

"School Communities"

National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
July 2000

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National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry.

National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education (Australia).

“School Communities”: National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education.

ISBN 0 642 26972 6

1. Educational equalization - Australia - Case studies. 2. Education, Rural - Australia - Case studies. 3. Aborigines, Australian - Education - Case studies. 4. Parent-teacher relationships - Australia - Case studies. I. Australia. Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. II. Title. III. Title: National inquiry into rural and remote education.

370.91734

Our cover features Denise Walker, Ravenshoe High School, and Cody Lincoln, Boulia State School.

Designed by Phillipa Janos, Easy Online.

Printed by J S Macmillan.

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Introduction

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission - HREOC - has been investigating rural and remote education since February 1999. Education is a human right for every child. We investigated whether education was available for children in rural and remote areas, its quality and whether it respects human rights, including Indigenous rights.

We summarised the evidence and submissions in *Emerging Themes* and put our proposals in *Recommendations* which was given to the Commonwealth Parliament. For Indigenous people our major recommendation was 8.1.

Recommendation 8.1: Five basic principles should form the basis for future planning and provision of education to Indigenous students throughout Australia.

- 1. The Indigenous community has a right to self-determination within the education system. This means that Indigenous parents and communities should be involved in education decision-making at all levels from the individual school level to the levels of regional/district, State/Territory and Commonwealth policy and implementation. An Indigenous community wishing to manage and determine the provision of schooling should be supported and facilitated to do so.*

- 2. Indigenous children have a right to be educated in and about their own language, culture and history. The way in which this right is implemented, including the choice of educators, should be determined by the local Indigenous community.*
- 3. Indigenous children have a right to an education which prepares them for full participation in Australian society and equips them, in particular, with English literacy and numeracy proficiency.*
- 4. Indigenous communities have a right to transmit their language and culture and the education system should respect the knowledge, expertise and experience of Indigenous community members and ensure that every opportunity is provided for its use in the education of Indigenous and non-Indigenous children.*
- 5. Education needs should be evaluated in their social context and education planning and provision should be integrated with planning and provision of health services, housing, essential services, employment opportunities and other infrastructure.*

This book is about getting involved in your local school. It gives examples of different ways of getting involved, drawn from actual experiences in different parts of Australia.

1. Join a parents' committee. The example is ASSPA Committees.
2. Join an inter-agency committee. The example is the Walgett Community of Schools in north-western NSW.
3. Help to establish and run a culturally appropriate school. The example is Barramundi School in Kununurra, East Kimberley, WA.
4. Establish an independent community school. The example is Wulungarra Community School at Kadjina, which is also in the Kimberley region of WA.

5. Contribute your knowledge of the local environment, history, culture or language to the school curriculum. The example is the *Special forever* writing program in the Murray-Darling Basin.
6. Teach in a school. The example is Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers.
7. Combine the best of these in a culturally-appropriate, bilingual school (now known as '2 Way Learning' schools in the NT) with many Indigenous teachers and strong links with the local Indigenous community. The example is Yirrkala Community Education Centre.

This book focuses on Indigenous involvement in schools but community involvement is important for all schools and all students. Not every example in this book is an Indigenous example. We think all parents and communities will find the ideas useful.

Many Indigenous people had a bad introduction to European-style schooling in Australia. On missions the children were often taken from their families at school age and kept in dormitories. Mission education was a western education and the children could be punished for speaking their own language. By the age of 13 or 14 these children would be hired out as labourers or domestic servants.

Indigenous children in towns were not allowed to attend schools until the 1930s. Even into the 1950s and 1960s they could be excluded if any white parents objected or on the grounds of health or cleanliness.

Some problems continue. ATSIC told us:



Barraratjpi Homeland (NT) community members meeting with the inquiry.

Many parents want their children to achieve at school, but are reluctant to become involved themselves because schools often make few concessions to the issue of Aboriginality and parents feel uncomfortable and shy about going into the school as they tend to see teachers as 'figureheads' and consequently may find the school situation threatening.

Even today, in most parts of Australia, Aboriginal languages, culture and values are absent from classrooms. Aboriginal Studies, which covers Aboriginal history and culture, is taught to some extent in most schools but it is rarely compulsory, especially in high school. Sometimes it is only taught as one of several 'perspectives' within other courses.

Ravenshoe High School students from Queensland told us:

“We need more Aboriginal teachers.” “There should be more Aboriginal activities in school.” “Studying an Aboriginal language would make school more enjoyable and encourage kids to come to school.” “They don’t teach us anything about Aboriginal culture.” “Should teach us things about the bush like bush tucker.” “We should study the language around the area.” “Aboriginals don’t get taught about their culture.”

Indigenous children still often have bad experiences at school, including:

- all lessons may be taught in a foreign language - English
- there may be no lessons in or about the student’s own language
- there may be no Indigenous staff, or only one or two
- the lessons about Indigenous history and culture may be inaccurate and hurtful
- the lessons and teaching style may contradict the student’s culture and values
- other students may indulge in racist name-calling and bullying.

In Kununurra WA we were told about two examples of ways in which western schooling clashes with Indigenous culture.

Aboriginal children are taught [by their families] to wait and listen and the white kids are taught to speak up and be confident. So what happens is you get a class full of white local children who are Western

learners who put up their hands and shout together. There are certain people that the Indigenous students must not associate with and shouldn't be in class with. And the teenage girls need to have a separate unit from the boys.

ATSIC gave us another example:

The extended family network is crucial to the nurturing role of students and kin members are often ignored in the school setting, which often assumes nuclear families to be the norm.

These and other factors, including especially Indigenous poverty, mean that on average:

1. Indigenous students don't attend school as regularly. WA government school figures show that:
 - Aboriginal pre-school students attend 70% of the time compared to 85% for non-Aboriginal students
 - Aboriginal primary school students attend 84% of the time compared to 93% for non-Aboriginal students
 - Aboriginal students attend the compulsory years of secondary school 81% of the time compared to 92% for non-Aboriginal students.
2. Indigenous students drop out of school earlier. Nationally, Indigenous students are around 15 times more likely than non-Indigenous students to leave school between Year 8 and the end of Year 9 and around 6 times more likely to leave between Year 9 and the end of Year 10.
3. Fewer Indigenous students complete high school. Nationally only 33% of Indigenous students completed Year 12 compared with 73% of other students.

ATSIC told us:

The involvement of parents and communities in the school environment and decision making is considered crucial to the improvement of participation, achievement and outcomes for Indigenous students.

Education policy is committed to involving Indigenous parents and community members in school decisions and as teachers, administrators and other staff. There is still a long way to go before this is fully achieved.

John Bucknall, the Coordinator of the Aboriginal Independent Schools Unit in the Kimberley region of WA, told the Commission:

Central to the achievement of Indigenous rights is the broader acceptance and understanding of the role of Indigenous knowledge and experience by non-Indigenous educators ... In my view while the structures are theoretically in place to achieve this objective, the experience, understandings and commitment to make this happen is still limited by and contingent on limited individual goodwill and effort. The culture of inclusiveness is still relatively limited in our schools.

This book promotes the participation of Indigenous people in children's school education. Education is supposed to be accessible to every student. We question whether a school that is foreign and alienating can be truly accessible for Indigenous children. Education also has to be acceptable to the children and their parents. We question whether a school that contradicts Indigenous culture and values and excludes

Indigenous parents from decision making roles can be acceptable. We are certain such a school is not in the best interests of the students.

The involvement of Indigenous people has the potential - over time - to help ensure that schooling is accessible, acceptable and in every child's best interests. One example is at Yipirinya School in the NT. Beverley Angeles told us about it briefly:

A really important one, I think, is to recognise the Aboriginal community members as playing a key role in supporting students at school and to provide funding for these people as employees in the school. We find at Yipirinya School that, if the students have got family there, they're more inclined to come to school and to stay there. If there's no-one there, family, you might get them for the odd one or two days a week or a few weeks and then you don't see them again.

This book gives other examples. As we were told in Nguiu:

It is only when the decision making is owned and instigated by the Tiwi people that success is the outcome. We have to devise the policies in the future.

Join a parents' committee

Aboriginal Student Support & Parent Awareness

What is ASSPA?

ASSPA is a program funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA). It funds school-based Indigenous parent committees.

ASSPA's aims are

- to enhance educational opportunities for Indigenous students in preschool, primary and secondary schools
- to involve Indigenous parents in educational decision making processes.

ASSPA facts - 1998

- about 3,800 committees
- 44,485 remote Indigenous students covered
- 60,841 non-remote Indigenous students covered
- remote ASSPA committees get more funding
- \$17.7 million spent in 1998: \$9.9 million for remote students and \$7.8 million for non-remote students.

Examples of ASSPA projects

One of the excellent things that our Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Committee [ASSPA] provides is breakfast. The teachers take it in turns, once a term, in pairs, to have breakfast. Breakfast is a proper sit down meal where the kids come in and they have juice or milk. Doesn't matter, Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal, anyone who wants a feed can come and have a feed. It's done with the kids taking it in turns to prepare it, to help eat it and then clean up (Paul Loxley, Bourke Public School Principal, Bourke NSW hearing).

The ASSPA Committee a number of years ago fitted out our Aboriginal Resource Room with some bunks and beds and things like that for the kids who do come in and need somewhere to sleep. We have kids who come in who for one reason or another haven't been home and need somewhere to sleep, so we provide it for them. If the immediate need of the kid is food, we provide that. If the immediate need of the kid is rest, we provide that. Unless the kids have these things, education is not going to happen anyway. If we can provide that safe welcoming place for them, the kids are likely to come back, so that's what we try and do (Michael Chapman, Bourke High School Principal, Bourke NSW hearing).

