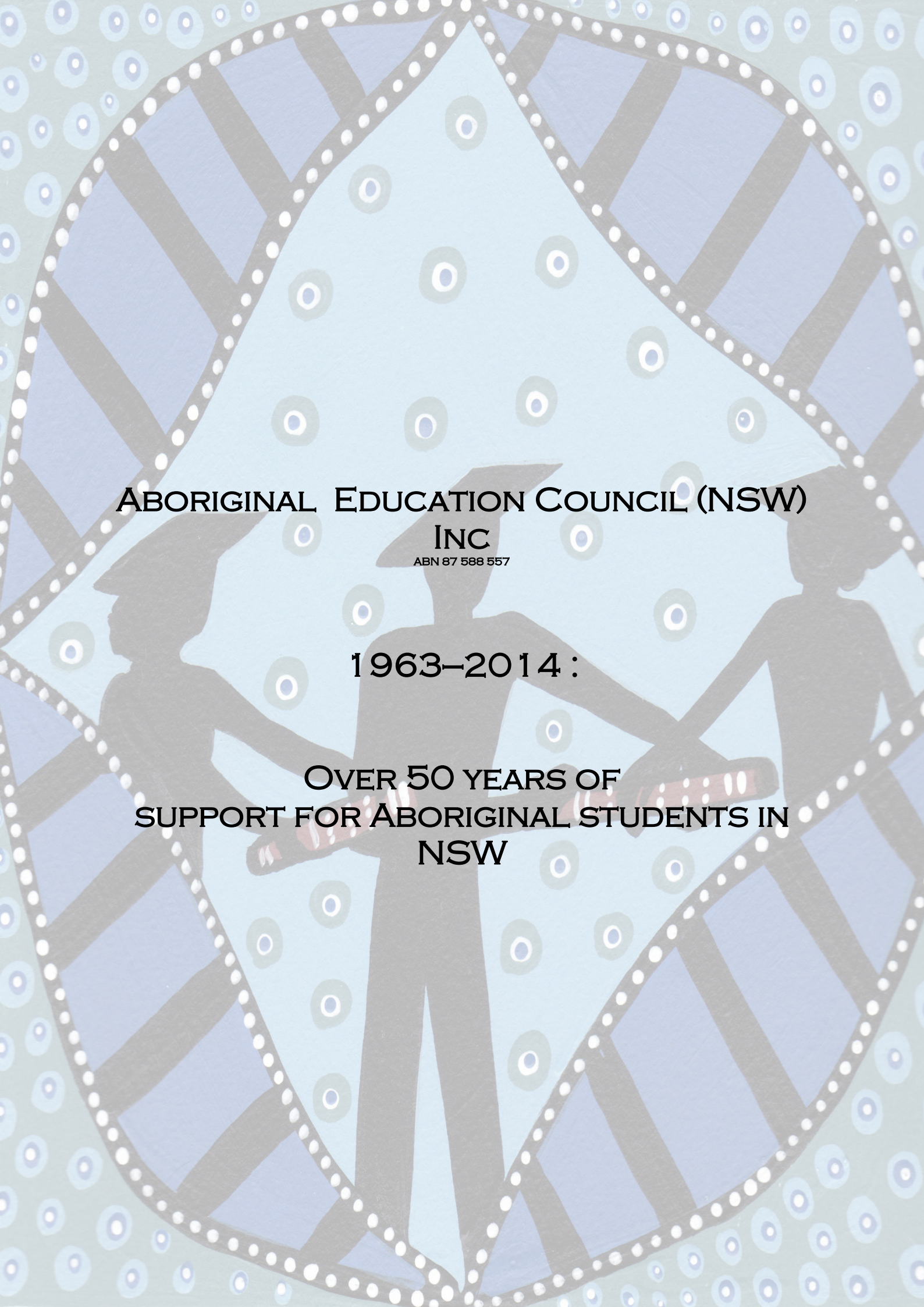

Aboriginal Education Council (NSW) Inc

ABN 87 588 557

1963–2014 :

Over 50 years of support for Aboriginal students in NSW

We the members of the Aboriginal Education Council (NSW) Inc. acknowledge that Aboriginal people are the owners of this land and we recognise and respect their unique position in Australian history and Culture.

THE ABORIGINIAL EDUCATION COUNCIL (NSW) INC

CELEBRATING OVER 50 YEARS OF SUPPORT FOR ABORIGINAL STUDENTS IN NSW

1963 –2014

Original Text

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For the Aboriginal Education Council
2003

Edited and Updated

Beverly Baker
For the Aboriginal Education council 2014

In memory of Alan Towers Duncan
1924-2014

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- AEC Annual Reports
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- Various books written by a number of authorities

ABORIGINAL EDUCATION COUNCIL (NSW) INC

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Foreword

It is an enormous honour to be invited to provide the foreword to this important history of a remarkable organisation.

The Aboriginal Education Council is celebrating over 50 years of continual operation. Their history is littered with the names of many people who trail blazed in issues related not just to Aboriginal education but also the human rights of Aboriginal people. It is not just the story of the Council, it is the story of Aboriginal education in NSW.

Aboriginal education is fundamentally about two things. Firstly, it is about equity of outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

It has been put to me that it should really be about equity of access so that all children in our education systems have the same opportunity. What a limited and easy view to take. If only it were true that equal access translates in equal outcomes. It does not!

The life choices and choice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families at every social indicator is cause for this country to hold its head in shame. If a child is come to school tired, ill and from an overcrowded and poor home, equal access will and does not translate to equal outcomes.

The second tier of Aboriginal education is the education of all people about Aboriginal history, culture and peoples, what we might call Aboriginal Studies in the school curriculum. This is crucial and should be mandatory for all children It is essentially about truth telling about our collective history and therefore how we shape the future. The Council clearly recognised both these things well before they became conventional wisdom. The Aboriginal Education Council has been rich with people in its service who understand the imperatives of social justice

I never cease to be moved by the quote of Dr. Mick Dodson whilst he was the Social Justice Commissioner. It captures the incredibly important role that education plays.

"Social justice must always he considered from a perspective which is grounded in the daily lives of indigenous Australians.

Social justice is what faces you in the morning. It is awakening in a house with adequate water, supply, cooking facilities and sanitation. It is the ability to nourish your children and send to a school where their education not only equips them for employment hut reinforces their knowledge and appreciation of

their cultural inheritance. It is the prospect of genuine employment and good health; a Life of choices and opportunity free from discrimination. "

This book and the history really paints the picture of the history of Aboriginal people in NSW. It helps to explain in a real way the misconception and sometimes racist attitudes that bedevilled true equal outcomes for Aboriginal children.

One quote above others that encapsulates the attitudes of the past stated;

"It was suggested that this trait might he caused by several factors the principal one being that Aboriginal children, as a whole, do not possess an intelligence quotient comparable to that of their white counterparts" 1961 Annual Report of Aborigines' Welfare Board.

I want to congratulate and pay homage to the Council for over 50 years of service to Aboriginal families, especially the children of these families.

I also acknowledge the many, many people who have been part of the family of the Aboriginal Education Council, whose tireless service and vision has delivered equity for so many.

THIS BOOK IS PUBLISHED TO CELEBRATE OVER 50 YEARS OF WORK IN THE FIELD OF ABORIGINAL EDUCATION BY THE ABORIGINAL EDUCATION COUNCIL (NSW) INC

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The Great South Land

When the colony of New South Wales was first established in 1788, the invaders led by Governor Phillip paid as little attention as possible to the original inhabitants.

The explorer William Dampier once described Aboriginal people as 'the most miserable creatures in all the world' and this was the view held by the majority of the new settlers. Unable to step outside the bounds of their own cultural experience, the English despised the lack of materialism, the communal landholding and absence of private property, and the importance of family and clan obligations. To European eyes all these were hallmarks of an uncivilised race headed for extinction.

