 per cent of the overall Australian population. As a number of these Aboriginal students were undertaking special courses which were not university or college of advanced education level courses, the proportion of Aboriginals actually undertaking tertiary courses at a comparable level to the rest of the community was only 0.3 per cent.¹⁹

PROFESSOR WATTS' REVIEW OF ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

1.18 In her review of research and developments in the education of Aboriginals, *Aboriginal Futures*, Professor Watts pointed out that the studies of Aboriginal educational achievement were all conducted in the early and mid-seventies before the improvement in educational outcomes that might have been anticipated from the new policies and special initiatives that have been taken in Aboriginal education. However, Professor Watts believed that from the few more recent studies available, from the statistics on school and tertiary participation rates (discussed above) and from her own discussions with a wide variety of people involved in Aboriginal education, several conclusions could be drawn about Aboriginal educational attainments:

1. There has been a slight increase in the numbers of Aboriginals securing good or very good academic achievements and/or successfully completing senior secondary or tertiary studies.
2. There has, over the decade, been a highly significant increase in the number of Aboriginals attending secondary school; there remains, however, a low participation rate in the senior secondary school.
3. There still exists a highly significant proportion whose educational achievements are too limited to enable them to function successfully in their personal adult lives or to secure for them opportunity to enter the workforce in other than unskilled or semi-skilled jobs.
4. Again, for significant numbers, schooling does not serve well the function of assisting the children to discover and develop their talents and potentials.²⁰

1.19 Professor Watts also claimed, that in the case of large numbers of Aboriginal students, schools remained unresponsive to Aboriginal needs, and that schooling did little to affirm positively a sense of Aboriginal identity. There was a lack of effective communication between the Aboriginal home and the school so that parents were often

unaware of ways to assist the educational progress of their children. However, Professor Watts pointed to the increasing, but still inadequate, Aboriginal voice in educational decision-making.

THE NEED TO IMPROVE ATTAINMENTS

1.20 The research studies on Aboriginal educational achievements indicate that the literacy and numeracy skills of many Aboriginal students are well below those of the remainder of the community. However, as Professor Watts has pointed out, these studies were undertaken in the early and middle 1970s before the effect of many of the initiatives that have been taken in Aboriginal education could be felt and there is no clear picture of the extent to which these initiatives have improved the educational achievement of Aboriginals.

1.21 Recent figures on retention rates in secondary schools and participation rates in adult and tertiary education indicate that there has been a considerable increase in the numbers of Aboriginals obtaining higher educational standards. The success that has been achieved may well be due in part to the special programs that have been introduced in the last ten years or so.

1.22 However, the recent trends also indicate that the achievements and access to education of Aboriginals still remain well below those of the rest of the Australian community. The Schools Commission's objective of equality of educational opportunities and outcomes has been far from achieved in relation to Aboriginal people. There is still a highly significant proportion of Aboriginals whose educational achievements are too limited to enable them to function successfully in their personal adult lives and schooling for Aboriginals does little to affirm positively their Aboriginal identity or develop their talents and potentials. These conclusions are a matter of great concern to the Committee and provide a firm basis for recommendations made in this report to improve educational opportunities for Aboriginal people.

HISTORY OF ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

1.23 Before the arrival of Europeans in Australia, Aboriginal people had a form of education that enabled them to successfully transmit their culture and way of life from generation to generation. For more than 50,000 years this culture and way of life had allowed them to triumph over a difficult environment and establish a rich and complex society. Aboriginal society was disrupted by the arrival and subsequent occupation of Australia by Europeans. Traditional Aboriginal education and the transmission of Aboriginal cultural knowledge became increasingly irrelevant in the face of the destruction of Aboriginal society. However, little provision was made in the early years of European settlement for the education of Aboriginals. Since then and until very recent years, the provision of education for Aboriginal people has been inadequate or premised on the basis of Aboriginals becoming absorbed into Australian society. Current Aboriginal educational disadvantage, as has been just outlined, is rooted in this historical experience of Aboriginal people.

TRADITIONAL ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

1.24 Aboriginal society was a non-literate society and knowledge about the land and the means of survival, and about kinship and religion was not written down but was held and transmitted by the older men and women of the society. Learning was then largely a

matter of observation and imitation of the actions of older people and to a much lesser extent by verbal instruction from those who were older. Much learning was unstructured and took place within concrete contexts. The early education of Aboriginal children was undertaken by those with whom they were intimate and kin. Dr Stephen Harris describes the learning process:

Opportunities for learning by observation abound in Yolngu [Aboriginal] society because parents live out most of their life in front of the younger generation . . . Everything that a Yolngu child has to do in life he/she will have seen performed many times before he is fully responsible for having to do it on his own. When a woman goes into the bush to get yams, or goes to get crabs or bush fruits, or cooks a damper, she normally has with her several children, both girls and boys, off-handedly observing everything she does. In fact, it is relatively rare that any Yolngu performs any skill on his or her own.²¹

It was only later in life, particularly in the context of initiation or in the learning of religious knowledge and ritual, that verbal instruction was given in a more formal and structured way, and that information was imparted by people who were strangers or relative strangers.

1.25 It is important to note then that neither school nor formal schooling was a traditional Aboriginal institution.²² In modern Western societies the purpose of formal education is to prepare people for participation in the workforce and in the wider economy and community generally. In Aboriginal society, by contrast, education normally took place in an informal way and was designed to enable Aboriginals to survive as hunter/gatherers and maintain their complex social and religious system. Dr Stephen Harris, who undertook research into traditional Aboriginal learning styles in Mililingimbi in the Northern Territory, has observed five major traditional Aboriginal informal learning strategies and contrasted these with a Western-oriented approach to education:

1. Most Aboriginal learning is through observation and imitation rather than through verbal instruction, oral or written, as is the case in European schools and society.
2. The other most important learning strategy is learning through personal trial-and-error as opposed to verbal instruction accompanied by demonstration.
3. Most learning is achieved through real-life performance rather than through practice in contrived settings, as is often the case in schools.
4. Focus in Aboriginal learning is on mastering context-specific skills. Mastery of context-specific skills is in contrast to a school education system which seeks to teach abstract context-free principles which can be applied in new previously unexperienced situations.
5. Aboriginal learners are more person-oriented than information-oriented, and there is no institutionalised office of 'teacher' in Aboriginal society. This means that Aboriginal children and adults will assess, respect, or ignore non-Aboriginal teachers more on the basis of how they relate as persons, than according to how they perform as teachers.²³

1.26 While the form of traditional Aboriginal education was well suited to a hunter/gatherer way of life and enabled the transmission of a complex culture and society, it was not suited to an economy and society in the early stages of industrialisation. This became evident with the arrival of Europeans in Australia.

THE IMPACT OF EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT

1.27 The arrival of Europeans in Australia commenced a process of dispersion and disruption of Aboriginal groups and society that continues to the present. Progressive European settlement of the continent cut Aboriginal people off from their land bases which provided them not only with economic sustenance but with spiritual and social meaning. The loss of their land base and the effects of diseases introduced by white settlers steadily increased the levels of Aboriginal mortality. The system of traditional Aboriginal education could not equip people to cope with this dramatic breakdown of their society.

1.28 Although some attempts were made to provide formal education for Aboriginals in the 1800s, the schooling provided was almost always second-rate, appropriate to a view at the time of Aboriginals as inferior beings. Where education was to be provided to Aboriginal children it was seen as only being successful if it was 'possible to remove them from the influence of their parents.'²⁴

THE ERA OF 'PROTECTION'

1.29 In the late nineteenth century, a policy of 'protection' of Aboriginals emerged. Aboriginal people were to be protected by being segregated onto reserves and having special legislation passed to control almost all aspects of their lives. The implications of this policy for the education of Aboriginals were they were often excluded from public schools and what education they received was provided in a school on the reserve. The nature of the schooling provided on the reserves has been described by McConnochie:

The bulk of the teachers were unqualified, inexperienced and overloaded with other administrative duties which placed them in the role of policemen rather than teachers. The education was conducted in inadequate and ill-equipped buildings, following a programme which at least fitted them for ill-paid seasonal work, and which provided no possibility for movement out of this situation. Aboriginal children were refused admission to the white school system, and in many instances received absolutely no education at all.²⁵

1.30 Mission stations were also established for Aboriginal people with official encouragement. Schools were established in many of the missions for Aboriginal children. In fact in some States (e.g. Victoria) the earliest records of the education of Aboriginals is in the establishment of mission schools.²⁶ Missions provided protection for Aboriginals in the form of assistance with food and medical treatment. They also provided at least some education for Aboriginal children.

THE POLICY OF ASSIMILATION

1.31 From about 1940, policy towards Aboriginals shifted from one of protection and segregation to one of assimilation into the wider community. The assimilation policy was defined by the Native Welfare Conference in 1961:

The policy of assimilation means that all Aborigines and part-Aborigines are expected eventually to attain the same manner of living as other Australians and to live as members of a single Australian community enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities, observing the same customs and influenced by the same beliefs, as other Australians.²⁷

1.32 During the period of assimilation education was seen as one of the key mechanisms for the achievement of the absorption of Aboriginal people into the Australian community. Education was to train Aboriginals in the skills essential to their assimilation

into the workforce. It was also seen as being the instrument to bring about a change in attitudes and values among Aboriginals so that assimilation into the general Australian community could take place. The role of education was seen as one of developing in Aboriginal children a set of skills, values and behavioural characteristics which approximated as closely as possible to those of their white middle-class peers. Schooling and the school curriculum were thus deliberately Western-oriented and little or no attention was given in the school to traditional Aboriginal cultural or social values and forms. Ultimately, education would allow Aboriginal people to take their place as full and useful members of Australian society as was required by the policy of assimilation.

1.33 By the mid-1960s most primary aged Aboriginal children were attending school. However, the participation rate in secondary schooling was still very low. A survey by the New South Wales Teachers' Federation in 1964 showed that only 9 per cent of Aboriginal children proceeded beyond 2nd year secondary school and over 58 per cent were rated as slow learners. A second survey in 1971 revealed a limited improvement with 38 per cent of the Aboriginal secondary enrolment in slow learner classes. Only 27 per cent of the Form One enrolment stayed at school until Form Four.²⁸ The policy of assimilation did not bring about significant improvements in Aboriginal educational achievement.

1.34 The response to the failure of the educational programs of the assimilation period was to introduce compensatory education programs. These programs tended to be premised on a belief that Aboriginal people suffered from a 'cultural deprivation' or 'deficit' which had the effect of impoverishing their linguistic and cognitive ability. Failure was attributed to the Aboriginal home environment which was considered to be deficient in providing Aboriginal children with the right sort of attitudes and values to achieve well at school. The purpose of these programs was thus to provide intensive remedial teaching to compensate for linguistic and cognitive impoverishment, but also to inculcate in Aboriginal children the values of their white middle-class peers as a prerequisite to better educational attainments.²⁹

1.35 The Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, in rejecting educational programs based on the notion of cultural deprivation, claimed:

There is no doubt that in material terms Aborigines are seriously disadvantaged but in our view these assumptions have not adequately distinguished between cultural deprivation and cultural difference and have confused cultural and economic deprivation. Consequently, many of the education programs for Aborigines appear to aim at making Aboriginal children conform to Anglo-Saxon standards and norms and rarely are attempts made to develop the strengths of Aboriginal children and that which is positive in the Aboriginal experience. Material and economic disadvantage must be recognised for what it is and should be tackled on a far broader scale.³⁰

THE POLICY OF SELF-DETERMINATION

1.36 In the early 1970s government policies changed from those of assimilation to those of self-determination and self-management for Aboriginal people. Self-determination and self-management as policies recognise the validity of Aboriginal culture and the importance of Aboriginal control over, and responsibility for, programs designed to meet their needs. The change in policies also coincides with greater Commonwealth involvement in funding programs for Aboriginal people.

1.37 In Aboriginal education, the change in policies has had a number of important consequences for the sort of educational programs which have been established.

1.38 Firstly, the recognition of the validity of Aboriginal culture has meant that educational approaches have been developed which value Aboriginality instead of treating

it as a deficiency or obstacle which must be overcome if education is to be effective. These approaches give recognition to the cultural differences of Aboriginal people. The approaches developed include bilingual/bicultural education, the use of informal Aboriginal learning styles in teaching and the incorporation of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and values into the school curriculum.

1.39 Secondly, it has been recognised that the discontinuity between formal education and the Aboriginal community needs to be reduced and that the best way of achieving this is by having more Aboriginal people participating in educational policy making and in the educational process. The approaches which have developed include increasing the involvement of Aboriginal educational consultative committees in Aboriginal educational policy making, employing local Aboriginal people as teachers, teaching assistants and liaison officers in schools and involving Aboriginal communities in the setting of aims of their schools. These developments in Aboriginal education will be examined in greater detail later in this report.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE PAST

1.40 From this short history of Aboriginal education it is clear that poor Aboriginal educational achievements can be explained very much by the inadequacy and inappropriateness of past Aboriginal educational programs. It was not until the mid-1960s that formal schooling was provided to most Aboriginal children in a systematic way at least to primary school level. Even then Aboriginal education was seen as an important mechanism to achieve the assimilation of Aboriginal people into the wider society. This approach was destructive of Aboriginal society and values and achieved little in terms of improved educational outcomes. As has already been noted it is difficult to judge the effects of more recent programs in Aboriginal education developed within a framework of Aboriginal self-determination and self-management. However, to the extent that improvements in the educational achievements of Aboriginal people are taking place they can perhaps be attributed to the new approaches to Aboriginal education.

THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY

1.41 In considering the present state of Aboriginal education it is necessary to consider the tremendous diversity of economic, social and geographical circumstances of the Aboriginal community. The National Aboriginal Education Committee has constructed a model of Aboriginal society which classifies the variety of communities on the basis of two variables:

- Traditional orientation — the degree of observance of traditional institutions such as kinship, ceremonies and Aboriginal law.
- Embeddedness — or the degree of economic, social and demographic attachment to non-Aboriginal society.

On the basis of these criteria four broad categories of Aboriginal communities and their typical school provisions have been described:

**Category I — Traditionally
Oriented Communities**

People who have the greatest geographical and social separation from the rest of Australian society with some degree of economic connection e.g. homeland centres, outstations and traditionally oriented communities.

- Special government schools (such as bilingual schools in the Northern Territory).
- Mobile schools or schools serviced by itinerant teachers.
- Independent Aboriginal community schools (e.g. Strelley, W.A.).
- Children boarding at various non-government schools.
- Special boarding systems, (e.g. residential colleges in the Northern Territory).
- Correspondence school, including School of the Air.
- Schools controlled by the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Advancement in Queensland.

**Category II — Rural
Non-Traditional Communities**

Aboriginal people who have considerable social and geographic separation from the rest of Australian society but are not as highly traditionally oriented as Category I, e.g. rural non-traditional communities.

- Special government schools (eg. Palm Island, Qld: Point Pearce, SA).
- Independent Aboriginal community schools.
- Government and non-government schools, including boarding arrangements for attendance at these schools.

Category III — Urban Communities

These people are highly geographically and economically embedded in non-Aboriginal society but because of their community social organisation they have considerable social separation. Less traditionally oriented than Category I.

- The urban community has similar schooling options to any urban dweller in Australia except that in some places the community may be large enough to establish independent schools such as the Christian Aboriginal Parent-Directed School, Coolgardie, and the former Black Community School, Townsville.

Category IV — Dispersed Urban

This group is highly socially, economically and geographically embedded in the non-indigenous Australian society.

- The same schooling options as any urban dweller in Australia.³¹
-

1.42 It is important to note that even those communities with the greatest degree of traditional orientation still have some degree of economic connection with the wider Australian community. All Aboriginal people are to some degree embedded within Australian society and this has consequences for the sort of education with which they should be provided. In discussing Aboriginal educational needs, Yipirinya School Council, an Aboriginal organisation running an independent Aboriginal school in which Aboriginal values are strongly emphasised, acknowledged that:

Because they live in a multicultural society, Aboriginal people accept the fact that educationally, they need to acquire certain knowledge, skills, attitudes and perhaps even values from the dominant culture so that they can survive in it.³²

1.43 However, it is also important to note that the urban communities with the greatest degree of embeddedness in Australian society are nevertheless strongly Aboriginal in their identification. Education for these communities should recognise this feeling of Aboriginality.

1.44 The way in which Aboriginal education can meet the diverse needs of Aboriginal communities is discussed in the next chapter.

ABORIGINAL STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS

1.45 According to the School Commission's Working Party on Aboriginal education, the majority of Aboriginal students attend government or non-government Catholic schools. The remainder attend non-government non-Catholic schools or Aboriginal community-run schools.

1.46 The precise numbers of Aboriginal enrolments in primary and secondary schools is difficult to determine as many State education departments do not record enrolments by race. In her review of Aboriginal education, Professor Watts estimated the Aboriginal enrolment in government schools in the mainland States and the Northern Territory and

presented it in terms of the percentage of Aboriginal enrolment and the size of the school. This information is presented in Table 1. Although these figures are now rather dated, and are only estimates, they allow a number of important conclusions to be drawn about Aboriginal enrolments in schools. These conclusions are supported by more recent enrolment figures in submissions made to the Committee.

1.47 Firstly, column 1 in the table refers to schools in which Aboriginal children constitute the majority of the school population. Usually these schools are small and are located in remote areas. Most of them are found in Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. These schools accounted for 31 per cent of Aboriginal school enrolments.

1.48 Column 2 refers to schools where Aboriginal children form a significant minority. As with the schools where Aboriginal children comprise the majority of students, these schools are usually located in remote areas and country towns where the Aboriginal population constitutes a significant minority. Eleven per cent of Aboriginal children attend schools in this category.

1.49 Schools with Aboriginal enrolments between 10 per cent and 20 per cent are grouped in column 3 and provide education for 13 per cent of Aboriginal children. Most would be country town schools, varying in size from very small to medium, and catering for children living in town or near to the town.

1.50 Many Aboriginal students (45 per cent) attend schools in which they form less than 10 per cent of the student population (details of these are not included in the Table). The percentage of these students varies greatly between States and the Northern Territory, ranging from 25 per cent of Aboriginal enrolments in the Northern Territory to 90 per cent of Victorian Aboriginal enrolments.

1.51 There are thus fewer than one-third of Aboriginal students in schools in which they form a majority of the school population. This figure may have decreased since Professor Watts' survey because of the increasing urbanisation of the Aboriginal community. On the other hand, nearly 60 per cent of Aboriginal students attend schools in which they constitute a small minority of the school population (less than 20 per cent and, in most cases, less than 10 per cent).

1.52 This pattern is confirmed by more recent figures supplied by the Western Australian Department of Education based on government school enrolments in 1983. According to the Department, more than half of the Aboriginal student population attend schools in the south-west of the State, where they constitute a small minority of the total school population. In primary schools, 55.2 per cent of Aboriginal students attend government schools in the south-west of the State where they comprise only 2.84 per cent of total school enrolments. A similar pattern was shown in secondary school enrolments.³³

1.53 Programs to meet the needs of Aboriginal students in schools in which they constitute a majority of the school population, and often have a traditional orientation, are of great importance. However, programs must also be developed to meet the needs of the majority of Aboriginal children who form only a small minority of their school's population, often in urban environments. Aboriginal educational needs are discussed in the next chapter.

INADEQUACY OF STATISTICS

1.54 Statistical information available on Aboriginal education is limited as is indicated by the dearth of information available to the Committee. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs collects education statistics based on regular surveys of approximately 800

Table 1
Estimated Aboriginal Enrolments* in Government Schools × % Aboriginal Enrolment × Size of School
Qld, N.S.W., W.A., N.T., Vic., S.A.

Percentage Aboriginal enrolment	(1)				(2)				(3)				(4)	(5)
	50-100%				20-49%				10-19%					
Size of school	<100	100-299	300-599	600+	<100	100-299	300-599	600+	<100	100-299	300-599	600+	Totals Cols 1,2,3	Total estimated Aboriginal pupils
Qld														
No. of pupils	778	1 723	1 221	0	399	685	680	0	184	366	1 252	606	7,894	13 319
No. of schools	24	10	4	0	31	14	7	0	21	16	23	7	157	
N.S.W.														
No. of pupils	479	314	551	0	111	786	620	397	0	270	1 012	493	5 033	11 000
No. of schools	12	3	2	0	5	14	5	3	0	9	16	6	75	
W.A.														
No. of pupils	1 084	1 102	129	0	205	343	493	14	39	196	166	222	3 993	8 292
No. of schools	25	9	1	0	12	6	4	1	4	6	3	2	73	
N.T.†														
No. of pupils	1 952	3 515	1 304	0	73	168	168	0	4	169	361	549	8 263	10 993
No. of schools	53	20	4	0	6	3	2	0	1	4	6	5	104	
Vic.														
No. of pupils	35	0	0	0	19	0	0	0	16	0	136	0	206	1 975
No. of schools	1	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	5	0	2	0	12	
S.A.														
No. of pupils	410	455	0	0	35	209	90	0	15	110	327	0	1 651	3 213
No. of schools	9	3	0	0	4	33	1	0	2	4	6	0	32	
TOTALS														
Pupils	4 738	7 109	3 205	0	842	2 191	2 051	411	258	1 111	3 254	1 870	27 040	48 792
Schools	124	45	11	0	62	40	19	4	33	39	56	20	453	

*Students enrolled in primary and secondary schools.

†N.T. (a) Figures include children enrolled at pre-schools on Aboriginal communities.

(b) An estimated 438 children attended homeland centre schools in June 78; these have been included in the total for N.T. even though they constitute 100% of the school enrolment, they have not been entered in the column 50-100% as the exact number of schools is not known.

Source: Watts, p. 638.

Aboriginal communities carried out by the Department's local staff throughout Australia. The Department also acts as a clearing house for the assembly of statistics on Aboriginals from numerous other sources, particularly government departments. These statistics are published in regular bulletins. In the area of education, the preponderance of statistics collected by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs relate to the Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme and the Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme.

1.55 Statistics available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics on Aboriginal education are also limited and are confined almost entirely to those which can be extracted from the National Population Census.

1.56 Although the administration of education is a State responsibility, few States collect comprehensive statistics on Aboriginal education. There is limited information available from some of the States.

1.57 The dearth of statistical information makes it difficult for those concerned with Aboriginal education to make decisions based on detailed data. The Committee believes that there is a need for the collection of detailed information about Aboriginal enrolments in pre-schools, schools and further educational institutions, Aboriginal attendance rates and Aboriginal educational attainments. The nature of the sort of information required would be best decided by educational authorities involved in Aboriginal education. In particular, there should be a body of research undertaken to establish what Aboriginal achievement standards are at all levels of the educational system and the impact that the educational programs for Aboriginals introduced in the last decade or so, have had on Aboriginal educational attainments.

1.58 The Committee recommends that:

- *the National Aboriginal Education Committee in consultation with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, the Commonwealth Department of Education, the Commonwealth Schools Commission, the Tertiary Education Commission and State and Territory governments and Aboriginal Educational Consultative Groups develop a co-ordinated approach to the collection of statistics in Aboriginal education with a view to improving the data base for decision-making; and*
- *a research study be undertaken into the standards of educational attainment of Aboriginal people at all levels of the educational system, including the impact of Aboriginal educational programs introduced in the last decade or so, on these educational standards.*

Endnotes

- 1 Commonwealth Schools Commission, *Recommendations for 1986*, Canberra, April 1985, p. 2.
- 2 Commonwealth Schools Commission, *Commonwealth Standards for Australian Schools*, Canberra, April 1984, pp. 117-18.
- 3 *Quality of Education in Australia*, Report of the Review Committee, AGPS, Canberra, April 1985, p. 4.
- 4 Schools Commission, *Commonwealth Standards*, p. 118.
- 5 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4704.
- 6 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4799.
- 7 Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Statistical Section Newsletter, No.13, p. 52.
- 8 B.H. Watts, *Access to Education: An Evaluation of the Aboriginal Secondary Grants*, p. 76.
- 9 Marion M. de Lemos, *Aboriginal Students in Victoria*, ACER Research Monograph No.3, 1979.
- 10 S.F. Bourke and J.P. Keeves, *Australian Studies in School Performance: Vol. III The Mastery of Literacy and Numeracy — Final Report*, Education Research and Development Committee, AGPS, Canberra, 1977, p. 154.
- 11 *Ibid*, p.153.
- 12 B.H. Watts, *Aboriginal Futures: Review of Research and Developments and Related Policies in the Education of Aborigines*, April 1981, p. 268.
- 13 Transcript of Evidence, pp. 4731-33.

- 14 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5287.
- 15 Transcript of Evidence, pp. 4745 and 5289.
16. Commonwealth Department of Education, *Survey on Aboriginal Access to Tertiary Education*, p. 15.
- 17 National Aboriginal Education Committee, *Aborigines and Tertiary Education*, 1984, pp. 34-35.
- 18 Department of Education, *Survey on Aboriginal Access*, *op.cit.*, p. 2.
- 19 *Ibid*, p. 14.
- 20 Transcript of Evidence, pp. 1685-86.
- 21 S. Harris, *Culture and Learning : Tradition and education in north-east Arnhem Land*, Canberra, A.I.A.S., 1984, p. 77.
- 22 H.C. Coombs, M.M. Brandl and W.E. Snowden, *A Certain Heritage*, Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, Australian National University, Canberra, 1983, pp. 156-57.
- 23 S. Harris, *Culture and Learning*, *op.cit.*, pp. 77-102.
- 24 Protectors Report, 1839. Quoted in K. McConnochie, 'Aborigines and Australian education: historical perspectives'. In J. Sherwood (ed), *Aboriginal Education: Issues and Innovations*, Perth, Creative Research, 1982, p. 21.
- 25 *Ibid*, p. 22.
- 26 S.S. Dunn and C.M. Tatz (eds), *Aborigines and Education*, Sun Books, Melbourne, 1969, p. 4.
- 27 Quoted in C.D. Rowley, *Outcasts in White Australia*, Canberra, ANU Press, 1971, p. 399.
- 28 D. Huggonson, Towards a History of Aboriginal Education in New South Wales. In *Aboriginal Child at School*, Vol. 12(5), Oct/Nov 1984, p. 26.
- 29 McConnochie, *op.cit.*, pp. 26-29.
- 30 Transcript of Evidence, p. 1825.
- 31 Commonwealth Schools Commission and National Aboriginal Education Working Party on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education, *Funding Priorities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education*, Canberra, 1984, p. 3.
- 32 Transcript of Evidence, p. 585.
- 33 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4033.

Chapter 2

Aboriginal Educational Needs

INTRODUCTION

2.1 The failure of Aboriginal education programs to significantly improve Aboriginal educational outcomes, as outlined in the last chapter, indicates that the education system generally has failed to cater to the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people themselves have stated to the Committee that they see the educational process as generally failing to meet their needs. The National Aboriginal Education Committee indicated that the Australian education system inadequately meets the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.¹ This view was supported by the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group which claimed that the existing Australian education system is 'inappropriate in catering for the needs of the Aboriginal community'.²

2.2 An important reason for the failure of the educational system to address itself to Aboriginal needs has been the lack of significant involvement, until recent years, of Aboriginal people in defining their needs. Throughout the history of Aboriginal education, according to Dr Maria Brandl, questions about Aboriginal educational needs have been posed and answered by non-Aboriginals. She believed that Aboriginal people were best placed to judge whether their educational and societal aims and objectives were congruent.³ The Department of Aboriginal Affairs also claimed that the question of Aboriginal educational needs was one which might best be addressed by Aboriginal people themselves. The Department pointed to the National Aboriginal Education Committee's Statement on Rationale, Aims and Objectives in Aboriginal Education as perhaps the most comprehensive synthesis of Aboriginal views on needs in the education area. The Statement was issued by the National Aboriginal Education Committee after extensive consultation with Aboriginal communities, organisations and consultative groups, teachers and educational administrators. The Statement is included as Appendix V.

2.3 The great diversity of the Aboriginal community, described in Chapter 1, also means that there are a diversity of Aboriginal educational needs. Thus, although the National Aboriginal Education Committee has developed a statement on educational needs, it claimed that:

Cognisance of the diversity of Aboriginal society and of their needs should also be taken into account. It is more appropriate to ask the respective communities what they see as their needs rather than to make generalisations.⁴

Many other submissions also pointed to the fact that the diversity of Aboriginal society meant that there was a diversity of educational needs which may be expressed by Aboriginal people.⁵ It is in the light of these comments that the Committee has taken great care to obtain information from a wide range of Aboriginal organisations, educators, parents and children.

