

Review of Aboriginal Education

Chapter 4

Junaaygam

Recommendations

The translation of *Recommendations* in the Gumbaynggir language is

Things that are told

Introduction

Stories of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parents, students, workers and community members, of teachers, principals, academics, researchers and submission writers collected during the Review have created a small mountain of information.

Stories were often told from the heart. They shared the good and bad experiences of people themselves or of family members in schools, on TAFE NSW campuses and in offices of the NSW Department of Education and Training (NSW DET).

It is pleasing to report that there are school and campus communities where good things are happening, where Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people work together to prepare the next generations for positive futures.

In these school and campus communities, School Education Areas and Regions there is enormous goodwill and fair-mindedness among many towards maintaining or improving the attendance, retention and academic performance of Aboriginal students in schooling and training.

To give the full picture, however, it must also be said that attitudes and behaviours encountered during some parts of the review process could, at best, be described as defensive or ambivalent.

The bulk of schools, campuses and offices are somewhere in the middle, contributing in some ways to both the improvements and ongoing failures of the education system to make a difference for Aboriginal young people.

The Review indicated that all levels of the education system require inspired leadership and support if they are to move forward. Leadership and support with determination to tackle the barriers to success that are faced by too many Aboriginal students. Leadership and support with wisdom to make worthwhile contributions to Reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Australia.

Data sets, information, complaints and suggestions are essential parts of the previous chapters in this Report because they reveal what is happening in families, communities, schools, campuses and offices. The Recommendations that follow build on the information offered to provide the impetus for improvement, in effect to “kick start” change.

To conclude, there is no quick fix to the long-term issues being faced ... The problems are entrenched, complex and multi-faceted. Whilst many well-intentioned people have put forward solutions ... experience has shown that ad hoc and poorly designed solutions only exacerbate the situation.

– Dr Colin Gellatly (2004) *Report of Proceedings before the Standing Committee on Social Issues: Inquiry into issues related to Redfern/Waterloo*, NSW Government, Sydney, p. 4.

A cautionary note

Before listing the recommendations of the Review, there are a few matters that need to be raised. Highlighting these matters doesn't make them go away, nor does it in any way absolve DET from responsibility for making meaningful contributions to eliminating the negative impacts that these factors can have on Aboriginal students, families and communities. It does, however, provide a more realistic view of the social context for the recommendations that follow.

First, education and training is only one part of the story of bringing brighter futures to Aboriginal children, teenagers and young adults.

Good health, solid housing, safe and nurturing families are essential to effective learning. For those Aboriginal, and non-Aboriginal, students who are intermittently or permanently without these critical foundations, the Review has shown that the Department needs to find better ways to work with the agencies within government that are responsible for providing the assistance needed for families and communities.

Second, one of the most valued aspects of schooling and training is the potential for studies to lead to employment. The Review heard many times, in eloquent and sometimes forceful ways, of the frustration and hopelessness of limited employment opportunities. The jobs simply aren't there for Aboriginal people in many urban, rural, regional and isolated areas of New South Wales.

DET does not create the economic climate that in turn generates jobs. The Review demonstrated that the community does not expect the Department to create jobs for all unemployed people in the community. It does expect the Department to do its bit better – helping students to acquire the literacy and learning skills they need to succeed at school, to have options about university or other vocational training and to seek, obtain and hold employment.

Third, a consistent message from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people during the Review was that many people within DET, its schools and campuses would benefit from additional training and experience in working with Aboriginal people.

We go to meetings to sort out troubles. We listen. We give them ideas. Then they do what they want. Mostly we don't hear any more about it. What's the point?

– Aboriginal parent

The understandings of *community*, *collaborative decision-making* and *self-determination* held by non-Aboriginal leaders and staff members are only a shadow of what these concepts mean to Aboriginal people.

The Review heard of the common practice of involving Aboriginal people in the “identifying problems” and “gathering ideas” phases of activities but then excluding them at the critical point of deciding which ideas go into a plan, report or initiative.

Clearly, staff at all levels of the Department require training, guidance and positive experiences to build their capacity to work with Aboriginal people in the collaborative ways that will benefit all parties and make a difference for Aboriginal students. The Review heard enough examples of effective collaboration to conclude that such approaches do succeed.

Structure of the recommendations

As the Review progressed, the ideas, concerns, issues, grumbles, complaints, successes, failures and suggestions in what people said started to settle around a number of consistent messages

The consistent messages, labelled *themes* for this report, were often expressed in terms of “Do something about ...”:

- strengthening policy, planning and implementation
- extending quality teaching and learning
- fortifying identities of Aboriginal students
- engaging Aboriginal students
- applying Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge
- collaborating in partnerships
- building community capacity
- challenging racism
- advancing leadership and accountability.

The frequency with which ideas and suggestions contributed to these messages makes it clear that they should be the focus of recommendations and receive urgent attention.

Brief outlines of the nine themes follow. For clarity’s sake, the outlines are brief. They do not repeat all the points people made over the months of the Review. Rather, they attempt the difficult task of singling out critical aspects

*Don’t rush. Listen.
Be with your people.
The answer will
come.*

– Aboriginal community member

from among the complex array of important points mentioned to establish a bridge to the future.

The Review's recommendations follow the outlines of the themes and they too are categorised under the nine themes. It is important to recognise, however, that although recommendations are listed under one theme, many are expected to make a difference across a number of themes. For example, recommendations focusing on data collection, including data about complaints of racism, are listed under *Advancing leadership and accountability*. The recommendation about complaints of racism could just as validly have been listed with recommendations under the *Challenging racism* theme. In this context it is essential that the recommendations be considered together as an integrated package designed to bring greater success to Aboriginal students at school and in training.

STRENGTHENING POLICY, PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Policy development, planning and evaluation are familiar territory for all in DET. These tools are used to build strategies and priorities within statewide initiatives, such as the *Two Ways Together: the NSW Aboriginal Affairs Plan 2003-2012*, *Aboriginal Education Policy*, *NSW DET and NSW AECG Inc Partnership Agreement*, *State Literacy Strategy* and *Quality Teaching Framework*, into the operation of local schools and TAFE campuses. Participation in policy, planning and evaluation processes can be the way that individuals and groups get to influence what happens in their school or on their campus.

The Review revealed that the community supports many of the Department's policies and plans but remains concerned that:

- implementation of the good ideas contained in policies and strategic plans are rarely fully realised
- development of new or revised policies and plans does not include early consideration of implications for Aboriginal students.

The Department was urged to promote a shift in organisational culture so that contributing to improvements in the attendance, retention and academic performance of Aboriginal students becomes part of everyone's business in schools, on TAFE campuses and in offices. This would ensure that responsibility for overcoming resistance and making improvements is not left to committed individuals, nominated officers or special Aboriginal Education Units.

