

National Board of Employment, Education and Training

**Meeting the Educational Needs of
Aboriginal Adolescents**

Commissioned Report No. 35

Howard Groome
Arthur Hamilton

April 1995

Foreword

Over the years, there has been an extraordinary number of reviews and reports produced in the area of Aboriginal Affairs/Aboriginal Education. In the main these have been broad based and essentially concerned with policy and politics with attendant recommendations for policy makers, politicians or managers of programs.

Whilst they have been, and are, useful in their own way, Aboriginal Education now needs publications that are particularly strategic and useful for the schools and teachers who work with Aboriginal students. This publication is a first in this genre.

For many years most of us involved in Aboriginal Education have debated the appropriateness of our programs in the light of the differing needs of Aboriginal students in various parts of the country. We have tried to do this within a framework emanating from our traditional Aboriginal culture and through consultative mechanisms based on this. This approach is still relevant, but we must now acknowledge that time has moved on and a new contemporary culture is emerging. This newly emerging culture can be seen in the environments of both country and city. The report has concerned itself with those Aboriginal adolescents in the middle years of schooling who live in urban areas—the places where most of our students live.

The consultation conducted by the researchers confirmed the emergence of a contemporary culture for Aboriginal adolescents. It confirmed that the policy now in place that emphasises the need for Aboriginal cultural affirmation for Aboriginal students needs to be maintained and developed. However, all students understand that they are individuals who are also participating in a more global world. They are not isolated from their peers, be these Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal. Today's urban students are exposed daily to global information and international influences, particularly those from the United States of America. Although they do have a distinctive sense of identity as Aboriginal people, these adolescents share the aspirations and world-views of their non-Aboriginal peers and have to pass through the same stages of development.

No longer are our students in urban schools totally separate in their Aboriginality or lifestyle as most Aboriginal communities were in the past. They wish their identity to be accommodated within today's wider contemporary society.

This should not be interpreted as an argument for assimilation, for both the students and their wider families remain committed to their Aboriginal heritage. However, it does mean that those of us involved in providing educational services need to develop more integrative processes that can accommodate the range of identities and values in today's contemporary student society.

This publication will be of great use to those willing to accept this challenge. Mr Groome and Mr Hamilton were uniquely qualified researchers for this project. I am sure you will agree that their knowledge and skills are reflected in the report. I was proud to chair the management committee whose own talent, experience and expertise supported that of the researchers. On behalf of all involved, I commend this report to politicians, policy makers and managers, but particularly to schools, teachers and students. The implementation of the action recommended by the report would advance the progress of today's cohort of young Aboriginal students and ensure that they become skilled, aware adults of tomorrow.

Dr Paul Hughes AM
Chair, Management Committee

Despite some notable outcomes in participation and outcomes, Aboriginal youth, in particular, remain poorly serviced by the various education systems in Australia.

Low self esteem, diminished educational opportunities, and a consequential lack of employment prospects, are significant factors in the disproportionately high rate of Aboriginal imprisonment.

*Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody,
National Report, 1991, vol. 2, p. 369.*

If the lives and subjectivities of low-income adolescents are taken seriously, the very boundaries and concerns of public schools must stretch to incorporate that which is central to their lived experiences.

Michelle Fine Framing Dropouts

Contents

Foreword	iii
Acknowledgments	viii
Abstract	ix
Conclusions	xi
Recommendation and Key Objectives	xv
Introduction	xvii
 Chapters	
1 Aboriginal Adolescents in the 90s	1
1.1 Profiles	1
1.2 Aboriginal Adolescents and their Schools	3
2 Constructions of Aboriginal Adolescence	11
2.1 Universal Tasks of Adolescence	11
2.2 The Tasks of Aboriginal Adolescents	12
2.3 Perceptions Held by Aboriginal Adolescents	13
2.4 Gender Issues	14
3 The Worlds of Aboriginal Adolescents	17
3.1 The Wider World	17
3.2 The Family World of Young Aborigines	21
3.3 The Peer World of Young Aborigines	30
3.4 Balancing the Worlds	33
3.5 Issues of Cultural Identity	34
4 Educational Environments and Aboriginal Adolescents	39
4.1 The Physical Environment	40
4.2 The Emotional Environment	43
4.3 Meeting Affective Needs	49
4.4 Behaviour Management Strategies	52
4.5 Transitions	54
5 The Curriculum and Aboriginal Students	57
5.1 Ability	57
5.2 Skills	58
5.3 Pathways and Preferred Subjects	60
5.4 Back to School Programs	63
5.5 Curriculum Support	63
 Appendices	
Appendix A Schools and Centres Visited	65
Appendix B Persons Interviewed in the Course of the Project	67
Appendix C Bibliography	69
Appendix D National Board Publications and Advices 1992–95	73

Acknowledgments

This project has received assistance and support from a wide range of persons. The list of individual students, teachers and parents who contributed can be found at Appendix B.

Assistance was also received from:

- the Ministers of Education in Queensland, New South Wales, Tasmania and South Australia;
- the coordinators of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in these states, and their staff, especially Dr Paul Hughes and his staff in Adelaide, who provided valued practical support;
- the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Education Consultative Committee;
- the Tasmanian Aboriginal Education Council;
- the Aboriginal Education Consultative Committee of the Australian Capital Territory; and
- officers of the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Department of Employment, Education and Training, and the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, who provided statistical and other advice.

Contact was also made with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and the Federation of Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups.

We acknowledge too the assistance we have gained from writers in the fields of adolescence and Aboriginality.

The members of the management committee for the project were:

Dr Paul Hughes

Mr Peter Buckskin

Ms Michelle Fitzgerald

Mr Mark Fryer

Ms Pat Thomson

Dr Eric Willmot

Ms Davina Woods

Abstract

During 1994, surveys were conducted in 22 primary and secondary schools with significant Aboriginal populations, in several Australian states. The purpose of the surveys was to acquire a range of perspectives on the educational needs of Aboriginal adolescents. Information was gathered through unstructured interviews with the young people, their parents and teachers.

The principle findings of the project were as follows.

- The developmental tasks of contemporary Aboriginal young people are identical to those of their non-Aboriginal peers. However, Aboriginal young people have a strong and growing sense of identity which, if recognised and supported by the school, can support high academic achievement.
- Schools in general are not successful in recognising and meeting the needs of their Aboriginal students.
- Schools which are successful, respect and value all of their students as individuals. They communicate with Aboriginal families and create an environment which welcomes and fosters the identity of the young people. They have a curriculum which meets students' needs while making academic demands. The best outcomes can be seen in school communities which have high levels of tolerance and strongly motivated Aboriginal students who frequently persevere to Years 11 and 12.
- Aboriginal students attributed their own success to the strength of the support they received during their schooling from their own families, their mates at school and supportive but demanding teachers.

Conclusions

These conclusions apply to situations in which groups of Aboriginal young people are enrolled in significant numbers in a school. We cannot say that they necessarily apply to Aboriginal students who are isolated from groups of peers.

1. The Developmental Tasks of Contemporary Aboriginal Adolescents

Our discussions with Aboriginal adolescents, their teachers and parents have enabled us to produce a profile of these young people, a profile which both confirms and challenges previous descriptions.

- It is evident that Aboriginal adolescents share with their non-Aboriginal peers the universal developmental tasks of their age group. These include the need to develop a strong sense of personal identity and self esteem.
- This study could find no distinctive Aboriginal way in which they meet and deal with these tasks. To an external observer their lifestyles, world views and interests are indistinguishable from those of their peers, especially peers in the same socio-economic group.
- Aboriginal adolescents do, however, have a distinctive sense of identity as Aboriginal people. The ways in which they experience and express this identity will vary greatly from individual to individual. In early puberty it may be a source of confusion and embarrassment. However, the majority of Aboriginal young people work on this issue positively, their Aboriginal identity becoming a growth area of their lives which they foster and nurture, valued as a source of personal strength and self esteem.
- The Aboriginal young people we met had a sense of identity which they were maintaining as a constant as they sought to construct a personal reality amid the conflicting messages which they were receiving from the wider world, their families, peers and school.
- These young people were asking that all the persons they meet in these worlds, accept and respect them primarily as individuals, not especially as Aboriginal young people.
- They are concerned to see a harmonising between and within these worlds, an escape from the inter-personal, inter-group and inter-racial struggles which bring tension into their lives.
- Aboriginal youth rely heavily on the support they get from other Aboriginal people, especially family members and close peers.

- Most wish to achieve well at school and get a good job. Many want to work in an area in which they can express their identity and use their skills for the purpose of advancing an Australia in which racial barriers are lessened.
- A strong sense of personal identity as an Aboriginal person, if recognised and supported by the school, is supportive of academic endeavour, not oppositional to it.
- Aboriginal young people vary in the degree to which they are prepared to accept racial pressures and cultural dominance in achieving their personal goals. An increasing majority are learning skills to cope effectively with personally devaluing experiences, others conceal their identity from public gaze, some abandon schooling because of these pressures.

2. The Educational Needs of Aboriginal Adolescents

This report confirms existing evidence which indicates that in general, Australian schools are not meeting all the educational needs of Aboriginal adolescents.

We have, however, seen successful practices which lead us to the firm conclusion that any school can effectively meet the educational needs of Aboriginal adolescents. Furthermore, the achieving of this outcome need not be costly or educationally misadventurous, rather the evidence indicates that it benefits all the students in the school.

There is a documented lack of educational achievement of Aboriginal students when measured on levels of attendance, retention and attainment.

This report supplements and amplifies this statistical data. The findings are that schools and teachers in general, in relationship to their Aboriginal students, fail to provide them with the educational experiences which they and their parents desire and expect.

The study found many examples of good practice which indicate that this situation is not immutable and that there are distinct possibilities for success for Aboriginal students.

These possibilities will be maximised when there is a genuine commitment by school leadership teams towards meeting the needs of Aboriginal students by instituting policies, programs and strategies which:

- provide a total school environment, curriculum and resource collection which supports and encourages the developing sense of identity of their Aboriginal students;

- promote positive relationships between staff and these young people, in which all are viewed as individual persons rather than through stereotypes, and the individual needs and aspirations of students are recognised;
- outlaw racial harassment by any persons in the school, with clear guidelines as to how complaints can be lodged;
- establish Aboriginal Studies as a major curriculum area within the school;
- foster effective communication with Aboriginal families, not blaming families for the uneven performance of students without accurate information;
- prevent the placement of Aboriginal students in remedial or non-academic streams without a true assessment of their ability;
- ensure that full consultations are held with parents when any decisions about academic futures are being made;
- recognise and accommodate the fact that poverty or alternative lifestyles can make an impact on the everyday lives of students;
- establish that behaviour management is concerned with developing positive interpersonal behaviours and is sensitive to varying cultural values;
- set high standards in behaviour and achievement and expect all students to meet these, yet still giving 'chances' to those who fail to meet expectations;
- develop innovative structures and teaching strategies in the first year of secondary schooling;
- provide systematic intervention and assistance in basic skills;
- develop imaginative courses and pathways which are serious and rigorous alternatives to those which support tertiary admission;
- ensure that students learn basic life and work skills;
- provide effective and tangible support for Aboriginal staff members; and
- foster the development of strong supportive bonds among Aboriginal students.

In implementing these strategies, schools need to know that they can rely on the active support of senior officers in their system.

Recommendation and Key Objectives

We believe that in order to meet the educational needs of Aboriginal adolescents, a number of objectives must be pursued. The responsibility for this action will lie with a range of organisations and individuals. These include:

- the Commonwealth Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs;
- the Commonwealth Minister for Employment, Education and Training;
- the Commonwealth Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training;
- the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training;
- State and Territory Ministers for Education;
- Directors of Catholic Education;
- National Council of Independent Schools
- systems coordinators of Aboriginal education;
- National Federation of Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups and other affiliated groups;
- Australian Education Union, The Independent Education Union of Australia, and their branches and associated bodies;
- National Tertiary Education Union;
- Principals Associations and Subject Associations, including the Australian Curriculum Studies Association;
- Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee and deans of teacher education faculties;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission; and
- individual teachers, principals, students and families.

To facilitate a wide awareness of these objectives, we recommend that members of the Task Force appointed by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs consider the objectives below as resources to assist them in developing a proposal for a National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Our inquiry convinces us that real progress can be made in achieving these objectives, provided there is a concerned and sustained commitment by all involved.

Key Objectives

To ensure that schools are effective in meeting the educational needs of Aboriginal students, we must:

1. raise the skills of all teachers in dealing with Aboriginal students;
2. recognise and promote the needs of Aboriginal students at every level of education;
3. improve communication between educators at all levels, and Aboriginal families, communities and organisations;
4. develop a number of schools in each state or territory which, by their educational environment, staffing and programs, will attract Aboriginal students;
5. establish or extend Careers or Tertiary Aspirations programs;
6. develop resource materials to assist Aboriginal students in their personal development, especially in the area of identity and self esteem;
7. initiate strategies to recruit more Aboriginal secondary teachers;
8. implement further research to increase the national knowledge base on the educational needs of indigenous students; and
9. use this report as a contribution to the development of National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy Strategic and Operational Plans for the next triennium.

Introduction

This project began with the intention of investigating the educational needs of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adolescents. Regrettably, we met very few of the latter in schools which we visited. Therefore, while we believe that many of the issues we raise are applicable to both groups of students, we feel that the project cannot legitimately claim to represent the needs of Torres Strait Islander students.

Background and Themes

In recent years, there has been a high level of investigation into the needs of adolescents aged between ten and fifteen years. There is now a considerable body of knowledge about this group and the educational strategies which best meet their distinctive needs.

While this information is of value, it fails to recognise the specific needs of the various sub-groups which comprise the adolescent population. The concern of this report is to investigate whether the principles and practices advocated for the group as a whole will also bring benefit to Aboriginal adolescents. Such a study is of especial importance as it is apparent that on several indicators, the majority of Aboriginal adolescents has significantly lower levels of achievement in schools.

In this report, we have been guided by three principles. We have sought to relate our findings to existing knowledge about young people in this age group; to take a national perspective; and to examine the needs of these students as they are perceived by the students themselves, their parents and teachers.

We are concerned in this report to avoid deficit perspectives. Typically, these perspectives have fostered the viewing of Aboriginal adolescents as a problematised special group, and the stereotyping of them on the basis of imagined social, educational or cultural characteristics. These stereotypes, with their associated emphases on assimilation, have long been one of the fundamental blockages to progress in Aboriginal education.

The project has sought to find answers to the following questions.

- What are the developmental and educational needs of urban Aboriginal students between the ages of ten and fifteen?
- How can schools better support them in achieving their needs?
- What outcomes should be expected?

Methods and Protocols

The study is limited to Aboriginal students living in urban settings. In general the needs of this group are distinctive and different from those of young Aborigines living in remote Homelands. The specific and pressing needs of this latter group are worthy of a separate study.

The project was designed as an interpretive study. It is based on unstructured interviews which were conducted with appropriate staff, Aboriginal students, and in some places, parents, in 22 schools in South Australia, Tasmania, Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria. Data was gathered from March to August 1994.

All of the schools visited had significant populations of Aboriginal students, ranging from 7% to 75%. Guidance about schools to be visited was received from Aboriginal Education Coordinators. These officers also provided helpful relevant statistical data and reports.

The schools visited were chosen to represent a range of sizes and locations. Some primary schools were visited but the predominant focus was on secondary schools and colleges. The names of schools visited are listed at Appendix A. Visits to schools lasted for a day or a half day.

Interviews were focussed around the two questions:

- What are the blockages to Aboriginal students succeeding?
- How can these be overcome?

The methods used were chosen to reflect the stress placed on oral communication and interpersonal relationships by Australian indigenous peoples. This was considered to be an important design factor in the light of the numbers of indigenous contributors. The confidentiality of all personal information received has been observed; all those individuals who have contributed to the project have been acknowledged in Appendix B.

In addition to the interview data, written submissions were received from a number of individuals and schools. The names of these persons are shown in Appendix A.

Aboriginal Adolescents in the 90s

Young people form a significant and growing sector of the Australian Aboriginal community. In common with this community, they are predominantly an urban group whose lifestyles are becoming increasingly diverse, socially, culturally and economically. Aboriginal adolescents stand out among their peers as being the one group which consistently gains least from schooling.

1.1 Profiles

A Significant and Growing Group

The 1991 census counted 36 628 Aboriginal young people aged between ten and fifteen¹. In common with the general Australian population, there were more males than females (c1000).