2.4 While this diversity exists, the statements of Aboriginal educational needs made to the Committee almost universally grouped educational needs under two broad fundamental objectives. These objectives were that Aboriginal people be able to acquire knowledge and skills to enable them to live in the wider Australian society but also that they be able to retain their Aboriginal identity and lifestyle. These twin objectives of

Aboriginal education were expressed in Aboriginal communities as the need to teach 'both ways' in schools, i.e. the European way and the Aboriginal way.

2.5 While there was almost universal recognition that the achievement of these twin objectives was central in catering to Aboriginal educational needs, the objectives were expressed in different ways which indicated differing emphases and implied differing conceptions of how these objectives could be achieved. The different expressions of these objectives also indicated, to varying degrees, a tension which exists in the achievement of the objectives. This chapter looks at these objectives, the tension which exists between them, and how this tension might be resolved.

2.6 Aboriginal educational needs have also been greatly affected by economic, social and environmental factors which have limited Aboriginal success in the educational system. Catering to Aboriginal educational needs includes addressing these factors. This chapter also looks at the effect of these factors on Aboriginal educational needs.

STATEMENTS OF OBJECTIVES

2.7 One of the earliest important statements of Aboriginal educational objectives reflecting the importance of European education being acquired in a way which also allowed the retention of Aboriginality was that of the Aboriginal Consultative Group to the Schools Commission in 1975. In its report, *Education for Aborigines*, the Group outlined its objectives for Aboriginal education:

We believe that every child has a right to be brought up as a member of his own culture. This does not mean that he must be prevented from learning about (and learning from) other cultures, but simply for survival the individual must be firmly rooted in his past, and his past (perhaps more than his present) is his culture.

The child should nevertheless be educated in such a way that he is able to function successfully in both his own culture and the wider Australian society if he so desires.

Furthermore, we believe that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island culture should be retained and that Aboriginal identity should be actively developed through education. It is accepted that some parts of Aboriginal culture and folklore associated with survival in pre-European times should now be replaced with those skills which will allow the Aboriginal people to participate equally in the trade and professional areas of the Australian economy.⁶

This statement of objectives has had significant influence on later statements of Aboriginal educational needs.

2.8 The National Aboriginal Education Committee's statement of aims and objectives in Aboriginal education reflects this influence. It gives importance to the achievement of dual aims in Aboriginal education and expresses them in similar terms to those of the Aboriginal Consultative Group:

Aboriginal parents have expressed the desire for their children to be able to function successfully in both their own culture and the wider Australian community. Aborigines accept that some parts of their traditional education program should be complemented with those skills which allow them the opportunity of participating in the general Australian society.⁷

2.9 The Department of Aboriginal Affairs sees the objective of teaching 'the European way' as being to provide Aboriginals with equality of educational opportunities at all levels in the education system to enable them to live in the wider Australian society in a diversity of professional, trade and other occupational roles. However, educational equality, according to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, is to be achieved without at the same time threatening 'the fundamental right of Aboriginals to retain their racial identity and associated lifestyle'.⁸

2.10 John Budby, then of the Queensland Department of Education, stated in his foreword to the Department's booklet on The Education of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders that:

The majority of Aboriginal and Islander parents want their child to gain the skills and knowledge required to survive within a highly bureaucratic and technologically sophisticated Australia while still maintaining a strong cultural identity (and gaining a knowledge of their heritage) as Aborigines or Islanders. In considering citizenship then, the school should promote a dual focus.⁹

2.11 Despite the tremendous diversity of Aboriginal society and of its needs, these two fundamental objectives of Aboriginal education, education being provided 'both ways', were seen almost universally to summarise Aboriginal educational needs. These twin objectives were expressed by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in submissions and in visits made to Aboriginal communities. In the visits to Aboriginal communities these objectives were expressed in terms, firstly, of the desire of Aboriginal people to gain the skills of literacy and numeracy in English, but secondly, of their desire to preserve Aboriginal identity and to have education as far as possible provided in their local communities so that children could remain in communities to be raised as Aborigines.

DIFFICULTIES IN ACHIEVING OBJECTIVES

2.12 Given that there was almost universal agreement about the centrality of these twin objectives it might have been imagined that catering to Aboriginal educational needs was straightforward. This is not the case. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs saw difficulties in achieving the aims of Aboriginal education because they were 'not always easily or readily reconciled'.¹⁰

2.13 Professor Watts also sees difficulties in the achievement of the National Aboriginal Education Committee's aim of the acquiring of academic and technological skills in harmony with Aboriginal cultural values, identity and choice of lifestyle. According to Professor Watts, this aim may not be capable of achievement in full, particularly for traditionally-oriented Aborigines, because some Aboriginal values and aspects of Aboriginal lifestyle e.g. Aboriginal cultural orientation to authority and to the sources of knowledge, may not be compatible with the pursuit of Western skills.¹¹

2.14 The difficulties and dilemmas created for Aboriginal people by the conflict that can arise between these objectives has also been explained by Beth Graham of the Northern Territory Department of Education:

Aboriginal parents frequently ask that the school teach their children English oracy, literacy and numeracy. But they cannot understand why it is that what their children receive is not sufficient for their needs, why it has to be gained at the cost of Aboriginal knowledge and identity, nor why aspects of non-Aboriginal culture cannot be taught to their children as skills to be used as required, and not as a value system that must be utterly absorbed, with disorienting results to the recipient.¹²

WAYS OF RESOLVING CONFLICT BETWEEN OBJECTIVES

2.15 It was not accepted that the conflict between these two objectives would have to remain unresolved. Various ways were suggested to overcome this conflict.

2.16 The Department of Aboriginal Affairs believed that the conflict could be overcome by allowing Aboriginal people to decide on the balance they wished to see in achieving the two aims. Where this balance lay would probably differ for various Aboriginal communities and would depend on the degree of involvement they wished to have with

the wider Australian community. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs claimed that Aboriginal requests for educational services may range from the teaching of basic literacy and numeracy skills in homeland centres to the full range of educational services, including those at tertiary level, in urban areas. Regardless of the nature of education Aboriginal people and communities chose, the Department emphasised the importance of education being provided in harmony with Aboriginal cultural values and identity. As a result Aboriginal education often needed to take a different form from that provided for the general population. According to the Department, there was a need to develop, adapt and modify education services, practices, curricula and facilities to ensure that Aboriginals are provided with the skills and knowledge which meet their needs and aspirations.¹³

2.17 The National Aboriginal Education Committee also recognised that Aboriginal people may have to make a choice about the balance between obtaining academic skills and retaining their Aboriginality. As Paul Hughes, Chairman of the National Aboriginal Education Committee, claimed:

The personal side of things we see equally as important as skills; currently they (Aboriginal people) are not getting either and so if we had to make a choice our community would go for people coming out as whole people, or at least that being a major priority.¹⁴

Professor Watts also noted that the question of the compatibility between Aboriginal culture and desired elements of western culture was one which Aboriginal people must explore in depth and about which they must make the decisions.¹⁵

2.18 A great deal can also be done to reduce the incompatibility between the objectives. Much of the tension and conflict in the objectives has arisen because of the way in which the education system has responded to Aboriginal education. For example, as Pam Harris, currently Principal of the Yuendumu School, notes, the phrase, 'equal opportunity' has often been interpreted to mean:

'*same* education, with the *same* curricula, and in the *same* language (English) without regard to basic differences in needs related to social, cultural, and linguistic factors in the Aboriginal child's environment'. However, in my experience there are many situations where '*same* education' does not equate with 'equal opportunities'.¹⁶

If Aboriginal people are to have equal opportunities to succeed in education, find a job and live a satisfying life, Pam Harris believes that what is needed for Aboriginals is a different education, one that is appropriate to Aboriginal people's needs.¹⁷

2.19 Professor Watts claims that few attempts have been made in the academic programs of schools to capitalise on children's Aboriginality. As a result the child's cultural membership has, in many cases, been viewed at best as irrelevant or at worst as a handicap in his pursuit of the formal academic goals of the school. The achievement of both goals has been impaired, because of the explicit devaluation of the child's cultural identity.¹⁸

2.20 The conflict and tension between the objectives in Aboriginal education can be reduced by building one objective on the firm basis of the other. By recognizing Aboriginality as the firm basis for the lives of Aboriginal people and attempting to build Western knowledge and skills from it, a way of overcoming some of the conflict which exists between objectives in Aboriginal education may be found. The National Aboriginal Education Committee's aim of complementing, rather than replacing, Aboriginal cultural knowledge and skills with Western knowledge and skills, recognizes that education for Aboriginals should be an additive process. It also recognizes that Aboriginal people should decide the extent of Western skills and knowledge they wish to be taught and that this will be related to the amount of participation they wish, or expect to have with the wider Australian community. The value of this approach is that it may finally allow the

achievement of the twin objectives of Aboriginal education — to see Aboriginals successfully educated whilst allowing them to retain their Aboriginality.

2.21 The achievement of such an approach offers an enormous challenge to educational authorities and governments. It means being prepared to make moves towards the incorporation of Aboriginal values into education for Aboriginals and allowing a substantial degree of Aboriginal control over Aboriginal education. The failure of educational programs in the past to educate Aboriginals, and the importance of Aboriginal people having skills in English literacy and numeracy to allow them to successfully run their own affairs, means that governments and educational authorities must be prepared to adopt such an approach.

2.22 That educational authorities and governments have been prepared to move in this direction is evident from the policies and programs which have been developed in Aboriginal education in the last 10 years. The approach and attitude is well summarised in the Schools Commission's 1984 Report on Standards for Australian Schools:

Although educational policies based on concepts of equity and equality of opportunity require above-average provision to be made for groups in special need, Aboriginal needs must be considered also in terms of form and approach. The culture of many Aboriginal people requires a different pedagogy, particular forms of teacher preparation, properly researched curricula and materials, and facilities which match cultural and geographical requirements. A twelve year-old living in a traditional community will be highly skilled educationally in terms of his or her local cultural and environmental context. However, this child, as well as Aboriginal students in other cultural contexts, may seek to acquire knowledge and skills in a more European sense and here too educational provisions should be more closely attuned to Aboriginal culture and circumstances.¹⁹

2.23 The Committee is conscious of the need to seek ways to overcome the conflict between the objectives of Aboriginal education, by attempting to reduce the discontinuity between Western education and the Aboriginal home and community. It is the existence of this discontinuity which has exacerbated the conflict between objectives in Aboriginal education and led to the past ineffectiveness of education for Aboriginal people. This discontinuity can be reduced by the incorporation of Aboriginal cultural values and understandings into the education process and by substantially increasing Aboriginal involvement in education. It is the development of programs and policies based on these approaches which can best address the dilemmas and difficulties raised by the conflict in objectives to cater for Aboriginal educational needs.

2.24 However, the Committee is also conscious of the fact that many of the dilemmas and difficulties will need to be worked out in quite different ways in the great diversity of circumstances in which Aboriginal people live, and that some of the difficulties and dilemmas may not always be resolvable. In urban and rural areas the conflict between objectives may be overcome by the development of enclave programs, the employment of Aboriginal teachers, teacher aides and liaison officers and the greater involvement of Aboriginal parents and communities. The implementation of these programs to reduce the tension between objectives should allow Aboriginal people to look forward to greater equality of educational opportunities and outcomes without threatening their cultural identity. From them the Aboriginal professionals and administrators of the future should emerge.

2.25 In the traditionally-oriented communities, where the conflict between objectives is more profound, the school is going to have to make much more radical moves to address itself to the educational needs of the communities. Aboriginal cultural values, forms and ways of learning will have to be incorporated into schooling and the Aboriginal communities will need to be given significant control over the educational process. Because of the diversity of the communities the schooling provided will probably have to

be tailored to meet the particular needs and circumstances of particular communities. This will necessitate close consultation between the local school and the community it serves about the sort of education program that is to be provided. Such a system of education may make far more successful for these communities the educating of all children in at least basic skills to enable them to deal with the wider community and effectively manage their own affairs as an Aboriginal community. Currently, education in the communities is failing to provide this basic education which is critical to their future as self-determining, self-managing communities.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS AFFECTING NEEDS

2.26 Apart from this conflict in objectives in Aboriginal education in which cultural factors play an important part, there are also important social and economic factors which explain the poor educational attainments of Aboriginals. These social and economic factors must be addressed if Aboriginal educational standards are to be improved. A variety of programs are operating to cater to these needs, but clearly much more needs to be done.

INTERCONNECTION OF FACTORS

2.27 The Commonwealth Department of Education claims that there are a number of extrinsic factors which work against the success of Aboriginals in their schooling. These factors include poverty, poor health and housing and a general lack of facilities. They are closely inter-related and improvement in one area without corresponding improvement in others is unlikely to have major effects.²⁰

2.28 According to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Aboriginal people's dispiriting experience in formal education not only disadvantages adults but severely narrows the educational opportunities of their children by circumscribing educational aspirations and reducing the scope for parental help and encouragement. The Department claimed that:

For many Aboriginal children these disadvantages are aggravated by poverty, poor housing, chronic or recurrent illness, and severe visual or hearing impairment. Measures to increase the educational opportunities of Aboriginal people of all ages must be accompanied by, and will assist in, wider action designed to overcome the general economic and social problems of the Aboriginal people.²¹

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES

2.29 In its visits to communities, the Committee was told about the effects of the poor socio-economic circumstances of Aboriginal people on their schooling. The Committee was told that some Aboriginal children go to school tired and listless, because their home circumstances have prevented them from getting a good night's sleep and because in many cases they have had no breakfast. Some schools provide breakfast for Aboriginal students as they recognise that learning cannot take place if children are hungry.

2.30 Poor home circumstances also affect children's ability to do homework, which is particularly important in secondary education, and this is recognised in some communities where special homework centres have been established. The poverty of many Aboriginal people means they are unable to buy books and other equipment that would assist in their children's education. The Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme was introduced to assist the parents of secondary students to adequately provide for their children. There is no similar scheme for the parents of primary school children.

HEALTH PROBLEMS

2.31 Health problems also affect the schooling of Aboriginal children. The Commonwealth Schools Commission claimed that the lack of school achievement among Aboriginals could be partially explained by the deleterious effect of eye and ear malfunctions in Aboriginal children.²² Drs Dyer and Sunderman also referred to the effects on education of the high incidence of ear problems among Aboriginal children:

... conductive deafness among Aboriginal children is a major problem affecting some 32%. In the past it was believed that children with moderate conductive hearing loss were no education problem. There is now closely documented evidence that the children are handicapped enough to make schooling very difficult — and that they are not merely 'shy' 'native' 'mentally slow' etc. The remedy may well be in medical and social measures, but the educational impact of this problem requires further research.²³

In some cases special hearing equipment is provided to assist these children. For example, the Committee was told during visits to schools that such equipment was in use at Roebourne Primary and Halls Creek Primary Schools in Western Australia, and at Lajamanu School in the Northern Territory. In the case of Lajamanu School there was insufficient equipment for the number of children with hearing problems.²⁴ In an additional submission, Dr Dyer claimed that conductive deafness in Western Australian Aboriginal children had been largely ignored by educational authorities.²⁵

2.32 Apart from the eye and ear problems of Aboriginal children, there are many other health problems which affect their schooling success. These include respiratory and intestinal infections and the problems caused by poor nutrition. These health problems are generally not being adequately addressed in a school context. However, the Schools Commission's Working Party on Aboriginal Education has recommended that funding be provided to support health and nutrition programs provided by health educators and to provide supplementary meals, drug and alcohol education and food preparation.²⁶

UNEMPLOYMENT

2.33 The high levels of unemployment amongst Aboriginals is an important factor affecting educational achievement. The unemployment rate among Aboriginals at March 1984, was about 46 per cent. By comparison, the rate for the general Australian community, using the same comparison of CES registrations with labour force estimates, was about 12 per cent.²⁷ Levels of unemployment among Aboriginals in rural and remote communities would be much higher. As the National Aboriginal Education Committee noted, when school-age children saw their older brothers and sisters unemployed, they developed little incentive to do well at school.²⁸ Professor Watts also claimed that the rising levels of youth unemployment had a particular effect on Aboriginals and their orientation to school:

... many Aboriginal children and their parents perceive the advantages of education as lying in improved job opportunity. Increased numbers of Aboriginal youth have remained at school and achieved higher standards of schooling than their older siblings; they might therefore have looked to a better job future. But at the very point in time when such prospects looked enhanced and the people and their children might have seen some 'pay off' from education, large numbers of school leavers found jobs not available. Without denying the effects on other sections of the Australian community, the severity of those effects in the Aboriginal case is most marked.²⁹

This problem is particularly acute in the rural and remote communities where unemployment levels are extremely high, and from where many Aboriginal people do not want to move, for cultural and social reasons, to seek employment.

2.34 Various programs are operating to improve the employment prospects of Aboriginal people by creating additional employment opportunities. These programs tend to address the problem from the point of view of the lack of employment opportunities for Aboriginal people. It is also important to look at the problem of a high level of unemployment among Aboriginal people from the perspective of the sort of education that is being provided to Aboriginal people by the education system and how this meets their employment needs. The question of what education for Aboriginals should be about then becomes critical. As Dr Stephen Harris notes:

... the Western school system is largely designed to prepare Western society's children to have the capacity to earn a living within the Western economic system. If at a place like Milingimbi, young people do not need this kind of training or education to survive materially, then 'Education for what?' becomes a very important question. It would seem that the principles of community-development, or education for self-help and self-dependence, is the most important educational philosophy that might help provide answers to present economic dilemmas.³⁰

2.35 For those Aboriginal people living in communities with the greatest degree of embeddedness in the wider society, the answer to the question 'Education for what?', is education which enables them to compete successfully with members of the broader community for employment opportunities. However, for people in those communities with a lesser degree of embeddedness in non-Aboriginal society and in which employment prospects in the wider community are poor or non-existent, education should be closely related to the internal developmental needs of the community. It should have the object of enhancing the ability of these communities to run their own affairs. While giving this emphasis to education in the more traditionally-oriented communities, it is also important to note that Aboriginal people move fairly freely between different social contexts. Education should also then provide the skills needed by Aboriginal people to enable them to live in other, but less familiar Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal social contexts.

REMOTENESS AND ISOLATION

2.36 The isolation and remoteness of many Aboriginal communities has a dramatic effect on educational needs. It makes it difficult and expensive to provide these communities with access to the full range of educational services available to the general community. Because in many cases it is impossible to provide higher education services to the communities, Aboriginal students must leave home to further their education. Many Aboriginal people do not wish to leave home and thus they have no access to further education. For those Aboriginals who do leave home, the experience can be disturbing and culturally destructive. There must be much more attention paid to how educational programs can be undertaken within communities so that Aboriginals can have access to further education without suffering the often destructive effects of leaving their communities.

2.37 The problems created in providing educational services to remote and isolated communities have been exacerbated by the growth of the homelands/outstation movement. These are normally small communities and are often located at some distance from the Aboriginal settlements in which schooling is provided. The provision of educational services to those homeland communities which ask for them is expensive and raises questions about the adequacy of the services which can be provided to such small and isolated communities. These issues are discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

2.38 Isolation is not just a problem for remote communities. The Committee found that even some town camp communities on the edge of country towns and cities could be 'isolated' from educational institutions. The lack of private transport in these

communities, and the lack of public transport to them, means that children can have difficulty getting to schools which are not within walking distance. This problem could be simply resolved by educational authorities providing school buses to collect students from these communities.

COMMUNITY ATTITUDES

2.39 A very important factor affecting Aboriginal success in education is the general community attitude towards Aboriginals. In its report on Aboriginal Town Camps a former Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs stated that:

... a particular identified area of concern in the education of town campers is the high level of prejudice existing against the Aboriginal community. This is a problem for all Aboriginals but, as pointed out earlier, it is possibly most severe in country towns where town campers live.³¹

The National Aboriginal Education Committee also claimed that the existence of prejudice could affect the schooling of Aboriginal children as children developed a dislike of school and tended to reject it.³²

2.40 The prejudicial attitudes towards Aboriginal people which exist in the general community are usually reflected in the attitudes of non-Aboriginal teachers and students towards Aboriginal students. As the above quotations indicate, these attitudes are often worse in country towns and other areas where Aboriginals form only a small proportion of the general and school population. Thus at school Aboriginals often form a small, isolated group which suffer from the attitudes of the majority school population, often including the school teachers. This problem is usually exacerbated in high schools where Aboriginal students form an even smaller proportion of the total population. The existence of the prejudicial attitudes which include discrimination, the expectation of failure and the ridiculing of different values are an important explanation of lack of Aboriginal academic success. They produce in Aboriginal students low self-esteem and little anticipation of educational success.

2.41 Attempts to overcome this problem of community attitudes must be an important way of addressing Aboriginal educational needs. As Professor Watts has noted probably the most critical of the changes required is a change in the majority society's attitudes to and perception of the Aboriginal people.³³

SOCIAL PRESSURES WITHIN THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY

2.42 An important effect of Aboriginals forming a small minority group within the community, is the existence of a strong peer pressure to protect the security of the group. The National Aboriginal Education Committee described how this peer pressure could influence a child's schooling:

Within an Aboriginal group a child who attempts to be better than others is heckled by the others. Children, regardless of their abilities, will opt for a class which has a large number of Aboriginal children. In most cases this is the low stream class.³⁴

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

2.43 The Committee believes that Aboriginal people are best equipped to define their educational needs. Much of the failure of past educational programs can be attributed to the fact that Aboriginal people have had their educational needs defined by others with the

consequence that these needs have not reflected the aspirations of Aboriginals. To the extent that there is conflict in objectives in Aboriginal education, it should be Aboriginal people who decide on how this conflict should be overcome and where priorities should lie.

2.44 Many Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments have broad statements of aims and objectives in Aboriginal education which reflect perceptions of Aboriginal educational needs. Unfortunately, not all governments have such statements, and these governments should establish broad objectives. There would also be value in revising existing statements to ensure they reflect current Aboriginal educational needs and to allow significant Aboriginal input into the development of broad policy objectives. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs indicated that its statement of objectives and guidelines in Aboriginal education was in the process of being reviewed and amended.³⁵ In developing or revising statements of Aboriginal educational aims and objectives, Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments must be cognisant of Aboriginal educational needs as expressed by Aboriginal people themselves. The respective national, State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Committees and Groups are best placed to advise governments on Aboriginal educational needs and they must be consulted in developing and revising policy statements on objectives in Aboriginal education. There may also be advantage in consulting other relevant Aboriginal organisations which can provide advice on Aboriginal educational needs.

2.45 However, these statements of objectives can only reflect the broad principles in Aboriginal education that affect all Aboriginal people. The intricate array of factors affecting Aboriginal educational needs when combined with the diversity of Aboriginal society means that it is impossible to specify one set of Aboriginal educational needs. The educational needs of Aboriginal people and communities are going to differ according to their social, economic and cultural circumstances. This means that local Aboriginal communities must have a substantial role in working out, with their local schools, what their educational needs are and the sort of programs that should be introduced to cater to those needs.

2.46 The Committee therefore recommends that:

- *the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups be consulted by their respective governments on the preparation and revision of broad statements of objectives in Aboriginal education by providing advice on current Aboriginal educational needs; and*
- *Aboriginal communities, in consultation with their local schools, establish local Aboriginal educational, training and skills needs and the sorts of programs that will need to be introduced at the local level to meet those needs.*

2.47 In the remainder of this report the Committee discusses the wide range of programs and policies which will assist in improving Aboriginal educational achievements. In doing so the Committee is conscious of the broad objectives in Aboriginal education as outlined in this chapter. In particular, the Committee has emphasised the need for educational programs and policies to cater to the differences between the values and behaviour patterns of Aboriginals and those of non-Aboriginals. The tension which can exist between the major objectives in Aboriginal education of providing equality of educational opportunities while ensuring the retention of Aboriginal identity and lifestyle, must be reduced. This presents the challenge to educational authorities and governments of reducing the discontinuity between Western education and the Aboriginal community in an attempt to overcome the destructiveness and failure of past educational programs. In

doing so, particular emphasis must be given to substantially increasing the involvement of Aboriginal people in the whole process of Aboriginal education.

2.48 The effects of socio-economic and environmental factors on Aboriginal educational needs also forms an important basis for the programs recommended in this report. The Committee specifically addresses the sorts of programs which should be developed to reduce the effects of these factors on Aboriginal education in later chapters in the report.

2.49 Success in education is a vital way for Aboriginal people to be able to improve their socio-economic circumstances. If this education is acquired in a manner which is compatible with Aboriginal cultural values it will ensure that Aboriginal people also retain their identity and live satisfying and full lives.

Endnotes

- 1 Transcript of Evidence, p. 195.
- 2 Transcript of Evidence, p. 1356.
- 3 Transcript of Evidence, pp. 568-69.
- 4 Transcript of Evidence, p. 2619.
- 5 Transcript of Evidence, pp. 225, 345 and 896.
- 6 Aboriginal Consultative Group to the Schools Commission, *Education for Aborigines*, June 1975, pp. 5-6.
- 7 National Aboriginal Education Committee, Statement of Rationale, Aims and Objectives, p. 4.
- 8 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4800.
- 9 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4332.
- 10 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4800.
- 11 Transcript of Evidence, p. 1696.
- 12 B. Graham, Distance or Difference in Aboriginal Education. In: *Developing Education*, Vol. 8(6), 1981, p. 8.
- 13 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4800.
- 14 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4927.
- 15 Transcript of Evidence, p. 1698.
- 16 Transcript of Evidence, p. 2193.
- 17 Transcript of Evidence, p. 2194.
- 18 Transcript of Evidence, p. 1696.
- 19 Schools Commission, *Commonwealth Standards*, April 1984, p. 130.
- 20 Transcript of Evidence, pp. 227-28.
- 21 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4799.
- 22 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5117.
- 23 Transcript of Evidence, p. 1597.
- 24 Hansard Precis of informal discussions, Lajamanu School, 13 June 1985, p. 55.
- 25 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5614.
- 26 Report of the Working Party on Aboriginal Education, *op.cit.*, p. 40.
- 27 Department of Aboriginal Affairs, *Annual Report, 1983-84*, A.G.P.S., Canberra, 1984, p. 12.
- 28 Transcript of Evidence, p. 2621.
- 29 Transcript of Evidence, p. 1688.
- 30 S. Harris, *Culture and Learning*, *op.cit.*, p. 13.
- 31 *Strategies to Help Overcome the Problems of Aboriginal Town Camps*, Report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, PP 366, 1982, p. 71.
- 32 Transcript of Evidence, p. 2621.
- 33 Transcript of Evidence, p. 1689.
- 34 Transcript of Evidence, p. 2620.
- 35 Transcript of Evidence, pp. 4842-44.

Chapter 3

Co-Ordination and Funding

INTRODUCTION

3.1 In this chapter the Committee addresses the problems involved in funding and co-ordination of Aboriginal education. The provision of funds for education in Australia, including Aboriginal education, now involves the Commonwealth and State governments. This is despite the fact that, under the Constitution, education is defined as a matter for the States.

3.2 Following the 1967 Referendum which gave the Commonwealth the power to legislate for Aboriginal people, all States, except Queensland, agreed to transfer administrative responsibility for the co-ordination, planning and development of a national policy on Aboriginal affairs to the Commonwealth. These agreements define the respective roles of Commonwealth and State governments in the education of Aboriginals.

3.3 In broad terms, the States have the basic constitutional responsibility for providing education for Aboriginal people as they do for the rest of the community. The Commonwealth provides for special efforts beyond this basic responsibility to assist Aboriginals to overcome the educational disadvantage from which they suffer. The direct Commonwealth Government expenditure on Aboriginal education for the years 1976/77 to 1984/85 is at Table 2.

