People Places and Pathways in NSW Aboriginal Education

The Impact of Aboriginal Community on Education Provision in NSW

by

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Diploma of Teaching and Master of Education

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in the fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Statement of Originality

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Signed: Laurel A. Williams

Date: September, 2013
Abstract: People Places and Pathways in NSW Aboriginal Education

The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact that Aboriginal people have had on education provision in NSW. I believe that it will be valuable to seek the opinions and thoughts of Aboriginal people through a recognised Aboriginal organisation, the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG). Although many members of this organisation operate in multiple professional roles, Aboriginality is not an external overcoat that can be taken off or put on at will. Responses to survey questions will be given from a cultural base inclusive of personal histories and professional experiences. A benefit to individual participants is the opportunity to express their perspectives and make comment based on their experience in Aboriginal Education. There is potential benefit to learners, through reporting data gleaned from surveys and interviews, to influence positive change to policy guidelines which deal with the delivery of Aboriginal education. The 2004 NSW Aboriginal Education Review has shown that average measures of performance between Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students have identified a “gap” which does not appear to be closing. An Australian education review undertaken by the Australian Council of Educational Research focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education outcomes and found that “serious gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes remain ...” Corrigan & Mellor: 2004.1

This investigation will serve two purposes. First, to explore whether Aboriginal community participation has affected change on Educational Policy and Practices through Aboriginal community engagement with education providers and, second, if Aboriginal AECG members feel they have developed a skills base which can be utilised in the education environment. While there are non-Aboriginal members of the NSW AECG, this investigation will focus on the Aboriginal members of the organisation.

Nineteen NSW AECG Regions have been canvassed to complete surveys through their particular Management Committee structure. Consideration is given to geographic location and accessibility to education institutions when analysing qualitative responses.

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1 Corrigan & Mellor, 2004: 2
A comparative analysis of Regional survey questionnaire completions will be analysed in four categories;

Metropolitan: Metropolitan South West, Metropolitan West, Metropolitan North, Metropolitan East.

Country: Lower South Coast, Upper South Coast, Central Coast, Hunter, Manning, Lower North Coast, Upper North Coast.

Rural: Riverina 1, Western 1, North West 2, North West 1.

Isolated: Riverina 2, Riverina 3, Western 3, Western 2.

The purpose of this strategy is to compare reflective attitudes between members of the four geographic areas in terms of Aboriginal Education priorities, self-assessment of members’ skills base and identified positive outcomes.

A brief description of two Regions (Hunter and Metropolitan South West) will provide some examples of Aboriginal community participation in activities which have resulted in positive modelling for other Regions. Recorded interviews from NSW AECG Life Members will highlight changes to the NSW AECG and the influence that individuals have had on the provision of Education in NSW and in particular Aboriginal Education.

Storytelling has been recognised as a valuable tool of communication for thousands of years by many cultures throughout the world. Oral histories have been incorporated throughout this dissertation as reflective text. In Chapters Two, Four, Five and Six, individual anecdotes report personal memories and experiences of Aboriginal people involved in Aboriginal Affairs. Access to social services for Aboriginal people will be discussed by making reference to some of the political activity undertaken in the past and how vital health, housing, employment and education services are interlocked. Aboriginal social disadvantage has been publicised in the media leading up to the current debate in Federal Parliament (Feb. 2013), whether Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be recognised as Australia’s first people in the Australian Constitution. A Bill was supported by all political parties to design a Referendum in order to gain the support of
the Australian voting population. It is intended to hold the Referendum by the end of 2015 regardless of which party is in Government.

Cultural Acknowledgement

Land, Sea and Air are arms of nature that cradle people’s identity and sense of place. Respect for nature’s arms must be embedded in the spiritual memories of thought and mind and be illustrated by the physical behaviours of self. I would like to acknowledge Aboriginal people from all cultural traditions who have paved the way for others to open doors into the realm of learning. Many have pushed against mainstream social boundaries to lay a strong foundation for Aboriginal people to walk along the path of opportunity and experience new ways of thinking while maintaining strong cultural memories.

Relationships between Aboriginal Education service providers are vital. We have witnessed Aboriginal Cultural interpretation through dance performance and narrative expression, within educational institutions and throughout communities on particular occasions. We need to reflect on the diverse stimulus that is presented to us as we operate within our professions and communities.

Care must be taken that we embrace cultural expressions that are relevant to our own personal experiences. It is impossible to borrow culture from someone else’s experiences and be personally passionate about identity. As educators, each person can influence identification of Aboriginality in various ways. The major goal must be a positive outcome for future Aboriginal leaders in Australian society.

Paying respect for cultural beginnings can only be measured by the individual’s personal construction of kinship and country. I would like to pay my respects to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who maintain a vision for a positive future for the youth of tomorrow.
Researcher Profile

I have worked in Aboriginal Education service provision for more than thirty seven (37) years. During this time I have held positions in the Primary, TAFE, Higher Education, Commonwealth Education and Community Aboriginal education provider sectors. Throughout my career, I have acknowledged the need for education to influence my personal growth and to open doors of opportunity and choice in the employment market. To increase skill mobility I have completed studies in Education at; the University of Western Sydney through the Aboriginal Rural Education Program (AREP) Bachelor of Education, Primary Teaching and the University of Wollongong, Master of Education. I am currently enrolled in a PhD at Newcastle University. This study will investigate the ‘Impact of Aboriginal Community on Education Provision in NSW’.

I am an active Life Member of the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) and have had continual active participation in this organisation for thirty seven years (1976-2013). Those years have been spent firstly in Metropolitan South West Sydney via Mil-pra AECG and currently the Hunter AECG Regions. I maintain a practicing philosophy that education is an observational experience that grows from “Looking, Listening and Learning”. This means that learning can take place during everyday activities if you are open to absorbing new information.

‘Looking’ is one of the vital components of Aboriginal teaching methods in terms of a holistic approach to education.

‘Listening’ with ears and eyes are skills that Aboriginal people have developed as a technique to gain knowledge.

‘Learning’ is a term that can define a concept related to repeated behaviours. Humans learn in many ways. Learning gives empowerment to Aboriginal people.

As Aboriginal people we need to consider the “power” base in Australian society. If education is based on the deficit model and learning is a result of the education process, then the real power is when we understand and use the understanding for our benefit and growth. Knowledge is of no benefit unless it is useful to the person as a learning tool. In
any communicative process, information is worthless if the receiver has no understanding of the information. I believe that the real power of education is the process of understanding.

It is this level of experience in Aboriginal Education that supports the validity of being able to measure and analyse the viewpoints of the NSW AECG membership through recorded survey responses. My daughter gave me a poem at a retirement function in 1994 organised by the Mil-pra AECG, which expresses her observations of me.

*My Mother*

*My Mother has a beautiful soul*  
*Her aura is red black and gold*  
*My Mother loved and reared her kids*  
*She worked and did what she did*  
*From a seamstress to typist, Mother was on her way*  
*Reading and learning, more knowledge she gained*  
*To become a school teacher, that's what she did*  
*Creative and rhythmic, that's pretty good for a Forster Gin*  
*Meetings lectures seminars too*  
*There wasn't a thing Mum couldn't do*  
*Policies and changes that had to be made*  
*Mum paved the way for the kids of yesterday*  
*30 Years of educational work*  
*There comes a time to stop, feel and smell the dirt*  
*The young Koori girl who left home by the sea*  
*Has come full circle and did what was meant to be*

*By Kylie Roberts- 1994*

I dedicate this project to members of my family and extended family in the hope that education will be a positive learning experience in their lives. I offer gratitude to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who wish to participate in working toward equity of outcomes for Aboriginal people.
Personal Metaphor

As an Aboriginal person who was raised by my maternal grandparents on the mid North Coast of NSW, I spent many years observing my homeland environment through a coastal landscape. My country is surrounded by beaches, lakes, rivers and salt spray from the sea. The love of country is ever present in my life. Aboriginal researchers are increasingly using an “Insider” approach when investigating topics specific to their own ethnicity and cultural origins.

My concept of Aboriginal Affairs and the behaviour of the ocean can be parallel in behaviour patterns. To observe the tidal motion of the ocean and the surrounding environment is nature’s interpretation of the operational activities carried out when involved in Aboriginal Affairs. Low tide on a fine day exposes shells and pebbles that gently move across the sandy bed of the ocean. There is an admixture of complete and broken pieces of shell that gather in a furrow created by the constant movement of the water. Further up the beach large shells are sitting on the dry sand, awaiting high tide to return them to the comfort of the caressing sea. Driftwood and seaweed is also found on the high water mark often covering remnants of flotsam which could have been discarded by fishermen.

Think of the pebbles and shells as Aboriginal people who participate in Aboriginal service provision across the Aboriginal Affairs portfolio. These people could be employed in the public service, in the private sector, in community organisations or participating on a voluntary basis. The shells which are thrown up onto the beach by the high tide are Aboriginal leaders who are prepared to take a stand against the status quo to make change through policy advice or Aboriginal community protests. These people may have been outstanding in their specific areas of expertise for many years and are held in esteem by the management of the organisation. Their career prospects are promising and they reach the middle management levels in a short period of time and are paid accordingly. On the surface their professional position appears to be stable, not unlike the sets of waves that roll in from the ocean, until a younger, more educated person with a broader set of skills applies for a position within the organisation. Similar to the rogue wave that intermittently presents in the ocean, undercurrents occur that rip into and upset
the operational vision of the team. Some team members are so affected by the disruption they are crushed by the instability and often need to take stress leave. You will find these people among the broken pieces of shell harboured in the seabed furrows created by the continuous crashing of waves, because of the injection of new ideas being accepted by management in preference to many years of loyal experience. Those people who have been unseated will move on to other positions within the organisation or change portfolios in Aboriginal Affairs. You will find examples on the beach in the form of pebbles which roll from one position to another pushed by the ever changing tide. Non-Aboriginal people who have been employed in the Aboriginal service industry are the pieces of driftwood or flotsam left to dry in the sun and soon forgotten by the organisation only to be replaced by their Aboriginal counterparts.

Every five or six years you will observe a new wave of Aboriginal leaders moving onto the beach to do things in a different way. If you consider the time it takes to graduate from a University with a degree, then change can be tracked to align with acquired knowledge. Experience is then tossed aside to join the flotsam above the high tide mark. Political change will also herald operational change within organisations dependant on the attitudes of the power holders.

Chicka Dixon, a well-known identity involved in the Aboriginal political movement in Australia talked about the repetitive topics discussed at The Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (1958–1978 FCAATSI) conferences. He named each topic as being Health, Housing, Employment and Education or double H double E. You will find these particular patches of beach intertwined with each other along the shoreline of the Aboriginal Affairs coastline.
Acknowledgement

I would like to take this opportunity to thank those members of the Regional Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups who completed the Survey questionnaires which made this project possible. Thank you to those Life Members who shared their experiences in Aboriginal Education as a reflection of many years of collective participation in NSW Education provision. Can I congratulate those members who volunteer their time and energy when accepting positions on Management Committees within AECG Regions.

Without the encouragement of people who showed interest in Aboriginal Education I would not have completed this project. I would like to say thank you to Craig Aspinall for his encouragement and editing, Cheree Dean for her enthusiastic commentary and editing suggestions, Margaret Simoes for her friendship, input into the content of this dissertation and resource loans, Lyn Stewart for providing resources in Early Childhood education, Ann Flood for her support and resource loans, Nerida Blair for her professional advice, encouragement and responding to phone calls and Cody Austin for sharing his expertise with computers. Special thanks to Vicki Bethel who gave her time freely to transcribe life member interview recordings and editing. Without continual consultation with Rachel Small and Ken Weatherall as the Hunter Region AECG monitoring committee for the life of this study, I may not have completed this thesis. Thanks go to Bob Jones who showed patience in editing several early drafts of chapters included in the final writing. Bob and Vicki are large pieces of driftwood who bask in the warmth of the sun alongside Aboriginal people on the beach of Aboriginal Affairs. I say thank you all.

