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# Djadi – Dugarang

*The Newsletter of the  
Indigenous Social  
Justice Association  
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## RECONCILIATION EDUCATION = ASSIMILATION EDUCATION. How Practical is That?

### Editorial

Education. Every Australian, whatever their ethnic background, is either waiting to go through the process, is going through the process or has been through the process. Those who are going through it or have been through it, all have opinions on how it should be run. Always for the better, of course.

I too have ideas on the current education system, even though I left the NSW Education System on the day of my 15<sup>th</sup> birthday. By request I will add.

My ideas, thoughts or whatever they may be interpreted by the Reader are restricted to the Education System as outlined by the Howard Government. The Education of the so-called Practical Reconciliation.

But, Education is more than the schooling of the Three R's. Education is integral to the History of the Nation. Ongoing Education of the Citizens includes the Art Galleries, Museums, Libraries and other venues of the purveyors of History. We are as we know smack in the centre of the whirlwind that has been given the name, Culture Wars.

Winners are grinners, so it is said, and Winners write the Histories. Howard is grinning and they are currently winning those Battles but they will not win the War. Our History, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander History, is flowing free from the Social eruptions arising from those Battles.

To better set the scene we have today we must first return to the past.

Our Education was Tribal in its essence. It involved the whole adult and young members of the Tribe. It was both aural and oral. The History was evolved through Song and Dance, by Lore, Ritual and Law. Painting was our only method of writing to pass on and reinforce the Knowledge required to be a productive and full member of the Tribe.

This Cultural way of learning was brutally destroyed and suppressed by the Invading Society. Attempts were made to 'educate and civilise the savages' but generally these were an exercise in futility and faded away. There came the time whereby if any White Teacher or White Parent objected to the inclusion of Aboriginal Children in the school/classroom, the Aboriginal student was expelled. Our Education became the realm of the Missions and the Missionaries. Our Histories became moribund. So to many of our Languages We were only to be taught a totally Western, British- oriented view of the World but, worse still, also of Australia. The rest as they say is History. The only memory I have of 'learning' about the Indigenous Peoples of this Country was that well known picture of a desert Tribal Man, standing on one leg, his other foot resting on his other knee and holding a spear as he looked wistfully into the distance. Obviously eagerly

awaiting to fulfil the role allotted to him by his Betters, and that was to die out and fade away.

We did not and OUR History lives.

Education began to very slowly change after the 1967 Referendum. From that time, Organisations managed by our own People began the struggle proper for better Education outcomes for our Youth. That fight continues to this day. Indigenous students have been and still are underrepresented at all levels of Education. The School System, and the Teachers who work within it, is all important to the success or otherwise of the Indigenous students. We must recognise that we have good Teachers and Principals as we must also recognise that we also have bad and racist Teachers and Principals. We also have those Lazy and Immoral Teachers who year after year progresses Aboriginal students who cannot read or write. Our Gaols and Juvenile Justice Centres are full of such examples. This pathetic practice must stop.

Back in May 1997, Howard raised the Practical Reconciliation Flag for Education. He done this, he believed, to stop the divisions occurring in the Country. No Land, no Treaty, no Apology. He knew exactly what the Indigenes of this Country needed, and one item he listed among four, was Education. Why?

Then Aboriginal Affairs Minister, Herron, stated the case for PR.

"We believe that actions speak louder than words. In broad philosophical terms, we will not pander to trendy, politically correct teams of do-gooders living off the (Aboriginal) Cause rather than for the Cause. We will not set up huge expectations with empty promises and jargon-loaded political rhetoric. No, we are actually getting our hands dirty."

We will now judge the dirtiness of their Liberal/National Party hands.

*We will begin with a general overview of the Australian education system and we will not restrict our thoughts to Aboriginal kids only. We then do a State by Territory sweep focusing strictly on Aboriginal students.*

*I can only hope that 'no news is good news' for our kids in the Torres Strait Islands, Queensland and Victoria*

*e first Report deals with Education at various levels, for youth and for adult. Anne Summers explains her view of where Australian Education stood, and the values it espoused, at the beginning of this year. She also previews the coming of Howard's Vandals who are intent on sacking - in every sense of the word - the National Museum of Australia and its Aboriginal Director, Ms. Dawn Casey.*

### **Multicultural cringe becomes a snarl**

*The Sydney Morning Herald  
January 6 2003*

THERE seems to be a new, unofficial - but just as malign - white Australia policy, writes Anne Summers.

A few weeks before Christmas my nephew and his wife had their first baby, a little girl they named Jasmine. Jasmine's mother is of Chinese descent but Jasmine will have an Anglo last name because her father's forebears came from England and Ireland. Both her parents are successful, ambitious and high achieving, and chances are Jasmine will be, too. There is every likelihood that 18 years from now, when she completes year 12, Jasmine will be among her state's top scorers. Because of her last name, when those lists of results are scoured she will escape being vilified for being successful because of her Chinese blood. Seeing her name, anyone would think she was just an Aussie. As she is.

Yet the same privilege is not being extended to dozens of kids who took top honours in the 2002 HSC. The many high scorers who happen to come from Chinese families are being accused of being insufficiently Australian. These kids work too hard, do too much homework, get coaching, are disciplined, are fanatical and don't lead well-balanced lives (i.e., don't play enough sport), say the critics.

These characteristics are, apparently, un-Australian.

Funny that. It hardly seems smart of citizens of a country that once set being clever as a national goal to deride people for scholastic excellence.

As we head towards Australia Day 2003 after an especially traumatic year, you'd think we'd be doing everything we could to bring people closer. As well as lending a hand to those who have suffered so much in the past year due to drought, bushfires or the Bali bombings, we should be honouring all of our successful students. They are, after all, our future and our hope. Instead a vocal minority is begrudging the achievements of some students because of where their parents were born.

As a nation we supposedly loathe dole bludgers, dope-smokers, surfing bums and others who loaf around, yet we can't bring ourselves to celebrate the results that hard work brought to a handful of our brightest students.

At the same time as some of us are accused of not being Australian enough, others are being castigated for being "too Australian".

You can't get much more Australian than to be Aboriginal and you might expect that an Australian museum would devote a fair bit of space to the country's indigenous inhabitants and their story. Yet the Federal Government has set up an inquiry to determine whether the new National Museum of Australia is too politically correct. Apparently in the eyes of a couple of its board members the museum devotes too much attention to Aborigines.

The museum's director, Dawn Casey, an Aboriginal woman, and presumably responsible for allowing "too much" Aboriginal content, has had her contract renewed for just one year - a further gesture of board disapproval. It takes a pretty courageous (in the Sir Humphrey sense of that word) board to sack a director who has got this new institution off to such a stellar start. In its first 18 months the NMA attracted 1 million visitors, well over the budgeted numbers, and audiences that most Sydney museums can only dream about.

If the word was out that the NMA was boring or too political or made visitors uncomfortable, it's hard to see that these numbers could be maintained. They can't all be going to see Phar Lap's heart.

It is not public reaction that is generating all this heat. Instead, a small band of highly ideological political marksmen have selected their targets and are proceeding to demolish them. Their major target might be a view of history that does not shirk from documenting

injustice and atrocity - what the Prime Minister so insultingly labelled the "black armband" view - but the fall-out will be felt by people. Indigenous people.

If it becomes politically correct to denigrate indigenous people by mocking their past and whitewashing attempts to exterminate them, there will inevitably be flow-on to their treatment as citizens today. If David Barnett and Christopher Pearson, the two NMA board members who are reported to have pushed for the review, and John Carroll, the Victorian academic who will lead it, succeed in forcing a museum to alter its approach to Aboriginal history, this country is in even greater trouble than the most pessimistic of us feared.

It is one thing for historians to sling arrows at each other on this subject. It is quite another for a government to sanction intervention to alter a view of history that, before the museum opened, was signed off on by most of the country's prominent historians.

The current debate among historians has degenerated into a nasty and divisive business with Keith Windschuttle's book, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History* engaging in character assassination of at least one historian (rather than merely disputing their facts or their interpretations). Things will get even more hateful if the Government gets involved. It is bad enough for its political cronies to be pushing a bigoted view of indigenous history, but for the Government to endorse it would be tantamount to an official repudiation of the rights of some of the country's most disadvantaged people.

Sadly, the vilification of Chinese and Aborigines is nothing new for this country. Whereas in the 1830s Chinese "coolies" were attacked for undermining wages and conditions, gold prospectors were rioted against in the goldfields in NSW and Victorian in the 1850s, and laws were passed in the 1860s to

restrict Chinese immigration, today the yellow peril is perceived to be in the classroom.

Instead of embracing the success of a group that has moved beyond the stereotype of the market garden and the Chinese laundry, many of Irish descent feel threatened that their social hegemony is being undermined by people willing to work harder.

So what if the Chinese students mostly do medicine and science? Irish Catholics once went mostly into the public service, into customs and taxation and immigration (where their bigotry continues to have an impact on policy) and later in large numbers into law. Most groups deal with discrimination - be it from Masons or whoever - by seeking the safety of numbers. What exactly is wrong with so many Chinese wanting to do medicine? We could do worse than create a generation of Victor Changs.

It shows how far we still have to go as a country that likes to call itself multicultural that two groups which have historically endured prejudice and even persecution are once again on the receiving end of what looks like a concerted campaign of denigration.

We should be more than alert to what is happening here. We should be afraid. Very afraid.

*Education also falls within the parameters of saving our Aboriginal Languages. Since the Invasion, of the original 250 - 300 distinct languages, up to two thirds are either extinct or we only have a handful of Elders remaining with the knowledge.*

*Only about 20 of the surviving languages are actively spoken, but they are spoken fluently. The remaining languages are fading as our Elders die.*

*During the year, to their credit, the NSW Government will initiate programmes in an attempt to save the remaining NSW Language Groups. ISJA congratulated the Government for doing this.*

*Sometime next year we will be looking in more detail as to what is occurring in the saving of the Languages, and the success or otherwise of their efforts.*

### **Academic strives to save Aboriginal languages**

<http://abc.net.au>

A Melbourne academic says valuable information about traditional medicines could be lost if endangered Aboriginal languages are allowed to disappear.

Melbourne University associate professor Steven Bird is developing a standardised computer template for researchers and linguists, to replace systems that are constantly having to be updated.

Professor Bird says the Northern Territory has almost half of all the endangered languages in Australia.

"Some of this information may actually be economically important," he said.

"For instance, knowledge of traditional remedies which could be used for the development of new medicines.

"But the cultural information is also important for future societies who may want to have some access to their history, their culture, which is just being lost so quickly."

Professor Bird says one or two languages are being lost every week around the world and it is a remarkable opportunity to try to record them for posterity.

"For Australia as a whole there are about 80 languages with five or fewer speakers," he said.

"My guess is that in the Northern Territory probably about half of them fall into that category.

"But in fact any language other than say the top 10, which have say 50,000 or more speakers, any of these languages are really critically endangered and need to be preserved urgently."

*The following Reports, the first from the Australian Council for Educational Research and the second from the Brotherhood of St. Laurence (a constant thorn in Howard's side) show that the Socio-economic tragedy that is Australia today, for the greater majority of Families, is causing an Educational Divide. States and Territories, for many years, have been in the 'slash and burn' practices so beloved of the Federal Governments, both past and present. Meanwhile, Howard, and now Brendan Nelson, push mightily to continue the Americanisation of our Education System.*

*There has always been 'differences' with the Australian Education System. The debates between Public vs.. Private; between Secular vs.. Religious; between Old Education vs.. New Education continue unabated.*

*I am amazed, and saddened by that amazement, of the seemingly unstoppable decline in students leaving schools with out any real understanding of*

*what are termed the 3 R's. Educational standards and values have gone backwards, but not for the elite schools. The elite schools are producing the so-called 'leaders', the middle schools those with just enough academic skills to be able to push the buttons or to serve their masters as they should. The lower schools will produce the 'drones', the life-long unemployed, and those to fill the many, many gaols and the too few hospitals for the damaged among us.*

*Some 25 years ago, perhaps even longer, I went to a well known store, (no names here, mate), and was served by a young person fresh out of school. Preparing to pay for my purchases, the young man informed me that the cash register was not working and he did not have a calculator. He asked me would I total up the purchases because he could not.*

*It is my opinion that the Education System has regressed much further since then.*

### **Report reveals socioeconomic differences among Australian schools**

*Australian Council for Educational Research Media release  
5 February 2003*

A new study of test scores achieved by Australian 14-year-olds in reading comprehension and mathematics between 1975 and 1998 has revealed growing differences between Australian schools along socioeconomic lines.