Table 2
Direct Australian Government Expenditure on Aboriginal Education 1976-77 to 1984-85 (\$000)

	<i>Department of Aboriginal Affairs Education and Training</i>	<i>Department of Education and CDC</i>			<i>Schools Commission and CDC</i>	<i>Tertiary Education Commission</i>	<i>Total</i>
		<i>Abseg</i>	<i>Abstudy</i>	<i>Other</i>			
1976-77	8 515	10 002	2 277	82	—	—	20 876
1977-78	9 154	12 073	3 581	123	—	—	24 931
1978-79	11 366	12 956	5 116	281	—	—	29 719
1979-80	11 970	13 962	7 389	431	719	—	34 471
1980-81	13 484	17 425	10 111	373	1 574	56	43 023
1981-82	15 027	19 153	11 626	451	1 681	na	47 938
1982-83	16 957	21 627	13 842	528	1 758	na	54 712
1983-84	19 134	25 364	19 561	477	7 259+	na	71 795
1984-85 (est)	21 312	29 460	24 914	603	7 259+	1 334	84 882

Source: Transcript of Evidence, p. 5394.

3.4 The co-ordination and funding of Aboriginal education is a fragmented affair at the Commonwealth level and differs from State to State. There are a myriad of organisations and agencies providing funding in Aboriginal education. This has resulted from ad hoc decision-making over the years. It is often inefficient and confusing to Aboriginals. This chapter describes the arrangements for the co-ordination and funding of Aboriginal education at the Commonwealth and State/Territory level and makes recommendations for improvements which need to be made in this area.

COMMONWEALTH AGENCIES

3.5 At the Commonwealth level a number of departments and authorities have responsibility for the administration and funding of Aboriginal educational services.

THE ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO

The Department of Aboriginal Affairs

3.6 The Department of Aboriginal Affairs described its role in Aboriginal education in terms of its co-ordinating responsibility for all Commonwealth Government programs for Aboriginals. It also funds special Aboriginal assistance programs in the area of education. However, it is not responsible for providing basic education or training facilities, and does not directly deliver services in Aboriginal education. According to the Department, the State and functional Commonwealth departments are responsible for financing general services to Aboriginals as to other citizens.¹

3.7 The Department of Aboriginal Affairs' operating guidelines provide that projects should not be supported without full investigation of the possibility of financing by an appropriate educational authority (e.g. Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, Office of Child Care, Commonwealth Schools Commission) or other sources of financial support (e.g. Training for Aboriginals Program, Aboriginal Secondary and Study Grants Schemes). The Department provides finance in two ways:

- State Grants — Grants to State Governments under Section 96 of the Constitution, to improve or accelerate the provision of general services to Aboriginals, or for special services to meet Aboriginal needs.
- Grants for Aboriginal Advancement — Grants to organisations and non-government institutions to enable them to deliver services to Aboriginals.

3.8 *State and Territory education authorities receive the bulk of the Department's education funding through State Grants. In 1983–1984 grants to State education authorities totalled \$9.318m which was 65 per cent of the total expenditure of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs on Aboriginal education. The grants to the States have enabled the employment within State schools of Aboriginal people working as teaching assistants, teacher aides, pre-school assistants, liaison officers and in other specialist roles.*²

3.9 The Department of Aboriginal Affairs is critical of the failure of State departments of education to expend more of their own funds on Aboriginal education. It notes the failure of its initiatives to be taken up by Commonwealth and State agencies, particularly those involving recurrent funding. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs sees its role as that of providing 'seed' funding to sponsor initiatives which it expects the responsible authorities to take up once the programs are proven and established. Failure to do so restricts the scope of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs to sponsor new projects on a 'seed' funding basis. Similar criticism has been voiced in regard to TAFE funding. It is said that the State TAFE authorities are reluctant to commit funds to Aboriginal education projects beyond the limits of special grants provided by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

3.10 The Department of Aboriginal Affairs also provided \$5.019m in 1983–84 to support 69 projects by non-government organisations involved in the Aboriginal education field. The direct participation of Aboriginal people in the planning and operation of the projects is encouraged. Programs supported by these grants include:

- education programs conducted by non-government authorities such as the Catholic Education Commission (W.A.), the Kindergarten Union (S.A.), and Save the Children Fund (N.S.W.);
- special courses for Aboriginals such as the Aboriginal Community College (S.A.);
- Aboriginal teacher education courses;
- community-based pre-schools such as Yelangi in Brisbane and Murawina in Sydney;
- independent Aboriginal schools such as Strelley and Yipirinya.³

The Committee discusses many of these programs later in the report.

Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies

3.11 There is also an agency within the Aboriginal Affairs portfolio which has a minor role in Aboriginal education.

3.12 The role of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies is mainly to promote Aboriginal studies through research and to publish the results of such work. The major part of its funding is slanted heavily towards financing specific research projects, but the Institute has also played a significant role in promoting the teaching of Aboriginal studies at tertiary level and, to a lesser degree, at primary and secondary level.

THE EDUCATION PORTFOLIO

The Commonwealth Department of Education

3.13 The Commonwealth Department of Education does not have prime carriage of Aboriginal education policy. Instead, it receives advice from the National Aboriginal Education Committee and acts as a consultant or advisory department to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and other government departments and agencies involved in Aboriginal education on policy issues and funding. The Department administers three special schemes of student assistance — the Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme, the Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme and the Aboriginal Overseas Study Awards Scheme. The Committee discusses these schemes in detail later in the report.

3.14 The Department had a co-ordinating role in Aboriginal education within the education portfolio. However, given the enhanced role of the National Aboriginal Education Committee, the Department proposed that a Portfolio Aboriginal Education Group be established under the chairmanship of the National Aboriginal Education Committee, and including representatives of the Department, the Schools Commission, the Tertiary Education Commission and, possibly, the A.C.T. Schools Authority. This Committee would replace existing arrangements for co-ordination within the Portfolio. It was also proposed that co-operative and consultative arrangements extend to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs to ensure a co-ordinated approach to Aboriginal education policy.⁴ It appears that the proposed Portfolio Aboriginal Education Group has not been established, even though the head of the Aboriginal Education Branch no longer acts as co-ordinator within the Education Portfolio. However, the National Aboriginal Education Committee is recognised as primarily responsible for Aboriginal education within the Portfolio.

3.15 In relation to advising the States on Aboriginal education, the Department of Education claimed that its role has been as 'a stimulator rather than implementer of policy development and change'.⁵ It has performed this role by promoting discussion of issues, through research and the establishment of information and data bases.

The National Aboriginal Education Committee

3.16 The National Aboriginal Education Committee was established in March 1977 to advise the Commonwealth Minister and the Department of Education with informed views on the educational needs of Aboriginal people and appropriate methods of meeting those needs. Its advice was also to be made available to the Minister and Department of Aboriginal Affairs on request.

3.17 Since its establishment, the role of the National Aboriginal Education Committee has expanded greatly. The Minister for Education, Senator the Hon. Susan Ryan, announced that the National Aboriginal Education Committee is to be regarded as the principal adviser to the Commonwealth Government on Aboriginal education matters. As a result of its greatly enhanced role the National Aboriginal Education Committee has obtained a significant input into Commonwealth Schools Commission and Tertiary Education Commission programs as well as providing advice to the Department of Education.

3.18 The National Aboriginal Education Committee consists of a full-time Chairman and Deputy Chairman, plus 17 part-time members drawn from each State, the Northern Territory and the Torres Strait Islands, to enable a spread of geographical representation on the Committee. Five of the part-time members provide advice on specialist areas, e.g. early childhood, secondary education and adult education.

The Commonwealth Schools Commission

3.19 The Schools Commission provides advice to the Commonwealth Government in the following areas: acceptable standards in schools, the needs of schools, matters relating to Commonwealth assistance, grants to the States and Territories for schools and any other matter in primary or secondary education referred to it for comment. To facilitate longer term education planning, the Schools Commission issues triennial reports. Since 1975, however, the Government has adopted the practice of issuing annual guidelines setting out the financial limits of funds it will provide for the following calendar year. Upon receipt of these guidelines the Schools Commission has prepared a short report, including financial recommendations.

3.20 Until recently the Schools Commission has had little direct effect on Aboriginal education. The Commission's approach had been to deal with the needs of Aboriginal students in the context of its existing programs rather than establishing special programs primarily directed at Aboriginals. Some of the specific purpose programs, namely the Disadvantaged Schools Program and the Country Areas Program, were seen to have particular application to schools enrolling Aboriginal students. In recent years Aboriginal access to other Commission programs has increased. In 1982, for example, proposals to teach Aboriginal language and culture became eligible for funding under the Multicultural Education Program.

3.21 Recent initiatives supported by the Commonwealth Government and administered by the Schools Commission, including the Computer Education Program and the Participation and Equity Program, have direct relevance to the education of Aboriginal students and can be expected to meet particular needs as their implementation proceeds. For instance, the Participation and Equity Program (PEP), which was announced in the context of the 1983-84 Budget, has as its basic objective the increased participation by young people in education and the aim of ensuring greater equity in overall education provision for young people. PEP funding assists particular schools and the TAFE system to increase participation in the final years of secondary schooling and in post-school education. The Commission considers that PEP is particularly relevant to Aboriginal students. The Committee discusses the program in more detail in later chapters.

3.22 In guidelines to the Schools Commission from the Minister for Education in 1983, the Commission was asked to undertake a review of Aboriginal education in co-operation with the National Aboriginal Education Committee. The Commission set up a Working Party on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education to undertake this review. The Working Party had a joint chairmanship comprising the Chairman of the National Aboriginal Education Committee and a full-time Commissioner. A majority of the membership was made up of Aboriginal members nominated by the National Aboriginal Education Committee.

3.23 The Working Party presented its first report in April 1984, recommending the establishment of an *Aboriginal Education Program* funded through the Schools Commission with four components:

- an Aboriginal Education Recurrent Grants Program;
- a Language and Cultural Studies Program;
- an Aboriginal Education Development Program; and
- a Scheme for Teachers in Aboriginal Community Schools.

3.24 A total of \$25.35m is recommended in the Report for these programs in 1985 to improve the quality of education for Aboriginal students, with the funds to be additional to those provided in the present programs of the Schools Commission and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. In addition, increased funds are recommended for the Aboriginal enrolments element of the Capital Grants Program.⁶

3.25 The Schools Commission supported the Working Party's recommendations and included them in its document to the Government on funding proposals for 1986 called *Recommendations for 1986*.⁷ The Government's response to the recommendations was expected in mid-1985 in the context of its Guidelines statement to the Commission on funding and program arrangements for 1986.⁸ Many of the detailed recommendations from the Working Party's report are considered by the Committee throughout this report.

3.26 In terms of direct response to Aboriginal needs, the Government provided funds to establish in 1984 an Aboriginal enrolments element of the Commission's Capital Grants Program. Funds totalling \$5.235m were allocated to government and non-government schools enrolling a majority of Aboriginal students for buildings and related facilities planned in consultation with their Aboriginal communities. In 1985, \$7.54m will be allocated under the Capital Grants Program. Another example of the establishment of a program element directed specifically at Aboriginal education is the new Aboriginal Education element of the Projects of National Significance Program. This element will support nationally significant projects and action-research in the fields of Aboriginal primary and secondary education. Funds totalling \$100,000 were available in 1984. In 1985, \$0.5m will be allocated under the Projects of National Significance Program to the State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups.

3.27 The Schools Commission has rationalised its Aboriginal education advisory groups into a single Advisory Committee which will provide it with advice on all matters relating to the policy, development and funding of programs for Aboriginal students. The new Advisory Committee will be co-chaired by the Chairman of the National Aboriginal Education Committee and a full-time Commissioner. Other members, a majority of whom will be Aboriginal, will be drawn from the National Aboriginal Education Committee, the State and Territory Consultative Groups, the Commonwealth Departments of Education and Aboriginal Affairs, State and Territory education departments and the non-government schools sector.⁹

Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission

3.28 The Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission consists of three Councils — the Universities Council, the Advanced Education Council and the Technical and Further Education Council — responsible for advice and consultation in their respective sectors. The Commission's major responsibility is the provision of advice to the Minister for Education on the financial needs and priorities for these three sectors of tertiary education.

3.29 The Tertiary Education Commission has placed the onus of determining policy on Aboriginal education on the individual institutions it represents. Accordingly, any initiatives in this field are the result of steps taken by particular tertiary institutions supported by funds from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs or schemes funded by the Department of Education and Department of Employment and Industrial Relations. Such measures include the establishment of special courses and the setting up of special support services for Aboriginal students in the form of tutorial assistance, counselling, and enclave programs.

3.30 The guidelines delivered to the Education Commissions by the Commonwealth Government in 1983 required the Commissioners to address themselves specifically to issues of participation and equity in the development of future policies. In its response the Tertiary Education Commission, in its most recent report for the 1985–1987 Triennium, recognises that the number of Aboriginal students presenting themselves for higher education studies during 1985–1987 Triennium will depend largely upon the extent of special support provided.¹⁰

3.31 The Commission, in the report for the Triennium, stated that its position in relation to responsibility for funding in tertiary Aboriginal education was that any strategy to increase Aboriginal enrolments in regular courses must recognise that the normal costs of those enrolments are to be met from the ongoing sources of funding of the institution or sector concerned. The general recurrent grants provided through the Commission enable higher education institutions to meet the basic teaching costs associated with Aboriginal enrolments in award courses. So, the Commission claimed that it already provides considerable support for Aboriginal participation in higher education through the grants which it recommends for universities and CAEs.¹¹

3.32 To meet the higher costs which the Commission acknowledged are associated with tertiary education for Aboriginal people, the Commission noted that a number of funding agencies including the Commonwealth Department of Education, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations and State agencies had provided additional assistance to particular tertiary programs for Aboriginals. According to the Commission, it had received overwhelming evidence that this multiplicity of funding agencies, providing funds on an annual basis only, creates considerable confusion and uncertainty among institutions and intending students. It claimed that it shared the National Aboriginal Education Committee's view that:

supplementary resources required for increased Aboriginal participation would best be channelled through a single co-ordinated source, and that given its responsibility for the ABSTUDY scheme, the best source would be the Department of Education and Youth Affairs, working in close co-operation with the NAEC and the Commission. The Commission reiterates its earlier view that the funds should be provided on a long-term basis, by means of triennial contractual arrangements with the institutions, and after consultation with the Commission, to ensure that special funding is co-ordinated with the general funding provided through the Commission.¹²

3.33 An area of particular concern to the Committee during the Inquiry has been the provision of opportunities for Aboriginal people in the field of TAFE. While every effort should be made to provide support for Aboriginal people who qualify to entrance to

universities and colleges of advanced education, these measures will be devoted to a small elite within the Aboriginal community. Provision for TAFE has the capacity to reach much further into communities and provide support for communities as such rather than just for exceptional individuals. The importance of action at this level is supported by the report of the TAFE Council for the 1985-87 Triennium.

3.34 In recognition of this, the TAFE Council has increased its involvement in Aboriginal education. Two features of the Council's involvement are apparent: most States have developed a range of 'access' courses for Aboriginal communities; in addition, a number of full-time pre-vocational or trade courses have been provided for Aboriginals in association with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs or the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations. However, the Council notes that TAFE systems are still largely in the developmental stages of gearing their courses towards Aboriginal needs.

3.35 The TAFE Council claimed that the services provided by TAFE authorities for Aboriginals have been heavily dependent on funding which is specifically earmarked for Aboriginal advancement. According to the Council, the sources are varied, each with its own objectives, conditions and timetable, adding to the difficulty of developing a unified provision for Aboriginals in TAFE. As most funding is short-term, the encouragement to long-term planning is reduced.

3.36 The Council proceeded to lament the fragmented approach to funding and lack of co-ordination of the overall effort and adds its voice to that of others for a rationalisation of provisions under the auspices of a Tertiary Education Program for Aboriginals administered by the Commonwealth Department of Education.¹³

EMPLOYMENT AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS PORTFOLIO

Department of Employment and Industrial Relations

3.37 The Department of Employment and Industrial Relations assists Aboriginal job-seekers with the Training for Aboriginals Program (TAP) which provides funds for Aboriginals to participate in vocational training. Through TAP, Aboriginals are given assistance which will enable them to undertake formal courses and to participate in on-the-job training in both public and private sectors. In 1983-84 some 9,500 Aboriginals took advantage of TAP. In addition, the Aboriginal Employment and Training Branch of the Department together with the Commonwealth Employment Service provides a counselling service for young unemployed Aboriginals and school leavers.

National Aboriginal Employment Development Committee

3.38 The National Aboriginal Employment Development Committee was established in 1978 with a view to ensuring that Aboriginals have equal employment opportunities and that they are able to obtain secure and satisfying employment similar to other Australians. Located within the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, it was specifically charged with the responsibility of encouraging an increase in the employment and training of Aboriginals, particularly in the private sector. The Committee consists of members from the Aboriginal community, industry and the trade union movement. The Committee's activities include a nationwide advertising campaign on Aboriginal employment and an evaluation of assistance programs offered by the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations.

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SECURITY

3.39 The Department of Social Security is involved in early childhood education for Aboriginal children through its Office of Child Care. Although the Office of Child Care has little direct involvement in early childhood education for Aboriginals, Aboriginal children are included as special needs category under the Children's Services Program and are thus given priority of access to all Commonwealth subsidised day care services.

ABORIGINAL ARTS BOARD

3.40 The Aboriginal Arts Board is one of seven boards of the Australia Council which advises on policy and allocates grants within its particular art form. The Board's main effort is concentrated in three areas: first, supporting the practice of traditional Aboriginal culture; second, disseminating knowledge about it among Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals, by exhibitions, performances, publications and the sale of artefacts; and third, by providing means by which those Aboriginals who have lost touch with traditional ways can re-establish contacts with them.

ROLE OF STATE GOVERNMENTS

3.41 The constitutional responsibility for the provision of education services rests with the State and Northern Territory Governments. The nature of services, therefore, differs from State to State as does the approach to, and degree of emphasis given to, Aboriginal education. In the States and the Northern Territory, Aboriginal education is mainly provided by the respective departments of education and departments of further education. Other departments may also be involved in service delivery to a lesser extent such as the Ministry for Aboriginal Affairs in New South Wales and the Health Commission of Victoria.

3.42 Some State departments of education and departments of further education have established identifiable Aboriginal education units ranging from full branches to smaller units. The Western Australian Education Department contains an Early Childhood Education (Aboriginal) Section, an Aboriginal Education Branch and a Technical and Further Education (Aboriginal Access) Branch. An Aboriginal person has been appointed at the Assistant Director level to be a co-ordinator of development in Aboriginal education. The Western Australian Department of Education claimed that continued Commonwealth financial assistance to the State will be required for the provision of special resources to satisfy the needs of discrete Aboriginal groups and communities.¹⁴

3.43 A Western Australian Aboriginal Education Consultative Group has only recently been fully established to provide advice to the Western Australian Department of Education on Aboriginal education. There was previously a network of regional advisory committees on Aboriginal education which received little recognition from the Department of Education.

3.44 In Queensland an Inspector of Schools (Primary) and an Inspector of Schools (Secondary) have the oversight of the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. They work together consulting with all sections of the Education Department from pre-school to technical and further education. A number of Aboriginal people are employed in different aspects of departmental work. The most important of these positions is the Aboriginal Education Officer. Since the beginning of 1979, a Committee consisting of the Deputy Director-General, Divisional Directors, Northern Regional Director, Inspectors, Aboriginal Education Officer, and representatives of the Department of Community

Services (formerly the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Advancement), the Queensland Teachers' Union and the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Committee, has met regularly to assist in providing a co-ordinated effort in the planning and delivery of education to Aborigines and Islanders. The Queensland Department of Education noted that, in addition to extensive State expenditure on education programs for Aborigines, funds are made available to the State as a direct grant from the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs to purchase additional specialised equipment, continue or commence innovative programs and enable the employment of additional staff where needed.¹⁵

3.45 The Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Committee (QATSICC) provides advice to the Director-General about Aboriginal education in Queensland. The Queensland Department of Education recognises that a most significant contribution to education policy decision-making can be made by the Committee and it supports:

- (i) a close consultation process with it;
- (ii) effective participation from a community base in QATSICC;
- (iii) a full time secretariat;
- (iv) QATSICC restructuring, involving local and regional committees;
- (v) stability in funding.¹⁶

3.46 The New South Wales Department of Education has an Aboriginal Education Unit. The Department has developed a comprehensive policy statement on Aboriginal education together with a number of supporting documents. The New South Wales Government claimed that the State:

... has clearly increased its expenditure on Aboriginal education even though Aborigines are primarily a Commonwealth responsibility. N.S.W. financial commitment now exceeds that of the Commonwealth by a significant amount.¹⁷

Among the initiatives funded by the N.S.W. Department of Education are an additional 70 Aboriginal teacher aides so that an Aboriginal teacher aide can be provided in schools where Aboriginal enrolments exceed 30 or where there is an apparent need. The Commonwealth currently funds 60 Aboriginal teacher aide positions in New South Wales. An Aboriginal Education Unit also exists in the New South Wales Department of Technical and Further Education. The Unit is essentially concerned with offering special courses for Aboriginal people.

3.47 The New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group provides advice to the New South Wales Government on Aboriginal education. The New South Wales Government claims that it recognises the importance of the advice it receives from the Group and has funded the Group since 1981 when Commonwealth financial support was withdrawn. In 1984-85 a grant of \$140,000 was provided to the Group which is also supported by the administrative services of the Department of Education.

3.48 The Victorian Department of Education has established Aboriginal Education Services with Commonwealth funding under the Department of Aboriginal Affairs' State Grants assistance in Aboriginal education. The Service consists of a component in central office, a number of staff in field units and Aboriginal teacher aides working in schools. The Department is advised in Aboriginal education by the Victorian Aboriginal Education Consultative Group. The Group comprises 32 members representing geographical areas, Aboriginal organisations, Aboriginal teachers and other Aboriginal educators. Since 1980 the Victorian Government has funded the operation of the Group which, according to the Victorian Department of Education, has set priorities for Aboriginal Education Services

programming. All programs since 1976 have been joint Aboriginal Education Services/Victorian Aboriginal Education Consultative Group projects.

3.49 Aboriginal education in South Australia is the responsibility of a Superintendent of Aboriginal and Isolated Education. According to the South Australian Education Department, the education of Aboriginal students costs about 18 per cent per capita more in State funds than that of other students. This additional cost is in staff loadings, support staff and contingencies provided specifically for Aboriginal students. The Commonwealth, through its State Grants for Aboriginal Assistance, provides additional support on top of the State allocation. This amount represents about 20 per cent of the total expenditure on Aboriginal education in South Australia. The South Australian Government considered that the programs funded from both State and Commonwealth resources were innovative, generally effective and had the support of Aboriginal parents and communities.¹⁸

3.50 However, despite the undisputed benefits and advances that have been made in Aboriginal education, the South Australian Government claimed that there appeared 'to be no firm commitment from the Commonwealth'.¹⁹ It stated that:

Aboriginal Affairs has been constitutionally transferred to the Commonwealth: Education is a State responsibility. However, somewhere in between lies Aboriginal Education, and we would believe that both the State and the Commonwealth have commitments in this field, at least until Aboriginal disadvantage is removed.²⁰

The South Australian Government considered that the most important outcome of the Committee inquiry should be that the Commonwealth Government give a firm commitment to Aboriginal education.

3.51 The South Australian Aboriginal Education Consultative Committee provides advice to the State Minister of Education and his officers. According to the South Australian Government, areas of consultation with this Consultative Committee are being expanded, but the mode of operation of the Committee and the extent of resources which need to be allocated for the Committee to function with maximum effectiveness, have still to be resolved.²¹ The Committee is funded by the South Australian Government.

3.52 In Tasmania, Aboriginal education is the responsibility of the Superintendent of Special Education. The Tasmanian Government's submission claimed that education programs for Aboriginal children in Tasmania have been based on the application of Commonwealth programs and resources to Tasmanian schools.²² However, it stated that it recognised:

... the need to develop a policy and implement a program that involves the commitment of its resources to the education of Aboriginals in Tasmania.²³

The Tasmanian Aboriginal Education Consultative Committee was formed in 1979 and provides advice to the Education Department on Aboriginal education. The Tasmanian Government claimed that the effective delivery of education services to Tasmanian Aboriginals was largely dependent on the continued funding and consultation of the Committee.²⁴

3.53 The high proportion of Aboriginals in the Northern Territory necessarily ensures that the Northern Territory Department of Education devotes a considerable amount of effort to Aboriginal education. Aboriginal education is catered for through the general services of the Department although a Superintendent of Aboriginal education has primary responsibility. The delivery of educational services generally in the Northern Territory is difficult and costly because of remoteness. This is particularly the case with Aboriginal education where the special needs of Aboriginal students also increases the cost of providing educational services. The small and dispersed population of the Territory and the isolated nature of most of these communities pose severe logistic problems for

educators and result in the highest per capita cost in Australia of providing educational services. The same range of primary and secondary courses, curriculum development, evaluation and advisory services as are provided in the other States are expected to be provided by the Northern Territory education system despite the smaller population of the Territory and the isolation of most communities.

3.54 The Northern Territory Department of Education is provided with advice on Aboriginal education by the Northern Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Group — 'Feppi'. Funding through the Commonwealth's Participation and Equity Program has enabled the appointment, initially for a year, of a Chairman, a research officer and a field liaison officer to Feppi. According to the Northern Territory Department of Education, Feppi is seen as a body capable of 'having significant input into areas relating to Aboriginal education', and 'promises to be a more active contributor than in the past'.²⁵

3.55 The A.C.T. Schools Authority is responsible for education in the A.C.T. and the Jervis Bay Territory. A significant number of children from the Wreck Bay Aboriginal community attend the Jervis Bay Primary School. The A.C.T. Schools Authority is provided with advice on Aboriginal education by the A.C.T. Aboriginal Education Consultative Group formed in 1983. The Group is funded by a three-year grant from the Commonwealth Schools Commission which ceases in mid-1987. The Schools Authority claimed it has put a case to the Schools Commission for continued funding of the Group after this date as the Authority considered it has insufficient funds to support the Group.²⁶

ROLE OF OTHER AGENCIES IN ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

3.56 A significant number of Aboriginals attend non-government, non-Aboriginal schools. A number of these are mission or former mission schools. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs provides funds to a number of church-run schools and the Catholic Education Commission in Queensland, Western Australia and New South Wales through its Grants-in-Aid program.

3.57 In Queensland, the Catholic Education Commission has allocated resources to:

- (a) mission schools — Thursday Island and Palm Island;
- (b) schools in large provincial centres with a substantial proportion of Aboriginal students in the enrolment — Cloncurry, Cunnamulla, Charters Towers and Rockhampton;
- (c) community support on reserves — Woorabinda and Cherbourg;
- (d) metropolitan — day and boarding schools where Aboriginal students join the mainstream, and
- (e) pastoral care — in rural and inner city areas (hostel supervision and community support).²⁷

3.58 In Western Australia the Catholic Education Commission has established an Aboriginal Education Services section, to which it has appointed a co-ordinator, conducted a curriculum advisory service and appointed and trained Aboriginal teaching assistants. In relation to funding arrangements, the Western Australian Catholic Education Commission claimed that there should be combined decision-making by the various funding authorities to establish national funding policies that are related to national plans for services to be provided.²⁸

3.59 In the Northern Territory there are six former mission schools (five Catholic and one Lutheran) which are run by their respective churches. As the Northern Territory Government considers the missions to be providing a service which it would otherwise be called on to provide, it accepts full financial responsibility for maintaining these schools. Government finance is provided for mission schools on the same basis as for government schools in Aboriginal communities in respect of salaries and wages, operational expenses,

in-service activities, buildings, i.e. capital works and maintenance and furniture. They also have access to the support services of the Department of Education's advisory staff and Curriculum Development Unit. They are expected to be registered and to comply with the general Northern Territory education guidelines in matters such as teacher qualifications, curricula etc.

3.60 The Department of Aboriginal Affairs' Grants-in-Aid provide direct funding to a wide range of educational institutions and community-based organisations involved in Aboriginal education, for example, enclave programs at tertiary institutions, Save the Children Fund pre-schools in N.S.W. and the Summer School Institute of Linguistics in the Northern Territory. The Committee considers many of these programs in later chapters of this report.

ROLE OF ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

3.61 Although some Aboriginal communities take an active interest in education, overall there is little community influence on the education provided to their children. Some community initiatives have been established and are funded by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs' Grants-in-Aid program, e.g. the Adelaide Aboriginal Community College and the Institute for Aboriginal Development in Alice Springs. Independent schools have been established (such as Strelley and Yipirinya) and some communities have set up Aboriginal education advisory committees. The Committee gives detailed consideration in the next chapter to the ways in which Aboriginal community involvement in Aboriginal education can be greatly increased.