I also thank Emeritus Professor Terence Lovat and Professor John Maynard of the University of Newcastle, Australia, who were my supervisors for this thesis.
# List of Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAPA</td>
<td>Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>ABSEG</td>
<td>Aboriginal Secondary Grants</td>
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<td>ABSTUDY</td>
<td>Aboriginal Study Grants</td>
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<td>ACER</td>
<td>Australian Council for Educational Research</td>
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<td>ACG</td>
<td>Aboriginal Consultative Group</td>
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<td>AEC</td>
<td>Aboriginal Education Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>AECG</td>
<td>Aboriginal Education Consultative Group</td>
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<td>AECSL</td>
<td>Aboriginal Early Childhood Support and Learning Inc.</td>
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<td>AEIW</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Islander Education Worker</td>
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<td>AEO</td>
<td>Aboriginal Education Officer</td>
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<td>AEP</td>
<td>Aboriginal Education Policy</td>
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<td>AHSLO</td>
<td>Aboriginal Home School Liaison Officer</td>
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<td>AMS</td>
<td>Aboriginal Medical Service</td>
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<td>APA</td>
<td>Aboriginal Progressive Association</td>
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<td>APB</td>
<td>Aboriginal Protection Board</td>
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<td>AREP</td>
<td>Aboriginal Rural Education Program</td>
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<td>ATA</td>
<td>Aboriginal Teacher Assistant</td>
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<tr>
<td>ATSIC</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>BOS</td>
<td>Board Of Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAE</td>
<td>College of Advanced Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAPO</td>
<td>Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDAC</td>
<td>Campbelltown and Districts Aboriginal Corporation</td>
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<td>CEP</td>
<td>Commonwealth Employment Program</td>
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<td>CMA</td>
<td>Catchment Management Authority</td>
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<td>Acronym</td>
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<tr>
<td>COAG</td>
<td>Council of Australian Governments</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEC</td>
<td>Department of Education and Communities</td>
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<td>DEET</td>
<td>Department of Education Employment and Training</td>
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<td>DEEWR</td>
<td>Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>DET</td>
<td>Department of Education and Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>DFaCS</td>
<td>Department of Family and Community Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>DUI</td>
<td>Driving Under the Influence</td>
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<tr>
<td>FCAATSI</td>
<td>Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders</td>
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<td>FOSCO</td>
<td>Federation of School Community Organisations</td>
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<td>GATS</td>
<td>Gifted and Talented Student</td>
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<td>IECB</td>
<td>Indigenous Education Consultative Body</td>
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<td>IPROWD</td>
<td>Indigenous Police Recruitment Our Way Delivery</td>
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<td>LALC</td>
<td>Local Aboriginal Land Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>MCEEDCYA</td>
<td>Ministerial Council for Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs</td>
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<td>MCEETYA</td>
<td>Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs</td>
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<td>NAEC</td>
<td>National Aboriginal Education Committee</td>
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<td>NACG</td>
<td>National Aboriginal Consultative Group</td>
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<td>NAIDOC</td>
<td>National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee</td>
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<td>NAISDA</td>
<td>National Aboriginal and Islander Skills Dance Academy</td>
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<td>NAPLAN</td>
<td>National Assessment Program-Literacy and Numeracy</td>
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<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
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<td>NATSIEP</td>
<td>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy</td>
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<td>NTSCORP</td>
<td>Native Title Service Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>P&amp;C</td>
<td>Parents and Citizens</td>
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<td>PaCE</td>
<td>Parent and Community Engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td>PD-H-PE</td>
<td>Personal Development-Health-Physical Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>PLP</td>
<td>Personal Learning Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>RACLO</td>
<td>Regional Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer</td>
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<td>RAEAC</td>
<td>Regional Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee</td>
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<td>SAFA</td>
<td>Student Action for Aborigines</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Tertiary and Adult Further Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>UWS</td>
<td>University of Western Sydney</td>
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The thesis titled ‘People Places and Pathways in NSW Aboriginal Education: The Impact of Aboriginal Community on Education Provision in NSW’ will investigate the influences that Aboriginal people have had on the delivery of education services to Aboriginal people. From the outset, this study will examine some of the historical and political factors that have shaped the early educational environment for Aboriginal people. Since 1788, the total mistreatment of Aboriginal people since the invasion and then colonisation by non-Aboriginal people, constitutes a recorded history that underpins the development of government policy and continues to deal with the social determinants that affect Aboriginal disadvantage. This study cannot be completed without considering how the effect of some historical events in Aboriginal Affairs has shaped the current educational situation relevant to Aboriginal Education. Under the NSW Aborigines Protection Act of 1909, the care and control of Aboriginal people living on missions and reserves were directed by Parliamentary legislation. The following extracts from the Aborigines Protection Act: 1909 (By Authority: Alfred James Kent, Acting Government printer, Sydney 1923,) (3d) exemplify the attitude upheld by law makers of the day toward Aboriginal people:

4. (1) There shall be a Board, to be styled “The Board for Protection of Aborigines,” to consist of the Inspector-General of Police, or acting Inspector-General of Police, who shall, ex officio, be chairperson, and not more than ten other members who shall be appointed by the Governor.¹

The wording of the above section implies that Aboriginal people needed protection by a group of people led by law keepers in Australian society. The ‘Act’ goes on to outline the duties of the ‘Board’ in point 7 from (a to e): related to apportioning the allocation of Parliamentary funds, the distribution of rations, the management of reserves, and protection against injustice, imposition and fraud. Aboriginal people who resided on reserves in NSW came under the total control of what became known as the Aborigines Protection Board (APB).

(c) to provide for the custody, maintenance, and education of the children of

¹ Aborigines Protection Act 1909, By Authority: Alfred James Kent, Acting Government printer, Sydney 1923, (3d)
Connecting to Social Policy and Aboriginal Lifestyle

Social policies of assimilation and segregation were practised in States and Territories in Australia. The notion of separating an Aboriginal group from the rest of the community was instigated by the NSW Aborigines Protection Act of 1909. One way to separate and control Aboriginal people was to establish missions and reserves in towns where numbers of Aboriginal people gathered. The purpose was to disconnect the continuity of traditional cultural practices. Not all individuals were forced into reserve residency. Some people escaped into nearby bushland to continue the cultural lifestyle they had practised for generations. Evidence is provided via oral histories, often passed on at social gatherings by older family members as they tell stories, of punishment enforced by the authorities when Aboriginal people refused to uphold the rules of the Protection Board. During that era a belief was held that it was best to assimilate people into practising the social behavioural patterns of non-Aboriginal people. Exemption Certificates were offered to Aboriginal people who complied with the social expectations of the dominant society in Australia.

In 1943 Exemption Certificates for Aboriginals were issued to those who could prove that they could take their place in white society. Many Aboriginal people refused to accept this because they felt it was degrading and reminded them of the old “King Billy” neck plate days.

“King Billy” neck plates were given to Aboriginal people by non-Aboriginal people, to identify the perceived leaders of particular groups of Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people who wore the neck plates were the people non-Aboriginal people approached to negotiate agreements on behalf of Aboriginal people. Living conditions were sub-standard on reserves under the provisions of the APB. Several attempts to protest against the regulations imposed on reserve residents, by the APB, often led to violent disputes between Aboriginal leaders and representatives of the APB.

Organised Protests

Aboriginal people became active under the leadership of people identified in publications by Maynard: 2007 and Horner: 1974, to organise protests against the social
injustices aimed at Aboriginal communities. Maynard writes in ‘Fight for Liberty and Freedom’:

*Maynard is one of the great forgotten Aboriginal patriots and organisers of political activism. He was instrumental in forming the first unified and long-lasting politically motivated and organised Aboriginal movement, the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA).*\(^4\)

The AAPA held its first conference in April 1925 at Surry Hills, Sydney, NSW. This was said to be the first Australian Aboriginal civil rights convention:

*The process of social change for Aboriginal people was accelerated by World War II. After the war ‘assimilation’ of Aboriginal people became the stated aim of the government. To this end, the rights of Aboriginal people were subjugated even further – the government had control over everything, from where they could live to whom they could marry. Many people were forcibly moved from their homes and townships, the idea being that they would adapt to European culture, which would in turn aid their economic development. This policy was a dismal failure.*\(^5\)

Employment opportunities were limited for all people as a ramification of shortages after World War II. Even though Aboriginal soldiers enlisted and fought in overseas campaigns and domestic attacks on Darwin in the Northern Territory during World War II, most families had to survive on rations handed out by managers of Reserves or those veterans who received ration cards enabling families to purchase goods cheaply. Some Aboriginal people had been agitating for improved social conditions for their people before the outbreak of war. Horner: 1974 identifies many Aboriginal people in ‘Vote Ferguson’, who combined their efforts to discuss and develop strategies to influence social change for Aboriginal people. William Ferguson called for the establishment of the Aborigines Progressive Association (APA) in 1937. A change of name from the Aborigines Protection Board to the Aborigines Welfare Board also heralded an inclusion of Aboriginal representation on the ‘Welfare Board’:

*Pearl Gibbs followed William Ferguson and Herbert Groves onto the Aborigines Welfare Board (1955-57). She was to be the only woman who served on it.*\(^6\)

Horner: 1974, reports that while many Aboriginal people thought that having an Aboriginal woman (Pearl Gibbs) on the AWB would increase the opportunity to

\(^4\) Maynard: 2007: 1
\(^5\) Australian History: http://australiatrek.com/Australia_Assimilation_of_Aboriginal...accessed 6/03/2013
\(^6\) Horner, 1974: 40
influence decisions that impacted on the lives of Aboriginal people, in reality this was not the case. Gibbs was not allowed to visit reserves without being on official business and in the company of other Board members. Often decisions were made at informal meetings held in hotel bars which made Gibbs suspect that she was excluded from the important decision making process, because women were not allowed entry to bars at that time. I allege that a concept of “Insider Insurgents”, which is discussed in further detail in Chapter 3: Listening to Learn and referred to throughout the thesis, was introduced by the militant action taken and Aboriginal membership on the Aborigines Protection Board and then the Aborigines Welfare Board. These early crusaders, and many others who accepted appointments to boards and committees to represent Aboriginal perspectives, believed they were placed in positions where they could influence change in government policies and practices for the benefit of Aboriginal people.

**Social Change and Legislation**

A decade or so after these events occurred in the 1950s and early 1960s, amid multiple organised protests and publicised political actions highlighting the inequitable social treatment toward Aboriginal people, the Australian Government was forced to hold a Referendum on the issue on 27th May 1967. Comprehensive details can be accessed on the National Archives of Australia website on: [http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/factsheets](http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/factsheets). Two questions were put forward to change the Australian Constitution. The first question asked the voting population to support an amendment to Section 24 of the Constitution that the House of Representatives must always be twice the size of the Senate. This amendment was rejected and only received 40% support nationally. The second question was to determine whether two references in the Australian Constitution, which discriminated against Aboriginal people, should be removed. Broader access to public education provision as a result of support for the changes to the Constitution was an outcome. The Aboriginal sections of the Constitution under scrutiny were:

> 51. **The Parliament shall, subject to the Constitution, have power to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the commonwealth with respect to:**

> (xxvi) *The people of any race, other than the aboriginal people in any State, for whom it is necessary to make special laws.*
The removal of the words ‘... other than aboriginal people in any State...’ in section 51(xxvi) and the whole of section 127 was considered by many to be the driving force behind the previously publicised protests for political change within Aboriginal affairs. The Referendum in 1967 gave Aboriginal people rights to move more freely in the broader Australian society and the Commonwealth of Australia was charged with the responsibility of providing social services to Aboriginal people. The Racial Discrimination Act of 1975 strengthened this responsibility. Many changes have taken place for Aboriginal people as a consequence.