In bringing this cultural shift into being, the Department was reminded that it is not enough simply to "demand change". Staff in schools, on campuses and in offices require demonstrations of genuine commitment, specific guidance and practical support on how to "build in"⁴² Aboriginal education within their core business and how to monitor progress. Inspired leadership in this area would also do much to break down barriers that

Governments over-estimate their influence and impact in the short-term and under-estimate it in the long-term.

– Dr Geoff Mulgan
(April 2004) *Strategic Challenges for the Governments of Europe*, Presentation to the Institute of Public Affairs NSW Forum, Slide 85.

⁴² "Built in" and "bolted on" are terms coined by Bear, R (April 2004) "Built in or Bolted on: Managing equity and diversity in vocational education and training delivery", in *Equity in Vocational Education and Training: Research readings*, Australian National Training Authority, Adelaide, 2004.

undermine the success of cooperative ventures between sections of the Department and sour relationships with external agencies and groups.

In the absence of this support and guidance, strategies to forge improvements for Aboriginal students will be “bolted on”⁴³ to policies and plans conceived for other students or will remain marginalised as separate issues requiring specialist attention.

Many issues raised during the Review related to the services of other agencies, both state and Commonwealth. For example, transport was consistently identified as a major barrier to access. Contributors urged that the Department continue to advocate for systems and processes to resolve such issues through genuine cooperation between government, non-government and community organisations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Department of Education and Training (DET):
 - a) commit to targets developed under the *Two Ways Together* process that will aim to equalise the educational outcomes for Aboriginal students with those of non-Aboriginal students within 10 years
 - b) work closely with other government agencies to ensure this goal is achieved through their complementary targets that will be required to positively improve the lives of Aboriginal people.
2. That DET prepare an *Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan* that:
 - a) establishes strategies to meet the recommendations of this Review
 - b) incorporates targets to achieve the desired results listed in Recommendation 1
 - c) is adopted within the Education Action Plan under the statewide plan, *Two Ways Together*
 - d) forms part of the Department’s i) Service and Resource Allocation Agreement, ii) Senior Executive Service performance agreements, and iii) annual reporting requirements.
3. That an Aboriginal Education and Training Task Force reporting to the Director-General be established to monitor the implementation of the *Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan*, the use of available funding, and the recommendations from this Review Report. It is also recommended that:
 - a) the membership of the Aboriginal Education and Training Task Force be representative but the majority membership be Aboriginal people representing the voices of the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (NSW AECG), other key Aboriginal organisations such as Land Councils, Aboriginal teachers (both school and TAFE) and Aboriginal workers. This group should also

⁴³ Ibid.

- include principals, senior DET staff and representatives from the NSW Teachers Federation and tertiary sector
- b) the Aboriginal Education and Training Task Force also have responsibility for conducting community feedback sessions across the state to introduce the Review recommendations and the *Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan* to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, and the wider educational community
 - c) the Aboriginal Education and Training Task Force continue to assess recommendations and suggestions arising from this Review, and other sources, and the refinement of practices to provide continuous improvement in education, training and social outcomes of Aboriginal students.
4. That a Directorate of Aboriginal Education be established within DET and:
 - a) the Director be an identified (Aboriginal) position and be included as a member of DET's Board of Management
 - b) this Directorate be responsible for strategic policy advice to the Director-General and providing support to the Advisory Task Force in its monitoring of the Department's performance in relation to the implementation of the *Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan*. This Directorate should be structured from the current Aboriginal Programs Unit (APU) to meet the requirements of this plan.
 5. That each region and TAFE Institute, in partnership with the AECG and other key Aboriginal organisations such as Land Councils, establish an Aboriginal Education and Training Planning Group to identify regional targets and strategies enabling the implementation of the *Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan*, in the form of a *Regional Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan*, and
 - a) membership of these planning groups include senior DET staff, DETNAC managers and ACE managers, the local AECG and Land Councils, Aboriginal school and TAFE teachers and coordinators and representatives of principals' groups and other key human services agencies assisting families and communities in the region
 - b) these regional planning groups liaise and coordinate with other regional interagency planning mechanisms established by the New South Wales Government.
 6. That the *Aboriginal Education Policy* be updated in partnership with the NSW AECG and:
 - a) the policy be supported in its implementation through professional development strategies for all staff at all levels
 - b) that accountability measures to guarantee implementation in schools be built into regional plans and that regions report each semester to the DDG on the progress of implementation
 - c) DET review all its policies and practices to ensure that they align with the implementation of the *Aboriginal Education Policy* and the recommendations of this Review.

7. That each DET region be funded to establish a senior identified (Aboriginal) position, at least at the level of Principal Education Officer, for coordination of regional consultants and the implementation of the *Regional Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan*. This officer will report directly to the Regional Director and act as executive support to the Regional Aboriginal Education Planning Group.

8. That DET develop a *NSW DET Aboriginal Human Resource Development Plan* which would include personnel planning, recruitment, career development, professional development, mentoring and the provision of support for Aboriginal employees through strategies such as a DET Aboriginal Employee Network. (The plan should address ways in which Aboriginal people may be employed in targeted projects, eg speakers of Aboriginal languages.)

There is nothing more important to learning than what

EXTENDING QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING

It was often said that the attendance, retention and academic performance of Aboriginal students in schooling and training would improve if more Aboriginal people were in classrooms and if teaching and learning strategies better engaged, supported and extended learning among Aboriginal students.

Families, communities and many schools suggested that the critical phase for action was with the youngest children. Quality programs are therefore needed from the start of formal learning. Programs that build on the cultural knowledge and oral language skills of Aboriginal students to develop strong literacy and numeracy skills at a young age. Quality programs that provide solid foundations for ongoing success at all levels of schooling and training.

At the same time, legitimate concerns were raised about those Aboriginal students who have already passed beyond the formative stages of the early childhood and primary years without developing sufficient reading and writing skills to participate in schooling and training in meaningful ways.

– Teacher

Strong resistance was voiced against the idea of an “alternative curriculum” for Aboriginal students. The preferred option for Aboriginal students with limited literacy skills was quality teaching and learning strategies in every class that could assist them to renewed access and success in the regular curriculum. It was recognised, however, that some students may prefer applied learning and vocational training to the academic curriculum. Realistically, this should be an option for some students. In no way should it become the only option or an obligatory requirement for all Aboriginal students.

Family, social, economic and personal factors were all mentioned as contributors to successful learning in schooling and training, but the work of teachers was singled out as the “make or break” element. The teacher characteristics that were believed to make “regular” teaching into “quality” teaching and learning were:

- expectations that Aboriginal students can succeed
- commitment to working with Aboriginal students, families and workers to promote student learning and success

- ability to maintain quality relationships with Aboriginal students and families
- capacity to build regular success into learning programs for all students so that they come to believe in themselves as competent learners
 - understanding that Aboriginal English is a firm foundation for literacy
 - ability to break learning sequences into manageable chunks
 - skill at keeping learning tasks interesting, challenging and meaningful
 - expertise in monitoring and extending the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills of students to meet the expanding demands of the curriculum
- professional discernment which ensures that placement of Aboriginal students in special needs provisions is based on accurate assessment of learner needs
- thorough knowledge of syllabuses and the flexibility within them for catering to diversity among students
- familiarity with adapting teaching and learning activities, assessment tasks, classroom management strategies and content selection to cater for Aboriginal students.