EFFECTIVENESS OF EXISTING METHODS

CO-ORDINATION

3.62 What should be clear from the details given above is that there is a plethora of organisations and agencies involved in policy development and service delivery in Aboriginal education. This has led to a fragmented approach to Aboriginal education and has resulted in a lack of overall direction and duplication and waste in the provision of services. The many funding agencies have created confusion among Aboriginal people and a haphazard development of programs.

3.63 The Northern Land Council claimed that there were too many agencies involved in administering the education and training of Aboriginal people.²⁹ This was supported by Mark de Graaf who claimed that, because of the large number of agencies involved in funding and operating Aboriginal education programs, a 'Lack of co-ordination and sometimes co-operation between institutions and programs has led to, at best, an ineffective and inappropriate response to the very diverse and challenging needs'.³⁰ The dangers of having so many agencies involved was referred to by the National Aboriginal Education Committee:

There would . . . be a prima facie case for asserting that there is needless and wasteful duplication in the provision of educational services to Aborigines.³¹

The Thursday Island P. & C. Association claimed that the multiplicity of funding agencies had created 'confusion' among Aboriginal people.³²

3.64 The division of responsibility in Aboriginal education between a large number of organisations has led to the haphazard development of programs. There is a lack of a co-ordinating agency to decide whether the aims and results of programs are consistent, and

whether they are consistent with overall aims and objectives in education. For example, there is no co-ordinating organisation to decide whether the programs operating in primary schools lead smoothly on to those operating in secondary schools and then consistently on to those operating in tertiary and further education institutions. The dangers of duplication and wasted resources that this situation creates are obvious. It also means that overall objectives in Aboriginal education cannot be implemented within the existing methods of providing services.

3.65 If an overall direction is to be given to Aboriginal education it will need to occur at the Commonwealth level. Unfortunately there is no single co-ordinating authority at the Commonwealth level able to provide direction, and this is significantly restricting the effectiveness of the effort in Aboriginal education.

3.66 The lack of co-ordination at the Commonwealth level is most clearly reflected in difficulties in the relationship between the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. In its early evidence to the Committee, the National Aboriginal Education Committee claimed that its advice was not always sought by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs on educational issues. It said that advice was often requested on a day-to-day basis when crises occurred rather than advice being sought on programs generally. This often led to insufficient time for the Committee to consider and respond to issues raised, or for only members of the Executive and not the full Committee to be consulted. The National Aboriginal Education Committee considered it essential that there be a formalised, direct link between itself and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs on education issues.³³

3.67 In its most recent submission, made in June 1985, the National Aboriginal Education Committee claimed that it did not have:

a consistent relationship with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs at the Canberra level. Despite agreements between the Ministers for Aboriginal Affairs and Education that the NAEC shall be involved in all decisions relating to Aboriginal Education no efficient process has yet emerged . . . In meetings we have consistently proposed a more regular process of contact across the whole year of the funding cycle. We have also proposed that the Policy Branch of DAA be outposted in a co-related situation with the NAEC secretariat and the Aboriginal Education Branch of CDE. DAA seems unable or unwilling to seriously give consideration to better procedures.³⁴

However, the National Aboriginal Education Committee claimed that relationships with the Department at the State level were much better. The Committee and State Consultative Groups are involved to varying degrees with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs' State offices in consultations about funding. Discussions relating to co-ordinated policy development at State level though were non-existent.³⁵

3.68 The Department of Aboriginal Affairs, on the other hand, claimed that in the past there was limited contact between itself, the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the Commonwealth Department of Education which resulted in irregular communication concerning individual issues, with the broader policy issues being neglected. However, the Department stated that:

There has been considerable discussion, at both officer and Ministerial level on ways to improve co-ordination and consultation between DAA, CDE and the NAEC, to enable sound input and involvement by the NAEC at all levels of policy development and programming. It was agreed that DAA would consult with local NAEC members in the regions and that regular meetings would occur in Canberra between Senior Officers of DAA, CDE and NAEC members.³⁶

The Department considered that, in the past year or so, it and the National Aboriginal Education Committee 'have progressed in a satisfactory working relationship'.³⁷

3.69 The Department of Aboriginal Affairs also disputed the National Aboriginal Education Committee's claim to be the designated 'principal adviser to the Commonwealth Government in Aboriginal Education'. According to the Department, the National Aboriginal Education Committee provides advice to the Minister for Education on Aboriginal education, but the Department of Aboriginal Affairs has a co-ordinating responsibility in Aboriginal affairs, including Aboriginal education. The Department did consult with the National Aboriginal Education Committee on Aboriginal education issues, but its advice to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs may not always be consistent with that of the National Aboriginal Education Committee because of the need to consider 'the ramifications of proposals across the Aboriginal Affairs portfolio and not merely from an educational perspective'.³⁸

3.70 It is not just at the Commonwealth level that there is a lack of co-ordination and a lack of overall objectives which affects the effectiveness of Aboriginal education. As we have seen, each of the States and Territories make their own arrangements for Aboriginal education. There are also a large number of other agencies and institutions concerned with Aboriginal education. Clearly greater co-ordination needs to be achieved between these governments, organisations and institutions and the Commonwealth effort. This can only be effectively done once better co-ordination has been achieved at the Commonwealth level.

3.71 The Committee will consider ways of improving the co-ordination of Aboriginal education later in this chapter. However, it is necessary first to look at the effectiveness of present methods of funding in Aboriginal education because this is tied in closely with the question of co-ordination.

FUNDING

3.72 There are a number of significant issues which require resolution in relation to funding in Aboriginal education.

3.73 The first relates to the earlier discussion of co-ordination. As has been seen, there are a number of departments and authorities at the Commonwealth level concerned with funding Aboriginal education. There is a need to rationalise the funding arrangements. It has been proposed by a number of organisations including the National Aboriginal Education Committee, the Commonwealth Department of Education, the Schools Commission, the Tertiary Education Commission, the Review Committee of the Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme and the Working Party on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education, that overall co-ordination at the Commonwealth level would best be improved by the transfer of Department of Aboriginal Affairs' funding in Aboriginal education to the Education Portfolio. The National Aboriginal Education Committee claimed that the Department of Aboriginal Affairs' funding should be transferred to the Education Portfolio under two separate programs:

(1) *Tertiary Education Program for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (TEPA)*

Our previous reports and submissions have argued that an appropriate response by Government to the growing tertiary needs of Aborigines is the establishment of a Tertiary Education Program for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, administered by the Commonwealth Department of Education in liaison with the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission on the advice of the NAEC. This would better integrate disparate elements presently administered by different Departments. It would also allow for the CTEC to be more involved in presenting advice to the government which is its charter as a commission. The NAEC and State Consultative Groups would play the major role in policy decisions.

(2) *Schools Education Program for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (SEPA)*

The NAEC recommends that the current DAA programs and funds in the schools area be transferred to the Commonwealth Schools Commission to add to current programs available under the Commission. This would allow for a much more co-ordinated approach to policy development and funding. As in TEPA this would also allow for the direct involvement of the NAEC/SCG advisory network.³⁹

3.74 The benefits of a consolidation of Commonwealth funding within the Education Portfolio were outlined in the report of the Schools Commission's Working Party on Aboriginal Education. According to that report, the benefits of a transfer of Department of Aboriginal Affairs' funding to the Education Portfolio would be:

- to establish a co-ordinated and integrated approach to Aboriginal education at the primary and secondary school levels;
- the availability of educational expertise and national consultative arrangements within the Education Portfolio;
- the existence of the Aboriginal educational consultative and advisory structure comprising the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups which is to assume increasing responsibility for Aboriginal education;
- the availability for calendar (school year) funding through the Commonwealth Schools Commission, which allows for forward planning to be undertaken on a school year basis.⁴⁰

3.75 The difficulties of long-term and school year planning in the area of Aboriginal education which result from the nature of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs' funding were raised frequently with the Committee as a matter of concern by schools, other educational institutions and Aboriginal groups. A transfer of funding for Aboriginal education from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs to the Education Portfolio would assist in overcoming many of these difficulties. It would facilitate longer term planning and add stability to the conduct of programs for Aborigines in both the school and post-school programs.

3.76 The Department of Aboriginal Affairs expressed concern about the proposal to transfer its education funding to the Education Portfolio. It claimed that it had the flexibility and capacity to respond to the urgent educational needs of Aborigines, a flexibility which may not be shared by the Education Portfolio. The Department cited the example of providing assistance to Aboriginal independent schools before they obtain registration. It claimed that the Education Portfolio would need to develop mechanisms to respond to this need as the Commonwealth and State/Territory education portfolios currently only provide funds to independent schools after registration.⁴¹ The Department proposed that it:

... should continue to provide innovative and establishment funding for Aboriginal education projects. Once a project is established, it should be funded from the mainstream source, such as the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, Commonwealth Schools Commission and State/Territory Education Authorities.⁴²

3.77 The National Aboriginal Education Committee claimed that mechanisms could be developed within the Education Portfolio to respond to urgent needs in Aboriginal education.⁴³ However, it saw no difficulty in having the Department of Aboriginal Affairs retain a capability to respond to emergency needs in Aboriginal education.⁴⁴

3.78 Another major issue in funding of Aboriginal education is the respective responsibilities of the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments. As mentioned previously, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs funds Aboriginal education through direct grants to the States and the Northern Territory or Grants-in-Aid. State grants and grants to the Northern Territory represent the largest component of this funding

totalling \$9.5m or 68 per cent in 1983–84. Grants-in-Aid represent less than half this amount and total \$4.5m or 32 per cent of funding.⁴⁵

3.79 The Department of Aboriginal Affairs indicated that this imbalance placed constraints on its funding policies. By being committed to providing such a large proportion of overall funding as grants to the States and the Northern Territory, the Department's flexibility in funding worthwhile new projects is considerably reduced. In addition, the Department felt that it was funding a number of continuing programs which State and Territory governments should provide for. It called for the States and the Northern Territory to assume greater responsibility for the funding of recurrent costs in Aboriginal education within their normal programs, particularly of on-going programs of proven worth. This would ease the pressure on the Department of Aboriginal Affairs' budget and would free up funds which could then be directed towards assisting more community-based initiatives in their early stages.⁴⁶ The arguments of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs about the States and Territories assuming greater funding responsibility in Aboriginal education apply equally to funding provided through the Commonwealth Education Portfolio.

3.80 A number of State and Territory governments have assumed significant funding responsibility for Aboriginal education as the earlier discussion of the role of State and Territory governments indicates. However, it is also clear that the State and Territory governments consider funding for Aboriginal affairs to be largely a Commonwealth responsibility. This includes responsibility for Aboriginal education despite the major constitutional role of the States in the education area. It could be expected that State and Territory governments would strongly resist efforts to have them assume greater funding responsibility for Aboriginal education. The Committee discusses funding arrangements that should apply between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories later in this chapter.

3.81 The final issue in relation to funding is the relative distribution of Department of Aboriginal Affairs' funding between the States. Table 3 provides a breakdown of Department of Aboriginal Affairs' funding in each State since the 1981–82 financial year. The Table indicates that some States, such as South Australia and Western Australia, receive a much greater proportion of Aboriginal education funding than would be the case if the allocation was made on the basis of their proportions of the total Aboriginal population. At the same time States and Territories, such as New South Wales, Queensland and the Northern Territory, receive a significantly smaller proportion than they would otherwise receive.

3.82 The Committee's attention was drawn to the relative funding between the States by the Queensland Government.⁴⁷ It claimed that it has for many years drawn the attention of the Commonwealth Government to the gross inequity that exists in the provision of funds to the States for Aboriginal education. According to the Queensland Government, it provided significant additional funding to Aboriginal education from its own resources and, as a result of its willingness to spend its own funds, it has meant that its 'need' is seen as being not so great as other States. It claimed that special funding made available by the Commonwealth Schools Commission may be distributed on the same 'need' basis resulting in further significant disadvantage to Queensland.

3.83 The Department of Aboriginal Affairs stated that it allocates education funding on a needs, rather than a per capita basis. It claimed that the relative funding between the States will be seen as the result of a number of factors including:

- The relative priority accorded to the Education Function within DAA regions.
- The presence of major Aboriginal education institutions and programs within particular States.

Table 3
Department of Aboriginal Affairs Regional Education Funding

<i>Region</i>		<i>1981-82</i> \$	<i>1981-82</i> <i>% Total</i> <i>Departmental</i> <i>Education</i> <i>Funding</i>	<i>1982-83</i> \$	<i>1982-83</i> <i>% Total</i> <i>Departmental</i> <i>Education</i> <i>Funding</i>	<i>1983-84</i> <i>(proposed)</i> \$	<i>1983-84</i> <i>% Total</i> <i>Departmental</i> <i>Education</i> <i>Funding</i>
N.S.W. (inc A.C.T.)	G.A.A.	940 000	8.52	1 189 323	9.78	1 399 500	9.76
25.6% of	States Grants	1 032 000	9.36	1 170 200	9.64	1 161 000	8.10
Aboriginal	Total	1 972 000	17.88	2 359 523	19.42	2 560 500	17.86
population							
Vic./Tas.	G.A.A.	48 500	0.44	52 470	.43	38 500	0.27
11.0% of	States Grants	1 145 650	10.39	1 431 000	11.78	1 639 000	11.43
Aboriginal	Total	1 194 150	10.83	1 483 470	12.21	1 677 500	11.70
population							
S.A.	G.A.A.	796 500	7.22	481 694	3.96	537 300	3.75
6.7% of	States Grants	2 101 831	19.06	2 274 970	18.73	2 291 500	15.98
Aboriginal	Total	2 898 331	26.28	2 756 664	22.69	2 828 800	19.73
population							
Qld	G.A.A.	298 000	2.70	290 000	2.38	365 200	2.55
25.7% of	States Grants	859 000	7.79	1 132 900	9.32	1 245 500	8.69
Aboriginal	Total	1 157 000	10.49	1 422 900	11.70	1 610 700	11.24
population							
W.A.	G.A.A.	1 105 000	10.02	951 166	7.82	1 118 300	7.80
16.2% of	States Grants	2 318 238	21.02	2 594 213	21.34	2 704 000	18.86
Aboriginal	Total	3 423 238	31.04	3 545 379	29.16	3 822 300	26.66
population							
N.T.	G.A.A.	274 000	2.48	334 102	2.75	560 000	3.90
14.8% of	States Grants	109 000	.99	250 720	2.06	277 000	1.95
Aboriginal	Total	383 000	3.47	584 822	4.81	837 000	5.85
population							
National	Total	1 000	0.01	1 300	0.01	1 000 200	6.96
TOTALS		11 028 719	100.00	12 154 058	100.00	14 337 000	100.00

Source: Transcript of Evidence, pp. 4853-4.

- The approach taken by, and within, the different States. Each State determines the projects it wishes to see funded, and the degree to which there are demands on Commonwealth finance and is partly dependent on State initiatives to meet identified and high priority needs, and on available State funding. Queensland, for example, is the only State which has largely accepted the substantial financial burden of funding the employment of Aboriginal teaching assistants.
- Some States, particularly South and Western Australia, made early calls on Commonwealth finance when States Grants arrangements were introduced. The Department is to a certain extent tied into patterns of recurrent expenditure reflecting early funding decisions. The maintenance of these expenditures inevitably diminishes the scope for revision of funding between States or, indeed, the support which can be offered to new or innovative projects.⁴⁸

Given that funds are not unlimited, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs claimed that real increases in New South Wales and Queensland could only be achieved at the cost of real reductions in South Australia and Western Australia.⁴⁹

3.84 While the Committee strongly supports the principle of funding being provided on a needs, rather than a per capita basis, the Committee is not persuaded that the educational needs of Aboriginals in Queensland and New South Wales are any less than those of Aboriginal people elsewhere. The Committee considers that the additional Commonwealth funding it has recommended in this report be provided for Aboriginal education should be distributed on a needs basis and should help in redressing some of the imbalance between the States which exists in Commonwealth funding for Aboriginal education.

DEVELOPMENT OF MORE EFFECTIVE METHODS

CO-ORDINATION AND FUNDING AT THE COMMONWEALTH LEVEL

3.85 The Committee considers that the co-ordination and funding of Aboriginal education can be greatly improved by taking a number of major initiatives. The present fragmented funding arrangements and lack of overall direction in policy making must be changed if Aboriginal education is to be more effective.

3.86 Firstly, there must be greater co-ordination of the effort at the Commonwealth level. It is the Commonwealth Government which must provide the overall direction in Aboriginal education and this can only be effectively undertaken if the Commonwealth effort is well co-ordinated. The greatest contribution to a better co-ordination can be made by the transfer of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs' funding in Aboriginal education to the Education Portfolio. The Committee is persuaded by the arguments of authorities in the Education Portfolio that this transfer would significantly improve the concentration of the Commonwealth effort in Aboriginal education by allowing the development of policies and programs within the one portfolio. It would also give this responsibility to specialists in the field of education which is where Aboriginal education should be located so that it can benefit from the latest thinking and developments in education. But above all, such a transfer would place co-ordination and funding of Aboriginal education programs and policy substantially under the control of the Aboriginal organisations concerned with education, namely the National Aboriginal Education Committee acting in consultation with the network of State and Territory Consultative Groups and regional and local Aboriginal education committees. This control should be confirmed by having the National Aboriginal Education Committee officially recognised as the principal adviser to the Commonwealth Government on Aboriginal education policies and programs within the Education Portfolio.

3.87 Despite the Committee's view that the Department of Aboriginal Affairs' funding in Aboriginal education should be transferred to the Education Portfolio, the Committee strongly supports a continuing role for the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in Aboriginal education. The Department should have a continuing capacity to provide emergency assistance to community-based Aboriginal organisations and educational institutions which require rapid assistance to commence or continue programs in Aboriginal education. This should very much be seen as *emergency* funding and should not become an alternative way of funding innovative programs. Responsibility for funding innovative programs should largely be with the Education Portfolio which would control the vast bulk of the funding. The major role which the Committee considers the Department should play in Aboriginal education is in providing the Education Portfolio with advice about the broad scene of Aboriginal affairs and the place of Aboriginal education within that scene. It is this sort of advice which will be required within the Education Portfolio and the Committee considers that there should be a formal arrangement for the Department to provide advice in relation to Aboriginal education policy and funding.

3.88 The Committee recommends that:

- *the Department of Aboriginal Affairs' Aboriginal education funding for continuing and innovative programs be transferred to the Commonwealth Education Portfolio and be administered by the Commonwealth Department of Education, the Commonwealth Schools Commission and the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission acting on the advice of the National Aboriginal Education Committee;*
- *the National Aboriginal Education Committee be formally recognised as the Commonwealth Government's principal adviser on Aboriginal education and as the co-ordinator of Aboriginal education within the Education Portfolio;*
- *the Department of Aboriginal Affairs retain a small element of funds to provide emergency assistance to Aboriginal education projects which require it. Once these projects become established they should be considered for funding by the Education Portfolio or by State and Territory governments; and*
- *the Department of Aboriginal Affairs have a formal role in providing advice to the Education Portfolio about Aboriginal educational policy and programs.*

3.89 The Committee considers that the implementation of these recommendations should occur quickly, within the next twelve months, so that the Department of Aboriginal Affairs' funding can be integrated with other funding available in Aboriginal education. In particular, the transfer of funding should coincide with the additional funding and responsibility in Aboriginal education which the Committee recommends in this report for the Schools Commission and the National Aboriginal Education Committee.

3.90 The Committee considers that there should be a review of these new administrative arrangements at the conclusion of the 1988–1990 Triennium after they have been given time to work. The review should evaluate the extent to which the new arrangements have improved overall co-ordination and effectiveness in Aboriginal educational policy and funding.

3.91 The Committee recommends that:

- *a review be undertaken of the new administrative arrangements proposed in the above recommendations after the conclusion of the 1988–90 Triennium.*

3.92 While these recommendations are being implemented, the Committee considers that the National Aboriginal Education Committee should be closely involved by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in all aspects of its policy and programming in Aboriginal education. Similarly, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs should be

consulted by the Education Portfolio about Aboriginal education funding within its area of responsibility. There should be a great effort made to establish co-operative relationships in the area of Aboriginal education at the Commonwealth level so that the development of policies and programs does not suffer.

CO-ORDINATION BETWEEN COMMONWEALTH AND STATE GOVERNMENTS

3.93 The other major area needing attention is co-ordination between the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments. The Committee considers that the co-ordination between Commonwealth and State governments will be substantially improved by having the Commonwealth responsibility for Aboriginal education also entirely located within the Education Portfolio. Consultative and co-ordinating mechanisms already exist between the Commonwealth Education Portfolio and the State and Territory Education Portfolios, and co-ordination in Aboriginal education will greatly benefit from these mechanisms.

3.94 The close links between the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups should provide a major means of co-ordinating the efforts of Commonwealth and State and Territory governments. To encourage a co-ordinated effort there should be regular meetings between the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the State and Territory Consultative Groups. Just as the Committee has stated that the National Aboriginal Education Committee should receive formal recognition as the Commonwealth's principal adviser on Aboriginal education and be drawn in a major way into decision-making at the Commonwealth level, the Committee also considers that similar arrangements should apply in the relationships of the Consultative Groups with their respective governments. The Committee views these measures as important ways of affirming and extending the involvement of Aboriginal people in deciding the future directions of Aboriginal education and also of increasing the extent of co-ordination and co-operation between Commonwealth and State governments.

3.95 The Committee recommends that:

- *the State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups be formally recognised by their respective governments as their principal advisers in Aboriginal education and participate in all decisions made in relation to Aboriginal education in their respective States and Territories.*

3.96 In the section on improving co-ordination at the Commonwealth level, the Committee has emphasised the major role it sees the Commonwealth playing in establishing overall objectives in the area of Aboriginal education largely under the auspices of the National Aboriginal Education Committee acting in consultation with the State and Territory Consultative Groups. In view of this significant role that is envisaged for the Commonwealth Government in establishing objectives and co-ordinating Aboriginal education, the Committee acknowledges that the Commonwealth Government should also accept a significant funding responsibility. However, the Committee does not consider that this means the States and Territories do not have the same responsibility to fund the education of their Aboriginal people as they do of all other people.

3.97 The Committee considers that Commonwealth funding for Aboriginal education should largely be provided for new initiatives and innovations, such as the proposal made later in the report to establish a number of enclaves in secondary schools, and to assist the States and Territories with programs that are particularly expensive to provide, such as primary and secondary facilities and services in the remote communities and bilingual

education. The Committee makes specific recommendations for the involvement of the Commonwealth in these and other areas throughout the report.

3.98 At the same time the Committee is strongly of the view that State and Territory governments should be assuming funding responsibility for on-going programs, currently funded from Commonwealth sources, which have established beyond doubt their value. The programs which most clearly fit these criteria include the employment of Aboriginal teacher aides and teaching assistants in schools and the staffing and resource support of the State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups. As new programs become well-established and prove their worth, State and Territory governments should progressively assume responsibility for them within their recurrent funding. Funding of well-established and successful programs should be seen as part of the responsibility of State and Territory governments to provide an effective education for all their citizens.

3.99 The Committee recommends that:

- *following the transfer of funding from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs to the Commonwealth Education Portfolio, the agencies of the Portfolio negotiate with State and Territory education departments on their accepting responsibility for continuing programs currently funded by the Commonwealth.*

3.100 The implementation of this recommendation would in turn provide more scope for the Commonwealth to assist individual programs of merit in their early stages. As many of these new programs are likely to be Aboriginal community-based initiatives, such a move would allow the Commonwealth to increase the part Aboriginal communities themselves have in them.

CO-ORDINATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

3.101 The Committee considers that greater co-ordination at the Commonwealth level will also improve the overall co-ordination with other agencies. Broadly speaking, Aboriginal education funding by the Commonwealth will be dispersed to other agencies through the one portfolio and under a single set of objectives. To facilitate co-ordination the Committee considers that other agencies involved in Aboriginal education should establish links with the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups.

3.102 The Committee recommends that:

- *other organisations and agencies involved in Aboriginal education be encouraged to establish links with the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups.*

3.103 Aboriginal communities will have a significant role to play in Aboriginal education by providing advice to the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the State and Territory Consultative Groups, and by implementing and co-ordinating policies and programs at a local level. The Committee envisages the establishment of a network of regional and local education advisory committees which will link in with the State and national advisory committees in Aboriginal education. The establishment of such a network would enable effective co-ordination in Aboriginal education from the national to the local level. The Committee considers the greater involvement of Aboriginal communities in Aboriginal education and the establishment of a network of advisory committees in the next chapter.

Endnotes

- 1 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4804.
- 2 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4805.
- 3 Transcript of Evidence, pp. 4805-06.
- 4 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4703.
- 5 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4670.
- 6 Report of the Working Party on Aboriginal Education, *op.cit.*, p. xi.
- 7 Commonwealth Schools Commission, *Recommendations for 1986, op.cit.*, pp. 5-7.
- 8 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5329.
- 9 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5330.
- 10 Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, *Report for 1985-87 Triennium, Vol. 1, Part 1*, April 1984, p. 75.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 76.
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, *Report for 1985-87 Triennium, Vol. 1, Part 5*, Advice of Technical and Further Education Council, April 1984, p. 115.
- 14 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4040.
- 15 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4429.
- 16 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4441.
- 17 N.S.W. Government, submission, June 1985.
- 18 Transcript of Evidence, p. 3619.
- 19 Transcript of Evidence, p. 3620.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 Transcript of Evidence, p. 3613.
- 22 Transcript of Evidence, p. 2293.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 Transcript of Evidence, p. 2295.
- 25 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5194.
- 26 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5674.
- 27 Transcript of Evidence, p. 1754.
- 28 Transcript of Evidence, p. 1738.
- 29 Transcript of Evidence, p. 100.
- 30 Transcript of Evidence, p. 2169.
- 31 Transcript of Evidence, p. 207.
- 32 Transcript of Evidence, p. 882.
- 33 Transcript of Evidence, p. 2617.
- 34 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5389.
- 35 *Ibid.*
- 36 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5518.
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5517.
- 39 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5392.
- 40 Report of the Working Party on Aboriginal Education, *op.cit.*, pp. 31-32.
- 41 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5518.
- 42 *Ibid.*
- 43 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5481.
- 44 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5482.
- 45 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4806.
- 46 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4805.
- 47 Transcript of Evidence, pp. 4438-41.
- 48 Transcript of Evidence, pp. 4806-07.
- 49 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4807.

Chapter 4

Aboriginal Self-determination and Education

INTRODUCTION

4.1 Commonwealth Governments have established a policy of self-determination in Aboriginal affairs. According to the policy, programs of assistance to Aboriginals in the past have failed because they were not based on an understanding of Aboriginal culture and society and because Aboriginals were not involved in their formulation and did not want them. The Government has claimed that the programs 'in which Aboriginals determine their own needs and priorities are not only more equitable, they are more successful and cost-effective'.¹ This provides the rationale for the policy of self-determination in which programs will be directed at creating a situation where:

Aboriginals have sufficient economic independence to enjoy the civil and political rights provided in our system; and where they can control basic services such as health, education, housing, so that they come in a form and of a standard that meet Aboriginal needs as defined by the Aboriginal people themselves.²

4.2 In submissions made to the Committee there was overwhelming agreement on the need for Aboriginal involvement in all aspects, and at all levels, of the planning, conduct and management of Aboriginal education programs. It was put to the Committee that only when Aboriginal people are sufficiently involved in designing Aboriginal educational services and actively involved in delivering those services, will any real impact be made in Aboriginal education.³

4.3 Significant achievements have been made in effecting Aboriginal participation at national, State and local levels in the development and delivery of Aboriginal educational services in the last 10 years. The need for Aboriginal participation and consultation is included in the aims of all Commonwealth and State and Territory Government departments, organisations and authorities concerned with the development of policies and delivery of services in Aboriginal education.