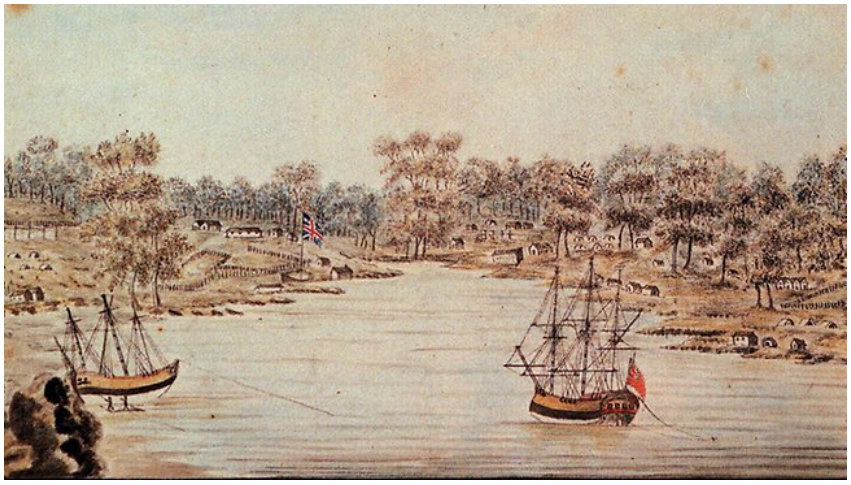
The nomadic ways of the original Australians meant that they did not value gathering material possessions, or aim for individual success. Instead they lived a lifestyle which depended on co-operation rather than competition.

Aboriginal people believed in helping their fellow kin and in sharing their possessions. Individual ownership had little or no place in their lives and was not significant in their culture.

The early colonists made no attempt to understand the rich culture inherent in the lives of the Aboriginal people nor did they comprehend the social and religious patterns which governed the way they lived.

Instead, Australia's founding fathers believed that the Aboriginal race would die out, and chose to do nothing to prevent this. They also chose, conveniently, to ignore the ample evidence of complex laws governing the ownership of land. This allowed the doctrine of *Terra Nullius* (land belonging to no one) to apply, and for all land to be annexed by the Crown.

Aboriginal people were driven off their ancient homelands and had their traditional lifestyle, culture, and economy destroyed, yet they were denied the vote and other civil rights, and weren't even counted as citizens in the Census until 1967.



Reserves, Missions and Pastoral Camps

In the 1860s it was government policy to place Aboriginal people, "for their protection" onto specially organised reserves and missions.

So it fell to the missionaries and reserve managers rather than the government to provide food, clothing, medicine, as well as religion, to the Aboriginal people.

Those who were not sent to mission stations or to government reserves were often drafted to work on rural stations, where they lived in squalid camps and were paid a pittance for long hours of arduous work. They were subject to many restrictions on their freedom and suffered extreme discrimination.

They were, however, highly skilled stockmen who deserved to be rewarded for the contribution that they made to the wealth and security of the budding nation. Unfortunately their efforts were taken for granted.

In these early days any attempt by Aboriginal people to retaliate against the treatment they received, or any attempt to resist was regarded as a criminal act and they were punished indiscriminately and ruthlessly.

The reserves and mission stations did however provide Aboriginal people with a 'paternalistic' sort of security and were therefore accepted by many.

While the churches and missionaries were the first sources of educational provision for the early settlers there was seldom any attempt made to include Aboriginal children -- unless it was to teach the rudiments of reading so that they could read the Bible.

There was no effort whatsoever to provide a proper and formal education for Aboriginal people. This was the situation even when, in 1880 free, compulsory and secular education was introduced in NSW.

This all important Act implied that Aboriginal students would attend and be welcomed into the public system.

There was, however, no specific clause that demanded their inclusion.

It is sad, therefore, that over time and certainly in conflict with the Act's intention, social attitudes led to the establishment of a number of separate schools for Aboriginal children.

From the Department of Education's publication 'Sydney and the Bush' we learn that ***at the end of the 1930s the Aboriginal system consisted of about forty schools mostly in sub-standard buildings and taught at the lower level by untrained teachers.'***

Policies which supported segregation permitted Aboriginal children to attend local schools only '***if they were adequately dressed and well fed'***, and as well, '***they had to be clean, clad and courteous'.***.

In 1902 an ***'exclusion on demand'*** policy was introduced when the then Minister for Education gave instructions to schools in NSW to remove Aboriginal children if white parents so demanded. It was this removal of Aboriginal children from mainstream classes that created a need for separate schools.

When the Aborigines' Protection Board was established in 1883 it did establish a policy which allowed for the education of Aboriginal children living on the reserves which had, by then, been established.

Many of the managers on the Reserves were appointed because they possessed the 'missionary spirit' which was thought to be a necessary requirement when working with Aboriginal people.

These managers were expected to include the education of children as part of their duties despite the fact that they had neither the time nor the qualifications to provide for proper teaching or instruction to the children under their control.

And so the situation remained until 1916 when the first syllabus for Aboriginal schools was introduced. This new syllabus stressed manual training as its primary feature and reading writing and arithmetic to 3rd class level as other requirements.

From "Sydney and the Bush" we learn that ***'In 1916 a course of studies for Aboriginal schools was issued which laid heavy emphasis on teaching Aboriginal children practical subjects in preparation for vocations as domestic servants or farm labourers. The standard of work officially expected in Aboriginal schools was of a lower standard than public schools; their teachers were inferior in quality. No one expected Aborigines to acquire or to require anything more than the rudiments of learning'***

And so the advancement through education was impeded seriously until around 1939 when a Public Service Board Enquiry found that ***'at present the system of education of Aboriginal children leaves much to be desired.'***.

As a result of this enquiry a revised Syllabus was introduced. This, however, still stressed ***'manual training, physical education and gardening'***. As well it contained a specific instruction that the '***proportion of time devoted to manual work, domestic work and nature work must not be decreased without the written approval of the District Inspector of schools'.***

So still Aboriginal children were treated differently than were their peers and so their opportunity of success in the more formal subjects was seriously impeded.

Paternalism

Paternalism was rife in the minds of the early pioneers. They had ideas about what was best for young Aboriginal children and there was a real belief that if the children were separated from their families and kin and, from the earliest age possible, put into homes, then they could be trained in European ways.

So began the policy of stealing young Aboriginal children and placing them, supposedly for their own good, in special homes.

To-day a lot is known about the ***'stolen generations'*** thanks to the wonderful work of Aboriginal organisations such as the regional Link-up groups which were funded by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission.

Special homes were set up at places such as Bomaderry for babies stolen from their parents and Cootamundra and Kinchela near Kempsey for older children. For many years these were the only homes and families known to many Aboriginal children.

Aboriginal children stayed in these homes until such time as they were adopted out, were employed, or until they reached eighteen years old.

Ken Brindle, a former Vice-President of the Aboriginal Education Council, and someone about whom further is written in this book was taken from his parents and spent many years at the home at Kinchela.

While he did attend secondary school at Kempsey, his before and after school activities included heavy farm and dairy work from early each morning to after the evening milking.

I well remember many of the tales Ken told me of his experiences at Kinchela. Tales of the children having to go out to round up the cows bare-foot and of them ending up with very serious cases of frostbite. And of children being tied to the leg of a very heavy table for hours on end for minor misdemeanours

Amongst other things he told me were details of some horrific experiences at Kinchela and of the harshness of his life there.

Bomaderry Infants Home, 1928. Courtesy State Records New South Wales.

From the Bomaderry Babies home most were adopted out to white families and the records kept were scant indeed, so complicating any future reunion with their families.

Changing Viewpoints

This cruel and complacent paternalism received a salutary shock when thirty students from Sydney University arranged a bus tour of the north and north-west of New South Wales.

The group was led by Charles Perkins who was the President of the Student Action for Aborigines Group at the University of Sydney.

This brought him nationwide attention which, because of his character, capacity and achievements, he retained throughout his lifetime.

As Senator Aden Ridgeway said of Charles Perkins ***"I regard him as the champion of champions. None of the Indigenous leaders would be in the position we are today without him having paved the way for the rest of us to follow. Charlie was a man who used the fire in his belly to dedicate his life to fighting for his beliefs and for getting recognition of the rights of Indigenous people."***

This action by students was likened to the 'freedom rides' which were part of the civil rights movement in USA, highlighting segregation in that country. The students' action was, however, quite different in its organisation and its purpose.

Its aim, as well as collecting information, was to draw public attention to the entire Aboriginal question and to draw attention to the policies, or lack of them, which held Aboriginal people in permanent discrimination and disadvantage.

A very positive start to this bus tour was made when an editorial in the Sydney Morning Herald said ***It is deeply encouraging that more people – and young people with whom the future lies – are interesting themselves in Australia's many faceted Aboriginal problems "***

Negatives however, soon made their way into the blatantly biassed country press, which accused the students of being "***deliberately engineered to exaggerate, so creating an impression that racial discrimination is on a much larger scale than it really is."***

Jim Spigelman, now New South Wales Chief Justice but then Secretary of the student group wrote, that ***'the provinciality of the country press had to be experienced to be believed'***.