The ASSPA Committee is mainly concerned with supporting Aboriginal students. But it does benefit both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. The ASSPA Committee purchased a bus some years ago and that bus is available to everybody for transport. If students

need to go somewhere whether they're Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, we don't discriminate (Anne McGee, Walgett High School Principal, Walgett NSW hearing).

For a while there were regular barbeques for parents and teachers to get to know each other. They were funded by ASSPA. [The aim was to prevent absenteeism among Aboriginal students by] building better relationships between the school and the parents through informal meetings and gatherings. However, they have since fallen by the wayside. Not many parents turned up (public meeting and teachers' aides' meeting in Normanton Queensland).

Opinions about ASSPA

DETYA thinks the ASSPA program is very successful. DETYA's Assistant Secretary for Indigenous Education, Peter Buckskin, told us:

It's probably one of the most successful programs, with the aim to increase parent participation in the schools; at school level it was certainly very, very successful. But it has a whole range of other outcomes or goals as well, or objectives, and that clearly is also an increased student awareness and student participation as well.

The NT Education Department is also very positive.

The provision of funds direct to ASSPA groups, has assisted parents to become involved in a decision making process concerning additional activities for Aboriginal students. Through this parental

involvement, understanding of what schools are and how they operate has been enhanced. Aboriginal parents have also been able to extend their knowledge and understanding of the importance of schooling and the need for regular school attendance (NT Department of Education submission).

The Australian Education Union agrees.

An evaluation of ASSPA (1998) found that it overcame the cost barrier for students, increased their access to school programmes and activities, expanded their educational horizon and raised self esteem/confidence. Through ASSPA, Indigenous students became more familiar with and took pride in their own culture (AEU submission).

ATSIC, however, feels ASSPA has had mixed success.

Most parents did support the concept of ASSPA but few saw this as giving them a voice in school decision-making or facilitating that outcome (ATSIC submission).

What are the problems?

ATSIC was concerned that some ASSPA committees were not put in charge of the funding.

At one of the schools visited during community consultations, a workshop was being conducted with committee members to advise them of their rights to decide how to spend grant moneys. Although there had been a committee for over five years, the school principal had usually decided how to spend ASSPA

funding. One member advised that they ‘were usually told before the funds were spent and could complain if [they] didn’t agree’, but that they ‘hadn’t realised the committee was actually in charge of the funding’.

This highlighted the concern that money being provided under the ASSPA programme is being used, in many cases, by the schools to buy new equipment, such as computers, software, photocopiers etc. without the agreement of Indigenous parents. What good is the equipment if the students are not attending in the first place? The money is there, but it needs to be spent out in the field, encouraging parents to become interested in their children’s education and taking a more active role in their education (ATSIC submission).

We were told that the ASSPA Committee at one Victorian secondary school was being “run by staff. They’re saying where the money should go. Whereas actually it’s the parents’ and children’s money” (Bairnsdale Victoria Koorie workers meeting).

An Aboriginal pre-school principal was concerned that:

We lack management training. A lot of our management committee are unskilled and I think that is a big problem for our school (Maxine Mackay, Bourke Pre-School Principal, Bourke NSW hearing).

DETYA also recognises that improvements can be made. Peter Buckskin outlined DETYA’s plans.

If anything we want to strengthen it and target it so it does focus on education outcomes and literacy and numeracy and attendance and tell parents, ‘This

is what you have to do. Like, for example, if you want your kid to be literate, read to them, listen to them read. You've got to help them with their homework. Give them a place to do their study.' (Canberra hearing).



Mural at Kalkaringi Community Education Centre NT.

Other parents' committees

A long-standing school tradition in Australia is the Parents' and Citizens' Committee (P&C) or the Parents' and Friends' Committee. P&Cs have a predominantly fund raising role and often run and staff the school canteen or tuckshop.

Rural P&Cs help lessen the burden of distance for country students by raising money for excursions and other activities. Country Areas Program (CAP) funding from the Commonwealth also helps out but schools still rely heavily on P&C fund raising. Fund raising is very much harder in a small community than in a major town or city. Government should meet all necessary education costs including educational excursions. That would free P&C committees to raise funds and organise other activities for the benefit of local children.

We recommended that “The Commonwealth should maintain and, where possible, extend Country Areas Program funding and encourage regional pooling of CAP funds across all sectors to extend the learning opportunities, including work experience, for rural and remote students. Every student in a rural or remote school should be guaranteed one excursion each year, at no cost to his or her family, to enable participation in sporting, cultural activities and/or on-site study of topics covered by the curriculum” (Recommendation 5.19 in our June 2000 report *Recommendations*).

What did HREOC recommend about ASSPA?

ASSPA Committees could work more effectively. One necessary change is to give them more flexibility to spend their money to suit local needs and conditions. Another necessary change is to open up ASSPA membership so that community leaders can work side by side with Indigenous parents and AIEWs.

Join an inter-agency committee

Walgett Community of Schools

‘This project has developed new ways of co-ordinating services to cater for ‘at-risk’ students and families in the local community to increase the involvement of the community in addressing educational needs and to provide opportunities for increased participation by young people in vocational education and training ... It has also resulted in improvement in school attendance’ (NSW Department of Education and Training submission).

It is a very exciting project. The reason for that is because it is very much a community driven project. Its origins lie with the community - the broad Walgett community (Pat Cavanagh, Senior Officer, Walgett Community of Schools Project).

About Walgett

Walgett is the administrative centre of Walgett Shire 700 kilometres north west of Sydney. It sits on the Castlereagh Highway, beside the Barwon River, between Brewarrina and Moree. It is about 140

kilometres south of the Queensland border. The Shire covers an area of 22,000 square kilometres and has a total population of 8,289 of whom 1,764 (21%) are Indigenous.

A wide range of Commonwealth and State government agencies affect the lives of Indigenous young people throughout Australia including the school, police, courts, Centrelink, State housing and community services departments, ATSIIC, Aboriginal Legal Service and many others. In many towns these agencies have competing agendas and can pull young clients in many different directions. The people of Walgett want their agencies to work together in the best interests of local children and their families.

The most positive thing that I've seen in Walgett as far as education's concerned is the degree and extent of interest in education that extends across the community. Here in Walgett, it really has impressed me the degree of involvement and the extent of good will amongst people who see that there are difficulties with education here in Walgett but they want to do something about it (Pat Cavanagh, Senior Officer, Walgett Community of Schools Project).

About Walgett Community of Schools

The project's aims are:

- to cater for a number of 'at risk' students by providing them with individualised programs
- to facilitate improved communication between all sections of the community

- to provide on-going support for teachers to achieve improved educational outcomes for their students (NSW DET submission)
- to develop programs on Aboriginal culture and history for all Walgett students (Sydney hearing).

The project's senior officer, Mr Pat Cavanagh, told us:

Our most obvious aim and the immediate aim that we're attempting to address is to assist the schools in Walgett with children who for one reason or another are not fulfilling their educational potential.

In the medium to long term, though, we hope to facilitate the relationship between the community of Walgett and the educational institutions at all levels here, from primary school through to TAFE and beyond. We hope to be able to assist the young teachers who come to towns like this, to assist them in making contact with the community and in developing and implementing curriculum that are appropriate to all the children in Walgett. I suppose the pressing and most important long-term aim is to facilitate a whole of government response to the educational needs of the town (Walgett hearing).

The project has a management committee representing most sectors in the town, including the Indigenous community and representative organisations such as the local ASSPA committees, the non-Indigenous community, the government sector including the police and the community services department and all educational institutions, including TAFE.



Students from Boulia State School in Queensland meeting with the inquiry during the 1999 Croc Eisteddfod in Weipa.

The Project established the Walgett Cultural and Education Centre in April 1998.

The Centre's role is to assist with the delivery of culturally appropriate programs and to provide additional assistance for students exhibiting learning or behavioural problems. Centre staff assist teachers to develop Individual Education Programs for some students; parents are involved in the initial assessment of 'at risk' students and consulted about the program. The centre is staffed by a principal education officer with special education background and 2 classroom teachers (NSW DET submission).

In 1998 and 1999 the project was

- tackling the need for early childhood education with a pre-school for 20 children
- supporting students in transition between primary and secondary school
- building closer links between TAFE and the schools in town
- providing an education with a strong Aboriginal cultural base for students having difficulties in the mainstream system
- training local teachers in Aboriginal culture, history and heritage
- developing strategies to attract teachers to the community who are well-prepared for their role and who understand the community they will be serving, for example, by negotiating with teacher training institutions on the placement of trainee teachers in Walgett.

The aim is to have all relevant agencies and the community involved in helping young people at risk.

Total government agency support for individual students as a case-managed program to ensure that those students are back on track as quickly as possible and accessing mainstream education (Ian Wilson, DET District Superintendent, Walgett hearing).

Some achievements in 1999 and 2000

Visitors to Walgett schools are now greeted in Kamilaroi - the local Aboriginal language - by students.

Individual Education Programs have been developed for 15 students - from Year 2 to Year 9 - at the Community of Schools over the past year. The two teachers develop individual programs for them which can include some work on literacy, some work with adults on local CDEP projects such as the nursery and pottery and learning about Bush tucker from a local Elder. Their attendance has improved to about 75% - much higher than previously.

Several trainee teachers have done 4 weeks' teaching practice in Walgett and have been introduced to the local Aboriginal history and culture and visited significant sites as well as meeting many local Aboriginal people.

One Community of Schools student danced at the 2000 Adelaide Festival and has been chosen to dance at the Olympic Games Opening Ceremony.

In 1999 Walgett TAFE taught a literacy course and a nutrition course at the former Aboriginal mission which is 11 kilometres out of town. In 2000 the adult students travel into town once a week to follow up their literacy course at TAFE and to have afternoon tea at the Cultural and Education Centre. Transport is provided by the Community of Schools troop carrier.