Aboriginal people therefore have an expectation to be able to access social services equitable to all other Australians under the 1975 Act. Under this Act, basic rights are afforded to all people regardless of race, colour, ethnic background, birthplace or descent. During the 40 years that have followed these changes to the Australian Constitution, many political and historical events have occurred that continue to call for equity in health services, housing provision, employment opportunities and educational outcomes for Aboriginal people. Some of these events will be discussed in Chapter 2: The Historical and Political Context, of the thesis as an example of how the social circumstances of Aboriginal people affect the educational outcomes for children. While some significant events have been discussed in Chapter 2, commentary should not be confused as being an exhaustive historical account of Aboriginal Affairs and the relationship to Aboriginal education. The focus of this study is Aboriginal education in NSW from an Aboriginal community perspective. Historically Aboriginal people have had to resort to street protests leading to physical violence to have their voices heard. In contrast, this study incorporates the written voices of Aboriginal community people through the structure of the NSW AECG, therefore encouraging them to express the ideas and aspirations espoused by Aboriginal communities designed to benefit Aboriginal Education in NSW. The following comment is a demonstration that observational learning reinforces the value of listening to stories told by people who

lived through experiences and have seen change through their eyes. This is expressed in the autobiography of Margaret Tucker: 1977:

*Young Aborigines have taught me a lot. They have courage and can give to our country in many ways. Many changes have come to pass through the years I have lived.*

**Access to Education**

Each State and Territory is legally responsible for the delivery of education in their respective jurisdictions. Compulsory education in Australia is a legal requirement specified by State and Territory legislation for all children. Specific State and Territory jurisdictions have variations written into their Legislative Acts relevant to public education. The NSW Education Act 1990 clearly states in the following sections that education is the responsibility of the NSW Department of Education and Communities (as is currently titled) to deliver services in public education:

**Part 2 Objects of the Act**

4. *Principles on which this Act is based in enacting this Act, Parliament has had regard to the following principles:*

   (a) *every child has the right to receive an education,*

   (b) *the education of a child is primarily the responsibility of the child’s parents,*

   (c) *it is the duty of the State to ensure that every child receives an education of the highest quality,*

   (d) *the principal responsibility of the State in the education of children is the provision of public education.*

Points (a) and (c) above provide clear directions for schools to achieve successful educational outcomes for all children enrolled in the public education system. These expectations also apply to Aboriginal children:

**Part 5 Attendance of children at school:**

21B  *Compulsory school-age*

(1) *For the purposes of this Act, a child is of compulsory school-age if the child is of or above the age of 6 years and below the minimum school leaving age.*

(2) *The minimum school leaving age is:*

   (a) *The age at which the child completes year 10 of secondary education*

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8 Tucker, 1977: 201
(subject to participation required in subsection 3) or

(b) The age of 17 years, whichever first occurs.10

The previous extract from the Act explains the legal right of passage to access a public education experience. Aboriginal people have not always felt they had the power to enforce their right to public education opportunities. This study explores some of the reasons why the political and historical events in this country have impacted on Aboriginal Education. Up until 1972, the NSW Department of Education policy guidelines included a section directly related to the enrolment of Aboriginal children and was cited in the 1969 edition of the Teachers Handbook:

5.1.2.3. Enrolment of Aboriginal Children:
It is the policy of the Department to encourage assimilation of aborigine children as members of the Australian community by permitting their attendance at public schools. Nevertheless, if the principal of a school is of the opinion that there are circumstances in the home conditions of aborigine children, whose enrolment is sought, which justify refusal or deferment of enrolment or if he is aware that substantial opposition to such enrolment exists in the local community, he should inform the district inspector of schools and await the departmental decision on the matter.11

An Aboriginal Education Community Structure
Partnerships between Aboriginal people and education providers have become a preferred method of interaction between government authorities and Aboriginal communities. The NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (NSW AECG) was established in 1976 to provide advice on behalf of Aboriginal communities to the Minister of Education and the Director General of Education in NSW. A review of Aboriginal Education in NSW was carried out in 2004 and reported that:

Probable the strongest message of the Review was that most Aboriginal families and communities want to be consulted about and involved in the education of their children, teenagers and young people.12

The NSW AECG has expanded its operations over the past thirty seven years and developed a three tiered formal structure across NSW to encourage Aboriginal community participation in education processes that affect their communities. Since 1976, Aboriginal people involved in Aboriginal Education have recognised the need for
an organised effort to present their stories and the effect that public education provision has on their communities and cultures. Voices of Aboriginal people in the education arena must be heard and valued before implementation of education policy can be validated as credible. A ten year (2010-2020) ‘Partnership Agreement’ was signed off between the NSW AECG and the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) on the 12th of March during the 2010 NSW AECG Annual General Meeting, giving a commitment to undertake a collaborative approach to provide the best learning environment possible for Aboriginal students. The essence of the ‘Agreement’ is to build positive relationships with schools and Aboriginal communities utilising the NSW AECG structure, as a vehicle to facilitate a process of consultation between DET and Aboriginal community members.

Aboriginal Community Consultation

At the time of writing this thesis (2012), as noted above, the NSW AECG has been established since 1976 and therefore has been providing advice relevant to Aboriginal Education for the past 36 years. Government Departments, Education Providers and more importantly Aboriginal Organisations acknowledge the experience and participation of AECG membership through consultation. The value of Aboriginal community involvement in educational discussion will be revealed from a participatory position by the respondents in Chapters 8: ‘Voices of AECG Members’ and Chapter 9: ‘Comparative Thinking Spaces’ of the thesis. Voices of Aboriginal people are presented as stories from each Region of the NSW AECG structure.

Concerns have been raised by some members of Aboriginal communities, questioning whether the advice provided by the NSW AECG organisation is a response representing an Aboriginal community perspective or reflective of the employment positions and workplace duties for some of the members. This study will identify the employment situations of elected members of the Hunter Regional Management Committee for 2011 and the State Committee membership for 2012 as samples of membership duality in an attempt to draw a conclusion on the question of reliability. Further detailed research will need to be undertaken to investigate the employment situation of members at Local, Regional and State levels in order to offer an informed response to the previous
questions.

NSW AECG members were requested to inform this study in relation to the impact of Aboriginal community participation on education provision by completing a questionnaire, followed by an analytical interpretation by the researcher in order to generate opinions. Members were invited to comment on the possible influential change in education provision because of the relationship between the NSW AECG and education providers. While I travelled through different cultural countries in NSW, I had the opportunity to listen to many Aboriginal people voice their opinion about Aboriginal education services in their Regions from a community perspective. This experience placed me in a favourable position to interpret the results of the survey responses based on communicative reflections discussed at AECG meetings while I was present.

A survey question designed to provide an opportunity for self-assessment is measured to ascertain the level of influence that members feel they have had on Aboriginal education delivery by being involved at the State AECG level. To investigate outcomes of relationships between education providers and Aboriginal people, a correlation of scaled rankings submitted by members of the State Committee was analysed. These results have indicated the level of interaction between schools and adult education providers by the elected State Committee representatives. Measurements have shown what focus area of education provision is linked to each of the AECG Regions. It was vital to provide an opportunity for members to express their particular relationships with education services from their perspectives. Responses have been reported as a numerical chart in Chapter 5: ‘The NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group’. The following map shows the geographic distribution of NSW AECG Regions.
The NSW AECG Management Committee members were invited to complete surveys in all nineteen AECG Regions across the State.

**Storytelling as Information Sharing**

Throughout the thesis, Aboriginal people will speak about their thoughts and experiences through responses to surveys reported in Chapter 6: ‘Mil- pra Aboriginal Education Consultative Group’ from a Local AECG member perspective, in Chapter 7: Hunter Aboriginal Education Consultative Group from a Regional AECG viewpoint and a broader NSW AECG aspect presented in. Chapter 8: ‘Voices of AECG Members’

Consideration has been given to the value of Aboriginal community opinion by constructing a questionnaire encouraging participants to self-evaluate their Region’s influence on education provision because of organisational membership. Surveys have been designed to give participants the opportunity to respond freely to eight questions by organising response spaces to write brief or lengthy commentary. This qualitative data collection can provide an overall picture to identify priorities, share positive outcomes and self-assessment of available people skills in specific AECG regions. It is
vital to include their voices as a narration of their story and involvement in the education landscape.

On this journey, we will listen to stories transcribed from recordings with some Life Members of the NSW AECG as they share stories of reflection and insights into the strengths and challenges for this organisation. The criterion is explained in detail in Chapter 5: ‘The NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group’. These stories are woven into the study to illustrate how Aboriginal people communicate their knowledge and understanding of the educational environment. A visual image is presented illustrating a shared Aboriginal storytelling model. This model is overlaid with the three tiered structure of the NSW AECG to reinforce the responsibility that Aboriginal people hold when sharing knowledge. Is consultation and sharing cultural knowledge applying an aspect of traditional Aboriginal storytelling in the modern context? At the heart of the intersecting circles are symbolic spaces grounded in cultural heritage and Aboriginality. It is recognised by social scientists, archaeologists and other professions that Aboriginal people in traditional environments did not use a written method of recording.

*It is through oral communication that concepts and beliefs about the Dreaming are passed on from one generation to the next. Oral traditions include the use of storytelling, song, dance, art, craft making, giving instructions and directions. All of these forms of Oral Traditions help to pass on specific cultural practices and values, language and laws, histories and family relationships.*

The mode of storytelling using physical imagery in artworks and describing the value of significant sites is accepted as teaching tools used to pass on culture by the cultural knowledge holders. Recording oral histories through telling stories continues a cultural practice that is beginning to paint many complex pictures in the mosaic construction of Aboriginal existence in Australia. Future research activity could uncover a wealth of knowledge when shared with the academy through the process of storytelling.

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The above model illustrates the connection between cultural protocols needed when determining Aboriginal community matters and the three tiered structure of the NSW AECG Inc.

Currently, the NSW AECG is governed by Association Rules endorsed at the Annual General Meeting held on the 12th March 2009. A vision statement highlights the agreed functions of the organisation. In addition to promoting respect, empowerment, self-determination, equity, cultural affirmation and integrity, the following extract clearly sets direction for the operations of the NSW AECG Inc.:

*The vision of the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. is to provide advice on all matters relevant to education and training with the mandate that this advice represents the Aboriginal community viewpoint.*

**Cultural Underpinnings and Research**

This study will explore what it means to apply cultural underpinnings to research activity as an Aboriginal insider. Questions that immediately come to mind are whether cultural identity makes any difference to the outcomes when carrying out research activity in Aboriginal communities and whether there are any advantages in positioning yourself as an insider researcher? By taking a cultural standpoint in research activity dealing with Aboriginal people, there are different cultural protocols that must be considered. No longer can the researcher just be an Aboriginal person collecting information to write up in academic studies. There are expectations and responsibilities...
placed on the researcher by Aboriginal communities, whether the specific participants change or remain the same. Gathering information from Aboriginal people by using traditional postal, phone, email or internet methods only is no longer acceptable to communities and the ‘fly in fly out’ strategy is frowned upon as well. The preferred option is face-to-face interaction within a timeframe that allows the knowledge holders to assess their trust in the researcher. In addition assumptions cannot be made that the researcher will be accepted just because he/she identifies as being Aboriginal. When the Aboriginal researcher is “off” country, validation of place through cultural heritage is a vital component of acceptance and connectedness. The issue of being aware of cultural ethics and protocols when carrying out research activity with Aboriginal communities becomes clearer when the questions, devised by Linda Smith: 1999, are answered in Chapter 4: ‘Information Gathering Techniques’:

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Whose research is this?}
\item \textit{Who owns it?}
\item \textit{Whose interests does it serve?}
\item \textit{Who will benefit from it?}
\item \textit{Who has designed its questions and framed its scope?}
\item \textit{Who will carry it out?}
\item \textit{Who will write it up?}
\item \textit{How will the results be disseminated?}\footnote{Porsanger, 2004: 115}
\end{enumerate}

This makes me feel that the researcher’s cultural integrity, ownership of knowledge and connectedness to Aboriginal communities are challenged in a way that forces a thoughtful reaction to each question. Answering these questions cannot be a “tick a box” exercise.

Hundreds of people have influenced change that has impacted on the current social circumstance of Aboriginal people. Acknowledgement is recognised by drawing on the colours found in a coastal landscape, my personal cultural home country.