Some groups advocated greater scope for local decisions to meet unique teaching and learning needs in communities with high Aboriginal student populations. Others were cautious, concerned that local “solutions” could dilute statewide standards.

Introduction of the Department’s *Quality Teaching Framework* and the *State Literacy and Numeracy Plan* were cited as tools for both promoting quality teaching and learning and for a focus on improving outcomes for Aboriginal students.

The Review heard that the likelihood of Aboriginal students attending, staying on over the years and doing better at school and TAFE is improved by learning activities that are meaningful, by lessons that acknowledge and respect students as descendants of the original people of this Land and by opportunities for them to bring their ways of learning and knowing to lessons and assessment tasks. These factors align closely with dimensions of the Department’s *Quality Teaching Framework*. It is a fervent hope of many that implementation of the *Quality Teaching Framework* will support teachers to make changes in teaching methods that better engage students, particularly Aboriginal students, with learning. Future results will be the measure of the framework’s success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

9. That through the Department’s *State Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*:
 - a) resources be realigned to better meet the literacy and numeracy needs of Aboriginal students

- b) targets be set biannually to narrow the gap between the literacy and numeracy outcomes of Aboriginal students and all students as measured by the results in the BST, PWA, SNAP and ELLA
 - c) planned teacher support documents focus specifically on literacy and numeracy programs for Aboriginal students.
10. That a professional development program be introduced for school teachers currently employed in DET, based on the *Quality Teaching Framework* and focused specifically at improving learning outcomes for Aboriginal students. This program should include:
- a) a professional learning program for all teachers of Aboriginal students that will be focused on “teachers knowing their students and how they learn”
 - b) training and development for these teachers that includes promising literacy and numeracy programs identified in this Report (eg *Count Me In Too*, *Count Me In Too Indigenous*, *In-class Tuition*, *Maths in Context for Aboriginal Students*, the *Bidialectal Approach to Teaching Standard Australian English*, *Scaffolding Literacy*)
 - c) postgraduate programs developed between DET and universities to facilitate and support teacher enrolment including school academic mentor initiatives
 - d) a set of high level study awards for staff to acknowledge and build on their contribution and achievements in relation to improving the performance and participation of Aboriginal students.
11. That the quality of teaching and learning in vocational education and training (TAFE) be enhanced through the following:
- a) the development of a VET Quality Teaching Framework based on the findings of the VET Pedagogy Project and focused specifically on improving outcomes for Aboriginal students
 - b) inclusion of specific topics on Aboriginal education in the Certificate IV Workplace Assessment and Training designed for people interested in becoming a TAFE NSW teacher
 - c) continued training for teachers in TAFE on Aboriginal education and culture and on flexible teaching methods and upskilling teachers’ knowledge on industry requirements to support Aboriginal students
 - d) the inclusion of Aboriginal representation on all Industry Skills Councils to ensure that Aboriginal issues are recognised in the development and implementation of training packages including adult literacy and numeracy support. It is also recommended that all TAFE NSW Curriculum Centres ensure that all educational resources developed to support training packages are culturally appropriate for Aboriginal students.
12. That as part of the quality teaching program for school teachers, the Department enhances the curriculum support to teachers by developing, in consultation with the Board of Studies, Aboriginal communities, Elders and the NSW AECG, an Aboriginal Education teaching framework for Aboriginal students that delivers:

- a) protocols for the development and implementation of curriculum with Aboriginal communities
 - b) a P–12 framework for Aboriginal Studies (including the elective Aboriginal Studies course)
 - c) regional support material that identifies Aboriginal cultural knowledge, skills and expertise that can be accessed by schools
 - d) regional plans that ensure that schools with high numbers of Aboriginal students have access to language and cultural education programs
 - e) regional reporting that demonstrates increased involvement and participation with Aboriginal communities in the development of culturally appropriate curriculum.
13. That teachers and schools be further supported in curriculum implementation such that:
- a) mandatory content in current and future Board of Studies syllabuses related to Aboriginal cultures and history be made explicit for teachers and that this content be supported by specific support materials and professional learning strategies
 - b) DET officers in consultation with officers from the Office of the Board of Studies provide schools with advice in the development of engaging and relevant Board Endorsed Courses or other programs that address the interests of Aboriginal students and lead to accepted qualifications
 - c) options be explored by the Board of Studies and DET to expand the range of vocational education and training offerings available as part of the mainstream curriculum to students prior to, and in, Stage 6.
14. That an enhanced recruitment and preservice training program for teachers of Aboriginal students be introduced including:
- a) an increase in the numbers of scholarships or cadetships for Aboriginal people to become teachers in schools with large Aboriginal populations (from 30 to at least 60 immediately, and to be under continuous review)
 - b) a pilot involving focused preservice training of a group of students for appointment as teachers to locations with high Aboriginal populations
 - c) a recruitment strategy targeting graduates and aspiring leaders with an interest in teaching in localities with high proportions of Aboriginal people to ensure that priority placement is given to these individuals
 - d) the investigation of a range of more flexible strategies to attract teachers, including acceleration through the pay scale, and/or other financial initiatives (including low cost loans), to ensure a larger number of experienced teachers are both appointed and supported in remote locations with large Aboriginal populations
 - e) the development of teams of teachers equipped and willing to teach in difficult to staff schools to support these schools in challenging circumstances as required.

15. That the government, through DET and the Teacher Education Council (Deans of Education), ensure that universities include Aboriginal education as a mandatory component in education courses. (It would be advantageous if Aboriginal units within each university were involved in this process.)
16. That targeted schools as identified by the Aboriginal Education and Training Taskforce (for example, those with 60 percent of Aboriginal students) may, through consultation and agreement with their communities, and through support by DET in negotiating new industrial instruments to protect the working conditions of employees, be classified as Community Schools and that these schools:
 - a) be permitted to reconfigure their resources in more flexible ways than is currently possible, while maintaining a curriculum guarantee
 - b) be able to determine their own operating times (eg extended days, differing hours of operation)
 - c) develop their own curriculum foci, approved by either the Department or the Board of Studies (for Years 7–12, eg Aboriginal leadership)
 - d) establish a School Board (with school staff and local AECG members and parents) that will advise on the school's *Aboriginal Education Development Plan* including performance targets
 - e) be provided with increased and ongoing funding to support initiatives
 - f) have a salary incentive package provided to attract experienced staff based on the targets established by the School Board
 - g) be supported through DET negotiating interagency involvement and support to provide a holistic model of child/youth development.
17. That a number of innovative secondary education programs be developed with community agreement that:
 - a) provide greater flexibility in the use of resources and staffing structures in specific schools to better meet Aboriginal student needs and aspirations, particularly in relation to improved literacy and numeracy outcomes
 - b) have a particular focus on supporting and mentoring high achieving students in areas of particular interest.
18. That research and additional data collection be commissioned that provides the Advisory Task Force with information about:
 - a) the link between access to prior-to-school services (long day care, preschools) and outcomes in literacy, numeracy and social development
 - b) the success or otherwise of alternative provision for “at risk” Aboriginal students
 - c) the incidence of racism in schools and the impact of racism on engagement and learning outcomes
 - d) the numbers of Aboriginal students in special education settings and the appropriateness and effectiveness of such placements