In 1999 a number of high school students did a cultural course at the Centre for one day a week for 10 weeks. Several local adults made presentations, including a former Walgett rugby league player who became a quadriplegic during a game many years ago. He now writes poetry and has inspired at least one student to try his hand at it. On another day a group of local elders recalled living in Walgett in the 1960s and talked about the Freedom Rides. Another day was for women and girls only.

Are there other examples?

The **Bourke Joint Schools Council** has some similar aims although the participants are only the Bourke education institutions. The primary school and high school principals described the project:

The Joint Schools Council has been a great initiative. It has brought together virtually everyone involved in education in Bourke: Maxine from the pre-school, there are people from the TAFE, and the principal of St Ignatius has been to some of the meetings. The AECG [Aboriginal Education Consultative Group] who also have a place on the Joint School Council provides some advice for us also.

Our stated aim is for every kid who leaves school in Bourke to go to some sort of work placement or specific training that they're interested in. It's a fairly steep call. I don't know that we are going to achieve it every year, but we do have employers on side. The Cotton Growers Association has actually got five of our students working there. They took some of our kids who were going to university this year over the holidays to give them work so that they had money to take away with them.

We have got to look at where our kids are going to go from Bourke Public School. Given the change in technology we need to think about what is going to happen for kids that are in kindergarten now and what life skills they'll need and what they'll have to be able to do.

The kids have got to be effective life long learners. They have got to be responsible and caring citizens and full participants in the decision making processes within the school.

We've incorporated a fairly large vocational educational program in our curriculum [at the high school]. It starts off with kids 15 years of age or just under 15 years of age, who are students at risk of leaving school.

They actually go on a program of work placement for a couple of days. Those kids go out and work on a program where they are getting work skills and life skills. They come back to school and the curriculum that they study at school is driven by the needs of that so that their literacy and their numeracy is actually work-based literacy and work-based numeracy. So hopefully we can give them the skills to go on and do something when they leave.

What did HREOC recommend about inter-agency projects?

Because a child isn't split up into different people - son or daughter, student, patient, friend, swimmer or netballer - the different people who work with children, including families, should work together. Education in isolation will not be satisfactory.

Education needs to be adaptable so that it can meet the needs of each child. Every child is entitled to an education that develops his or her personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential. This means that local responses to children's

needs may be necessary. Local inter-agency partnerships have the best chance of responding to each child's needs. They must have enough funding, be given decision-making responsibilities and include all relevant groups, especially parents and the children themselves. Local inter-agencies can also support teachers, especially those who are new to teaching or new to country life. And they can develop local leaders and offer familiar role models to local children.



The inquiry Commissioners, from left, Chris Sidoti, Barb Flick, Pearl Logan, Tim Roberts, Alby Jones, Pat Rhatigan and Brian Devlin.

Culturally appropriate schools

Barramundi School, Kununurra

‘Current mainstream schools perpetuate attitudes and values which do not reflect the culture and lives of Indigenous students’ (Beverley Angeles, NT Indigenous Education Council, Darwin hearing).

The cultural conflict between the western school and Indigenous young people can sometimes explain why the students drop out of school so young, sometimes as young as 12 or 13.

Aboriginal Elders were called in to talk about traditional Aboriginal theories of where knowledge comes from, what’s it like, how is it produced and what sorts of protocols need to be at work before knowledge can be produced in such a way that it enriches everybody’s life and their claim to their land and their history and their knowledge of who they are.

Along came these Elders and told stories, ancient stories, of their own lives and experience, which talked about knowledge production in a way which is completely different from the normal transmission metaphor that we use in the west. Most [western] schooling is built on a notion that information is in the head of the teacher and passes

through the mouth and along an imaginary pipe and into the brain of the person that's learning, and has the same shape in the student as what it has in the teacher.

From a Yolŋu point of view, that's impossible and it's undesirable because it's assimilation, especially if you've got a white teacher. The Yolŋu have always had a model for the production of knowledge, which is negotiated, which is talked about using a ceremonial metaphor. It's to do with how knowledge comes out of a relation between language and the land, and it's only formulated through respect for people's positions which they speak from, and through some sort of negotiated celebration of the moment. In other words, truth, for example, is not something which is universal. It's something which is momentary, which is negotiated and celebrated together, relevant to a particular moment and to a particular place (Dr Michael Christie, Northern Territory University, Darwin hearing).

About Barramundi School

Barramundi School was set up in 1995 because a lot of teenagers, especially Miriwoong teenagers, were not going to school. In 1999 the school was located at Moongoong Darwung - Aboriginal land of about 10 acres. There are two small classrooms separated by a breezeway so that the boys and girls can be separated. There is also one teacher's house and another house has the kitchen (for staff and students), radio room, TV room and offices.

For library, sports fields and industrial design and technology facilities, the Barramundi students go to the Kununurra District High School.

In 1999 there were two teachers - one male and one female - and an Aboriginal Education Worker who was female and worked with the female students. Many community members also participate in the school. Examples include the police who teach defensive driving, the Aboriginal Medical Service which teaches first aid, TAFE teaches welding and Elders teach law.

Kids learn traditional stuff such as the law. They go to law every year, both the boys and the girls. The AIEWs go out with the old women who tell stories and stuff. There is a lot of dancing. At St Joseph's, the kids got language at the Language Centre once a week. At the high school the white parents kicked up a fuss when the language was introduced. They don't want their children to learn Aboriginal culture or language. So the kids don't want to do it. We have language two or three times a week. We promote it as a good thing (quoted in the Barramundi School evaluation report *).

Community agencies also offer work experience placements for Barramundi students, including Kimberley Land Council, the youth centre and the police station.

In 1999 there were 22 students at Barramundi - 11 boys and 11 girls. They were mostly Miriwoong speakers and ranged in age from 13 to 16.

* Done by Dr Gary Partington, Cheryl Kickett-Tucker and Les Mack from Edith Cowan University and published for Kununurra Youth Services in November 1999.

Why was Barramundi set up?

The majority of kids from traditional communities around Kununurra spend most of their high school years, say 12 to 16, without any form of continuous Western education (Daniel Suggit, Barramundi School committee member from Kununurra Youth Services, Kununurra hearing).

Most Indigenous children do their primary schooling at St Joseph's Catholic School. But there is no Catholic high school in Kununurra. The transition to the high school is painful and many choose to leave school.

[T]here are certainly curriculum differences between the Catholic primary school and the District High School. Also, there has been an expectation [at the high school] that the students fit in rather than that the school accommodates [them] (Alan McLaren, Kununurra District High School Principal, Kununurra hearing).

At the high school the kids feel that they are picked on. I think being Aboriginal at the primary school St Joseph's, the children don't feel different because 70 to 80% of them are Aboriginal. At the high school they are not in the majority and they feel left out. There is a very different culture. For example, if you come late you are given a late ticket. If you get a couple of late tickets, you are punished. There is a very different culture. Once at the Barramundi School, their attendance improves (Sister Marianne Zeinstra, St Joseph's Primary School, Kununurra hearing).

The women were not supportive of their children attending the District High School. The lack of separation of males and females in the classroom was seen to be an important factor, while issues of shyness and shame were identified as factors reducing the appeal of the school. Parents spoke of the high school as being too big and “the Aboriginal kids feel threatened.” Coupled with this, the students had reported that they perceived that they were being picked on by teachers (Barramundi School evaluation report).

What are the aims?

Barramundi School aims to

- create a discussion with the community about the needs of teenagers in terms of learning, employment, cultural maintenance and identity
- bring ‘schooling’ to the community rather than the community to the school which is what the other Kununurra schools try to do
- involve traditional learning by community members as a basis for all learning that is done in the program.

Has it been successful?

Barramundi School was evaluated by Edith Cowan University in 1999. It was successful in

- attendance - attendance rates were up to 85% +
- literacy and numeracy - every student improved
- reducing offending - crime among the Barramundi

boys dropped from 80% in 1998 to 20% in 1999 and the 20% was committed during school holidays

- community approval - the community strongly approves of the Barramundi School
- student approval - the Barramundi students are proud of their school and like to learn together.

What the kids need is a school where they can learn English and also their culture. And the background they come from (quoted in the Barramundi School evaluation report).

I'm learning quick. We have a break and play sport. We go swimming after school at Ivanhoe Crossing. Have breakfast and lunch supplied. Or we go and have a picnic near the river for lunch. I would like Barramundi School to have sports equipment such as baseballs, soccer, basketballs, cricket and footballs (quoted in the Barramundi School evaluation report).

Why does it work?

Well it seems that children for whom English is a Second Language, struggle to fit in with a secondary mainstream school model like Kununurra District High School. The high school has to cater for the whole of the Kununurra secondary population. There is no doubt that this works for the mainstream children but at the moment it is not working for the community children. Their attendance drops off and remains very irregular. The majority of these children come from the Miriwoong and the Gajirawoong

communities. Many of them choose to go to the Barramundi School.

So why do they choose Barramundi? Well they do so because of its cultural appropriateness, the respect for their identity and culture and the links with the community. Barramundi is sensitive to the issues of relationship between men and women once they get to the law stage. That there are certain people that they must not associate with and shouldn't be in class with. Since the Barramundi school has received more funding and is now able to do these culturally appropriate things, its enrolment and its attendance has gone up 100 fold.

What works at Barramundi is that the groups are small. Usually 10 boys and 10 girls and this is good for their self-esteem. And the men's units and the women's units at Barramundi have links back with law men and law women in the community. They do at least a day a week with people from the community to study law and culture. The teachers at Barramundi School are out in the community every day and they have established relationships with the parents, guardians and grandparents. Time is flexible, and school doesn't start at 8.00am. Sometimes it is only getting going at 9.00am. The curriculum is flexible. There are far more individualised programs and there is far more attention to culture (Sister Marianne Zeinstra).