\textbf{Yellow shaded text} acknowledges Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who take their places in the sands of time knowing that they have played their positive part in making change for Aboriginal communities.

\textbf{Individual quotes} are highlighted by a blue background to symbolise the constant sets of waves that carry leaders onto the beach of Aboriginal Affairs.
My story is included as a reflection of my involvement in Aboriginal Education as a small shell being caressed by family and community in a furrow that lies beneath the waves and is identified by a green background.

Organisation of the Thesis

Chapter Two describes some of the political and historical issues that have impacted on the social circumstance of Aboriginal people during the implementation of the Commonwealth Governments’ assimilation and segregation policies reinforced by the Aboriginal Protection Board. Charles “Chika” Dixon was a renowned NSW Aboriginal activist who will act as our guide to follow footprints laid down by many people over time. We will revisit a few historical situations which illustrates what the social environment was like for many Aboriginal people across Australia. As we accompany Dixon through this environment, we will understand how difficult it was for Aboriginal people to access public education institutions. Throughout this chapter some Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have been acknowledged for the role they played in the struggle for human rights and justice for Aboriginal people. This chapter should not be assessed as a detailed account of Aboriginal political history or an interpretation of individual Aboriginal people and their participation in the process of influencing institutional change, but rather a glimpse into the past from an Aboriginal community viewpoint. Australian history places Aboriginal Education in a context swathed in discriminatory social practices which restricts and limits accessibility to public education provision for many Aboriginal people.

Chapter Three revisits the insights and attitudes of people who showed an interest in changing discriminatory practices of education provision prior to 1967 through published documents. Social attitudes are considered by listening to academics and educators in NSW during the formal period of assimilation. Documented records show that Aboriginal families recognised the value of education for their children regardless of the policies and practices enforced by the NSW Department of Education and the Aborigines Protection Board. Insights into improving outcomes for Aboriginal students are observed when shared by Aboriginal authors. Listening to people involved in Aboriginal Education presents interesting cultural challenges within the learning environment. Chris Sarra presents strategies incorporated into a paper produced for the
Australian College of Educators for the Quality Teaching Series in 2003. Sarra discusses the lessons he learned when he became the first Aboriginal Principal of Cherbourg Primary School in 1999. Paper No. 5 ‘Young and Black and Deadly: Strategies for ‘Improving Outcomes for Indigenous Students’, is his story of how he utilised the motivation and knowledge of the Aboriginal community of Cherbourg to influence positive change within the school. A message that Sarra promotes in his story is to always encourage high expectations of self and others in the learning environment. Reference is made to authors who have participated in an Aboriginal Education arena as a facet of the literature review.

This chapter examines the policies put forward by governments at National and State levels to address the unacceptable educational outcomes experienced by Aboriginal people. Analysis of research and review reports associated with public policy and Aboriginal community advisory committee input uncovers the need for intensive programs to be introduced into all sectors of the education portfolio. Selected policy documents have been analysed to uncover a pathway available for possible improved educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Linkages to some specific programs are described as a means of implementing Commonwealth policy and strategies at a NSW level.

Chapter Four explains the need for the academy to acknowledge the growing number of Aboriginal people who operate as insider insurgents to influence change due to cultural ways of knowing. A description is provided to explain insights into the strategies employed to carry out research activity in an Aboriginal organisation in NSW. A research design is a pathway to follow when needing to deal with the ethos of the specific cultural group identified in this study. Consciousness of cultural ethics and protocols when carrying out research activity in Aboriginal communities is discussed by researchers from different countries. The necessity to establish trust as a researcher before launching into any information gathering phase, is argued from a cultural standpoint. Aboriginal authors will present their positions and suggested elements of behaviour for researchers to consider when wanting to request information from Aboriginal people who are the knowledge holders.
Chapter Five is presented in two sections. Section one provides a detailed history of the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) and acknowledges the participation of many Aboriginal people involved in the very early establishment of this community organisation. As a voluntary organisation, the three tiered structure provides an opportunity for Aboriginal people to voice their opinion and effectively influence policy development and program funding allocations that affect Aboriginal education provision. The operations of the NSW AECG are described from an insider perspective. Section two includes results of a questionnaire designed for this specific focus group (Regional Representatives) of the study. A storytelling style of writing is used to report qualitative survey responses. Responses to questions three and five are used as an indicator of differences and similarities between Regional and State levels of consultation. Verbatim responses complete the section in order to uphold the trust that members have placed in the researcher to report their voice as a true record of shared knowledge and often these provide the most real and valuable responses. This strategy will show a connectedness to interpretation of data and reported results. The responses can be accessed easily and scrutinised to match the narrative reporting style, so that the integrity of storytelling as a knowledge sharing process is not compromised.

Chapter Six is presented in two sections. Section one outlines innovative community activities piloted by the Mil-pra AECG. The following initiatives will be described as examples of Aboriginal Community participation:

- Liverpool AECG School Support Unit
- Metropolitan South West Aboriginal Student Awards and
- The Mil-pra Art Exhibition.

People employed in the Liverpool AECG School Support Unit have been tracked, as far as possible, to investigate the career opportunities they have moved into after their experience as unemployed people in this Commonwealth funded employment program. A brief overview of the Aboriginal Student Awards in this Region is presented as an example of how Aboriginal people have worked in partnership with the Department of Education and Training. Joint partnership arrangements with the Department of Education and Training, Liverpool Council and Mil-pra AECG are illustrated through
describing the Mil-pra Art Exhibition. For more than twenty years, this exhibition has celebrated Aboriginal cultures during National Aboriginal Week. Qualitative data collection will provide information offered by the local AECG membership’s viewpoint and is included in this section. The second section includes survey responses from a sample of Local AECG members and reports a demographic profile inclusive of diversity and experience. Verbatim responses complete the section, in order to uphold the trust that members have placed in the researcher to report their voice as a true record of shared knowledge.

Chapter Seven is presented in two sections. Section one outlines two program initiatives introduced by the Hunter AECG Region. One example is the Regional Community Development Program (2010). Training topics identified from the first stage of the Community Development Program are included to present the beginnings of a three year plan by the Hunter AECG. The second program is the Regional Cultural Immersion Program (2010). Teacher evaluation commentary is included from the Hunter AECG component of the Cultural Immersion Program to illustrate the success of this initiative. A workshop report is included to show how decisions are made at a Regional level when attempting to resolve a community situation. Hunter Region Management Committee survey results have been collated and presented in section two. A combination of narrative interpretations related to specific questions and graphic images are used to present the outcomes of survey responses.

Chapter Eight is presented in two sections. Section one reports summarised Regional Management Committee survey responses from seventeen of the nineteen regions canvassed. Some questions require easily coded responses while others are more complex. Categories established for question seven (Community Participation, School Relationships and Regional Initiatives) are necessary to analyse qualitative data collected. Categories established for question eight (Aboriginal Studies, AECG Capacity Building, Student Issues and Education Providers) are necessary in order to analyse qualitative data collected. The categories were constructed on the premise that responses need to be encoded to compare against similar relationships. The stories told are a consolidation of the verbatim responses to eight focus questions distributed to participants. An insider interpretation is incorporated into the discussion to identify
emerging themes. All AECG Regions are reported in numerical order as identified on the NSW AECG Regional Map. Verbatim responses complete section two, in order to uphold the trust that members have placed in the researcher to report their voice as a true record of shared knowledge.

**Chapter Nine** continues the story told in Chapter 8: ‘Voices of AECG Members’, by organising four demographic regional groupings for the purpose of comparing results, to seek out similarities and differences in Sydney Metropolitan, Country, Rural and Isolated geographic areas in NSW AECG Regions. A criterion for selection is described further in this chapter. Numerical tables are constructed, using qualitative data from the categories described in Chapter 8: ‘Voices of AECG Members’, as a method of comparison between geographic grouping results. A comparison is also investigated between the State AECG Committee results and each Geographic Group result. Visual charts are incorporated to present differences and similarities for questions related to formal qualifications, positive outcomes and priorities between Geographic Groups and State aspirations.

**Chapter Ten** will demonstrate the need to consider cultural protocols and practices when carrying out research activity with Aboriginal communities. Concluding remarks discuss the progress made toward “Closing the Gap” between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educational outcomes. The cycle of Aboriginal Community Well-being models are included to reinforce the belief by many Aboriginal people that social determinants affect the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students. An Awabakal Dreaming story completes the thesis as a gesture of respect to the traditional owners of the country I reside and the land on which the University of Newcastle is built. The teaching technique of storytelling through oral history coupled with written records will ensure that the Aboriginal story will continue into the future.

**Thesis Documentation**

The **Bibliography** follows the completion of Chapter 10: The Story Continues using the Harvard style of referencing.

A **List of Maps and Tables** will identify pages associated with figures, maps and charts used throughout the thesis.
A List of Attachments is added to the document in chronological order as they appear in the thesis.

A List of Acronyms is presented prior to the commencement of Chapter 1: Introduction.
Chapter 2: The Political and Historical Context

Introduction

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been a topic of scientific interest since European colonisation began in 1788. Sociologists, anthropologists and archaeologists have been researching human physical construction and social cultural construction of Aboriginal people and their communities for several years. Gale: 1972 completed a study on the impact of urbanisation of the Aboriginal population in South Australia and in particular relocation to Adelaide. It is reported in the introduction of Gales’ publication that this particular case study will reflect the movement of many rural Aboriginal families throughout the country:

It is hoped that this case study made in depth in one city will provide some understanding of the problems which face urban Aborigines in Australia.17

In 1994, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) submitted a draft discussion paper relevant to research ethics, to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Organisations and Tertiary Education Units for feedback and comment. The paper ‘Research Ethics for Undertaking Economic Development Research Relating to, Involving and About Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ provides a background which presents reasons why it is necessary to establish an ethical research policy for ATSIC. The opening statement in this paper supports the idea that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been a topic of interest for many years:

It has often been said that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are ‘the most researched people in the world’. Historically, much of the research concerning indigenous peoples has been carried out by non-indigenous researchers.18

In a similar statement, Professor Paul Hughes presented the viewpoints of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) Advisory Committee,19 in the foreword of the Australian Education Review which supports both points raised by ATSIC:

Politically the Indigenous community has long held the view that we have been extensively researched for little outcomes. Indeed we have often claimed to be the

17 Gale, 1972: p1
18 ATSIC,1994: Background
19 ACER Advisory Committee Membership: Ms Isabelle Adams, Ms Wendy Brabham, Mr Peter Buckskin, Ms Dale Sutherland, Mr. Arthur Hamilton, Ms Maria Stephens, Dr Margaret Valadian, Mr Shane Williams.
most researched group in the world. We have felt that many people, mostly non-Indigenous, have studied us and in the process produced many publications that have helped them advance their academic qualifications, professional standing and careers.²⁰

These types of investigations have continued. Most of these research journeys have been carried out by non-Aboriginal people from their own perspectives, citing previous publications recorded by others within their professional disciplines e.g. medicine, archaeology, history, and social sciences etc. Social scientists have described the physical, social and cultural circumstances of Aboriginal communities across Australia from a scientific perspective. Once again early non-Aboriginal archaeologists have applied their knowledge through the lens of theoretical viewpoints put forward by writers of observational evidence, external to the cultural groups being studied, as unchallenged facts.

John Mulvaney was a Professor of Prehistory at the Australian National University and confesses that untrained amateur can do untold harm when investigating archaeological ‘digs’. For this reason he did not provide explicit details in his publications. Mulvaney: 1973 suggests that to recreate prehistory the analysis of bones, tools and refuse tips will lead to the discovery of the lifestyle experiences of mankind. He asserts that Australian prehistoric research began very recently compared to other countries. Mulvaney assures historians that this continent contains evidence relevant to world prehistory. The use of cave painting by Aboriginal people for at least 20,000 years ago uncover historical facts such as:

Consequently the origins of art in Australia may be as ancient as that decorating the Palaeolithic caves of Western Europe.²¹

Gale: 1972 asserts that Aboriginal people are socially and economically more advantaged by moving to a city environment rather than their country counterparts.