- e) other projects as required by the Aboriginal Education and Training Task Force.
19. That a conference on Aboriginal Education involving key personnel from across Australia be hosted by New South Wales and conducted by 2006 with a specific focus on innovative and successful programs and initiatives in schools, TAFE and other appropriate organisations to reinforce the *Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan*.
20. That the New South Wales Government establish an inter-agency working party involving senior officers from relevant state and Australian government agencies to:
- a) identify gaps in early childhood provision for Aboriginal children 0–5 in New South Wales
 - b) develop advice for service providers regarding curriculum support for these children in relation to early literacy and numeracy learning
 - c) identify and promote examples of successful transition to school arrangements and strategies
 - d) pilot collaborative strategies aimed at providing increased access to childcare services for Aboriginal children, including services for young parents undertaking secondary education, and strategies to overcome problems of transport.

The challenges that many Indigenous young people face in coming to terms with their identity are extremely problematic.

FORTIFYING IDENTITIES OF ABORIGINAL STUDENTS

For Aboriginal people, identity means *Aboriginality*, and although there are as many ways to live out Aboriginality as there are Aboriginal people, at its core Aboriginality is about *belonging* – belonging to the Land and to each other.

Aboriginal people and their cultures come from the Land and the Land gives a sense of belonging. Aboriginal people are connected to their families, their clans and communities, and these connections nurture belonging. Aboriginal people share celebrations and struggle as a group distinct from mainstream Australia. Celebrating and struggling together strengthen the embrace of belonging.

Contributors during the Review didn't mince words when talking about the impacts of schools and TAFE campuses on the identities and behaviours of Aboriginal students. There were glowing reports of schools, campuses and offices which make Aboriginal students, their families and community members welcome, that cultivate students' sense of belonging and nurture and affirm their developing identities.

There were also uncompromisingly honest and critical assessments of the failings of schools, campuses and offices in which Aboriginal people are made to feel anything but welcome, where Aboriginality is more often ridiculed, denied, discounted or deemed suspect and where the presence of Aboriginal students and their families is begrudgingly "tolerated".

Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people alike suggested that strategies to bring about improvements in the attendance, retention and academic performance of Aboriginal students are doomed to failure if they don't understand and do something about identity and belonging. To take on this important expectation, schools and campuses need support to make it a priority to:

- maintain environments that are welcoming and in which Aboriginal students perceive they are safe and belong
- ensure that the identities of Aboriginal students as both Aboriginal people and Aboriginal Australians are nurtured and respected
- eradicate attitudes and prejudices among staff and community that act as barriers to accepting and respecting the identities of Aboriginal students.

One of the most frequently suggested ideas for supporting the identities and belonging of Aboriginal students was an increased presence of Aboriginal people, both as employees and volunteers, in school and campus communities. The presence of Aboriginal people was an observable difference, but it also achieved the real though less tangible benefits of providing models of success and symbols of support and goodwill.

RECOMMENDATIONS

21. That DET work in collaboration with the NSW AECG and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs to provide schools and TAFE Institutes with information on Aboriginality. This should include:
 - a) assisting schools and TAFE Institutes in affirming, respecting and valuing the Aboriginal community and students for their Aboriginality
 - b) providing information about respectful and appropriate management of information about a student's Aboriginality.
22. That DET work in collaboration with the NSW AECG and DAA to provide schools and TAFE Institutes with guidelines and protocols regarding:
 - a) recognition and involvement of Aboriginal people at ceremonies and as guest speakers at DET functions
 - b) raising the Aboriginal flag
 - c) exemptions from Crown copyright for Aboriginal cultural knowledge materials provided by Elders nominated by AECGs.
23. That government agencies in consultation with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal academics and the NSW AECG develop a survey tool to determine the health, resilience and wellbeing of Aboriginal students in New South Wales government schools and TAFE, particularly in relation to their sense of identity at school or at TAFE.
24. That schools and TAFE Institutes report on measures to value, affirm and respect their students' Aboriginality and to provide Aboriginal students with skills, knowledge and experiences to participate in the mainstream education and training programs.
25. That the value of and continued need for key Aboriginal personnel in schools and TAFE be affirmed by:
 - a) revising and clarifying the role statements of AEAs, ACLOs and ASLOs in schools and ADMs in TAFE to ensure that these positions support the implementation of the relevant recommendations in this Review Report
 - b) providing additional training for these staff (TAFE should have a particular role to play in this provision)
 - c) providing principals with clear information and training about these roles and how they complement the responsibilities of other personnel in schools and regions
 - d) reallocating the current AERT funding to regions based on need to provide further support positions particularly in literacy and numeracy as required

- e) realigning the AEA positions in a measured and timely way to better meet identified needs of Aboriginal students
 - f) piloting a number of programs involving flexible support for community involvement in schools.
26. That the teaching of Aboriginal languages in schools be intensively supported by existing state and regional staff in partnership with the NSW and regional AECGs and be given highest priority in funding for languages programs commencing in schools with high Aboriginal student enrolments. (It is intended that these Aboriginal language programs will meet the BOS requirements for LOTE provision.)
27. That *Welcome to Country* and *Acknowledgement of Country* guidelines jointly developed by the NSW AECG, NSW Teachers Federation and DET be released and included as an introductory item in all Department (schools and TAFE) events.

It's boring. Why can't it be

ENGAGING ABORIGINAL STUDENTS

Aboriginal students are the reason the Review of Aboriginal Education was undertaken. In a nutshell, the Review was about finding ways to make schooling and training more responsive to the needs, potentials and aspirations of Aboriginal students, to make things better.

Over the course of the Review, some of the most penetrating and articulate voices were those of Aboriginal students themselves. Schools, TAFE campuses and the Department itself were urged to include students, and not just the top performers, in discussions and decisions about potential improvement strategies. Students often cut through the layers of details, complexities and “what abouts” that were crippling adults with insights of simple, yet profound wisdom. For example, *I don't know about those things, but it would be much better if teachers got to know us better and we got to know them better.*

Aboriginal student

Getting to know Aboriginal students, a process strongly recommended and not just by students, reveals that they are a diverse “mob”. Fundamental diversities such as geographical location, heritage, language, cultural knowledge, family structure and socioeconomic status are the starting points. Overcoming any obstacles to learning that these diversities can identify is a complex undertaking requiring whole-of-government and community action.