4.4 Despite the significance of these achievements, the Committee has received evidence that the extent of Aboriginal participation has not gone far enough and that much remains to be achieved if the policy of self-determination is to be effectively realised. Dr Stringer of the Western Australian Institute of Technology, claimed that policies in Aboriginal education which were genuinely based on self-determination and self-management would amount to an Aboriginalisation of Aboriginal education. He stated that Aboriginalisation should not be interpreted in a narrow sense of the involvement of a few Aboriginal teachers or administrators, but rather attempts need to be made 'to introduce a very significant Aboriginal presence into the educational process in all relevant settings'.⁴ The Committee agrees with Dr Stringer that Aboriginal self-determination in the area of education will amount to an Aboriginalisation of the process of Aboriginal education. This chapter considers ways of increasing the level of Aboriginal involvement in Aboriginal education so that Aboriginal people are in a position to determine the sort of education which they wish for themselves and their children.

4.5 There are important questions which are raised about how best to achieve significant Aboriginal involvement. Should involvement be concentrated at the national and State government levels and be essentially in the policy and administrative areas of Aboriginal education? Or should the concentration be on local Aboriginal involvement through the establishment of local Aboriginal education committees and through the involvement of Aboriginal people in the delivery of educational services at the local level?

4.6 Clearly there needs to be a mix of these. Involvement of Aboriginal people at the national and State government levels is critical to an effective Aboriginal input into Aboriginal education. It enables Aboriginal people to formulate views on education and advise governments and educational authorities, who have so much control over the sort of education provided in schools and other educational institutions, directly about those views. However, this involvement must be representative of local Aboriginal opinion and should defer to local Aboriginal opinion in the detailed implementation of programs wherever possible. At the school level, the local Aboriginal community has much to contribute to the formulation of school policy and the development of programs.

4.7 Mechanisms have been established which ensure a significant Aboriginal involvement at the national and State level through the Aboriginal Education Advisory Committees and Groups. There has also been some establishment of regional advisory Committees which can have an input at the local level. However, there has been less success in involving Aboriginal parents in schools and there is a need for greater involvement to be achieved at this level. There is also a need for greater Aboriginal involvement in educational administration and policy.

INVOLVEMENT AT THE NATIONAL AND STATE LEVELS

4.8 As stated earlier, involvement of Aboriginal people at the national and State and Territory government levels has been principally achieved through the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups. There are now consultative groups established in each of the States and Territories.

4.9 The consultative groups at the national and State levels have made significant contributions to Aboriginal education since their establishment. They have developed comprehensive statements of Aboriginal educational aims and objectives and provided detailed advice to governments about Aboriginal educational programs. The roles and responsibilities of the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the State and Territory Consultative Groups are similar and were summarised by the Schools Commission's Working Party on Aboriginal Education as follows:

- provide the appropriate Ministers and departmental officers with informed views on the educational and training needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- offer advice on the effectiveness of current programs and projects involving Aborigines. Such advice can help ensure that the programs will not only meet Aboriginal needs regarding the acquisition of academic and technological skills but also develop pride in being an Aborigine.
- assist in the selection of staff to work in Aboriginal education and in the identification of those positions which are suitable for understudy training.
- assist in the planning, implementation and administration of new educational policies and programs.
- undertake and/or assist with investigations and studies to enable a better understanding of Aboriginal education and training needs.
- assist in developing programs which will enhance the knowledge Aboriginal people have of themselves.
- support programs to improve race relations by increasing the levels of understanding and tolerance in the community.
- provide information to Aboriginal communities about present and future policies, programs and projects in Aboriginal education.⁵

4.10 The National Aboriginal Education Committee stated that it has been recognised as the Commonwealth Government's principal adviser on Aboriginal education. It provides advice directly to the Commonwealth Minister for Education and advises the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs about Aboriginal education on request. The Chairman of the National Aboriginal Education Committee is also a Schools Commissioner and a member of the Curriculum Development Centre Council. The Deputy Chairman of the Committee is to be a member of the Curriculum Development Centre Council, while another Committee member is on the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission's Technical and Further Education Council. Another Aboriginal person, Ms Pat O'Shane, is also a Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commissioner. As a result of these developments, the National Aboriginal Education Committee claimed that:

In the short span of two years, therefore, the Australian educational establishment has opened its doors to the first Australians, providing us with significant opportunities for consultation, and ultimately, self-determination.⁶

4.11 The achievements in relation to the State and Territory Consultative Groups are also significant although there are areas in which improvement can be made. In most cases the Consultative Groups operate to the State or Territory Minister for Education or, if not, at least to the Director-General of Education. However, the National Aboriginal Education Committee claimed it was essential that a formal mechanism exist in each State and Territory to allow the Aboriginal community to be involved at the highest levels of decision-making. It stated that it was fostering this development.⁷

4.12 The Committee strongly supports the establishment of formal mechanisms for involvement of the Consultative Committees and Groups at the national and State levels. While the Committee recognises the progress that has been achieved in Aboriginal involvement at the Commonwealth level through the National Aboriginal Education Committee, it is worth noting that few of these mechanisms for involvement have been formalised. The Committee believes that these mechanisms should be formalised, for example, by having the National Aboriginal Education Committee formally recognised as the principal adviser on Aboriginal education to the Commonwealth Government and by having one place on each of the Commonwealth Schools Commission, the Tertiary Education Commission and the Curriculum Development Centre Council set aside for an Aboriginal person. The Committee also believes that similar formal mechanisms for involvement of State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups in the policies and programs of State and Territory governments should be established.

4.13 The Committee recommends that:

- *formal mechanisms be established to ensure the involvement of the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups in policy decision-making at the highest level in their respective governments.*

4.14 If these Consultative Committees and Groups are to provide policy advice to governments about Aboriginal educational needs and the programs required to meet these needs, it is essential that they be provided with adequate resources. It is also essential that they reflect the views of the Aboriginal community. Self-determination includes responsibility and accountability to the Aboriginal community as well as an extension of involvement in decision-making.

RESOURCE SUPPORT OF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEES AND GROUPS

4.15 In its first submission made to the Inquiry in 1981, the National Aboriginal Education Committee expressed concern that the business and demands placed on it had stretched its structure beyond coping. It claimed that it needed to be restructured and that there should be an immediate increase in the full-time membership and a bolstering of secretariat support. This request has been met to a significant extent by the appointment of a full-time Deputy Chairman to assist the full-time Chairman, and by the provision of additional secretariat support.⁸ When funding for education programs is transferred from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs to the Education Portfolio, as is recommended by the Committee in the previous chapter, the National Aboriginal Education Committee will need additional support to enable it to provide the sort of advice the Committee considers it should be making on the allocation of education funding.

4.16 Many of the State and Territory Consultative Groups were originally set up with assistance from the Commonwealth Schools Commission, with, in most cases, State and Territory governments subsequently accepting the responsibility for funding the Groups. In 1985, the Commonwealth Schools Commission provided additional funding support to the State and Territory Groups through its Projects of National Significance allocations.⁹ This funding has enabled most of the State and Territory Consultative Groups to be supported by at least one full-time Chairman and Executive Officer. The Commission's recommendations to the Commonwealth Government for funding in 1986 include a recommendation for \$1.047m to provide additional support to the Consultative Groups.¹⁰ This recommendation followed the Report of the School Commission's Working Party on Aboriginal Education which claimed that the increased attention given to the Consultative Groups and the reliance placed on them for policy advice meant that they required more resources to meet the range of demands placed on them. The resources with which many of the Groups had been provided by State and Territory governments were considered 'inadequate' by the Working Party and it believed additional Commonwealth assistance was required.¹¹ The National Aboriginal Education Committee's policy is that an average of five full-time staff be provided for the Consultative Groups.

4.17 Some State Consultative Groups also expressed concern to the Committee about the level of support provided to them. The N.S.W. Aboriginal Education Consultative Group recommended that the State Government should provide funds to ensure that State Consultative Groups could function on a full-time basis.¹² The Tasmanian Aboriginal Education Consultative Committee claimed that it had insufficient support to enable it to meet the requests made to it. Given the importance that the Tasmanian Department of Education placed on its advice, it believed that it should be supported at an adequate level.¹³

4.18 Given the recommendations that the Committee makes in this report for the increasing involvement of the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the State and Territory Consultative Groups, they clearly need increased resource support to meet the demands for research, consultation and advice which will be placed on them. While the Committee supports additional funding through the Schools Commission to the State and Territory Groups as an interim measure, it considers that adequate funding levels should be provided to the Groups by State and Territory governments from their normal resources for education.

4.19 The Committee recommends that:

- *the Commonwealth Government provide adequate resource support to the National Aboriginal Education Committee and, on an interim basis, to the State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups to enable them to meet the*

demands placed on them by their increasing involvement in decision-making in Aboriginal education; and

- *State and Territory governments, which currently do not provide funding for their State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups, progressively assume full funding responsibility for these Groups over a period of three years.*

SELF-MANAGEMENT AND THE CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEES AND GROUPS

4.20 The National Aboriginal Education Committee recognised that the members of the State and Territory Consultative Groups should be elected from within the Aboriginal population if self-management was to become a reality.¹⁴ Most of the Consultative Groups have an elected membership.

4.21 The representative nature of the National Aboriginal Education Committee, whose members are appointed by the Commonwealth Minister for Education, could be assured by formalising an arrangement to allow each State and Territory Consultative Group to nominate a member to the National Aboriginal Education Committee. At present the Chairpersons of the South Australian, New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, Tasmanian and Western Australian Consultative Groups are also members of the National Aboriginal Education Committee. The National Aboriginal Education Committee claimed that its relationship with the State Groups was 'excellent'.¹⁵ A formal arrangement to have a representative of each State and Territory Group on the National Aboriginal Education Committee would ensure that the relationship remains close, and that the National Aboriginal Education Committee remains representative of Aboriginal educational interests.

4.22 The Committee recommends that:

- *a representative of each State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Group be a member of the National Aboriginal Education Committee.*

4.23 The Committee considers that the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the State and Territory Consultative Groups should be consulting with Aboriginal groups and organisations other than those just involved in education. Education has an effect on many areas of Aboriginal affairs and the National Aboriginal Education Committee and State Groups should be consulting widely with those groups involved in other areas of Aboriginal affairs to ensure that it keeps in contact with Aboriginal community feeling.

4.24 The Committee recommends that:

- *the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups consult widely with Aboriginal groups and organisations involved in areas other than education.*

LOCAL ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

4.25 The process of Aboriginal self-determination in education can be greatly improved by the greater involvement of local Aboriginal communities. As Dr Coombs noted in his report on the National Aboriginal Conference:

the 'self-management' or 'self-determination' which Aborigines seek is primarily local in its form and purposes, involving: the power to create and control their own institutions; to manage their own domestic affairs; to hold accountable those who exercise power among them; and to receive and administer resources necessary for these purposes.¹⁶

The Port Augusta Aboriginal Education Consultative Committee claimed that Aboriginal educational needs should be identified at a local community level and programs in Aboriginal education developed in conjunction with the local Aboriginal community.¹⁷

4.26 In recent years there has also been a recognition of the right of parents to help shape their children's education and a realisation that the success of the school program can be dependent on the co-operation of parents. The importance of Aboriginal parental involvement in the education of their children is no less than that for the rest of the community, and may be greater if school programs are going to be made relevant to Aboriginal children. The greater involvement of Aboriginal parents in schools offers the chance to reduce the gulf which can exist between the nature of the schooling system and the Aboriginal community.

4.27 The Department of Aboriginal Affairs pointed out that there is clearly much scope for involvement in largely Aboriginal communities and schools, but where Aboriginal students form a significant minority of the school population, the process of involvement is no less necessary although it may be often more difficult to achieve. Local community representative committees are essential in these cases to ensure that Aboriginal students are not submerged into an unresponsive school system.¹⁸

4.28 Aboriginal community involvement in education has taken a number of forms including:

- the establishment of regional and local educational consultative committees to provide advice at a local level and also to provide the grassroots of the State and Territory Consultative Groups;
- establishment of Aboriginal school or district councils to influence decision-making in the school;
- Aboriginal members of local Parents and Citizens Associations; and
- Aboriginal people becoming involved in school activities as individuals, e.g. as resource persons in Aboriginal studies courses etc.

4.29 Although Aboriginal people have become involved in education at the local level by all the means indicated above, the overall achievements can be much more significant. The Committee looks at how Aboriginal people have become involved in education and at ways of promoting wider local participation.

PROMOTION OF WIDER LOCAL PARTICIPATION

Establishment of networks of regional and local committees

4.30 The establishment of a network of regional and local Aboriginal education advisory committees would provide the State and Territory Consultative Groups and the National Aboriginal Education Committee with access to informed local Aboriginal concerns about education. These regional education committees could also provide advice to education authorities at the regional level about what should be happening in Aboriginal education in the region. The Schools Commission's Working Party on Aboriginal Education considered the establishment of a regional network of consultative committees to be 'an important step in ensuring that local communities can effectively contribute to consultations and have their views on the education of their children heard'.¹⁹

4.31 There has been some success in achieving this process of regionalisation of the consultative network. In Western Australia the original consultative committees in Aboriginal education were regionally based and it is only recently that a State Group has been formed. The N.S.W. Aboriginal Education Consultative Group reported that it had

undergone a regionalisation process 'which was motivated through a desire to accommodate a broader Aboriginal perspective on education' and that the process had been successfully completed.²⁰ In South Australia some success in regionalisation had been achieved in establishing education advisory committees in Port Augusta and the Riverland.²¹ In Queensland a number of local education advisory committees have been established, and regional committees had also been established in Rockhampton and Townsville.²² Efforts to develop regional networks of consultative committees are proceeding elsewhere.

4.32 In Victoria, 11 locally-based Aboriginal Education Committees (e.g. in Shepparton, Robinvale, Mildura, Swan Hill etc.) were established following Aboriginal parent seminars organised in Aboriginal communities throughout the State by the Department of Education. These committees are consulted by the Victorian Aboriginal Education Consultative Group on matters relating to Aboriginal education in their respective localities. They are involved to varying degrees in local school programs; in the selection of applicants for Aboriginal teacher aide positions; in local Aboriginal studies programs; and four have representation on at least one School Council in their areas. Seven Aboriginal Learning or Cultural Centres, with Committees of Management comprising majority Aboriginal membership, have been established in Victoria since 1977. These provide a focus for community education and Aboriginal educational involvement in Victoria.²³

4.33 The Committee considers that the establishment of this network of regional and local education advisory committees which will then feed into the State and Territory Groups and, ultimately, to the National Aboriginal Education Committee, is essential in making the policy of self-determination work in Aboriginal education. The Committee would see them as having broadly two roles.

4.34 Firstly, there would be the role of being the 'grassroots' of the Aboriginal advisory structure in Aboriginal education. They would keep the State Groups and the National Aboriginal Education Committee in close contact with local Aboriginal opinion on Aboriginal education.

4.35 Secondly, they have a critical role to play in the local and regional scene. The Port Augusta Aboriginal Education Consultative Committee outlined these valuable areas of involvement including: providing advice to regional administrators and principals about Aboriginal education; acting as a communication link between the community and educational institutions; participating in the implementation and evaluation of broader Aboriginal education policies and programs at the regional and local level and involvement in the pre-service and in-service training of non-Aboriginal teachers.²⁴ These areas of involvement agree with the areas suggested by the Queensland Aboriginal Education Consultative Committee as those in which its regional advisory committees will be involved.²⁵

4.36 The Committee recommends that:

- *the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups encourage the establishment of regional and local education advisory committees where they do not already exist;*
- *the regional and local Aboriginal education committees be consulted by State and Territory Consultative Groups and the National Aboriginal Education Committee about all aspects of Aboriginal education; and*
- *the regional and local Aboriginal education committees be recognised by State and Territory governments as the regional and local advisers on Aboriginal education. Regional educational administrators, school inspectors and school principals*

should consult with the regional and local Aboriginal education committees on all aspects of Aboriginal education.

Involvement of Aboriginal parents in schools

4.37 The reasons for the lack of involvement by Aboriginal parents in the schooling of their children are complex. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs, in its submission, brought out some of the difficulties Aboriginal parents have in becoming involved in schools:

Aboriginals have a long history of rejection by and failure at schools, and have good reason to see schools as a foreign environment. In the past there have been so many well-intentioned, but short-lived, attempts to build such links, that Aboriginal people may well be sceptical of new attempts to involve them.²⁶

4.38 As a result of their own educational experiences, Aboriginal parents can have a mixture of reactions to schools. They can feel hostility towards schools if their own schooling experiences were negative. If they failed themselves at school they can see schooling as a waste of time and not support their children in the school. However, many parents want their children to achieve well at school, but they are reluctant to become involved themselves because schools often make few concessions to Aboriginality and parents can feel uncomfortable and shy about going into the school. In Moree the Committee was told by an Aboriginal teacher that the experience of Aboriginal parents entering the school can be 'nerve-wracking' and that a low level of self-esteem by parents could contribute to these feelings. Aboriginal parents also tended to see teachers as 'figureheads' and so found the school situation threatening.²⁷

4.39 Given this background it is hardly surprising that principals and teachers of schools the Committee visited claimed that they organised special activities for Aboriginal parents so they could meet teachers and become involved in the school but that few parents attended. Efforts to encourage Aboriginal parents to feel easy about approaching the school and having the desire to become involved in school activities are obviously going to require a sensitive long-term approach on the part of principals and teachers. It will require an awareness, on the part of principals and teachers, of the difficulties Aboriginal parents have in approaching the school and a preparedness to persist in efforts to encourage parents to become involved by alleviating the difficulties. The Committee makes recommendations later in this report which will assist in placing principals and teachers, with an understanding of the Aboriginal community, in schools with significant Aboriginal enrolments. One of their main tasks should be to encourage Aboriginal involvement in the school.

4.40 Aboriginal staff employed in schools also have a significant role to play in promoting wider and more effective participation by the Aboriginal community in schools. Aboriginal teachers, teaching assistants and home/school liaison officers should see it as part of their duties to establish a communication link between the school and the Aboriginal community and encourage parents to become involved. This has happened in many areas. Aboriginal parental involvement has in fact been encouraged by the key role played by Aboriginal staff in the school. This key role needs to be recognised by principals of schools and educational authorities and strongly supported.

4.41 There are a number of ways in which parents can become involved in schools. In those schools with majority Aboriginal enrolment, establishment of Aboriginal school councils should be encouraged as a way of involving parents in the running of the school. The existence of school councils with effective control over decisions on policy, curriculum and staffing are a central feature of Aboriginal independent schools. For

example, the role of the Yipirinya School Council in managing the school was described in its application for registration as a non-government school:

Yipirinya School is managed by the Yipirinya School Council. The Council's Constitution ensures that control of the school is vested in the Aboriginal communities it serves. The Council is made up of all parents of Yipirinya children. The parents elect an executive which makes decisions on behalf of the Council, concerning every facet of school administration: staffing, finance, and curriculum. Aboriginal control of the school is complete.²⁸

4.42 In the Northern Territory, the Education Act allows community members to establish school councils with a wide ranging responsibility and authority including influencing the style of the education program, advising on local educational needs and influencing selection and duties of school staff. The school councils do not sit on selection committees for principals and staff, but they do have a say in advising the regional superintendent on the duty statement and description of the positions. In outstations, community leaders can be directly involved in appointing visiting teachers and for selection of outstation teachers themselves.²⁹

4.43 Where there is no school council, the Northern Territory Government has stated that the Community Council can, as it in some cases already does, provide the support and influence of a School Council. These Councils can have a large influence on undesirable teaching staff remaining in the community by threatening to withdraw permits for them.³⁰

4.44 The Northern Territory Government has not prescribed the degree of responsibility that a School Council should accept but has left it up to the communities 'to opt for the level of involvement and control with which they feel able to cope'.³¹ This was believed to be necessary in case a community was not ready to accept a wide range of responsibilities and was 'trapped into overcommitment and conflict within its clan groups as a result of being coerced into fitting into a model that is set before it'.³²

4.45 Dr Lynn Walker, of the Darwin Institute of Technology, was critical of the Northern Territory model of school councils in relation to Aboriginal communities. She claimed that if Aboriginal communities were only to be given some control over their schools through the establishment of school councils when they felt themselves able to accept the responsibility of that control, then Aboriginal control would be a long time coming. It was easy, according to Dr Walker, to get Aboriginal people to say they did not want control by saying 'control means you have to do everything, you cannot invite everybody in, you cannot have an expert'. She believed that control should be given and then the people should be asked what they want to assist them to take effective control.³³

4.46 Dr Walker was also critical of the emphasis in the role that school councils would perform as defined by the Northern Territory Government. The roles of exercising influence on the selection and appointment of staff should be at the beginning of the statement of roles and not at the end. The statement though was a reasonable intermediate step between what exists at the moment and the sort of control Dr Walker envisaged for school councils.³⁴

4.47 That involvement by school councils in selection of school staff was seen as a major priority by Aboriginal communities was confirmed in a statement from the Yuendumu School Council in the Northern Territory which was submitted to the Committee. The statement was made to the Northern Territory Department of Education and requested that:

. . . a firm commitment in writing that all future applicants or candidates for the position of Principal at Yuendumu School, whether being recruited from outside the system, or seeking transfer within the NT Department of Education, whether substantive or on an HDA basis, temporary or permanent, shall be chosen by the Yuendumu School Parents' Council in consultation with the school staff and in co-operation with the NTTS and the NT Department of Education . . .³⁵

4.48 Dr Stringer, of the Western Australian Institute of Technology, claimed that a School Board should be formed in each Aboriginal community, with membership from the community and with significant powers and responsibilities in the areas of staffing, planning, curriculum development and general liaison between the school and community. He stated that such School Boards should be seen as 'having some form of power to influence the fundamental character of its school'.³⁶

4.49 The Committee considers that Aboriginal school advisory committees should be established in all schools with majority Aboriginal populations and that these school advisory committees should have a significant input into planning and administration of the school.

4.50 The Committee recommends that:

- *State and Territory education authorities encourage the establishment of representative School Advisory Committees in schools with a majority Aboriginal population and these Advisory Committees be given significant powers and responsibilities over staffing, policy, planning and curriculum development within their schools.*

4.51 In schools in which Aboriginal children are in the minority of the school population, different strategies for Aboriginal involvement will need to be pursued. Those schools with a significant minority Aboriginal population would still benefit from the establishment of Aboriginal school advisory committees which could have some control over the specifically Aboriginal sections of the school program such as selection of staff and curriculum materials for this area. They could also provide advice to the school generally about the needs of Aboriginal children and how the school can respond to those needs. In schools in which Aboriginal children form a small minority of the school population, Aboriginal parents would be best involved in the school as individuals and probably through the existing Parents and Citizens Association structure within the schools.

4.52 The Committee recommends that:

- *State and Territory education authorities encourage the establishment of Aboriginal School Advisory Committees in schools with a significant minority Aboriginal population and these Advisory Committees be given significant powers in relation to the specifically Aboriginal components of the school program as well as providing general advice to the schools about Aboriginal educational needs; and*
- *school principals encourage Aboriginal parents to join Parents and Citizens Associations.*

4.53 Aboriginal people can also be involved in informal ways in the school. An important way of doing this is by arranging informal meetings between school staff and Aboriginal parents. As noted earlier in this chapter, the success of such meetings may only be realised as a result of persistent and sensitive efforts on the part of school staff. An interesting example of this sort of informal involvement of the Aboriginal community in developing the school's policy, occurred at Lajamanu School in the Northern Territory. The policy development exercise was conducted over a period of ten days and culminated in a full planning day when members of council, staff of the school, parents, relations and interested members of the community met to discuss policy aims and objectives. Out of the process of Aboriginal involvement a statement of school policy was developed.³⁷

4.54 Aboriginal people can be involved as resource persons in Aboriginal studies programs in schools. They can be involved as storytellers, dancers and artists as part of programs to present past and contemporary Aboriginal lifestyles. The Committee was informed that often Aboriginal parents were keen to be involved in the sporting activities

of their children and this may be a way of drawing Aboriginal parents into wider activities in the school.

4.55 The Committee has given particular attention to local Aboriginal involvement in education because it attaches great importance to it. Aboriginal education must be related to the desires and needs of particular Aboriginal communities and if this is to be achieved then there must be an integration of schools with the community development directions and needs of each Aboriginal community. Aboriginal community involvement in the policy and planning of the school program, the development of curricula and the staffing of the school are central to the achievement of this process.

EMPLOYMENT OF ABORIGINALS IN SCHOOLS AND EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

4.56 The appointment of Aboriginal teachers, teaching assistants and home/school liaison officers to schools with Aboriginal children is a major means of increasing Aboriginal participation in education. If a process of Aboriginalisation of Aboriginal education is to be achieved, many more Aboriginal people must be employed in schools. To date most Aboriginal people have been employed in schools as teaching assistants and teacher aides and there is a need to significantly upgrade their role and status within the school. There is also an urgent need to employ more Aboriginal people as teachers in schools. The Committee considers these issues in Chapter 14. As well as ensuring that educational programs are delivered by Aboriginal people, they can, as stated earlier, play an important part in promoting wider and more effective participation of the whole Aboriginal community. The Committee considers the recruitment and training of Aboriginal teachers and teaching assistants and the appointment of home/school liaison officers in later chapters of the report.

4.57 The Committee has considered earlier the ways of increasing Aboriginal participation in Aboriginal education through the involvement in decision-making of the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups. It is also essential to increase the numbers of Aboriginal people involved in administration and policy areas of education departments and other authorities concerned with the delivery of education services to Aboriginal people. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs acknowledged that there were still few Aboriginals employed in the policy and program areas of education departments and that this limited the effectiveness of policy-making in Aboriginal education.³⁸

4.58 The Commonwealth Department of Education believed that a number of measures could be taken to increase Aboriginal employment in education departments including:

- (i) departments and other bodies involved in Aboriginal education adopting policies leading to Aboriginalisation of relevant areas of their organisations;
- (ii) provision of relevant training; and
- (iii) making entry requirements to positions more flexible.³⁹

The Department pointed to its own endorsed policy of Aboriginalisation which involved *the identification of positions which should be held by people who have an understanding of Aboriginal culture and/or ability to communicate with Aboriginal people and which set guidelines discriminating in favour of Aboriginal people for selection for these positions.*⁴⁰ The Department of Aboriginal Affairs has identified all its positions in such a manner.

4.59 The Commonwealth Department of Education was also critical of the small number of Department of Aboriginal Affairs' funded positions in Aboriginal education branches in State departments of education which were held by Aboriginals.⁴¹ It suggested

that conditions might be placed on the Department of Aboriginal Affairs' funded positions, in consultation with State departments, to enable an increase in Aboriginal staff.⁴²

4.60 While identification of relevant positions and positive discrimination in favour of Aboriginal people are important strategies in increasing the number of Aboriginals employed in Aboriginal education branches, the shortage of Aboriginal people with relevant qualifications and experience makes it difficult to fill even identified positions. The National Aboriginal Education Committee has suggested the creation of understudy positions for the employment and training of Aboriginal administrators, curriculum development officers and education officers. This would involve periods of on-the-job training interspersed with suitable academic training over a number of years leading to appointment in a senior administrative position.⁴³

4.61 Encouragement also should be given to the increasing number of Aboriginal secondary students to consider professional training or careers in the education field.⁴⁴ Appropriate education programs might need to be developed at the tertiary level for these students.

4.62 The Committee recommends that:

- *Commonwealth, State and Territory governments identify positions in Aboriginal education requiring an understanding of Aboriginal culture and/or an ability to communicate with Aboriginal people, to be predominately filled by Aboriginal people; and*
- *Commonwealth, State and Territory governments create a number of understudy positions in their Aboriginal education branches or units in which Aboriginal people would receive on-the-job and academic training to enable them to acquire the necessary qualifications and experience to assume senior positions in Aboriginal education.*

CONCLUSION

4.63 There have been significant improvements in the last 10 years in the participation of Aboriginals in the development and delivery of Aboriginal education programs at all levels, though much remains to be done.

4.64 Of particular significance has been the creation of a national Aboriginal voice in education through the establishment of the National Aboriginal Education Committee, and through the establishment of State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups to advise State and Territory education departments on Aboriginal education matters. The Committee considers the role of these advisory committees needs to be extended.