The city offers a more suitable environment in which to close this historic gap between Aboriginal and European opportunities than the reserve or small country town could ever provide.²²
The above comment makes the presumption that Aboriginal people prioritise materialistic benefits in preference to cultural connections to country and family relationships. Many Aboriginal people continually make decisions to relocate to larger country or city centres to seek employment. This action will not necessarily guarantee a meaningful paid position which increases their economic position. While the specific study namely ‘Urban Aborigines: Aborigines in Australian Society’ is a case study focused on Aboriginal society in Adelaide South Australia. The publication was promoted as a volume of research that can be applied to many Aboriginal communities across rural Australia.

In 1963, The Academy of Social Sciences in Australia approved its third and most ambitious major project, ‘Aborigines in Australian Society’, with the following broad objectives:

*Elucidating the problems arising from contacts between Aborigines and non-Aborigines and formulating policy implications from these: drawing together existing knowledge in various parts of Australia...*\(^{23}\)

The National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) recognised the need for Aboriginal people to participate in writing for the purpose of developing education material. The late Errol West, a former NAEC Chairperson addressed a group of teachers in NSW and stated:

*Furthermore, it is necessary that encouragement be given to Aborigines to record their own histories and stories that could be used in the school context. At this stage very little of the Aboriginal viewpoint on history has been recorded and students are confronted with the biased view of white historians.*\(^{24}\)

Past and current Aboriginal authors Marcia Langton, Jackie Huggins, Eric Willmot, Gary Foley, Pat-Davis Hurst, Ella Simon, Margaret Tucker, James Miller, John Maynard and others have recorded Australian historical and social circumstances interpreted through the eyes of Aboriginal people. While many Aboriginal authors have different personal histories and experiences, their perspective is presented from an insider viewpoint as expressed by Gary Foley in the foreword of *Fight for Liberty and Freedom*, Maynard: 2007:

\(^{23}\) Gale, 1972: V

\(^{24}\) West, 1981 :19
The stories revealed in John’s book are truly remarkable, and emerge from a man whose path in life has a striking similarity to my own. We both came to formal academic studies late in life (each in our mid-forties), both studied history, and both have subsequently challenged the conventional wisdom of academic history by attempting to introduce an Indigenous voice and perspective. This book confirms why Indigenous perspective and voice is so important. The story John tells has been waiting to be told since the 1920’s, yet several generations of Australian academic historians had either ignored it, or not appreciated its significance. It is precisely because of non-Indigenous historians’ ignorance and/or indifference to the Aboriginal experience of Australian history that we need Indigenous historians like Maynard to give it expression.25

Eric Willmot holds credentials of renown in several areas. Born in Queensland he spent his youth droving in Queensland, New South Wales, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. He later became an educator at several levels of the education spectrum. In recognition of being one of Australia’s leading educationists he was honoured by the Australian government for his contributions in that field. In 1981 he was awarded Australian ‘Inventor of the Year’ in addition to the ‘Medaille d’ in Geneva, for his invention of a Variable Ration Transmission System.

For many years his interests and experience in academic research has recognised him as being an accepted authority on the life and times of Pemulwuy. His novel about the story of Pemulwuy the leader of the Eora people, who lived in the area now occupied by the city of Sydney in NSW, is one which reveals a truism of conflict between 1788 and 1802. Charles Perkins expresses his viewpoint in 1987:

*Eric Willmot’s fascinating and moving novel is a major land mark in Australian literary history. Not only does it mark the emergence of a new and gifted Australian writer, it dramatically portrays the Aboriginal experience. The coincidence of its publication with the Bicentennial should encourage every thinking Australian to reflect on and be inspired by the Aboriginal presence as a significant element of the Australian experience. Its effect on me was as profound as the subject matter. It should be required reading for all Australians.*

Willmot takes the reader into an observational space in his novel by including interpretive narrative between Pemulwuy and Eora Aboriginal people, Aboriginal people in the vicinity of Lake Awaba and non-Aboriginal people he came in contact

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25 Maynard, 2007: Foreword
with throughout his twelve year journey. His writing style tells the story as though conversations are a reflection of his own presence at the time. Examples include:

Kiraban asked Bennelong about Pemulwuy. Bennelong laughed derisively and said: “One Eye! He’s nothing. He does not understand the British.”

Bennelong began explaining to Koobee that the new governor had been charged by the King to make peace with the Eora. “Reconciliation,” said Macarthur, “with a mad dog like Pemulwuy!”

“The Governor is clearly charged by his Majesty to reconcile the Aborigines and that is the fact 0f the matter.”

Paterson leant forward in his chair. “Let me assure you that Phillip had all but talked them into sending a regiment of Highlanders out there with Hunter.”

Willmot closes his story with the following epilogue:

Bennelong died in Sydney in 1813.
Tedbury succeeded his father. He was captured and imprisoned in 1805, and died in New South Wales. The exact date is unrecorded.
Pemulwuy’s amputated head was placed in a jar of spirits and despatched from Australia aboard the ship 'Speedy’. To the best of the author’s knowledge the head still lies somewhere in England. His body and his spirit have long entered the earth and the Australia for which he gave his life.

Margaret Tucker (1977) tells her story as an autobiographical account of her childhood years spent at Moonahculla, an Australian Inland Mission Settlement in southern NSW. Tucker describes her environment in detail combined with clear connections to family and cultural kinship. She shares many aspects of Aboriginal cultural knowledge taught to her by members of clan groups. Evening campfires became classrooms where the older people were teachers using a storytelling technique to impart cultural knowledge and history to children. Tucker remembers:

As I listened to the tales told to us, handed down from our mother’s grandmother, I did not realise the significance. They told of the white explorers travelling down the Murray River. The Aborigines watched these men from behind the bushy gum trees, and ran silently from tree to tree as the men rowed down the river.

Throughout her teenage years, Tucker was placed into domestic service due to the Aboriginal Protection Board policy for Aboriginal people. She describes the cruel

26 Willmot, 1987: 30
27 Willmot, 1987: 167
28 Willmot, 1987: 299
29 Tucker, 1977: 44-5
existence she endured in these circumstances. Although she was extremely unhappy she remained optimistic that through her faith in Christianity righteousness would prevail:

_I make many mistakes, and don’t always have the courage to right those mistakes, but as long as I live, I pray that with God’s help, I can fight that old snake of hate and bitterness when he rears his head. That fight does bring peace of mind._

Toward the end of her book, Tucker relives her experiences as she travelled to different parts of the world. She closes her autobiography with a quote from Sir Douglas Nichols, who also held the same sentiments toward Christianity:

_In this I am guided always by the story Pastor Sir Douglas Nichols told in church one day about a black man who said, “You can play a tune of sorts on the white keys of a piano; you can play some sort of tune on the black keys; but for perfect harmony, you must use both. I got that point, it is a terrific one._

In closing these comments I feel it is respectful to use the words included on the book jacket of Aunty Margaret Tucker’s story:

_This is a simple tale of humour and sadness, adventure and legend. It is, incidentally, of great historical importance. But it will appeal as the story of a brave, dedicated woman and her struggle through a life of hardship towards the achievement of recognition for herself and her people._

James Miller (1985) in his publication has reconstructed his Koori (Aboriginal) ancestry through researching official and private documentation from pre-1820 till 1983. Miller insists on using the term ‘Koori’ throughout his publication when referring to Aboriginal people, out of respect for the people of the central coast of NSW who were the first to experience the impact of British invasion in 1788. In Miller’s ‘Introduction’ he supports the assertion what many Koori people believe about being over researched:

_In fact we are probably the most studied race of people in Australia. Academics have dealt with just about every aspect of Koori life. Archaeologists have dug, measured, recorded and drawn. Anthropologists have observed, written, compared and hypothesised, while linguists have listened tape-recorded structured and transcribed. There seems to be a never-ending supply of information on Kooris, researched by countless people throughout Australia._

Most documentation has been written by white people.
Due to the interest in adult education the pool of Koori authors are growing. This point is supported by Miller in his opening statement:

_More recently, however, there have been a number of Koori writers, writing about their own people. They are interpreting Koori lifestyles, both past and present, through their own eyes._\footnote{Miller, 1985: xv}

Miller highlights the experience of his family members during the eras of protection and control from 1880-1900. In many instances memories are reflected as similarities to institutions in other countries. The following comments were repeated in conversations:

_I have heard Kooris talk about their mission life experiences as being like those of the concentration camps of Russia and Nazi Germany. This can be seen as an emotional exaggeration on the part of these Kooris. However, the Koori mission stations were the closest things to concentration camps in Australia’s history._\footnote{Miller, 1985: 9}

Toward the end of his publication Miller makes reference to the relationship between the celebration of Australia Day and the attitude of Kooris. He notes the sentiment of two well known Koori activists:

_Charlie Perkins only a few days ago that for Kooris, Australia Day celebrations were “like dancing on your mother’s grave,” and Gary Foley saw it this way “Asking Aborigines to celebrate the landing of the First Fleet was like asking the Jews to celebrate the birth of the third Reich.”_\footnote{Miller, 1985: 225}

Miller briefly discusses the widespread feelings that still existed in the mid 1980s. He reproduced a letter received by the Sydney Morning Herald in 1983 which condemned any suggestion that Kooris had a rich culture before 1788. The author said:

_To describe as richly cultured a people who had no written language, only the most rudimentary musical instruments, practised no agricultural pursuits or animal husbandry, wore only animal skins and whose type of habitation could not have been more primitive, must be stretching any definition beyond belief._\footnote{Miller, 1985: 226}

Miller closes this book with a retort that such statements are more indicative of the author’s attitude than knowledge about the people the author is writing about.

John Moriarty (2000) opens his story by sharing memories and knowledge of Borroloola in the Northern Territory and who he is. He discusses in detail his kin
relationships to family and country which has shaped his Aboriginality. As a child his identity and place in the kinship structure was strong and clear until the Australian government policy of assimilation impacted on his life. He expresses the profound outcomes of policy implementation had on many people’s Aboriginality:

This was the identity I was born into, and it was what the assimilation policy of the government set out to destroy. It was an insidious, arrogant policy that amounted to cultural genocide. It was the stuff Hitler was made of, the things he espoused that are seen as abhorrent today.\(^{38}\)

For many years his memories of the treatment living in Mulgoa Anglican Mission Home and maturation as a man took up a vast amount of Moriarty’s time. It was not until 1960 that his political awareness in Aboriginal Affairs became meaningful. He became involved in Aboriginal community politics:

In South Australian politics Don Dunstan was also active in Aboriginal rights at the time, and I was impressed by his determination to abolish the exemption card that Aborigines needed to travel freely – an issue I felt very strongly about.\(^{39}\)

Moriarty was now entrenched in issues which affected Aboriginal rights. A co-ordinated approach grew when the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) was established in 1961.

It was a non-government body made up of Aborigines and non-Aborigines from around Australia and, as a founder of the Aborigines Progress Association, I was invited to participate.\(^{40}\)

Learning new information had always been of interest to Moriarty. In 1966 he made history by being the first Aboriginal person to be enrolled as a student at Flinders University in South Australia when he was 28 years old. He faced more challenges as a mature age student which is evident in the following comments:

One fellow even said “What’s he doing here? He’s an Aborigine – he shouldn’t be here. He should be back with his own mob, back on the reserves”.\(^{41}\)

As well, a fellow student remarked:

\(^{38}\) Moriarty, 2000: 6
\(^{39}\) Moriarty, 2000: 119
\(^{40}\) Moriarty, 2000: 126
\(^{41}\) Moriarty, 2000: 146
“Oh, it’s good that this Aborigine is at university, even though his intellectual capacity is not as good as ours”.\textsuperscript{42}

Of cause these perceptions do not apply to all people Moriarty came in contact with throughout his story.

Moriarty is a self-professed successful businessman who has built on his proud sense of Aboriginality. He has harnessed his experiences and used them as motivation to overcome challenges he has faced throughout his journey. Although he has faced some seemingly unsurmountable hurdles at times, he has drawn on his connection to family and country to strengthen his resolve to be an independent proud Aboriginal man with Irish heritage. He has spread his pride and culture around the world by transferring his artistic impressions onto two Quantas 747 aircraft. The ‘Wunala Dreaming’ story encapsulates feelings of his triumphant struggle to promote his culture.