It is a more effective learning context for teaching these kids Western literacy and numeracy. It is a more effective way to teach these kids to negotiate the White world of institutions, the law, banks,

governments and other learning places. It is also a way that the community can involve teenagers in traditional cultural learning. It could also allow the community to gain expertise for the future through its young in terms of community development and enterprise management. That is, the children could be seen, and see themselves, as a valuable resource for their people's own future (Daniel Suggit).

More time is spent with each kid here. At the high school there is a certain amount of time to teach something and if you miss out it is too late. We stay on a subject until all the students understand it. They are bright kids. They understand, but we've got to give them more. It is good here with small numbers. Three of us with them. They get a different view that way (quoted in the Barramundi School evaluation report).

Are there any problems?

The Barramundi School provides an alternative to Western style education within a town setting. It is not available to children until they reach the age of 13 by which stage many have had a year without schooling.

But [unfortunately] they have to enrol at the high school first and then their attendance has to be so bad that they will be accepted into the Barramundi School. They are set up to fail in a way and then they are forced to change schools (Sister Marianne Zeinstra).

In addition, the small size of the school and the lack of continuous funding put the Barramundi School in

jeopardy of closing each year. Barramundi School was well-resourced in 1999 because, as well as the WA Education Department's commitment of \$5,000 and one full-time teacher, the Commonwealth gave it a 1 year Strategic Results Project grant from the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program (IESIP) fund. The IESIP money is finished now and Barramundi is dependent almost entirely on the state education department.

A common problem for Indigenous language and culture programs is that education authorities tend to ignore the need to deliver good English language and literacy programs *as well*. They still have this responsibility. What Indigenous children and communities expect is exactly what everyone else takes for granted:

- English language training *and*
- an education that reflects their world view and value system.

This point was made by many witnesses and submissions including from the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education in the NT.

What improvements are needed?

So what are our recommendations? They are that Year 7 students be given a choice between mainstream and alternate culturally appropriate secondary education. To enable that to be a real choice the Barramundi School needs to be put on a sure footing. It only gets its funding year by year. I know it took us until August last year to get EDWA to commit to funding of the

school for the following year. Funding needs to be allocated so that the school can run at least 2 units. The girls need to have a separate unit from the boys. That is just much more culturally appropriate and it has certainly shown in the retention rates.

In order to support alternative education, the community needs to have a say in the selection of the staff. Children need to be able to enrol in the Barramundi School without having to first enrol in the high school and then drop out to go to the Barramundi School. It should be the first choice rather than the one of last resort (Sister Marianne Zeinstra).

Are there other examples?

The communities in the **Warlpiri Triangle** work together on teaching Warlpiri in their schools at Lajamanu, Nyirripi, Willowra, Yuendumu and Yipirinya. These schools teach in both Warlpiri and English so they need to have teaching materials and techniques for teaching in both languages. Of course, there are plenty of English language materials. The schools are slowly building up a body of Warlpiri materials.

Community elders, teachers, trainees, teacher linguists, teachers assistants and linguists from all the communities meet together in week-long workshops focusing on different aspects of teaching Warlpiri to children. Sometimes the workshops develop materials in Warlpiri which can be taken back to the schools to use in class. For example, there are workshops which compose and record songs in Warlpiri. Workshops have created materials on mathematical concepts using

Warlpiri. The Triangle collected information from the community, took photographs and brought in objects from the community to show what was meant in Warlpiri. Materials were developed which showed numerical versions, diagrammatic versions and vernacular descriptions of arithmetic, money transactions and geometry.

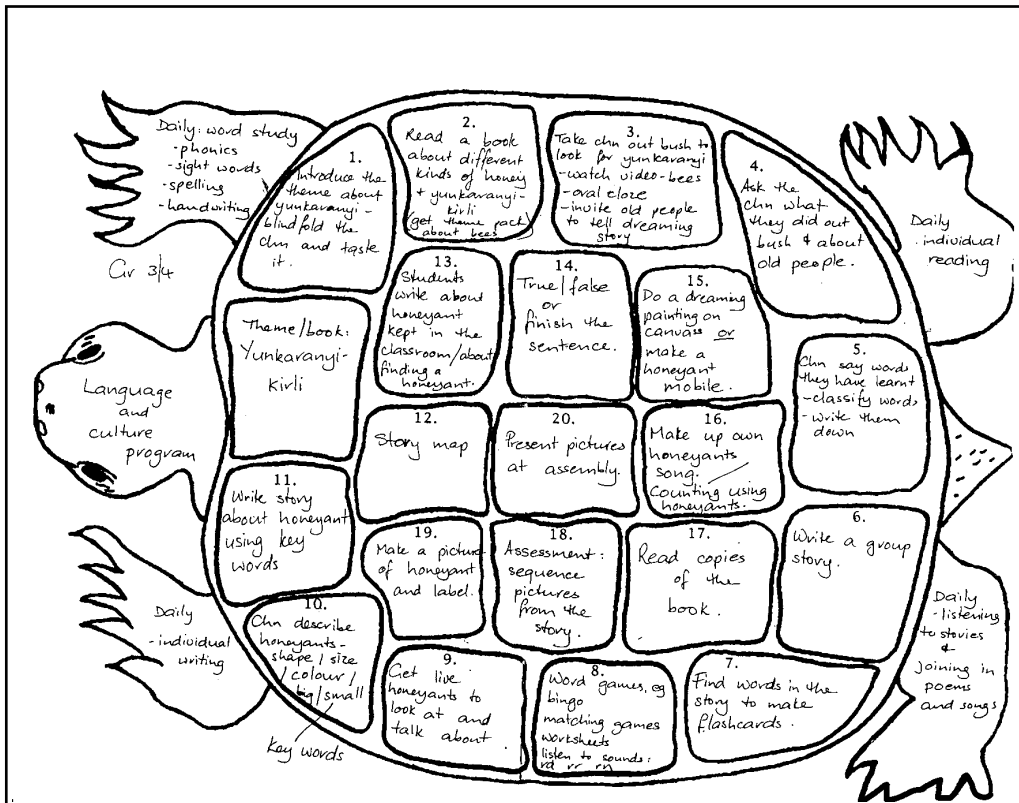
Other workshops at the meetings focus on particular programs for teaching Warlpiri culture. In the ‘Strong mothers strong babies’ workshop older women from the community share ideas on how to teach girls and young women in the schools about their health and culture.

It’s important for young parents to know the traditional way of controlling their lives, understanding and following the traditional way of marriage and raising children. They have to learn from grandparents and leaders of the families, to keep families and culture strong so children grow up with respect. Today they have to learn two ways; modern healthy ways and traditional ways. They are both important (Jeannie Egan, Yuendumu School).

At the 1998 Warlpiri Triangle meeting the participants learnt about the ‘Turtle Planner’. The example here was used by a teacher to plan the Grades 3 and 4 language and culture program. You can see how community cultural knowledge is used.

The community at Lajamanu told us:

We get our Elders involved in teaching our children. Our children learn Warlpiri. They learn about our culture and it makes them proud of themselves, of who they are. It is really important that bilingual education is not stopped. It shouldn’t be stopped.



Turtle Planner, Warlpiri Triangle NT.

What did HREOC recommend about cultural appropriateness?

Two of our five fundamental principles for Indigenous education are particularly relevant to cultural appropriateness.

The first principle is that the Indigenous community has a right to self-determination in education and, if a community decides to set up its own school, it should be supported to do so. Involvement by Indigenous parents and communities in their children's education is very important and must be increased.

The second principle is that Indigenous children have a right to be educated in and about their own language, culture and history. Teachers should be trained in Indigenous learning styles and culture. This is something that should be done in consultation with Indigenous people.



Inquiry staff, Susan Newell, left, and Fabienne Balsamo, right,
with Commissioner Pat Rhatigan.

Independent community schools

Wulungarra Community School

Self-governing or independent schools are created and governed independently on an individual school basis unlike government schools and most Catholic schools which are part of school systems. The schools usually receive some funding from the State or Territory and Commonwealth governments and have to meet State and Territory registration requirements. However, they are relatively free to decide their own goals and priorities, teaching methods and curriculum and employ teachers in harmony with the values of the school, as long as it is within the law.

There are about 900 independent schools in Australia with 343,364 students. This accounts for about 10% of Australian school enrolments compared with about 20% enrolled in Catholic schools and 70% in government schools.

In rural and remote areas self-governing schools can respond directly to a need in the local community. Types of self-governing schools include:

- Aboriginal independent schools

- schools for children who are unable to be accommodated within mainstream schools for a variety of reasons, for example special schools for children with disabilities
- schools with a particular religious affiliation
- schools which offer a different educational approach such as Steiner and Montessori schools.

Whatever their philosophy, self-governing schools share a common desire to offer educational choice to local students. In remote areas these schools may be the only effective choice for students and their families. Often they are set up by parents and the community themselves. This can mean that parents, teachers, students and the local community are highly committed to involvement in the school program.

Self-governing schools face all the problems of rural and remote schools without the assistance and support of larger education systems. These include:

- difficulty in attracting and retaining quality teachers and administrators
- difficulty in access to and the high cost of providing professional development for staff
- high cost and availability of obtaining expert advice about information technology
- high cost of purchasing current technology
- high cost of building repairs in the country
- difficulty in providing specialist programs such as languages, vocational education, music programs or a diverse range of senior secondary subjects due to difficulty in attracting staff and relatively small numbers of students

- inequitable and inconsistent provision of transport for students to access independent schools in country towns
- limited access to specialist career and course counselling for secondary students (SA Independent Schools Board submission).