Getting to know Aboriginal students also reveals that each Aboriginal student comes to school or TAFE with a unique combination of strengths, potentials and vulnerabilities. The Review heard of schools and TAFE campuses where timely actions had made a difference with these diversities.

For example, strengths and potentials, such as those of gifted and talented thinkers, leaders, speakers, artisans, performers and elite sport players, respond positively to nurturing attention and extension. Vulnerabilities and potentials, such as those of the physically or intellectually disabled, those experiencing disruptions to their learning, those with learning difficulties or those too easily provoked to non-compliant or disruptive behaviour, respond positively to appropriate short-term or long-term interventions.

Getting to know Aboriginal students involves getting to know their families and kin supporters (another strong suggestion of the Review). These concerned adults not only have high aspirations that their children will succeed, but they mostly have *realistic expectations of the talents, interests and capabilities* of their children. They do not expect schools and TAFE Institutes to promote success in the sense of turning all their children into surgeons or lawyers. They simply want their children to have the chance (with access to the full range and most appropriate delivery of services if needed) to do the best they possibly can and make the most of their time at school and training. They don't want their children's interest in education to be turned off by what they have to experience when they go to school or TAFE.

At the moment, results data suggest that too many Aboriginal students experience frustrating and unproductive times at school and TAFE which relegate them to the bulge of under-achievers in lower levels of results. Aboriginal families and communities want schools and TAFE Institutes to do something, and do it now, so that participation and performance in schooling and training among Aboriginal students move to match the spread of achievements among non-Aboriginal students.

Many ardent voices recommended that Aboriginal students would be best served by planned and purposeful teaching and learning programs in preschools and the early years of schooling. Programs developed and made to work by teachers who have a sound understanding of Aboriginal students and expertise to set Aboriginal students up with a solid foundation of literacy and numeracy skills.

It would sell contributors to the Review short, however, to give the impression that suggestions focused solely on improvements for future generations and ignored the needs of Aboriginal students who are currently under-achieving, struggling or lost to education.

There were many, many suggestions, complaints and concerns about the plight of Aboriginal students who were struggling, those who had passed well beyond the struggling stage to be seriously at risk of failure, for those whose failures had been so comprehensive and crushing that they have disappeared into the pool of "drop outs", and for those who had re-emerged to notice through Juvenile Justice Centres or Correctional Centres. The

Department was urged to put programs in place and better coordinate many existing programs so that they result in improved services to “at risk” students.

Moving on to suggested solutions, there was considerable discussion of the idea of tracking the progress of identified “at risk” students, throughout their years at school, across schools when they move, at critical transition and progression points, during their years in training and further education and at their post-school/training destinations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

28. That each Aboriginal student have a personalised plan that will be developed by the school in partnership with parents/caregivers and include targets for learning against syllabus outcomes and agreed family support strategies, eg home reading strategies, attendance, transition from primary to secondary education. (Schools need to be funded to support this undertaking.)
29. That the Department celebrate Aboriginal students’ achievements in a range of fields by holding annual Aboriginal Award Ceremonies at a regional and state level. Award ceremonies would be held in consultation with Elders, Aboriginal communities and local and regional AECGs.
30. That an individualised identification system be implemented to ensure all students, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, are monitored and supported through their education, allowing better monitoring of Aboriginal student progress, improved liaison between secondary schools and their feeder primary schools, and timely interventions.
31. That a process for sharing information with the non-government school sector and interstate systems be developed to monitor students as they move between government and non-government schools and TAFE NSW Institutes and across state borders.
32. That a transition-to-school scheme be established and supported by print and staffing resources. Each region will develop a transition-to-school plan for Aboriginal students. This plan should include liaison with Health and DoCS staff to ensure the minimum health needs of Aboriginal children are met. Aboriginal children should be given priority access to DET preschools.
33. That DET, DoCS, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Sector Advisory Group (ATSIECSAG), NSW AECG and other appropriate agencies liaise and develop protocols to ensure preschools provide the highest quality programs to prepare Aboriginal children for their entry to school.
34. That each DET region and TAFE Institute develop an Aboriginal student leadership strategy, through its Aboriginal Education and Training

Planning Group, to ensure that student leaders are identified, mentored and supported.

35. That a number of academically selective classes be piloted in targeted areas of New South Wales aimed at increasing the number of Aboriginal students enrolled in these classes.
36. That each region be given a discretionary allocation to support flexible programs based on need, to support Aboriginal students, that may include transition initiatives, tutoring, mentoring, attendance initiatives and support for Aboriginal students living in hostels or away from home.
37. That regions and schools review the effectiveness of their attendance and welfare programs in conjunction with their planning groups and the AECG to better meet the agreed school and family targets for improved school attendance and reduced suspension rates. Regions in particular will need to ensure appropriate interagency liaison and support where required.
38. That while prevention and intervention measures need to be explored by schools, a range of alternative strategies to suspension be developed for schools to ensure that all options are available to minimise the numbers of Aboriginal students suspended and the impact successive suspensions have on learning. Each school needs to immediately review its suspension data, in consultation with its Aboriginal community, and plan alternative interventions, supported by their region, to reduce these numbers where appropriate.
39. That TAFE NSW Institute Directors work in partnership with school Regional Directors to coordinate efforts to support at risk Aboriginal students to remain in the education system to gain qualifications and progress to higher levels of education or into meaningful skilled employment.
40. That career counsellors be available in each SEA and TAFE Institute for all Aboriginal students. That these career counsellors be professionals skilled in matching Aboriginal students' potential with their aspirations, and able to guide them in subject selection, goal setting, work experience/work placement and career pathway planning.
41. That TAFE, in partnership with key Aboriginal organisations and other appropriate government organisations, develop and implement a post-release program for Aboriginal detainees and offenders based on a case management approach which incorporates counselling, enrolment in TAFE programs (to enable ex-detainees and ex-offenders to complete courses commenced in Juvenile Justice and Correctional Centres) and the mentoring and community support necessary to reduce chances of them re-offending.
42. That non-government schools be required to commit to the same targets for Aboriginal students as described in Recommendation 1.

APPLYING ABORIGINAL CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

Material presented to the Review revealed that *Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge* is not a single body of knowledge shared by all Aboriginal peoples around the country, or around New South Wales for that matter, but a clan and community-specific inheritance from previous generations that meets the demands of local conditions.

Each clan and community of Aboriginal people has developed their own special ways of being, knowing, doing things and saying things that are unique to their people and communities. Ways that may appear similar on the surface, but which bear marks that make them unique to their people alone. This is the source of the Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge spoken of during the Review.

– Human Rights and Equal

There are some aspects of Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge that are the sole business of Aboriginal people and these are not the concern of schools and TAFE.

Opportunity Commission, (1999)
Social Justice Report 1999: Report
No. 2/2000, HREOC, Sydney, p. 49.

On the other hand, many contributors to the Review urged the Department to promote greater understanding among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, and their teachers, of Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge. In particular, about matches and mismatches between the assumptions, approaches and world view of Aboriginal students, and those within the cultural knowledge, Western or otherwise, of other students and their teachers. These matches and mismatches are strongly implicated as influences on the participation and performance of Aboriginal students in the business of schooling and training.