Socioeconomic status, as measured by parent's occupation, had a significant

effect on the scores achieved by students. Throughout the 1975-1998 period, students whose parents were employed in professional and managerial occupations had the highest average scores and students whose parents were production workers or labourers had the lowest. Between 1975 and 1998, the gap between these two groups of students at an individual level narrowed. However, at the same time, the gap in scores widened between schools with high concentrations of professional parents and all other schools.

The report, released today by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), examines student achievement scores on tests of reading comprehension and mathematics from five studies that tested the literacy and numeracy levels of young people in Australian schools conducted between 1975 and 1998. The study examines trends for all students and for smaller groups of students, with results reported by socioeconomic status, language background, gender and location.

"Although the overall achievement levels of students remained stable between 1975-1998, there are notable differences between students by socioeconomic status, both between individual students and between schools said Deputy Director of ACER, Dr John Ainley.

we found that within the same school a student who comes from a higher socioeconomic group will achieve better test results than a student from a lower socioeconomic group.

<sup>3</sup>Likewise, students attending a school that has a higher concentration of students from higher socioeconomic groups will also achieve higher scores in both reading and mathematics than students attending schools with lower concentrations of students from higher socioeconomic groups. It is important to note that this

school-level influence has increased since 1975,<sup>2</sup> Dr Ainley said.

The report also found that there is a strong indication that, as a group, students from homes where English is not the main language spoken have improved their achievement both in reading comprehension and in mathematics. While the average achievement on tests of reading comprehension for students of a non-English speaking background was lower than the average for students from English speaking backgrounds, their achievement levels improved significantly over the period and the gap was narrowed substantially.

Other results include no significant differences recorded between students from non-metropolitan schools and students from metropolitan schools in both reading comprehension and mathematics; female students have higher achievement scores in reading comprehension but male students scored higher in mathematics; and the widest gaps in average test scores remain between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students for both reading comprehension and mathematics.

The new report, *Achievement in Literacy and Numeracy by Australian 14-year-olds, 1975-1998*, by ACER researcher Sheldon Rothman, is Research Report Number 29 in the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) research program jointly managed by ACER and the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST).

Print copies of the report may also be purchased from ACER Press. email: sales@acer.edu.au

### **Strong economy no help to poor children**

*THE AGE*  
By Caroline Milburn  
August 28, 2003

ECONOMIC growth since the 1990s recession has not improved the lives of Australian children born into poverty, a

report to be released today says.

Three-quarters of the children covered by a survey who were born into poverty-stricken families in 1990 remain in the same financial situation, > according to the report by the Brotherhood of St Laurence.

A study called Life Chances traced the lives of 167 children born in 1990 into low, medium and high-income families in Melbourne's inner > suburbs and compared their progress.

The latest snapshot of the children, taken last year when they were 11 and 12, found no one was employed in 60 per cent of the families stuck on low incomes, while 40 per cent had at least one parent in low-paid work. Low income for a couple with two children was defined as less than \$34,369 a year and high income was over \$87,000.

Parents from all the income groups were dissatisfied about the high cost of their children's education. Half of the low-income families and a quarter of the wealthier families had problems affording books, uniforms, excursions, camps, levies and other school costs.

The deepest anxiety was felt by low-income parents, who feared their inability to pay was impeding their children's education. Their children's limited access to computers and the internet at home added to their educational disadvantage, the study found. Only 31 per cent of children in low-income families had access to the internet at home, compared with 88 per cent of medium-income families and 100 per cent of the high-income families.

"The current costs of government (school) education are undermining the ability of children in low-income families to fully participate in their schools," the report said.

The Brotherhood's executive director, Nic Frances, said it was unacceptable that so many children were missing out on educational opportunities and

after-school activities such as sport, music and holidays.

"The life experiences of these kids make you wonder how much longer we're prepared to put up with so much poverty and inequality in what's basically a very healthy society," he said.

"To have nearly a million children living in families with no adult in the workforce is creating big social problems for this generation and future generations."

The study also found that literacy and learning difficulties among children were a significant problem across the income groups surveyed, with one in five children displaying serious learning or developmental problems.

The report recommended that state and federal governments reduce the cost of "free" public education by increasing funding for school-related costs and services to help children with specific learning difficulties.

*It appears that Brendan Nelson has also been contemplating the System of yesteryear, 25 yesteryears in fact, and came to a similar conclusion as I outlined above re regression.*

*The Sociopaths currently running the Federal Parliament continue to lash out in their extremely nervous reactions to Reports that show or prove even, that non-Australian, read migrant, youth is besting 'our' kids of British stock. This is the same Government that has turned a once half-decent Multicultural Australia into a racist cesspool.*

*They decided that what worked for Bush should work for them. Brendan came out fighting and argued that whilst the Muslims just might be*

*scholastically a nose in front, they were all terrorists. Even down to the Muslim kids in kindergarten. Australia merely sunk lower in the cesspool.*

*Brendan, of course, does not reveal his sources. Disaffected One Nation members returning to the Liberal/National Parties perhaps?*

### **Migrants' children are best at English**

*The Sydney Morning Herald  
By Linda Doherty Education  
Writer*

*April 30 2003*

*Related: Narrowing the gap*

TEENAGE children of migrants have better language skills than their classmates, while students who have spoken English for less than four years have higher literacy rates than Aboriginal students, according to statewide test results.

The English Language and Literacy Assessment (ELLA) results of year 7 and year 8 students also suggest that boys are catching up with girls in reading, writing and language skills.

The most notable results are from children of non-English-speaking backgrounds, who performed above the mean in language skills.

Dr Maureen Walsh, a senior lecturer in literacy education at the Australian Catholic University, said children who spoke another language at home had a cognitive advantage with literacy skills.

"Whether it's Vietnamese, Chinese, Korean or Arabic, they have concept development in their first language and that transfers to the second," she said.

The Minister for Education, Andrew Refshauge, said the ELLA results were the "best ever" but there was more work to be done in raising boys' literacy rates.

"I am particularly encouraged by the improvement in the literacy skills of students from non-English-speaking backgrounds. This confirms the Government's policies are working when it comes to targeting areas of need," he said.

The ELLA system includes results for students where at least one family member speaks a language other than English, as well as students from a non-English-speaking background who have been in Australia for less than four years and rarely speak English at home.

The first group recorded the best results in punctuation, grammar, spelling and sentence structure. The new arrivals improved their year 8 language mean scores from 84.1 in 1998 to 88.1 this year, the largest jump of any group, which put them above the Aboriginal score of 84.7.

Dr Alan Laughlin, the Department of Education's deputy director-general (schools), said the narrowing gender gap reflected the effect of literacy programs that began in kindergarten.

The best result for boys was the year 8 reading mean score of 90, the best mark for boys since such testing began in 1998. "The gap is narrowing in all literacy areas," Dr Laughlin said.

This is not a view shared by the federal Minister for Education, Brendan Nelson, who yesterday allocated \$4.3 million to 226 Australian schools to lift boys' performance.

"It is unacceptable that 14-year-old boys are doing worse in literacy tests than they were 25 years ago," he said.

More than 140,000 students from public and non-government schools sat for ELLA in March. The exam was marked as a score between 45 and 120.

But literacy expert Professor Mary Kalantzis, the president of

the Australian Council of Deans of Education, said statewide tests were political tools and "superior results" would be gained by investing more in teacher training.

"I'd expect much more dramatic changes than these [the NSW results] if you were to get a return on this very large investment in testing," she said.

### **Concerns raised over Islamic schools**

*AAP:*

*March 27 2003,*

FEDERAL Education Minister Brendan Nelson has written to state education ministers raising concerns that Islamic schools may be encouraging anti-Christian and anti-Western feelings in students.

Dr Nelson's letter, tabled in Queensland parliament today, said: "I have received a number of letters from concerned citizens across the country who feel that the teaching in Islamic schools may be encouraging anti-Christian and anti-Western feeling in the students enrolled in them."

Dr Nelson said in the letter he was confident this was not the case, but was concerned such sentiments could spread and advised state governments to ensure that schools complied with teaching and curriculum standards.

"I think in these times it is important that we can assure the wider Australian community that these state inspection regimes are rigorous and provide a firm basis for guaranteeing the quality and content of teaching and curriculum, not just for Islamic but for all non-government schools," Dr Nelson wrote.

Queensland Premier Peter Beattie today told reporters the letter reflected "divisive, base politics" by the federal government.

"This week they are picking on Islamic schools, next week it could be Catholic schools ... we

are not going to allow that to happen," Mr Beattie said.

"I think it is a base agenda - he should explain himself to Australia." Queensland Education Minister Anna Bligh told parliament the state had the strictest accreditation for non-state schools in the country.

Ms Bligh said Queensland had two Islamic schools which were providing "high quality education" to 257 students. 'Both of these schools jumped high hurdles to achieve non-government school status,' Ms Bligh said.

Dr Nelson's spokesman said the minister was "extremely disappointed" Ms Bligh and Mr Beattie were seeking to politicise such a sensitive issue which he had addressed in a private letter.

*We will begin our Educational Walkabout in NSW, which, it is alleged, is the 'State of Excitement.' There is a lot to excite one in this State and the following Reports give a glimpse in just one area and show why.*

*Back in March of this year the NSW Government sounded the clarion call by having the Deputy Premier and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Dr. Andrew Refshauge announce that the Government now intended to do things just a bit better relative to the Aborigines of this State. Again. One of the areas to be looked at included Education.*

*Perhaps the Government had had some inkling of the Report that was made by Aboriginal Educationalist, Professor John Lester from the University of Newcastle the following day.*

*The Report shows that Aboriginal students were*

*continuing to come last in all Education Indicators. The good Professor believes, as we do, that it is time that serious consideration was given to setting up schools that are based on the Tranby model. Aboriginal schools managed by Aborigines, for Aborigines. Indigenous schools are a success in Aotearoa (New Zealand) and Canada. If Tranby is any guide, then it will also be a success in this Country. This is not an exercise in Apartheid, it is an exercise in the survival of our youth. This Country is sitting on a black youth time-bomb and if it aint fixed soon we are heading for the worsening of the current nightmare. Our kids, some at the kindergarten level, are being expelled because they are put in the 'too hard basket.' These kids come from fractured Families, some from Families with a history of generational fracture. Expelling our youth is not the answer. More on this later.*

*When Andrew Refshauge became the Education Minister at the end of March, everyone, including the Teachers Federation, hoped that at last we were on the Yellow Brick Road to an Education Eden. Yeah well, that's hope for you. Just as well it is said to spring eternal. We will need it.*

#### **NSW Govt releases Aboriginal affairs policy**

*ABC INDIGENOUS NEWS  
Wednesday, March 5, 2003*

THE New South Wales Government has launched its Aboriginal affairs policy with a

promise to initiate a whole of government approach to Indigenous issues.

Under the policy, groups of government agencies will be required to meet targets in areas such as health, education, economic development, justice, housing and culture.

The Deputy Premier and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Andrew Refshauge, says the Government will finalise an Aboriginal Languages Policy and complete a review of Aboriginal education.

The Minister has also promised to develop an Aboriginal Justice Plan to look at the causes of crime in Aboriginal communities and reduce incarceration rates.

"We have too many Aboriginal people in jails, too many Aboriginal people in detention centres," he said.

We need to make sure that we change that.

"And so we're looking at more imaginative ways of expanding circle sentencing, finding outstations for young offenders to actually learn skills so that we turn them away from a life of crime."

#### **System has failed indigenous students**

*The Sydney Morning Herald  
By Linda Doherty  
March 6 2003*

NSW was the first parliament to say sorry to the stolen generation, but after eight years of a Labor government, all the hand-wringing and buckets of money have done little to lift the overall academic performance of Aboriginal students.

Indigenous students doing the NSW Basic Skills Test consistently record mean scores at least five points below all other students. They account for 40 per cent of girls as young as five suspended from school. Only 37 per cent complete year 12. The general NSW rate is 71 per cent.

Aboriginal students come last in all education indicators while the progress of migrant students has improved so dramatically they are now matching or beating their classmates.

The Aboriginal students are "flatlining" and there is evidence that children are switching off school as early as kindergarten, according to Aboriginal educationalist John Lester from the University of Newcastle.

"My feeling is we are in crisis," he says. "The problems are going to multiply because our birth rate is three times higher than the rate of general Australia."

