

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES IN ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

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Since the 1967 Referendum the Australian Government has expanded its activities very considerably in the field of Aboriginal education. While maintaining its previous direct responsibility for the education of Aboriginals living in the Northern Territory, the Government now provides financial and other assistance each year to support the efforts of State Governments and other authorities in an Australia-wide program financed from an Aboriginal Advancement Trust Account administered by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

In the five year period from 1968-69 to 1972-73 grants to the State Governments from the Aboriginal Advancement Trust Account to enable them to extend and improve activities in Aboriginal education have amounted to some \$6.8 million. Additional classrooms, pre-schools, hostels, school buses, homework centres, teaching materials, in-service courses for teachers, conferences and research activities are some of the items resulting from this Australian Government initiative which extends over all levels of education from pre-schooling to adult education.

Pre-schooling has, in fact, been given a major emphasis following acceptance by Ministers for Aboriginal Affairs of the Australian and State Governments that lack of opportunity in the pre-school years imposes a permanent hardship on Aboriginal children. The Department of Education has assisted the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in the formulation of an Australia-wide program for the extension and improvement of Aboriginal pre-schooling, and more than \$1.8 million has been provided for this purpose in the period 1968-69 to 1972-73, largely as a component of the State grants.

The State Grants for the 1972-73 financial year are shown in the following table:

ABORIGINAL ADVANCEMENT PAYMENTS TO THE STATES, 1972-3

State	Grants for Educational Purposes	Total Grant
	\$	\$
New South Wales	327,000	4,750,000
Victoria	227,000	770,000
Queensland	1,274,000	7,700,000
South Australia	435,000	1,740,000
Western Australia	618,000	6,886,000
Tasmania	6,000	154,000
All States	2,887,000	22,000,000

Organizations requiring assistance in their programs generally first put their case in writing to the State Aboriginal Affairs authorities. Approved projects are forwarded each year by these State authorities to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in a consolidated request for Australian Government assistance in respect of the coming financial year. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs then seeks the advice of the Australian Department of Education on each one of these items and, after considering this advice, makes grants to the States under the States Grants (Aboriginal Advancement) legislation.

The National Workshop on Aboriginal Education, held in Brisbane in 1971, has played a significant part in this program of assistance by defining priorities for action and research. Organized by Dr. Betty Watts, in consultation with the Australian Department of Education, and financed by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, this Workshop involved teachers, administrators and researchers in a week-long study of special needs in these three areas at the pre-school, primary and secondary levels.

One Workshop recommendation was that there should be a further National Workshop devoted solely to the theme of the continuing education of Aboriginals. As a result, a conference on this topic was held in May, 1972, at the Australian National

University, sponsored by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and organized by the A.N.U. Centre for Continuing Education on behalf of the Australian Association of Adult Education.

The recommendations and priorities enunciated by both these Workshops have provided policy guidelines for education authorities, schools and other bodies concerned with the education of Aboriginals.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

A very far-reaching initiative of the Australian Government has been the introduction of two non-competitive schemes of educational assistance to students of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islands descent, the Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme and the Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme, which are administered and funded by the Australian Department of Education.

Aboriginal Secondary Grants are for children attending approved secondary schools and classes in any Australian State or internal Territory, and to students of 14 years of age who attend an approved primary school and are likely to benefit from remaining at school.

Benefits payable include living allowance, text book and uniform allowance, personal allowance, tuition fees, and board and travel costs in certain cases. Satisfactory standards of progress and attendance must be maintained for a student to retain the award.

The number of students in receipt of awards has increased steadily since the inception of the Scheme in 1970. It is expected that the number of awards held during 1973 will be close to 9,000.

Aboriginal Study Grants are for persons wishing to study further after leaving school. Grants may be awarded to students for full-time or part-time courses in a wide variety of educational institutions other than normal primary or secondary school. Benefits for full-time students include a living allowance, textbook and equipment allowance, dependants' allowances where applicable, all compulsory fees, cost of compulsory travel and tutorial assistance. Benefits for part-time study include the cost of compulsory fees, and an allowance for incidental costs of the course. Satisfactory progress and attendance are conditions for continued tenure of a grant.

The number of grants awarded has risen from 115 in 1969 (the first year of operation) to 689 in 1972. Of the grants made in 1972, 72% were held by women and 73% were used for study in full-time courses.

Application forms and information statements for each Scheme are available from State Offices of the Australian Department of Education.