The students surveyed the reaction of the political parties just before a State election and there were indications that the tour was having a real impact on the electorate.

One positive reaction from the government was when the Premier of NSW, J. B. Renshaw, came out in public and debated with Charles Perkins and Jim Spigelman the whole Aboriginal question and the existing policies..

The blatant country press bias, however, continued with politicians and aspiring politicians making their negative viewpoints known.

When the tour visited Walgett the local member stated that there was no discrimination on the basis of colour in that town and the member for Moree was of the opinion that ***'it is tragic that the university students should stir up trouble on the Aboriginal question'.*** The local member for the Kempsey area agreed.

These reactions from those in power ensured that the tour was provided the incentive for further public action by concerned community members

The Rev. Ted Noffs actively supported and participated in the student tour by allowing his Wayside Chapel to be used as its Sydney base.

As well, the Australian Council of Churches added their support and said the 'survey on the Aboriginal situation and action against discrimination is of great importance.

During the tour many, many examples of blatant discrimination were discovered. These ranged from the exclusion of Aboriginal people including children from community facilities such as local swimming pools, clubs, theatres and public halls.

But perhaps even more serious were the more subtle and sinister forms of discrimination which existed in many of the towns visited.

Local areas were seen to have generated their own racial folklore which differed only in a degree to the very worst forms of racism. This type of folklore was seen, by the student activists, to have a disturbing impact on the self-respect and pride of individuals and on the whole of the Aboriginal group.

Perhaps one of the most important and positive aspects of the bus tour was the favourable reaction the students received from most of the Aboriginal people.

It showed that they were very concerned about the health, housing and education needs of their people and it showed them that only political action would put these needs on the political agenda.

The Aboriginal Education Council and its members and supporters saw this important tour as providing the means of stimulating government and community action for Aboriginal development, and of further educating the white community.

Charles Perkins waits with children from Moree Aboriginal Station outside Moree swimming pool, shortly before attempting to enter, 20 February 1965. *Daily Mirror*, 22 February. (Photo courtesy of Newspix)

Charles Perkins

Changing Times

It was not until the NSW Department of Education assumed the responsibility for the education of Aboriginal children and that teacher-managers on the various Reserves were slowly replaced by trained and qualified teachers, that the opportunity for real change presented itself.

Sadly it seemed to make little difference as most of the new teachers had little or no experience with Aboriginal students.

After the Second World War there was an extreme teacher shortage. This compounded by the 'baby boom' of the 50s meant that it was not until the mid-fifties that all Aboriginal schools were eventually staffed by trained teachers.

This was the first moment that those living on Reserves had had any real opportunity for education, and it surely came as no surprise that the majority of Aboriginal adults had not had the opportunity to develop skills in either literacy or numeracy.

Nor was surprising that many Aboriginal parents could not see the value of education as a means of improving the opportunities available to them and to their children.

Alan Duncan was one of these trained teachers first appointed to the Aboriginal school on the Reserve at Moonahcullah. This appointment led Alan to observe the problems and the deficiencies and set him off on his now recognised pathway to improvements in Aboriginal education.

Alan T Duncan

As Aboriginal children gained new opportunities to take advantage of education it could have been argued that they were no longer suffering educational disadvantage.

However social issues such as health, poverty and poor housing has hindered their ability to learn and to achieve successful outcomes.

Until the deficiencies in other service areas are overcome the situation will not change. This surely must always be a government priority if they genuinely want to deliver to Aboriginal people educational services that are equal to the rest of the population.

A myth, perpetuated over time and supported by blatant discrimination, holds that Aboriginal people are not able to learn as do those from European backgrounds.

There was a well demonstrated need for Aboriginal people to participate in the skilled trades and professions so as to enable them to participate in all facets of the society.

There was, however little being done by governments to achieve this end, despite there being a wonderful technical network of tertiary institutions which could deliver the necessary services if funding for special Aboriginal programs was available and appropriate courses developed.

For there to be changes which would bring about a lifting of educational results a very different teaching and learning strategy was needed.

In its 1961 Annual Report the Aborigines' Welfare Board stated "***In view of the small number of Aboriginal children completing secondary education – even to intermediate standard – field officers were directed to discuss this aspect with headmasters of secondary schools throughout the State, particularly in respect of the pronounced tendency of Aboriginal bursars and Aboriginal school children to finish schooling when they reach the statutory school leaving age and of those who do elect to continue, go no further than the Intermediate.***" The report went on to say ***"It was suggested that this trait might be caused by several factors the principal one being that Aboriginal children, as a whole, do not possess an intelligence quotient comparable to that of their white counterparts".***

However in its next report of the Board rejected this idea and said that further investigation had taken place which ***"….discounted any suggestion that one reason might be a lower intelligence quotient, as compared with white children, and generally, the finding was that the primary factors are absence of home study facilities and parental interest and possibly, the lack of groundwork which could be provided at kindergarten level."***

Those in authority were, at last examining the reasons as to why Aboriginal children were not succeeding in mainstream schooling and why they were not continuing on and seeking further education.

While there are still those in the community who assume that Aboriginal people are generally below average intelligence there were studies including one by a special committee set up by U.N.E.S.C.O. which found that "***according to present knowledge, there is no proof that the groups of mankind differ in heir innate mental characteristics whether in respect of intelligence or temperament. The scientific evidence indicates that the range of mental capacities in all ethnic groups is much the same."***

This statement has never been effectively challenged and it is well accepted that the failure of Aboriginal children to achieve educational standards equal to their European peers has its origins in successive governments failing to ensure

that the social, housing and health problems faced by Aboriginal families are overcome.

It was still patently obvious that the politicians of the day had little concern to address the educational needs of Aboriginal people.

They failed to make any efforts to address the problems or make any effort to change the system, simply because there were no votes for them or for their party in so doing.

The challenge was for governments to establish a learning environment which was meaningful and relevant to the Aboriginal students.

Many groups and organisations in the general community were, at this time, expressing concern about the plight of Aboriginal people and it was out of these concerns that there was developed the policy of assimilation

It was thought that if Aboriginal people were given the same rights as others and their conditions improved that the wrongs of the past would right themselves. But it just wasn't happening!

And it didn't even start to happen until the responsibility for the education of Aboriginal children passed from the Aboriginal Welfare Board to the Department of Education.

This should have provided the impetus for some new thinking about the educational needs of Aboriginal children.

There was at that time, little or no research available to demonstrate how successful teaching and learning could be achieved for the Aboriginal people.

So the situation for Aboriginal people and their status as part of the community remained as it had been for many decades. .

There was, however, a growing concern about how best to improve the living conditions and the health of the Aboriginal population and there were many people who now recognised the blatant racism afforded Aboriginal people in the past.

As well there was a real and growing concern that unless action was taken to improve educational opportunities there would continue to be many intellectually bright Aboriginal children doomed to a life of servitude because of the colour of their skin.

The difficulties faced by teachers in schools with Aboriginal students began to emerge, and pressure soon came from those who were frustrated that their best efforts were not able to help Aboriginal children to achieve successful outcomes in their learning

So after many decades of neglect and inaction at last people were seeking solutions and thinking of the way forward. Alan Duncan was one of those who wanted to move forward.

From Interest to Action

In 1959 when he attended a Conference at the University of New England and heard of the work of Jim Warburton of that University, that Alan Duncan first joined the Australian Aboriginal Fellowship.

Alan knew only too well the problems associated with Aboriginal education.

He was at that time Principal of Hillston Central School and had previously taught at both Moonahcullah and Woodenbong schools, so his experience in teaching and working with Aboriginal communities was evident.

He certainly was able to bring a lot of knowledge to each of the forums in which he participated.

Just a short time later, the Aboriginal Fellowship joined with other like organisations from other States to become the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

This group brought the whole question of the past grievances of Aboriginal people to the fore and placed the needs well and truly on the political agenda.

Aboriginal leaders like Kath Walker, and Pastor Doug Nichols were the driving force in FCAATSI which was demanding that the same rights be given Aboriginal people as those enjoyed by their white counterparts. And at last their voices and demands were being heard!

Many white Australians still, however, maintained an ***'out of sight, out of mind'*** attitude to the whole question.

There were, however, many in the general community who were troubled by the lack of action by Governments and by those in authority.