Professor Lester, the university's head of Aboriginal Studies, is one of the few willing to state publicly what a growing number of educators believe is the answer to this merry-go-round of misery.

He believes NSW should fund schools that would be open to all students, but would target their syllabus and teaching styles towards indigenous children. They would be established like existing specialist schools for sport or technology but would focus on Aboriginal studies and language development.

Aboriginal teachers and school managers would be encouraged to break out of what Professor Lester sees as the current "poor whites in black skins" paternalism.

"The catchcry will be that this is apartheid but stop and think how many schools are out there for specific ethnic or religious groups," Professor Lester said.

"Why shouldn't there be indigenous schools? Whatever anyone says, the [academic] gap is not closing."

The NSW Teachers Federation president, Maree O'Halloran, said teachers were so "gravely concerned" at indigenous education results that there was a need to consider "all these issues".

From 1997 to 2001, the number of Aboriginal students in public schools increased by more than 5600 to 30,825. They now account for 4 per cent of the government school population. Another 3124 Aboriginal students attend non-government schools, mainly in the Catholic system.

New Zealand has more than 60 publicly funded Maori schools. They are typically small, deliver lessons in the Maori language and take a holistic approach to children's development based on cultural and spiritual values.

The New Zealand Education Review Office found last year that the schools - although dogged by a lack of curriculum resources and untrained teachers - were "building a level of parental and whanau [community] support, which is not as common in other schools".

Canada also has taxpayer-funded indigenous schools, including some transferred to the Inuit people in northern Quebec in the 1970s.

In NSW, the status quo cannot be allowed to stay. The drive for change needs to be institutional, political and comprehensive.

### **Teachers urge Minister to focus on Aboriginal education**

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/s819815.htm>

THE New South Wales Teachers Federation says it hopes Indigenous education across New South Wales will be strengthened under new Education Minister Andrew Refshauge.

He will be sworn in this week to replace John Watkins, who will become Police Minister.

Dr Refshauge is also Aboriginal Affairs Minister and Teachers Federation President Maree O'Halloran says she wants him to use his expertise in the area to improve Aboriginal education.

"As Minister for Aboriginal Affairs we hope that the issue of Aboriginal education is given the priority that it needs and deserves in this term of office," she said.

"We particularly hope that Dr Refshauge will begin negotiations immediately, as the Government promised to ensure that we can keep our teachers by making sure they're paid properly."

*Education is, and must be, as we already know, an exercise in mutual commitment. Both our Societies, Indigenous and non-Indigenous must accept that Learning is to be a natural acceptance by both Societies, for both Societies. It is as appropriate for Indigenous Educators, and their tools, to have positive access and input into mainstream schools as it is for non-Indigenous Educators to have positive access and input into the same schools. However strongly Howard and his ilk may want to believe the opposite, Australia is now a Multicultural Country. Our Education System must be the best, and one that respects all other Cultures. We owe this at least to all the youth of this Country.*

*One way of achieving this goal is told in the next article. A positive action that will feed into all NSW schools, ultimately to the benefit of all students. Sadly, the article following that highlights the overall lack of interest in Wiradguri Heritage and Culture in the rural areas of NSW. The 7 Point Plan still oozes its poison in Country NSW.*

## New books to improve Indigenous literacy rates

*ABC INDIGENOUS NEWS*  
Tuesday, May 20, 2003

A program aimed at improving the literacy standards of young Aboriginal people has been launched in Sydney, with a series of school reading books written by Aboriginal people to be distributed throughout New South Wales schools.

The 11 Indij Readers books, written for both young and older students, are designed to promote early literacy skills, telling contemporary stories presenting positive images of Aboriginal society.

Project coordinator Anita Heiss says 10 years of work has gone into producing the school readers.

"Lots of consultation with elders, with the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, in and out of New South Wales schools, working with school children, authors and illustrators, to develop the first 11 books in the series," she said.

"Half the series is for 'little fellas', as we say, and the other half is 'big fellas', so there's the various levels of literacy development."

## Little interest shown in Wiradjuri heritage report

A report's recommendations to preserve Wiradjuri heritage and culture in the Wagga Wagga local government area of southern NSW, have sparked little public interest.

Wagga City Council commissioned the report.

The Wiradjuri Heritage Study's recommendations call for the items which have been identified to be formally catalogued, so they can be properly managed into the future.

One recommendation is to have two Indigenous staff employed by the council to ensure the study's findings can

be applied in tourism and in education.

"Those two positions would be for those purposes to look after it, to plan for it and to see how we can sensitively use the material in that study and on the ground for those various purposes," study author Dick Green said.

Another recommendation is to hold a regular talkback session on ABC Riverina about Wiradjuri culture.

The Aboriginal heritage study is the first of its type in the state, but after two months on public display, the 300-page document has not drawn one public submission.

Wagga council will consider a report on the study and its recommendations later this month, or in July.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/s869679.htm>

*It has long been debated as to which is the worst Educational World to be in existence in, City or Country. Both have some advantages, both have major problems. For Aboriginal kids, the advantages become less whilst the problems are exacerbated.*

*Another 'trial' has been introduced in an attempt to make the Government's beauracatic Department's work better for real people. Quite a task and we wish them all well. I especially like the recognition of the practice of 'point scoring' that has bedevilled our People for so long. And then there's the racism of course.*

## World class for some, Third World for others

*The Sydney Morning Herald*  
By Linda Doherty Education Editor  
September 29, 2003

Until three years ago, Lightning Ridge teenagers had

to make a 160-kilometre round trip to Walgett to go to high school.

Now they have a secondary school closer to home, but they still have to go Walgett for a decent game of rugby league. Such is the tyranny of distance that a game of footy costs hundreds of dollars in transport costs alone.

But the hardship does not stop at sport. When the new principal of Lightning Ridge Central School, Peter Partridge, arrived this year he could find only one casual teacher to fill in for his 40 staff.

Many students do not have computers at home because they live in camps with no electricity. But out in the backblocks, a little help can make a big difference.

Lightning Ridge is one of the towns in the Murdi Paaki region – which Aborigines call Black Man's River - that makes up one-third of NSW in the far west, north west and Murray districts. It includes Coonamble, Cobar, Bourke, Brewarrina, Broken Hill, Collarenebri, Menindee, Ivanhoe, Wentworth, Gulargambone, Goodooga and Wilcannia.

The region has been chosen as the trial site for bipartisanship between the federal and state governments in NSW, because the needs are so great there is no room for political point-scoring.

Murdi Paaki has 7500 Aborigines, and their booming birth rate now means that 12 per cent of the population is aged under four. The list of "social issues" compiled for the trial includes high crime, jail and unemployment rates, alcohol abuse, domestic violence, "very poor" school attendance, teenage parents and deaths from curable diseases.

The Council of Australian Governments' project aims to find solutions to improve the health and education of Aborigines and help communities help themselves by working together.

Last week the federal Education Minister, Brendan Nelson, visited Murdi Paaki towns, where a "shared responsibility agreement" was signed last month between both governments and the regional Aboriginal council.

To Dr Nelson, the challenge to raise academic results and school attendance rates of the country's "most educationally impoverished people" is more urgent than his university overhaul.

"It would be an empty achievement if we built higher education into a world-class sector and we still had one in four indigenous students who could not pass a reading test in year 3," he said.

The biggest bugbear is red tape, but committees in 16 towns will work with all government agencies - instead of problems being flicked between the commonwealth and the state.

Dr Refshauge said there would be a strong focus on supporting families. Better health and education for Aborigines would have "enormous flow-on effects" for entire communities.

In Murdi Paaki, just over one-third of the 15 to 19 year olds are at school or in training, compared with the general rate of 68 per cent. Statistics show Aboriginal students go to government schools, the whites to Catholic schools or boarding schools.

At Wilcannia Central School, 95 per cent of the students are Aborigines but the town's indigenous rate was 64 per cent of the population at the 2001 census.

The percentage of students finishing year 12 has risen nationally from 29 per cent of Aboriginal students in 1996 to 38 per cent last year but this is still almost half the non-Aboriginal rate.

*We close the year in NSW with the clarion call becoming mutated to a*

*muffled scream. A scream of frustration and anger that another year has passed without any change to the misery that is NSW Education for all students, but especially, Koori students.*

*A week after the reporting of the dismal outcomes for Aboriginal students, the Minister for Education and also Aboriginal Affairs bravely, and unabashedly, calls for still another 'Review.'*

### **NSW schools fail Aboriginal literacy test**

*Monday, October 13, 2003*

The annual literacy test in New South Wales primary schools has shown not enough is being done to improve basic skills among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pupils.

The Deputy Premier and Education minister Andrew Refshauge says the results of this year's basic skills test for years three and five show that students from non-English speaking backgrounds are still performing well above the state average.

However Dr Refshauge concedes that more can be done to boost literacy and numeracy skills among students from Indigenous backgrounds.

"We need to put effort there, we have been but we certainly need to do better," he said.

"There's a whole range of reasons and I think they aren't particularly educational reasons, but often it's a matter of health or social circumstances."

### **NSW Govt announces review of Aboriginal education**

ABORIGINAL education in New South Wales is to undergo a major review.

On announcing the review, the Minister for Education and Aboriginal Affairs, Dr Andrew Refshauge, says Aboriginal

students are the most educationally disadvantaged student group in Australia.

Dr Refshauge says the review will be carried out in consultation with Aboriginal communities, parents, teachers and principals and the state's peak Aboriginal advisory body.

*Before we become too depressed with the NSW situation we now move to the far far south. To Tasmania. There are no Reports from the Victorian scene (there are rarely ever any reports from Victoria. Their papers are full of Australian Rules.)*

*Michael Mansell is also depressed at the Education Standards in Tasmania and he informs us of the high Indigenous dropout rate.*

*A month later, Hobart is hosting a Forum looking at Bridging Programmes for ATSI students to enter a University. Provided of course that they get through Kindergarten, Primary and High School.*

### **Claim education policy causing high Indigenous dropout rate**

*Thursday, February 20, 2003*

IT has been claimed Tasmanian Government education policies have resulted in unacceptably high dropout rates and low literacy and skill rates for Indigenous children.

Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre president Michael Mansell says the special needs of Aboriginal children have been ignored for over 20 years.

Mr Mansell says the present school curriculum needs an overhaul.

"[The curriculum] teaches the positives of Aboriginal history, teaches the kids about where their families fit into the Aboriginal community, teaches

them about their culture," Mr Mansell said.

"So instead of the school relying entirely on the parents of Aboriginal children to do the work of the schools, the schools instead take on the responsibility of sharing the workload with the parents."

Tasmania Education Minister Paula Wreidt says Aboriginal education was a high priority for the Government, with a policy addressing issues for Indigenous education due for completion in June.

Aboriginal centre to investigate education opportunities

Representatives from Aboriginal centres around Australia are in Hobart to share ideas about improving higher education opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Tasmania's Centre for Aboriginal Education is hosting the two-day forum, which begins today.

Bridging programs which prepare students for University will be the focus of the forum.

Clair Anderson from the Centre for Aboriginal Education says all centres are working toward common goals.

"We are trying to empower our students," she said.

"We want them to be successful graduates.

"We want them all out there contributing to mainstream society in Australia and the people with the degrees with the full qualifications, they are the people who are doing that and for a lot of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people haven't had very good access initially to a full education."

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<http://abc.net.au/news/newsitems/s810576.htm>

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*.Now for a Good News Report from South Australia. Somebody at sometime, in whatever brand of Government, finally refused to countenance the 'bottom line' and opted for the Social payoff instead. Let's hope the good works continue*

*The AEU speaks up for an apology to the Stolen Generations and an end to racism in the schools of South Australia*

### \$2m dream school for the people that time forgot

*The Advertiser  
By Political Reporter LEANNE CRAIG  
05may03*

STUDENTS of Oak Valley school in the state's Far North have endured the harshest conditions.

Their classroom was once a tarpaulin laid in the dust and, later, a caravan that became an oven in the 50C summer.

But yesterday, students, teachers and the 100-strong community shook off their Third World education status to celebrate the opening of a \$2 million school, though which students will progress to Year 12.

Oak Valley is one of Australia's remotest communities, on the edge of the Great Victorian Desert and an eight-hour drive from Ceduna. It is also the traditional home of the Maralinga Tjarutja people.

Premier Mike Rann, who opened the school yesterday, described the earlier conditions for students as a disgrace, and said the new education facilities were long overdue.