Independent community schools could overcome some of the difficulties of isolation by building alliances or being part of regional associations with other independent schools.

About Wulungarra Community School

Wulungarra Community School is situated in the Aboriginal community at Kadjina which is about 4 to 5 hours drive from Fitzroy Crossing in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. During the wet season the road is unusable and the community can be isolated for several months each year.

The Wulungarra Community School has 30 students from Kadjina and surrounding Aboriginal communities, although the numbers fluctuate for a variety of reasons. There are two teachers at the school, one of whom is also the principal. Languages spoken in the community include Kriol and Walmajarri.

Wulungarra Community School obtains funding from the Isolated Children Education Program, directly from the Commonwealth. We are an independent school so most of our money comes directly from the Indigenous Education Branch of DETYA (Sue Thomas, Wulungarra Principal, Fitzroy Crossing public meeting).

In Western Australia there are 14 Aboriginal independent schools which are members of the Aboriginal Independent Community Schools Association. The schools have either majority Aboriginal membership of their governing body or full involvement by Aboriginal community members in their development. The schools each have their own ethos but they share 'a commitment to Aboriginal control and the maintenance of the world views and values of the respective communities'.

Great self-determination and strength has been shown by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents who have taken the initiative to gain complete control of the education of their children. For example, parents who were in despair of their children gaining an effective education in existing government and church schools in the local region set up independent Indigenous schools ... Independent schools strive to develop a total and unique education program that incorporates Indigenous languages, history, and pedagogy. The schools also reflect the Indigenous community's desire for self-determination in the education system. These schools have remained small and have encountered immense problems particularly in regards to registration, enrolment fluctuations and funding from the State and Territory Education Departments. Not surprisingly, these schools are always battling the possibility of closure (ATSIC submission).

At Wulungarra Community School Aboriginal community members teach and participate in school activities. Students are taught to read and write in English and in their first languages.

We have been able to develop materials with the children in their languages as well as English. This means that the students are very aware of what is Kriol, what is Walmajarri and what is English (Sue Thomas).

What are the challenges?

The Wulungarra Community School has to be flexible. Often the community is isolated from basic services that are essential for survival. These needs cannot be separated from the running of the school.

Education is not an entity unto itself. It sits in a broad context. At Wulungarra we have had road access for only 2 weeks this year. At one point our community ran out of food and this was at a time when our airstrip was not operational. The only food that we had was lentils. We have had power and water problems. We do our best to teach but there are difficulties with essential services. Sometimes you can have committed staff and good programs but other factors can intervene. These factors can really compromise the community's health and viability.

Isolation is another problem for us. In order to come to this meeting [in Fitzroy Crossing] we had to fly here. If we have a broken tap we have to fly somebody out. All of this costs money and constitutes a huge amount of our expenses. So even though Fitzroy Crossing is considered to be a remote school and does have issues that no city school would have, there are also differences in remoteness between Fitzroy and a community like us (Sue Thomas).

At certain times of the year students cannot attend school because of family and community obligations. The school is able to work around these changes because parents and community members are involved in the day to day running of the school and are in regular communication about what is needed.

One of the main difficulties in running a community school in a remote area is distance and lack of transport for children in the surrounding areas.

There is a community about half an hour away from Wulungarra called Ngalapita or Koorabye and it has no educational offerings for the children. When families from these communities are visiting Wulungarra the numbers of school students can double. In the 6 years that I have been around I have observed that there are numbers of children from these communities and others who have no access to education.

We have had a few meetings with them, but there are problems with transport and no-one is taking responsibility for this problem. The children sometimes come to us and sometimes they go to another school. If this was a group of 20 white middle class children this lack of educational access would never happen. We have approached the Transport Authority but apparently they have out-sourced all this sort of travel. Therefore it is not going to be a financially viable enterprise for a private company to bus children from Ngalapita to Wulungarra School every day (Sue Thomas).

Jarlu ngarrangkarni kurriny parrijarra pila najinga ngunangani.



Long ago there lived two boys. They lived in a cave.

A page from "The Two Boys" by Leryan Costaine,
Wulungarra Community School Literature Production Centre 1999.

Are there other examples?

Giant Steps is a school in Deloraine, Tasmania, specifically for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The opening of the school in June 1995 was the culmination of 3 years hard work by a dedicated group of parents and community supporters who refused to accept the lack of services for their children in the area.

Maximum funding allows us to take on 15 full-time students, all of them moderate to severe on the autism spectrum. In principle the centre is open to children

from all over Tasmania, though in practice accessibility is determined by what is reasonable in terms of daily travel (Mick Clark, Giant Steps Program Manager, Devonport Tasmania public meeting).

The idea for this school came from parents of children with autism who lived in northern Tasmania who found that the local schools were unable to cater for their children's needs. Based initially on a Giant Steps school in Canada, the school applied for registration and funding with the Tasmanian Education Department. It was approved as a partnership with Autism Tasmania. By 1995 the school was operational and able to teach 15 students aged 3 to 13. Now the school can accept children up to 16 years of age. Some students live with their families in Deloraine, others live within about 45 minutes by car and some students have relocated with their families from other parts of Tasmania and even interstate.

Giant Steps successes include:

- local community involvement in the school's management, including representatives from church groups and local Lions and Rotary clubs
- good relationships with other local schools including providing advice to other schools about children with autism
- seven of the children are currently participating in part-time inclusion programs in other local schools.

Problems they face include:

- attracting and retaining occupational therapists and speech pathologists in northern Tasmania
- no occupational therapy or speech pathology training in Tasmania

- finding respite care so that parents can have a break
- very few recreation opportunities for local children and young people
- insufficient funding to employ all the necessary staff.

The **Young and Powerful School** in Lismore, northern NSW, is another example. It is a non-religious community-based school for primary and secondary school students up to Year 10. It has 65 students who come from Lismore and around the region, including Byron Bay and Ballina.

The school was started in 1994 by several local parents who wanted an alternative education for their children, one which treated the students with respect and allowed them to learn within an emotionally-supportive environment. The school aims to create a loving and safe environment that allows all students to reach their full potential in all areas. Classes generally have a maximum of 15 students.

The school runs as an incorporated body with a management committee. It receives funding from the NSW and federal governments and keeps school fees to a minimum.

The students are diverse. At least one-third of the students are Indigenous children. There are students who have been at the school since kindergarten and other students who have come to the Young and Powerful School after finding that the local government school or other non-government school did not suit them.

Achievements at the Young and Powerful School include:

- the close involvement of teachers, parents and students in all aspects of the operation of the school
- improvements in literacy for many of the students
- excellent attendance as the students enjoy being at school
- offering work opportunities and traineeships to local Indigenous young people and adults
- parent and student participation in teaching and other duties: for example some of the students are employed as school cleaners
- the school has established links with other Lismore agencies: for example police officers visit every fortnight to meet with students, juvenile offenders can do their community service at the school and a local Department of Community Services worker helps lead a weekly Aboriginal Support Group.

Shalom Christian College in Townsville began in 1992 as an initiative of the Aboriginal and Islander Uniting Church Congress, a national body of the Uniting Church. This independent, co-educational College offers an educational program from pre-school to Year 12, as well as a boarding house which draws Indigenous students from the Torres Strait and other parts of Queensland.

Shalom Christian College is part of a network of community interests which includes:

- the Shalom Elders Village
- a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre
- the Crystal Creek conference centre and camp site
- the Yalga-binbi Institute for Community Development and Education Unit

- Shalom Development Services, the construction arm of the Congress.

Yalga-binbi operates fee-for-service activities in community development, education and training for a wide range of government agencies and other Indigenous community organisations. Congress members have adopted a community development approach suited to their needs and aspirations, where all the above activities are administered individually but operate on an interdependent basis. The school also operates within this wider community context (from *Katu Kalpa* paragraph 1.39 *).

What does HREOC recommend about independent schools?

The Commission recommended that, if Indigenous communities decide that their children's education needs would best be met by a community-run school, then every assistance should be provided.

**Katu Kalpa* is a report on Indigenous Education in Australia. It was done by the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee in March 2000.

Contribute to the school curriculum

Special forever, Murray-Darling Basin

Students in rural and remote areas often learn about topics unrelated to their daily lives. They discuss environments they have never seen or are asked to appreciate and understand topics outside their experience. Everyone agrees it is good to expand students' knowledge and ideas beyond their limited experience because it helps them make choices and equips them for careers they may want to follow in the future. But students can also learn a lot through local knowledge. Students' own experiences and the experiences of their local community offer many opportunities to learn about the world, how it works and the skills needed to survive in it. Students can draw on their personal experience and local knowledge to learn to write, draw, plan projects, make calculations, read and learn about history and geography. Through this process they gain problem-solving skills and awareness of their surroundings and improve their self-esteem. They are able to respond to issues that they have thought through and have placed in their own context rather than being forced to react to things that they are not familiar with. It encourages community involvement and mutual respect between students, schools and the rest of the community.

Many teachers in rural and remote areas already encourage local content in their classroom curriculum. There are also some good curriculum materials developed in schools and by regional organisations.

About the *Special forever* writing program

The children are writing about what is significant to them. Because it has such a local content and local flavour, people who live here love to hear about themselves. That is probably the secret of it. The kids are writing about something that is a real part of their everyday life. It helps them to look beyond their everyday life to what is important about where they live and their environment (Rosemary Zalec, *Special forever* coordinator, Mildura Region, in 1996).

The *Special forever** writing program involves more than 35,000 primary school children from throughout the million square kilometre Murray-Darling Basin. The Murray-Darling Basin catchment area covers most of inland south-eastern Australia, extending from Goolwa in South Australia to Toowoomba in Queensland, from Broken Hill to Tamworth in NSW and through the ACT into Victoria. The program encourages children to think about and record what is important to them environmentally and socially. It also gives them the opportunity to tell the rest of the community what they value and what they think the future should hold.