And many people in the general community were thinking about how the status of Aboriginal people could be raised. and how the opportunities that had hitherto been denied them could be provided.

The original Australian Constitution said ***"In recognising the numbers of people of the Commonwealth, or of a State or other parts of the Commonwealth, Aboriginal natives shall not be counted."***

It was becoming increasingly obvious that the time had arrived when some amendments to the Constitution were needed to provide Aboriginal people with, at least their basic rights.

The apathy of the general community towards the needs and the rights of the Aboriginal people was slowly being eroded and it was generally agreed that the Aboriginal culture should remain and be preserved and that all forms of discrimination should be removed.

While in 1965 the '***Freedom rides'*** organised by Charles Perkins and supported by university students did highlight many of the areas as New South Wales

where discrimination was blatant and where Aboriginal people were denied access to such places as local swimming pools, hotels, cinemas and clubs, little had changed.

Governments were still adhering to a policy of assimilation. However people were, by that time, becoming convinced that assimilation was, in fact, really ‘Europeanisation’.

Faith Bandler, had by this time. emerged as one of the leaders who were seeking to have a Referendum on Aboriginal issues.

Eventually it was agreed that there should be a referendum which referred questions on the rights of Aboriginal people to vote to the entire white population.

So in 1967 the Australian people voted ten to one in favour of amending the Australian Constitution and so give the Commonwealth the power to make laws for Aboriginal people and to include them in the national census.

This then should have been the time for governments to move on and seek solutions to the problems of health, housing and education.

There were still many other issues which affected the Aboriginal people and which needed to be resolved and not the least of them was the question of improving the retention rate of Aboriginal students and of their successful completion of the compulsory years of schooling..

The opportunity was there to recognise the values and heritage of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait people and for everyone to work towards providing justice and equity for them.

Mrs. Kath Walker (centre), confers with Mr. W.C. Wentworth, Mr. J. Morgan, Mrs. Faith Bandler and Mr. Gordon Bryant before the referendum last year.

A New Awareness

During the late 50s and early 60s there emerged a new public consciousness and a better knowledge in regard to the Aboriginal people and their needs. There was great concern that most had to depend on welfare for their very existence.

So at last there was a growing feeling that the entire community had a moral obligation to insist that those in authority should assist to raise the social and economic status of Aboriginal people.

Members of the Aboriginal Education Council always maintained that a co-ordinated series of activities developed with the active involvement of Aboriginal people and their communities was essential if its planned projects and programs were to be successful.

They realised also that it would have to capitalise on the interest of a number of voluntary organisations which had become active in Aboriginal affairs.

To mount projects and to institute new programs depended on raising funds and so the members set about raising money, firstly to fund its proposed secondary scholarships and then to support other proposed pilot projects.

Working Towards Educational Change

In 1963 Alan Duncan was appointed to the Department of Adult Education at the University of Sydney, and charged with the responsibility of discovering where the needs for Aboriginal learning lay and of consulting with others on how they might be met.

What emerged was the need for a special group to support Alan's work and it was imperative that there be some form of organisation which encouraged Aboriginal people to participate.

So the Consultative Committee on Aboriginal Education comprising a number of interested people, both black and white, came into being in early 1963. This group consulted with Aboriginal people and came to the conclusion that Aboriginal education had to be tackled with the whole family involved, because the educational disadvantages suffered were influenced by many factors and many needs.

Alan had been set a formidable task. He alone had to cover the whole State, including Reserves and remote communities, to identify areas of need and to win the trust and confidence of Aboriginal people.

While Alan's work and responsibility was primarily focussed on adult education he was very interested in and concerned about the education of Aboriginal children. He studied and then visited New Zealand to see the progress that had been made there in providing for the needs of the Maori people – adults and children.

He was encouraged by many of the projects and programs that he had observed and returned anxious to implement new programs of training for Aboriginal adults.

As well he was determined to find ways of improving educational opportunities for Aboriginal children.

Early meetings and discussions pointed up the need for a number of pilot projects, based on proper action research, projects which could be evaluated as to their relevance towards achieving successful educational outcomes for both adults and students. .If proven successful these could then be put to State and Commonwealth Governments with the view to them being introduced into schools and other educational institutions..

Perhaps one of the most important gifts that Alan had was his ability to stir interest in people and to inspire them to use their talents in support of these projects.

So new ground was broken through the efforts of Alan and the newly-formed Consultative Group, and progress made towards identifying needs and designing responses There remained, however, a need to overcome ignorance in

the general population about the systemic failures of the past and the need for urgent redress.

Alan Duncan, Shirley Berg, Rita Bostock
2003 40th Anniversary Conference

Working Together

The movement grew at a rapid pace and the Consultative Committee outgrew itself. As a consequence the Aboriginal Education Council (NSW) was formed to provide a more comprehensive and representative means of promoting Aboriginal education.

The Council accepted as its charter a goal of providing a pathway by which Aboriginal people and those involved in and concerned with all aspects of education could consult and develop a co-ordinated approach to overcoming the barriers which had, since the early colonial days, impeded the educational progress of the original Australians.

To do this the support of many interested organisations and key individuals was sought with the emphasis always being on working in partnership with Aboriginal people, and rejecting paternalism old and new.

The Aboriginal Education Council was soon able to venture on a program of activities in a wide variety of fields.

Its first innovative project was the provision of incentive scholarships to replace the old Aboriginal Welfare Board bursary system, and to encourage Aboriginal students to complete their secondary education beyond the statutory school leaving age and then, if it was their wish, to progress to tertiary studies

As it was the public examination system which determined educational progress this first innovative project of the Council was supported by a coaching scheme which then provided the pathway to all forms of tertiary education.

Members of the AEC quickly became aware that it was the grading or streaming of students and the testing regime which meant that Aboriginal students were often discouraged by low grades. As well it was noted that failure was often used as a punishment.

Alan Duncan's philosophy, which became the keystone of the Council's beliefs, was that positive reinforcement was the way to build the self-concept of Aboriginal students. As well he always argued that the real question was not what was taught but how it was taught,

It was his commitment to teaching in a way that ensured successful learning that inspired members to support a number of projects.

Fundraising, generous Donors and benefactors

Implementing the AEC's innovative projects required breaking down barriers to access and providing a secure environment in which motivation could flourish.

So began the necessary task of promoting the projects and acquiring the necessary funds.

The emerging community awareness and interest had to be capitalised on and Council volunteers went out into the wider community with plans and ideas and so captured a supportive audience.

This form of community education led to a wonderful response from many organisations in both the business and service groups as well as from many individuals. The support was spontaneous!

By 1965 the Council was able to begin to implement its program – firstly with a scheme of Incentive Secondary Scholarships and then to move on to assist in other ways.

The Aboriginal Education Council was now firmly established and was busy planning its activities for the years to come.

At this time meetings of the Executive and the Council were held at least twice a month and as well the various committees. This increase in the activities of the Council and the time demands on the volunteers made it necessary to consider a permanent administrative centre so as to progress the work.

The activities of the Council were quickly becoming an impossible burden for the very willing team of volunteers and its work, which had always stressed the need for personal contact, was being seriously comprised.

So in 1969 the AEC office was established in Glebe. This was .made possible through the generosity of Mr. Richardson of Victa Mowers who provided funds to cover administration costs.

Mr. Richardson's support, through his Gavemer Trust, continued for many years so enabling the AEC to use all of the money raised to initiate projects to support Aboriginal people.

Mrs. Lee Gaynor was appointed as Executive Secretary and was made responsible for the general management of the office and was required also to assist in fund raising.

The developing interest in the work of the Council by both the Government and the general community was undoubtedly because of the tremendous amount of voluntary work undertaken by so many and of the planning and success of the projects which it was initiating.

The Council's fundraising efforts and its community education program had emerged as one of the most important elements of its work. There was,

however, always the expectation that once the initiatives were proven successful, that Governments or other authorities would either fund them through the Council or introduce them through their own agencies.

Di Graham, a volunteer Council member, was responsible for the community education program and it was through her efforts that many of the State's leading businesses and individuals came out in support of the projects.

Among those who did much to advance the work of the Aboriginal Education Council over many years was the Nobel prize-winning author, the late Patrick White. Introduced to the organisation in the late 80's, his personal interest in, and involvement with, the initiatives being undertaken remains as testimony to what was achieved in those early times and was evidenced in the AEC being nominated as a beneficiary of his estate.