These young people comprised 13.8% of the total Aboriginal population. In comparison, ten to fifteen-year-olds comprised only 8.8% of the total Australian population.

Aboriginal young people form a strongly growing portion of their communities. Based on the 1991 data, there will be 46 267 persons in this cohort in the year 2000. This is an increase of 26%. The same age cohort in the total Australian community will have grown by only 1% in the same period.

These young people are members of a group which will potentially have an increasingly significant role to play in the labour force in future decades.

¹ Census data in the report was provided as customised matrixes by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Adelaide.

Distribution among the States and Territories

Table 1 Distribution of Young Aboriginal People among the States and Territories

State/Territory	Actual	Percentage
Queensland	9 994	27
New South Wales	9 481	26
Western Australia	5 775	16
Northern Territory	5 512	15
South Australia	2 106	6
Victoria	2 094	6
Tasmania	1 419	4
Australian Capital Territory	247	>1
Total	36 628	

Source: ABS Census 1991

A Predominantly Urban Group

Two-thirds of these young people lived in cities and towns with more than 1000 inhabitants; over one quarter lived in the capital cities.

Over the last twenty years, as the Aboriginal population has grown in size and in socio-economic diversity, Aboriginal families have increasingly moved into an extremely wide range of residential locations. The social atlases produced from the 1991 census indicate that while there are still certain suburban areas preferred by Aboriginal families, there are now Aboriginal people living in virtually every statistical division within each major city of Australia.

One result of this is that Aboriginal students are now enrolled in approximately 80% of Australian schools.

1.2 Aboriginal Adolescents and their Schools

It is apparent that when viewed on the indicators of attendance, retention and achievement, the majority of Aboriginal adolescents are not engaging in schooling to the same degree as their non-Aboriginal peers, nor are they gaining maximum benefit from their experiences in school, especially secondary school.

The data in this section have been gathered from a range of sources. While the general trends and patterns can be accepted, the data have to be treated with some caution. They rely on the correct identification of Aboriginal students, either by the young persons themselves, their parents or teachers. For a range of reasons, there are considerable variations in the reliability of identification, between families, schools and states.

1.2.1 Attendance Rates

While national figures are not available, it is apparent from our discussions with educators that attendance rates among Aboriginal students are generally low compared with those of all other students. (Schools in lower socio-economic areas reported low attendance rates among all students.) It can be assumed that a school is achieving success with its Aboriginal students if they are attending at rates which are comparable with the norm.

In South Australia in 1993 (Department of Education and Children's Services), the average attendance rate of Aboriginal students at primary schools was 85.5%, as compared with 93.1% for the total primary school population. This represents an average loss to each Aboriginal student of a day and a half each fortnight. Many have much higher levels; schools talked to us about some students attending for only three days a week.

The secondary figures for the same period were 78.4%, compared with 89.4%. This represents an average loss of over two days each fortnight.

The implications of these figures are that Aboriginal students are likely to lose between two and four years of schooling through absenteeism. Rates for the total population are less than half these.

There are differences between girls and boys. Girls' attendance rates tend overall to be lower than those of boys by 3.6 percentage points.

Attendance rates tend to progressively decline in the secondary years, as indicated in the following table:

Table 2 South Australian Aboriginal Attendance Rates in 1993 (for 2 terms)

Year	Attendance (%)
Five	84
Six	83
Seven	82
Eight	79
Nine	74
Ten	75
Eleven	77
Twelve	84

Source: South Australian Department for Education and Children's Services

The South Australian study found that 10% of students attend schools for less than 50% of the time.

Reasons for Poor Attendance

The reasons for poor attendance by Aboriginal students are varied and are canvassed at length in this current report². The factors include:

- disaffection with school, for a variety of reasons;
- difficulties of supporting students when families are living in poverty—there is frequently a lack of pocket money and/or food needed to send students to school;
- relatively high levels of sickness among Aboriginal people of all ages;
- pressures on students to babysit in single parent families; and
- the high death rate among Aboriginal adults. In large Aboriginal families, deaths occur with frightening frequency. Since attendance at funerals is a recognised social obligation, young people are frequently removed from school to attend. If the funeral is in another part of the state, or interstate, the family may be away for a week or more.

² Attendance is discussed more fully in chapter 3.

Dropouts

In the course of our discussions, we were told that there are significant numbers of school-age Aboriginal students, some as young as ten, who are permanent non-attendees.

It is impossible to state how many young people are in these groups, but there are probably between one and three hundred in each capital city.

These young people pose a continual threat to those who are seeking to maintain regular attendance. Several young people confided in us that they were being regularly lobbied to leave their school by non-attenders.

Patterns of Attendance

Among those Aboriginal young people who do attend school, there are complex patterns of attendance. While the majority maintain a consistent enrolment at one school, there is a significant group (over 15% in the South Australian survey) who move frequently between schools, often with long periods of non-attendance between each enrolment.

It is apparent that the established procedures for enrolment and transfer between schools are not adequate to keep track of a mobile and irregular group of students. While questions of privacy will need to be resolved, it would appear to be essential, if the compulsory aspects of the Education Acts around Australia are to be meaningful, for centralised computerised registers of students on a state-wide, and possibly national basis, to be established. Records of this kind would enable the attendance rates of all students with irregular attendance patterns to be more closely monitored.

Education is premised on the regular sustained attendance of each student. There is a cumulative pattern to learning which is irrevocably broken by absences. Teachers believe that there is a direct correlation between a lack of school skills (especially those of reading) among Aboriginal students and irregular attendance patterns.

In addition, students who move between schools frequently present behaviour problems, being either excessively withdrawn and reluctant to engage with teachers or peers, or they may be aggressively defensive among other students.

We were informed by teachers and students that secondary students who attend school regularly may absent themselves from certain classes during the day. Aboriginal students, and possibly others, choose the lessons which they will attend and those which they will avoid. These choices appear to reflect their appraisal of their relationship with the teacher involved.

1.2.2 Retention Rates

Apparent retention rates of students at school are frequently used to demonstrate educational outcomes. They are, however, especially for Aboriginal students, highly unreliable measures.

When taken on a school basis, they assume that each group of students entering at Years 7 or 8 will remain stable in membership over time. With transfer rates in some schools running at 60% this is not a realistic assumption. State-based figures fail to allow for interstate mobility and the issues of identification already discussed.

The data also fail to indicate achievement. It cannot be assumed that students who have remained at school until Year 12 will gain a satisfactory final certificate, or that those who have left school are intellectually incapable.

For this study, we have taken the national Abstudy data³ as providing one of the most reliable sets of retention figures for Aboriginal students because it is likely to be most free of the problems described above. (It must be noted however that there are some Aboriginal students **not** on Abstudy. The size of this group is impossible to determine.)

The limitations of this data must be noted. It is obvious that in states where numbers are low, small variations in enrolment can lead to considerable fluctuations in percentages.

Having stated the caveats, there are a number of observations which can be made about the data in the tables. (The figures can be taken as reliable indicators of the patterns among similar cohorts within the last five years.)

- Retention rates among girls are significantly higher than those of boys.
- There is a marked fall-off in enrolments beyond Year 10.
- There is marked variation among states in the retention rates of Aboriginal students and their progression into tertiary education.

The differences between the states raise important questions. Some of the differences can be explained by migratory and demographic factors. However, we believe that only in the Northern Territory where 34% of students live in urban situations can these factors be regarded as significant.

³ Abstudy Retention Rates 1993, Data Services Section, Schools and Curriculum Division, Department of Employment, Education and Training.

Table 3 Aboriginal Students on Abstudy Enrolled in Year 8 in 1988, Year 10 in 1990 and Year 12 in 1992

Boys

State/Territory	Year 8 1988	Year 10 1990	Year 12 1992
Queensland	993	856 (86%)	538 (54%)
New South Wales	769	596 (77%)	195 (25%)
Western Australia	579	419 (72%)	87 (15%)
Northern Territory	313	170 (54%)	70 (22%)
South Australia	173	141 (81%)	66 (38%)
Victoria	150	91 (61%)	48 (32%)
Tasmania	95	70 (74%)	34 (36%)
Australian Capital Territory	26	23 (88%)	27 (104%)
Total (Australia)	3098	2366 (76%)	1065 (34%)

Girls

State/Territory	Year 8 1988	Year 10 1990	Year 12 1992
Queensland	881	834 (95%)	473 (54%)
New South Wales	806	627 (78%)	222 (27%)
Western Australia	528	422 (80%)	148 (28%)
Northern Territory	329	193 (62%)	68 (22%)
South Australia	183	191 (104%)	92 (50%)
Victoria	158	119 (75%)	67 (42%)
Tasmania	104	90 (86%)	57 (55%)
Australian Capital Territory	9	11 (122%)	26 (289%)
Total (Australia)	2998	2487 (83%)	1153 (38%)

Source: Abstudy Statistics 1993

Comment

From our observations, we believe that there are several factors which account for the variations in retention between the sexes and between the states.

These will be discussed more fully later, but they include:

- different expectations and pressures regarding work and achievement placed on Aboriginal boys as against those placed on girls;
- significant differences in the ways in which Aboriginal students around Australia construct themselves as students and as Aborigines—these are reflections of the varying ways in which they perceive their worlds and interact with them; and
- differences between the states in the levels of significance vested in Aboriginal education and in the provision of support mechanisms of various kinds.

1.2.3 Achievement Levels

It is extremely difficult to quantify achievement levels among students with any precision. It is generally recognised, however, that Aboriginal students, on the average, do not achieve at the same level as the total secondary population. However, when compared with other students from low socio-economic homes, their performance becomes more normative.

National data indicates that within the ten to fifteen years cohort, an average of 75% of Aboriginal students are working at their expected year levels or above, compared with 83% for the total population⁴. Our research indicates that levels of literacy for the 25% who are working below the norm will be significantly depressed. One country high school found that six Aboriginal students out of fifteen in Year 10 were at least five years behind in English literacy skills. However, in this school it is estimated that one in three of all boys have literacy problems.

The most definitive profiles of the achievement of Aboriginal students in literacy and numeracy can be gained from data collected in states which conduct basic skills testing. The New South Wales Public Report of 1990 (New South Wales Department of School Education) provides information on the performance of all students in Years 3 and 6 in these two areas.

The findings of this report indicated that the average performances of Aboriginal students in both literacy and numeracy were significantly lower than the state average. The median scores for Aboriginal students taken as a group were below or equivalent to those of the lowest 25% of all students.

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics 1993, data provided by the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs.

The report points out that there are many Aboriginal students who do achieve well; on the other hand, it should be noted that this testing is conducted in Years 3 and 6 only. As we have already indicated, there are significant numbers of Aboriginal students already held back below their expected year level because of lack of basic skills.

The data supports our repeated findings, in discussions with teachers, that unacceptable numbers of Aboriginal students enter secondary school lacking formal academic English. Many reasons can be advanced for this situation. They include the low levels of attendance already discussed, problems of mobility, and issues to do with establishing a rapport between Aboriginal learners and the school. These issues will be taken up later in the report.

It is important, however, to see questions of achievement as one aspect of a total pattern of the ways in which students relate to education and schooling, and not just as isolated artefacts.

Constructions of Aboriginal Adolescence

Aboriginal people in Australia today are constructing extremely diverse cultures under the one umbrella of Aboriginality. These cultures reflect the varying histories of individuals and groups, and different aspirations and strategies within contemporary experiences of Aboriginality. The constant background and modifier to this process is the individual experience of racism. Aboriginal adolescents are as fully engaged in this process of cultural construction as their older relatives.

2.1 Universal Tasks of Adolescence

For all young people, adolescence is a period of rapid and often bewildering change. Wexler has described the goal and purpose of this period of life as being to construct a personal identity, to 'become somebody' (Wexler 1992). Essential to this process is the establishment of a strong sense of self esteem. Evers (1992) identified the developmental tasks of young Australian adolescents as being to:

- adjust to profound physical, social, emotional and intellectual changes;
- grow toward independence;
- gain experience in decision making, and in accepting responsibility for these decisions;
- develop a positive self-confidence through achieving success in significant events;
- progressively develop a sense of 'Who I am', and of personal and social values;
- establish their own sexual identity;
- experience social acceptance, and gain affection and support among peers of the same and the opposite sex;
- think in ways which become progressively more abstract and reflective;
- become more aware of the social and political world around them, and gain skill in coping and interacting with that world; and
- establish or maintain relationships with particular adults, who can provide advice and act as role models.

We believe that this list is relevant to Aboriginal students but we would add the task of developing their own cultural identity. It is apparent that the achieving of these tasks by Aboriginal adolescents is made much more difficult by the marginalising pressures of racism.

2.2 The Tasks of Aboriginal Adolescents

We have concluded that there is no predetermined 'Aboriginal path' through adolescence. Our discussions with Aboriginal young people, their parents and teachers have led us to the conclusion that the developmental tasks which they have to master are the same as those of their non-Aboriginal peers. Furthermore, the ways in which they tackle these tasks are highly similar, especially if we compare Aboriginal youth with their peers from the same socio-economic groups. Frequently the lifestyles and cultures which they forge are virtually indistinguishable from those of their peers. We have been impressed by the similarities, rather than differences, between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal young people.

This leads us to the conviction that one of real issues confronting teachers working with Aboriginal young people is to counter the continual press to stereotype them as 'different'.

It is apparent that teachers can hold a wide range of stereotypes of Aboriginal students. These range through viewing them as rogues or non-performers to seeing them as innocent victims. Regardless of the motives of the individual teacher, all stereotyping of Aboriginal students is harmful in that it fails to recognise the individual person and his or her needs.

Aboriginal students themselves are very emphatic that they don't want to be treated as different, or to get special treatment.

Aboriginal students are seeking respect as unique individuals. Some are asking for respect of their distinct cultural identity. Most believe that the things they have in common with other students are significant and worthy of emphasis.

It is significant that one of the most successful schools for Aboriginal students had a deliberate policy of not doing anything different for these students; the staff simply sought to affirm the cultural identities of **all** the students in the school.

Where difference does exist, it is usually created within the school by inequitable treatment of Aboriginal people and other minority groups at the institutional and personal level, or by the condoning of racial harassment and vilification.

We do not deny that Aboriginality exists as a definite sense of identity among these young people. Virtually all of the students we spoke to had a keen sense of pride in being Aboriginal; they saw this as a positive extra

dimension to their lives. It was important to them to ‘know who they were and where they came from’. For some there was a distinctive spiritual dimension to this sense of being Aboriginal. (This issue is discussed more fully in section 3.5.)

Both adolescence and Aboriginality can be viewed as social constructs (Cormack 1992). In this report we examine the ways in which both these constructs are formed; the key influences which bear on the lives of Aboriginal young people, and the ways in which they perceive and respond to them as they seek to create themselves as adolescents and Aborigines.

At the very heart [of education for adolescents] is the development of clear self concept and positive self esteem. These represent the central feature of the human personality [bringing] together the physical, social and cognitive characteristics into a sense of identity, adequacy and affirmation. And from the sense of self springs a myriad of variables such as behaviour, perceptions of others and motivation.

James Beane *When the Kids Come First*

2.3 Perceptions Held by Aboriginal Adolescents

Resistance models have been used in other settings, notably the United States, to explore the schooling experiences of minority groups (Ogbu 1987). While there is strong evidence of varying forms of resistance among Aboriginal young people, we feel that these models fail to fully reflect the Aboriginal adolescent experience.

We believe that a more helpful way of examining these processes is that advocated by Wexler. He suggests that in the process of maturing and ‘becoming somebody’, young adolescents look to significant others in their lives to provide support and assistance in developing their identity, self esteem and opportunities to succeed. These significant others are family members, teachers and peers.

The perceptions which these young people have of the significant others in their lives, and the relationships which they develop with them, become important determinants of the choices they make and therefore their life history.

We are seeking to capture in this report the ways in which perceptions held by young Aboriginal adolescents determine their responses to education and the implications of this for educators.

2.4 Gender Issues

There can be no definitive answer to the question of whether school is harder for Aboriginal girls or boys. The answer will vary from setting to setting and cohort to cohort.

The overall higher levels of success in school of Aboriginal girls reflect the generally strong position of Aboriginal women in the community.

However, girls themselves frequently spoke about the fragility of their lives⁵. They felt their self esteem and self-confidence were always at risk, that Aboriginal girls needed programs to help overcome low self esteem. They felt that when they succeed, their success heightens feelings of failure among other family members, especially males. This can sometimes lead to active resentment and harassment.