* The information about this program comes from David Eastburn, its creator, in publications including *Special Forever Feedback and Participation by Schools in the Murray-Darling Basin 1993-1998* (1999) and *Links with the Land: Writing and Art by Children of the Murray-Darling Basin* (published by the Murray-Darling Basin Commission and the Primary English Teaching Association).

An individual, group, class or school in the area can volunteer to participate in *Special forever*. Since the program began in 1993, 790 primary schools in the region have participated: that's more than 50%.

What are the aims?

Special forever aims to:

- involve primary students in the Basin-wide community in thinking about their own locality, what makes it special to them and how to preserve its special qualities
- encourage students to write these thoughts in a variety of ways and publish them locally
- encourage children to become more aware of the differences and similarities of life in other parts of the Basin.

One or more schools in one area may even decide to combine to produce a publication of the children's writings. By publishing their work, students can see a real outcome from the project.

The Murray-Darling Basin Commission and Primary English Teaching Association (PETA) distribute guidelines, organise a support structure of regional coordinators, run workshops and provide support materials (posters, certificates, stickers, pamphlets, booklets, games and videos). It is up to teachers and students to decide what they want to write or speak about and how they will present their ideas. Teachers and students can work together creatively.

Seamus Bromley, then aged 9 and a student at Wahgunyah Primary School, published this story in 1997.

Floods on the Murray

Today Mrs McLean from the Riverside Motel came to talk to us about floods. She showed us some diagrams on how floods are made. I learnt that a flood has a strong current. I also learnt that the fish (and trees) are used to the hot water in summer, so when the cold water comes it is so cold that the trees and fish die and the trees fall out. I also learnt that every sandbag costs fifteen cents. The water stays up in the floods for ten days. Mrs McLean told us that the sandbags rot if the floods stay too long. She told us that they keep records on how high the floods are. She told us that during the floods red-bellied black snakes came up to the stairs and then they went back down into the water again. After the floods she said that there were heaps of carp and baby rabbits that were nearly dead. Before the floods she rings up some people that take measurements and then they tell her. I learnt a lot about the floods and how they affect people.

Benefits

There are many benefits about using local content in curriculum. In *Special forever* students discovered things about their local environment, their families and their community members they never knew before. They gained confidence and self-esteem and learned to appreciate their surroundings and to take an active interest in helping to look after it. Community members developed relationships and respect for the school students.

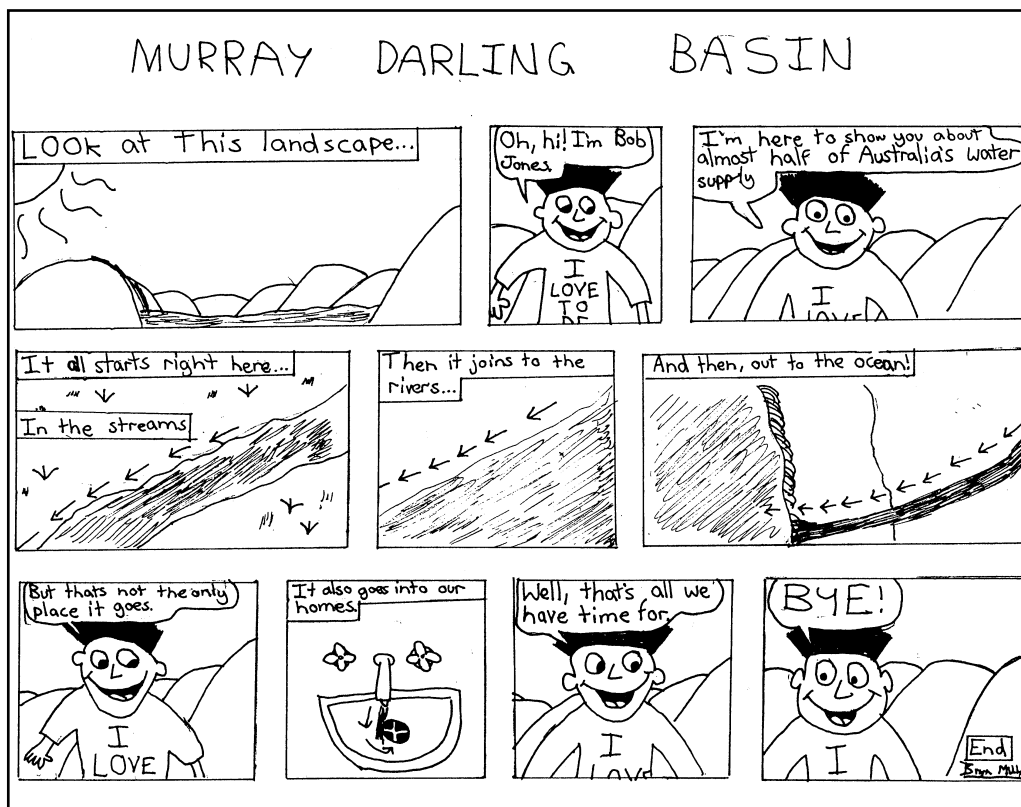
... now whenever we are talking about [relevant] things we relate them to the Murray-Darling Basin. We can transfer that to the knowledge of the rest of the world if you like, in terms of our resources and sharing the resources - even in terms of world peace, thinking about others and the effects that our actions can have on other people (Cooper, 1997, quoted by David Eastburn).

Children not normally noted for academic work spent a long time talking with elderly family members and produced excellent stories about their lives - resulting in increased self-esteem for these children (Bathurst West Public School, 1995, quoted by David Eastburn).

It is an inclusive program and everybody can have a go at any level ... we tend to underestimate children's capacity to think and feel about all sorts of things, but particularly about what is special to them in their own areas. Places evoke memories for all of us, so writing is a very powerful tool. People who have read the children's writings have been quite surprised.

“It takes children seriously, it teaches them to write and children get to express what they love about their area, what the problems are and what they are passionate about ...”

The most important thing to me is children in this part of Australia recognising the special qualities and perhaps feeling better about where they live and perhaps fighting for it (Vivienne Nicoll-Hatton, Special Project Coordinator, 1997, quoted by David Eastburn).



Drawn by Brynley Millar, then aged 11 and
a student at Charles Conder Primary School.

Are there other examples?

Special forever is an ambitious and well-funded project. There are smaller ways of delivering local curriculum content which are just as significant to local children. The best example is when local **Elders** teach the students about local Indigenous culture, significant sites, bush foods and local languages.

At Courallie in Aboriginal Studies we learnt the Kamilaroi region words. We had an Elder come in and speak to us and teach us bit by bit. It was interesting

to hear her stories and learn some of the words. Very interesting (Moree NSW students meeting).

We learn about our four skin groups. These are plants, sun, rock and fish. Our skin groups come from our family skin groups, from our mothers and our grandmothers.

I like dancing in my dreaming. This comes from our fathers' side. This is the fathers' dance and we learn it at school (Nguiu NT students meetings).

We have lots of community involvement with places like Gundabooka Aboriginal Corporation. They paint on our grounds and that's one way of getting mothers and fathers on site. We have wonderful morning teas with them. We have a nursery group from Gundabooka that comes up and do gardens with our children from planting the seeds to then actually picking (Maxine Mackay, Bourke Pre-school Principal, Bourke NSW hearing).

Teaching is a job that needs to be studied. Not many Elders are trained teachers. If schools take their lessons seriously, they need to provide help with teaching.

The elders need structured support though. Going into a classroom is difficult for traditional people who are not used to being in the classroom; it is not their natural environment. Nobody would expect these old ladies to take the classes of kids. It is not as though they could go into a classroom and teach 30 children. The elders are eager to teach the language but they need support and they need literacy support (Halls Creek WA public meeting).

We were told this support is happening in WA.

In some places the languages are known only by a small number of people. And those people who do know the language are usually old, have never been to school, so the whole idea of them going into a school to teach the language is a difficulty for them and for the school. So what we have been doing in WA is to develop language teams. The person who knows the language we call the specialist. Then there is the classroom teacher, and these two people are the two key people, because without the classroom teacher the thing doesn't work, it has to be timetabled and disciplined and so on, and then we have either the Aboriginal teaching assistant or the AIEW depending on which system you are talking about and that person is the liaison between the two, making sure the specialist is comfortable and able to communicate and often that person works in the schools. That seems to be working and seems to be the only way to provide the language in the schools given the situation that we have (Joyce Hudson, linguist, Broome WA hearing).

Schools that are keen to teach language and culture sometimes cannot afford to do it.

Last year we had plenty of funding: we had \$38,000. We were able to employ Aboriginal people to come in and teach Yolŋu language. For all Year 8 students there was an option to learn either Indonesian or Yolŋu. We had two classes of Yolŋu and one Indonesian class. This year we applied for funding to go on to Year 9. The kids wanted to go on to Year 9, the parents wanted to go on to Year 9 but they gave us only \$20,000 to run double the program.

We decided that it was impossible to run all of the program on the \$20,000. We have had to scrub the camp component of the program where our students went with Yirrkala students to the Homelands Communities. We are going to be scratching to do what we do; to simply run the classes. The Department response was that they had to really fight to give us any money at all (Nhulunbuy NT public meeting).

What does HREOC recommend about local content?

Local content is an important way to improve the relevance of school education. It shows respect for the local history, culture, environment, community and language. In this way it also shows respect for the children. It also creates jobs for local people to participate in their children's education.

We recommend that local people and organisations should have opportunities to develop curriculum materials which incorporate local or regional content. Teaching local Indigenous languages and histories needs to be supported with language books and other materials and funding is needed to assist local people to publish these.