Patrick White 1912 - 1990

The AEC has also been nominated as a beneficiary of the late Pat Brown Eklund and the late Margaret Ida Howie.

These generous benefactors have enabled the AEC to consolidate a corpus of funds from which the interest supports the day to day operation and underpins many of the programs and scholarships

In the years since many individuals have contributed to the organisation through legacies and donations.

The projects initiated over the past fifty years by the Aboriginal Education Council have depended entirely on the individual volunteers who have come together since 1963 to work in a field of education which had been sorely neglected.

Incentive Scholarship Schemes and The Associated Coaching Project.

Launched early in 1966 the AEC's Incentive Scholarship Scheme had clear aims but modest immediate goals.

The response to fundraising for these scholarships far exceeded expectations,

as did the performance of most of the scholarship recipients.

Twenty seven scholarships were awarded during the first year, three times more than had been anticipated.

These scholarships did much to overcome the economic pressures which had, in the past, resulted in many Aboriginal students with ability ending their education as soon as they reached the statutory school leaving age.

Public examination results at the end of 1966 fully endorsed the faith that the Scholarship Committee had in the processes that they had put in place.

Of the seven scholarship holders who sat the exams that year one student gained 2As and 3Bs in the Leaving Certificate and six who sat the School Certificate all passed.

Successes in other grades included one awardee who topped her class and others who were successfully coping with advanced and credit level subjects.

While academic performance was not a prerequisite many of these first scholarship holders were amongst the first Aboriginal students to enter tertiary institutions and they became role models for many who followed.

Motivation and mentoring were seen as a vital component in the educational mix, and this task fell also to the volunteers on the Scholarship Committee.

They were tireless in following the students' progress, corresponding with them, arranging coaching, sending birthday cards and when possible making personal contact.

An important part of the support was the special coaching in areas where they experienced difficulties.

Once again the volunteer network which the Council had built up came to the fore. Students from the various universities and teachers from across the State made themselves available, on a regular basis, to make sure that each and every scholarship holder received the extra coaching that they needed.

The coaching scheme which went hand in hand with the Incentive Scholarship holders commenced in 1964 and assisted more than one hundred and fifty students. Most of the scholarship holders who received help in a wide variety of subjects were from the Sydney area, however the Council did provide coaching to a number of students in country areas.

The consensus of opinion by those actively involved was that the availability of coaching assistance provided positive encouragement for Aboriginal people to further their general education or to qualify for skilled vocational training.

In the first two years of the scheme an amount of $10,000 was provided to some sixty-two secondary or adult students. This was a tremendous effort particularly as all of the money was raised from public donations and the scheme was organised and run by volunteers.

One of the key elements of the AEC's incentive scholarship scheme was the careful selection process which ensured that the award of the scholarship would give the incentive to the student to successfully complete his or her secondary schooling and then, if it was their wish, to proceed to tertiary education.

In the second year of its operation it became obvious that the amount of work involved needed more time and effort than could be expected from a team of volunteers.

It was decided that the Council should employ a part-time scholarship secretary to work, in partnership with the Scholarship Committee, to ensuring that the principles upon which it had been established could continue.

The Scheme did continue and at the beginning of 1969 was able to award a further sixty-one scholarships, making a total of one hundred and three in all.

The very success of the scheme made it very difficult to maintain the close contact with the students, their families and their schools. However the dedication and commitment of the volunteers and the work done by the scholarship secretary reinforced the aims of the scheme which had been so carefully thought out when it was it was first introduced.

There was no doubt whatsoever that the introduction of the incentive scholarship scheme for Aboriginal secondary students fulfilled its original purpose and set many on a pathway to completing their education.

In many cases the students not only completed their secondary education but went on to successfully complete tertiary studies.

The value of the scholarships was recognised when in 1970, the then Liberal Government announced an Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme modelled closely on the AEC's work but with the awards available only to those who had turned fifteen years of age and who were under twenty-one.

So 1972 marked the end of the Incentive Scholarship Scheme as it was first planned. Based on its own proven success, it had achieved its own redundancy.

Then in 1973 the newly elected Labor Government came to office and delivered its election promise to extend the scholarships to all Aboriginal students attending secondary schools..

Relieved of its commitment to secondary students the Council had the opportunity to divert its attention to the needs of Aboriginal students in primary classes.

Alexandria Park Primary Students

So a scheme was devised and introduced to provide an award to selected Aboriginal students. Based on both need and ability, these awards did much to build the self-esteem and confidence of the recipients.

From their inception the scholarships awarded under the various schemes initiated by the Aboriginal Education Council have assisted approximately 600 secondary students from 85 public schools across the State. As well, in the past forty years assistance has been given to over 2500 students in primary schools.

Continuing the tradition of support for students in public schools in NSW, the AEC supports the Department of School and Communities awards in the annual Nanga Mai program celebrating excellence and achievement in Aboriginal education.

The AEC also offers support for Aboriginal students from NSW public schools who have been selected to represent their school at state, regional or district sporting competitions and who, without support would otherwise not be able to do so.

Council has also in the past provided scholarships to assist Aboriginal people who have left school continue in study.

In some cases help has been given to assist them to access “bridging courses” and to qualify for entrance to courses which were made available through the Commonwealth Study Grants Program.

In other cases help has been given to those Aboriginal people involved in activities which contributed to the educational advancement of the individual or to their Aboriginal community.

In 1990 the Council decided to make available special scholarships to those Aboriginal people who had gained entrance to a University or other tertiary institution.

The Ken Brindle Memorial Scholarships were awarded in memory and respect for one of the council's early Aboriginal Vice-presidents, a person whose work for the advancement of Aboriginal education was inspiring.

Ken Brindle
1931-1987

Dr. Lewis Peachie,
The first recipient of the Ken Brindle Award

In 2008 after applying to administer the funds of the late Margaret Ida Howie, the AEC introduced a scholarship for Aboriginal Women undertaking tertiary studies to improve their social outcomes.

Each year, scholarships up to the accumulated value of $40,000.00 are offered to women suffering financial hardship and undertaking tertiary studies at University, TAFE or with an approved training provider.

To mark the 50th Anniversary, three further scholarships are being offered.

In 2014 the Alan Duncan (Memorial) scholarship for Aboriginal men was introduced. Over 40 applications were received and awards to the value of $32,000.00 were approved. This scholarship will be offered on an annual basis using the same criteria for men as that used for the Margaret Ida Howie scholarship for women.

From 2015 the Honourable Marie Bashir Scholarship for post graduate study will be introduced. This scholarship will offer up to $5,000 to the successful applicant for research or travel to complete their doctorate.

Also from 2015 the AEC will partner with the Public Education Foundation to offer a scholarship for an Aboriginal student undertaking a course of study in the field of Education.

Support for Schools

Because of poverty and disadvantage amongst the Aboriginal sector, schools which had a large Aboriginal population rarely had available the audio-visual equipment and other modern teaching aids which were often provided by a school's P.& C Association.

Research showed that many of the Aboriginal students in secondary schools had poor outcomes simply because of their school experiences in infants and primary classes.

As a consequence many found school a less than satisfactory experience and as a result poor attendance was common. The same research showed that the highest instance of absenteeism amongst Aboriginal children occurred at Kindergarten, first and second grade levels.

This attendance pattern resulted in these young children failing to grasp the basic reading and number skills and so caused them to develop negative attitudes towards learning.

Members of the AEC decided to initiate a project designed to combat some of these problems. It proposed to give special assistance to selected schools which had a significant Aboriginal population.

Weilmoringle, one of the schools chosen to participate in this project was very isolated, being 160 kms North East of Bourke and 130 west of Lightning Ridge..

Mrs. Merri Gill, wife of the owner of the property surrounding the school described the participation of the school in the scheme in the following way

"***The AEC purchased a Language Master and paid for children to go to Stewart House for a holiday and small items such as books, tapes and sewing materials. A film projector meant film evenings, a great success in pre-television times.***

One donation Weilmoringle school received was $200 worth of Swaab Reading laboratories and materials donated by Sydney West Guides Association.

Alan Duncan and Ken Brindle, Aboriginal Liaison Officer of the Department of Adult Education University of Sydney arrived one day with a 'station wagon packed to the gunwales with goodies' games and a TV set much to the excitement of the children

The AEC support allowed for the creation of a compensatory environment as an incentive for the children to come to school and be involved with the normal cultural materials of a home as we know it – Women's Weeklies,

comics, toys, books, hobby activities and records. More than that, it was creating an environment in which to learn."