Pregnancies among school age Aboriginal girls are not uncommon. Some schools handle this sensitively. Recognising these Aboriginal teenage mothers as an especially vulnerable and needy group, they allow them to continue at school as long as they wish and then facilitate their return (sometimes with child) when they are ready. One of these girls commented as she returned to school, 'I have nowhere else to go and I can't read'.

Secondary schools may need to consider whether they should provide a creche, or be directly linked with a creche or childcare facility. The provision of childcare courses is an associated need.

There was concern among Aboriginal women about the low levels of self esteem among Aboriginal girls. In one country town, we saw a successful program designed to build up the confidence of girls. The Aboriginal woman who runs this program assists them to learn about careers beyond the locality, and provides them with a range of personal skills which enable them to pursue job opportunities with confidence.

Some girls told us they felt that teachers had higher expectations of them and if they 'played up' they got into more trouble than the boys. An alternative view was that Aboriginal boys were targeted and Aboriginal girls were not mentioned as trouble makers.

⁵ For a comprehensive discussion of issues facing Aboriginal girls, see *Teaching Aboriginal Girls*, Conference Papers 1993, South Australian Education of Girls and Female Students Association, Adelaide.

Teachers commented that in most schools there was a history of groups of Aboriginal girls who had successfully supported themselves through to senior levels.

Boys were viewed as being more interested in sport than academic achievement; they were seen as generally being more aggressive and having a short fuse when provoked. Teachers felt that boys tended to do the minimum work required and even then under protest. Aboriginal girls tended to aim higher.

Some boys shared with us the conflict they felt between their roles at home and school. In their homes, they may be the only senior male and carry significant responsibility. At school, they are treated as children. Girls may face similar situations but they appear to handle the pressures more effectively.

The Worlds of Aboriginal Adolescents

Aboriginal adolescents, in common with all Australian young people, construct their lives and their identities in the intersections of four worlds:

- the wider world of community and nation;
- their family;
- the peer group; and
- the school.

The issue for Aboriginal young people is that these worlds are rarely congruent and harmonious. Frequently there are tensions and borders between each one; these are created and sustained by racism and the legacy of different histories and worldviews. The school can play a key role as offering a place where Aboriginal young people can make a meaningful personal construction of their lives.

Within these worlds, they have to choose the attitudes and behaviours which will most strongly contribute to their growth as 'somebody'. These choices are far from easy. Frequently the climates in which they are made are far from neutral or harmonious. Often there will be major tensions between the worlds themselves and between key persons in each of the worlds. Young people are frequently caught up in these struggles, being called on to make allegiances which they may not desire for themselves.

There is a wide range of responses available to them. We have been strongly impressed by the variety and difference we have encountered between individual Aboriginal adolescents. Each life reflects diversities in social setting, family and cultural styles, school and educational experiences, peer influences, and varying experiences of racial, sexual, and class-based encounters.

3.1 The Wider World

Eyers identifies one of the developmental tasks of adolescents as being to become more aware of the social and political world around them, and to gain skills in coping with and interacting with that world. This is a task for Aboriginal adolescents, but an increasing awareness can be a disillusioning experience for them as they become more acutely aware of the marginalised

position which they and their people hold within Australian society. They also find that often the skills which they develop to cope and interact with the wider world may be viewed by that world as being inadequate or anti-social.

Phillipa

For the first twelve years of her life Phillipa was unaware of her Aboriginal ancestry. Nothing in her features would suggest her background. When she found out about her background she was thrilled and shared the news with her friends. They promptly cut her dead. She was left off party invitations and generally made an outcast.

She believes too that some teachers began to treat her differently—she was ignored in class when she put her hand up to answer a question.

Unexpectedly Phillipa's school was closed. She relocated to a new one with a significant number of Aboriginal students. Here she was welcomed as a cousin and began slowly to build a sense of pride and confidence in her Aboriginality. At first she had been scared of what it could mean to be Aboriginal, now she feels extremely positive about her identity.

Daily Life

Each Australian state, each city, town, and locality has its distinctive patterns of relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal inhabitants. These are the product of the history of race relationships in the area, and the personal and corporate relationships being forged in the present.

It cannot be emphasised too strongly how important community relationships, and their perceptions of them, are to the lives of developing Aboriginal adolescents.

Most non-Aboriginal Australians are unaware of the racism which Aboriginal people meet with on a regular basis. Regular verbal, and occasionally physical harassment is an accepted part of life for Aboriginal people in most areas of Australia. It is a reality which Aboriginal young people have to come to terms with. Some do this positively, others negatively. The harassment may not always be active, it may be the snubbing that takes place at the ticket window, in the queue, on the bus—the 'shame' of being singled out.

Racism based on colour can be selective. Several teachers, probably without realising how they were revealing their prejudices, made comparisons between Aboriginal and Pacific Islander students. They tended to denigrate the former because they failed to display the personality characteristics of the Islanders which were admired by the speakers.

In encounters of this nature, Aboriginal adolescents receive messages that they and their communities are not valued, that they are despised and irrelevant to life in Australia.

These negative messages can have a powerful effect. We have heard of young adolescents who became phobic about going out of their homes. There are authentic accounts of young Aboriginal girls desperately washing themselves with bleach in order to 'whiten' a skin which was only faintly darker than average. Others, such as a successful senior student who we met, try to 'pass', denying their identity, seeing it as a blockage to success. Sally Morgan has documented in *My Place* how her family strove to preserve her from the shame of being identified as Aboriginal.

In most Aboriginal homes, children are socialised into ways of coping with the negative messages from the non-Aboriginal world. There is a variety of responses which are inculcated, but two broad approaches can be identified. The first encourages the young people to 'give as good as they get' and to challenge all threats to them. The second seeks to develop skills of avoiding, ignoring or deflecting the attack.

Influence of the Media

The Australian media is rarely successful in portraying positive images of Aboriginal people. Langton (1993) talks of 'the familiar stereotypes and the constant stereotyping, iconising and mythologising of Aboriginal people by white people'. Television programs that feature Aboriginal people tend to be documentary or news productions such as *Blackout*. Aboriginal people are rarely found in serials or dramas. The marginality of Aboriginal people in the media is heightened by the numbers of Black American programs which are screened; these tend to reinforce a view that Aboriginal cultures are not valid Black cultures. When Aboriginal people are depicted on radio and in the print media, they are frequently portrayed in negative ways.

We spoke to several Aboriginal young people who were distressed by this continual demeaning of their culture, their families and ultimately themselves, by these negative media images.

Relationships with the Police

Australian police have been consistently employed by governments in carrying out the harshest measures against Aboriginal people.

This has historically ranged through experiences of warfare, 'protection' and criminalisation. While the details may vary from area to area, there is a continuing pattern of exceptionally high levels of arrest and imprisonment which has resulted in an ongoing legacy of fear and mistrust on both sides.

Cuneen (1994) quotes research which shows that throughout Australia, Aboriginal young people are more likely to be involved with the police than non-Aboriginals or Aboriginal adults. When apprehended, they are far less likely to be let off with a caution, far more likely to be arrested and charged, and far less likely to be allowed bail.

A number of schools with significant Aboriginal populations have developed programs aimed at overcoming these problems. These have typically taken the form of camps and other activities run in conjunction with local police officers and other community groups.

Country Towns⁶

Australian adolescents living in rural centres face a unique set of issues. As a sub-set within this group, Aboriginal adolescents share the same problems, with greater or lesser emphasis, depending on the location. They also face distinctive problems which are caused by racial attitudes.

Within most country communities, there is a distinct social hierarchy. Aboriginal families are commonly placed at the bottom of this structure. There is a social and geographical segregation which has been created by the fact that the only work opportunities available to Aboriginal people have been semi-skilled, and that Aboriginal families have historically lived in camps and fringe communities on the edges of towns.

This segregation has been echoed in schools until very recent times. Several states had, until comparatively recently, policies of not allowing Aboriginal children to attend country schools if the local whites protested. Schools which did admit Aboriginal students usually practised a strict physical segregation in classrooms. Both these practices, which highlight more obvious forms of institutional racism, occurred within the memory of many of the parents of today's adolescents.

⁶ A good description of life for Aboriginal people in a country town can be found in Cowlshaw, G. 1988, *Black, White and Brindle: Race in Rural Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Among white community members there is frequently an expectation that Aboriginal people will maintain their subservient position. Within country Aboriginal communities too, there can be powerful forces of resistance to any person, adult or adolescent who shows enterprise and ability.

These social settings place significant pressures on schools. One country school we visited had been criticised by non-Aboriginal parents for being 'too Aboriginal'. Some parents had withdrawn their children from the school because it 'favoured' Aboriginal students.

Throughout rural Australia at this present time employment opportunities are very limited. For Aboriginal young people, there are particular problems of gaining work which are related to racism. In country towns, Aboriginal young people, irrespective of their academic ability and personal presentation, very rarely gain work in private enterprise. Some country schools have been unable to place Aboriginal students in work experience.

Aboriginal young people in these settings generally share with their peers in having low expectations of success. Thus, despite the lack of employment and even sporting opportunities locally, there is little drive to leave the home town. There is suspicion and fear of the city among parents and a reluctance to allow their young people to leave home—even though they know that there are few local opportunities and that they are bored.

Some rural Aboriginal communities may lack a strong sense of corporate identity. This is due to the legacy of colonial and bureaucratic intervention in their lives over decades. They can be comprised of people drawn from different traditional groupings forced together by government decree. The ties between these groups are often strained. Their sense of identity can be a reaction to the town's negative perceptions of them.

There are, however, numbers of rural Aboriginal communities which share a common ancestry and heritage. These groups are frequently very focussed on achieving the best possible outcomes for their young people. They can enjoy considerable influence over education. They often enjoy the contributions of elders who act as counsellors and role models for the young. Because of their coherence as a group, they are able to interact very effectively with the local schools and command a great deal of respect by the contributions they make.

3.2 The Family World of Young Aborigines

The 1991 census painted the following picture of the families of Aboriginal adolescents aged between ten and fifteen.

- One third (37%) live in single parent households (12.6%)⁷
- The typical size of these households is 4.6 persons (2.6)
- In one third (36%) of these homes, the family members are joined by other extended family members (1.5%)

The statistics reveal some general characteristics of contemporary Aboriginal families. However, it is not safe to generalise about lifestyles based on this data. It is apparent from the total picture provided by the census, that contemporary Aboriginal families are following an extremely wide range of lifestyles and patterns of living⁸.

Thus, while a significant number of families are headed by a single parent (frequently with the mother as head), the majority of Aboriginal families have two parents. Similarly, while there are numbers of compound families, with family members beyond the immediate family living under the same roof on a permanent or temporary basis, the majority of Aboriginal families live as a single family unit.

The increasing diversity of lifestyles among Aboriginal families is a comparatively recent phenomenon. It has occurred as some families have escaped from poverty, and as others have moved away from traditional enclaves of Aboriginal living.

These changing patterns in themselves may create problems for young people. Families who escape from poverty can experience alienation from their communities; this can be stressful for young people who are concerned to maintain family and community links.

Among some families there has been a weakening of traditional networks. This situation has affected the lives of some young people. They may grow up in settings lacking the coherence and meaning which comes when older relatives and elders are available as sources of information, wisdom, discipline and comfort. Many Aboriginal families today feel the challenge to maintain family links as a contribution to the growth of identity for their young people.

Any discussion of Aboriginal families today must acknowledge the ways in which their predecessors were subjugated by successive state and territory governments in the name of policies of protection and assimilation. From the

⁷ The figures in brackets indicate national equivalents.

⁸ A lengthy discussion can be found in Eckermann et al. 1992, *Binang Goonj; Bridging Cultures in Aboriginal Health*, University of New England Press, Armidale.

first days of colonisation until comparatively recently, Aboriginal people have not been recognised as citizens of Australia with the freedoms and rights enjoyed by other Australians (Bourke et al. 1994).

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the majority of Aboriginal families who came into contact with whites were compelled to live highly regulated and controlled lives on government and church controlled missions and reserves. The non-Aboriginal managers of these institutions enjoyed unlimited control over their movements, their earnings and their daily lives⁹.

A major aspect of this situation, which has a significant relevance to this study, is the way in which these families lost control over the lives of their children to white educators and administrators. Thousands of Aboriginal children throughout Australia were removed from their parents and placed in foster homes and institutions (Read 1982). Many more who remained with their families were, in their schools, systematically deprived of their mother tongues and cultural values and 'civilised and Christianised' into mainstream language and values (Groome 1994).

The results of these destructive processes can be seen in the lives of the families of today's adolescents. The poverty, stress, mistrust of whites and ambivalence about education which are commonly reported have their roots in the ways in which Aboriginal people have been treated over the past 150 years¹⁰.

Poverty

In her study on Aboriginal poverty, Choo (1990) claims that:

the Aboriginal community as a whole is relatively and absolutely more impoverished than the non-Aboriginal community; almost all Aboriginals have experienced poverty themselves or know someone who lives in poverty, however this is defined.

The 1991 census found the following total family income levels among Aboriginal families who gave information on this aspect of their lives. (It must be remembered that on average, Aboriginal families have almost twice as many members as do non-Aboriginal ones.)

- 60% of single parent families received less than \$20 000 p.a. (43%)¹¹
- 51% of two parent families received less than \$30 000 p.a. (20%)

⁹ A detailed description of this process can be found in Attwood, B. 1989, *The Making of the Aborigines*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

¹⁰ The study of Aboriginal social health in Adelaide, Radford et al. 1990, *Taking Control*, Department of Primary Health Care, Flinders University, Adelaide, provides examples.

¹¹ The figures in brackets indicate national equivalents.

Poverty has direct effects on education. Single income families frequently find it hard to maintain the resources of cash and food needed to send a child to school. Children, especially adolescents, can feel acutely the stigma associated with poverty, particularly when it affects their ability to live up to peer expectations, especially in areas such as leisure pursuits and clothing.

Secondary-age students living in homes affected by poverty also lack other advantages of those living in more affluence. Patterns of daily life may not be congruent with those expected by schools. It may not be easy to find the time and privacy needed for homework. The early beginnings to the day might not be shared by other family members.

Parents and caregivers, who have not known extended schooling themselves, may find it hard to appreciate the rigorous and persistent homework regimes of modern secondary education.

In extreme cases, parents in poverty lack control over their own lives and make choices about the use of the limited funds available which may not benefit the children in the family who suffer inadequate care.

The crippling levels of poverty experienced by most Aboriginal families provide powerful justification for the various study support schemes made available by the federal Government.

Health

There is a direct correlation between poverty, health and education. The most obvious connections involve dietary and sleep patterns in homes with inadequate income and relatively high numbers of occupants.

There are a number of health-related issues in the lives of Aboriginal adolescents. These issues are discussed very fully in Brady (1991).

The incidence of pregnancy among Aboriginal girls tends to be higher than among non-Aboriginals. These reasons for this are not clear. These pregnancies and the subsequent births can be associated with medical complications. Brady notes that these pregnancies may be closely related to premature school leaving and a general lack of purpose in life.

The endemic hearing loss among Aboriginal students is also strongly linked with poverty. While incidence varies between localities, the data indicates that in most urban settings, a minimum of 20% of Aboriginal students will be suffering marked hearing loss due to otitis media (infection of the middle ear).

The reasons for this high incidence are not yet established. There appear to be hereditary factors associated with generations of living in poverty which are exacerbated by the patterns of infection and disease of the current sufferer.

The fluctuating nature of this loss makes the problem all the more difficult for teachers. It has also been observed that students frequently feel embarrassed about suffering from hearing loss and try to minimise or disregard their problems.

Problems with hearing are one of the major causes of low performance in language skills among Aboriginal children and can also be related to behavioural issues.

Students with hearing loss frequently fail to hear the teacher or their peers clearly. As a result they are liable to interpret messages wrongly. They are likely to be handicapped in their linguistic development. As they often miss needed verbal reinforcement from teachers or peers, they can also be handicapped in their social development.

It is apparent that Aboriginal young people use drugs and alcohol. It is doubtful whether they use them more than other comparable groups of teenagers. Parents we spoke to were deeply concerned about this aspect of their children's lives and were actively engaged in developing substance abuse programs of various kinds.

Stress

Families living in poverty are typically characterised by a range of stress factors. Some of these are statistically visible, others are less tangible.

The high level of contact with police has been reported by Aboriginal families as being a major source of stress in their lives (Brady 1991).