"For years, the children of Oak Valley sweltered out their school day in a cramped caravan with no air-conditioning and a long-drop as a toilet," he said.

"These children deserve the best chance in life - the same as all other children in our state."

The new \$2 million school replaces a school once dubbed the worst in Australia.

It will provide child care, pre-school and school services for up to 35 students and 22 day care students.

School principal Noelene Cox said the caravan offered only limited space, "but now we can have anything we want from computers to sports equipment".

The police officer in charge of the region, Sergeant Stephen Bowley, said education was the key to addressing social problems such as petrol sniffing and delinquency.

"There's a great interest in the school and the truancy rate is much less here than other schools closer to the more heavily populated centres," he said.

Aboriginal Affairs Minister Terry Roberts also announced a \$2.4 million power station for Oak Valley, including generators and a field of solar panels, would be operating later this year.

In addition to improving electricity supplies to remote communities, the project would provide valuable local jobs, he said

### **Union disappointed in Govt's response to reconciliation**

*ABC Indigenous News  
Tuesday 14 January 2003*

THE Australian Education Union (AEU) says it is disappointed the Federal Government still has not embraced the reconciliation process.

The comment followed the launch of a strategy in Adelaide today to help the education sector tackle racism and encourage Aboriginal students to stay at school.

Darcel Moyle from the AEU says the union has a strong commitment to teach students about Indigenous issues but is disappointed by the lack of government support.

"We are obviously dismayed that an apology has not been made to the stolen generation, considering that every state and territory government, at this point in time and to the best of my knowledge, I think has done that," he said.

"So we certainly think... a number of improvements can be made there."

*We now rush to Western Australia to become quite giddy with all the Good News emanating from that State. One needs to recognise, however, that the Good News glosses over the problems that are so much a part of the Education System of the other States and Territories. One also needs to take into consideration the*

*seemingly symbiotic relationship between the Geoff Gallop Labor Government and the State's only mainstream paper, the West Australian.*

*But even taking that into account, WA seems to be involving itself in a hell of a lot of Social Justice issues, and in a positive fashion.*

*A previous article made mention of special education programmes involving Education and Sport. Whether this is based on the Football (and etc.) Colleges of the USA or not I don't know. But it appears to be working at Balga.*

*Another positive move is the introduction of Aboriginal Education Managers. Part of their brief is to tackle the issues arising from Racism. Tim Goodwin then explains his experience with "true racism" whilst at school.*

### **Students go for high score with netball**

*The West Australian  
By Susan Hewitt  
February 05, 2003*

NETBALL training and physical fitness will be as important as cultural training, maths and English for a group of new scholarship students at Balga Senior High School.

The first intake of students on the special education netball program started this week and on their second day were visited by Aboriginal actress Leah Purcell.

It follows the school's successful boys' football program which combines sport and indigenous culture with traditional schooling.

Nineteen Year 8 girls have been selected for the program

based on academic results and sporting talent.

They take part in daily fitness and netball skill sessions as well as specifically developed programs in self-esteem and confidence building plus the usual high school classes.

Balga principal Merv Hammond said students on the football program, which is in its second year, had shown a dramatic improvement in attendance, confidence, literacy and numeracy.

"The program is culturally based and an important part of it is making connections with their Aboriginality," Mr Hammond said.

"This is something they can use as a stepping stone to sporting success or getting a job for life."

Purcell spoke to the students about what had inspired her to set goals and achieve success.

Last night, the class members saw her production Black Chicks Talking playing in Midland as part of the Festival of Perth.

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### **Aboriginal experts tackle school blues**

*The West Australian  
March 21, 2003  
By Minh Lam*

DAVID CALLOW and Edie Wright realise they have a big task awaiting them in the area of Aboriginal education but they are relishing the opportunity to tackle it.

Mr Callow, 32, and Ms Wright, 48, are two of 10 new Aboriginal education managers appointed by the Education Department of WA to 14 education districts in the State. The managers will coordinate Aboriginal education programs in schools in their districts.

They will ensure that issues affecting Aboriginal students such as racism and cultural awareness are addressed.

Mr Callow has been assigned to the Canning district office and Ms Wright in the Kimberley district.

Mr Callow said literacy and numeracy, levels of parent participation and staff cultural awareness were areas he was looking to address.

Ms Wright said her main challenge was changing attitudes and stereotypes such as Aboriginal students were not capable of learning as well as their peers, and that their parents did not value education.

All managers have an Aboriginal background and all but two are teachers.

### **Racism struck first in the playground**

*The Advertiser*  
29sep03

AN Aboriginal university student has told an education conference in Adelaide the only place he experienced "true racism" was at school.

Tim Goodwin, 19, urged teacher delegates to the Australian Curriculum Studies Association national conference yesterday to help dispel negative stereotypes of young Aboriginal people as "petrol-sniffing" and dysfunctional.

The Canberra arts/law student said students should be taught the history of Aboriginal people from the time they start school.

"If a five-year-old can stand up and listen to the marches of Anzac Day they can hear about the massacres that occurred to the indigenous people," Mr Goodwin said.

"Do not tell me one is more important than the other."

Adelaide-born Mr Goodwin said he first realised he was a racism target during school sport in Year 4 when he was "picked on really quite horrendously".

Despite it being a "really bad day", a positive outcome stayed strongly in his mind.

"This teacher came up to me and said you can never let anyone else define you," he said. ". . . I don't remember how she helped me with my grammar problems but I will remember those words for the rest of my life. And that's education in action."

*Computers and computer technologies are the key to our future and the youth of this Country, not just in WA, must be wired into the IT-World. The next Report recognises that but also, more importantly perhaps, also accepts the responsibility that without well-trained and enthusiastic teachers the Knowledge Country espoused by Hawke and other Prime Ministers will go nowhere.*

### **Indigenous students get on information super-highway**

*The West Australian*  
May 29, 2003  
By Minh Lam

INDIGENOUS students will get the opportunity to improve their literacy and numeracy skills in a new project at Moorditj Community College in Midvale.

The Moorditj Newmont information technology project also will give their teachers the opportunity to master computers.

It involves about 15 Year 4 students and 15 staff and is a joint program between the school, the Education Department, Edith Cowan University, mining company Newmont and the Smith Family.

Students will use an interactive computer program called Success maker to improve their literacy and numeracy. Staff will learn how to use the program and computers in general.

ECU teaching researchers will monitor their progress to assess the value of information

technology in improving indigenous students' literacy and numeracy and of teachers being trained to use the technology.

The project was launched yesterday by Education Minister Alan Carpenter.

Moorditj has been able to buy 10 new computers with a \$50,000 donation from Newmont. It now has 20.

Acting deputy principal Kerry Rowe said the computers also would be used by students for research and visual presentations.

ECU researcher Sandy Tasker said students' literacy and numeracy levels and teachers' attitudes to computers had been assessed before the program began.

She said teachers in general were not enthusiastic about information technology because they did not understand it.

"If the staff get strong training and they feel excited about using computers, then that is going to reflect directly on to their students and make them more excited as well," Ms Tasker said.

*We will end our look at the WA scene with three very positive Reports. The first deals with the actuality of a vision of a purpose-built school for Aborigines. The school is not restricted to Nyoongar youth and is open to all. The Nyoongar Language is an integral part of the curriculum and this is an important component of the Pride engendered in the students.*

*Professor Brian Gray informs us of the great success of a new literacy tool being used in some Independent Aboriginal Community schools. Reading levels and skills of students using the*

*Programme have increased dramatically.*

*The last Report is a well earned salute to those Nyoongar youth awarded for the Aboriginal Education Awards of Achievement held during NAIDOC Week. Well done Vance and Amanda.*

### **Vision of school excellence speaks volumes to Nyoongar youth**

*The West Australian  
July 5, 2003  
By Charlie Wilson-Clark  
NAIDOC WEEK*

ABORIGINAL students in the eastern suburbs cannot wait to get to school since the gates of Moorditj Noongar Community College opened in 2001.

The Middle Swan primary school was named after the Nyoongar word for good or excellent and is the only Department of Education school purpose-built with an Aboriginal vision in the metropolitan area.

With 140 students from kindergarten to Year 5, acting deputy principal Barbara Clayton said the Moorditj Noongar was working towards having a Year 7 class in 2005.

Three school buses collect students from their homes in suburbs such as Midland, High Wycombe, Beechboro, Maylands and Bellevue.

Ms Clayton said attendance had improved dramatically among students who transferred from mainstream schools, along with literacy and numeracy. Nyoongar language played a big part in the curriculum and gave both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students a sense of pride.

"They love it when they can go home and sing a song to their parents and their parents say the kids know more

language than they do," Ms Clayton said.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Day of Celebration Week starts around Australia tomorrow and will be officially launched at 10.30 am on Monday in Wellington Square, Perth. The theme is Our Children, Our Future, putting the focus on youth.

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### **Aboriginals lead learning revolution**

*The West Australian  
July 10, 2003  
By Charlie Wilson-Clark*

INDEPENDENT Aboriginal schools are producing better literacy results with a new teaching method called scaffolding.

Before it was introduced no student at Kulkarriya Community School, on Noonkanbah station in the Kimberley, could read at Year 7 level.

After six months on the program, half the students ranging in ages from 6 to 15 were able to perform at Year 7 reading levels - including some still in Year 6.

Developed by University of Canberra Professor Brian Gray, scaffolding turns traditional individualised reading programs on their head.

Professor Gray told a Perth seminar yesterday scaffolding developed students' independent working level and their comprehension of language, which led to more advanced reading and writing skills.

Scaffolding sessions broke texts down into small chunks in a group learning environment until students could think like the writer and imitate language.

Professor Gray said the limited vocabulary of early primary school texts consolidated poor literacy results by containing the academic scope of students who were much older than the text intended.

That meant that students performing poorly in the early years of school never became literate and suffered a widening gap between themselves and classmates who progressed.

"I would like to see this program in for 10 years before I can really say it is successful," Professor Gray said. "But the progress we are having is much more rapid than the 30 years where we have actually made no progress at all."

Thirteen of the 15 independent Aboriginal schools in WA now use the method and have begun to reach national literacy benchmarks for the first time. The program has also been taken on by the Northern Territory Education Department.

Kulkarriya Year 11 student Noria Button read at a Year 4 level before beginning scaffolding two and a half years ago. She is now literate and composes advanced creative writing passages in a single sitting.

Her principal, Josh Bell, said the method had restored his excitement for teaching and raised the level of learning the school offered.

Professor Gray began using a form of scaffolding as a teacher at Treager Park School in Alice Springs in the 1980s. His work at the University of Canberra since 1992 has developed the program and put it in classrooms under the supervision of scaffolding consultants.

Three WA Department of Education and Training staff attended Professor Gray's seminar.

One of them, Aboriginal Education Directorate curriculum consultant Heather Elmer, said the officers would investigate whether the program could benefit government schools.

**Keep it up, Jones: outspoken student eyes political arena**

*The West Australian*  
July 9, 2003

By Daile Pepper

VANCE JONES admits to aiming high - and last night he was rewarded for that determination.

The 16-year-old Ballajura Community College student was named the most outstanding male Year 12 student at the Aboriginal Education Awards of Achievement ceremony, held during NAIDOC Week.

Vance was nominated for the Department of Education and Training award by the school to recognise his positive attitude and dedication towards achieving his goals.

He wants to study environmental science at university next year.

"I like analysing, finding out how things work," Vance said.

Vance, who has played in the school concert band, wants to enter politics when he is older and has strong opinions on issues such as human rights, law and order and the environment.

He is not afraid to voice his opinion at school and wants to be a part of positive change.

"People should be standing up for what they believe in," he said.

Amanda Sibosado, of Hamilton Senior High School, was named outstanding female Aboriginal Year 12 student.

***And so we come to the Northern Territory. The NT comes with a much more open process of joint funding by both the Federal and the NT Governments.***

***Education, like Health and Housing, is both a Federal and Territory responsibility. This arrangement allows for political antics by both sides that if something is not working, then it is the fault of the other Party. Funding is reduced by***

***one side and the blame put to the other. It is a totally wasteful system. This is, of course, an Australia-wide phenomenon and mirrors politics at its worst.***

***The NT Government has made two small grants to both the Desert Peoples Centre and the Mutitjulu Community School. Never really enough but enough to keep them ticking over.***

***The Federals on their part also make two contributions. One is for the School of the Air to assist remote students in the NT and NSW. The second Grant for \$500 000 better reflects the politics of the Howard Government. All three Grants have links to their Commercialisation with Industry. The reference to 'banteng' means 'Water Buffalo'***

### **Indigenous education gets boost in Alice Springs**

*ABC INDIGENOUS NEWS*  
Tuesday, January 14, 2003

Funding worth \$300,000 can now flow to the Desert People's Centre in central Australia after receiving final approval from the Northern Territory Government.