This innovative concept designed to compensate for some of the disadvantages faced by Aboriginal students in remote areas was eventually taken over by the Commonwealth Government when its Australian Schools Commission initiated the Disadvantaged Schools Program and the Country Areas Program.

So yet again an innovation introduced by the Aboriginal Education Council had proven its worth and had become victim of its own success, allowing the Council once again to move on to other projects.

Aboriginal Teacher Aides

Perhaps the most rewarding of the innovative projects undertaken was the employment, in 1972, of two Aboriginal people as Aboriginal teacher aides.

Their employment was to support the effective use of the modern aids being supplied through the Compensatory Assistance Scheme and to act as a role model for the students.

Vera Byno from Weilmoringle and Heather Allen from Walhallow quickly accepted the responsibilities assigned them by their School Principals and they were able to act as a conduit between the school and the local community as well as between the teachers, the students and the parents.

Their presence in the classroom did much to overcome some of the difficulties faced by the students in understanding the usual teaching language, which is often very different from the home language of Aboriginal students.

This then led to the introduction of open classrooms, a scheme widely used in the U.S. and in England and one particularly appropriate for Aboriginal students.

The emphasis was always on co-operation rather than competition and on student learning rather than on the teaching.

What was noted at both Weilmoringle and Walhallow was that educational progress could be achieved through a different approach to teaching. Success came from a realisation that it wasn't what was taught but how it was taught.

It was important that the Aboriginal students achieved a degree of success in their work at school as success was essential to maintain self-confidence and to motivate them towards attainable goals.

The NSW Department of Education co-operated with and supported the introduction of the Compensatory Assistance Scheme and the employment of Aboriginal Teacher Aides.

Heather Allen decided to undertake the special training course which was being developed by Alan Duncan for the Department of Adult Education at the University of Sydney.

Heather had left school some ten years earlier when in Year 8, so it was a tremendous commitment that she was making.

In her work in the classroom Heather demonstrated high sensitivity and great teaching potential and her progress in the training course was remarkable.

The success of the Aboriginal Teacher Aide program prompted the NSW Department of Education to apply to the Commonwealth for funding to allow

for the appointment of Aides to be employed at other schools with a high Aboriginal enrolment.

So, yet another initiative of the Council had been proven to be of significant importance to the development of programs for Aboriginal students and when the Department received funding from the Commonwealth to employ more Aboriginal people as aides it was obvious that the scheme had taken off.

The Department first provided some twenty-two positions so Heather and Vera officially became employees of the Department of Education, so relieving the AEC of the responsibility of funding their salaries.

The very next year a further twenty positions were made available and new recruits joined to serve in schools with a significant Aboriginal enrolment.

The real success for the program can be attributed to School Principals, Peter and Pat Dargin from Weilmoringle and to Eric Draper from Walhallow, and of course, to Alan Duncan who first put forward the ideas which were taken up and funded by the Aboriginal Education Council.

The ATA Training Course

Alan Duncan had worked very closely with Heather Allen from Walhallow to design a training course which would meet the needs of applicants with a very different range of educational experience and ability.

With the appointment of the new intake of Aboriginal Teacher Aides it was vital that proper and professional training course be implemented.

While other States had introduced Aboriginal Teacher Aides to serve in their schools the NSW Department of Education was the only one which included a training component as a condition of employment.

Although the Department did meet some of the travel and accommodation expenses when the students were attending the training course it was difficult for the Aides to meet the additional expenses that they had to incur. So once again the AEC came to their assistance with extra funds..

Since the Adult wage for Aides was $90.04 per week and the Junior Rate $55.94 this financial support from the Aboriginal Education Council was absolutely necessary if they were to be able to travel to Sydney.. .

The training course should have led to a significant upgrading in the status and salaries of ATAs in keeping with the skills developed through their attendance at the course.

Mr. J. Buggie, the Director of Education first laid down the rules and wrote ***"The aides will be required, during their first year, to attend a substantial course of training at Sydney University, under the direction of Mr. A. T. Duncan, Senior Lecturer (Adult Education).The aides will be required to attend the course for approximately 15 weeks in the year***

(one to three weeks per session) interspersed with periods of working in the schools to which they have been appointed. The training course can be taken at several levels in order to accommodate the varying educational backgrounds of the aides. Aides who complete the course at the highest level may seek entry into Teacher Training or other tertiary courses."

The course was organised in a block release system which allowed the students to attend the University for short periods each term and to then spend the remainder of the time in the classrooms at their home school.

The Training Course was tailored to meet individual needs and abilities.

At the end of the first year (1975) five students had advanced to such a point that were offered a further two weeks intensive training which included trial examinations using past HSC papers .

Just a short time later each student sat for five two to three hour examinations which were held over four days. Each was successful and achieved a result equal to that required for tertiary entrance.

Four of these students subsequently applied for teacher training in 1976. asserting that the training course had provided them with the self confidence to pursue the pathway to full professionalism.

These students were the inspiration for many of the Aboriginal Aides who were to follow and undertake the training course and then go on to become qualified teachers. Others now hold important administrative positions in the Commonwealth or State Public Service.

Sir Hermann Black, Vice-Chancellor, University of Sydney presents certificates to ATAs

Heather Allen was one of the first successful graduates who moved on to teaching as a career, and she has chosen, twenty years on, to remain a classroom teacher. Chris Tyson, another successful graduate, is now the Principal of Weilmoringle Public School

In 1977 Dr. Art Moore, Professor and Director of the Native Indian Teacher Education Program at the University of British Columbia undertook a most comprehensive evaluation of the Training Course as developed and implemented by Alan Duncan and presented a very positive assessment of its achievements.

Despite its obvious success, problems came at the end of 1977 when the Commonwealth notified the University that funding for the course would be discontinued.

So began a real struggle to continue the program albeit on a much reduced scale. It was indeed fortunate that the NSW State Development Committee which was funded by the Australian Schools Commission agreed to meet the costs associated with the course, excepting salaries, for the first two sessions.

So with some unexpended funds from the previous year coupled with financial support from the AEC the course continued.

It was not until 1978 that finally the Commonwealth agreed to provide funding for the course for three years, so giving a guarantee of training to new ATAs as they were appointed.

In the years between 1975 and 1983 one hundred and ninety-eight ATAs commenced their basic training.

Fifty-seven students were successful in completing Level three and the majority of these proceeded to tertiary education.

The unique feature of this training course was that it provided an opportunity for adult Aboriginal people to further their education and to build on their skills, enabling each to make a valuable contribution to the educational needs of Aboriginal students and of their communities.

The training course continues today at the Koori Centre, University of Sydney and it still provides a pathway for many into teacher training.

In her book "Over My Tracks" Evelyn Crawford, one of the early Aboriginal Teachers' Aides tells of her belief that prejudice grows from ignorance and that it was this that led her as a mature age participant and mother of fourteen children to an active role in education. She began as an Aboriginal Teacher's Aide, then moved onto the wider role as Home-School Co-ordinator and finally to an all important role as the TAFE Regional Co-ordinator for the entire far west region of New South Wales.

There were many people without whose support the participation of the ATAs in the training course just wouldn't have been possible.

Doug Swan, the Director of Primary Education and later Director-General of Education in NSW recognised the potential benefits to Aboriginal students by having an Aboriginal presence and role model in the classroom. He worked tirelessly to secure funding to allow the program to happen.

Bill Rose of the Department's Special Education Unit assisted in developing the program at the school level and provided a tremendous support network for the students both in their home schools and when they were in Sydney for training.

Evan Sutton from the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs spent endless hours liaising with the appropriate authorities to ensue continued funding for the program.

Lecturers who were instrumental in the ultimate success of the training program included Chris Adams, Norma Hayman and Geoff Hunt who worked closely with, and under the direction of Alan Duncan.

Deidre Koller acted as Administrative Officer and ironed out the many problems which arose as a result of the ATAs being away from home for extended periods.

These were just some, amongst many, whose involvement was crucial to the training course and to its success.

A unique feature of this all important training course was that it provided a pathway for adult Aboriginal people which, because of its "block release" structure, allowed for rigorous course work while they were able to remain as part of a family and of their own community.

Until he took over as Acting Director of Adult Education at Sydney University Alan Duncan remained the anchor on which the success of the course rested.

His dedication and commitment to Aboriginal education has provided a model on which others will, in the future, undoubtedly build.