There are high levels of stress within some Aboriginal homes which can result in a lack of care among family members. In these settings, children may have to learn to be self-supporting to gain the basic necessities. They can find school, with all its concerns about regulation, order, uniforms and timekeeping to be an irrelevant and unwelcome additional strain. On the other hand, if it reaches out to accommodate them, it can be the one welcome place of security in their lives.

Education

The strategy of using education as a tool of colonisation and cultural change, and Aboriginal resistance to this, has left a lasting legacy of low levels of education among many Aboriginal Australian families, as is revealed by the following statistics drawn from the 1991 census.

- 79% of parents had left school at age 16 or less
- 87% of all parents had no recognised qualifications (61%)¹²
- 7% had a skilled vocational qualification (14%)
- 3% had a post secondary award or certificate (13%)
- Only 46% of the families of young adolescents had one or both parents in the workforce

Our findings supported previous research which indicated that despite their own lack of success at school, the majority of Aboriginal parents had a strong desire to see that their children achieve well at school. They were realistic however in recognising that their young people faced obstacles in achieving their goals.

The experiences of older generations of Aboriginal people in schools were frequently negative. They mainly knew schools as places of forced assimilation where they were humiliated and their cultures denied. There is still community grief and anger about the uses to which schools were put; supported by personal experiences of failure and racism. As a result, parents are often reluctant to visit schools and are ready to believe the worst about teachers.

Parents with minimal experience of school often feel embarrassed about their lack of knowledge of how to effectively support their student children, especially at secondary level.

Aboriginal parents who hold negative attitudes to schools have not necessarily rejected education or don't have high aspirations for their children. Our conversations with parents have reinforced research evidence which indicates that the majority have extremely high aspirations for their children (Watts 1981).

We were impressed by the numbers of Aboriginal parents we met who have overcome their negative feelings and become heavily involved in strongly supporting their student children in school.

¹² The figures in brackets indicate national equivalents.

Teachers need to recognise the potential goodwill of Aboriginal parents and tap into it, recognising that negative attitudes they may perceive from the parents have their roots in the backgrounds we have described above, rather than a personal antagonism to them.

One outcome of Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) committees has been that parents have gained knowledge about aspects of school life they had not previously understood. We found repeated evidence of the value of these committees. Their success, however, depended on the degree to which school managers were genuinely prepared to work with Aboriginal parents in achieving improved outcomes for Aboriginal students.

There is need for a much higher level of communication between teachers and Aboriginal parents. While building this contact is not easy, the outcomes are tangible. It is significant that those schools which are successful with Aboriginal students enjoy high levels of community contact. The need for this communication is supported by research evidence which shows that parental support is a critical factor in school success (Day 1992).

Education programs for parents about contemporary schooling were seen to be essential by some of the teachers we spoke to.

The students we met who were not motivated to attend school tended to perceive their homes as not being able to offer, or interested in offering, support in their schooling.

Mobility

The single most frequently reported characteristic of Aboriginal families, which has a profound effect on schooling, is the high level of mobility. This characteristic is not peculiar to Aboriginal families, nor is it typical of all families.

Unthinking non-Aboriginal observers discuss this as 'going walkabout' and imagine that it shows an aimless approach to life. The truth is that it demonstrates a high level of purposefulness. As members of complex extended families whose members can live scattered across a state, or even the nation, Aboriginal people need frequently to travel to discharge family responsibilities. They may also need to travel to escape from some distress in their home. These movements of families, in whole or part, frequently involve removing children from one school and enrolling them in another.

Some highly mobile families have a well-established pattern which involves children attending one 'base' school and moving regularly amongst others, depending on the changing demands and pressures within the family.

As we have already discussed, it is apparent that all of these patterns of movement can have educationally catastrophic results for some Aboriginal students.

Aboriginal students can be highly mobile in their socialising; frequently spending the night at the home of a friend or a relative instead of returning home. It is common for young people whose own home is particularly stressful due to excessive substance abuse or violence to stay with a relative or friend for lengthy periods. Teachers assured us that this lifestyle is not unique to Aboriginal young people.

Teachers who work closely with Aboriginal students emphasised that home and home problems can play an overwhelming role in their lives, sometimes totally disrupting their personal and academic lives for lengthy periods.

Aboriginal Families and Young People

There are differences among Aboriginal young people in the ways in which they perceive their families, their relationships and expected behaviours. The majority find high levels of warmth, acceptance, support and personal security in their homes. There are, however, Aboriginal homes where there is violence and abuse. We met a number of young people who had left their homes because of the unbearable tensions within them. We heard of some homes where the adults, lacking control over their own lives, had given up responsibility for their children. The children were passed on from relative to relative for care.

Young people with whom we spoke talked about alienation between some Aboriginal young people and their older relatives. In this, we saw a reflection of the reported breakdowns in relationships between 'generation X' (children of parents who were born post World War II) and their parents. There may be a range of causes of this situation. Frequently we heard complaints from adults about the behaviour of the young people and there was especial concern about those who were involved in substance abuse and anti-social behaviours.

In these situations, numbers of Aboriginal youth become alienated from their immediate families. Some find understanding care with other family members; others join the 'street' groups.

We agree with Eyers (1992) who believes that adolescents need to establish or maintain relationships with particular adults, who can provide advice and act as role models. Not all Aboriginal families today have resources of older members who can provide these mentors and models.

It was believed by some teachers that Aboriginal young people actually fared better than others from the same socio-economic group. In some communities, Aboriginal people themselves perceived that they were not on the bottom of the social scale. They believed that this was due to the strong networks of Aboriginal families and the availability of financial support.

Intra-group Differences and Tensions

Divisions and tensions within Aboriginal communities and families can powerfully disrupt the lives of some Aboriginal students. Issues to do with education can themselves cause rifts in communities. We heard of families who had been alienated from their communities because their children were succeeding at school.

The tensions which erupt between various family groups can spill over into the school and disrupt the lives of Aboriginal students. These incidents can be highly stressful for an Aboriginal young person trying to personally survive amid conflicting family loyalties.

It was felt by some contributors that students from 'middle class' Aboriginal homes did better than those from 'working class' homes. To make a generalisation about this situation is not safe. We met several young people from low income homes who were succeeding at secondary school. We heard too, of children from affluent Aboriginal families who had become irregular school attenders and were heavily involved in various forms of substance abuse and minor crime.

As already noted, where there is a strong cohesive Aboriginal community with high priorities for its young people, the results can be outstanding. A united face is presented to the world and students are obviously supported and encouraged in their school careers.

There is a tradition among some Aboriginal families of placing their children in Catholic schools. At the present time, some 12% of Aboriginal students around Australia attend these schools. The reasons for this are complex. The choice, however, appears to be rarely related to Catholic faith or a belief that Aboriginal culture will be more overtly recognised. Rather, it appears to be associated with a view that the young people will get a better education because standards and discipline are higher in these schools.

This concern reflects the strong and distinctive set of values which are evident in the ways in which Aboriginal families seek to socialise their children. The research of Eckermann and Malin has pointed to the profiles of 'ideal' Aboriginal people which underlie this socialisation. There is a desire

to train the child into a sense of independence which is balanced by a strong sense of affiliation with, and loyalty to, the group. Getting this balance right can be one of the major challenges faced by the family of Aboriginal adolescents and the young people themselves.

We met numbers of Aboriginal parents who were concerned about standards of discipline and endeavour in their local high school. Several felt that their children were not being stretched enough. Some saw this as an expression of benign racism.

The majority of the students who were achieving well believed that much of the credit for their success needed to go to one or other of their parents. Their support and encouragement had given them the courage and determination to persevere through the difficult periods of racism and depression. These findings are supported by the work of Day (1992) who found that successful Aboriginal students tended to have parents who valued and stressed the importance of schooling and fostered individual effort.

3.3 The Peer World of Young Aborigines

In this world, adolescents need to experience social acceptance and gain affection and support among peers of the same and the opposite sex. This world too, is a primary source for developing a sense of 'Who I am', and of personal and social values and establishing their own sexual and cultural identity.

Joanne

My older sister and I were the only Aboriginal students at school. We were teased and felt isolated because of our darker skin colour. Eventually we were accepted, however I remember having to sacrifice my identity as my friends would tease and put down other Aboriginal people in the community and never gave a thought to me. They believed I was different because I didn't look like one and I lived with my mother who is non-Aboriginal. It is a tremendous pressure when you are a minority group and are seen by the community as drunks, lazy and dirty. My identity wasn't acknowledged until I reached Year 10 and my history teacher asked if we knew any Aboriginal people. I raised my hand and said I was Aboriginal. He then made me justify how, in front of my classroom peers. I was really embarrassed and for history we studied the events that happened after 1788.

Relationships with Non-Aboriginal Peers

For most Aboriginal children, the junior and middle primary school period is generally one of being accepted by their peers. Some communities in which racism is deeply entrenched may be an exception, and there may be individual children and families who are singled out for harassment, but on the whole, race is not an active issue in the lives of children of this age.

However, with the onset of puberty, and especially when interest in the opposite sex begins to develop, race-based issues begin to affect the lives of adolescents. Friendship and dating across racial boundaries are still socially unacceptable in many Australian communities. These pressures, together with increased racial awareness and a desire to reflect perceived community mores, tend to separate Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal young people. The degree and nature of that separation will vary widely. In extreme cases there may be violent confrontations between Aboriginal students and various other cultural groups. Teachers are divided as to the correct interpretation of these. While many ascribe the tensions to racism, there are others who believe that race is not really an issue here and that the conflicts come more from insider-outsider groupings.

It appears that in most settings the separation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal young people is a matter of different interests rather than negative divisions. We observed relaxed and cordial relationships in most of the schools we visited.

Relationships with Aboriginal Peers

Relationships with their Aboriginal peers, can be highly problematic for some Aboriginal students, both boys and girls.

Teachers discussed with us the strong pressures which Aboriginal students placed on each other not to succeed. A climate can be created in which achievement is regarded as a 'shame job'. We commonly heard of young students with ability who, under pressure from their peers, began to go backwards in achievement. Aboriginal parents are concerned about this problem but frequently feel powerless to change the situation. Some families have resorted to moving to a new location in an attempt to take their children out of this trap.

Students themselves discussed problems with peers. They described the tensions they felt in relationships with some Aboriginal students who they viewed as 'just trouble makers'. Some girls especially felt themselves to be under strong peer group pressure. When these pressures came from older relatives whose behaviour patterns were alien to their own they found the situation especially difficult.

On the other hand, Aboriginal students who had survived into senior years believed that they had done so with the help and support of like-minded mates, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. Others talked about older age mentors and role models who had helped them to achieve.

We have already commented on the significant groups of young Aborigines of compulsory school age who are non-attenders or infrequent attenders at school. There are many reasons why these young people have opted for a lifestyle which does not include school, or in which school does not play a major role.

These may include: disruptions to the lives of some by violence or neglect in their homes; the fulfilling of the developmental challenges of adolescence through risk taking; the expressing of deep disillusionment and anger about Australian society and their perception of the marginal role Aboriginal people play in it. School dropouts may be involved in drug use and trading; multiple car thefts, often associated with high speed chases; ram raiding; assault and prostitution. We have little detailed knowledge about these groups.

It is possible to view these groups from two points of view. An orthodox position would be that these young people represent failure, either their own, or that of the schools, or their parents. There are others who would claim that these young people are creating an alternative, more attractive, 'initiation' into adulthood. They have rejected schools at the present time as not fulfilling their needs. There is evidence that numbers of them will re-enter the education system in their twenties and gain the training which they then see to be appropriate.

It is evident that these groups offer an attractive alternative to school for many Aboriginal young people. For boys especially, the lure of an independent life, with excitement and risk, may be preferable to school if it is a place of stress and pressure, failure, alienation and boredom.

The young people who have stayed at school beyond the age of compulsion all spoke of the cost of doing this in terms of the social alienation from friends and family members who had left school to join the peer group. They were under a constant pressure to leave. Their identity as 'real Aborigines' was constantly being questioned, they were accused of being 'white fellas' because they refused to abandon the schooling system.

Many are vulnerable as students in the face of this attractive alternative world. We heard of cases in which one negative confrontation with an unsympathetic teacher was enough to tip the scales so that the student left school.

The adoption of Black American cultural patterns among Aboriginal youth is evident in a number of major urban centres. The dress, language, behaviour

and especially the music of Black America is very faithfully replicated among these groups. This appears to be a strong manifestation of a resistance-type culture.

Aboriginal peer groups have their own barriers and groupings. These may arise over issues such as family feuds, academic success and degrees of colour and identity. However, if any Aboriginal student is challenged by any white outsider, the inter-group differences fall away in the need for Black solidarity.

3.4 Balancing the Worlds

Among these four competing and frequently contradictory worlds—the wider community, the family, the peer group and the school—young Aboriginal adolescents have to construct their own personal reality and identity and develop positive self esteem. Life can be a daily balancing act as they struggle to find affirming messages from among these worlds.

As we have noted, positive messages are rare in the wider world. Many will find them among their community and family, but this is not always the case. Gaining affirmation from within the peer group, both black and white, can be a hazardous game, the rules are frequently hard and complex and a failure to observe them can lead to rejection.

For many Aboriginal young people, the school becomes the critical factor in their search for identity. If they feel accepted and affirmed in their schools, they will have a much stronger chance of developing a strong cultural identity. If the school is just another area of pressure and stress, it is often dismissed as irrelevant and not worth continuing with.

The fundamental personal and educational need for Aboriginal young people is for communications between all of their worlds to be improved. Teachers are the key mediators in this process.

One group of Aboriginal people, teachers, parents and educational assistants, was concerned to stress to us how powerless Aboriginal students can feel. They described these students as feeling trapped in a cycle of poverty with little that they can own or call their own; frequently believing themselves to be ‘too dumb’ to succeed. Even those with ability allowed themselves to be discouraged by negative pressures. These pressures could come from family, peers or teachers.

Achieving at school may require the cutting of the umbilical cord to known securities. Aboriginal young people may not be prepared to take the next steps to get out of the relative security of their present comfort zone, as hazardous as that may be.

3.5 Issues of Cultural Identity

It is apparent that matters of Aboriginality and identity are key factors in the success or failure of Aboriginal students. However, there are many perceptions as to what constitutes Aboriginality and identity for young adolescents.

Defining Aboriginality and Identity

In our meetings with Aboriginal people, young and old, we were impressed by the wide range of perceptions as to what it means to be Aboriginal and the wide range of approaches to the formation of cultural identity.

We suggest that the formation of cultural identity is akin to that of sexual identity and that its expression and experiences vary as richly as do those of gender. Both processes are a journey, the course of which varies greatly from individual to individual.

We met some Aboriginal young people for whom their Aboriginality was an awareness only. They had yet to commit themselves to the journey—possibly they never would.

Others were finding the road one of pain, overwhelmed by the tension and loneliness of racism. Aboriginal identity for these young people, often alone in their schools, meant misgivings and fears with little comfort or pleasure.

But for others, the journey was positive. They discounted the inevitable harassment against the security of knowing their personal and communal origins and backgrounds. These young people were often fortunate to have elders or grandparents who were teaching them about their heritage.

Our research indicates that among contemporary young Aborigines, there is a growing sense of identity as members of the indigenous culture of Australia. Furthermore, this sense of identity can be a resource which will enable them to achieve well in school and society. Our findings agree with those of Day, who found strong links between pride, self esteem and progress in school among Aboriginal students.

In his research into successful secondary Aboriginal students, Day (1992) found that the common factor among all these students was a strong and growing sense of identity. This strengthening sense of identity had not produced an oppositional stance to school. Rather, Day found that they were prepared to modify some accepted traditional cultural values in order to achieve well at school. Their new behaviours included being competitive, and putting study before family and peers.

Some of our adult Aboriginal contributors believed that in their own adolescence, survival had been more important than identity. They felt that some of the cultural stereotypes created by Aboriginal people about themselves were not always true, they were created for political purposes. They did not see their Aboriginality as an issue which needed to signal a difference in their lives. They wished it to be a badge of heritage rather than a distinctive cultural marker.

On the other hand, it is undeniable that for the majority of the Aboriginal students with whom we spoke, identity **was** a central issue. They were proud of their heritage and culture, especially in the face of racist attacks. These students felt that they possessed a culture in a way in which their peers did not. Most had a sense of the spiritual dimension of Aboriginality that separated their culture from others. They used their culture as a personal multiplier that sustained them in a boring and not very relevant education system.

The biggest single tangible indicator of the depth of Aboriginal identity was the virtually unanimous feeling that there should be much more Aboriginal Studies taught in schools, for the benefit of all students.