The Review heard of Elders of Aboriginal communities sharing traditional knowledge to assist teachers to establish the relevance of syllabus content and sustain student interest.

Consultation with local Elders also made some schools and TAFE campuses aware of the cultural relevance of a “community of learners” approach in classrooms. Not just all students doing the same worksheet, sitting in groups, but genuine small groupings that worked collaboratively and drew on the range of skills and knowledge in the group to achieve meaningful learning tasks. Having observed students in action in learning communities, teachers are more able to include and validate Aboriginal ways of knowing in assessment tasks as they work towards achieving syllabus objectives and outcomes.

These ideas are not “rocket science”. Nor are they beyond the good practice of many teachers. The power of such good practice to make a difference for Aboriginal students, however, cannot be overstated. Overlooking or blocking such approaches takes away effective and culturally appropriate strategies that can enrich teaching and learning programs for all students. In a spirit of genuine partnership and fairness, Aboriginal people recognised that schools and TAFE “cannot reap what they cannot sow”. That is, schools and TAFE campuses need assistance in determining the knowledge, wisdoms and approaches of local Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge that can be incorporated into culturally appropriate teaching and learning programs.

Ideas and suggestions around this theme consistently focused on the transforming potential of:

- Aboriginal students learning the cultural knowledge of their heritage
- Aboriginal students becoming proficient in both Aboriginal “ways of knowing” and school “ways of knowing”
- non-Aboriginal students, teachers and school or TAFE campus communities learning about Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge
- sharing school “ways of knowing” with Aboriginal Elders, parents, caregivers and community members
- schools, TAFE campuses and the system collaborating with Elders of Aboriginal communities to identify elements of local cultural knowledge that can be successfully incorporated into teaching, learning and behaviour management programs as well as syllabuses
- weaving together the knowledge, skills and experiences of both Aboriginal and Western cultural knowledge to enrich teaching, learning, assessment and reporting programs and to improve attendance, retention and academic performance of Aboriginal students.

The experience of contributors to the Review suggested that incorporating local Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge within the content and methodologies of teaching and learning programs can initially be a difficult process. It takes time for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants to understand where each side is coming from. It takes time, negotiation and flexibility to identify those aspects of Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge that could be incorporated eventually and those that can make a difference right away.

Again, the experiences of contributors reveal that genuine two-way collaboration of schools and TAFE campuses with local Aboriginal Elders can identify aspects of Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge that enrich teaching and learning activities. Such consultations build understanding and respect for Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge among school and TAFE staff as well as their capacities and willingness to work with Aboriginal people. They also build the capacity of Aboriginal communities to partake in the planning and decision-making of teaching and learning programs. Establishing strong partnerships with local AECGs was the recommended starting point for meeting and developing quality relationships with local Elders.

Successful community collaboration of this order fosters a sense of ownership and inclusion. It builds respect for and valuing of education by Aboriginal students, their families and communities. It raises the profile and priority of Aboriginal education across learning communities.

An important practical suggestion highlighted the need for resources showing Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge incorporated in key units of work P–12 and within the work-related programs of TAFE. These units of work would offer suggested content and assessment strategies, but retain flexibility to adapt to needs and realities after consultation with local Aboriginal people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

43. That mandatory pre-service and in-service training in Aboriginal education, particularly in Aboriginal cultures and cultural knowledge, be developed in consultation with local communities and be provided for all teachers, school executives, principals and school administrative staff (commencing in 2005 in schools with high proportions of Aboriginal students). This material would complement or be part of other professional development programs on Aboriginal education, eg. Recommendation 10.
44. That this training include specific content in the following areas: Aboriginal languages, community partnerships, Aboriginal history and Aboriginal cultural knowledge, relationship between Aboriginal English and standard Australian English. This would complement Recommendation 12.
45. That each DET region be supported by an Elders group formed along traditional lines of Country. The Elders group would provide advice to the regional Aboriginal Education Planning Group, including the Regional AECGs, on appropriate cultural programs.

It is evident that children learn most effectively when there is a partnership between parents/caregivers and educators, when there is a sense of community between home and school environments.

COLLABORATING IN PARTNERSHIPS

From tens of thousands of years of working together, arguing together, compromising together and agreeing together, Aboriginal peoples understand the wisdom of consensus and expect decision-makers in schools, on TAFE campuses and in offices of DET to include them as active partners, not silent partners, in decision-making.

The Review highlighted two interrelated forms of partnerships that benefit from the contributions of Aboriginal people:

- *Partnerships at the local level*

Working together with others to plan, support and, where appropriate, deliver specific initiatives or programs designed to overcome influences that are currently limiting the success of too many Aboriginal students and to promote better outcomes for these students in schooling and training.

- *Partnerships at system level*

Working with others to oversee, coordinate, monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of policies, plans and programs to make improvements across more than one school, TAFE Institute, office or government department.

Genuine partnerships were frequently cited as reasons for successful attendance, student engagement and learning in early childhood, infant, primary, secondary, TAFE and VET settings. Similarly, genuine partnerships with Aboriginal people have improved the quality and scope of services provided by government agencies, non-government agencies, local councils, AECGs, Land Councils, universities, training organisations and employers, as well as schools, campuses and offices of the Department. Genuine partnerships to provide employment were considered essential.

The reputation of DET as a cooperative partner is patchy. The Department was urged to lift its game and to take notice of factors identified as contributing to successful partnerships. Contributors to the Review suggested these factors were:

- mutual respect for the talents, skills, expertise and experiences of others
- all people of the community with knowledge and expertise being included

MCEETYA Taskforce on Indigenous Education (2001) "Discussion Paper: Effective learning for Indigenous students aged 0-8 years", MCEETYA, Canberra, p. 17.

- Aboriginal people being included in decision-making when it really counts, that is, when determining which ideas get approved and which get left out
- determined leadership that inspires a whole school approach
- ongoing research and development that builds a body of knowledge about promoting the learning and success of Aboriginal students in schooling and training.

As the recognised peak advisory group, Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (AECGs) at local, regional and state levels are established as reference points for the education system. This mechanism for gaining the support and participation of local Aboriginal people was used effectively in some places, but participation of AECGs was not consistent across the state.

The critical issue highlighted about partnerships was the support required by Departmental employees with limited experience of working with Aboriginal people in genuinely collaborative partnerships.

Partnerships between government agencies have proved very positive and can be extended to bridge state and Commonwealth jurisdictions. The Murdi Paaki COAG trial is one such example.