After his retirement, Alan retained a keen interest in Aboriginal affairs and in particular in the education of Aboriginal students.

Alan was given the title of the AEC's President Emeritus in recognition of his long standing commitment to the Council.

Students at Armidale Teachers Colledge 1974 :
J.Lester, D. Eggington, Andre Carriage, Dianne Mumbler, Neil Thorne, Barry thorne

Home-school Co-ordinator Project

Another initiative of the AEC was to seek funding to conduct a pilot project to link the Aboriginal communities to their local schools.

The need arose from the experience of many of the ATAs who were spending an increasing amount of their own time after school hours visiting the homes of students whose attendance or behaviour was of concern.

Funding for a two year pilot project was provided through the Australian Schools Commission. The project was a partnership with the salaries being met by the Commission and all other expenses being the responsibility of the AEC.

Three of the more experienced ATAs were seconded to fill three positions created by the Aboriginal Education Council. Their secondment from the Department of Education provided the assurance that they could return to their substantive position at any time of their choosing. Each undertook some training and was then appointed to liaise with schools and families in their own areas.

Evelyn Crawford fulfilled this important role in the far west and worked from a base at Brewarrina.

Avis Ivanoff covered the inner-city area and Mary Button worked in and around the Kempsey area.

The Home/School Co-ordinators were provided with a travel allowance and in the case of Brewarrina a four wheel drive was leased by the AEC to allow for travel to remote schools.

AEC member John Skelton, a retired Army Officer and trained psychologist undertook the responsibility of overseeing this new initiative. As well, he provided the initial training and personal support throughout the operations.

During the two years of its operation this project was highly successful with many school principals reporting significant improvements in the attitudes and the attendance of Aboriginal students.

Despite excellent reports and a positive evaluation, the Schools Commission notified the AEC

that no further funding would be forthcoming. after the initial period. So sadly this project had to be terminated.

It is ironic that just a few short years late the NSW Department of Education appointed a number of RACLOs who carry out many of the functions previously undertaken by the Home/School Co-ordinators.

Yet another initiative of the Aboriginal Education Council had been, once again, recognised as a worthwhile contributor to Aboriginal education and had been taken up by the education authorities.

Homework and Study Centres

In the first instance study centres were established to provide educational assistance to compensate for the lack of facilities for effective study in the homes of Aboriginal students.

The first study centre was established at La Perouse early in 1966 when the Aboriginal community indicated their willingness to help Teachers and University students provided guidance and tuition to both secondary and primary students.

Equipment was provided by the AEC and a substantial library was set up and staffed by volunteer librarians. It made available for students a range of reference material, general reading books and specialised remedial material.

From the very beginning Aboriginal parents and community people participated in the management, supervision and financial support for the centre.

The successful operation of this first study centre led to the AEC, with the support of Abschol representatives (University students) , establishing other centres in areas such as the inner-city and at the Marella Mission Farm at Kellyville.

Eventually more Study Centres were established in country areas, all of them at the behest of local Aboriginal communities who were prepared to accept the responsibility of the day-to-day management. Always the AEC was able to provide the necessary educational aids.

Several Study Centres were set up in a number of country areas most modelled on the very successful La Perouse Centre.

There was however, a need to introduce variations so that they suited the local conditions. The success of each of the centres depended entirely on the availability of volunteer teachers so as to preserve the integrity of the model.

The Council had requests to start a Study Centre in areas as diverse as Moree, Wilcannia and Cabbage Tree Island It was indeed unfortunate that the government of the day was not able to provide funds to extend the Study Centre network. Aboriginal students who needed this assistance were therefore not always able to access it.

Eventually as Aboriginal groups became established and wished to run these centres. the AEC handed over management responsibilities.

However, when asked, the Council did assist with the provision of material, books and teaching aids.

Aboriginal Records

When Ken Brindle, a Vice-President of the AEC, sought to establish the details of his life as one of the 'stolen generations', he approached the NSW State Records Office to examine the files of Aboriginal people.

These important archival records were, he found, stacked in boxes, unsorted and certainly not indexed.

So he was presented with a real dilemma. If he was to obtain the information he sought he first needed to know where it was and with each of the boxes and their files stacked in a storeroom the task would probably have taken years.

Ken was concerned not only for his own files, but also about the problems facing those Aboriginal people who shared his difficulties in determining their real history and, in many cases, their identity.

To solve the problem he began to seek ways in which a proper index could be prepared. After consultation with the Institute of Aboriginal Affairs in Canberra, he sought the help of the Aboriginal Education Council.

The Records Office agreed that the preparation of an index was needed and they agreed that, if a way of achieving this could be found, that they would co-operate and make space available so as the work could commence.

With Ken Brindle acting as manager of the project, and with the Institute guaranteeing his salary a start was made. It was a tremendous task which had to be completed in a twelve months time frame.

The AEC was able to enlist the assistance of two Aboriginal people, and employed them through a Commonwealth Job Scheme.

James Brindle worked at the Records Office sorting the files and Sherlee Goode had the responsibility of entering the information on to a computer data bank.

The Institute loaned a computer and the AEC made space available in its office so that Ken and his assistant were able to set about the task of preparing the index. The Council agreed to meet the incidental costs associated with this major project and provided the administrative support needed.

Volunteers from the Council gave many, many hours of their time to help Ken towards the completion of this all important project.

The Council was insistent that the absolute privacy of the files should be guaranteed so that they would only be available to those entitled to view them. They worked closely with Dr. Morgan from the NSW Privacy Committee to ensure all possible safeguards were in place.

Within the time frame the task was completed and the official launch of this all important index was held at the NSW Records Office

The project and the intense work undertaken by the team had taken its toll on the health of Ken Brindle, and he passed away just one week after the launch of this all important index.

Its existence and its availability to all Aboriginal people is a fitting tribute to Ken Brindle who gave so much to ensure that Aboriginal people could more easily access the information they need to establish their roots.

This project is one which will serve Aboriginal people well into the future.

Homes Are Sought For These Children

A GROUP OF TINY HALF-CASTE AND QUADROON CHILDREN at the Darwin half-caste home. The Minister for the Interior (Mr Perkins) recently appealed to charitable organisations in Melbourne and Sydney to find homes for the children and rescue them from becoming outcasts.

I like the little girl in Centre of group, but if taken by anyone else, any of the others would do, as long as they are strong

Courtesy 'Between Two Worlds' Australian Archives

Jarjum An Early Intervention Program

In 2000 yet another major project was undertaken when the Council introduced the Jarjum program for pre-school aged children.

Cabbage Tree Island and Coraki Public Schools agreed to participate in a pilot designed to help young children to recognise the different language structure used when they begin their more formal education.

As it had always done the AEC sought, and were given, the co-operation of the appropriate Government Departments and personnel and when this was forthcoming the project started.

Over a two year period the Aboriginal Education Council employed a trained early education teacher to work with the staff in the pre-schools attached to each of the chosen locations.

Laurie Craddock and Alex Rivers, both professional educators and AEC members, developed a program which focussed on the differences in the home language of the students and that used by teachers in the classroom.

The emphasis was placed on developing the oracy and literacy skills needed for them to be successful learners when entering mainstream education.

The Department of Education's District Offices at Lismore and Tweed Heads gave their support to the pilot project as did the Principals of each of the schools.

Laurie and Alex were able to visit the schools on several occasions to oversee the project and to offer advice and training to the teacher who travelled between the two schools.

At the present time results of testing of those pre-school children who were in the first group and who have now gone on to mainstream schooling is being assessed and when this has been completed an independent evaluation is planned.

Norman Catts Bequest

The Norman Catts Trust Fund for the education of Aboriginal children in New South Wales originated from a legacy left in the Will of Norman Catts who died in 1968.

His will provided that the major part of his substantial estate be devoted to the education of Aboriginal children in New South Wales.

Norman Catts began his early business training in some of Sydney's leading retail stores. Then in 1915 he was a co-founder of the very successful Catts-Patterson Advertising Agency. He subsequently held executive position in several chemical firms and corporations.

The early Trustees were his great friend and the Executor of his Will, Donovan Sanbrook, Charles Ebert, the nominee of the Director General of Education and Mr. J. Green from the Aboriginal Welfare Board.

Upon their impending retirement the Trustees approached the AEC seeking their agreement to be involved in the distribution of the Estate. On agreement the Trustees appointed Perpetual Trustees to oversee the future management of the Estate with a committee of the Aboriginal Education Council to be responsible for the receipt of submissions for funding and for the determination as to worthwhile projects which fitted within the guidelines and which deserved funding.