4.65 Achievements of Aboriginal participation in education at a local level have probably been less significant. Some regional and local Aboriginal education committees and Aboriginal school councils have been established but the general picture is one of inadequate involvement. The reasons for this are complex including unwillingness of Aboriginal people to become involved, lack of support from schools and teachers for Aboriginals to become involved and a lack of knowledge on the part of Aboriginal parents of the schooling system and how they can be involved. Given the tremendous diversity of Aboriginal society, it is at the local level that Aboriginal self-determination can be most significant. Local Aboriginal involvement will ensure that Aboriginal educational programs are tailored to meet the local community's needs. The Committee has made a number of recommendations and suggestions which will enable a greater local Aboriginal involvement.

4.66 Aboriginal employment in Aboriginal education branches is also limited. Strategies of identification of relevant positions; encouragement of Aboriginal people to be involved in educational administration and provision of appropriate training programs should be developed as ways of increasing Aboriginal involvement in the administration and policy areas of Aboriginal education.

4.67 The totality of the strategy which the Committee has recommended for Aboriginal involvement in Aboriginal education is one of Aboriginalisation of the process of education for Aboriginal people. It is only when this process is complete that one will be able to talk in a meaningful sense of Aboriginal self-determination in education. The Committee considers that further moves towards achieving this aim are urgently required.

Endnotes

- 1 *Labor's Programme for Self-determination*, Aboriginal Affairs Policy 1983, p. 5.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- 3 Transcript of Evidence, pp. 67 and 1556.
- 4 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4191.
- 5 Report of the Working Party on Aboriginal Education, *op.cit.*, pp. 34–35.
- 6 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5389.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 Transcript of Evidence, pp. 3270–73.
- 9 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5335.
- 10 Commonwealth Schools Commission, *Recommendations for 1986*, Canberra, April 1985, p. 6.
- 11 Report of the Working Party on Aboriginal Education, *op.cit.*, p. 35.
- 12 Transcript of Evidence, p. 1416.
- 13 Transcript of Evidence, pp. 3068–69.
- 14 Transcript of Evidence, p. 168.
- 15 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5389.
- 16 H.C. Coombs, *The role of the National Aboriginal Conference*, AGPS, Canberra, 1984, p. 81.
- 17 Transcript of Evidence, p. 3732.
- 18 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4809.
- 19 Report of the Working Party on Aboriginal Education, *op.cit.*, p. 35.
- 20 Transcript of Evidence, p. 1353.
- 21 Transcript of Evidence, p. 3769.
- 22 Transcript of Evidence, pp. 4337–39.
- 23 Transcript of Evidence, pp. 2955–56.
- 24 Transcript of Evidence, p. 3733.
- 25 Transcript of Evidence, pp. 4338–39.
- 26 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4809.
- 27 Hansard Precis, Visit to Moree, 26 June 1985, p.17.
- 28 Application for Registration of a Non-government School, by the Yipirinya School Council Inc., p. 2.
- 29 Transcript of Evidence, pp. 1127–1132 and 2509.
- 30 Transcript of Evidence, p. 1129.
- 31 Transcript of Evidence, p. 2059.
- 32 Transcript of Evidence, p. 1130.
- 33 Transcript of Evidence, pp. 1223–24.
- 34 Transcript of Evidence, p. 1224.
- 35 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5644.
- 36 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4179.
- 37 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5738.
- 38 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4810.
- 39 Transcript of Evidence, p. 231.
- 40 Transcript of Evidence, pp. 297–99.
- 41 Transcript of Evidence, pp. 232–33.
- 42 Transcript of Evidence, p. 234.
- 43 Transcript of Evidence, pp. 162–63.
- 44 Transcript of Evidence, p. 162.

Chapter 5

Early Childhood and Pre-school Education

5.1 The importance of providing early childhood education programs for Aboriginal children was emphasised forcibly to the Committee on its visits to pre-schools, schools and Aboriginal communities. There was a strong belief that early involvement in an appropriate form of education by Aboriginal children would significantly reduce, if not totally eliminate, some of the causes of later schooling difficulties. The Committee shares this belief.

ABORIGINAL PARTICIPATION IN PRE-SCHOOLING

5.2 In the late 1960s the number of Aboriginal children attending pre-schools, while difficult to assess, was certainly low. It was estimated that as few as 2,164 Aboriginal children nationwide were enrolled in pre-school in 1966–67.¹ However, on the basis of the perceived importance of providing early childhood programs for Aboriginal children, Commonwealth and State Governments have provided funding and initiated programs in early childhood education. As a result of these initiatives a recent report by Teasdale and Whitelaw, *Early Childhood Education of Aboriginal Australians*, concluded that:

By 1980 pre-school facilities were available for most Aboriginal children, the State and Federal Governments had accepted a major funding role, parent and community involvement had become an established feature of most pre-schools, and programs increasingly were dovetailing in with the culture and lifestyle of local Aboriginal communities.²

5.3 While this report indicated that pre-school education was available for most Aboriginal children, a more recent report *Early Childhood Services for Aboriginal Children* showed that, as a very rough estimate, only 68 per cent of four year old Aboriginal children were participating in some form of early childhood program (mainly pre-school). For Aboriginal children in remote communities, the Committee's observations are that many are unable to avail themselves of pre-school education.

5.4 Although only limited data is available, it is possible to document the growth of Aboriginal participation in pre-school education since the 1960s in at least some States.

Estimated Enrolments of Aboriginal Pre-School Children

	1966–67*	1981**
Northern Territory	362	908
Victoria	60	112
South Australia	150	350
Western Australia	400	1 766
New South Wales	857	1 200
Queensland	240	1 356
Total:	2 164	5 692

* Source: Tatz and Dunn, *Aborigines and Education*, op.cit., p. 60.

** Source: McConnochie and Teasdale, *Early Childhood Services for Aboriginal children*, op.cit., p. 40.

These figures indicate to the Committee that there is still room for improvement in the participation rate of Aboriginal children in early childhood programs.

THE PROVISION OF PRE-SCHOOL SERVICES

5.5 It has long been acknowledged that the basic responsibility for the provision of pre-school education lies with the State and Northern Territory Governments. Services are therefore delivered by State and Territory education departments and other agencies. In addition, there are a number of non-government organisations involved in pre-schooling and early childhood education for Aboriginals.

ROLE OF THE COMMONWEALTH

5.6 The Commonwealth's entry into the field of early childhood education began in the early 1970s. In October 1974 the Government appointed an Interim Committee pending the establishment of the Children's Commission. This latter body was never established and was superseded in June 1976 by the formation of the Office of Child Care within the Department of Social Security.

The Office of Child Care

5.7 The Office of Child Care has little direct involvement in early childhood education for Aboriginal children. Instead, it is responsible for the operation of the Children's Services Program. The Program provides block grants to the States and the Northern Territory as a contribution to recurrent pre-school costs. The States and Northern Territory are free to allocate the block grant, together with their own funds, according to their own priorities. In addition, the Children's Services Program provides financial help for a range of child care services. These include day care for pre-school aged children, care before or after school or in school holidays, occasional and emergency care, and services for children with special needs.

5.8 Aboriginal children are included as a special needs category under the Children's Services Program, and are thus accorded priority of access to all Commonwealth subsidised day care services. Some of the projects funded under the program are specifically directed to the needs of Aboriginal children and families. Apart from child care, these include courses on nutrition and health, school lunches, transport costs of mothers and children to pre-schools and play groups. The Office of Child Care has also established its own Aboriginal Child Care Unit to liaise with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and other Commonwealth Departments involved in the development and implementation of policy on Aboriginal children's services.

The Department of Aboriginal Affairs

5.9 The Department of Aboriginal Affairs does not have functional responsibility in early childhood education, nor does it directly deliver services in this field. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs provides funds to the States and the Northern Territory and direct grants to organisations for pre-schooling. This funding covers the following areas:

- (a) capital and operating costs of some pre-schools (particularly Aboriginal community-based schools);
- (b) the employment of Aboriginal pre-school assistants;
- (c) the employment of ancillary staff such as cooks and bus drivers;
- (d) in-service training and advisory services for pre-school staff; and
- (e) transport costs in some areas.

THE STATES

QUEENSLAND

5.10 The Queensland Department of Education is the principal provider of pre-school education throughout the State. The Department conducts pre-schools in four Aboriginal and Islander communities: Mornington Island, Aurukun, Cherbourg and Doomadgee. These pre-schools cater primarily for Aboriginal and Islander children. In addition, they run other pre-schools, such as Cunnamulla and Mossman, with a high percentage of Aboriginal and Islander enrolments. The Queensland Education Department receives funding annually from the Federal Government's Children's Services Program of the Office of Child Care and from the State Government. None of the money provided by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs to the Education Department is intended for pre-school education.

5.11 Most Aboriginal children attend pre-schools run by the Department of Community Services (formerly the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Advancement). By 1 January 1987, the Queensland Department of Education will assume full control of these services. The transfer of responsibility for Aboriginal pre-school education was announced in conjunction with the transfer of responsibilities for education in the Torres Strait to the Queensland Department of Education. This issue is discussed in Chapter 6.

5.12 The Creche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland is a voluntary, non-profit, non-government organisation concerned with the care and education of children under the age of five. It is funded by both the Queensland and Commonwealth Governments. Its main role is in the help it gives to local communities to establish and operate their own local non-profit centres and in its distribution of State and Commonwealth funds to affiliated Kindergartens.

5.13 To obtain funding from the Creche and Kindergarten Association for the establishment of a pre-school facility, the initiative must come from the local community. An affiliated Kindergarten must be community controlled, i.e. administered by an elected committee of parents. In addition, the school must have a qualified Kindergarten teacher, follow an approved program, have an approved staff/student ratio, adequate buildings and suitable equipment.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

5.14 Western Australia has a comprehensive pre-school system for Aboriginal children run by the Early Childhood Branch of the State Department of Education. The Department of Community Welfare provides some pre-school services in its day care facilities. Funds for pre-school education for five year olds are provided by Commonwealth and State Governments. For Aboriginal children, additional money for pre-schooling and pre-pre-schooling comes from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs which funds individual programs and services.

5.15 The Western Australian Education Department also provides some early childhood (pre-pre-school) programs which are meant to be the first step in the transition from home into the community and involve children from 2-4 years of age. These programs place a great emphasis on the participation of Aboriginal parents and staff and are aimed at assisting the child to move more easily into an integrated group situation.

5.16 The Aboriginal Pre-School Division of the Education Department also maintains six mobile pre-school units, where teachers travel in four-wheel-drive vehicles out into isolated areas and visit groups of children on stations and in Aboriginal communities. The

Education Department also runs a small bridging program as an alternative form of early childhood education. It is provided to children in their first year of school and represents an attempt to bridge the transition from pre-school to the more formal system of primary education.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

5.17 Pre-school education programs in South Australia are run by both the South Australian Department of Education in Child/Parent Centres or by the Kindergarten Union in pre-school kindergartens. Both organisations are funded by a combination of State funds and Commonwealth money from the Children's Services Program. In addition, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs funds the employment of Aboriginal Assistants in all Department of Education Aboriginal pre-schools.

5.18 The Kindergarten Union establishes and manages kindergartens and appoints and pays the staff. Independent community-run kindergartens are also able to affiliate with the Union. The Education Department's Child/Parent Centres are normally attached to primary schools. Whilst the aims of these Centres are basically the same as those of other pre-schools, the content of the programs offered attempts to reflect the local environment and cultural background of the children.

NEW SOUTH WALES

5.19 Services for Aboriginal pre-school children in New South Wales, as for pre-school children in general, are largely provided by community-based or private groups rather than in Government run facilities. These community/private groups are supported by Government funds (State and Commonwealth) and the process of funding, licensing etc. is carried out by the Department of Youth and Community Services. The Department also administers the funding it receives from the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Office of Child Care and subsidises the whole range of pre-school services for children including the various forms of day care and sessional pre-school. Aboriginal policies and programs are the responsibility of the Special Services Division of the Department of Youth and Community Services.

5.20 In terms of New South Wales funding guidelines, Aboriginals are not specifically considered to be a disadvantaged group. Aboriginal pre-schools and those with a large number of Aboriginal children are able to apply for special assistance in the same way as other disadvantaged groups in the community.

5.21 The New South Wales Education Department establishes schools in areas of need where few (or no) other pre-school services exist. A proportion of Commonwealth Government funding from the Office of Child Care goes to the Department and pre-school funding is supplemented by State money. The Department also receives a grant from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs for Aboriginal education in general.

VICTORIA

5.22 The Health Commission of Victoria via its Pre-school Development Branch, is the main body responsible for pre-school services in Victoria. Aboriginal pre-school children are not, by and large, singled out for special provisions by the Branch. They are expected to participate in existing local pre-school facilities. Aboriginal groups have the same opportunity as other groups in the community for developing their own facility and

receiving a subsidy. The Health Commission of Victoria receives money from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs to administer the Aboriginal Pre-school Assistants' Scheme under which Aboriginal assistants are employed in Victorian pre-schools.

TASMANIA

Responsibility for pre-school education lies exclusively with the State Department of Education. Aboriginal children are fully integrated into existing State pre-schools and no State funds are specifically allocated for Aboriginal education. Cape Barren Island is the only school with a predominately Aboriginal population and it employs a part-time teacher to run a pre-school program.

NORTHERN TERRITORY

5.23 The Northern Territory Department of Education is responsible for funding pre-school education. Pre-schools are attached to primary schools and come under the direction of the local school principal. They are funded through the general allocation to the school to which they are attached.

5.24 The development of pre-schools on Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory represents one of the earliest attempts to develop a pre-school system specifically aimed at the needs of Aboriginal children. Pre-schooling is made available to a high proportion of Aboriginals in the Northern Territory. This may be through either urban pre-schools, mission schools, fringe camp schools, outstation schools or large Aboriginal community schools.

5.25 The Northern Territory Education Department also operates a transition program to assist children to move into Year 1 from pre-school. This program is currently being extended to all schools in the Northern Territory. In addition, the Community Welfare Division of the Department of Community Development offers a number of early childhood services including day care and a 'homemaker program' which has had some success in Aboriginal communities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

BENEFITS OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

5.26 The Committee believes that the major advantage of pre-school education is its potential to foster in Aboriginal children the emergence of educational and other skills that will enhance the probability of their success in subsequent stages of schooling. A satisfactory pre-school program for Aboriginal and Islander children should aim to provide or expose the child to those skills that will be required to progress into the primary school system with as few problems as possible. In a sense, pre-schooling acts as an important bridging program for Aboriginal children as they enter their first year of primary school.

5.27 Mrs Marie Coleman, Special Adviser to the Social Welfare Policy Secretariat, tended to support this argument in her evidence to the Inquiry. When describing the success of the Alberton Centre (S.A.) she noted that:

They are clearly finding that the children who had become used to group programs — to learning in a supportive group setting — are more likely to fit in and to stay in junior primary school once they get into it. So there is a bridging and developing of basic skills exercise which is obviously proving, in a pragmatic sense, to be useful.³

5.28 The sorts of skills which pre-school could give to the child were raised with the Committee at a number of pre-schools throughout the country. The child is able to gain some concept of participation in a group environment. Pre-school also provides an introduction to certain learning skills, i.e. the ability to listen and to concentrate, basic comprehension and the ability to solve problems. The semi-formal learning environment of pre-school exposes the child to some degree to the more formal schooling methods to follow. The child begins to develop an ability with language, i.e. confidence and practice in the use of language. This may be in English and/or an Aboriginal language. Concepts of colour, weight, number, time and space may also be taught at pre-school.

5.29 Many pre-school teachers felt that the most important aspect of pre-schooling was the potential to develop the child's confidence. If the child is able to participate in the range of activities offered at the pre-school his/her interest and enjoyment (and ultimately an expectation of achievement) will lead to an increase in self-esteem. In addition, the socialisation with other children and adults will give the child more confidence. In the field of Aboriginal pre-school education the development of the child's self-esteem and self-confidence depends largely on the extent to which the program is geared towards Aboriginal needs and values.

5.30 Although pre-schooling is a critical area in Aboriginal education, evidence to the Committee indicates that the needs of Aboriginals in pre-schools are not being catered for adequately.

5.31 Firstly, there is the problem that a significant number of Aboriginal children do not have access to a pre-school education. This can be a result of the fact that no pre-school is provided in the community, that there are too few places in the pre-school because of funding restrictions or there are inadequate transport facilities to the pre-schools which do exist. The difficulties with transport accessibility are certainly not confined to remote communities. The Committee found that lack of transport provided difficulties for children attending pre-schools in the cities. For example, some Aboriginal children had difficulties in attending Murawina pre-school in the western suburbs of Sydney because of transport difficulties. Murawina has introduced a mobile pre-school unit to reach those children without transport to the pre-school.

5.32 The Committee considers that the availability and accessibility of pre-schooling for Aboriginal children needs to be significantly improved. While pre-schooling is a responsibility of the State and Territory Governments, it is clear that significant improvement in providing pre-schooling to greater numbers of Aboriginal children will not take place without Commonwealth involvement through the Office of Child Care, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Commonwealth educational authorities.

5.33 The Committee recommends that:

- *funding be provided to make pre-school education available and accessible to all Aboriginal children by providing pre-schools in all communities and by improving transport accessibility to these pre-schools.*

5.34 In catering to Aboriginal needs in the pre-school area there is a second critical consideration. As Mrs Coleman expressed the situation to the Committee, Aboriginal people have often been expected to fit into pre-schooling services for non-Aboriginals.⁴

5.35 Teasdale and Whitelaw supported this argument claiming that early education is still too ethnocentric, being offered to Aboriginal people largely on 'white man's terms'. There have been some programs, funded mainly by the Commonwealth, which have assisted the development of Aboriginal-initiated and Aboriginal-run centres and which provided an appropriate early childhood education for Aboriginals. However, more needs to be done to make early childhood programs relevant to Aboriginal children.

5.36 The importance of recognising a child's Aboriginality is a recurrent theme in this report. The Committee believes that it is equally as important in pre-school as throughout the rest of the educational process. An effective education ought to relate, as closely as possible, and to grow out of the contemporary experiences of the child concerned. This point was discussed in Chapter 2. It would appear that this need can be more readily met in pre-schools with a predominant, or exclusive, Aboriginal enrolment. It is perhaps more difficult to achieve in a pre-school where Aboriginal children constitute a minority group. In this type of pre-school, realisation of the goal would call for the employment of staff who understand the meaning of the child's Aboriginality and who are able to interact with the children accordingly.

5.37 The Committee recommends that:

- *consideration be given to establishing predominately Aboriginal pre-schools where the need exists.*

5.38 At Murawina pre-school the Committee was told that the imposition of fees for attendance at pre-school will result in a notable drop in Aboriginal participation. The impact of Aboriginal poverty and unemployment on Aboriginal educational needs was discussed in Chapter 2. Before any attempt is made to impose fees on Aboriginals for attendance at pre-schools, the Committee urges the relevant authority to give special consideration to the economic situation of Aboriginal parents and the likely adverse effect of such a decision.

5.39 The Committee was told on a number of occasions of the great lack of pre-school resource material with Aboriginal content. In some cases individual pre-school teachers modified existing materials or produced their own for use in the school.

5.40 The Committee recommends that:

- *funding assistance be provided to enable the development of pre-schooling resource material with an Aboriginal content.*

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

5.41 An important way of increasing the Aboriginal content of pre-school programs for Aboriginal children is through the greater involvement of Aboriginal parents in the programs. The urgent need for Aboriginal parents to become more closely associated with the schooling of their children is discussed in Chapter 4. Such involvement is particularly important in the education of young children. Aboriginal participation generally in early childhood programs, as indicated earlier, has been higher than in other areas of schooling. However, from evidence presented to the Committee it appears that there is minimal involvement by significant numbers of Aboriginal parents in the pre-school education of their children, particularly in pre-schools in which Aboriginal children are in the minority.

Factors hindering parental involvement

5.42 It is evident that the reasons for low parental interest are similar at all levels of education. Some brief comment, however, on the pre-school level is warranted. Many Aboriginal parents, particularly those with little or no previous contact with pre-schools (and indeed the entire school system) are inhibited by a sense of cultural exclusion. Throughout the course of the inquiry the opinion that pre-schools were seen by some Aboriginal parents as basically non-Aboriginal institutions, was frequently expressed to the Committee by teachers, teaching assistants, parents and members of local communities. This feeling was particularly strong, although by no means exclusive, in pre-schools where Aboriginal families constituted a minority.

5.43 Related to this sense of exclusion is a feeling amongst Aboriginal parents of a lack of competence when dealing with non-Aboriginal institutions like pre-schools. It is worth noting that this problem exists even in pre-schools which genuinely desire to involve parents. It is difficult to communicate to parents, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, that the pre-school teacher does not necessarily hold the monopoly on the education of the child and that success of the pre-school program depends on the way in which the child relates his or her day-to-day experiences to what is happening in the school.

5.44 It is incorrect to assume that all parents understand the relevance of pre-school to the potential success in subsequent schooling, least of all the importance of child-parent interactions to the emergence and consolidation of child skills. Thus the very real lack of understanding of the relationship between the home and pre-school makes it difficult for parents to allocate priority to involvement in the school. Aboriginals have experienced a long history of being told that schools (including pre-schools) know best and that the parents' major role is to send the children along.

5.45 The problem was addressed by Mrs Clare Skelly, formerly of the Yelangi Pre-school, who noted:

just your basic breaking down of the parents' feelings that the kindergarten is not their area takes a long time. We have found that it is more important to work, to encourage one parent to come in and spend the day.⁵

In order to overcome this Mrs Skelly suggested that there was a need to work on a one to one basis to build up the confidence of the parents and work towards encouraging them to become part of the community.⁶

5.46 For many parents the amount of time that they devote to pre-school education is entirely a matter of priorities. For those who are living in difficult economic circumstances and who must contend with a number of small children, it is very difficult to give the time and emotional energy to a pre-school.

5.47 The physical location of many pre-schools and the distances involved in travelling to them often makes it difficult for many parents to become involved in their children's activities. The Committee notes and supports the efforts of a number of pre-schools throughout Australia which provide buses to bring both children and parents to the pre-schools and has made a recommendation earlier in this chapter that assistance be provided to help with transport to pre-schools.

Value of parental involvement

5.48 The Committee believes that pre-schools provide a good opportunity for involving Aboriginal parents in the education of their children at an early stage in the schooling process. In this regard, the Committee agrees with Mrs Skelly when she says that:

It is better if parents are aware, and if you can develop in them at that level an interest in finding out more about their children, about what is going on in the education system, about what kids do at school and how parents can participate. If you can start that at that level it is going to be so much better for the children, whether they are Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, as they go through school.⁷

In her evidence to the Committee, Mrs Coleman noted that the better early childhood programs have a strong emphasis on involving the mother in particular and the whole family, to the extent feasible, in the pre-school.⁸

5.49 A number of teachers suggested that pre-schools could be made to be less intimidating for parents because of the range of activities they could become involved in, e.g. gardening and maintenance, cooking, cleaning and babysitting. If parental involvement can be achieved at this early level, this constitutes a significant positive step in the education of the child and the attitude of the parents towards schooling. The

potential trend was best explained by Ms Peggy Banff of the Creche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland:

One of the big things that has happened is that parents who have been working in those community kindergartens we find are becoming the liaison people and the leaders in the primary school; it goes on. Parents do not drop their interests. Once they have been at kindergarten they are able, with the confidence gained, to go on into the school areas and give children a bit more help there.⁹

5.50 The Committee reiterates the particular importance of involving Aboriginal parents in pre-schools and recommends that:

- *pre-schools give particular attention to the development of ways of increasing the participation of Aboriginal parents in their activities.*

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

5.51 Health, hygiene and nutrition are considered to be important components of early childhood education for Aboriginals. Pre-schools provide an opportunity to check the child's physical condition and to ensure they are fed nutritious meals at a crucial stage of their physical development. This was stressed by Ms Peggy Banff of the Queensland Creche and Kindergarten Association:

It has always been a concern of our Association that unless a child is physically very healthy, learning is a secondary thing and so we are concerned about the health of all children in whatever kindergartens we are dealing with. In some of the areas we have evidence, particularly in isolated areas and northern areas, where some of the children still are subject to ear and eye troubles and so forth. This does concern us because we think if we are concerned about children, we are concerned about the total child. So we are very concerned that at this very young age when children's health needs to be checked that this must be a prime factor in early childhood education.¹⁰

5.52 This was supported by the submission of the Save the Children Fund (N.S.W. Division) in whose pre-school the children are supplied with nutritious meals and vitamins each day. Hygiene and cleanliness are also taught to the children. At Murrin Bridge pre-school, a nurse visits the school regularly to carry out check-ups on the children. The Save the Children Fund noted that the number of cases of gastro-enteritis, respiratory infections, scurvy and other illnesses associated with poor nutrition and hygiene has been reduced in the areas in which they operate pre-schools.¹¹

5.53 Murawina pre-school is also conscious of the health needs of Aboriginal children attending pre-schools. In re-locating its premises, Murawina is to include medical and dental facilities. The centre will hold nutritional and health programs for members of the local Aboriginal community. If this type of development is encouraged, the pre-school system will be able to perform a much broader role and assist the health and social needs of families and the local community.

5.54 The Committee considers it is essential that health and nutritional support be available to Aboriginal children attending pre-schools. The Committee recommends that:

- *health and nutritional programs be provided to Aboriginal children attending pre-schools.*

TRANSITION TO PRIMARY SCHOOL

5.55 The achievement of the benefits of pre-schooling is by no means automatic but depends on a range of factors. The Committee believes that any positive effects will be short-lived if there is no continuity or bridging process between pre-school and the earlier

stage of primary school; if the interest and involvement of the parents is allowed to wane; if the primary school teacher is not sensitive towards the educational needs of Aboriginal children; and if there is no concentration on the individual learning difficulties of the child. This was underlined by Mrs Skelly when she stated to the Committee that:

. . . a number of parents have said that pre-school had helped the children a lot as they went into grade 1. They have much more confidence in themselves when starting school but as the years in primary school go on, they have more trouble . . . It seems that in the initial year of starting school the children cope well, but after that a lot depends on the education system.¹²

5.56 The rather cautious approach to the ongoing benefits of pre-schooling was mentioned to the Committee in the course of informal discussions with pre-school teachers and was reiterated by Mrs Marie Coleman.¹³ Mrs Coleman described the way in which the Yelkindjeri Children's Centre, Alberton, S.A., sought to pre-empt difficulties in the first year of primary school and thereby prevent their leaving the schooling system in the early stages of the child's formal education. The Yelkindjeri Children's Centre had developed an arrangement with the local junior primary school to have a junior primary school teacher seconded to the Centre to assist with the transition problems of children coming out of the early childhood education program who did not fit easily into the local junior primary school. Mrs Coleman assessed this initiative as being 'a very positive thing in avoiding the breakdown of the kids and their drifting out of the primary system.'¹⁴

5.57 The Committee recommends that:

- *State and Territory education departments and pre-school organisations co-operate to develop transition programs for Aboriginal children moving from pre-school into junior primary school.*

CONCLUSION

5.58 Although participation by Aboriginals in early childhood education is greater than in other areas, it is by no means uniform and, in many areas, only limited facilities exist. *Inadequate consultation with Aboriginal parents and communities has ensured that early childhood programs frequently fail to meet the educational needs of Aboriginal children.* Despite these problems, the Committee believes that pre-school and early childhood programs provide a means of assisting the child's transition to early primary school and of preventing some of the difficulties which arise in the early stages of formal schooling. Because of this belief the Committee urges those involved in the provision of early childhood programs, both State and private, to expand these programs where possible and to take cognisance of the needs of Aboriginal parents and communities.

5.59 The benefits which are obtained through pre-schooling must be built upon in programs at the primary school level. It is to this that the Committee now turns.

Endnotes

- 1 K.R. McConnochie and A. Russell, *Early Childhood Services for Aboriginal Children*, AGPS, Canberra, 1982, p. 32.
- 2 C.R. Teasdale and A.J. Whitelaw, *The Early Childhood Education of Aboriginal Australians*, Australian Council for Educational Research, Victoria, 1981, p. 150.
- 3 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5107.
- 4 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5101.
- 5 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4630.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4635.
- 8 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5103.

- 9 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4568.
- 10 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4572.
- 11 Transcript of Evidence, pp. 3269–3270.
- 12 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4634.
- 13 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5102.
- 14 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5099.