RECOMMENDATIONS

46. That a new three-level partnership agreement between DET and the NSW AECG be developed based on the implementation of the Review recommendations and that this new three-level agreement take the form of:
 - a) an overarching agreement between the NSW DET and the NSW AECG Inc
 - b) regional partnership agreements between each region or Institute and relevant regional AECGs and Land Councils, in the case of TAFE, as appropriate
 - c) local agreements between School Education Areas and their local AECGs.
47. That the roles of principals and school executive members in building constructive continuous partnerships with local Aboriginal communities be confirmed as central to their responsibilities in building necessary conditions for success in Aboriginal education and that they be supported in this role by School Education Directors and other regional resources.
48. That TAFE Institutes and schools each develop an Aboriginal Education Development Plan in partnership with their Aboriginal communities or AECG (where a local AECG has been established) or Land Councils (TAFE as appropriate). This should take the form of a partnership agreement in all schools with an enrolment of 20 or more Aboriginal students.

49. That DET maintain programs supported in TAFE and in schools for at least four years and seek the support of other funding authorities for the same commitment.
50. That parent organisations, industry groups and other education-related community groups partner DET in liaising with Aboriginal groups at the state and local level to build a strong community consensus to support improvements in Aboriginal education.
51. That DET negotiate agreements with universities and industries within New South Wales to further engage their expertise to improve the outcomes for Aboriginal students. Such engagement could include:
 - a) identifying the implications of the NSW Quality Teaching Framework for teaching Aboriginal students
 - b) conducting case studies in schools where the framework is being implemented in classrooms with significant Aboriginal populations
 - c) mentoring of students, gifted and talented programs, research, project work with remote locations, languages, distance or on-line enrichment programs and collegial support for classroom teachers.
52. That DET in partnership with the NSW AECG and Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) establish alliances with industry sectors to improve sustainable pathways from education to employment for Aboriginal students. To this end, that the Premier be approached to establish a high level not-for-profit foundation of New South Wales corporate leaders with a strong commitment to Aboriginal education and employment to promote the creation of viable and lasting employment of Aboriginal people in the private sector and to encourage the private sector to fund cadetships and scholarships for Aboriginal students.

BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY

Probably the strongest message of the Review was that most Aboriginal families and communities want to be consulted about and involved in the education of their children, teenagers and young people.

The Review heard of collaborations between individual schools, TAFE campuses or offices and their local Aboriginal communities that made valuable and lasting contributions to improving the attendance, retention and academic performance of Aboriginal students at school and training. But the Review also heard of examples of attempted collaborations where all the best intentions were frustrated by limited understanding, expectations or experience in working together.

Such experiences prompted some schools, campuses and offices to expend energies on building the capacity of members of their communities to work collaboratively. That is, strategies to build the capacity of DET employees to work genuinely and collaboratively with Aboriginal people as well as strategies to build capacities of Aboriginal people to advise and work with DET workers.

A hallmark of the best strategies to build capacities was that they developed understanding and skills in the context of the practical issues that confronted local communities. For example, assisting Elders of Aboriginal communities to set up and conduct Circle of Friends meetings as an alternative to suspensions actually reduced the number and duration of suspensions while helping school executive members to build capacity for brokering solutions through genuine consensus.

Similarly, by conducting courses about helping young children to read and write at home and the ways schools teach literacy, TAFE teachers and Aboriginal Education Workers assisted Aboriginal community members to develop capacity in supporting their children's learning and for assisting teachers with reading programs at school.

As well as these schooling and training focused capacities, the Review highlighted the important contribution that DET might play in assisting Aboriginal people to build capacities within their own communities and to gain meaningful employment (hopefully locally) through formal training. Capacities that empower Aboriginal parents and carers to encourage and support their children's learning about their traditional heritage as well as the business of

... a major obstacle to reconciliation is apprehension and reluctance about

face-to-face communication.

Meaningful

communication and

personal

associations

overcome the

exaggerated sense

of difference which

flows from

ignorance.

reproduced in Stevens, T (2002) *Something Done: The Things that Matter*. Headline, Sydney, p. 197.

schooling and training. Capacities that develop leaders who can speak with a strong voice and with the trust of their communities about the needs, expectations and aspirations of Aboriginal students in schools and on campuses as well as those of Aboriginal people in Australian society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

53. That TAFE NSW develop for and with Aboriginal communities an Advanced Diploma in Leadership and Learning which will support community capacity-building at all levels of administration, leadership, governance and advocacy for policy change. Each Institute should establish a key centre for Aboriginal Leadership and Learning which will provide a focus for resource development, and will facilitate diffusion of the course through communities, according to the specific needs of different communities. The course should be flexible and have multiple entry and exit points, with appropriate levels of course accreditation. It will have experiential learning as its underpinning instructional foundation, and it will include opportunity for intensive literacy and numeracy support.
54. That DET, in consultation with DoCS, the NSW AECG Inc and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Sector Advisory Group (ATSIECSAG):
 - a) develop and promote an Aboriginal family education program which leads to accredited course outcomes through TAFE NSW. This would include programs for young parents to support them in their own learning and basic education, to assist them to support their children educationally and to provide them with the skills to act as volunteer literacy and numeracy tutors in schools as appropriate
 - b) develop and implement a pilot pre-Kindergarten literacy program. This program would focus on literacy intervention prior to school and the development of a literacy partnership between the home and reading teachers.
55. That TAFE Institutes offer programs in targeted areas designed to develop foundation skills in office administration and related areas for Aboriginal community members to better prepare them to apply for School Administrative Support Staff (SASS) positions in schools. DET will designate SASS positions that become available in schools with a significant number of Aboriginal students as identified positions (requiring Aboriginality). The application of this initiative and resultant employment outcomes should be reviewed annually and extended as required.
56. That, excluding exceptional and unforeseen circumstances, priority placement be given to Aboriginal teachers and SAS staff over all other priority teacher or SASS transfer/placement categories.

57. That external funding for the expansion of inter-agency programs such as Schools as Community Centres be directed to sites with high Aboriginal populations as the target areas for these new locations.
58. That an inter-agency program involving the provision of specific support for Aboriginal students particularly through local role models (eg homework assistance, developing community connections, leadership programs, mentoring) be piloted on some identified secondary school sites with high Aboriginal enrolments.
59. That the recently commissioned interactive distance learning resources in rural and remote schools be fully utilised to operate after-hours training in parenting and childcare and other relevant information sessions for Aboriginal parents.
60. That the New South Wales Government develop an *Aboriginal Employment Strategy* to improve the employment prospects of Aboriginal people and coordinate existing employment strategies, programs and resources into a holistic strategic framework.

Make no mistake, racism is a terrible burden. It attacks the spirit. It attacks self esteem and the soul. It says that those who are subjected to it would have not an inkling of understanding about.

CHALLENGING RACISM

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parents, students, workers and community members, teachers, principals, academics, researchers and submission writers made it clear that Aboriginal students continue to encounter both overt and covert influences of racism. The overt influences include name-calling, teasing, exclusion, verbal abuse and bullying. Subtler, covert influences are rarely brought into conscious awareness but stereotype Aboriginal people, constrain expectations of Aboriginal students and induce reluctance within Departmental offices, schools and campuses to challenge discriminatory attitudes and behaviours.