Education Minister Syd Stirling says the money will be used to fund the project's next stage, which is aimed at creating educational opportunities for young Indigenous Territorians.

"This will be used for quite involved planning and development of the learning centre and they'll get right down to a tin tacks now, developing digital communications for communities around Alice Springs and bringing together the Centre for Applied Technology and the Bachelor

Institution for Indigenous Tertiary Education," he said.

### **Mutitjulu community welcomes school upgrade**

*Wednesday, May 28, 2003*

THE Mutitjulu community, near Uluru in central Australia, has welcomed a Northern Territory Government allocation of \$150,000 to upgrade its school.

The community had complained that the school's facilities were inadequate with no running hot water and poor toilet facilities.

The community's Graham Calma says he is pleased the Government has heard their concerns.

"Sometimes you have to get there and lobby in different ways," he said.

"When you have people here who aren't happy with the facilities, well then you sort of have to take some sort of step in doing something, so we did and we're very pleased with the outcome."

### **Remote students gain access to digital schooling**

SCHOOL of the Air students have entered the digital age with the launch of an interactive distance learning initiative in Alice Springs in the Northern Territory.

The \$17 million package will benefit remote area students in the Territory and New South Wales.

Federal Communications Minister Senator Richard Alston launched the initiative at the Alice Springs School of the Air this morning.

The broadband system will deliver lessons using video technology from a network of teaching studios in Alice Springs, Darwin, Broken Hill, Dubbo and Port Macquarie.

Satellite dishes and computers will complete the network with 547 sites across

NSW and the Territory, including remote homesteads, isolated schools and Indigenous settlements.

### **NT University wins major grant funding**

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/s869268.htm>

THE Northern Territory University has won nearly \$500,000 in Commonwealth grant funding, with the money to go towards three projects over the next five years.

The Linkage Project grants will help academics to develop research alliances with industry.

The biggest winner from the funding is a project looking into bushfire smoke and the relationship between human and landscape health, which received \$395,000.

Another project is developing a series of databases focusing on Indigenous knowledge.

While in the third project, a group of five researchers are looking into managing banteng at Gurig National Park on the Coburg Peninsula.

The university's Vice Chancellor Ken McKinnon says the grants show the calibre of researchers at the institution.

*Literacy is a big a problem in the NT as it is elsewhere in Australia. The next two Reports highlight an ongoing problem that really frustrates the overall system. We read previously of the success of the WA Programme to increase reading ability, which seems to be working, and here the NT Government introduces and trials another one. There is no coordination nationally to obtain the best of whatever the programme may be, and work on one proper standard. Why do we need eight different Education Systems, most, if not all, of which*

*are staggering along and practical and positive outcomes are too few and far between.*

*Then of course as the next article explains, if it (whatever it may be) is going or gone wrong, then blame the previous Government. And they will return the compliment when they regain power. 'Tis a weird and wasteful world.*

### **NT literacy program may be expanded**

ABC INDIGENOUS NEWS  
Friday, March 28, 2003

THE coordinator of an Indigenous literacy pilot program being trialled in Alice Springs, Darwin and Ngukurr says it is likely to be expanded.

The Accelerated Literacy Project supports students with literacy problems to read texts aimed at their age, instead of giving them younger level reading material.

Overall results show students enrolled in the project are recording achievement rates 300 per cent above their original reading level.

Fiona McLoughlin says results in the six test-schools have been phenomenal.

"Currently the department is looking closely at the results we've achieved to date in each of the schools, and looking to expanding the project after June, and hopefully more schools will be able to access the program."

Claim education reforms will cut Indigenous participation rate

An Aboriginal tertiary group says Indigenous participation rates will drop if the Federal Government insists on pushing the 'Crossroads Education' package through the Senate without reforms.

The package is a result of a national review into higher education and includes an increase in Indigenous support funding and the establishment

of an Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council.

The National Indigenous Postgraduate Association Aboriginal Corporation says the broader package contains interest on postgraduate loans, more up-front fees and a five-year limit on publicly subsidised education.

The corporation president, Peter Radoll, says those aspects undermine the equity measures aimed at Indigenous students.

"We'll get fewer Indigenous postgraduates because one of the incentives in the package is this thing called 'Indigenous staff scholarships', which supposedly is some sort of attempt to raise the employment rate," Mr Radoll said.

"It goes without saying you need a bachelor's degree to get into a academic staff position and with these changes going through we're going to see a drop in participation."

### **Accusations fly over Indigenous literacy**

THE Northern Territory Government claims that when the Country Liberal Party (CLP) was in power it concealed Aboriginal literacy problems.

The Labor Government has accused the Opposition of deliberately disempowering Indigenous people.

The Community Development Minister, John Ah Kit, has told Parliament he is deeply angry about the callous neglect of the education of Indigenous Territorians by the CLP.

He says it had a starvation of the mind policy, which left Indigenous people with a lack of capacity to harness the future for further generations.

Mr Ah Kit says under the CLP, schools ignored Indigenous children who were most at risk of having literacy problems.

He says students who could not handle a literacy test were left out of the process and

Territory residents were lied to about Aboriginal people's literacy problems.

Mr Ah Kit says under a Labor Government the time for lies is over.

The Shadow Minister for Education, Terry Mills, says the Territory Government should be ensuring its strategies to improve Indigenous education bear fruit rather than politicising the issue.

"For the Minister to politicise this very, very important issue to all Territorians by blaming a former regime is certainly not going to be helping Indigenous mums and dads in improving the education outcomes of Indigenous children," Mr Mills said.

*The following two articles do identify some of the Educational lapses that the Claire Martin Labor Government found on coming to power. It is to be hoped that Government funding can be found.*

### **Katherine: What voters want**

*Northern Territory News  
By CAMDEN SMITH  
September 29, 2003*

THE itinerants issue is looming as the major concern for voters in Katherine's by election this week.

Most residents interviewed by the Northern Territory News want the problem tackled urgently.

As the five candidates struggle to sell their policies to voters, a Katherine teacher came up with her own suggestion yesterday to help tackle the problem.

Delvene Clarke, 25, says a school built 15 years ago on a remote Arnhem Land outstation symbolises the itinerancy dilemma.

She said the school, built on the Budawarku Outstation, 25 km from the so-called Roper Bar, has never been used since

it was built by Yolngu family members with assistance from the then CLP Government.

Ms Clarke said two generations had missed out on an education.

Ms Clarke and her mother Erica Hampton, also a teacher, formed the Wilkie Aboriginal Corporation last year to campaign to improve conditions on communities.

"All we need is funding for teaching positions and some resources for teachers," Ms Clarke said.

"It's no wonder itinerants want to come into town when the conditions there are so bad.

"Not only is there no school, there's no available health services and no fresh water or electricity.

"ATSIC promised 13 months ago they would install a generator and water pump but there's been nothing done."

### **Attendance officer to boost Wadeye pupil numbers**

*ABC INDIGENOUS NEWS  
Saturday, October 11, 2003*

THE Northern Territory Government has employed a school attendance officer at Wadeye, 250 kilometres south-west of Darwin, in an effort to improve class numbers.

Only half the 800 children in the Port Keats area are enrolled in school.

There are plans to employ officers in eight Territory centres.

The Education Minister, Syd Stirling, says attendance officers at Palmerston and Alice Springs have been successful in getting more children into schools.

"We look forward to the attendance officer there bringing in the same sorts of results that Anita Kruger has brought forward in Alice Springs," Mr Stirling said.

*Universities around Australia are currently*

*engaged in a further struggle with the Federal Government, any Federal Government since the Whitlam Government, to take the 'politics and politicisation' out of Education.*

*Grants are becoming smaller whilst fees are continuing to become higher. More and more, there is an active political push to change our current system to a more American style whereby the poor are pushed out to allow the rich and fee-paying students from overseas to fill the University places.*

*In every University that I know of, there is an Indigenous Unit, a place where Indigenous students can be and feel safe, where they are mentored and assisted in their studies. Such Units also intervene in any situations of racist behaviour, whether from students or Staff, and generally look after the interests of the Indigenous students.*

*What concerns me is that with the push by this Federal Government against compulsory Student Unions, should they succeed in that, then the funding for the Indigenous Units would be next to be cut. The 'user-pays' principle is uppermost in their minds at all times.*

*The following Report shows what can be done when the heart and the commitment are present and positively used.*

### **UWA Wins National Award for Indigenous Studies**

*Media Statement**Tuesday, December 2, 2003*

THE University of Western Australia's innovative and practical approaches to Indigenous students have won it an Australian University Teaching Award announced today by the Federal Government.

The Federal Minister for Education acknowledged that UWA's School of Indigenous studies had empowered and enabled Indigenous students to fulfil their potential, and to develop knowledge and skills that are valued by employers, professional associations, labour markets and society.

UWA Acting Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alan Robson, congratulated the staff of UWA's School of Indigenous Studies and the School's Head, Jill Milroy, for the outstanding success.

"This national recognition reflects the excellent work done by the School, supported by staff across many other areas of the University, particularly in the Faculties of Law and Medicine.

"UWA's School of Indigenous Studies has developed an innovative, flexible, and responsive approach to the needs of Indigenous students which is a model for the rest of the nation," Professor Robson said.

The School was distinguished from many of its counterparts by its commitment to ensuring Indigenous students have access to highly competitive mainstream degree courses in professional areas such as law, medicine, engineering and social work; and by its extensive work with Indigenous secondary students, not just in relation to UWA courses, but in promoting courses at other Western Australian universities to help students make informed career choices.

A series of pathways had been developed into mainstream degree studies that helped Indigenous students tailor programs to meet their own

educational needs and aspirations by choosing or combining study options.

The School had also recognised the need for course specific support in particularly difficult and academically competitive areas by creating a full-time law tutor position, and working with the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry to establish the Centre for Aboriginal Medical and Dental Health.

The Australian Awards for University Teaching were established in 1997 to celebrate and raise the status of Australian university teaching.

***We Indigenous Peoples must have our own Educational Facilities. We already have our Aboriginal Pre-schools, we only have a varied input into Primary and High schools with what are known as 'homework centres.' In NSW we are indeed very lucky to have had committed people to introduce Aboriginal Education at the Tranby Cooperative for Aborigines Ltd which was founded in 1958. Under Aboriginal management, Tranby operates as an accredited TAFE. I am a sometime presenter at Tranby and am honoured to be so.***

***Another Aboriginal Facility is the Eora Centre which was set up by TAFE in 1984. The curriculum emphasises training in the visual and performing arts. By 1990 the Centre became an annexation of an inner Sydney TAFE.***

***Such Establishments occur Australia-wide. Gatjil Djerrkura has supported the proposal that the NT Bachelor Institute become Australia's first Aboriginal***

***University. And why not, say I.***

***Syd Stirling, NT Education Minister, scoffs at the proposal. He claims that the NT does not carry the population for it to happen. Sadly, Syd should look further afield than just the NT. There is population enough of Indigenous peoples across Australia to continue to fill the University places. I know from my short times at Tranby that the Aboriginal students came from every State and Territory, and even the Torres Strait Islands.***

***They came, as they come to every other Aboriginal Educational Facility, because they prefer to be taught in a Facility managed by their own people.***

### **Plans afoot for first Indigenous university**

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/s933666.htm>

THE management council of the Batchelor Institute in the Northern Territory says it is considering proposals to become Australia's first Indigenous university.

The council's chairman, Gatjil Djerrkura, says the idea is on the agenda of a council meeting in Alice Springs today.

"We will be working towards a timeframe and I have said publicly in my graduation speeches in the last two graduations of our commitment and now putting that commitment into action I think is the next phase," he said.

The Batchelor Institute will hold its graduation ceremony in Alice Springs today.

More than 100 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students will graduate from a range of fields including education, health,

environmental management, linguistics and broadcasting.

Mr Djerrkura says the newly qualified students have important roles to play in the community.

"It's a very important process in Indigenous self-management, self-determination, ownership, and empowerment of people," he said.

"I think that's important and it's people taking on responsibility for their own in the future and the families in the communities."