Chapter 6

Primary Schooling

INTRODUCTION

6.1 The Committee believes that primary schooling provides the essential grounding for later educational success. It is in primary school that the child's attitude towards learning and the school are shaped and where the skills which will allow the child to progress through the education system and to participate in the community are acquired. As the Department of Aboriginal Affairs observed, a lack of relevance, motivation or role models at the primary school level can stifle further interest in formal education.¹

6.2 The National Aboriginal Education Committee also stated that:

Primary education must develop a positive self-identity amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, maintain and promote their understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society and provide the basis for a broad education, both academic and social . . . Primary schooling must provide a successful transition to secondary education.²

Mr P. Hughes, the Chairman of the National Aboriginal Education Committee, claimed that most Committee members and the State Consultative Groups believed that 'the biggest need in education at present is in the primary area'.³

6.3 Primary schooling should provide the grounding for students in basic skills which will prepare them for successful later studies. Often the schooling system has failed to provide these skills to Aboriginal children. At primary school there is a particular need for the programs which provide these skills — language programs and curricula which stress the development of literacy and numeracy skills.

6.4 However, these basic skills cannot be taught to all Aboriginal children in a uniform way. The circumstances of Aboriginal children at the primary school level are varied and the *programs developed to teach basic skills must reflect the differences in these circumstances*. Thus the differences between the needs of the majority of Aboriginal children who attend schools in urban and rural areas in which they form a fairly small proportion of the population, and those of the often more traditionally-oriented communities in which the children mostly form a majority of the school population, have to be catered for.

6.5 The often poor socio-economic circumstances of Aboriginal people also have an effect on the primary schooling of their children. The Aboriginal Education Council (N.S.W.) noted that the difficulties in the home conditions of many Aboriginal families, such as *overcrowding and poor facilities for home study*, meant that Aboriginal children were not likely to find their schooling a satisfying experience or to perform well in the classroom.⁴ Aboriginal children can suffer from hearing, nutritional and other health problems which clearly create impediments to effective learning. The geographic isolation of many Aboriginal communities also makes the provision of good schooling facilities and services to them difficult and expensive. *These problems have meant that the schooling provided to some Aboriginal communities has been inferior to that provided to most Australians.*

6.6 A range of programs is operating to assist Aboriginal children in primary schools. To varying degrees, these programs are meeting the differing educational needs of Aboriginal children. The Committee examines these programs and considers ways to improve them and to develop further programs which may be necessary to fill gaps which exist in the current provision.

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY PROGRAMS

6.7 As indicated above, one of the priorities of primary schooling for Aboriginal children must be to improve the standard of literacy in English. Aboriginal people have told the Committee, in submissions and in informal discussions, that they want their children to be able to speak, read and write English. This is because they accept that they live in a society alien to their traditional culture but in which their children must grow up and compete. The evidence from research studies referred to in Chapter 1, is that the standard of literacy in English and numeracy among Aboriginal children generally in schools is such that many would be handicapped in their progress through school and that many are likely to be disadvantaged in their adult lives.⁵ This indicates that schooling is failing to meet the expressed needs of Aboriginal people.

6.8 There are a number of special language and literacy programs being conducted for Aboriginal children. These can be broadly grouped into two: bilingual/bicultural programs and language programs in which English is the language of instruction.

6.9 Bilingual/bicultural programs have been established in a number of schools in traditional areas, particularly in the Northern Territory. Bilingual programs incorporate into the schooling program the Aboriginal child's knowledge of an Aboriginal language as his/her first language. The Aboriginal language and English become the mediums of instruction in a program which is designed to enhance the student's ability to do well in school. Bilingual programs are also, to varying extents, bicultural programs as they incorporate history and culture associated with the mother tongue into the educational program. Bilingual/bicultural education is a very significant development in Aboriginal education and the Committee discusses it in some detail in the next chapter.

6.10 Bilingual education programs cater for only 7–8 per cent of Aboriginal children.⁶ The remainder of Aboriginal children, whatever their language background, are educated in English. There are a number of language programs which are operating for Aboriginal children in non-bilingual schools.

6.11 At the Commonwealth level, work on the development of English language programs for Aboriginal students has been done by the Curriculum Development Centre. These programs include the Leaps and Bounds Program and the English Language and Mathematics Program (N.T.). The Commonwealth Government's decision to re-establish the Curriculum Development Centre within the Schools Commission will ensure that this valuable work continues to be supported. The Curriculum Development Centre responds to requests from State and Territory governments for the development of programs. It is within the Curriculum Development Centre that English language projects with wide application can be developed.

6.12 In the Northern Territory a language program, 'Tracks', has been developed for use in Aboriginal schools. 'Tracks' is primarily a reading program for Aboriginal students learning English as a second language, and is designed to teach literacy in English. Non-bilingual schools in the Northern Territory use the program to teach initial literacy from Year 1, while the program is used in bilingual schools for students who are ready to bridge to English literacy (approximately Year 4).

6.13 According to the Northern Territory Government the program is significant in that it attempts to provide suitable materials for Aboriginal children learning to read English. Other reading programs had often depicted an urban Australian life that was unknown to Aboriginal children. The program has had such wide acceptance that it is being supplied to schools in Western Australia, Queensland and South Australia.⁷ The major problem with the program is the lack of staff with training in the development of curriculum programs in the teaching English as a second language (TESL) area. This has made it

difficult to further develop materials and provide inservice and advisory visits to schools. The lack of teachers qualified in TESL is considered later in this chapter.

6.14 In homeland centre communities in the Northern Territory a curriculum program called the 'School of the Bush' series is used to provide basic literacy and numeracy. The series is based on a teaching technique for second language learners of English. The program was designed to be taught by largely untrained Aboriginal teachers who were selected by the communities. Completion of the program enables a child to achieve a standard approximately equivalent to Year 4 in primary school. It is anticipated that 'School of the Bush' will eventually cover all levels of the primary school.⁸

6.15 Apart from these language programs essentially for Aboriginal children in the traditionally-oriented communities in the Northern Territory, there is also an innovative language project being conducted at Traeger Park Primary School in Alice Springs. The aim of the project is to provide a language-literacy program for urban Aboriginal children. The interest and concentration of children on the use of oral and written language is increased through the production within the school of reading books, which are based on ideas emerging from the acting out of everyday experiences by the children. The project is successful and the Committee was most impressed by it and considers there would be value in extending the teaching technique to other schools with large numbers of Aboriginal children. The school is in the process of extending the technique to other schools with Aboriginal students which have expressed an interest in the program. However, to extend the program to a number of schools will require significant staffing support for the program within Traeger Park School. Although this innovative program has achieved significant success and is being extended to other schools, there still seems to be a lack of awareness of the program in many schools with large numbers of Aboriginal students, including some in the Northern Territory.

6.16 In Queensland the principal language arts program is the Van Leer Language Development Program. This program has been developed for children for whom standard English is a second dialect. It works from acceptance and fostering of the child's non-standard English dialect with the aim of developing the child's competence in standard English. According to the Queensland Department of Education, the program works because it starts with the child and builds on the child's experience, language, ideas and world.⁹ The program is wider than simply a language development program, as it is also concerned to develop concepts and skills which are essential in mathematics, science, social studies and so on.

6.17 Apart from these broader initiatives there are also language programs being developed at a local level by schools, groups of schools and academics. The emphasis of these programs is on the development of language and reading materials which are suited to local needs. The Committee saw examples of these programs on its visits to schools and communities.

6.18 The development of appropriate language programs addresses only one aspect of the problem. A difficulty in meeting the language needs of Aboriginal students, both in bilingual programs and in non-bilingual language programs, is the dearth of teachers with specialist English as a second language training suitable to teach in schools with Aboriginal children. This difficulty has been recognised by the Northern Territory Department of Education which is taking the following steps to ensure that non-Aboriginal teachers of Aboriginal children become specifically qualified in teaching English as a second language:

- Teacher induction and inservice courses will be further developed so that non-Aboriginal teachers are trained as teachers of English as a Second Language;

- Education Officers (language) located in Regional Offices will also be encouraged to become expert in TESL;
- From 1984, in each school which has a large proportion of pupils whose first language is not English, one of the existing promotion positions will be for an ESL specialist. The specialist will act as a TESL resource person and co-ordinate all TESL programs within the school.¹⁰

6.19 The Committee believes that strategies to increase the numbers of teachers with TESL training in schools with Aboriginal students with language difficulties, should be pursued. Given the dearth of appropriately trained people, emphasis should be given to pre-service and in-service training programs in TESL, particularly for teacher trainees undertaking courses which equip them well to teach Aboriginal children. In this regard, the Committee notes that the Schools Commission has recommended, on the advice of its Working Party on Aboriginal Education, that \$2.09m be spent on language and cultural studies programs in 1986 including support for teaching of English as a second language. At this stage the priority should be on training programs, with attention then being given to ensuring that those with appropriate training are employed in schools with Aboriginal students with teaching English as a second language needs.

6.20 To ensure that the English language development needs of Aboriginal children are better met the Committee considers that greater attention needs to be given to non-bilingual language programs and the training and employment of appropriately trained staff to implement these programs.

6.21 The Committee recommends that:

- *funding be provided to ensure the development and introduction of innovative non-bilingual language programs for Aboriginal students and to ensure that those programs which have been established and have demonstrated their success are extended to other schools with Aboriginal students;*
- *more pre-service and in-service training programs in teaching English as a second language be provided for teacher trainees and teachers; and*
- *teachers with English as a second language training be employed in schools with large proportions of Aboriginal students who do not have standard English as their first language to assist the students in developing English language and literacy skills.*

CURRICULUM MATERIALS FOR ABORIGINAL CHILDREN

6.22 Apart from bilingual and non-bilingual language programs, there is a need for the development of more curriculum materials which are relevant to Aboriginal students. It was suggested to the Committee by the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group that irrelevant curriculum had impeded the success of Aboriginal students.¹¹ The Group suggested that curricula could be improved significantly for Aboriginals by having Aboriginal parental involvement in the design and implementation of curricula, basing curricula on local histories and events so they were relevant to students, recognising Aboriginal languages in the curriculum and through the provision of varied and stimulating subjects.¹² This section is concerned with curriculum materials designed specifically to meet the needs of Aboriginal children. The area of Aboriginal studies materials designed for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students is discussed in a separate chapter.

6.23 There are no nationally developed curriculum guidelines and materials for the education of Aboriginals although the Curriculum Development Centre had been working on some curriculum projects in Aboriginal education before its temporary disbandment.

These projects were largely designed as Aboriginal studies materials. The projects included the development of urban Aboriginal culture materials and teacher education for Aboriginal studies.¹³ The decision to re-establish the Curriculum Development Centre could assist in the development of curriculum guidelines and materials for Aboriginal students. The Working Party on Aboriginal Education in the Schools Commission recommended that funding be provided through the Curriculum Development Centre, acting on the advice of the National Aboriginal Education Committee for the support of specific curriculum projects at a national, State and regional level.¹⁴ The Committee supports this recommendation.

6.24 The responsibility for the development of curricula in schools of course rests primarily with State and Territory Governments. Most of the States and Territories have developed curriculum materials suitable for Aboriginal students.

6.25 In relation to the Northern Territory, mention has already been made of the 'Tracks' program and the 'School of the Bush' series in the context of language programs. While 'Tracks' is essentially a reading program, the 'School of the Bush' series provides the full curriculum for Aboriginal children in homeland centres and is designed to develop basic literacy and numeracy skills.

6.26 The Northern Territory Department of Education has identified a need to develop a curriculum for Aboriginal schools which has different and more appropriate strategies through which students will be encouraged and expected to reach the highest possible levels of academic attainments.¹⁵ The development of these curriculum materials is seen by the Northern Territory Department of Education as part of the action necessary to enable Aboriginal students to proceed through schooling and attain levels of achievement the equal of non-Aboriginal students. At the moment, according to the Department, a significant proportion of Aboriginal children proceed through school without achieving functional literacy and numeracy.¹⁶

6.27 An important project, funded jointly by the Northern Territory Department of Education and the Curriculum Development Centre, is the Mathematics in Aboriginal Schools Project. The work on the project was done by Pam Harris, currently Principal at Yuendumu School, and its aim was to describe the 'mathematical world' of traditionally-oriented Aboriginal people as the foundation for the development of programs for teaching mathematics in Aboriginal schools. The conclusion of Pam Harris' research is that Aboriginal children have mathematical skills which are different from those of the Western cultural viewpoint on which school curricula are based. According to Pam Harris, these curricula then are inappropriate for Aboriginal children living in traditionally-oriented communities and there is a need to develop appropriate mathematics curricula for these children.¹⁷ The Committee has emphasised the need for programs which allow Aboriginal students to acquire basic skills in language, literacy and numeracy. The Mathematics in Aboriginal Schools Project is thus an important project in achieving these objectives as far as traditionally-oriented Aboriginal people are concerned, and there should be a development of appropriate teaching methods and curricula as a result of the research which has been undertaken by Pam Harris.

6.28 The Queensland Department of Education has also developed curriculum materials for Aboriginal students. In an effort to improve the mathematics education of Aboriginal children, the Department has developed and introduced the 'Mathematics Program for Schools in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Communities — Years 1–10'. It is in use in 15 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities.

6.29 The Western Australian and South Australian Departments of Education also claimed it was necessary to produce different curriculum materials for Aboriginal children. However, because of the diversity of Aboriginal educational needs these

materials must also be adapted to the particular cultural and social backgrounds of Aboriginal students. In the Pitjantjatjara schools this means the South Australian Government providing specialised bilingual curriculum materials and staff to advise teachers in different teaching techniques. However, in other schools what is required is the adaptation of curricula to provide materials relating to the study of Aboriginal culture.¹⁸ The New South Wales Department of Education's Aboriginal education policy also recognises that the school curriculum should contain an 'Aboriginal perspective'.¹⁹

6.30 The Working Party on Aboriginal Education to the Schools Commission is of the view that a more intense effort in the area of curriculum development needs to be made. It considered that the establishment and operation of specific curriculum units within each State and Territory Education Department was one way of achieving this. It recommended that funding be provided to establish the curriculum units, staffed by two or three officers, for an initial period of three years.²⁰ The Committee supports this recommendation and suggests that emphasis in curriculum development in the primary school area be given to projects which will allow the teaching of basic skills.

6.31 Apart from curriculum materials being developed by national, State and Territory Governments, initiatives in this area are being pursued at the local level by schools, teachers, academics and others. Given the diversity of needs within the Aboriginal community there is particular value in curriculum materials developed at a local level and tailored to meet local needs.

6.32 The Committee encountered examples of these curriculum projects on its visits to schools and communities. Some were new projects while others were adaptations or modifications of existing programs. The Schools Commission's Disadvantaged Schools and Innovation Programs have been sources of financial support to these projects.

6.33 In its Report, the Schools Commission's Working Party on Aboriginal Education has recommended that funding be provided to school-based initiatives in an effort to promote more enjoyable and relevant schooling for Aboriginal students. Among the activities which would contribute to meeting this objective, the Working Party included the adaptation of curriculum in ways to contribute to the maintenance of Aboriginal self-esteem by reflecting the cultural background of Aboriginal students, the improvement of literacy and numeracy, and the involvement of Aboriginal parents and communities in curriculum implementation.²¹

6.34 The value of the development of curriculum materials at a school level is that local Aboriginal people and communities can become involved in the process, ensuring that the materials are relevant to local needs. By being involved in the development of the curriculum, the Aboriginal community will identify more closely with the school.

6.35 The Committee attaches great importance to the development of appropriate curricula which will enable Aboriginal students to achieve greater educational success. The Committee supports the initiatives recommended by the Working Party on Aboriginal Education of the Schools Commission and considers that curriculum projects undertaken should give emphasis to the teaching of language, literacy and numeracy to Aboriginal children.

6.36 The Committee recommends that:

- *support be provided for the development of appropriate curriculum materials which will enable greater Aboriginal educational success, particularly in literacy and numeracy.*

EMPLOYMENT OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN SCHOOLS

6.37 The Committee believes that the employment of more Aboriginal people in schools is a vital way in which the educational outcomes of Aboriginal children can be improved, and it should be a priority in Aboriginal education. The involvement of greater numbers of Aboriginal people in the school is a major way of overcoming the discontinuity which can exist between the school and the Aboriginal community.

6.38 Most Aboriginals currently employed in school are teaching assistants or teacher aides, funded mainly by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and to a lesser extent, State and Territory Governments. The Committee was impressed by the success of the teaching assistant and teacher aide program. The Western Australian Department of Education claimed that the program was a success because it:

- provides an Aboriginal contribution to the school or pre-school programme;
- creates a communication bridge between Aboriginal students and their teachers and between school and home;
- provides a tangible adult model for children in school;
- permits more continuity of staffing;
- provides a valuable resource for the induction of new teachers;
- increases acceptance of the school by the Aboriginal community;
- provides a resource within the schools which can, and does advise on appropriate organisation of classes and groups, and methodology which will enhance learning.²²

6.39 In schools in which Aboriginal children form the majority of the school population, including bilingual schools and homeland centre schools, teaching assistants can undertake significant teaching responsibility in support of non-Aboriginal teachers in the school. This is particularly important in bilingual programs, and in homeland centres which only have a visiting non-Aboriginal teacher approximately once a week. They also provide positive role models with whom students can identify and they can provide a valuable link to the Aboriginal community.

6.40 In schools in which the Aboriginal student population is in the minority, teacher aides provide a vital identification point and role model for students in what can be a difficult social environment for Aboriginal students. The Committee was informed during its visits to such schools, that the presence of Aboriginal teacher aides had made a great difference to the way Aboriginal children responded to school. The teacher aides also can establish a rapport with the Aboriginal community which can increase the acceptance of the school by the community.

6.41 The Committee considers that there should be even greater use made of Aboriginal teaching assistants and teacher aides in schools with Aboriginal students. The Committee strongly supports increased funding being provided to employ more Aboriginal teaching assistants and teacher aides in schools.

6.42 However, there are a number of factors which are limiting the potential effectiveness of teaching assistants and teacher aides. Firstly, there is a lack of definition of the role of teaching assistants and teacher aides which is reflected partly in the differing terms with which State and Territory Governments refer to such personnel, e.g. as 'teaching assistants', 'assistant teachers' and 'teacher aides'. Other factors affecting the effectiveness of these Aboriginal support staff include their salary and employment conditions such as lack of permanency, lack of a career structure and the question of whether funding for teaching assistants should be provided by the Commonwealth or the States. Given the value of the employment of teaching assistants in schools, the Committee believes that these factors limiting their effectiveness should be overcome. The Committee considers ways to overcome these factors in Chapter 14.

6.43 The extensive use of Aboriginal teaching assistants in schools has come about as a result of the small number of trained Aboriginal teachers who are available to teach in schools with Aboriginal students. The employment of Aboriginal teachers in schools achieves all the benefits of the employment of Aboriginal teaching assistants with the great additional benefit that fully qualified Aboriginal teachers will be able to do the teaching in the schools. The teaching assistants and aides currently employed in schools form a large pool of potential Aboriginal teachers. This pool should be tapped more effectively and special assistance provided to allow for teaching assistants to become qualified. The Committee attaches particular importance to the employment of more Aboriginal teachers in schools with Aboriginal students because of the value which employment of more Aboriginal teachers will have in improving the educational attainments of Aboriginal children.

6.44 The importance of having more Aboriginal teachers in schools has been recognised in the wide acceptance of the National Aboriginal Education Committee's target of employing 1,000 Aboriginal teachers in schools by 1990. Every effort should be made to achieve this target. The Committee considers programs to enable the training of Aboriginal people, including teaching assistants, as fully qualified teachers in Chapter 14.

6.45 The employment of Aboriginal people in schools in such roles as home/school liaison officers and counsellors is also important. However, in primary schools where teaching assistants and aides are employed, many of these roles can, and are being, performed by them. There needs to be appropriate recognition of, and recompense to, teaching assistants for undertaking these tasks. The employment of Aboriginal home/school liaison officers and school counsellors is particularly important in secondary schools where there are few teaching assistants and it is discussed in Chapter 9.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

6.46 There has been an important recognition in the last decade of the value of achieving greater parental involvement in the education of their children. This must also be an emphasis in Aboriginal education where the greater involvement of Aboriginal parents in their children's education is one of the key ways in which the schooling system can be made more relevant to Aboriginals. An awareness of, and involvement in, the schooling of their children by Aboriginal parents is essential if Aboriginal children are to succeed at school. Unfortunately, there has generally been little involvement of Aboriginal parents in education.

6.47 As discussed in Chapter 4, the reasons for the lack of involvement are complex. They include an uneasiness on the part of many Aboriginal people about their reception at school. This places an onus on principals and teachers to encourage Aboriginal parents to become involved in the school.

6.48 Another factor referred to by the Aboriginal Education Council (N.S.W.) was that some Aboriginal parents did not provide the encouragement and support to their children necessary for their progress through school because many Aboriginal parents have not had an adequate education themselves and often have negative attitudes towards school. They tend not to encourage their children to stay at school, nor to become involved in their children's education.²³ It is likely that as more Aboriginals gain a benefit from education, that greater involvement in their children's schooling will occur.

6.49 The Committee has outlined in Chapter 4 the success that has been achieved in a number of schools in increasing Aboriginal involvement. It also considered ways of increasing this involvement. These measures include the establishment of Aboriginal school advisory committees, the involvement of Aboriginal parents in school Parents and

Citizens Associations and the encouragement by school principals and teachers of Aboriginal involvement. Once these measures take effect there should be a significant increase in Aboriginal parental involvement in the schooling of Aboriginal children.

THE ROLE OF NON-ABORIGINAL PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS

6.50 While the ideal situation may be to have Aboriginal teachers teaching Aboriginal children, there are currently insufficient Aboriginal teachers to teach other than a small number of Aboriginal children. It is also impractical to expect to have Aboriginal teachers in schools with only very small numbers of Aboriginal students. The majority of Aboriginal children then will be taught by non-Aboriginal teachers for most, if not all, of their schooling. Non-Aboriginal teachers have an important contribution to make to Aboriginal education. It is essential that non-Aboriginal teachers who are to be trained and recruited to teach Aboriginal children, should have an awareness of the special educational needs of these students and be equipped to handle their needs in a sensitive way. The Committee has met many committed and sensitive non-Aboriginal teachers in its visits to schools throughout Australia. The recruitment and training of non-Aboriginal teachers to teach Aboriginal children is considered in Chapter 15.

6.51 The critical role of the principal in schools with significant numbers of Aboriginal children cannot be underemphasised. In those schools where the principal is aware of, and sensitive to, Aboriginal educational needs, the support for Aboriginal education pervades the whole school. In those schools where the principal is unsympathetic towards Aboriginal educational needs, the lack of support is reflected by other teachers in the school and by the lack of progress in Aboriginal education in the school. Even the most supportive State or Territory Aboriginal educational policy or program is difficult to implement in a school with an unsympathetic principal.

6.52 In view of the critical role of the principal in schools with significant Aboriginal enrolments, the New South Wales Government introduced, in 1983, Special Fitness Appointments to certain schools with high Aboriginal enrolments. Teachers-in-Charge and principals in these schools are selected by an interview panel which includes representation from the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group. Whilst regard is given in such appointments to qualifications and experience, 'the overriding requirement for selection is the attitude of the applicant towards Aboriginal people'.²⁴ In the Northern Territory, the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, Feppi, has a major contributory role on promotion recommendation panels for teaching positions in Aboriginal schools.²⁵ The Committee strongly supports Aboriginal involvement in the appointment of people to senior positions, particularly principals, in schools with significant numbers of Aboriginal students.

HEALTH AND NUTRITION PROGRAMS

6.53 The Committee considers that the learning process cannot be divorced from the general health and welfare of the child. If Aboriginal children are to gain benefit from schooling and are to be receptive in the classroom, they need to be healthy and have had sufficient to eat.

6.54 Reference has already been made to the health problems which affect the education of Aboriginal children. Health problems among Aboriginal children were discussed with the Committee throughout the country. Poor nutrition, deafness and eye problems were cited to the Committee as problems often affecting Aboriginal children. The Northern Territory Department of Education referred to the re-emergence of diseases, such as

tuberculosis, which were thought to have been eradicated, as a matter of concern.²⁶ Evidence supports a correlation between poor nutrition in early childhood and impaired physical and mental development. Deafness as a problem affecting Aboriginal children often goes undiagnosed and is often unknown to the teacher. The incidence of these and other diseases has a profound and obvious effect on the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students.

6.55 Reference was made in Chapter 2 to the existence of special hearing equipment in some schools to assist Aboriginal children with hearing problems. In relation to the problem of otitis media, or weeping ear, where hearing aids are of no assistance, the Northern Territory Department of Education has commenced a trial program using FM radio transmitters attached to the teachers, and earphones. The program is running jointly with the National Acoustics Laboratory and is being trialled on Bathurst and Melville Islands. Although no written evaluations have been done yet of the program, the Northern Territory Department of Education claimed that teachers using the equipment say that 'the difference in classroom interaction between the kids and the teachers is remarkable'.²⁷ If the results of the program prove to be favourable, the program could be spread to other places. The Committee believes that such programs are vital in improving Aboriginal education achievements.

6.56 There are some programs being conducted in schools to help overcome the health and nutritional problems which affect Aboriginal children. These include the provision of breakfasts to students in some schools. In one case, at Yuendumu in the Northern Territory, the breakfasts were provided partly at the expense of teachers at the school who recognised that hungry children were not in a fit condition to learn.

6.57 The Committee considers that greater resources need to be devoted to programs in the area of health and nutrition. The Committee welcomes the recommendation of the Schools Commission's Working Party on Aboriginal Education that resources be made available to provide school-based health and nutrition programs to schools with Aboriginal students. The Committee strongly supports this recommendation and considers that such programs are essential if other educational programs are to be successful. This is an area in which the Commonwealth Government should be taking action.

6.58 The Committee recommends that:

- *funding be provided through the Commonwealth Schools Commission, acting on the advice of the National Aboriginal Education Committee, to extend nutritional and health programs to those schools with Aboriginal students in need of such programs and which do not currently possess such programs; and*
- *support be provided for special education programs and equipment to assist Aboriginal children suffering from deafness.*

TUTORIAL SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

6.59 It was suggested to the Committee that there would be value in extending the benefits available under the Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme (ABSEG) to Aboriginal students in primary school. In particular, it was suggested that the sort of tutorial assistance available under ABSEG should be extended to primary school students, especially to upper primary students.²⁸ It was argued that by the time they reach secondary school, some Aboriginal students are having such difficulties in coping with schooling, and have fallen so far behind their non-Aboriginal peers, that no amount of additional benefits or extra tutorial assistance can rectify the situation. It was therefore suggested that additional tutorial assistance and support be provided in the later primary years so that students entered secondary school with sufficient skills to enable them to cope. The South

Australian Government claimed that pilot programs providing tutorial assistance to Aboriginal primary students had met with considerable success.²⁹

6.60 The Committee would not support the extension of allowances, currently available under ABSEG, to parents of Aboriginal children in primary school. The purpose of these allowances is to encourage Aboriginal parents to have their children stay on at secondary school and provide them with financial assistance to enable them to do so. The cost of extending these allowances to primary school students would be enormous, and the potential benefits for students who have to attend school anyway, would not justify the costs. This money would be much better spent in improving the educational programs available at primary school.

6.61 However, the Committee does see benefit in extending the tutorial assistance and the support of Education Officers under ABSEG at least to the two upper years of primary school. This could be done either under the existing ABSEG program or as a separate program, funded by the Schools Commission, and providing additional school-based tutorial assistance for older primary students. As the Commonwealth Department of Education noted, an extension of ABSEG in this way would have significant financial and staffing implications. It also claimed that the benefits would be questionable if it were not also accompanied by an educational program that was designed to meet Aboriginal needs and was taught by teachers sensitive to those needs.³⁰ While the Committee acknowledges the cost involved, it considers that the educational advantages of such an extension would justify the cost. It also agrees that additional tutorial assistance would have to be provided in the context of appropriate language, literacy and other programs which meet Aboriginal educational needs. Recommendations have been made earlier in this chapter for the development of these programs.