Moriarty closes his story by making reference to the connection between his own children and his place of birth Borroloola.

\textit{I am happy for them that they will be able to keep their connection with Borroloola.}\textsuperscript{43}

Sally Morgan (1987) has used conversational themes throughout her publication to share the fascinating autobiography of her experience as a West Australian who grew up believing she was of Indian heritage. Similar experiences have occurred across Australia to many people who have not had the knowledge about their Aboriginality for a raft of reasons. Morgan’s mother supported this understanding during her school years:

\begin{quote}
“Come on, Mum, what are we?”
“What do the kids at school say?’
“Anything, Italian, Greek, Indian.”
“Tell them you’re Indian.”
I got really excited, then. “Are we really? Indian!” It sounded so exotic.
It was so good to finally have an answer and it satisfied our playmates. They could quite believe we were Indian, they just didn’t want us pretending we were Aussies when we weren’t.’\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{42} Moriarty, 2000: 147
\textsuperscript{43} Moriarty, 2000: 278
\end{footnotesize}
Morgan has recounted her family’s shame of being Aboriginal throughout her publication.

Towards the end of the school year I arrived home early one day to find Nan sitting at the kitchen table, crying. I froze in the doorway, I’d never seen her cry before.

“Nan... what’s wrong?”

“Nothin!”

“Then what are you crying for?”

She lifted up her arm and thumped her clenched fist hard on the kitchen table. “You bloody kids don’t want me, you want a bloody white grandmother, I’m black. Do you hear, black, black, black!”\(^{45}\)

These assertions based on the experiences of racism and discrimination spilled over into Morgan’s adult life. After an identity challenge was raised with the Commonwealth Government agency who administered Aboriginal scholarships, she became confused and questioned her claims to Aboriginality.

Had I been dishonest with myself? What did it really mean to be Aboriginal? I’d never lived off the land and been a hunter and a gatherer. I’d never participated in corroborees or heard stories of the Dreamtime. I hardly knew any Aboriginal people. What did it mean for someone like me?\(^{46}\)

Morgan use conversational oral history to investigate her family’s heritage. A journey to her grandmother’s country uncovers many hidden truths kept secret for generations. Her determination and curiosity revealed many aspects of Aboriginal culture that she was not aware of. A warning of her Grandmother’s death was heard by her sister Jill. Morgan completes her story by acknowledging the spiritual signs of Aboriginality:

“Oh, Nan,” I heard it too. I cried with sudden certainty. “I heard it, too. In my heart I heard it.”

The previous samples of Aboriginal identified authors are examples of how publications can include Aboriginal oral histories and knowledge of Aboriginal culture from the perspective of the writer. Various sources are used to validate the research undertaken by Aboriginal people. Oral histories cannot be discounted as a primary source of valuable information when reconstructing political and social history in an Aboriginal context.

\(^{44}\) Morgan, 1987: 45
\(^{45}\) Morgan, 1987: 120
\(^{46}\) Morgan, 1987: 179
This chapter will provide some discussion that contextualises the role of Aboriginal politics in the history of Aboriginal education. While general topics uncover the relationship between social exclusion and the lack of access to public education for the majority of Aboriginal people, detailed historical documentation is not the purpose of this study. Political activity and policy implementation has impacted on the social, cultural, physical and spiritual well-being of individuals and their communities. To explain the social circumstance of some Aboriginal people at particular intervals in history, I have inserted some examples of self-observation and reflective narration relevant to personal experiences. This method of writing is recognised by Wall: 2006:

*Auto ethnography as an emerging qualitative research method that allows the author to write ... drawing on his or her experience to extend understanding about a social phenomenon.*

A clear understanding of social injustices will emerge by highlighting some of the significant historical events where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leaders were washed ashore to remain in the sands of time, and take their place in the political efforts that affected Aboriginal Affairs. An overview of the following events will be explored:

- The Freedom Ride,
- The 1967 Referendum,
- The Tent Embassy,
- NAIDOC,
- The National Aboriginal Education Committee,
- The Native Title Decision,
- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission,
- The National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families,
- Reconciliation.

Aboriginal Education cannot be discussed in isolation without being inclusive of social determinants that exist in Aboriginal communities. Health outcomes, housing conditions, employment opportunities and cultural practices are social aspects that influence educational aspirations for Aboriginal people. In the second edition of *Generations of Resistance: Aborigines Demand Justice,* Lorna Lippmann (1991) makes reference to social circumstances and educational outcomes as they were interpreted by

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education systems. She cites an attitude held in the 1960s of a deficit theory relevant to Aboriginal Education:

*Children who came from homes which were economically poor or culturally different from the mainstream were seen as disadvantaged by their difference. According to this principle, it was not the school which was failing by its appropriateness but the students and their families who were inadequate and therefore non-achieving.*

Although some policies had changed and programs introduced in the following twenty years Lippmann identifies some distressing results:

*Many Aboriginal children live in worse conditions than those in Third World countries, their families a seemingly permanent underclass. Appalling living standards, homelessness, chronic unemployment and ill health are still the lot of large numbers, as are absence of clean water and sanitation.*

These social determinants were formally reported to the United Nations in Geneva by Dr Julian Berger (Deputy Director of the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues) after a visit to Australia in 1987:

*Berger had spent eight weeks in Aboriginal communities and expressed surprise that so little had been done by way of improvement in housing, employment and welfare, considering they were such a small population. He found that were living in Third World conditions, similar to those faced by blacks in South Africa.*

A third report was released in 1987 by Erica Irene Daes in her capacity of chairperson of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations:

*Australia has yet to achieve the level of Un standards in areas affecting basic rights and fundamental freedoms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.*

The relationship between social determinants and positive Aboriginal Education outcomes is clearly highlighted by the previous comments. These political issues will be discussed as we listen to many Aboriginal people make reference to social justice matters as they arise in some of the significant events where political action occurred. Throughout a recorded lecture ‘A History of the Political Struggle: A Personal Point of View’ produced by Jumbanna the Indigenous House of
Learning located at the University of Technology Sydney, ‘Chicka’ Dixon reflects on his involvement in the Australian political struggle as an Aboriginal person. He acknowledges many people who participated in the struggle for social justice. Charles ‘Chicka’ Dixon was born in 1928 and was one of the most colourful Aboriginal identities among many. He spent his early years in Wallaga Lake on the South Coast of NSW.

**fig. 3:**  
*Chicka Dixon*²

Dixon’s personal recollection of schooling included himself and others being taught by the Mission Manager’s wife, (an untrained teacher married to a sanitary carter from Bega) at the Wallaga Lake mission school. Dixon remembers that during the 1930s and 1940s that most Aboriginal people were not allowed to attend public schools. All students of families who lived on missions and reserves were taught by the Mission Manager’s wife or by untrained teachers as far as a third class level of instruction; it did not matter how old you were. He believed this was a strategy to purposely keep Aboriginal people illiterate. His family moved to Sydney in the late 1930s and lived on La Perouse Mission. In those days Aboriginal people across the country had to have a permit to leave the mission. Living conditions were maintained under the policies administered by the Aborigines Protection Board (APB). Dixon’s mother would beg him not to argue with the Mission Manager because of the threat to cut off their rations.

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² Dixon, 1928: State Library of NSW
Control of residents on reserves came under the administration of a Manager appointed by the APB. Under the Aborigines Protection Act 1909:

5. *The board may appoint managers of stations and such other officers as may be necessary.*

In 1946 Dixon celebrated his eighteenth birthday by attending a meeting held at the Ironworkers Union Hall in George Street Sydney. He intended to “make a pitch” for one of Bill Onus’ daughters who attended the meeting. Jack Patten was a passionate speaker who called for Aboriginal people to “stand up for their rights”. This was Dixon’s introduction to Aboriginal politics. He swore to give up alcohol while ever he fought for justice for Aboriginal people. He was conscious then of how power corrupts. His pledge to sobriety and the Aboriginal struggle was kept until his passing on 20th March 2010. After seeking advice from Patten on how he could become involved in the movement, he was advised by Patten of two important aspects he always needed to remember:

Never ever join a political party and never ever abuse a politician, use a politician.

He advised the audience he had continued to heed that advice ever since. According to Dixon, during the twenties, thirties and forties Aboriginal people survived many social changes. At first the notion of extermination was introduced to rid Aboriginal people from valuable farmland so that the “settlers” could grow crops to feed the population of homesteads and law-keepers of the land. In 1883 the NSW Aborigines Protection Board was established. Later a strategy was introduced to collect and locate Aboriginal people onto missions and reserves. The Board’s policy was that all Aboriginal people should live on reserves. By 1883 there were 25 reserves established, increasing to 133 by 1900 as stated by Parbury: 1986 in ‘Survival: A History of Aboriginal Life in New South Wales’ (p 86). Management of reserves was implemented under the regime of the Aborigines Protection Board. Traditional lifestyles changed dramatically.

No longer was traditional hunting and gathering the most important daily skill taught to young Aboriginal people as an educational tool of survival. On particular days a replacement activity was the handing out of food rations by the mission manager, for

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54 Dixon, 2005: DVD Jumbanna the Indigenous House of Learning
those who lived on missions and reserves. Formal education of cultural lore in public places was violently discouraged, ultimately enforced by law keepers and punished by mission managers through the withdrawal of rations. Public expression of culture became exotic traditional dance performances at the request of non-Aboriginal people, to impress visitors to townships. These performances were employed as a method of evaluation to illustrate how Aboriginal people were treated. Cultural Education was replaced by a form of educational instruction delivered by untrained teachers in mission schools. To counteract the unjust treatment of Aboriginal people, the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA) was established in the mid 1920s. The delivery of education was sub-standard. Horner: 1974 states:

*The staff positions on thirty Aboriginal stations were taken by Europeans. The manager of a ‘station’ and his wife as the matron, were chosen by the sub-committee of the Protection Board for their managerial experience. But the candidates were expected, though not trained, to be the teacher and nurse there as well. If possible a matron was a nurse, with double-certificates. Their appointment was curious: for they were ‘Ministerial employees’ of the Chief Secretary’s Department, under Section 44 of the NSW Public Service Act: paid by the Education Department, and loaned to the Aborigines Protection Board on the nomination of the under-Secretary of the Chief Secretary, the Inspector-General of Police and the Chief Inspector of Education (all members of the Board). The last named judging by interview ‘if they were of a standard of education to teach Aborigines’. This enabled the school inspectors to visit the station schools for an inspection, but the conditions of managers’ and matrons’ service was not controlled by the Public Service Board.*

55 These comments are evidence of the attitude and policies in place to educate Aboriginal children during the 1920s and 1930s. In 1943 social changes were being made to the circumstance of Aboriginal people due to political pressure being applied by Aboriginal people.

The following personal reflection supports Horner’s commentary, as an observation embedded in my memory, to demonstrate that practices of segregation continued until the early 1950s:

An example in my own lived experience is ‘Tobwabba’ mission school on the NSW North Coast. This school had one class inclusive of all ages from six to fourteen.

55 Homer, 1974: p13-14
Education instruction was delivered by the Minister’s wife in the church located on the mission. During the early 1950s a policy of ‘Integration’ was implemented in the public education system. I recall very clearly the day the “mission kids” came to Forster Central School. I was in 5th class at the time. All the Koori kids were placed in 2nd or 3rd class regardless of their age or education skill level. In later years I’ve thought about how embarrassing that must have been for those Aboriginal kids who knew all the town kids of their own age, but found themselves placed in much lower classes than what they were. Of course the majority of the non-Aboriginal kids made fun of the Koori kids because of their placement in the lower classes. (Laurel Williams).