### **No room for two universities, Stirling says**

*Friday, August 29, 2003*

NORTHERN Territory Education Minister Syd Stirling says the territory does not have the population to sustain two universities.

The Batchelor Institute south of Darwin is considering a proposal to become Australia's first Indigenous university.

Mr Stirling says it is a noble idea but only one worth looking at in the future.

"It would be well placed to be Australia's first Indigenous university," he said.

"But just at this stage of the territory's development, I couldn't see the territory sustaining two separate universities," Mr Stirling said.

*As stated previously, literacy levels for all students, but for Aboriginal students especially, becomes an exercise in the horror being multiplied by each well meaning change or fad that is introduced. Both the WA and NT Education Systems claim to have found the answer to all their Education problems. Only time will tell.*

*The first article acclaims that the Australian*

*Principals Association will set targets for literacy levels for Aboriginal students. And High School completion rates as well.*

*Brendan Nelson is in support as is ATSIC South-West Commissioner in WA, Farley Garlett, but there is no other reported support. Especially from Aboriginal groups such as the AECG. Aboriginal Teachers appear, to me, to be added merely as an afterthought. Though initiated with all good thoughts, Governments, school Principals and others must realise that we need to manage our own schools, at all levels.*

*A further Federal Government initiative that received a stern reply involved the proposed 'Crossroads Education Package.' It was believed that should Crossroads be enacted then there would be fewer Indigenous Post-graduates. hardly an outcome to be desired, unless the 'user-pays' mindset lurks in the background.*

### **School heads to spur on Aboriginal literacy**

*The West Australian  
April 9, 2003*

*By Charlie Wilson-Clark*

SCHOOL principals will set targets under a plan to improve literacy levels and high school completion rates for Aboriginal students.

The Australian Principals Association professional development council today will announce plans to achieve at least a 10 per cent improvement in Year 5 literacy levels in three years time.

The council also hopes to improve Year 12 retention rates

among Aboriginal students by 10 per cent over the same period.

The council is made up of principals from government, Catholic and independent schools around Australia.

Chairman Tom Croker said 300 schools had already made the commitment, which will be formally launched by Federal Education Minister Brendan Nelson.

"The work of this project and the commitment to these outcomes present a bold challenge to our members," he said.

"Participation is voluntary but can there be any Australian school which can find a legitimate reason not to be part of this process?"

Aboriginal students reach the Year 5 national literacy benchmark at a rate 25 percentage points lower than that for non-Aboriginal students.

Retention rates for the non-compulsory Years 11 and 12 are 33 percentage points lower than for non-Aboriginal students.

Schools with no Aboriginal students will be asked to participate by pledging to teach more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture.

WA Education Minister Alan Carpenter said he welcomed any initiative which aimed to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students.

"I look forward to seeing further details of the Commonwealth's project funding," he said. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission South-West commissioner Farley Garlett said the plan should be commended.

"I'm very happy this is being driven by the principals because they are the people to make things happen," he said.

Mr Garlett said professional development and cultural awareness training for teachers,

who were often sent to regional and remote areas during the early part of their careers, could improve the performances of Aboriginal students.

WA Council of State School Organisations policy and research officer Karen Vincent said parents would strongly support the move.

The state of Aboriginal education had been clear since the publication of a Commonwealth report on the issue in 2001.

"We need to have well-trained indigenous teachers in these schools with a whole range of support programs," Ms Vincent said.

Principals also needed to look for ways to involve parents.

### **Claim education reforms will cut Indigenous participation rate**

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/s869209.htm>

AN Aboriginal tertiary group says Indigenous participation rates will drop if the Federal Government insists on pushing the 'Crossroads Education' package through the Senate without reforms.

The package is a result of a national review into higher education and includes an increase in Indigenous support funding and the establishment of an Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council.

The National Indigenous Postgraduate Association Aboriginal Corporation says the broader package contains interest on postgraduate loans, more up-front fees and a five-year limit on publicly subsidised education.

The corporation president, Peter Radoll, says those aspects undermine the equity measures aimed at Indigenous students.

"We'll get fewer Indigenous postgraduates because one of the incentives in the package is this thing called 'Indigenous staff scholarships', which

supposedly is some sort of attempt to raise the employment rate," Mr Radoll said.

"It goes without saying you need a bachelor's degree to get into a academic staff position and with these changes going through we're going to see a drop in participation."

*When I left school in 1956 I was an avid reader of books, atlases, dictionaries, whatever printed piece of information I could find; I read. I had a passion for knowledge and 'Truth' as I called it, that my mates thought bordered on insanity. I just loved reading, and still do.*

*Imagine my horror then, and that of most parents and grandparents, when our children and grandchildren either read with difficulty or not at all.*

*We were taught the Phonic method, they were taught (?) the Whole Language Theory. We need to return to the Phonic method. It is true that I personally have very little practical knowledge of the WLT, but with my three eldest Granddaughters, I see and hear the results and lack of reading skills.*

*I assume that the Teachers Federation and the Parents and Citizens Associations are also in favour of the WLT method, why I do not know. Maybe it does work for some kids but we need to find a method(s) that work for all kids.*

*We need as many Methods as it takes to keep our kids literate in the 3R's.*

*The two next articles clearly show why.*

### **Why young readers hit the wall**

*The Sydney Morning Herald  
By Miranda Devine  
December 4, 2003*

MARK Latham, the new federal Labor leader, presents himself as a working-class success story. From the mean streets of Green Valley, he climbed what he calls "the ladder of opportunity" by "working hard, studying hard", becoming dux of Hurlstone Agricultural High School and achieving honours in economics at Sydney University. He said this week he believes in "upward mobility" and nominated a "decent affordable education" as one of the crucial rungs on his ladder of opportunity.

But, for the current generation of disadvantaged children, there are signs that crucial rung is collapsing. Aboriginal elders from Walgett to Cape York are growing increasingly worried about falling literacy among their grandchildren. The story in the struggle-street suburbs of Sydney, where Latham grew up, is much the same.

And while authorities are aware of the problem and trying to fix it with loads of money, remedial reading programs are proving useless for a significant number of children, thanks in large part to an intellectual fad which has infected literacy training in Australia for the past 25 to 30 years: whole language theory.

Whole language "immerses" children in print, allowing them to figure out words for themselves "naturally" and informally, without having to bother with details of breaking words into their component parts and sounding them out, a method known as phonics.

The problem with whole language theory, as the literacy expert Kevin Wheldall, director of Macquarie University's Special Education Centre, said yesterday, is that it doesn't work for about 25 per cent of children. Instead of decoding

words they will build up what he calls a "visual lexicon" of words they can recognise on sight until at about age eight their memory capacity is overwhelmed and they "hit the wall".

Whole language has been thoroughly discredited in recent years as researchers discover more about how the brain processes language. But the theory stubbornly holds on, buried within what educators describe as a "balanced approach", in combination with phonics, but which Wheldall says all too often pays only lip service to phonics.

Six weeks ago, a report by the Victorian Auditor-General found literacy rates in that state had not improved despite an outlay of \$662 million on specialist reading programs between 1996 and 2003. "There has been little average improvement in the reading proficiency of all students at years 3, 5 and 7," the report said.

One of those expensive literacy programs is Reading Recovery, a whole-language-based early intervention program for six-year-olds struggling to read in year 1. In NSW last year 8000 children did Reading Recovery at a cost of \$25 million. It is expensive because it involves one-on-one instruction with a trained Reading Recovery teacher for 30 minutes a day for about 15 weeks. Which would be fine if it did what it promises to do. But, says Wheldall, it doesn't and the tragedy is that he told the then-Liberal state government so 10 years ago.

In 1993 Wheldall was commissioned by the NSW Department of Education to evaluate Reading Recovery, invented in New Zealand in 1985 by Dame Marie Clay. He tested Reading Recovery students at 10 NSW primary schools and compared them with a "control" group of at-risk students from the same class who received just the usual teaching. Another comparison group of low-

progress readers from five comparable schools was used. The conclusion: Reading Recovery was effective for only one in three students. "One recovered, one did not, and one would have recovered anyway without it."

But this was news the Education Department and the government of the day did not want to hear. The report was never released, and successive governments continued to pour money and resources into Reading Recovery.

"We kept ... trying to get them to release the report," Wheldall said yesterday. But Reading Recovery had become a sacred cow. It had seized the public imagination to such an extent that the NSW Government was judged on its commitment to education by the amount spent on Reading Recovery.

Wheldall published his results in the Reading Research Quarterly in 1995. Since then, Reading Recovery has received increasing criticism. In the US last year, where 150,000 students go through Reading Recovery annually, 32 researchers launched a campaign against the program, saying the results do not back up the hype.

A paper published in 2001 by Willam Tunmer and James Chapman of New Zealand's Massey University, recommended "fundamental changes" to the program. It criticised Reading Recovery's whole-language strategies and pointed out that "20 to 25 per cent of beginning readers will not discover spelling-to-sound patterns as a by-product of more general reading, suggesting that these children require more explicit instruction in alphabet coding and related skills".

Wheldall says Reading Recovery is like a religion, with teacher-trainers required to study in NZ for a year, and course content copyright-protected so attempts to modify it are forbidden. But he stresses he does not think Reading

Recovery should be dismantled, just updated to include systematic phonics instruction.

"Many aspects of Reading Recovery are wonderful, not least the publicity and political engine ... My view is not that Reading Recovery is bad; it's just that it is not good enough ... It has failed to adapt and change in the light of new knowledge," he says.

Wheldall, who runs Macquarie's remedial reading program Multilit (Making Up Lost Time in Literacy), says 25 per cent of children will learn to read no matter what you do to them. The middle 50 per cent will learn to read with some form of regular instruction. "It is the bottom 25 per cent I am very worried about ... They are biologically equipped with a poor phonological processing ability, probably coupled with environmental disadvantage."

If these most vulnerable children can't learn to read properly, they don't have a hope of making it to even the first rung of Latham's "ladder of opportunity", let alone the top.

### **A neglect you wouldn't read about**

*The Sydney Morning Herald*  
November 20, 2003  
[devinemiranda@hotmail.com](mailto:devinemiranda@hotmail.com)

SOMETHING'S amiss when kids are leaving school illiterate, writes Miranda Devine.

With the school year almost over, parents in Walgett are weeping with frustration as another crop of children emerge into the world unable to read or write. Jenny Trindall, president of the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, says her unemployed 18-year-old son can barely read, can't write a letter and signs his name in scribble.

"It puts you in mind of a little kid, in year one or two," she said yesterday on the phone. "He's a very smart kid but he never got taught the basics."

Now he can't find a job and he can't go to TAFE to learn a

job skill. "He'd be embarrassed because he can't read." Trindall estimates that 20 per cent of children who leave Walgett High, most Aboriginal, are illiterate.

She knows because she used to supervise at the local Aboriginal employment and training office and found the young boys couldn't even write their own name or even spell it. Some wrote initials which were almost illegible. "It's shocking, just shocking," she said. "We've been screaming for years but no one's listening."

In a letter to the Education Minister, Andrew Refshauge, in August, Trindall said: "We have elders within our community who will clearly tell you they are better educated than their children or grandchildren ..." She still hasn't received a reply.

The Government has been mucking around with Walgett High for some time, installing new Aboriginal staff, a new principal, restructuring, and now Refshauge has promised more changes. But the illiteracy problem would seem to start much before the children reach high school, when they are first taught, or not taught, to read at age five and six.

Walgett parents such as Trindall are puzzled their children appeared to be doing so well in primary school, receiving awards and praise and good reports. But without being able to read and write, no amount of false praise can rescue their self-esteem when they find they can't cope in the real world.

The most striking aspect of the Walgett puzzle is that the parents and grandparents of illiterate children are able to read and write fluently, suggesting a change in teaching methodology may be the answer. The biggest change in education in the past 20 years has been the fashion for the "whole-language" method of teaching reading, rather than the old phonics approach which involved sounding out the words.

A literacy expert, Professor Kevin Wheldall, director of Macquarie University Special Education Centre, said yesterday about 25 per cent of children will struggle to learn to read the whole language way, which involves "immersing" children in print and letting them figure out the words themselves.

For children from literary backgrounds whose brains are wired in such a way they will learn to read no matter how they are taught, whole language instruction is probably very stimulating. But the others will need systematic, intensive phonics instruction.

In NSW teachers use a so-called "balanced" approach combining both methods, but Wheldall warns "balance" can mean mere lip service to phonics.