– Pearson, N. (2000). *Our Right to Take Responsibility*, p. 34.

Suspension of Aboriginal students highlights many of the claims and counterclaims about racism in schools. Some contributors suggested that the over-representation of Aboriginal students in suspension lists is an indicator of the difficulty that schools face in dealing with non-compliant, challenging or disruptive behaviours among students. Other contributors suggested that the higher proportion of Aboriginal students of all ages being suspended demonstrates racism in action. The Department was urged to find out the validity of these alternative interpretations.

Turning to the Department's *Anti-Racism Policy Statement and Responding to Suggestions, Complaints and Allegations*, most Aboriginal parents support the words of the policies and simply want their concerns taken seriously. Many believe that far from being treated seriously, their complaints are disregarded or not fully understood.

A number of factors were suggested as barriers to eradicating racism from school and campus communities:

- the “fear factor”, especially of “the racism card”, that can emerge when Aboriginal parents raise issues or offer suggestions
- the Department not collecting adequate data on complaints about racism and suspensions
- the lack of mechanisms and discipline strategies to resolve complaints about racism involving staff members
- the limited understanding among staff about how their attitudes and behaviours contribute to the bias, prejudice and racism perceived by Aboriginal people

- the absence of an appeal mechanism to settle matters that local management of conflicts failed to satisfactorily settle.

In this context it is no wonder that making a complaint can escalate into conflict and irreconcilable breakdown in relationships between the family and the school or campus.

These factors suggest that Departmental offices, schools and campuses require skill development in implementing the *Anti-Racism Policy Statement* and *Responding to Suggestions, Complaints and Allegations* and training in handling complaints, mediation and the management of conflicts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

61. That DET, in collaboration with the NSW AECG, NSW Teachers Federation and the NSW Public Service Association:
 - a) identify anti-racism education as a strategic priority and provide support to schools to recognise and counter the effects of racism, in particular for Aboriginal students, on the formation of cultural identity, engagement in schooling, behaviour, student attendance and retention, and academic performance
 - b) continue to support schools and regions through the development and dissemination of anti-racism education information and resources.

62. That regions:
 - a) provide professional learning opportunities for school staff to understand racism and its effects and to acquire skills for teaching anti-racism strategies in the classroom
 - b) identify schools to participate in targeted anti-racism projects which address local need utilising existing resources such as *Racism. No way!* <http://www.racismnoway.com.au> and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Website <http://www.natsiew.nexus.edu.au>
 - c) identify key schools to participate in the *Cooling Conflicts Program* in order to assist students, in particular Aboriginal students, to develop skills in managing conflict
 - d) promote successful school anti-racism projects, practice and outcomes to other schools in the region
 - e) report on school anti-racism strategies and the incidence of the complaints of racism in their annual *Aboriginal Education and Ethnic Affairs Priorities Statement* reports.

63. That schools:
 - a) include strategies to counter racism as a part of their school plan
 - b) ensure that an Anti Racism Contact Officer (ARCO) is appointed and receives training
 - c) ensure that all executive understand their responsibilities under the *Anti-Racism Policy* and the *Responding to Suggestions, Complaints and Allegations* procedures (in particular the role of principals and

school executive members, as chief agents in resolving complaints about racism)

d) explain the appeals mechanism available to the complainant and the respondent.

64. That the Aboriginal Education and Training Task Force evaluate current programs in countering racism, assess the degree and nature of racist incidents and develop further recommendations based on this work.

ADVANCING LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The Department's principals, directors, general managers and the Board of Management are critical leaders but they are not the only leaders in schools, on TAFE campuses and in offices of DET. For example, faculty heads, grade supervisors, unit managers, team leaders, senior school assistants and office managers all make important contributions to leadership in their workplaces.

Contributors to the Review spoke of the extraordinary influence that educational leaders can exert within their school or campus communities through inspiring others to share their *vision* for improvements in Aboriginal education and by their *determination* to bring their vision into practical reality.

In some places, Reconciliation and improvements in the retention, attendance and academic performance of Aboriginal students are essential parts of leaders' visions. They are consequently built into operational plans that drive local level decision-making, priorities and action. Progress is closely watched. Explicit accountability measures are established so that all members of the school or campus community can monitor progress and judge success. Failures are seen as mistakes that identify areas for improvement.

– Principal

In other places, however, leadership has a reputation for failure on both the “vision” and “determination” dimensions of educational leadership. The leadership potential of visions outlined in policy statements and strategic plans withers from the lack of resolve to watch what happens and make things work. If Reconciliation and improvements in the retention, attendance and academic performance of Aboriginal students feature at all in operational plans in these places, they are more often than not awkwardly or feebly bolted on to plans focusing on other students. Monitoring and reporting of implementation is usually “overlooked” or left to committed individuals or staff in specialist units who do not have the necessary clout to influence priorities. Accountability measures are often non-existent or so “flexible” they are meaningless.

The Review suggests that to bring about the shifts in awareness and practice that are required, the Department must establish a dynamic vision for the future and demonstrate both courage and determination to bring the vision of improved attendance, retention and academic

performance of Aboriginal students into reality.

To bring these shifts into reality, the Department was urged to provide professional development programs for current and new leaders at all levels of the organisation, to require accountability from those charged with responsibility for keeping an eye on progress, and promote opportunities for staff committed to making quality contributions to Aboriginal education to be in the right places at the right time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

65. That a set of ongoing leadership development programs be provided for all principals by:
 - a) supporting and building on programs such as *Dare to Lead* and *What Works*
 - b) incorporating a comprehensive Aboriginal education focus in induction programs for new principals and school executive
 - c) requiring attendance at targeted courses as determined in consultation with their School Education Directors.
66. That TAFE NSW Institutes include an Aboriginal education focus in all leadership and professional development programs for managers, including faculty directors.
67. That a targeted leadership mentoring and support program be developed to better assist the welfare and development of leaders within school and TAFE, particularly in remote and isolated locations.
68. That the performance agreements, where applicable, of all executive (eg Senior Executive Service and management positions within DET) include requirements targeting improvements in Aboriginal education, including the implementation of the *Aboriginal Education Policy* and the *Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan*.
69. That selection criteria for all school-based and non-school-based promotions positions within DET include specific reference to knowledge of, and demonstrated commitment to, the implementation of DET's *Aboriginal Education Policy* and *Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan*.
70. That performance indicators be developed, in consultation with the Aboriginal Education and Training Task Force, to monitor implementation of the *Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan*, including:
 - a) identification of students requiring early intervention
 - b) the number of suspensions of Aboriginal students and the range of reasons given for these
 - c) the post-training destinations of Aboriginal students undertaking TAFE

- d) the number of complaints about racism (the total number of complaints about racism, the number resolved and the number yet to be resolved).

This information should be published each year in DET's *Annual Report*.

- 71. That principals of schools (through the School Plan), regional directors and directors of TAFE NSW Institutes be required to report annually on educational outcomes against their *Aboriginal Education Development Plan*.