The following excerpts from an Aboriginal history timeline (1900 to 1969) are evidence of an alternative option to living under the so called protection of the government:

A further amendment to the Aboriginal protection legislation in NSW give two Aboriginal people- one ‘full-blood’ and one ‘half-caste’- representation on the Aboriginal Welfare Board. Walter Page and William Ferguson, both Aboriginal Progressive Association members, take up the positions.

Challenges and bickering continued among the members of the Board.

An Exemption Certificate is introduced, exempting certain Aboriginal people from restrictive legislation and entitling them to vote, drink alcohol and move freely but prohibiting them from consorting with others who are not exempt.

This process caused dissention among communities and created rifts within families:

Aboriginal people use the derogatory terms ‘dog tags’ or ‘dog licences’ to refer to the certificates. For many Aboriginal people renunciation of their traditional lifestyle is promoted as the only opportunity to overcome poverty, gain work and access to education and social welfare benefits.56

Unless families had in their possession an ‘Exemption Certificate’, which allowed families to enrol their children in the public education system, access to public education followed after the process of sub-standard instruction delivery for Aboriginal people across the country was discontinued. Not all Aboriginal people supported the idea of holding one of these certificates, also known as ‘dog tags’, because there was a feeling that people who applied to the Board had become assimilated to white ways of living and thinking. Exemption Certificates were granted after meeting eligibility criteria set by the Aborigines Welfare Board. Aboriginal people had to be approved by non-Aboriginal people to be worthy of living off the mission, of being independent of

any welfare handouts from the Aborigines Welfare Board and promise to return the certificate immediately if revoked (attachment 1). Some of the positive aspects of holding a ‘dog tag’ meant that Aboriginal people had access to the public education system, could purchase land and build accommodation to house their family and maintain gainful employment. Being able to self-determine their own future without relinquishing their Aboriginality was coveted by many Aboriginal people across the country. On a personal level, my grandparents held exemption certificates. The following reflections describe some personal memories of how the principle of self-determination was implemented by my family:

Nan (Lucy) and Pa (Andrew) Leon were able to do a lot of things because of being granted an exemption certificate. Pa and his brothers built a house in the town to accommodate his family. Pa also built a cottage on land Nan owned adjacent to their house and rented it to tourists. Pa was employed in the timber industry therefore knew a lot about timber and its uses. He was self taught and did not have any formal qualifications connected to the building industry. After my mother died when I was two years old, my brother, older sister and myself lived in that house with other members of our family until both my grandparents passed away.

Because he was raised on the coast he learned how to construct boats for recreation use. I remember the one man sailing boat he made for my brother Colin. I must have been about four years old. He and his brothers also built a launch named ‘Maud’ that both he and Nan used to take tourists around Wallis Lake. They were involved in the tourist industry at a time when Aboriginal people were not even acknowledged as citizens of this country. Uncle Keith (Nan and Pa’s son) told me that he had a good education at Forster Central School and was dux when he was in third year (HS). His younger brothers were attending the public school in 1939, even though several years before, they were refused admission.

Pa was involved in the fishing industry during World War II, and had responsibility to provide some food resources for the local community. Two of his four sons and a son-in-law (Claude Leon, Keith Leon and Joseph Clarke) enlisted in the army and fought in overseas campaigns. Uncle Keith lived on Tobwabba Mission (Tobwabba was renamed Cabarita) with his family and became very involved in Aboriginal community affairs.
My own experience at Forster Central School was positive and I was rewarded with academic success. In my final year I was elected as the school sports captain in the early 1960s. This seems a contradiction in social practices when you consider as an Aboriginal person I was allowed access to swimming pool facilities from 9.00 am till 3.00 pm, but outside of that timeframe and in the company of my cousins and friends from Tobwabba we were denied access to certain recreational facilities in this town (Laurel Williams).

During this period in Australia a cultural wedge was inserted into Aboriginal communities. The non-Aboriginal caste system supported the notion of who is a “real” Aboriginal person. Due to mixed heritage or wherever an individual’s birthplace was individuals were placed in various categories depending on skin colour and depth of cultural knowledge. Stereotypes emerged as a result that continues to be applied today. The popular descriptor is presented as someone who has dark skin, big brown eyes, a flat nose, curly black hair and can be found sitting cross legged around a campfire with a spear lying beside him on the sandy earth. This image was transferred internationally, into the minds of people as information about Aboriginal people, on the 2000 Australian Olympic Games promotion website. There are the Aboriginal people who grew up on a mission or reserve and people who were born on a river bank or those who lived in town or those people who were removed from their families either under the Aborigines Protection Board (APB) policy of child removal or because of welfare issues. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people today originate from diverse cultural and social backgrounds, because of historical and social policies implemented by the APB. The APB continued until the late 1950s and underwent a name change becoming the Aboriginal Welfare Board.

After many years of organising, Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal supporters united to take up the mantle of equality for Aboriginal people. Many Aboriginal people became leaders in black politics, under the direction of several organisations. Details can be found in Horner: 1974 (p27) when Charles Leon reminded Ferguson that the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA) had been active from 1924 to 1927, and William Cooper who had started an organisation, the Australian Aborigines
League (p30), also Maynard: 2007, (p71) when he highlights the AAPA’s Kempsey conference as being a huge success and demonstrated the organisational capacity of the AAPA. Dixon reflects in his Jumbanna lecture, of his involvement in 1957 when the first National Aboriginal organisation was established under the name of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI). This organisation included Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal membership. Conferences were held every Easter to discuss issues relating to housing, health, employment, education or double H double E. Some of the names have changed but the underlying issues remained the same year after year. Dixon recalls one of the biggest mistakes made by Aboriginal people is that a permanent political lobby has never been established in Canberra and accredits this inaction as being the failure to making long term change in Aboriginal Affairs generally.

**Freedom Ride**

Perkins is recorded erroneously in Australian history as being the first Aboriginal male to graduate from an Australian University in the mid 1960s. The honour of firsts was shared by Margaret Valadian also a graduate of Sydney University. Perkins was well known as an Aboriginal activist, a leader of equality for his people and a skilled sportsperson (soccer). His passion for soccer was reported in an interview and included in Perkins’ published biography by Peter Read: 1990:

*In June 1957 Perkins...said “Soccer to me is one way of breaking down the barriers between national, racial and language difficulties.*

When I deliver Aboriginal cultural awareness training activities, participants are requested to identify five Aboriginal politicians. Perkins is often mistakenly identified as an elected politician instead of the highest ranked Aboriginal bureaucrat of his time employed in Australia. Perkins was invited to address the Rotary Club of Melbourne on Australia Day in 1984, where he expressed his thoughts about what Australia Day means to many Aboriginal people:

*I am a descendant of a once proud tribe from Central Australia – the Arrente [sic] people. Today we number very few and own nothing ... We cringe like dogs at the prospect of the ‘White backlash’. We pray eternally that the White authority structure will not turn on us and impede what little progress we have made. We...*  

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57 Reid, 1990: 50
ask for land rights with tongue in cheek knowing full well in our hearts that the land belonged to us in the first instance. We stagger and stumble into each other in confusion when our identity ... is contested and thus allow ourselves to be moulded by others. Our land, our pride and our future has been taken away from us and our people buried in unmarked graves. We wander through Australian society as beggars. We live off the crumbs of the White Australian table and are told to be grateful. This is what Australia Day means to Aboriginal Australians. We celebrate with you, but there is much sadness in our joy. It is like dancing on your mother’s grave.58

Civil unrest reported in the United States of America and relayed to Australia via media reports on radio and television motivated activists in support of Aboriginal human rights issues in Australia, to stage a protest outside the American Embassy in Canberra ACT. This group was encouraged to look in their own backyard before they take up the fight for equal rights outside their own country. This advice led to a duplication of the “Freedom Riders” action of the American Civil Rights Movement. Students studying at Sydney University formed a group called the Student Action for Aborigines (SAFA), with aims to support Aboriginal people to resist discrimination. SAFA also wanted to raise public attention to the poor state of social determinants namely Aboriginal health, education and housing. Perkins was elected as President of SAFA. In February 1965 Perkins led a group of Sydney University students through rural NSW to bring attention to the sub-standard living conditions of Aboriginal people and the high level of racial discrimination existing in country towns. Aboriginal people did not have access to public amenities such as cinemas, hotels, cafes and swimming pools.

The 1965 bus ride received national and international media coverage and became known as the Aboriginal ‘Freedom Ride’. In the town of Walgett the Freedom Riders were joined by local Aboriginal people who picketed the Walgett RSL. Although the RSL is the home of the ANZAC legend and promotes concepts of mateship and nationhood, Aboriginal ex-servicemen were only able to use club facilities on ANZAC Day. Entry was refused on any other day, as experienced and expressed by local Aboriginal returned servicemen. After the protest at Walgett, an unidentified driver rammed the bus forcing it off the road. After reporting this incident to the authorities,
the local police refused to offer protection of the Freedom Riders.

At Moree, the students gave a public address against the discriminatory act of segregation against Aboriginal people accessing the local swimming pool facilities. Admission was refused on the grounds of cleanliness and not based on racism as alleged by the protestors, resounded the pool manager. After constant abuse and conflict between the protestors and local non-Aboriginal residents, an agreement was reached to desegregate access to the pool, but unfortunately was later reinstated. The Freedom Riders visited Wellington, Gulargumbone, and then returned to Sydney via Lismore, Bowraville and Kempsey.

The same restrictions applied to Aboriginal people in my hometown at that time.

My experience as a teenager in Forster was being allowed limited access to the local picture theatre (cinema) and remains a very clear memory. We were charged the same entry fee as everyone else, but could only sit in the first four rows of the theatre closest to the viewing screen. This section was roped off for Aboriginal entry only. The usher would patrol the area repeatedly to ensure nobody sneaked off to other seating outside this space.

There were two hotels in the vicinity, one at Forster and one at Tuncurry. Access to Tuncurry was limited to a launch drawn ferry or a private boat to travel across the mouth of Wallis Lake. Even though many Aboriginal men fought in World War II, they were denied equal rights to recreational drinking at both hotels. The usual practice was to give money to their non-Aboriginal mates to purchase alcohol for them and pass it through a gap in the fence at the rear of the hotel. This practice encouraged people to drink at home or in secluded public places.

A recreational pinball centre was established in the main street which housed a juke box. Early in its operations Aboriginal teenagers were allowed to spend their money enjoying the music available and playing the pin ball machines. If one Aboriginal person got a bit cheeky with the owner of the Centre, then all of us were barred from entry for a couple of months to teach us a lesson. During these periods we gathered
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Across the street to listen to the music at least.

I mentioned the bewilderment of not being able to enter the main beach baths outside school hours in the summer. Thank goodness the fence was removed and access is open to anybody and everybody now (Laurel Williams).

In 2005, another re-enactment ‘Freedom Ride’ travelled through NSW to determine how much, if anything had changed in forty years and to foster debate on reconciliation. This group conducted interviews and filmed a cross section of community members in towns that they visited, to investigate the current position of race relations and whether Aboriginal people were getting a fair go. Workshops and discussion forums were held with large groups of senior high school students. There were many compelling stories of racism and barriers faced by Aboriginal people in NSW including exclusion and differential treatment in shops and public places. Experiences of discrimination were reported and poor housing conditions for some Aboriginal families were noted. After visiting thirteen communities, findings were presented to the then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Andrew Refshauge. Some of the film footage and a summary of the key issues were presented to the Minister. Plans were outlined for a range of projects and campaigns arising from the ride. Several individual complaints about discrimination are being followed up and funding is being sought to develop material collected, and formatted into an educational resource which can be used by schools and the community. A documentary has been produced about the re-enactment ride and further details can be accessed on http://reconciliation.org.au/nsw/freedom-ride/#2005.