There is a continuing problem for those Aboriginal students who are picked on by their peers because of Abstudy and other grants. There is a persistent Australian myth that Aboriginal people receive extraordinarily high 'handouts' from the government. Assistance to Aboriginal students is frequently a basis for racist/classist-motivated harassment.

Some contributors commented that Aboriginal young people suppressed their identity to avoid these kinds of conflicts and tensions. This had been very noticeable in some areas at the height of the debate about the High Court decision on Native Title, when Aboriginal people were under particular attack. It was believed by some teachers that Rap and basketball cultural styles are popular among Aboriginal young people because they are a neutral form of distinctive cultural marking.

Identity issues are often forced on the young people by others: by peers, both white and black; by teachers acting out of negative or positive intent; by their families. Without this labelling, they may choose to be non-distinctive, involved in the same issues and preoccupations as their non-Aboriginal peers.

Young Aborigines who lacked a strong family resource for identity formation were frequently looking to their schools to provide it. Schools can provide an effective support to Aboriginal students by recognising and affirming Aboriginal identity, assisting them to overcome the negative messages which can so easily overwhelm them.

Schools do not have a successful history of celebrating Aboriginal cultures. For this reason, they need to be especially proactive in this area. The basic actions which can be taken include:

- having a wide range of approved resources, books, tapes, videos, posters;
- inviting Aboriginal people into the school regularly, as valued partners;
- conducting successful cultural experiences in which the whole school joins;
- ensuring that the Aboriginal students are secure and free from harassment; and
- providing spheres in which Aboriginal students can make a public contribution to school life.

These processes should aim to foster and enhance the cultural identity of Aboriginal young people and help them to see themselves, and be viewed in the school, as people of intrinsic value, not as stereotyped trouble makers. Beyond these basic strategies, there is a range of actions which involve identifying the individual social and educational needs of Aboriginal students.

We are concerned that schools too frequently fail to identify and affirm Aboriginal students. Having observed first hand the tangible results in the lives of young people who have received affirmation and support in their schools, we can only consider schools which fail to take positive action in this area as being delinquent in failing to meet the needs of this significant group of students.

Racism

Racism was recognised as a reality by most of the students we spoke with. They experienced it from fellow students and teachers. Generally they knew how to deal with racism from their peers. As a last resort they could use

harassment procedures. When they experienced it from teachers, they were often distressed and not sure of what to do. The lessons of that person were often avoided, or school itself was abandoned. The kinds of racism they experienced from teachers included:

- racial abuse and vilification;
- negative comments about their families and their behaviours on the basis of race;
- prejudicial treatment;
- being treated as a child at school (when they are treated as adults in their homes);
- being spoken to in a domineering manner ('strong talk'); and
- being made to feel personally guilty for getting extra money and special benefits.

There is also an inherent structural racism perpetuated in many schools. This characteristic has frequently become so ingrained that staff members are unaware of its existence. It is expressed in various ways. The most common form is the failure to acknowledge the presence of Aboriginal students and their culture in the school, or in fact the culture of any other group. Programs and school events are not organised with the needs of minority groups in mind; hierarchies based on class, wealth and ability are perpetuated.

To succeed at school, individuals need to feel a sense of worth about their identities...Children who live in two cultures, one of which is stigmatised as inferior by dominant groups, have great difficulty in resolving the conflict of loyalties which ensues. Their academic progress is placed at risk...

Prof J Smolicz

Educational Environments and Aboriginal Adolescents

We have emphasised the need to place the education of young Aboriginal adolescents in a context of concern for the total person. For this goal to be achieved, schools need to focus on the social, personal and emotional needs of these students. We agree with Eyers who believes that this approach should be regarded as essential in all secondary schools, one which runs 'hand in hand with the academic curriculum'.

Jamie

Jamie is a gifted communicator, handsome and outgoing; he wears his Aboriginality with pride.

The dominant feeling that came from talking with Jamie was confidence. He was confident in himself and in his Aboriginality, believing that he could achieve any task he put his hand to.

He claimed that he was not concerned about racism. His parents had trained him to deflect racist taunts and he had learnt this lesson well, feeling sorry for those who felt that they had to resort to racial abuse.

But Jamie's story could have been very different.

His first two years at secondary school were misery. As the only Aboriginal student in his school he was the object of continuous harassment. The favoured term was to call him a Neanderthal. Only two boys stood by him. Despite his stress he continuously achieved well, but this only added to his problems. He was accused of being a teacher's pet.

Eventually, when he was suffering acute depression, his parents urged him to change schools.

He moved to a school with a large Aboriginal population and a record of success with Aboriginal students. Here he regained his pride and began to discover his full potential. He believed he received no special treatment as an Aborigine. But there was no harassment, students respected each other and received respect from, and returned it to their teachers. In this, his final year, he is now school captain.

*We saw plenty of evidence to support the claim that a good school for Aboriginal students will be a good school for **all** its students. This is not to deny that Aboriginal students may have special needs which need to be met. Effective schools recognise and seek to endorse the individual needs of all their students, regardless of their cultural or social backgrounds.*

We believe that Aboriginal adolescents share the same basic affective needs as their non-Aboriginal peers. However there may be differences between the two groups in the degree of need and the ways in which these needs will be best met.

These needs have been identified (Wiles & Bondi 1981; Evers 1992) as being to:

- develop self esteem and success;
- be part of a group with identification and acceptance;
- be recognised;
- develop relevant social skills;
- be safe and free from threat;
- be loved;
- be independent; and
- achieve in the academic area.

The schools which we visited which were most successful with Aboriginal students were meeting all or most of these needs. It is apparent that when schools meet these needs they also succeed in meeting academic ones.

An emphasis on meeting the affective needs of students requires schools to prioritise matters of environment.

4.1 The Physical Environment

The creation of a positive physical environment must be the first concern in supporting Aboriginal students. Aboriginal educator Maureen Watson commented in 1980 about the failure of schools to reflect back to Aboriginal students aspects of their life and culture. It is apparent that some schools have changed since then. We found numbers of 'Aboriginal Rooms' decorated with Aboriginal posters, artefacts and pictures. Creating these areas may be a small

step but it is a highly symbolic one to Aboriginal students. Similarly, having the Aboriginal flag on display and posters and pictures in public areas of the school reinforces the presence of Aboriginal students and enhances their self esteem.

The secret of success with these ventures seems to be in making them open and accessible to all students, an inclusive resource which is shared by the whole school with pride.

School Size

We encountered a range of views on the question of optimal school size for Aboriginal students. The majority of staff, both primary and secondary, believed that small schools, or mini-schools, of around 300–400, were preferable for Aboriginal students. Schools of this size allow everyone to be known and good rapport to develop between staff and students.

We were impressed by those schools which were of a size that allowed staff and students the chance to get to know each other as individuals. There was a tangible feeling of mutual trust and acceptance—some described it as affection—between students, and between staff and students. It was very apparent that in the warmth of these smaller schools, all of the students, and especially the Aborigines, flourished.

One principal, however, preferred a larger school believing that in a small school students had little choice of their peer group and could get ‘locked in’ with a negative group and fail to strive to achieve. Smaller schools also have to reduce offerings, especially in senior classes; they frequently have to make hard choices between traditional academic subjects and more innovative ‘hands on’ and vocational ones.

But we did find a few exceptions. One school we visited had over 1000 students. About 40 of them were Aboriginal and it was apparent that they were enjoying a very positive education. The key factor was the incredibly close involvement of the Aboriginal families. The parents chose this school as their preferred secondary school out of the five others in the town and were investing a very high level of energy in supporting their children, by funding the development of a professional development course for mainstream teachers. The main focus of this is to raise teachers’ and students’ awareness of Aboriginal English as being the first language of their children.

Relative Numbers of Aboriginal Students

It is apparent that Aboriginal students flourish in settings in which they are able to enjoy the support and companionship of others from the same cultural background. We believe that there is an optimum number of Aboriginal

enrolments required for a group of students to gain a strong sense of identity. An enrolment of more than 20 appears to be needed so that at each year level, there are sufficient Aboriginal students to give each other support. Below this number they are in danger of being marginalised and not having a positive voice and presence in the school.

There is a counter argument that when there is a large number of Aboriginal students, there is a danger of individuals becoming lost in one generalised group. Teachers may stereotype all the students on the basis of a few who fail to achieve or who are regularly in trouble. The group itself can also segregate itself from the rest of the school population.

The bottom line in all situations is the degree to which staff are prepared to pursue issues of equity and inclusivity, and how strongly they insist among themselves, and with the students, that everyone in the school is respected as an individual.

Segregation and Streaming

It is apparent that there is a tendency in schools where 'special classes' exist to draft Aboriginal students into these on the basis of Aboriginality rather than need; often these placements are made at a young age.

This trend was apparent in New South Wales in particular. In this state, there is a major network of Intellectually Moderate (IM) classes in schools. The Department of School Education reported in 1986 that Aboriginal students were more likely to be placed in these classes than non-Aboriginal students. This was especially true in country towns with a high Aboriginal population. We were reliably informed that this situation remains basically unchanged.

Several causes for this situation have been identified. The design of the instruments used to assess these students has been queried; tests may not be sensitive to cultural factors and especially to the Aboriginal English background of the students. The report considered that the criteria used to assess students, which were developed in the 1930s, were not valid for modern populations. The writers of the report believed that with earlier intervention, especially in language skills, many of the Aboriginal students could have avoided being placed in these classes.

There is, however, another aspect to this issue. It has been recognised that Aboriginal students may actually welcome being placed in a special class and that they may see no stigma in this situation. The environment in these classes is frequently one in which Aboriginal students can feel at home.

- There is a strong sense of family.
- The learning style is often collaborative.
- The one teacher is usually warm and supportive.
- The structures of the class are stable and predictable.
- There is a high level of individual attention.
- There are fewer dangers of 'shame' situations.

While the benefits of learning in these settings are acknowledged, the problem for Aboriginal students is that these placements can become too comfortable and permanent. There may be little pressure to leave and, if the teacher is not trained in special education, there may be little learning progress being made.

It is important that placement in a special class be regarded as a useful remedial experience rather than a permanent educational solution, and that the inputs and outcomes be rigorously monitored.

4.2 The Emotional Environment

The key determinant of the emotional environment in a school is the nature and quality of the relationships forged between students and teachers. This is especially true for Aboriginal students. Our conversations with Aboriginal students confirmed the belief that these students are extremely sensitive to the quality of relationships. Teachers are evaluated as persons with whom to relate, rather than as educators to be followed implicitly.

Attitudes of Schools towards Aboriginal Students

Linda

Linda is a quiet, reserved young woman. She is the girls' captain of a large suburban school and well thought of by the staff as representing 'good' Aboriginal traits.

Linda attended private schools and returned to the state system because she thought it offered her more chance of success. She has achieved well due to hard work and a single-minded determination to avoid distractions. Linda acknowledges her Aboriginality but does not mix with other Aboriginal students. Linda fears that their attitudes will impede her progress. The comment of the staff that she is 'unusual' reflects as much about them as it does about Linda.

Relationships between Aboriginal students and teachers are not developed in a vacuum. They are shaped in the culture which each school constructs in terms of its approach to Aboriginal students. This culture is primarily shaped by the principal and the management team.

We were continually impressed with the absolutely strategic importance of the principal in determining the school's approach to Aboriginal students and their families. If he or she demonstrates respect to the Aboriginal students, relates well to their families and sets high standards for the staff, there is every expectation of success for the Aboriginal students.

Our findings are supported by recent research quoted by Vacha and McLaughlin (1992) which demonstrates that the climate and characteristics of the school, and the way in which these are perceived by individual teachers, are the key determinants of success among at-risk students, far exceeding factors to do with the student themselves, their families or individual teachers. The basic factor in determining school climate itself is the attitude and approach of the school leadership team.

It is apparent that the needs of the school in terms of meeting the educational needs of its Aboriginal students are rarely taken into account when selections of principals are being made. Too often, principals of schools with significant Aboriginal populations have had no previous experience with these students, nor receive any training prior to taking up the position. As a result, several, while well-intentioned, lack the detailed knowledge required for leadership in these schools. We heard sufficient authenticated anecdotes in the course of our research to convince us that there are numbers of principals of schools with Aboriginal students who are, in fact, racist and lack the professional skills and personal attributes needed in such a demanding position.

Schools vary considerably in their approach towards Aboriginal students. However it is apparent that there are two polar attitudes which can be described.

The first attitude is characterised by those schools which confront, and try to get rid of, students who create problems. We met several Aboriginal students who had been told that they were no longer required at their schools. Some students had histories of being rejected by one school after another. They felt that each school had done all it could to get rid of them, often finally expelling them for petty reasons which had more to do with prejudice rather than any failings on their part. They felt that they had to 'justify themselves all the time' in these schools. We met two boys who were suspended and then eventually left school because of their preference for wearing caps. One of the lads was suspended for one week for wearing a baseball cap on his way home from school. In these schools also, comments made by school leaders such as, 'What's the good of teaching her, she'll only go and get pregnant', pass without challenge.

These schools emphasise conformity and competition and foster a climate of constant sorting and selecting among students.

A significant number of students, when asked to reflect on why they had left schools, said that they had felt depersonalised and had lost self esteem under the pressure of racial harassment and 'put downs' from both teachers and students.

We were repeatedly told by older Aboriginal adolescents that they want education, they want to achieve and be successful, they have high aspirations but they cannot cope with the confrontational and alienating climate which they find in so many schools.

The second attitude is characterised by schools which have a stated policy of not being prepared to lose any student. This approach was exemplified by one principal who described how he goes out of his way to welcome students whenever they arrive: 'If we beat up the ones who come late they don't come at all'.

These schools take a supportive and accepting approach to students rather than one which is confronting and challenging. Students are accepted for who they are. Yet these are not soft communities. High standards of honesty and interpersonal relationships are set and achieved.

These schools are characterised too, by having strong links with the Aboriginal community at a range of levels. Parents and community members are regularly involved in the life of the school in a range of formal and informal roles. These can include being on school council, being on canteen roster, talking with students on a range of issues. Aboriginal organisations are involved in the life of the school. Dance and theatre groups run workshops and training events. Various Aboriginal para-professionals, health workers, legal aid workers, juvenile justice workers and police aides all make regular contact with these schools.

In these schools, Aboriginal young people were learning to take more advantage of the opportunities offered to them. In these settings, relationships with teachers were generally positive and expectations of success, pride in themselves and in the school were high.

Our descriptions of two stereotypical forms of schools echoes the work of Wexler who claims that class difference is the basic factor which sets one school apart from another. He believes that schools establish elaborate

structures of social or identity ‘tracks’ which determine the types of students they wish to produce. The key markers of these tracks are questions of language, speech and behaviour.

We found a very close correlation between issues of race and class among the schools which we visited. Frequently it was difficult to separate out the relative influence of each one. We are inclined to propose that issues of class may frequently be predominant factors in the educational experience of Aboriginal adolescents, rather than ones of race.

Aboriginal students identified a number of practical innovations which they believed would improve their school environment. Suggestions from one group included:

- having a breakfast program at school;
- availability of homework centres;
- more relaxed uniform rules; and
- more equitable arrangements so that lunchtime detention did not take all lunch.

Pacific Islanders

There are increasing numbers of Polynesian migrants, Maori and Pacific Islanders, moving to Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. Young people from these groups comprise significant minorities in many schools. Often these are schools with Aboriginal students.

Some schools regard these students as being in competition with Aboriginal students, with some teachers making disparaging comparisons about Aboriginal students, often based on stereotypes of the two races. However, it is evident that the two groups can coexist to their mutual benefit in settings where their special needs are recognised and bridges built between them.

Relationships with Teachers

Debbie

Debbie is an articulate and confident Year 10 student. Some of the senior staff at her school demonstrate clear racism in their language and behaviour. Debbie has learnt to mask her deep resentment of them and the school in order to succeed. She confided in us that the thing which she most resents is not being able to talk with the Aboriginal Education Worker without being cross-examined by a senior staff member.

Our research leads us to strongly support Eyers who found that developing positive relationship between teachers and students was a basic strategy in fostering adolescent development.

We would suggest that the question of relationships between teachers and Aboriginal students is a basic issue which can determine whether an Aboriginal student will maintain his or her school career or jettison it.

The biggest stress faced by some Aboriginal students can be rejection by teachers, either threatened or actual. We heard of several high achieving students whose work and behaviour had deteriorated markedly when they experienced a change of teachers and found that they could not relate to the new teacher.