6.62 The Committee recommends that:

- *the Minister for Education evaluate alternatives and introduce an effective program to provide tutorial assistance and educational support to students in the last two years of primary school.*

6.63 An anomaly in the payment of ABSEG to Aboriginal students in the State and Territories was also pointed out to the Committee. ABSEG is only paid to students in the years of schooling defined as 'secondary' by the relevant State authorities. As a result, students in Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory receive ABSEG for only five years from Year 8 while students from the other States receive ABSEG for six years from Year 7. The Commonwealth Department of Education claimed the inequity of the situation was particularly evident in border areas. Approximately 5,000 additional students would receive ABSEG and there would need to be significant staffing increases if the anomaly was overcome by providing benefits to all students from the beginning of Year 7.³¹ The Committee believes that the anomaly should be corrected by making ABSEG available to students from Year 7 regardless of whether they are then in 'secondary' school. This matter should be addressed in the context of the review of ABSEG that the Committee recommends in Chapter 9.

ABSENTEEISM

6.64 A particular difficulty in providing effective primary schooling to Aboriginal students is the often high rate of absenteeism. The problem of the high rate of absenteeism among Aboriginal students was raised with the Committee in many of the schools it visited. Attendance rates in some schools with an almost entire Aboriginal school population could be as low as 70 per cent. However, poor attendance rates among Aboriginal children were not confined to schools with majority Aboriginal populations.

The Committee was informed that the absentee rate among Aboriginal students at Moree Primary School was 20 per cent.³² Mr Spring, the Secretary of the Northern Territory Department of Education, claimed that the attendance rate was one of the principal reasons for failure of Aboriginal children to proceed successfully through schools.³³

6.65 The reasons for the high rate of absenteeism are complex. They include a perceived lack of relevance of the schooling program by Aboriginal students who are then not interested in attending school. In some cases the failure to attend school is condoned by Aboriginal parents who recall their own schooling experiences. It is difficult to have children attend school regularly without the active co-operation of parents. Aboriginal people tend to move quite often and this interrupts the schooling of children. In traditional communities the holding of ceremonies and movement to and from homeland centres can disrupt schooling.

6.66 Given the causes of high levels of absenteeism among Aboriginal students, there are a number of ways in which attempts can be made to overcome the problem. The recommendations the Committee has made earlier in this chapter to try to make primary schooling more relevant for Aboriginal children should provide encouragement for children to attend the school more regularly. There also needs to be a degree of flexibility on the part of schools in accommodating within the school system the cultural needs of Aboriginal students such as the holding of ceremonies or the movement to and from their communities to visit relatives. However, it is clear that any attempts to improve Aboriginal attendance rates which do not actively involve Aboriginal parents are bound to fail. The greater involvement of Aboriginal parents in the school and the greater understanding on their part of the value of education for their children should help to ensure that Aboriginal parents encourage their children to attend school. The Committee has discussed ways of involving Aboriginal parents in schooling in Chapter 4.

6.67 The Northern Territory Department of Education, which is very much aware of the problem of the high truancy rate amongst Aboriginal children, has been seeking to develop some positive strategies to reduce this rate. It currently has a pilot project in four schools with large numbers of Aboriginal students and is trying various ways of improving attendance rates. A report will be prepared on the results of this project indicating the successes and failures. The information from the project will be provided to each Aboriginal community council as a way of involving them in assisting with the problem of Aboriginal attendance rates. It is the Northern Territory Department of Education's intention, following the completion of the project and advising the communities of the results, to enforce the compulsory provisions of the Education Act. According to the Northern Territory Department of Education:

You can go so far through encouragement but also people have to realise that they have a responsibility to get their children to school.³⁴

6.68 The Committee considers that there is a need for other departments of education in the States to undertake research into the reasons for high levels of absenteeism among Aboriginal students. As a result of this research the departments of education should develop ways of attempting to improve attendance rates. Any strategies should closely involve Aboriginal communities and parents in participating in assisting the improvement of attendance rates.

TORRES STRAIT ISLAND EDUCATION

6.69 Primary education in the Torres Strait Islands is provided by the Torres Strait Islands School which consists of a central administration and support units located on Thursday Island and 14 outer island school campuses located on 14 of the Torres Strait

Islands. There are also 14 pre-schools located on these islands. The total school population is approximately 800 students of whom 600 are primary school students.³⁵

6.70 The central support unit is funded by the Queensland Department of Education and is staffed by a Principal, Deputy Principal, two advisory teachers and three teacher aides. The unit provides advice and curriculum materials to the outer island schools.

6.71 The 14 outer island schools and pre-schools are controlled by the Queensland Department of Community Services (formerly the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Advancement — DAIA). The schools are staffed by 25 teachers, 19 of whom are unqualified Torres Strait Islander teachers and the other six of whom are qualified teachers seconded for two years.³⁶ The Torres Strait Island teachers undertake a two year training program at the TAFE college in Cairns which qualifies them as assistant teachers.

6.72 The Department of Aboriginal Affairs expressed concern about the quality of education provided to Torres Strait Islander children. The Department claimed:

It is essential to remove the dual State administration structure under which DAIA segregates these reserve communities from mainstream education and thereby perpetuates the provision of sub-standard education and a sense of separation from the rest of Australia.³⁷

The Committee was informed that the Queensland Government had decided that the administration of the Torres Strait Island schools would be transferred from the then Department of Aboriginal and Islander Advancement to the Queensland Department of Education. The Committee strongly supports this decision. At a public hearing in March 1984 the Queensland Department of Education claimed that, if such a transfer of responsibility took place, then a number of significant decisions would need to be made and all those decisions would 'cost a terrific amount of money'.³⁸ For example, the Department would need to staff all the schools with a fully qualified teacher to act as principal and this would mean providing suitable accommodation on eight of the islands currently without appropriate accommodation. Decisions would also need to be made on the future employment of the unqualified Torres Strait Island teachers.

6.73 The Committee has been informed by the Queensland Government that responsibility for education in the Torres Strait Islands will be fully transferred to the Queensland Department of Education by 1 January 1987. The transfer will also include responsibility for the pre-schools in other Aboriginal communities provided by the Department of Community Services. The transfer is being co-ordinated by an inter-departmental committee within the Queensland Government and is being effected progressively. For example, the recruitments, placement and management of teachers for all schools in the Torres Strait and on Aboriginal communities became the responsibility of the Department of Education from 1 January 1985.³⁹

6.74 According to the Queensland Government, its primary concern is for the quality of education provided in the schools and so a program has commenced to staff the schools with appropriate numbers of qualified teachers. This will be done progressively with a qualified principal being appointed to each school by 1987. More mature and experienced staff will be attracted as principals to the schools by effectively 'over-classifying' the schools.⁴⁰

6.75 The Committee is concerned to see that the unqualified Islander teachers have a continuing involvement in the schools. They clearly can make a valuable contribution by being employed as teaching assistants in the schools on the same basis as teaching assistants are employed in other schools in Queensland. They will provide continuing and local cultural understanding that will be invaluable to the qualified teachers who will be teaching in the communities and will assist in the further development of appropriate curricula for the Torres Strait. The Queensland Government has indicated that no Islander person presently employed in the schools should be disadvantaged.⁴¹

6.76 In the longer term, though, these teaching assistants should be provided with the opportunity to become fully qualified teachers. As they have carried the substantial teaching burden in the schools, they can be expected to make the transition to fully qualified teachers quite effectively. The Queensland Government noted that opportunities will exist for suitable Islander teachers to upgrade their qualifications through programs of in-service education.⁴²

6.77 In view of the contribution that the unqualified Torres Strait Islander teachers have made to the Torres Strait Island schools, the Committee recommends that:

- *training programs be developed for the unqualified Torres Strait Island teaching assistants to enable them to become fully qualified teachers.*

6.78 A capital works program is also to be undertaken on the Torres Strait Islands to upgrade facilities on the islands. This includes the provision of adequate teacher accommodation and the upgrading of school facilities. The teacher housing is to be funded from Queensland Government resources, while the provision of classroom facilities will be jointly funded by the State and Commonwealth. The Commonwealth funding is through the Schools Commission's Capital Grants Program for schools with significant Aboriginal enrolments.⁴³ Given the tremendous need in the Torres Strait Islands for upgraded school facilities, the Commonwealth Schools Commission's Capital Grants Program should give attention to funding facilities in the Torres Strait.

CONCLUSIONS

6.79 The Committee has emphasised that primary schooling should provide the grounding for students in basic skills which will prepare them for successful later studies. Generally the schooling system has failed to provide these skills to Aboriginal children although the Committee has pointed to areas where considerable success has been achieved.

6.80 Unfortunately there was little quantitative information on Aboriginal educational attainments in primary schools, although the Committee assessed from its discussions with schools and other qualitative evidence, that Aboriginal children were often not doing well in school. For example, Mr Spring of the Northern Territory Department of Education, claimed that four years ago the proportion of Aboriginal students who proceeded through primary school without achieving functional literacy and numeracy could have been as high as 90 per cent. However, he stated that his impression was that the situation was improving and that it may now be quite common to see a Year 7 class with students who have high attendance rates achieving at Year 7 level, and most students are not more than one or two years behind their urban counterparts.⁴⁴ The Committee referred, in Chapter 1, to the great need for detailed information on Aboriginal educational attainments at all levels of the educational system and recommended that a research study be undertaken to produce this information. This lack of quantitative information about Aboriginal achievement applies particularly in the primary school area and makes the development of appropriate programs difficult. The Committee re-iterates the importance of its recommendation in Chapter 1, particularly in relation to primary schooling.

6.81 At primary school there is a particular need for appropriate curricula which stress the development of literacy and numeracy and additional tutorial assistance to ensure that the other programs are successful. The Committee's report gives attention to strengthening programs to provide basic skills at an early stage of schooling for Aboriginal children.

6.82 But the Committee also believes the teaching needs to take place in an atmosphere which Aboriginal children find comfortable and which does not destroy their identity as Aboriginals. The employment of Aboriginal teachers and teaching assistants in schools will significantly improve the success of the normal schooling system for Aboriginal students. A greater awareness of, and involvement in, schooling by Aboriginal parents and communities will also assist in making the normal schooling system relevant and successful for Aboriginal students. There is also a need for non-Aboriginal teachers who are sensitive to Aboriginal educational needs and who are equipped with the skills necessary to teach Aboriginal children effectively.

6.83 Attention also needs to be paid to programs which address the educational effects of the often poor socio-economic circumstances of Aboriginal children. In particular, the Committee has highlighted the need for more school-based health and nutrition programs. Poor health and poor nutrition can have a dramatic impact on educational success and additional programs to address these problems among Aboriginal students are urgently needed.

6.84 Little will probably be achieved if the programs to cater for the educational needs of Aboriginal students in primary schools are implemented singly, divorced from the other programs which are essential to support them. The value of an integrated approach to the provision of programs is demonstrated by the examples of successful schools for Aboriginal children.

6.85 One example is the Port Augusta Primary School which was visited by the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs in 1983. The Port Augusta Primary School, with substantial additional resources, has developed an integrated program which caters well to the 80 per cent of its students who are Aboriginal. It has breakfast and lunch programs for students who require them, and nursing services are available to students. A 'bridging teacher' is employed to provide special support to students with needs in relation to health, English as a second language, attendance or learning difficulties. Aboriginal Education Workers provide a contact between Aboriginal homes and the school in relation to health, educational or family difficulties. This has helped create a closer relationship between the school and the Aboriginal community. This process has been assisted by the enthusiasm and commitment of the Port Augusta Aboriginal Education Consultative Committee which obtained a significant input into local schools. The school staff has been reviewing the curriculum for Aboriginal students to ensure that it meets their specific social, cultural and educational needs. The success of the school program can also be attributed in significant measure to the dedication of the Principal and teachers of the school and the awareness they have of the importance of meeting the different educational needs of Aboriginal students.

6.86 Reference should also be made to the successful bilingual/bicultural schools in the Northern Territory where significant academic improvements are being achieved. In these schools the combination of a pedagogy which recognises Aboriginality, the involvement of committed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers and teaching assistants, and strong support by the Aboriginal community for the school program has seen a significant improvement in educational outcomes. The Committee considers bilingual/bicultural programs in the next chapter.

6.87 The Committee believes that the allocation of additional resources to develop, in an integrated way, the sorts of programs it has considered in this chapter, should see the success that has been achieved in Port Augusta Primary, the bilingual schools in the Northern Territory, and other schools repeated throughout Australia.

Endnotes

- 1 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4816.
- 2 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4892.
- 3 Transcript of Evidence, pp. 4918–19.
- 4 Transcript of Evidence, p. 1555.
- 5 Bourke and Keeves, *Australian Studies in School Performance*, *op.cit.*, p. 154.
- 6 B.H. Watts, *Aboriginal Futures: A Review of Research and Developments and Related Policies in the Education of Aborigines. A Summary*. ERDC Report No. 33, Canberra, AGPS, 1982, p. 66.
- 7 Transcript of Evidence, p. 3612.
- 8 Transcript of Evidence, p. 3615.
- 9 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4392.
- 10 Transcript of Evidence, p. 3767.
- 11 Transcript of Evidence, p. 1368.
- 12 Transcript of Evidence, pp. 1368–69.
- 13 Curriculum Development Centre, *Annual Report 1982–83*, Canberra, AGPS, 1984, pp. 10–11.
- 14 Report of the Working Party on Aboriginal Education, *op.cit.*, p. 30.
- 15 Transcript of Evidence, p. 3766.
- 16 Transcript of Evidence, p. 3761.
- 17 P. Harris, *Measurement in Tribal Aboriginal Communities*, Northern Territory Department of Education, 1980, xv-xvi.
- 18 Transcript of Evidence, p. 3607.
- 19 N.S.W. Department of Education, *Aboriginal Education Policy*, 1982, p. 6.
- 20 Report of the Working Party on Aboriginal Education, *op.cit.*, p. 30.
- 21 *Ibid.*, pp. 28–29.
- 22 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4043.
- 23 Transcript of Evidence, p. 1556.
- 24 N.S.W. Government Submission, June 1985.
- 25 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5194.
- 26 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5271.
- 27 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5270.
- 28 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4816.
- 29 Transcript of Evidence, p. 3608.
- 30 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4680.
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 Hansard Precis, Visit to Moree, 26 June 1985, p. 1.
- 33 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5212.
- 34 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5231.
- 35 Transcript of Evidence, pp. 4455–56.
- 36 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4368.
- 37 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4818.
- 38 Transcript of Evidence, p. 4457.
- 39 Queensland Government, Supplementary Submission, 7 June 1985, pp. 1–2.
- 40 *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 42 *Ibid.*
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 44 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5217.

Chapter 7

Bilingual/bicultural Education

INTRODUCTION

7.1 A significant number of Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory, South Australia, Western Australia and Queensland speak an Aboriginal language as their first language. Until the 1970s all but a few received their education in schools where English was the language of instruction and where teaching was conducted by non-Aboriginal teachers, often with little or no knowledge of the local Aboriginal language. The aims of schooling were heavily slanted towards the acquisition of European skills and knowledge through European learning styles. The impetus for bilingual education came in late 1972 when the then Prime Minister, the Hon. E.G. Whitlam M.P., announced that the Federal Government would launch a campaign to have Aboriginal children living in Aboriginal communities given their primary education in Aboriginal languages. He indicated that this would be supplemented by the teaching of traditional Aboriginal arts, crafts and skills mostly by Aboriginals themselves.

7.2 Experimental programs were initially introduced in five government schools in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. There are currently 15 government schools in the Northern Territory with bilingual programs in 12 languages.¹ Bilingual programs also operate in a small number of government schools in Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland. A number of Aboriginal independent schools also operate bilingual/bicultural programs including Strelley and Yipirinya Schools.

7.3 According to the Commonwealth Department of Education the definition of bilingual education which is most closely associated with the development of programs in Australia is the working definition formulated by the United States in framing its Bilingual Education Act in 1967:

Bilingual Education is the use of two languages, one of which is English, as mediums of instruction for the same pupil population in a well organized program which encompasses part or all of the curriculum and includes the study of the history and culture associated with the mother tongue. A complete program develops and maintains the children's self-esteem and a legitimate pride in both cultures.²

This approach was approved by the then Commonwealth Minister for Education in 1973, in introducing the bilingual education programs into the Northern Territory.

7.4 As this definition indicates, bilingual programs incorporate history and culture associated with the mother tongue. Thus bilingual programs are, to varying extents, also bicultural programs. Dr Stephen Harris of the Northern Territory Department of Education, has defined bicultural education as:

. . . in its broadest sense . . . the teaching of two ways of life. A bicultural Aboriginal School is one where at all levels the Aboriginal to non-Aboriginal staff ratios, classroom subject content, languages of instruction, teaching styles and sources of decision-making, significantly represent both cultures.³

7.5 The two fundamental principles of a bilingual/bicultural education program then are the incorporation of the language and cultural values of the child and the community into the schooling program with the aim of facilitating educational achievement. In bilingual/bicultural programs, children are taught in their early years of schooling mainly in their first language which, in later years, continues to be used for some time each day as a language of instruction. As the child progresses through primary school, English plays an

increasingly important part until it eventually becomes the main language of instruction. However, the Aboriginal language continues to be recognised and used in the schooling program.

7.6 As with Aboriginal education generally, bilingual education reflects the tensions which exist between the acquisition of knowledge and skills to allow Aboriginal people to live without disadvantage in the wider society on the one hand, and the retention of Aboriginal culture on the other. Much debate about bilingual education has taken place between those who see bilingual education merely as an effective way of developing literacy in English ('transfer' model of bilingual education) and those who see bilingual education as being an important means of maintaining Aboriginal language and culture while also enabling the acquisition of literacy in English (a 'maintenance' model of bilingual education).⁴

ADVANTAGES OF BILINGUAL PROGRAMS

7.7 It was expressed to the Committee that the educational rationale of bilingual education is the simple one of starting with the known and moving to the unknown. The Australian College of Education claimed that education should begin with the child's previous experiences and present knowledge, and his or her particular physical and socio-cultural environment, including the speaking of a particular language as the mother tongue. Teaching should begin with what is known to the child and introduce them to the unknown.⁵

7.8 Bilingual programs thus contain significant educational advantages for Aboriginal children whose first language is not English. A bilingual program implicitly recognises and respects the child's culture and language. In this regard the school becomes 'an agent of cultural continuity rather than discontinuity'.⁶ The school curriculum suddenly becomes more accessible to the child who is operating in a familiar language area and therefore feels more secure. The child's language identifies him with his cultural group. The use of the mother tongue in schooling enhances the self-confidence and self-concept of the young child and improves his educational prospects. To ensure that the full benefits of bilingual education are obtained, the Aboriginal language should continue to be recognised and used throughout the bilingual program. The emphasis then should be on a 'maintenance' model of bilingual education.

7.9 There are sound educational reasons for establishing literacy in the child's first language before developing literacy in English. It breaks the pupil's initial learning tasks into two: first they learn to read and write, then they begin to cope with English. The child only has to tackle one major task at a time, that of learning to read without the added burden of fully learning a new language at the same time. The child understands his mother tongue and therefore what he reads makes sense. Once the child knows how to read he can apply basic reading skills to learn to read in English. The child will also gain a sense of satisfaction, rather than frustration, at being able to read and express himself orally and in writing initially in his first language and later in English.

7.10 There is evidence that bilingual programs are improving the educational outcomes of Aboriginal children. Research at Milingimbi school in the Northern Territory has shown that children involved in the bilingual education program are achieving significantly better than children from the same community who had received their education in English.⁷ The Northern Territory Government also claimed that its evaluations of three of the bilingual programs operating in its schools indicated that academic success in the programs was in some cases dramatic:

... as far as academic performance is concerned, by Year 7 the bilingual students in each of the three schools had taken off and quite markedly left the non-bilingual students behind, and, I think, in 14 tests of maths and English, in each area tested, were all ahead of the non-bilingual schools. The pattern repeated itself and in one or two instances the scores were high enough to be comparable with European schools. That is quite a dramatic result, not across the whole range but in a couple of areas. I do not think that has been achieved anywhere else.⁸

7.11 More recently the Northern Territory Department of Education claimed that the evaluation undertaken to accredit three of its bilingual schools recently had shown the significant results of the programs. From Year 4 onwards the achievement of students in the programs, compared to a control group of 20 non-bilingual schools, dramatically outstripped the achievement of the students in non-bilingual schools. The Northern Territory Department of Education considered that the success of the programs lay not simply in the methodology of bilingual education, but particularly with community support for the school and the significant role of Aboriginal teaching assistants in the schools. The success of the bilingual programs was considered by the Northern Territory Department of Education to be an event of international significance.⁹

7.12 Apart from the academic benefits for children participating in the programs, there are also important social benefits to the adults and the whole community which flow from the programs. Aboriginal teachers and teaching assistants are able to make a major contribution to the education of the community's children when their own language and cultural values are used in the school. Other Aboriginal people also have the opportunity to be employed in the school writing and printing stories, teaching and doing linguistic work for the production of language materials. According to the Northern Territory Government, the non-academic aims of the bilingual programs have been well achieved in the schools evaluated.¹⁰

7.13 Because of the more significant roles assumed by Aboriginal people in the school, non-Aboriginal teachers tend to play a less dominant and more supportive role within the school. Non-Aboriginal teachers in bilingual schools have to achieve a good rapport with the Aboriginal teachers and teaching assistants to make the bilingual program work effectively and so greater effort is made by non-Aboriginal teachers to establish a good working relationship with Aboriginal people working in the school.

DIFFICULTIES WITH BILINGUAL PROGRAMS

7.14 Despite the success of bilingual programs in the Northern Territory in achieving their academic and non-academic objectives, the programs have not been without difficulties. The difficulties fall into three main areas: the extent of administrative and support services provided by the Bilingual Section in the Northern Territory Department of Education; the staffing of the schools; and the production of materials in the literature production centres. To a significant extent many of these difficulties can be overcome by the allocation of additional funding. However, there must also be strong positive support from governments, educational administrators, and bilingual school principals and teachers if the programs are to realise their full potential.

7.15 The difficulties in the Bilingual Section appear to stem from understaffing. According to Ms C. Nicholls, currently the Principal at Lajamanu School in the Northern Territory:

... to really allow Bilingual Education programmes to achieve their full potential, there would need to be a dramatic increase in existing support systems for Bilingual Education. The Bilingual section at P.S.B. are extremely supportive, as is Katherine Regional Office ... however the trouble is THERE ARE JUST NOT ENOUGH OF THEM.¹¹

Ms Nicholls recommended immediate expansion of the Bilingual Section within the Northern Territory Department of Education to support the existing bilingual programs in schools in the Northern Territory.

7.16 In relation to the staffing of bilingual schools a number of difficulties arise. Firstly, the school has to be provided with a Teacher/Linguist to support the program. As they are specially trained staff there can be difficulties in ensuring that all the schools are always supported by a Teacher/Linguist. Because of the specialist nature of the skills required by Teacher/Linguists, the Northern Territory Government provides training for them at the School of Australian Linguistics in Batchelor. However, there are obviously difficulties in ensuring that all 15 bilingual schools are staffed by a Teacher/Linguist all the time. It was pointed out that because bilingual programs are dependent on specialist staff they are vulnerable if the supply of specialists is not maintained.¹²

7.17 Because of the sensitivity and complexity of bilingual programs, difficulties also arise in providing suitable teaching staff to support the programs. The Northern Territory Department of Education referred to the bilingual program as a fragile one which demands a high degree of training of both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff.¹³ A number of teachers working in bilingual schools in the Northern Territory told the Committee that they did not feel adequately qualified or trained to implement the program successfully. The problem in adequately staffing these schools is exacerbated by the generally high teacher turnover rate that is a feature of all schools with large proportions of Aboriginal students. A prime consideration for a successful program is the continuing involvement of committed teachers. According to Colin Bourke, who undertook a research study of bilingual programs in the Northern Territory, the extra funds and resources supplied to bilingual schools can be wasted unless the right teachers are appointed to the schools. Bilingual schools need well-trained teachers who wish to work in a bilingual program and have an understanding and empathy toward people of another culture.¹⁴

7.18 The difficulties in appropriately staffing the bilingual schools emphasise the importance of training and recruiting Aboriginal people as Teacher/Linguists, teachers and teaching assistants to fill these positions. The value of the current involvement of Aboriginal people in the bilingual programs has been referred to above. The increased involvement of Aboriginal people in the programs could overcome some of the problems of obtaining sensitive teaching staff with a continuing commitment to their schools which are affecting the bilingual programs.

7.19 Finally, there are the problems in the production of sufficient materials in the 10 literature production centres supporting the bilingual programs in the Northern Territory. The centres employ a team of specialists, including Aboriginal storytellers, writers and illustrators who write, prepare and print the materials. A wide variety of literature is being developed including basic texts, readers, traditional stories, environmental science programs and bilingual newsletters. However, there is a great need for more literature in local languages so that people who become literate will have literature to read. The production of materials to satisfy the interests of older readers can also be a problem. To overcome these problems more writers and literature production workers need to be employed. In some cases there is a dearth of Aboriginal people literate in their own language to produce materials.

7.20 The difficulties with bilingual programs are not confined to the Northern Territory. The South Australian Department of Education claimed that it was not fully confident about its bilingual/bicultural approach. It was concerned about the future and further development of programs. It considered there was a need for advice about bilingual/bicultural education programs based on Australian and international experience and research. This advice would be best provided at a Commonwealth level.¹⁵

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.21 The evidence available to the Committee is that the achievements of the bilingual program are very significant and promising. The academic performance, particularly in English literacy and numeracy, of students involved in the bilingual programs in the Northern Territory is significantly better than that of students in non-bilingual schools. There has also been substantial achievement of the non-academic goals of the bilingual programs in terms of developing the confidence and self-esteem of students, developing a better understanding of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal society and developing a closer communication between the school and the community. These non-academic goals of course have important effects on the academic achievements of students. Their successful implementation can be expected, in themselves, to improve academic achievement.

7.22 To enable the bilingual programs to achieve all they might, the difficulties which the programs face need to be overcome. Bilingual education is a complex and sophisticated educational program which needs strong support, financially, administratively and philosophically, if it is to be fully successful. This support must be provided to the bilingual programs. Although the prime responsibility for the programs lies with State and Territory governments, the Commonwealth Government should also be supporting these complex and expensive educational programs in consultation with State and Territory governments about the resource support required.

7.23 There is an inadequate understanding in some of the communities with bilingual programs of the aims of those programs. This indicates that the communication between the school and the community has not always been sufficient. The support of the community is critical to the success of any educational program, and is particularly so in the case of bilingual education. Aboriginal communities in whose schools bilingual programs operate should be involved in decision-making about the aims of the programs and how the programs are implemented.

7.24 Given the evident success of bilingual programs in improving the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students involved in the programs, there would be value in extending bilingual education to those communities which request it. Before bilingual education is extended to other communities the achievements, objectives and teaching methods of bilingual education should be explained and a clear indication given by the communities that they want a bilingual education program introduced.

7.25 The Committee recommends that:

- *Commonwealth, State and Territory governments ensure that the bilingual education programs are provided with sufficient administrative and financial resources to enable them to achieve their full potential;*
- *the Aboriginal communities in which bilingual education programs are operating be closely consulted about the aims and implementation of the programs; and*
- *bilingual education programs be extended to other communities which give a clear indication that they want bilingual education to be introduced and where there are sufficient language speakers to justify establishing a bilingual program.*

Endnotes

1 Transcript of Evidence, p. 3592.

2 Transcript of Evidence, p. 273.

3 S. Harris, Traditional Aboriginal Education Strategies and Their Possible Place in a Modern Bicultural School in J. Sherwood (ed), *Aboriginal Education: Issues and Innovations*, Creative Research, Perth, 1982, p. 127.

4 *Ibid*, p. 128.

- 5 Transcript of Evidence, p. 2989.
- 6 B.H. Watts, *Aboriginal Futures, op.cit.*, p. 889.
- 7 K. Gale, D. McClay, M. Christie and S. Harris, Academic Achievement in the Milingimbi Bilingual Education Program. In *TESOL Quarterly*, 15(3), Sept 1981.
- 8 Transcript of Evidence, p. 3552.
- 9 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5244.
- 10 Transcript of Evidence, p. 3552.
- 11 Transcript of Evidence, p. 3810.
- 12 Transcript of Evidence, p. 781.
- 13 Transcript of Evidence, p. 5245.
- 14 C. Bourke, *Aboriginal Bilingual Education: A case study of schools in the Northern Territory and several States*, Aboriginal Research Centre, Monash University, 1980, p. 39.
- 15 Transcript of Evidence, p. 3617.