Another perspective on local content is that Indigenous communities have a right to transmit their language and culture to their children. The education system should respect their knowledge and expertise.

Teaching

Aboriginal & Islander Education Workers

Working in the school as an AIEW is another way for Indigenous people to contribute to children's education. This benefits both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. In addition, AIEWs are role models for Indigenous students and parents and make the school a more welcoming place for all Indigenous people in the community. They also help the school relate to the local community and help teachers - especially new teachers - learn about the town, the people and their culture.

These assistants work in the school. They understand the students' ways and have a wealth of local knowledge to draw upon. They are a rich resource that trainee teachers need to know how to utilise. This raises the question of recognition of these assistants within the schools. These are the ones who stay on, these are the role models the students need, these are the people that represent the community's values and aspirations. How much credit are these people given for their knowledge? (Gwen Bucknall, Notre Dame University, Broome hearing).

What is their role?

AIEWs are also sometimes called:

- Koorie Educators (in Victoria)
- Aboriginal Education Workers (AEWs - in South Australia and Tasmania)
- Aboriginal Education Assistants (AEAs - in NSW)
- Aboriginal Assistant Teachers (in NT community schools).

Their role is broad and includes:

- assisting teachers
- providing literacy and numeracy support and tuition to Indigenous students
- monitoring attendance, behaviour and progress of Indigenous students
- counselling and advising Indigenous students
- supporting language and culture in the classroom and giving an Indigenous perspective in the curriculum
- establishing links between home and school
- liaising between the school and the community
- assisting Indigenous students with family, welfare, medical and other problems
- providing induction for new teachers.

I'm with them during the day, helping them understand teachers' jargon. A lot of the kids who've come to us now are very articulate. They can talk; they've got a good vocabulary but they can't sit down

and write. They talk more or less in their own language and find it hard to communicate in English (AIEW in the NT).

In the absence of sufficient Indigenous teachers, AIEWs will continue to play a vital role in bridging the cultural gap between Indigenous students and non-Indigenous teachers, and in the development of appropriate curriculum (Australian Education Union submission).

In 1994 there were almost 1,700 AIEWs in Australia. AIEWs are mostly appointed to schools with significant numbers of Indigenous students. For example, in Tasmanian Catholic Schools the minimum is 10. In NSW government schools the minimum is 30 Indigenous students for the first AIEW and 80 are needed before a second AIEW will be appointed.

Successes

There is plenty of evidence that AIEWs are often essential to the success of Indigenous students. We heard many positive comments.

When we were in Year 7 we had an Aboriginal teacher who used to take us out on this language program. He used to tell us all these Aboriginal stories. That was every week. That was good eh? We even made a video (Brewarrina NSW students meeting).

You can't put these people into schools and pretend they don't make a difference ... The contribution to the learning outcomes from allied

staff generally - but Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers in particular - is up to 35%. You can't ignore that. They're critical educators in those communities. They're even more important given the cultural role they hold (Sharan Burrow, then President, Australian Education Union, Melbourne hearing).

When Courallie High School in Moree NSW recently employed 7 Aboriginal tutors, Aboriginal students who had been alienated from school and sent to the Time Out Centre mostly returned to school. Those tutors made Courallie a welcoming place for those students.

Aboriginal staff stay on in communities and I think there is considerable evidence now of Aboriginal staff who have been in schools 10, 13, 14 and 15 years whereas the non-Aboriginal staff in that period of time has changed quite dramatically (John Bucknall, Coordinator, Aboriginal Independent Schools Unit, Broome WA hearing).

Problems

There have been problems in the past:

- many AIEWs are only part-time
- no permanency - they are on term-time contracts or casuals
- no career path
- no salary increments
- no professional development or in-service training
- isolation

- role too broad
- no incentive or assistance to study for teaching qualifications
- many schools still don't have an AIEW.

These problems continue in some places. For example, the Commission was told:

I certainly don't think that there are enough of them, I don't believe that they are accorded appropriate status. They should take on a central role in the education of the children in our schools ... one of the things that we are wanting to do is to increase the number of Aboriginal teachers working in their own communities. We've failed dismally in our efforts, but again not for a lack of trying; we just haven't got it right yet ... The AIEWs are seen more as a simple support structure rather than being accorded a full status in terms of their capacity to impact and influence what happens in schools and what happens in the learning programs for Aboriginal students (Laurie Andrew, District Director, Kimberley Education, EDWA, Broome WA hearing).

AIEWs are not always afforded the same access to opportunities of professional development [and] rarely, if ever, attend inservice events with their colleague teachers or support staff (Independent Education Union submission).

They're seen as extras rather than an integral part of the system (Edna McGill, NSW Ethnic Communities Council, Sydney hearing).

The Koorie Educators have to run professional development programs. When we do that we've got to run around begging for resources. It's not compulsory so if they choose not to go to Professional Development days ... They're not over-rapt in Aboriginal PD days. You struggle to get half a day. If you say a whole day, the teachers turn up their noses. They choose to do whatever they like. We're called in as education workers to sort out the problems [in the schools] and we don't always get these people taking on our suggestions. Why do we have to battle all the time to create awareness? (Bairnsdale Victoria Koorie workers meeting).

Non-government schools often fall even further behind government schools. For example:

- the Tasmanian Catholic Education Commission AEWs only work between 5 and 15 hours each week
- the Independent Education Union told us that “one diocese had somebody working for 17 years - temporary” and that “many of them have only worked on one-year contracts - when term finishes on 18 December people have to go on unemployment benefits”
- the Rockhampton Catholic Education Office in Queensland told us “there is no career structure as such ...”
- although some Catholic school AIEWs have permanency, “many continue to be employed on a temporary basis from year to year” according to the Independent Education Union.

But the problems also persist in the government school system. The Australian Education Union told the Commission:

In particular, the precarious nature of the employment of many AIEWs should be addressed. Poor working conditions, low status, lack of recognition of skills, low salaries, racism, exploitation, lack of career paths/structures and limited access to professional development and further education and training are all matters in need of urgent attention if the high turnover of these extremely valuable people is to be stemmed.

The AEU's Ara Kuwaritjakutu project reported that the average salary level for an AIEW in 1994 was \$18,590. In some cases there had been little change by 1999.



Students from Yarrabah in Queensland who met with the inquiry at the 1999 Croc Eisteddfod in Weipa.

Teachers' aides in Normanton Queensland told us:

Teachers' aides sometimes want to enhance their skills and qualifications. However, we have very limited opportunities for training and development. When teachers' aides do courses the extra skills and qualifications they obtain do not translate into additional pay. Teachers' aides don't get the same recognition or have access to the same incentives as teachers when they undertake further study. For example, we don't have the same entitlement to study-time.

Fixing the problems

The *Katu Kalpa* Committee * recommended “that MCEETYA [the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs] implement a strategy that provides an appropriate career and salary structure for AIEWs in all the states and territories and that provides for consistency in pay and conditions across the states and territories. It further recommends that AIEWs be given incentives to gain full teaching qualifications” (Recommendation 19).

Some education departments have recognised the problems and are working to fix them.

New South Wales

The NSW Department of Education and Training employs 244 AIEWs in rural and remote schools. The

**Katu Kalpa* is a report on Indigenous Education in Australia. It was done by the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee in March 2000.

Department has an Aboriginal Employment and Career Development Program with a number of strategies including the Community Based Indigenous Teachers Education Program at Boggabilla, an Aboriginal Mentor Program and an Aboriginal Teachers' Career Pathway Program. The career options for government AIEWs include becoming an Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer, an Aboriginal Education Resource Teacher, an Aboriginal Student Liaison Officer, an Aboriginal Education Consultant or a qualified classroom teacher. The Department told us:

There are tremendous pressures on Indigenous teachers. There are now multi phased induction programs for Indigenous teachers. There are strong networks from the District Office, the school and the Aboriginal Education Assistant Network to ensure that people are supported in practice and classroom management, classroom organisation and feeling comfortable in the teaching environment. It is improving all of the time. We recognise that in the past there have been the pressures that have been described (public meeting in Moree NSW).

Western Australia

The Education Department of WA has 275 AIEWs and Aboriginal Liaison Officers. Like NSW the WA Department also has an Aboriginal Employment and Career Development Plan which includes a mentoring program and cadetships. EDWA is also working on a career structure described as follows.

[It] provides the opportunity to work initially as unqualified teachers and subsequently, through a

combination of recognition of prior learning (RPL), formal study, on-the-job training and development and supervised practical teaching experience, to be recognised as fully qualified classroom teachers.

The AIEW career structure includes a new position of Aboriginal Specialist Teacher (AST). ASTs are two-year trained Aboriginal teachers who will have specific responsibility for numeracy and literacy programs for Aboriginal students and teaching Aboriginal culture, language and history to mainstream students.

As the AIEWs move through the career structure, the appropriate levels of salary and conditions are accorded fairly and equitably to reward and recognise their qualifications, experience and competence (EDWA submission).

Also in WA the Catholic Education Office offers scholarships to its AIEWs to study to become teachers on full pay. In 1999 16 AIEWs were studying on scholarships in the Kimberley region alone (Ian Trust, Wunan Council, Kununurra WA hearing). Sister Clare Ahern from Notre Dame University in Broome told us:

As well as paying the HECS contribution, the scholarships enable the students to study full-time without having to find part-time work (Broome WA hearing).

South Australia

South Australian government AIEWs recently won their own enterprise agreement and their career path is

structured according to TAFE certificate courses. The Department of Education, Training and Employment told us:

Most school based AEWs are on around level 1 or level 2. The extremely good AEWs, who have kept up with their training and development, will go to a level 3. When you become a level 4 AEW, you are eligible then to work - if there is a position available - in our district offices. Then you can go to a level 5 AEW, which has managerial roles across groups of districts (Michael Williams, Superintendent of Aboriginal Education, DETE, Adelaide hearing).