NORTHERN TERRITORY

On 12th February this year the Prime Minister announced that:

- he had endorsed an agreement between the Ministers for Education and Aboriginal Affairs whereby special education for Aborigines in the Northern Territory, including adult education, would become the responsibility of the Minister for Education as from 13th February, 1973;
- there would be continuing consultation between the Ministers and Departments of Education and Aboriginal Affairs to ensure that the overall policies of the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs were reflected in the education programs; and
- particular consideration would be given to the special and sometimes different needs of Aborigines.

This has had the effect of merging the two previous school systems, one comprising the general community schools and pre-schools situated in the more populated areas of the Northern Territory and the other, the special schools for Aboriginal children, most of which are in remote areas, on settlements, missions and pastoral properties. All now form part of a single, unified education system operating within the Australian Department of Education under the direction of the Director of Northern Territory Education, Dr. Hedley Beare.

To help co-ordinate education policies and programs for Aborigines in the Northern Territory, an inter-departmental committee comprising representatives of the Departments of Education and Aboriginal Affairs is being established in Canberra with a sub-committee in Darwin.

A school building program is being developed. It will be largely based on the report of a committee representing the

Departments of Education and Works which is at present travelling throughout the Territory assessing the education building needs of each major Aboriginal community.

The Commonwealth Teaching Service will provide teaching staff for all Northern Territory schools at the request of the Director of Northern Territory Education. Proposals for staffing which include some substantial improvements are being formulated following the recommendations of another special committee. Aboriginal Teaching Officers will be appointed as temporary teachers in the Commonwealth Teaching Service.

With the proposed appointment of teacher librarians and the building of resource centres, the extension of library facilities to Aboriginal communities and their schools is also under way. The stocking of school libraries is planned as part of a program to raise standards to those recommended by the Library Association of Australia.

BILINGUAL EDUCATION

One of the most significant Australian Government innovations in Aboriginal education has been the introduction this year of bilingual education in certain Northern Territory schools. The policy is to introduce this program, as circumstances permit, in schools where the necessary pre-requisites are met. These are schools in distinctive Aboriginal communities where an Aboriginal language is the mother tongue of the children. As was explained in *The Aboriginal Child at School Vol.1, No.1*, the aim is for these children to commence their schooling in their own language, proceed to the acquisition of literacy skills in that language, then acquire literacy in English and have most of their subsequent schooling in English.

The educational aim of such an approach is the development of children who are thoroughly competent in their own language and able to read and write it, who are more proficient in English than they would have been under the previous system and who are better at all their school subjects because their schooling, and their early schooling in particular, has been more interesting, enjoyable and meaningful to them. One would also expect psychological benefits from this recognition of the children's language and culture, and more enthusiastic support from the parents for the schooling their children are offered.

Pre-requisites for the introduction of a program of bilingual education into a particular school include *inter alia* an eagerness for it on the part of the Aboriginal community, acceptance by that community of a particular Aboriginal language for use in the school, linguistic analysis of that language to a stage at which literacy in it can be achieved and the availability of Aboriginal teaching staff members. At present the schools which have commenced bilingual teaching in the Northern Territory are at Angurugu on Groote Eylandt, Milingimbi, Goulburn Island, Areyonga and Hermannsburg.

FUTURE ACTIVITIES

As can be seen, a large number of pre-schools, schools and other educational institutions, and many thousands of Aboriginal students, have benefited from Australian Government initiatives since the 1967 Referendum. Now, with Commissions established or being established at all levels of education from pre-school to university, the funding role of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs may change in some respects. There is likely to remain, however, in the foreseeable future, a need for special assistance in respect of Aboriginal children over and above what the Commissions find themselves able to provide. The main thrust of this effort may very well be an "enabling" one, designed to assist teachers, administrators and researchers to do what they believe they should do but lack the special resources to do.

This is one of the reasons why a Journal such as *The Aboriginal Child at School* is particularly welcome at this time. To the extent that it disseminates information about useful classroom activities and stimulates enthusiasm and soundly based innovatory thinking, it will help very materially to assist efforts towards improving the meaningfulness and effectiveness of the education of Aboriginal children throughout Australia.

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The Concept of Equality of Educational Opportunity -
(continued from p.16)

These issues must concern those of us working in the field of Aboriginal education. What are we aiming at? The education we are providing for Aboriginal children leads to what end?

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