An excellent article by Jane Cadzow in the Good Weekend last month revealed the still simmering battle between whole language and phonics advocates. In the face of overwhelming evidence about the pitfalls of the whole-language approach, it appears phonics is still unfashionable in Australia.

The article cited Bellfield Primary, in a disadvantaged area of Melbourne, where in 1996, new principal John Fleming introduced systematic, structured daily phonics instruction. At the time, "more than four-fifths of his pupils were reading at lower than the minimum acceptable standard for their age group". Today, "statewide literacy tests put Bellfield in the top 10 per cent of schools in Victoria".

Cadzow cited research that IQ has little bearing on early reading ability and that clever children can mask their reading problems by memorising words or guessing by context until about the age of eight when they "hit the wall". But "while the phonics team may have won the credibility contest ... whole-language devotees still have control of classrooms".

A paper in the Education Australia Online journal by four academics led by Scott Poynting, from the faculty of education at the University of Western Sydney, offers some explanation: "What passes for new literacy education programs are more often than not 'quick-fix', 'feel-good' methods such as whole language, brain theory, and accelerative learning techniques which, despite government opposition, are still being promoted to schools as an educational panacea. [They] are more concerned with changing the way in which students 'feel' about their writing."

The paper says that Bob Carr's Government has instructed teachers to focus on basic literacy. But "many educators, unfortunately, see this government directive as simply another front in the continuing battle of ideological positions and actively seek to subvert the Government's agenda ... which leaves their students as the victims".

Whole language also has influential boosters, including Paul Jennings, a former teacher and bestselling Australian children's author. In his new book, *The Reading Bug*, he tells parents phonics should be the "last strategy to be employed, not the first".

Instead of sounding out, Jennings writes that children should guess at words they can't read. In one chapter he says the child who reads the sentence, "I use soap to wash my face" as "I use soap to clean my face", is reading better than the child who reads, "I use soap to watch my face."

"It is unpleasant to be corrected," he says, while admitting he taught his daughter to read using phonics. "She started school aged five with a reading age of eight." No such luxury in Walgett, where parents are said to be considering a class action against the Department of Education.

Trindall says she doesn't blame individual teachers but the "system". "When you look at our kids not reading or writing something must be going on in there," she says.

School authorities have pointed to poor attendance as one cause of poor literacy, but that wasn't the problem with her son. "He never missed a day of school, except when he was sick. He really wanted to learn."

*I was unaware of how large the problem of schools evicting youth, mainly Aborigines, (that begins in kindergarten!), was until I read the second article below. We are informed that the number of school expulsions of Aborigines, in NSW, rose to 6934 in 2001. We can only imagine what it is now.*

*Some years ago now, a Family came to ISJA seeking support for their son to not be evicted from a Sydney western suburb high-school. The Principal was adamant that the troubled youth was to be expelled and that is all there was to it. The teenager was equally adamant that he was the butt of racist remarks and actions by both teachers and students. He further claimed that he wished to continue his education. Regardless of what either the Student or the Principal quoted as defences for their particular line, neither Combatant changed their view. I argued that expelling the youth would only send another bitter youth on to the street where it would be fairly obvious what would occur.*

*Over three meetings we came to a solution that*

*whilst perhaps not perfect, (they rarely ever are) did at least allow the youth to continue his education. Whilst the student was unable to return to the school, (the teachers would not allow it) he was able to continue his lessons at home, until, with the support of the Principal, he was able to attend TAFE to continue his studies.*

*I admit that I do not know the outcome of this little social experiment but it did make me very much aware of the expulsion problem and the seemingly eagerness of Teachers and Principals, but only some, to expel the 'problem.' Some schools, correctly in my view, do not expel as a matter of first resort. Some schools set up a special Time-Out classroom and at least make further attempts to sort the joint problems. These kids can be bloody brutal but I firmly believe that throwing them to the Culture of the Streets will only compound the Social Problems and end up costing a great deal more. Such difficult students, both Aborigine and non-Aborigine, are much too prevalent in the school system. And no, I am not advocating the return of the cane; I copped enough of that in my time and, quite frankly, it made no difference to my actions.*

*Too often, the Streets are where they want to be. And it seems, so do we.*

*There needs to be a Summit involving the NSW government, the Teaching Unions, the*

*P&C's, Aboriginal Organisations such as the AECG, homework classes and, of course, we must include the end users, the Students, both those expelled and those not. Those places, such as Tranby, NAISDA and others also need to explain why Education by Aborigines just happens to work. And included must be Aboriginal Community Groups such as ISJA.*

*Bob and Andrew, if we can have Alcohol, Drug and other Social Issue problem Summits, then we must look to saving our troubled youth in a troubled Education System.*

*The third article merely highlights the hysteria that some 'school authorities' sink to when they cannot understand what is going on. This Christian Boarding School sent 'recruiters' into the NT to find students. At \$9000 a student, it's not a bad business. They took some 70 14 to 18 year old Desert Country kids and took no account of their Culture and outlook in taking them out of their Place and putting them so far away.*

*But again, expelling them seems to be too easy an answer.*

*Laying costs at the parents, to me, smacks too much of the 'blame the victim' syndrome. Why should the parents pay for the abject failure of the Christian college to understand the problem that the college caused.*

## Indigenous parents seek school suspension alternatives

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/s928853.htm>

ABORIGINAL parents in the southern NSW Riverina city of Griffith are calling for a different approach on school suspensions, saying they may cause more harm than good.

About 10 parents concerned about what they say is a high suspension rate held a protest rally on Wednesday, before meeting the Griffith district superintendent of schools.

Spokeswoman Maureen Young says her son has anger management and grief problems and he is out for four weeks on his second suspension this year.

She is concerned the enforced idleness could create a new host of social and criminal problems.

"If you're suspending young children, very young children, and my child is eight, he's not doing that now, but if this continues I am worried that that could happen...I don't want that to happen to my child, nor do I want that to happen to any other child, be it Aboriginal or non-Indigenous," she said.

Griffith district superintendent of Schools Mark Everett says suspension is the final step where the behaviour is violent or threatening to the welfare of other students or teachers.

He says communications lines with parents must be kept open, but he has defended the Griffith Public School's actions in the case of Ms Young's son.

"The school cannot be and should not be seen as the saviour for all of these young people in terms of meeting their particular needs," he said.

"We work very, very hard at it and I compliment Griffith Public School on the work they do, the commitment of the staff and the absolute concern for every young person that is enrolled there."

Mr Everett says more than 100 of the 110 Aboriginal students at Griffith Public are not having problems.

## State fails Aboriginal students

<http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/02/16/1045330466808.html>

By Linda Doherty, Education Writer  
February 17 2003

THE State Government scrapped a politically sensitive review of Aboriginal education because it knew, before any evaluation, that its seven-year-old policy had failed indigenous students.

The Minister for Education, John Watkins, confirmed yesterday that he stopped a \$100,000 independent review of the Aboriginal education policy because statewide test results and high suspension rates had already revealed "we weren't delivering to Aboriginal kids".

"I'm unhappy with the high suspension rates, low school completion rates," he said. "I'm disturbed that Aboriginal results in basic skills tests are considerably below other groups."

But the president of the NSW Teachers Federation, Maree O'Halloran, believed the review was cancelled "because of the damaging results that would have come out before the [state] election".

The education policy, which was introduced in 1996 and meant to improve Aboriginal students' literacy and numeracy and promote the teaching of indigenous history and culture, was to be reviewed in 2001.

Newcastle University was to conduct the review and report by the end of last year on how schools were implementing the mandatory policy.

Preparatory work, including interviews with 40 Aboriginal teachers, started early last year before Mr Watkins refused to approve the funding.

Last year's independent inquiry into public education said there were concerns the

Aboriginal education policy "is yet to be implemented in more than a tokenistic way in many schools".

Among a myriad of "performance strategies", the policy requires schools to promote Aboriginal languages but a syllabus for the language course is still being developed seven years after it was promised.

Mr Watkins said he had asked his department to map the effectiveness of specific state and federal government Aboriginal education programs costing \$38 million this financial year. This process could result in "a new policy that directly addresses Aboriginal need in education".

Despite the existing policy calling for "appropriate support" for suspended Aboriginal children, the number of suspensions of Aborigines from kindergarten to year 12 rose from 5115 in 1999 to 6934 in 2001.

The 31,000 Aborigines in public schools account for 4 per cent of the government school population. But 40 per cent of the 104 suspensions of girls in kindergarten to year 2 in 2001 were Aborigines, as were almost a quarter of boys suspended for up to four days in the same age group.

The president of the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, Charles Davison, said Aboriginal children were sometimes suspended for "minor reasons bordering on the ridiculous" such as for bad language or back-chatting teachers.

The president of the NSW Primary Principals Association, Geoff Scott, said it was a major concern that the "percentages of Aboriginal suspensions are out of all proportion". He said new solutions had to be found but schools could not ignore bad behaviour or inappropriate language from any student.

Literacy and numeracy levels for students in years 3, 5 and 7 last year showed Aboriginal

students were at least five points behind other students. Only 37 per cent of Aboriginal students stay at school until year 12; the average rate is 71 per cent.

### **Ghosts cause expulsions**

*The Northern Territory News*  
By RAJIV MAHARAJ  
09Apr03

TERRITORY students who believed evil spirits wanted to kill them have been expelled from a Christian boarding school.

A letter obtained by the Northern Territory News accuses the children - most of them girls - of violent and hysterical behaviour.

More than 60 students from Tennant Creek rioted in their dormitories at the Uniting Church-run Shalom Christian College in Townsville.

The students, aged between 14 and 18, believed "house spirits" were taunting them.

School authorities investigated the superstitious claims, but were told the evil spirits were invisible to "white fellas".

Two riots subsequently took place. College principal Chris Shirley reacted by introducing a campaign of expulsions, saying girls from Tennant Creek were to blame.

"The hysterical, violent and out-of-control behaviour of mainly female students from Tennant Creek has forced the college to isolate and expel the main troublemakers," Mr Shirley wrote in a letter to parents.

The students were woken at 7 am and boarded on to a bus for the 1500 km trip back to Tennant Creek, 511 km north of Alice Springs.

Many of the students do not speak English well. More expulsions are expected this week.

"It (the college) is not a half-way house prior to a juvenile

detention centre," Mr Shirley wrote.

"During the next four weeks more students will be expelled and sent back to their communities.

"These students will be sent back with no prior warning to the students."

The principal said students could "wreak havoc" if they were told in advance of their expulsion.

College board of directors chairman Shane Blackman said only four students had been expelled, with a further 18 leaving on their own choice for "sorry business" at Tennant Creek.

"They may want to come back, so they haven't been expelled at all," Mr Blackman said.

The students from Tennant Creek were recruited to the college by agent Bob Fletcher.

Shalom College took between 60 and 70 Territory students, for which it received \$9000 per student per year in Abstudy payments.

The college said it would bill parents for the cost of the bus fare back to Tennant Creek.

*We began this Newsletter with a view of Higher Education issues revolving around the concerns that Howard and his Conservative Camp-followers had with the History of this great Country, but more importantly, how that History is presented to all Australians and our Overseas visitors. People attend Art Galleries, National and Local Museums, National Libraries, among others, to educate themselves on the History of Australia and the many and varied Citizens of this Country. A History that ABSOLUTELY MUST*

*include our Joint History, wars and all.*

*I believe the National Museum of Australia was built to do just that. Ms. Dawn Casey was to become the first Director of that Museum. The fact that Ms. Casey was an Aborigine was merely a happy circumstance. It has never been argued that Professionally she was not up to the job. Except from those Conservatives who believe that there is too much Joint History and not enough of the British-based History. 215 years as opposed to some 120 000 years, but it was the Invasion History specifically that they objected to. The White Blindfold View versus the Black Armband View.*

*Barnett and Pearson were specifically put on the Museum Board to undermine and change the structure of the Museum as set up by Ms. Casey. Their total ignorance of Aboriginal Culture and Events since 1788 is well detailed. Also well detailed is the Education of Ms. Casey and the struggle she had to reach the position she has reached today.*

*Ignorance and Intolerance, ably supported by the Howard Government and the ultra-Right Think Tanks favoured by Howard, such as the ill-named Bennelong Society, have won. Ms. Casey has been 'sacked' or whatever other name they wish to use. Barnett has come up with some esoteric conspiracies and false arguments that the Museum has been built,*

*stocked and managed as a Holocaust Museum offering to the Indigenous Peoples of this Country. What rubbish. The two quick visits I was able to make certainly fell far short of any such plan.*

*If Howard, Barnett, Pearson and others of their ilk are going to set the Education Agenda, at every level, for this Country, then Culturally and Socially we are being badly served. All of us.*

### **Casualty of the history wars**

*The Sydney Morning Herald  
December 6 2003*

ONE of Australia's top Aboriginal bureaucrats, Dawn Casey took on Howard's men - and paid the price. Now the outgoing director of the National Museum of Australia talks frankly about her struggle. Christopher Kremmer reports.