Professor Janet Mooney, AEC President and Sharon Galleguillos Senior Vice-President preside over this committee which has, over the years since, provided funds for many innovative projects.

During 2013 over $50,000 was dispersed to schools to explore projects as diverse as understanding mathematics to sustainable food.

The AEC is concentrating its efforts on investigating issues surrounding Juvenile justice and its impact on Aboriginal children. To this end the AEC is partnering with Just Reinvest NSW to address the shameful overrepresentation of young people in custody.

Involvement With Other Projects

The past fifty years has seen great activity in Aboriginal Affairs and at all times the Council has been there supporting and assisting where appropriate.

Early 1969 saw the introduction of Family Education Centres to New South Wales. This New Zealand based scheme was supported by the Bernard Van Leer Foundation

Family Education Centres were established across the State with Aboriginal people organising and running their own centres.

The AEC assisted in the identification of appropriate locations for the establishment of the centres and was represented on the Advisory Council of the Bernard Van Leer Foundation Action Research Program. By July 1969 education centres at Box Ridge and Tabulam were firmly established and nine new groups were being formed.

As well they assisted the three qualified Maori Education Centre supervisors, who came across to be instrumental in the setting up of the centres,

So as to ensure that these centres were successful the AEC helped to fund two Aboriginal women – Mrs. D. Knight and Miss O. Yuke – to travel to New Zealand for training in this pre-school work. On returning they were able to train others.

As part of the NAIDOC celebrations in 1967 the AEC organised displays of the work of the Family Education Centres as part of a wonderful exhibition in Sydney Town Hall.

These celebrations were organised by AEC member Di Graham and did much to place emphasis on the positive things that were happening in Aboriginal education.

This special event was attended by almost 2,000 secondary school students many of them travelling some distance to attend. It was officially opened by the NSW Chief Secretary Mr. Eric Willis and was marked by outstanding speeches from prominent Aboriginal leaders including Clive Williams, Les D'Arcy, Miss Therese French and Kevin Williams.

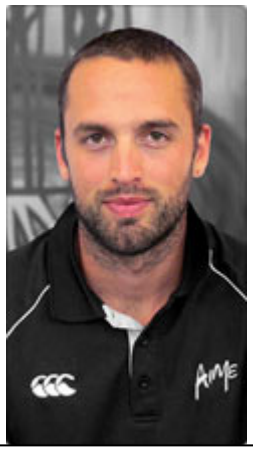
Close co-operation with its member oranisations has always been a keystone in the work of the Aboriginal Education Council.

This was clearly demonstrated when **Kirinari,** the Aboriginal Children's Advancement Society's hostel for Aboriginal students, was being established.

Kirinari was opened on July 17th 1967 and by the November of that year all of the students living there and attending local high schools were in receipt of an AEC scholarship.

In 2005 the AEC approved a start-up grant to a young Aboriginal student, Jack Manning Bancroft, from Sydney University, for an Aboriginal mentoring program to give "skills, opportunities, belief and confidence to grow and succeed". This resulted in the establishment of AIME, which is now a leader in its field offering mentoring programs nationwide .

In 2013 AEC was nominated as Charity of the Year for this investment in the future.



Jack Manning Bancroft

AIME mentors and students

Supporting Organisations

The Aboriginal Education Council has had the support of other groups which had been working for many years in the area of Aboriginal education. These included the N.S.W. Teachers' Federation, The Federation of P. & C. Associations of N.S.W. and the Federation of Infants School Clubs.

Their members knew only too well of the injustices and difficulties faced by Aboriginal students and were quick to point up the inadequacies and inequalities that existed in the public schools system.

Their combined knowledge and help, as well as their involvement has always been instrumental in setting the directions that the Aboriginal Education Council would take.

From their collective membership the AEC was able to attract the volunteers needed to set each of the past projects in motion.

The various committees set up and the volunteers to action the early projects came, in the main, from the ranks of these organisations as well as from the academic community.

There were, of course, other organisations such as the Salvation Army, service organisations such as Apex and Rotary, the YWCA, the Country Women's Association and the various churches who were very active and who dedicated their efforts to assisting the Council in furthering its work.

Reconciliation

The year 2000 was the culmination of the work of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and their final report was presented to the people of Australia on the 21st May of that year.

This all important document made six major recommendations to the Prime Minister and the Commonwealth Parliament as a means of progressing the reconciliation process.

On the 24th August, 2000 former Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Malcolm Fraser, in a speech, discussed the Commonwealth Government policies that created many of the past problems and as well highlighted the role of Governments in the reconciliation process.

Speaking of the spectacular bridge marches across the country he said:

"Let me speak to the role of Government. There have been some suggestions that in the future reconciliation must become more and more a people's movement. In one sense people have responded to that by marching with their feet. But in another sense, it is wrong. Issues of race are always the hardest to resolve, especially when the issue involves property They are most unlikely to be resolved by the initiative of citizens alone unless those citizens so hound their politicians that the politicians become frightened not to act.

But that happens rarely. 50,000 people in Brisbane, 250,000 in Sydney, 20,000 in Hobart represent a good start, and governments should take note. This is an issue on which votes will change.

But it is the Government that is informed, it is the Government that is meant to have all the facts, it is the Government that has resources, authority and power, it is the Government whose files contain the evidence of the past that today we condemn.

In a matter so critical to the future of society and the future of Australia it is not reasonable to say the community must lead.

The community and its actions are an important component but it is the Government that must be to the fore and persuade all Australians that we must act with greater expedition and with greater generosity.

Government, if not this, another will set the pace."

On February13, 2008 the Prime Minister of Australia Kevin Rudd offered a long overdue and much awaited apology to the Stolen Generations.

He on behalf of all Australians said in part "We apologise for the laws of successive parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and the loss on these our fellow Australians"

At the time, the apology had bipartisan support.

In 2014 Australia's Prime Minister Tony Abbott has also taken the role of Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

In 2000 Mr. Fraser also contrasted the inaction of our Commonwealth Government with regard to the reconciliation process with that of Canada where regional agreements have been the means of resolving outstanding issues and of advancing self-determination and self-government.

What has been articulated remains very much in the minds of many Australian citizens.

To really move forward three critical areas need to be addressed – equality of access to services, health and education.

Then and only then will we be able to go forward as a nation of Australians, united.

50 Years On

Aboriginal education remains far too important for it not to be a major issue on the political agenda of either State or Federal Governments.

It is one thing to dwell on past achievements and it is yet another to examine the present, and, most importantly, to plan for the future.

Currently huge amounts of public money are being directed to the non-government school sector to encourage them to enrol more Aboriginal children. Governments of all persuasions appear to believe that “private” schools are the best option to improve educational outcomes. This continues in spite of the fact that emerging research suggests there is no evidence to support this direction. In any case over 90% of Aboriginal students, including all the most disadvantaged, attend their local public schools.

AEC’s many successes and its record in promoting Aboriginal education has proven that innovative programs introduced as pilot projects can work and can make a difference. It has proven that for change and empowerment to occur partnerships must be built and decisions jointly made, – it cannot be forced from above. Successful programs can also influence the decisions that governments make in determining directions and policies for present and future Aboriginal students in our public school system

The Council can continue, fifty years on, to expand its activities, and, with new directions and ideas, initiate and trial new programs. To so do, the Council needs support and enthusiastic volunteers to help it provide a better, more productive and secure future for the Aboriginal students of today.

When Linda Burney the first Indigenous person to be elected to the New South Wales Parliament made her maiden speech she said “Education is the cornerstone of social justice because it is the basis of opportunity”.

These words epitomise the work of the Aboriginal Education Council over the last 50 years.

Inaugurated in 1963 as the Aboriginal Consultative Committee its members have always based their actions and their projects on the imperative of social justice for all.

The contents of this book have been gleaned from many hours of research from historical records and from various papers presented by the organisations founder Alan Duncan OAM who loaned them for the purpose of the original production of this book.

The annual reports of the Council from 1963-1975 provided the details of most of the projects undertaken in the early years and of the many volunteers and their participation in the Council’s work.

Information about the actions of students in the “Freedom Rides” was taken from papers written by Jim Spigleman the ten Secretary of the Student Action for Aborigines Group.

To the many who have been involved and who have received no mention you have all played a very important part in the history of the AEC and its achievements.

To those yet to participate – the future is in your hands

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