Crowley and Rizvi (1993) have described the phenomenon of ‘culturalism’, the tendency of teachers to treat Aboriginal students differently from the ways they treat other students. The treatments may be excessively benign or excessively demanding and punitive. Teachers may be reluctant to confront anti-social behaviour or absenteeism because of misplaced stereotypes. They may not make demands on students because of misconceptions of ways in which Aboriginal students learn. Frequently teachers have false expectations that urban Aboriginal students will demonstrate the world views and behaviours of ‘traditional’ Aboriginal people. Culturalism is also associated with assimilationist ideas; a belief that Aboriginal students ‘need to be brought up to standard’.

The existence of this outlook was reinforced by the accounts we heard of Aboriginal students, who were achieving highly, being counselled out of academic streams and into more practical subjects and classes in Years 9 and 10.

When Aboriginal youth are unable to develop positive relations with teachers, they can develop identities which are oppositional to those desired by the school. These self-images tend to further structure the negative course of the relationships. They see themselves as losers who are processed, defined and recycled within the mechanism of the school. Their existence as persons is devalued and they become targets for reform or exclusion.

Aboriginal Students’ Perceptions of Teachers

The Aboriginal students who spoke with us had very clear perceptions about the effectiveness of teachers. They were extremely perceptive in their assessment of the attitudes which individual teachers held towards them as Aboriginal people. They recognised that the attitude (not the skill) of the teachers was critical to their success. One student said to us, ‘If I get support from teachers I can do **anything**’.

In the view of Aboriginal students, good teachers listen to them and respect them. They foster discussion and enter into dialogue. They explain clearly the processes, frequently in a one-to-one situation. They take time and get to know students as persons. They are not soft, have high expectations, make demands and don't let students get away with too much. They say what they really think, but they are fair and have fun. They don't have attitude problems, they are interested in **all** the students, not only, but definitely including, the Aboriginal students.

The most effective teachers of Aboriginal students have entered into an extraordinarily close relationship with them. There is genuine warmth and trust, news and photos of family members are exchanged and there may be a high level of touch and close physical proximity.

In the view of students, bad teachers don't listen, especially not to Aboriginal students. They ignore them and are capable of making fun of them in front of the class. Some teachers are racist. They abuse Aboriginal students, call them names, and treat them differently, picking on them for behaviour which they allow non-Aboriginal students to get away with. It was apparent that teachers who were confrontational in their approach had little success with Aboriginal students.

All the students we spoke to believed that there should be more Aboriginal teachers in schools, especially in high schools.

Several teachers commented to us on the negative effects of high staff turnover. One experienced teacher believed that it took three to four years to effectively induct a teacher into a country high school with Aboriginal students. Often, at this stage, they left. Training and development for new and existing staff in these schools was regarded as essential.

Levels of Knowledge and Understanding

Previous research has indicated that teachers tend to lack knowledge and understanding of the families and cultures of the Aboriginal students in their care. This ignorance springs from a lack of communication with Aboriginal parents¹³. It appeared that this ignorance is often accepted without comment, as being normal and acceptable.

¹³ For example, Tannock, P. & Punch, K. 1975, *A Report on the Equal Status of Aboriginal Children in Western Australia*, University of Western Australia, Perth.

This communication failure leads to one of the most striking characteristics of educational endeavour among Aboriginal students. This is the way in which the parties involved tend to blame each other for the perceived failures of the students. Teachers blame parents and/or their children, the parents blame the teachers or their children.

We saw tangible evidence that where this culture of blame is overcome and strong links are established between educators and Aboriginal community groups, there is genuine progress in the education of Aboriginal students.

One concern from this study was the discovery of how little educators learn from each other and from the past. In Aboriginal education, as in other areas of education, there is a lack of consolidation of good practice. In one school we visited, successful strategies were being re-invented by a new generation of teachers a decade or more after they were first introduced to the school by a group of teachers who had long since left.

There is need for recording and consolidating good practice and passing it on. This is related to having people in key positions for longer periods.

4.3 Meeting Affective Needs

A successful emotional environment for Aboriginal students is one in which the needs listed on page 40 are all attended to.

To Develop Self esteem and Success

McInerney (1991) found that the critical set of variables which determined whether an Aboriginal student remained at school 'revolves around a sense of self: self-reliance, confidence and goal direction'. Our conversations with Aboriginal young people have supported that finding.

Students who stayed on at school told us that they did so because they saw the connection between education and getting a good job. This realisation, together with the support of their parents and other key persons in their lives, were the major incentives to stay. It was apparent that these students had high levels of confidence in their ability to succeed.

Teachers have found Aboriginal students may be acutely self-conscious and fearful of failure, to a degree which is not found among other students. 'Shame' is a word which these students commonly use to describe situations of embarrassment and failure. These students need high levels of affirmation and many experiences of success to develop the confidence, self esteem and self-reliance needed to stay on at school.

Phil

Phil is a senior student whose academic record is poor. He appreciates the way in which the school has gone out of its way to keep him. He especially values his relationship with the principal; they treat each other with affection and respect. He has also received support from his older brother and Aboriginal teachers. His strength has been in football, he is an outstanding player; now he is wondering what other skills he needs to develop in his life. He is fortunate that his school operates an Annexe which allows any of its students to remain within the system without the pressures of regular classes and other constraints.

To be Part of a Group with Identification and Acceptance

Numbers of Aboriginal students with whom we spoke said that the most important thing which kept them at school was friends. For some, the mates were solely or mainly Aboriginal. For others, it didn't matter whether they were Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal. Teachers talked with us about the high levels of care exercised among groups of Aboriginal young people, how individuals were always 'watched over'.

We encountered several small groups of closely bound Aboriginal young people in Years 11 or 12 who were supporting each other, enjoying good relationships with other students and receiving strong support from a number of supportive teachers. It appears that the formation of these groups, sometimes in unlikely settings and in the face of strong odds, is a factor which makes the difference for many older Aboriginal adolescents.

The roots of these groups appear to lie in a combination of student determination to succeed and the consistent support over several years of a few highly supportive staff. These secure, supportive circles of like-minded friends were obviously a key positive force which strengthened them against negative forces, such as the pull of the anti-school peers, the indifference of their homes and racism in the school.

Peer Support Programs have been tried with success in some schools. These programs use high-profile Aboriginal young people to stimulate the whole group to lift its game.

The policy of some schools of breaking up natural groupings of Aboriginal students, both in classes and in the school grounds, appears to be antagonistic to the best interests of these students.

To be Recognised

Recognition is a delicate issue. Aboriginal students, especially in adolescence, may dislike being spotlighted in any way. There are, however, more discrete ways of affirming and reinforcing achievement which are appreciated by the young people. Their self-confidence is fostered when they take part in mainstream activities in which they see themselves as valued participants. These experiences should be in a broad range of activities, and not limited to the sporting field only.

To Develop Relevant Social Skills

Aboriginal young people can feel that they lack necessary social skills. These perceptions are the result of growing up as members of a marginalised minority group. Aboriginal girls especially, need assistance to develop confidence in their social skills, and possible training in gaining new skills which they can use in the wider world. Several schools are recognising this and offering programs to foster social skills.

To be Safe and Free from Threat

It is apparent that racism is a real issue for many students. We were impressed by the argument, advanced by several schools, that the needs of Aboriginal students are best met in a total school social justice approach rather than the creation of special Aboriginal programs. Effective schools for Aboriginal students are vigilant in outlawing all forms of harassment, irrespective of its basis and targets.

To be Loved

We were deeply impressed by the genuine affection which we found between teachers and students in several settings. This affection generated feelings of trust and confidence which boosted the self esteem of the students in tangible ways. There was a feeling that where this existed, the possibilities for the students were limitless.

To be Independent

Malin (1990) has described how Aboriginal students in the early years of schooling find the highly directive nature of Junior Primary classrooms alien.

She believes that Aboriginal children are often socialised in their homes into high levels of autonomy and self-direction and, at the same time, are expected to function in a highly collaborative manner.

There is no comparable study among older groups of students but evidence that we gained from the students indicates that they find a highly directive and controlling management and teaching style to be a source of tension. In their private lives, most are used to high levels of autonomy and independence, being expected by their families to accept responsibility for their own lives and actions.

To Achieve in the Academic Area

Effective teachers of Aboriginal students make intellectual demands on them. They are also concerned to equip them with cognitive and critical strategies which will enable them to function as effective learners in a range of settings.

The Critical Point

We have become aware that in the lives of successful Aboriginal young people, there has frequently been a critical point. It may not have been a recognisable point in time but it comes as a decision to take control of their lives, move away from a resistance model, and participate in the mainstream as an Aboriginal individual.

It may not be a decision to stay at school, in fact it may mean that they leave school, for a TAFE course or for a job.

We are unclear about the factors involved in achieving this point. There appear to be several ingredients involved. These may include the close support of groups of teachers, community members, family members and peers who respect the students as individuals and take time to foster them into stepping out and taking control of their life.

Further research is needed into this area.

4.4 Behaviour Management Strategies

Numbers of teachers and parents expressed concern about behaviour management policies. It is apparent that schools need to consider the relevance

of their practices to Aboriginal students. Often the policies are not understood or appreciated by Aboriginal parents. Parents in one school viewed the 'time out' room as being too synonymous with solitary cells in prisons.

'Sit out', withdrawal and suspensions can be inappropriate for Aboriginal students in that they add to, or create, feelings of 'shame'. The application of these policies can have results which are opposite to those expected.

There is an inflexibility and inevitability about many of the plans currently being used. They can be viewed as creating a pathway which processes students who differ from the status quo into ever more extreme forms of behaviour.

It is important that behaviour management policies be viewed as affirmative action, designed to assist students in their personal development. They will fail if they are seen as strategies for punishing or assimilating Aboriginal students. Schools with ineffective plans can become an ally in student racist strategies. We heard of several cases of Aboriginal students who were 'set up' by their peers. They gained a label as trouble makers and were eventually suspended.

It is evident that the policies can be manipulated by astute students to their own ends. For example, the suspension system fails when Aboriginal students play it to their advantage to gain absence from school. It then becomes a reward for bad behaviour rather than a punishment.

It was generally agreed that problems were created when it was perceived, correctly or incorrectly, that there were one set of rules for Aboriginal students and another for the rest of the school.

Strategies which were successful had the following characteristics. They:

- were specific and clear, understood by all staff, parents and students;
- left no room for individual interpretation and discrimination;
- were demonstrably fair and worked for all school members;
- incorporated a clear sense of having broken rules and being in the wrong with an instant loss of privilege; and
- included plenty of praise and incorporated designated rewards for good behaviour and achievement.

A program had been introduced at one school of placing misbehaving students in the care of the Aboriginal groundsman. While this was regarded as successful by the parents, it was not continued.

Disturbed behaviour by Aboriginal children frequently reflects the weight of other pressures on their lives. They may be concerned over stress in their home, there may be a major sickness in the family or the funeral of a close friend or relative.

Behaviour problems are also linked to learning difficulties. Bad behaviour can be a 'secondary behaviour' which indicates shame over poor performance and a desire to cover up for this.

The formulation of appropriate policies in this area is an ideal area for communication between the school and Aboriginal parents.

Violent Behaviour by Aboriginal Students

It has been reported in several states that Aboriginal students, especially boys, are significantly over-represented in referrals for violent behaviour.

Almost inevitably, the roots of violence lie in racism experienced by the Aboriginal child. If the child feels that the school is not recognising his or her needs or rights in a situation of racial harassment, they can resort to violence as a way of handling the situation.

Aboriginal young people may be themselves the victims of violent abuse. In their homes, violence, frequently associated with alcoholism, has become an accepted means of solving personal problems. It must be emphasised that violence is repudiated by Aboriginal communities and welfare groups and is not accepted in many homes.

The violent behaviour which is frequently ascribed to Aboriginal students needs to be better understood. As one principal noted, there is a significant difference between verbal and physical violence. Swearing and violent language is not uncommon in Aboriginal families; it is not necessarily an indication of anger or possible violence. Teachers can mistake the use of verbal violence by Aboriginal students as a prelude to physical violence. By their reactions they may escalate the situation and provoke physical responses.

4.5 Transitions

In the final years of their primary schooling, Aboriginal students are often accorded independence and responsibility on a level which is comparable with that which they enjoy in their homes. They frequently enjoy a relaxed and companionable relationship with their own teacher. This security and

affirmation can be lost in the move to secondary school. In this change, Aboriginal students can experience confusion, a loss of responsibility, choice and freedom and a lack of recognition as persons.

This appears to be a wasteful and totally unnecessary process. In the opinion of experienced teachers, it can produce a deep change in the outlook of many Aboriginal students. Aboriginal parents have commented on the changes they observed in their children in the move from primary to secondary education. Students themselves shared with us their perceptions of stigma which occurs at transition from primary to secondary. Individuals who gained a bad name in the first year at high school tended to keep this throughout their school life.

It can be argued that this is an inevitable outcome of maturation and would happen in any case and that this happens to all students. We would argue that Aboriginal students find this experience significantly more distressing as they frequently lack the cultural capital to make the new location work for them.

Several schools have addressed problems of transition. They have focussed on the following issues:

- fully informing all involved members of staff about the backgrounds and needs of each new student;
- familiarising new students with the geography and routines of the school;
- assisting students to relate to numbers of teachers; and
- providing assistance for students with inadequate literacy and numeracy skills.

Several secondary schools have tried establishing mini-schools for students regarded as being at risk, or modified programs for all students in their first year. Typically, these programs involve reducing the number of teachers working with these students to two or three, and redesigning the subject load to allow remedial lessons in literacy and numeracy to be taken if required. These programs appear to have achieved considerable success.

The significance of Year 10 in the lives of Aboriginal students needs to be stressed. At this important point, when students and parents need to be consulted about future options, the communication gaps between schools and parents can become lethal for the academic progress of Aboriginal students. A decision to go on to Years 11 and 12 may be a major one for Aboriginal students for the reasons we have already discussed. There is often a great deal of encouragement needed from home and school for this step to be taken. Several schools are experimenting with in-depth counselling and guidance which involves students and parents in full briefings on future options. Schools themselves need to ensure that there are

links between the counselling given in the subject and careers areas and between both these areas and work experience. Associated with this are specific programs in Years 9 and 10 to get students to the level of independent learning and literary skills they will need.

We repeatedly heard comments about the critical role played by the counsellor in negotiating admissions and transitions of Aboriginal students. It is essential that this staff member be skilled at communicating with Aboriginal students and their parents.

The Curriculum and Aboriginal Students

Aboriginal students cover a wide continuum in terms of academic achievement. Statistical evidence already quoted indicates that increasing numbers are achieving highly and going on to tertiary studies or other chosen pathways. Others, however, for a range of reasons, fail to achieve. In this section, we examine the linkages between various aspects of curriculum and the educational needs of Aboriginal young people.

Clinton

Clinton is a shy but purposeful Aboriginal boy with a winning smile. At the age of 15 he is beginning to learn to read. Somehow he managed to go through primary school and on to secondary without this basic skill.

But now, thanks to the regular individual attention of a gifted literacy teacher he is cracking the code.

What is his motive to learn to read at this stage of life?

Clinton has discovered the link between literacy and the great passion in his life; learning more about Aboriginal cultures. He is making great strides, reading books which appear to be quite beyond his reading age and designing and carrying out sophisticated research programs which involve interviewing Aboriginal Elders in the local area.

Clinton is rapidly gaining a competent basic literacy—but it may be too late—this highly intelligent boy will probably leave school when he is 16, going out to face an uncertain future.

5.1 Ability

In the first decades of this century, there was a belief, fostered by the work of Porteus and other psychologists, that Aboriginal students were only of limited mental ability. While this view has been rejected among psychologists and theorists in child development, it does appear to still enjoy currency among some teachers.

We have already described situations in which Aboriginal students have been treated casually, without any real consideration of their abilities. Sadly, these experiences are all too common. It appears that frequently the abilities of Aboriginal young people are not recognised or drawn on by schools. It is also apparent that ability can be stifled by negative pressures in their homes or from among peers. Most teachers who are experienced with Aboriginal students regard them as being very bright and able. This ability, however, does not always transfer into academic achievement. An example is the girl we were told about who competently manages her family home, keeps it spotless and does all the purchasing, yet is only able to decipher one or two words in a page of writing.

Some teachers recognised a ‘failure syndrome’ for Aboriginal students which could begin in Years 1 and 2. Students trapped within this syndrome got into a habit of never working to their full potential. We believe that this may be a reality for many Aboriginal boys.