It was a typically confronting day on the board of the National Museum of Australia. The debate had turned to the return of indigenous human remains to Aboriginal communities - a process pioneered by museum boss Dawn Casey - when a member of the governing council interjected. Human remains, Aboriginal or otherwise, were vital to a good museum, said David Barnett, a conservative member of the council. They must be displayed so people could study the history of human evolution.

Casey, the daughter of a poor Aboriginal family from far north Queensland, said nothing. She did not expect Barnett to sympathise with Aboriginal cultural practices concerning the living or the dead. He was already on record as describing the Stolen Generation as a "victim episode".

"He told me once that it had been necessary to separate the children, because from Port Augusta to Broome, their parents were killing and starving them," Casey recalls

with a deep sigh, her extended family having suffered from the forced separation of children from parents.

As she prepares to leave her post, Casey is reflecting on her own long journey, from school drop-out to accomplished public servant, and on what she sees as a growing threat to the integrity of Australia's great cultural institutions.

When Casey looked around the boardroom table, she saw a phalanx of the Prime Minister's men staring back. "If you appoint a chairman who's a current member of the executive of a political party, and a councillor who's the prime minister's biographer, and another councillor who has written speeches for the prime minister, then of course, you will get the strong perception of political interference," she says.

In interviews with the Herald over the past six weeks, she has spoken frankly for the first time about the museum's debilitating internal struggles over claims that it has misrepresented Australian history. She blames two board members - Barnett, who co-wrote a biography of John Howard, and the conservative columnist and former Howard speechwriter, Christopher Pearson - for creating a "destructive" atmosphere on the board. "There were articles in the press, extremely critical internal memos ... I even had a phone call from Christopher demanding that we change a certain display in the museum. It went on and on and on."

Pearson and Barnett are unlikely bedfellows, the former a bumptious Adelaide literary figure, the latter a dour veteran of the Canberra press gallery who runs a farm near the town of Yass. But they share a fascination for politics and proximity to power. They are courtiers in Howard's raj.

Casey is a battler. Her father was a stockman and the family lived on cattle stations in far north Queensland but drifted into Cairns in the 1950s, where

they lived in a shack on the outskirts of town. Her mother cleaned houses and her father worked as a garbo.

She left school at 14, was married and pregnant by 16, and worked as a cleaner to put herself through business college. A job with the Department of Education unleashed the achiever in her. She rose rapidly to senior posts in AusAid and the arts bureaucracy, and developed equal opportunity and reconciliation policies, winning three Public Service Medals along the way. She was honoured with the 2003 Centenary medal for service to Aboriginal society, and last month inducted into the prestigious Australian Academy of the Humanities.

But this week, Casey was negotiating a severance package after being told there was no longer a permanent position for her in the public service. She leaves the museum on December 14. At home in the Canberra suburb of Wanniasa she fusses over an eclectic garden and the bookshelves are stocked with Don Burke, Jamie Oliver and other how-to books. In social encounters she speaks the typical Aussie patois lots of gunnas and youses - and words often fail her.

But at the boardroom table issues are core, positions are advertised and projects are completed. She co-ordinates, lobbies, builds teams and is "rigorous in terms of savings" and "very consultative".

"There's nothing trumped up about her. She plays by the rules. She doesn't use her race as a crutch," says Kathryn Greiner, a senior member of the NSW Liberal Party and one of the museum's roving ambassadors.

The National Museum is, literally, the house that Dawn built. In 1997 she joined the \$152 million project as construction manager. As director from 1999 onwards, she drove architects, builders and staff harder than her dad

ever drove cattle, completing the ultra-modern building on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin on time and on budget. "She did an amazing job," says Tony Staley, a former federal president of the Liberal Party, and chairman of the museum council since 1999.

As a public servant of 27 years standing, the NMA director is not, say those who know her, one to go looking for a fight, unless it's for self-betterment. But reluctantly, she found herself drawn into the so-called history wars. In October 2000, five months before the museum opened, Barnett fired his opening salvo in a memo to Staley. He warned that political correctness infected the labels that explained museum exhibits. "The 'labels' ... are quite alarming," Barnett wrote. "We are heading towards public, parliamentary and media criticism."

Staley, the veteran Victorian Liberal, handled the crisis adroitly, calling on an independent historian, Graeme Davison to review the labels. Some were changed, but Davison rejected claims of systematic bias. "David gives the impression - which I am sure he does not really hold - that the museum should follow the historical views of the government of the day," Davison reported to Staley. Later he would change his mind.

To assure the board that exhibits would be mounted in line with best practice, he formulated a statement of aims to guide curatorial staff. But the complaints continued. Davison would later write ruefully of the museum's critics that "I have now reluctantly concluded that their concerns are not primarily scholarly at all, but political."

Barnett took the director to task over a display concerning the 1967 national referendum, at which Australians voted to give Aborigines the vote. It showed Labor leader Gough Whitlam campaigning for the "yes" vote. Barnett told the director the referendum had

been brought on by a Coalition government. The complaint sparked a wild goose chase for photos of Liberal ministers campaigning for the "yes" vote. Casey says staff couldn't find any because while the Liberals had introduced the referendum, they ran dead on the issue. Despite that, the exhibit was later removed.

Barnett won't comment. He told the Herald he had never commented publicly about the museum's business, and would not break with past practice.

One day in mid-2001, Casey received a telephone call from Pearson. "I have had a senior person contact me about the museum's display of the diary of an Italian internee who was a supporter of Mussolini. You should change it." Pearson has declined to comment, but the Herald has been told he was concerned the exhibit might damage the museum's reputation in the Italian community. Casey, however, was wearying of his advice on a range of issues.

"Some council members ... thought they were there to reshape the total content of the museum," says Professor Kay Saunders, a University of Queensland historian who advised the museum and attended occasional board meetings. "The first rule of being on a board is that you don't interfere in the day-to-day operations of the organisation. That's why you have a CEO. And if you're too unhappy, you resign."

At times, the issues occupying the board - and even the Federal Arts Minister, Rod Kemp - seem to have been rather petty. Museum sources have told the Herald that Kemp and Staley were furious over a book launch at the museum, at which historian Stuart Macintyre, co-author of *The Oxford Companion to Australian History*, criticised the Government.

But Pearson was being critical too. His columns in national newspapers attacked

alleged left-wing distortions of history, fuelling the "history wars". While he did not attack the museum directly, his journalism was sometimes sympathetic to those who did, including the conservative historian Keith Windschuttle, who had claimed that accounts of massacres of Aborigines by early settlers have been fabricated.

In August or September 2001, as Casey recalls it, Pearson walked into the boardroom and dropped a draft of a Windschuttle article entitled "How Not to Run a Museum" scheduled for publication in the conservative quarterly *Quadrant*. Lambasting the NMA, it claimed the museum mocked the white settlement of Australia as a series of disasters. "We're in trouble," Pearson told his fellow councillors. "We should respond to this." Soon Windschuttle was invited to discuss his theories at a forum held at the very museum he had described as a "profound intellectual mistake".

The Windschuttle incident strengthened Casey's concerns about what she saw as conservative dominance over the museum's agenda. Her concern was shared by several board members who spoke to the Herald.

Pearson's power, however, could not be ignored, if only because of his phone calls to and from cabinet ministers and ministerial advisers. When the board was debating whether the museum should charge for admission, one member noted that the then arts minister, Peter McGauran, wanted entry fees to be charged. Pearson contacted the Prime Minister's Office, and the proposal to charge admission never saw the light of day.

On that occasion, Casey was pleased. It could have been a winning combination - a board with friends in high places and a museum that was winning public and critical acclaim. Two million people have visited the NMA in less than three years,

far beyond expectations, and corporate sponsorship and profits from the museum shop have grown steadily.

Six months out from the end of her contract, Casey was still fully expecting to be given a typical three- to four-year extension. Kemp had given her top marks at her annual performance review in May last year. But the museum's governing council was increasingly divided. As Pearson and Barnett's persistent questioning of exhibits and management continued, board members began to rally around their embattled director.

In August 2002 an article in Melbourne's Herald Sun, headlined "Museum in a Capital Crisis", quoted a board member as highly critical of a "culture of defeatism" in the museum when it came to fundraising. "I just knew then that it was the start of a campaign to say 'She shouldn't be reappointed. She's not capable enough, and here is her weak area,'" Casey says. She doesn't know who gave the media the material, but the boardroom leaks were like the Victoria Falls.

By early November last year, although retaining the support of a majority of board members, she suspected her days were numbered. Sensing the same thing, several board members contacted Kemp, urging him to retain the director. He did, but only for a year. The conservatives had won. "I said, 'Well, I'm astonished ... On what basis is it only for one year?' ... And he said, 'Well there's a review that's going to happen ... and we'd need to look at the outcome of the review.'" Casey turned to her chairman: "I was very cross and upset [but] he [Staley] said, 'We've got to wait for the review, and it may be that we might need an academic ... to be the director of the museum'."

Suddenly, Casey was back to square one. She had pulled herself up from the lowest rung of Australian society to an almost legendary status within the public service. And it still

wasn't enough for them. "I said, 'Well Tony, it's interesting that you should say that. Do you know my history? My father was one of those children that was taken away. He was a half-caste child. They were never allowed to go to school to learn to read and write. My mother's mother was taken away to Palm Island, and my mother was never allowed to learn to read or write. But they thought it was really important that we went to school. When I went to school and tried to do subjects ... I was told that I couldn't. I could only do domestic science. Aboriginal kids couldn't do it. Aboriginal kids never went to university or even grade 12.'"

Staley refused to comment to the Herald on why Casey had to go. "She's shown very good leadership indeed, and she goes with our great goodwill," he said. Kemp was equally opaque.

Pearson said: "Dawn did a good job under terrible deadline pressures to get the museum up and running, and my relations with her have almost invariably been cordial. I'm afraid that she hasn't handled her one-year extension of office as well, and that grief, denial and the urgings on of her boosters have led her to get some specific events and some general issues topsy-turvy."

For historian Kay Saunders, the saga has important lessons for Australia's public institutions. "You need workshops for council members to be told what your role is and where you draw the line," she says.

In recent changes to the National Museum's board the Howard Government has dumped most of those who supported Casey, while her main opponents had earlier been given second terms. Pearson was not only reappointed but appointed to the board of SBS as well.

Casey is preparing for a new, and hopefully less excoriating, future. Despite it all, the futuristic edifice on Acton Peninsula will be a source of

enduring pride to at least one Australian. "When you walk into those galleries, and see thousands of schoolchildren, and ... elderly people and young people, well, I don't regret it," she says, then laughs with just a hint of relief that her ordeal is almost over. "Imagine what we could have achieved if everyone had been really supportive."

*Yes, just imagine if all Australians worked for the benefit of all Australians – regardless of race, ethnicity or birthplace. If we all really acted as Australians – a 'fair go for all'.*

*The title of this newsletter set a question that I feel has not been fully answered.*

*There remains still a push against the Aboriginalisation of school curricula. During the early nineties there was a push to make Aboriginal studies compulsory in all schools Australia-wide. This was too much of a shock to a powerful few who better favour the Construct red Silences and White Blindfold Views.*

*The compulsory became voluntary and I believe less than five percent of Australian schools accepted the studies as a normal part of their curriculum.*

*The complete, self evident argument that our one true chance of a proper and practical reconciliation relies on our children. And that must start in the schools at the kindergarten level and on up to our universities and colleges.*

*Howard's way is as practical as his seven*

*point plan. A bloody  
racist disgrace.*

*May there be peace and  
goodwill to all, regardless  
of you religious beliefs or  
otherwise.*

*The January 2004  
newsletter will be  
dedicated to another of  
Howard's constructs.  
Employment, better  
known as unemployment.*

*FOR KOORI JUSTICE.*

To contact the Association

Indigenous Social Justice  
Association Inc.  
PO Box K555  
Haymarket NSW 1240  
Phone: 02 9318 0947  
0418 436 572  
02 8399 2632