Becoming a teacher

As ATSIC told the Commission in Kununurra WA:

If there were more commitment to Aboriginal teacher training it would ease teacher recruitment problems and provide stable staff. It would relate to the majority of students and provide role models for students.

It is highly desirable that schools in Indigenous communities have on their staff Indigenous teachers who are from that community. The AEU would support special programs of recruitment and replacement which facilitated this occurring. The AEU believes that in self-managed Indigenous community schools, Education Departments/Ministries should negotiate with the community regarding selection of teachers (Australian Education Union submission).

Many AIEWs and other people who would like to be teachers have family and cultural commitments which mean they cannot spend three or four years living and studying in a capital city or even a regional city closer to home. Also they may need to keep working and study at the same time for financial reasons. Fortunately some universities now structure Indigenous teacher training so that AIEWs can continue working in their school and that work is taken into account for their degree. They keep in touch with their lecturers by mail and phone and sometimes by E-mail. They do regular residentials at the university campus to consult lecturers and have lectures and tutorials. These residentials are usually only for a week each time. Sometimes it is also possible for a lecturer to visit the schools and assess and help the trainees put what they have learned into practice.

In South Australia there is a teacher training program on the Pitjantjatjara Lands which is linked to the University of South Australia. James Cook University in Townsville runs a Remote Area Teacher Education Program for Queensland and Notre Dame University in Broome WA offers the same program for the Kimberley region. Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education is an Indigenous controlled training institute which offers distance teacher education in the NT (as well about 15% of Batchelor's students are from WA, northern SA and northern Queensland).

Non-Indigenous staff

Finding experienced staff for rural and remote schools - especially staff prepared to stay several years and make a commitment to the community - is a very real problem.

It's not only Indigenous people who can benefit from off-campus distance teacher training. In South Australia, for example, we heard about many rural women wishing to return to teaching who need to upgrade and update their qualifications without leaving their families and businesses (for example, the family farm).

Now that governments are recognising the importance of early childhood education, there's a great need for early childhood teachers in rural and remote areas. At present, in South Australia again, trainees have to spend part of each week on campus to do their study.

The university in Whyalla has been thoughtful in the way it has structured some of its programs so that people can travel to Whyalla, spend an intense three days, and then go back to their community and live. That puts a strain on families but at the same time it has made courses accessible to families.

So you will have people who reside in places like Elliston on the far west coast, Poochera, Wudinna, who could ... travel the 400 kilometres to Whyalla, be there Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, have all their workload condensed into that time and then go back to their communities, and then come back the following week (Peter Cibich, Port Pirie Catholic Education Office Director, Port Lincoln SA hearing).

The only early childhood off-campus course is run by Macquarie University in Sydney. It is in danger of closing due to lack of funding.

Local people also work in schools as support carers for students with disabilities, Special Education Aides,

Indigenous language tutors and a range of other roles. Role models are important for all students.

What did HREOC recommend about AIEWs?

The Commission's recommendations have the aim of increasing the numbers of well-trained AIEWs and teachers in rural and remote schools. The location and quality of their training and the suitability of their working conditions need to improve.



Students and staff at Baniyala Homeland Community School NT.

Combining the best

Yirrkala Community Education Centre

About Yirrkala CEC

Yirrkala in Eastern Arnhem Land NT is a strong Yolŋu language community that administers a large area with many smaller Homeland Centres. The Yirrkala CEC is a Northern Territory Education Department school with 191 students. It has

- a combination of Indigenous and non-Indigenous teaching staff
- a bilingual - Yolŋu and English - teaching program
- a culturally-appropriate learning approach.

Learning language

One of the inquiry's Commissioners described the Yirrkala curriculum as 'both ways' education.

"Both-ways education" is a philosophy that is broad enough to reconcile a determined effort to lift standards of attainment in English literacy and numeracy on the one hand with, on the other, a recognition of difference: and I mean here differing lifestyle choices, a different epistemological system, different cultural histories, the fierce

determination to hang on to surviving cultural practices and languages, as well as young people's evident desire to express themselves in new, non-traditional ways (Dr Brian Devlin, NT University).

Bilingual education (since early 2000 called '2 Way Learning') at Yirrkala is assisted by a CD-Rom about Yolŋu and, of course, by the bilingual Indigenous teachers and AIEWs who work there. Talking about the Lajamanu program which is delivered in both Warlpiri and English, Dr Christine Nicholls from Flinders University has pointed out:

Aboriginal controlled bilingual programs give Aboriginal parents and their extended families a real place in their children's education. Indigenous controlled bilingual education programs put Aboriginal teachers into Aboriginal classrooms as "real" teachers; assist the Aboriginalisation of schools, thereby acting as circuit-breakers to continuing welfare dependence; improve relations between community members and schools; increase school attendance; legitimate and strengthen Indigenous languages thereby raising the self-esteem of both adults and children (quoted in ATSIIC submission).

Learning culture

At Yirrkala CEC it is important for the students to learn about their own culture. The community told us:

We need our children to be educated. Educated in the proper manner. Educated in a way that we would like them to be. Because tomorrow's future is held by these young people.



Students and staff at Wandawuy Homeland School NT.

The Sober Women's Group participates in teaching the students as described in the Youth Research Centre survey for the inquiry.

The education is based on Gurrutu, which is the kinship system for the extended family. When alcohol was discussed it was placed in reference to Gurrutu. All children at the Yirrkala school were placed in groups to describe and discuss Gurrutu and their skin groups and the importance of Gurrutu to Yolŋu (Aboriginal people). It was then shown that alcohol "puts shyness to sleep" and that people then go off and live with the wrong related kinship group. This is wrong for Yolŋu culture.

The health effects of alcohol were shown to the children by cooking a wallaby. When a wallaby is cooked, its liver becomes hard. This was related to alcohol to show the effect that alcohol has on people's livers.

The other education related to nutrition and teaching Gurrutu. Bush tucker trips were organised with the women showing the children how to hunt and to fish, catch crabs, find turtle eggs and mussels from the mangroves, and find stingrays, mud crabs, oysters and clams, while talking to them about the importance of Gurrutu (Youth Research Centre Survey report).

Are there any problems?

When the inquiry visited Yirrkala, students, parents, teachers and community members strongly stated their opposition to the Education Department's decision to stop funding bilingual education as a special program. They were determined to continue with the program. Former Principal Mandawuy Yunupingu told us in a letter:

We have much to offer the people of the world. And language is at the heart of what we have to offer. If we lose that, we lose our culture. And if we lose our culture, you lose something that is unique.

If the language is lost, the culture will be lost also, customs, tradition and law will be destroyed, because we also need to use the language of the law in politics and many other areas.

Yirrkala CEC's accreditation as a 2 Way Learning school finishes at the end of 2000. There is no guarantee that

it will be successful in being accredited again and that there will be sufficient funds to produce the literature needed to support bilingual education and other needs.

Yirrkala teachers also told us that Yirrkala CEC is not an accredited provider of secondary education and the school can only provide Foundation Studies, General Studies and Intensive English Courses for secondary-aged students. None of the Yirrkala students goes to the neighbouring town, Nhulunbuy, for high school. The teachers feel that the courses the school provides are insufficient and inappropriate. However, two students are studying Year 10 by correspondence with some tuition.

Are there other examples?

ATSIC told us, “there are several government schools throughout the country that have a majority of Indigenous staff, including principals. These schools reflect community concerns more closely in their curriculum and teaching strategies. Other education initiatives have also been launched such as ‘two way’ schooling where there is an integration of Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge and values in the curriculum” (ATSIC submission).

Just one example is **Rawa Community School** which is located on the edge of the Great Sandy Desert in WA. It also has a ‘two way’ learning philosophy which aims to prepare students to participate fully in the broader Australian community (if they choose) and also to keep the Martu people’s culture and language alive (from *Katu Kalpa* paragraph 1.37).

Acknowledgments

The Commission gratefully acknowledges the following members of the inquiry team who worked with the Human Rights Commissioner, Chris Sidoti.

The Co-Commissioners were:

Associate Professor Dr Brian Devlin (Northern Territory)

Ms Barbara Flick (New South Wales)

Dr Alby Jones (South Australia)

Lady Pearl Logan (Queensland)

Sister Patricia Rhatigan (Western Australia)

Mr Tim Roberts (Victoria)

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Dr Bill Jonas, assisted the inquiry at its Sydney hearing and at meetings in Moree NSW with students participating in the 1999 Croc Eisteddfod.

The director of the inquiry was Meredith Wilkie. For varying periods during the course of the inquiry research, drafting and administration were undertaken by Fabienne Balsamo, Susan Newell, David Robinson, Kate Temby and Meredith Wilkie assisted by Morten Achilles Bruus, Dameeli Coates, Patricia Judd, Cecilia Ricard and Isabel Seidel.

This book was written by Meredith Wilkie and Susan Newell. They acknowledge with gratitude the following who assisted them: Lynne Rolley, Sue Thomas, Wendy Baarda, Maureen Moran, Mick Clark, David Eastburn, Pat Cavanagh, Daniel Suggit, Sister Marianne Zeinstra, Leon White and Robert Picton.

The Youth Research Centre survey was managed by Helen Stokes and co-authored with John Stafford and Roger Holdsworth.

Library: Anthony Attard and Leonie Nagle.

Media: Erin Broderick, Jackie Randles and Janine MacDonald.

Website: Lisa Thompson and Joanna Kay.

Secretarial and administrative assistance were provided, again for varying periods during the course of the inquiry, by Sarah Barnes, Katie Bates, Janis Constable, Elaine D'Souza, Rachel Miers and Rosie Parkyn. Transcription services were provided by Spark and Cannon.