There is a need for schools to be sensitive to the real abilities of each individual Aboriginal student. Too often, schools appear to be prepared to relegate them to lower streams, often on the basis of a negative racial stereotype. There are also some schools which regard their only purpose as being to foster academic excellence. In these schools, there appears to be a belief that critical thinking and purposefulness can only be expected in the academic stream.

The first curriculum task for any school with Aboriginal students is to make an objective assessment of the ability of each one, finding out what strengths the student has and what the blockages are to academic skill development. Successful schools build on this initial assessment by developing individual programs in key learning areas for students at risk.

5.2 Skills

Literacy and Numeracy Issues

As we discussed earlier, issues to do with literacy and numeracy skills lie at the heart of the educational needs of many Aboriginal students. It is beyond the scope of this report to discuss in full all the complexities of this area, however, some points can be noted.

Low Level of Literacy

By the time they reach secondary school, most Aboriginal students will have gained skills in oral communication in Standard Australian English. Many, however, will have significant literacy problems.

These low levels of proficiency in English can be due to a variety of factors.

- The young person may have significant hearing problems.
- Primary teachers may not have been skilled in teaching literacy to reluctant readers.
- Relationship with primary teachers may have been poor.
- Family mobility may have resulted in a very disrupted primary schooling.
- Reading may not be valued in the home.

Aboriginal English

Any focus on the problems faced by Aboriginal students in learning English must begin with an understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal English (Eades 1988).

Aboriginal English is a valid dialect of English which is used extensively among Aboriginal communities. There are numerous variants, each of which draws in varying degrees on the vocabulary, grammar and usages of Aboriginal languages and on the forms of English used on missions last century.

The use of Aboriginal English can be a highly significant marker of identity for Aboriginal adolescents. There may be strong peer pressure on Aboriginal adolescents who 'talk flash' or 'talk like whitefellas'.

Aboriginal students may have difficulty in relating to some codes of Standard English. Language is used among Aboriginal people more sparsely and less interrogatively. A teacher who is highly verbal and uses language in a very controlling fashion is likely to alienate Aboriginal students who will feel that they are being intimidated by a 'loud teacher' or 'strong talk'. Teachers may be totally unaware of the effect they are having.

A feature of Aboriginal use of language that is relevant to schooling is the comparative lack of debate. There is a tradition of avoiding confrontation; some students will avoid participating in classroom activities that will put them at odds with other students and teachers.

Aboriginal languages also tend to be highly contextualised, distinctly different from English which, especially in its use in educational settings, tends to be strongly de-contextualised.

Masking

Aboriginal adolescents can develop effective skills in masking their lack of skills in classrooms.

We met several students who had successfully continued at school to ages 13 and 14, surviving with virtually no literacy. They had become adept at surviving in a literate world as non-literate members.

Teachers commented on Aboriginal boys who, in class, gave every appearance of being involved in the work at hand. It transpired later that they lacked the skills to undertake the task but were too embarrassed to call for help.

Teaching Strategies

There are a number of teaching and learning strategies which teachers can adopt which will be beneficial to Aboriginal students. These include:

- working in small groups;
- creating ‘hands on’ and practical learning situations;
- reducing reading and writing components and using other methods of recording work; and
- avoiding spotlighting Aboriginal students, whether for rebuke or praise.

5.3 Pathways and Preferred Subjects

While some Aboriginal parents may see the success of their children in terms of highly paid professional careers, the majority of Aboriginal students do not desire to become doctors or lawyers. Many, however, do have ambitions which embrace professions and trades. We met students who had firm intentions to take up careers such as journalism, childcare, teaching, archaeology, catering, carpentry and dancing.

In terms of career pathways and competencies, there is a real danger in quantifying ‘success’ as academic achievement and Year 12 retention. The desire of students to be homemakers, shop assistants, factory workers and

tradespeople is often denigrated by educators who have been acculturated to judge achievement solely in terms of academic scores. There is need to legitimise and acclaim other areas of success.

We saw plenty of evidence to indicate that Aboriginal students enjoyed courses which have a strong vocational and practical component. These courses need not be simply 'trades courses'. In one high school, the Early Childhood course was highly valued by the Aboriginal students enrolled. We were encouraged to find schools which are offering a range of pathways for students apart from the academic/tertiary stream. In several cases, these are being offered in partnership with TAFE colleges; by TAFE staff working in the school, or with school students going to the TAFE campus.

Partnerships are also being developed with industry. In some states, the final school certificates are being broadened to embrace these kinds of courses and experiences. All of these steps are welcome in terms of seeing more Aboriginal students succeed.

There is, of course, a danger here of perpetuating the image of desirable Aboriginal employment opportunities being limited to manual and outdoor trades. The dramatic increase of Aboriginal enrolments in tertiary education in recent years has helped to dispel that stereotype. The challenge to schools is to develop a range of pathways which are genuinely demanding in a range of competencies, not solely those which are related to tertiary entrance.

Preferred Subjects

Students generally preferred practical subjects such as Physical Education, Woodwork, Music, Drama, and Dance but others discussed their enthusiasm for academic subjects; History, Maths, English, Commerce and Science.

Aboriginal Studies was clearly the most valued subject. All Aboriginal students with whom we spoke wanted to see more Aboriginal Studies in their schools. They preferred to learn it as a discrete subject rather than as a perspective within other courses, an approach which they felt marginalised the subject area.

In several schools, Aboriginal students had achieved outstanding results in Aboriginal Studies in Years 11 and 12.

It was noticeable that in several schools, the introduction of dance programs with an emphasis on performances and cultural promotion had been a critical factor in encouraging Aboriginal students to participate more strongly in the life of the school.

Several students made the comment that the attractiveness of a subject depended more on the quality of their relationship with the teacher than the value or interest level of the subject itself.

Career Education

There are some excellent programs now operating which are heightening the awareness of Aboriginal students as to their future options. The Careers Aspirations Programs and Tertiary Aspirations Programs being run in some states are making highly significant inputs into the thinking of Aboriginal young people about their studies. Some teachers were concerned that these programs focussed too heavily on tertiary study.

The Australian Vocational Centres run by the Commonwealth Employment Service were highly praised. These centres provide experiences in work which are linked to local needs. The areas covered include hospitality, arid lands horticulture and tourism. In a similar vein, the Queensland Career Guidance Camp and the South Australian Science Summer School are valued by students.

One Community Development and Employment Program manager was concerned about the lack of vocational skills among Aboriginal students leaving school. In his experience, these young people lacked knowledge and skills in key areas such as budgeting, tax and tax file numbers, birth certificates, rents and receipts, bank accounts, voting and preparing to get their driving licence. He believed they were not adequately prepared for employment.

What Aboriginal Students Wanted from the Curriculum

Aboriginal students indicated that these were areas that they would like to see increased in the curriculum:

- individual tuition in difficult subjects;
- Aboriginal Studies;
- opportunities to take part in performance groups;
- practical courses, especially performing and creative artwork experiences;
and
- music, sport, excursions and camps.

5.4 Back to School Programs

There are programs operating in a number of centres with the aim of getting 'street kids', not only Aboriginal ones, back to school.

It was very apparent that these programs are effective and are appreciated by the Aboriginal young people whom they serve.

One program we observed operates in a wing of the school and has 43 students on roll. The brief is to work with long term non-attendees in the 12–16 age group. Some of these young people have been away from school for six years. Many began a pattern of irregular attendance at school in Years 3 or 4 and progressively tapered off from then on. The reasons they give for dropping out were associated with their increasing feelings of failure and the constant pressure of racism on their lives.

The program is run as an 'Open House'. The young people usually stay for the morning once they arrive. Twelve students have been won back into full time schooling over one year of operation. This appears to be remarkably good value for 1.6 teachers and one aide.

The staff believed that the essential aspect of the success of this Back to School program was that the Aboriginal young people involved had claimed ownership of the project. They were proud of it and proud to be part of it.

5.5 Curriculum Support

Aboriginal Education Workers and Aboriginal Teachers

There is universal agreement among teachers, students and parents that the appointment of an Aboriginal Education Worker (AEW) is essential in any school with a significant enrolment of Aboriginal students.

We met with several AEWs who were obviously filling a critical role in their schools. They were offering vital support for students and their parents and helping to establish bridgeheads between the Aboriginal community and the school.

It is regrettable that so few AEWs are employed in secondary schools. In our opinion, it is essential that more of these key personnel are deployed in these schools.

Despite their value to schools and students, it is apparent that the position is a difficult one. AEWs walk a tightrope as they seek to balance the conflicting demands of the school, students and parents. Divisions within each of these groups can cause as much stress as tensions between them.

In their relationships with students, they are concerned about achieving the right balance between being warm and being demanding. There is a constant fear for some that the young people will turn away from them and the school.

Several AEWs commented that they felt let down by Aboriginal parents, who they regarded as being too soft on their children.

Some also expressed a sense of conflict between what they were trying to achieve and the positions taken by their schools: 'Aboriginal teachers and AEWs feel that they are fighting a losing battle. The harder we work to support the kids the more schools push them out the back door'.

Separate Schooling

It is worth commenting that despite the criticisms which were made of schools and the ways in which they treat Aboriginal students, no-one with whom we spoke mentioned the concept of establishing alternative separate schooling for Aborigines. The overwhelming desire expressed to us was to make the system work more to the advantage of these students. Aboriginal parents and their children expressed to us their concerns about functioning more effectively within Australia and being recognised for who they are while still being free to live as individuals who can make their own contribution to national life.

Schools and Centres Visited

ACT

Gugan Gulwan Youth Project

New South Wales

Bidwill High School
Bidwill Public School
Cleveland Street High School
Coomealla High School
La Perouse Public School
Matrville High School
Yasmar School

Queensland

Jaragul Resource Centre
Richlands High School
Woodridge High School

South Australia

Augusta Park High School
Murray Bridge High School
Paralowie R-12 School
Port Augusta High School

Tasmania

Gielston Bay High School
School of Distance Education
Rokeby High School

Victoria

Doveton Secondary College
Mooroopna Secondary College
Shepparton High School
Swan Hill Primary School
Swan Hill Junior Secondary College

Persons Interviewed in the Course of the Project

New South Wales

Nola Allen
 Fred Briggs
 Alan Bruce
 Colin Campbell
 Chris
 Linda Christian
 Matthew Coe
 Clint Cooke
 John Dale
 Duane Dixon
 Geraldine Dwyer
 Ella
 Ann Fry
 George Gifford
 Patrick Hannan
 Marilyn Hill
 Sue Holden
 Wendy Holland
 Des Jones
 Jamie Linnell
 Naomi Lister
 Elizabeth Mc Glynn
 Tony Mellor
 Robert Miles
 Joash Minnacon
 Neville Murray
 Phil Nean
 Sue Nicholson
 Charlie Ord
 Olivia Patten
 Andrew Playford
 David Prosser
 Carol Reid
 Vanessa Rooke
 Dennis Ryan
 Gayle Silleri
 Petra Silva
 Robert Simms
 Peter Sims

Keven Spence
 Betty Stewart
 Phillip Streatfield
 Tamika
 Paul Traveni
 Vanessa
 Paul van de Ven
 Walter
 Grace Wickey
 Peta-joy Williams
 Helen Wilson
 Joyce Woodberry

Victoria

Geraldine Atkinson
 Robbie Britten
 Jan Buckland
 Sandy Dannenmann
 Fiona De Zylva
 Paul Edwards
 Laurie Fagan
 Shannon Firebrace
 Barbara Gray
 Bernie Kelly
 Rosie McKenry
 Shane McKinley
 Colleen Maher
 Iris Mallia
 Daniel Owen
 Jill Pattenden
 Irene Perry
 Marilyn Porter
 Jan Rabl
 Keith Staples
 Lucinda Tolmae
 Meryl Ward

Queensland

Gayle Abdy
 Donna Ahern
 Michele Ahmat
 Sandra Bach
 Bill Bowie
 Lyn Cizauskas
 Rebecca Collins
 Des Crump
 Lisa Hayman
 Ann Isaac
 Trisha Ishmail
 Eilsie Ishmail
 Alan Jamieson
 Michael Johnson
 Veronica Jukic
 David Keleher
 Ian Laidlaw
 Linda Link
 Pam Lynch
 Therese McCabe
 Drew Millar
 John Milne
 Kathryn Nand
 Aaron O'Connor
 Jenny Radke
 Colleen Sam
 Kylie Skeen
 Tanya Skeen
 Harriet Tamway
 Lesley van Mollenbrek-Andersen
 Raoul de Vidas
 Mayanne Watson
 Nancy Watson

South Australia

Vicki Benton
 Delrae Brady
 Jill Brindley
 Helen Brown

John Clarke
 James Collard
 Zsuzsi Coppin
 Jo Davidson
 Tara Dodd
 Barbara Fox
 Jo-Anne Gowley
 Michael Hare
 Fiona Haselgrove
 Joe Hull
 Connie Love
 Jan Makaev
 Chrisma McKenzie
 Jacinta McKenzie
 Taryn Nunn
 Di Russell
 David Roe Simmons
 Steve Simpson
 Marilyn Stuart
 Lee Sumner
 Pat Thomson
 Michelle Warren
 Nita Warren
 Tawana Weldon
 Mark Williams
 Carol Wilton

Tasmania

Julie Butt
 Maggi Gillham
 Bill Hodge
 Brenda Hodge
 Heath
 Trevor Rootes
 Scott
 Tammy
 Linda Woods

Bibliography

- Attwood, B. 1989, *The Making of the Aborigines*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.
- Australian Curriculum Studies Association 1994, *Curriculum Perspectives*, Vol. 14, No. 3, Canberra.
- Bourke, C. et al. 1994, *Aboriginal Australia*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane.
- Brady, W. 1991, *The Health of Young Aborigines*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra.
- Choo, C. 1990, *Aboriginal Child Poverty*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.
- Cormack, P. 1992, *The Nature of Adolescence: A Review of Literature Reviews and Other Selected Papers*, Education Department of South Australia, Adelaide.
- Cowlshaw, G. 1988, *Black, White and Brindle: Race in Rural Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Cuneen, Chris 1994, 'Enforcing Genocide? Aboriginal Young People and the Police', in White, R. & Adler, C. *The Police and Young People in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne.
- Day, A. 1992, 'Aboriginal Students Succeeding in the Senior High School Years', in McCann & Bailey (eds), *Creating Opportunities, Proceedings of the 4th National Conference for the Education of Gifted and Talented Children*, Melbourne.
- Department of School Education 1986, *The Placement of Aboriginal Children in Classes for the Mildly Intellectually Handicapped (OA Classes)*.
- Department for Education and Children's Services, Aboriginal Education Unit 1993, *Aboriginal Secondary Student Survey*, Adelaide.
- Eades, D. 1988, 'They don't speak an Aboriginal language, or do they?' in Keen, I. (ed), *Being Black*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra.
- Eckermann et al. 1992, *Binang Goonj; Bridging Cultures in Aboriginal Health*, University of New England Press, Armidale.

Eyers, V. et al. 1992, *Report of the Junior Secondary Review*, Education Department of South Australia, Adelaide.

Giroux, H. 1989, 'Schooling as a Form of Cultural Politics; Towards a Pedagogy of and for Difference', Giroux and McLaren (Eds.), *Critical Pedagogy, the State and Cultural Struggle*, State University of New York, New York.

Heaven, P. & Callan, V. 1990, *Adolescence; An Australian Perspective*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Sydney,

Langton, M. 'Well, I heard it on the radio and I saw it on the television.' 1993, Australian Film Commission.

McInerney, D. 1991, 'Key Determinants of Motivation of Non-traditional Aboriginal Students in School Settings; Recommendations for Educational Change', *Australian Journal of Education*, Vol. 35, No. 2.

Malin, M. 1990, 'The Visibility and Invisibility of the Aboriginal Child in an Urban Classroom', *Australian Journal of Education*, Vol. 34, No. 3.

Department of Employment, Education and Training, *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Statistical Annexe*, 1994, AGPS, Canberra.

New South Wales Department of School Education, *Public Report 1990*, Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne.

Ogbu, J. 1987, 'Variability in Minority School Performance: A Problem in Search of an Explanation', *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, Vol. 18.

Read, J. 1982, *The Stolen Generations; the Removal of Aboriginal Children in New South Wales 1883–1969*, New South Wales Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, Sydney.

Rizvi, F. & Crowley, V. 1993, 'Ethnicity and Curriculum' in Smith, D. (ed), *Australian Curriculum Reform: Action and Reaction*, Social Science Press, Wentworth Falls.

Schools Council, National Board of Employment, Education and Training 1992, *The Middle Years of Schooling (Years 6–10), A Discussion Paper*, Compulsory Years of Schooling project, AGPS, Canberra.

Schools Council, National Board of Employment, Education and Training 1993, *In the Middle: Schooling for Young Adolescents*, Compulsory Years of Schooling project, AGPS, Canberra.

Tannock, P. & Punch, K. 1975, *A Report on the Equal Status of Aboriginal Children in Western Australia*, University of Western Australia, Perth.

Teaching Aboriginal Girls, Conference Papers 1993, South Australian Education of Girls and Female Students Association, Adelaide.

The study of Aboriginal social health in Adelaide, Radford et al. 1990, *Taking Control*, Department of Primary Health Care, Flinders University, Adelaide.

Vacha, E. & McLaughlin, T. E. 1992, 'The social structural, family, school and personal characteristics of at-risk students: policy recommendations for school personnel', *Journal of Education*, Vol. 174, No. 3.

Watson, M. 1982, *Black Reflections*, Wattle Park Teachers Centre, Adelaide.

Watts, B. H. 1981, *Aboriginal Futures, Review of Research and Developments and Related Policies in the Education of Aborigines*, Schonell Education Research Centre, Brisbane.

Wexler, P 1992, *Becoming Somebody: Toward a Social Psychology of School*, The Falmer Press, Washington.

Wiles, J. & Bondi, J. 1981 *The Essential Middle School*, Merrill, Columbus, Ohio.

Appendix D

National Board Publications and Advices 1992–95

Education, Training and Employment Programs, Australia, 1970–2001: Funding and Participation (Commissioned Report No. 11): A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	January 1992
A Snapshot of the Early Years of Schooling: Compulsory Years of Schooling Project Paper No. 2 A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Schools Council	January 1992
Curriculum Initiatives (Commissioned Report No. 12): A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	February 1992
The Quality of Higher Education: Discussion Papers of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Higher Education Council	February 1992
Productive Interaction An Investigation of the Factors which Constrain and Promote Proposals under the APRA (I) and ARF (I) Schemes (Commissioned Report No. 13) A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	February 1992
Advice on Fee-Paying Postgraduate Courses: Report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Higher Education Council	March 1992
The Australian Vocational Certificate Training System A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Employment and Skills Formation Council	March 1992
Careers Education and Careers Advisory Services Forum: Proceedings and Outcomes A joint report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and the Business Council of Australia	March 1992
Higher Education Council Sixth Report to the National Board of Employment, Education and Training on the Operation of Section 14 of the <i>Higher Education Funding Act 1988</i> and the Higher Education Contribution Scheme	March 1992
A National Training Framework for Careers Coordinators: A Proposal (Commissioned Report No. 14) A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	April 1992
Advice on Funds Allocated to Higher Education Institutions: Report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Higher Education Council	April 1992

Advice on the Small Grants Scheme: Report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Australian Research Council	May 1992
Assessment of the Impact of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme on the Potentially Disadvantaged (Commissioned Report No. 15): A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Higher Education Council	May 1992
A Stitch in Time: Strengthening the First Years of School (Commissioned Report No. 16) Compulsory Years of Schooling Project Paper No. 3 A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Schools Council	May 1992
Employment, Education and Training Opportunities for Prisoners and Ex-prisoners (Commissioned Report No. 17): A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	June 1992
Issues arising from <i>Australia's Teachers: An Agenda for the Next Decade</i> —Assuring the Quality of Teachers' Work: Report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Schools Council	June 1992
Response to Discussion Paper, <i>Review of the Commonwealth Capital Grants Program for Non-government Schools</i> : Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Schools Council	June 1992
Review of the Special Research Centres Program and the Key Centres of Teaching and Research Program: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Australian Research Council	June 1992
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education in the Early Years: A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Schools Council	July 1992
The Australian Vocational Certificate Training System (Executive Summary): A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Employment and Skills Formation Council	July 1992
Disadvantaged Jobseekers: Casual, Part-time and Temporary Work (Commissioned Report No. 18) A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	July 1992
The Quality of Higher Education: Draft Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Higher Education Council	July 1992

Research and Research Training in a Quality Higher Education System: Occasional Paper of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Higher Education Council and Australian Research Council	July 1992
Developing Flexible Strategies in the Early Years of Schooling: Purposes and Possibilities A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Schools Council	August 1992
Minimum Fees for Postgraduate Courses: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Higher Education Council	August 1992
Research Infrastructure: Report of the Joint ARC–HEC–DEET Working Party, Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Australian Research Council	August 1992
Australian Research Council/Discipline Research Strategies: <i>Towards 2005: A prospectus for research and research training in the Australian earth sciences.</i> Prepared by a Working Party for the Australian Geoscience Council	August 1992
Australian Research Council Comments on Discipline Research Strategies: <i>Towards 2005: A prospectus for research and research training in the Australian earth sciences.</i>	
Commercialisation of Research: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Australian Research Council	September 1992
Australian Research Council/Discipline Research Strategies: <i>Educational Research in Australia</i> Report of the Review Panel, Strategic Review of Research in Education	September 1992
Comments on Discipline Research Strategies <i>Educational Research in Australia</i>	
Postgraduate Support and Student Mobility: Working Party Report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	September 1992
Planning for the 1993–95 Triennium: Preliminary Advice of the National Board and its Higher Education Council	September 1992
Current Practices in Credit Transfer and Related Issues: Occasional Papers of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	October 1992
Expanding the Research Base in Private Industry and Improving Interaction in Research across Sectors—Developments since 1988: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Australian Research Council	October 1992

Future Directions: Report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	October 1992
Higher Education: Achieving Quality A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Higher Education Council	October 1992
Response to the <i>Report of the Discipline Review of Computing Studies and Information Sciences Education</i> : Report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Higher Education Council	October 1992
Support for Postgraduate Research Awards in the 1993–95 Triennium: Interim Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Australian Research Council	October 1992
Review of Grants Outcomes No. 2: Response by the Australian Research Council to <i>Report No. 2, British and European History 1983–1987</i>	October 1992
Review of Grants Outcomes No. 3: Response by the Australian Research Council to <i>Report No. 3, Australian History 1981–1985</i>	October 1992
Review of Grants Outcomes No. 4: Response by the Australian Research Council to <i>Report No. 4, Igneous and Metamorphic Petrology and Geochemistry 1986–1990</i>	October 1992
Review of Grants Outcomes No. 5: Response by the Australian Research Council to <i>Report No. 5, Genetics and Evolution 1986–1990</i>	October 1992
Science and Technology Issues in Management Education: A report to the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and the Science and Technology Awareness Program of DITAC	October 1992
Changing Patterns of Teaching and Learning: The Use and Potential of Distance Education Materials and Methods in Australian Higher Education (Commissioned Report No. 19): Report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Higher Education Council	November 1992
Internationalisation of Research and Research Training in Higher Education: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Australian Research Council	November 1992
Credit Transfer and Related Issues: First Annual Report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	November 1992
National Board of Employment, Education and Training Annual Report 1991–92	November 1992
Post-compulsory Education and Training: Fitting the Need: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	November 1992

Response to the Report of the Taskforce on a Broadbanded Equity Program: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Schools Council	November 1992
Change and Growth—TAFE to 2001: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Employment and Skills Formation Council	December 1992
Distance Education in Australia: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Higher Education Council	December 1992
Industry Training Advisory Bodies: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Employment and Skills Formation Council	December 1992
The Middle Years of Schooling (Years 6–10): A Discussion Paper of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Schools Council	December 1992
Agenda Papers: Issues arising from <i>Australia's Teachers: An Agenda for the Next Decade</i> , Volume 2 A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Schools Council	December 1992
Research Infrastructure in Higher Education: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	December 1992
Skills Sought by Employers of Graduates (Commissioned Report No. 20): A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Higher Education Council	December 1992
Employment, Education and Training Opportunities for Prisoners and Ex-Prisoners: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	December 1992
Research Performance Indicators Survey (Commissioned Report No. 21) A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	January 1993
Australian Research Council/Discipline Research Strategies: <i>Physics: A Vision for the Future</i> Prepared by a Working Party of the National Committee for Physics of the Australian Academy of Science	February 1993
Australian Research Council Comments on Discipline Research Strategies: <i>Physics: A Vision for the Future</i>	
In the Middle: Schooling for Young Adolescents: A report by the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Schools Council	February 1993

Review of Grants Outcomes No. 6: Response by the Australian Research Council to <i>Report No. 6, Ecology 1986–1990</i>	March 1993
Review of Grants Outcomes No. 7: Response by the Australian Research Council to <i>Report No. 7, Condensed Matter Physics 1986–1990</i>	March 1993
Review of Grants Outcomes No. 9: Response by the Australian Research Council to <i>Report No. 9, Mathematical Sciences 1987–1991</i>	March 1993
Equity Outcomes: A Report to the Schools Council's Task Force on a Broadbanded Equity Program for Schools	April 1993
Issues in Science and Technology Education: A Survey of Factors which Lead to Underachievement (Commissioned Report No. 22) A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	April 1993
What Do They Know?: The Understanding of Science and Technology by Children in Their Last Year of Primary School in Australia (Commissioned Report No. 23) A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	April 1993
Adult English Language and Literacy Provision by the Community Based Education Sector: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Australian Language and Literacy Council	May 1993
Advice on the Small Grants Scheme: Report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Australian Research Council	May 1993
Assessment for Australian Vocational Certificates: Supplementary Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Employment and Skills Formation Council	May 1993
Competency Based Approaches to University Selection and Credit Transfer: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Higher Education Council	May 1993
Funding Principles for the 1993–95 Triennium and Advice on Funds Allocated to Higher Education Institutions: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Higher Education Council	May 1993
Higher Education Council Seventh Report to the National Board of Employment, Education and Training on the Operation of Section 14 of the <i>Higher Education Funding Act 1988</i> and the Higher Education Contribution Scheme	May 1993

Implementation of the Recommendations of the External Review of the Waite Agricultural Research Institute, University of Adelaide: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Australian Research Council	May 1993
Postgraduate Support and Student Mobility: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Australian Research Council	May 1993
Review of Grants Outcomes No. 8: Response by the Australian Research Council to <i>Report No. 8, Materials and Chemical Engineering 1987–1991</i>	July 1993
Review of Grants Outcomes No. 10: Response by the Australian Research Council to <i>Report No. 10, Organic Chemistry 1987–1991</i>	July 1993
Review of Grants Outcomes No. 11: Response by the Australian Research Council to <i>Report No. 11, Fluid Mechanics 1986–1990</i>	July 1993
Planning and Funding Principles for the 1994–96 Triennium: Preliminary Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Higher Education Council	August 1993
Higher Education Research Infrastructure: Report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	August 1993
Five to Fifteen: Reviewing the ‘Compulsory’ Years of Schooling A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Schools Council	September 1993
Review of Grants Outcomes No. 1: Response by the Australian Research Council to <i>Report No. 1, Economics 1986–1990</i>	September 1993
Assessment of Competency Quality Related to a Standard Level: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Employment and Skills Formation Council	September 1993
Australian Research Council/Discipline Research Strategies; <i>Chemistry; A Vision for Australia</i> . Prepared by a Review Panel appointed by the Royal Australian Chemical Institute	September 1993
Australian Research Council Comments on Discipline Research Strategies: <i>Chemistry: A Vision for Australia</i>	
High Energy Physics in Australia: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Australian Research Council	September 1993
Raising the Standard: Middle Level Skills in the Australian Workforce Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Employment and Skills Formation Council	November 1993

National Board of Employment, Education and Training Annual Report 1992–93	November 1993
Credit Transfer and Related Issues: Second Annual Report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	November 1993
Consultative Forum on Credit Transfer and Skill Recognition: Proceedings	November 1993
Crossing Innovation Boundaries: The Formation and Maintenance of Research Links Between Industry and Universities In Australia—Volume 1 (Commissioned Report No. 26) Report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Australian Research Council	November 1993
Crossing Innovation Boundaries: The Formation and Maintenance of Research Links Between Industry and Universities In Australia—Volume 2	November 1993
Crossing Innovation Boundaries: The Formation and Maintenance of Research Links Between Industry and Universities In Australia—Executive Summary	November 1993
Incorporating English Language and Literacy Competencies into Industry Standards: Report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Australian Language and Literacy Council	November 1993
Australian Vocational Certificate Training for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Employment and Skills Formation Council	November 1993
Review of Grants Outcomes No. 12: Response by the Australian Research Council to <i>Report No. 12, Molecular Biology 1987–1991</i>	November 1993
The Effects of Resource Concentration on Research Performance. (Commissioned Report No. 25) A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Australian Research Council	November 1993
Post-compulsory Education and Training Arrangements in the Australian States and Territories A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Schools Council	December 1993
Workplace Learning in the Professional Development of Teachers (Commissioned Report No. 24) A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Schools Council	January 1994
Science and Technology Education: Foundation for the Future A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	February 1994

The Strategic Role of Academic Research: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Australian Research Council	February 1994
The Collaborative Activities of the Institute of Advanced Studies, The Australian National University: First Annual Report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Australian Research Council	February 1994
Speaking of Business: The Needs of Business and Industry for Language Skills Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Australian Language and Literacy Council	February 1994
Education and Training for 16–18 year olds: Some Reflections from Europe A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Schools Council	March 1994
Reviews of Grants Outcomes No. 13: Response by the Australian Research Council to <i>Report No. 13, Electronics and Communications 1987- 1991</i>	March 1994
The Role of Schools in the Vocational Preparation of Australia's Senior Secondary Students A Discussion Paper of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Schools Council	April 1994
Quantitative Indicators in Australian Academic Research (Commissioned Report 27) A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Australian Research Council	April 1994
Higher Education Council Eighth Report to the National Board of Employment, Education and Training on the Operation of Section 14 of the Higher Education Funding Act 1988 and the Higher Education Contribution Scheme	May 1994
Advice on Funds Allocated to Higher Education Institutions. Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Higher Education Council.	May 1994
Provision of Post-compulsory Education and Training in Non-Metropolitan Australia A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	June 1994
Reviews of Grants Outcomes No. 14: Response by the Australian Research Council to <i>Report No. 14, Psychology 1986- 1990</i>	July 1994
Developing Indicators of Infrastructure Needs in Secondary Schools (Commissioned Report No. 31) A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Schools Council	August 1994

The Shape of Things to Come: Small Business Employment and Skills: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Employment and Skills Formation Council	August 1994
Developing Lifelong Learners through Undergraduate Education (Commissioned Report No. 28) A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Higher Education Council	August 1994
Guidelines for Disability Services in Higher Education (Commissioned Report No. 29) A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Higher Education Council	August 1994
Resource Implications of the Introduction of Good Strategies in Higher Education for Disadvantaged Students (Commissioned Report No. 30) A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Higher Education Council	August 1994
The Enabling Characteristics of Undergraduate Education: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Higher Education Council	August 1994
Making the Future Work: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Employment and Skills Formation Council	September 1994
Women in the Teaching Profession (Commissioned Report No. 32) A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Schools Council	September 1994
Beyond Entry Level Skills (Summary Report of <i>Raising the Standard: Middle Level Skills in the Australian Workforce</i>)	September 1994
National Board of Employment, Education and Training Annual Report 1993–94	October 1994
Credit Transfer and the Recognition of Prior Learning: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	October 1994
Reviews of Grants Outcomes No. 15: Response by the Australian Research Council to <i>Report No. 15, Classics, Classical Archaeology and Prehistory</i>	November 1994
Increasing the Learning Options: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Higher Education Council	November 1994
Cost and Quality in Resource-based Education on and off Campus (Commissioned Report No. 33) A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Higher Education Council	November 1994

A Study of the Academic Results of On- and Off-Campus Students (Commissioned Report No. 34) A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Higher Education Council	November 1994
Making it Work: Women and Small Business Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Employment and Skills Formation Council	December 1994
More Than Able: People with Disabilities and Small Business: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Employment and Skills Formation Council	December 1994
Cultivating the Human Factor: Employment and Skills in Australian Rural Industries: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Employment and Skills Formation Council	December 1994
The Role of Schools in the Vocational Preparation of Australia's Senior Secondary Students: Final Report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Schools Council	December 1994
Reviews of Grants Outcomes No. 16: Response by the Australian Research Council to <i>Report No. 16, Inorganic Chemistry 1988–1992</i>	January 1995
Collaborative Activities of the Institute of Advanced Studies, The Australian National University. Second Annual Report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Australian Research Council	January 1995