1967 Referendum

A campaign was launched in 1960 to change the Australian Constitution. The first question, referred to as the ‘nexus question’ was an attempt to alter the balance of numbers in the Senate and the House of Representatives. The second question was to determine whether two references in the Australian Constitution, which discriminated against Aboriginal people, should be removed. A door knock appeal was driven by FCAATSI. Dixon remembers being spat on by many people during that appeal. When Aboriginal people approached State and Territory governments for financial assistance to improve living conditions in communities, they were told they had no money
therefore they could not help them. This was true because the Federal government controlled the finances distributed to States and Territories. It was vital to have both sections of the Constitution relevant to Aboriginal people changed.59

The 1965 ‘Freedom Ride’ protest action publicised through worldwide media outlets, sparked debate and discussion around Australia about the state of Aboriginal affairs. It is believed that this debate and media publicity led to the majority vote being carried in the 1967 Referendum, which approved two amendments to the Australian Constitution. On 27th May 1967 a Federal Referendum was held.

The Aboriginal sections of the Constitution under scrutiny were:

51 The Parliament shall, subject to the Constitution, have power to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the commonwealth with respect to:-

(xxvi) The people of any race, other than the aboriginal people in any State, for whom it is necessary to make special laws.

127. In reckoning the numbers of the people of the Commonwealth, or of a State or other part of the Commonwealth, aboriginal natives should not be counted.60

The removal of the words ‘... other than aboriginal people in any State...’ in section 51(xxvi) and the whole of section 127 was considered by many to be representative of the previously publicised protests for political change within Aboriginal affairs. The practical application of this change included:

1) The Commonwealth Government was given the power and responsibility to make laws specifically to benefit Aboriginal people. This was an important step in increasing the government’s ability to provide welfare, empowerment, and access to justice for Aboriginal people:

2) Another constitutional change allowed Aboriginal people to be included in the population count as people of the States and Territories in Australia.

The result of the 1967 Referendum was accredited to the political climate instigated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs:

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59 Dixon, 2005: Jumbanna the Indigenous House of Learning DVD
As a result of the political climate, this referendum saw the highest YES vote ever recorded in a Federal referendum, with 90.77 per cent voting for change.61

What rights did Aboriginal people have prior to 1967? The first denial of citizenship rights was the misuse of the term ‘terra nullius’ as this negated all existing Aboriginal Australians legal rights, such as native title, to land and customary law. Legally, Aboriginal people, like other Australians, were British subjects from the beginning of European occupation. In practice however they were treated differently. Some notable colonial legislation that targeted Aboriginal people included:

- 1816 Martial Law (NSW). This proclamation declared Aboriginal Australians could be shot on sight if armed with spears, or even unarmed, if they were within a certain distance of houses or settlements.
- 1824 (Tasmania). Settlers are authorised to shoot Aboriginal people.
- 1869 (Victoria). The Governor can order the removal of any child to a reformatory or industrial school.
- 1890 (NSW). In a denial of human rights the Aborigines Protection Board could forcibly take children off reserves and socialise them to become socially acceptable to dominant cultural behaviour patterns.

Responsibility for Aboriginal Affairs was State controlled and each State’s conditions and regulations varied. Colonial governments, aware of the effects of violence, introduced diseases and of dispossession, believed that Aboriginal people were doomed to extinction and deserved protection during their remaining years. The colonies passed laws, usually called Aboriginal Protection Acts, which established authorities to place Aboriginal Australians on reserves to look after them. Colonial and State Protection Acts were constituted in Australian States between 1886 and 1911. Protection laws reduced the legal status of those on reserves from British subjects to wards of the state, with members of the Protection Boards as their legal guardians. The aim of the Acts may have been protection, but in practice they gave complete power and control over the lives of the Aboriginal people under the Protection Boards care.

Pat Davis-Hurst writes about her reflections of the historical situation under the

Aborigines Protection Board while growing up on Sunrise Station, later known as Purfleet Mission, on the fringe of Taree on the mid North Coast of NSW.

Sunrise Station was officially established in 1900 by the APB even though official records do not indicate it ever existed. Yet all the Goories of the Manning Valley knew of it by that name. Apparently it was changed when during World War II, because of the conflict with Japan, the design over the entrance could have been mistaken as a representation of the Japanese War emblem. Aboriginal people were not allowed to leave the Mission boundaries without the permission of the Manager. The Department of Family Endowments paid money into the APB for the distribution of food and clothing, most of which they never received: only a few meagre rations were supplied through the Manager. Total control regarding the mobility of Aboriginal people was given to the Mission Managers during this period. Segregation occurred throughout NSW not unlike the Walgett and Moree situations, as highlighted by the Freedom Rides.

In 1943 Exemption Certificates for Aboriginals were issued to those who could prove that they could take their place in white society. Many Aboriginal people refused to accept this because they felt it was degrading and reminded them of the old “King Billy” neck plate days.

The official policy of protection ended in 1941. The Protection Board was replaced with the Welfare Board. Only the name changed, but everything else stayed the same. Old age and invalid pensions, previously withheld from Aboriginals were now given, but only to those that lived on missions. In 1963 the ban on alcohol was lifted. But many Aboriginals were excluded from hotels, and the hotels that did accept them had a special room in the back for Aboriginals. The biggest change came after the 1967 Referendum... The reign of the Managers ended in 1968 and the Missionaries left in 1971 when the Purfleet Aboriginal Advancement League was set up by the local Aboriginals.\[62\]

Further evidence is provided that supports the notion that social policies have changed throughout history. From the 1940s State governments continued to issue citizenship rights to some Aboriginal people under certain conditions. The following rules were an expectation for those Aboriginal people under consideration for approval, prior to receiving a certificate. They had to promise to give up their traditional ways, to keep away from other Aboriginal people, to live a European lifestyle and to keep out of trouble. Certificates were then issued which allowed them to vote, to go into hotels, allowed their children to go to school and removed them from the restrictions of State protection laws. Legally these certificates meant that the people were no longer held

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62 Davis-Hurst, 1996: 17
social Aboriginal status. These certificates could be suspended or cancelled by a magistrate and there was no right of appeal.

The political and social environment of discrimination was still bubbling under the surface for Aboriginal people living in the Manning River district. In 1979 a race riot erupted between Taree and Purfleet residents. Police became involved and charges were laid against the Aboriginal people arrested. Davis-Hurst: 1996 reports:

*The race riots and conflicts of 1979 demonstrated that the people of Purfleet at that time were an alienated community – a community geographically located on the ‘outskirts’ with people occupying so-called government land and housing, suffering chronic unemployment and alcoholism, poor standards of health and educational achievement, together with feelings of shame, powerlessness and victimisation. Such feelings of alienation had been the definite outcome of historical relationships, especially the forced exclusion of the members of the Biripi and other nations from the traditional culture and forced exclusion from the mainstream of modern life.*

These riots were well publicised by the media across the country. Many communities started to analyse this social situation and wondered whether circumstances had changed very much since the 1967 Referendum.

While access to education had improved, many Aboriginal people in Australia did not feel that the quality of education had advanced enough to encourage people to seek out life changing opportunities in a broader Australian society. Leaders in communities had recognised the need for more Aboriginal people to gain successful educational outcomes. In 1969 finances became available through Dixon’s fund raising activities, supported by the Waterside Workers Union and the Painters and Dockers Union, to send five people to the United Nations to highlight acts of discrimination against Aboriginal people, at an international conference for black people. At that time the Aboriginal infant mortality rate was 5 to 1. Dixon wanted to expose this disgrace in the international arena. He sent Jack Davis, Patsy Kruger, Bob Mazza, Bruce McGuiness and Sol Belllear to the five day conference. He was not aware they did not have speaking rights. Comments made by Dixon in the recorded political lecture reveals that Belllear stayed

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63 Ramsland, 2001: 158
After Bellear’s visa expired he was protected by the ‘Black Panther Party’ who showed him how they set up community services to cater for the American Negro population. When Bellear returned to Australia he shared these ideas with Aboriginal leaders. In 1970 Prof. Hal Wooten held a meeting at the University of NSW which included Dixon, Bellear, five solicitors and himself. After five weeks of observing the actions led by the police force outside the Empress Hotel in Redfern, evidence highlighted the need for Aboriginal people to have legal representation in the local court system. Police vans were backed up outside the doors of the hotel and charges of being drunk or having goods in custody were laid against Aboriginal people who were loaded into the vans. The Aboriginal Legal Service was established.

In 1971, Prof. Fred Hollows spoke at a meeting attended by Chicka Dixon, Shirley Smith, Elsa Dixon, Gordon Briscoe, Gordon Nelson, Faye Nelson and Dr. McLeod proposing that a health service for Aboriginal people be established at 1 Botany Road Redfern. Prof. Fred Hollows provided the funding on the proviso that Dixon lobbied the government for continued funding after six months. The Aboriginal Medical Service still enjoys continued funding to this day. E. Dixon was the inaugural President and remained in that position for thirty five years, states her husband C. Dixon.

In 1971, David Anderson confessed at a FCAATSI rally that he had been paid $1,000 by ASIO, the (Australian National Security Intelligence Service), to disrupt the meeting. Anderson was so overcome by shame he reported this action to the meeting. Leaders became wary of Aboriginal people they did not know who attended future rallies. They established a ‘Black Caucus’ which enabled Aboriginal people who were known to be dedicated to the struggle to attend meetings.

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64 Dixon, 2005: Jumbanna the Indigenous House of Learning DVD
65 Dixon, 2005: Jumbanna the Indigenous House of Learning DVD
66 Dixon, 2005: Jumbanna the Indigenous House of Learning DVD
The Tent Embassy

In 1946 Patten spoke at the Ironworkers Union Hall calling for Aboriginal people to stand up for their human rights. He recommended that a Mission Station be set up in front of Parliament House in Canberra. Dixon reminds people that it took twenty six years for that recommendation to come to fruition in the form of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy.

**fig 4: The Aboriginal Tent Embassy**

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Source: National Archives of Australia, Canberra

The Aboriginal Tent Embassy was founded on Australia Day 26th January in 1972 to protest against the decision made by the McMahon Liberal government to reject a proposal for Aboriginal Land Rights. The government instead planned to implement a lease system, conditional on the ability of Aboriginal people to make economic and social use of the land, and excluding rights to mineral and forestry resources. Four Aboriginal activists:- Michael Anderson, Billy Craigie, Bertie Williams and Tony Coory, set up the protest under a beach umbrella on the lawns of old Parliament House in Canberra. A kind person felt sorry because of the icy weather conditions and supplied the protesters with a blue tent. Dixon joined them after he had finished work as a wharfie on the Friday of that week. They gave themselves ministerial portfolios, painted “no parking Aboriginal Embassy staff only” on the gutter and installed a letter box outside the tent. Dixon became the Minister for Defence. The movement gained traction with more and more tents being erected and numbers swelling to 2,000 people. On July

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20, 1972 after the Government modified a law relating to trespass on Commonwealth lands, police moved in and forcibly dismantled the embassy. Dixon stated this had been the highest level of violence he had ever experienced.

*fig: 5  Bishop Garnsey’s Telegram*  

The Australian Council of Churches made their sentiments known by sending a telegram to the Prime Minister (see above). Non-Aboriginal support was exhibited for the call for Aboriginal Land Rights by physically protesting alongside Aboriginal people in Canberra. Many more non-Aboriginal people stood beside Aboriginal people regardless of the threat of being locked up. The police removed the tent amid violent protests. The Embassy was re-established in 1974 and remained there until activist Perkins negotiated its removal pending the enactment of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act in 1976.

Seventeen years later, the Australian launch of the International Year of Indigenous People was marked by a speech delivered by the Prime Minister Paul Keating in

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68 Garnsey Australian Council of Churches: 1972. Australian Archives of Australia
Redfern Park, Sydney. Redfern, an inner city suburb is well known for a site where large numbers of Aboriginal people have relocated from country areas. Redfern is also known as a place where Aboriginal people meet to discuss political action against social injustice. Keating reminds people about a social test for non-Aboriginal people in the following words:

*It is a test of our self-knowledge. Of how well we know the land we live in. How well we know our history. How well we recognise the fact that complex as contemporary identity is, it cannot be separated from Aboriginal Australia. How well we know what Aboriginal Australians know about Australia. Redfern is a good place to contemplate these things.*

The Aboriginal Tent Embassy was listed on the Register of the National Estate as a site that represented the political struggle of all Aboriginal Australians in 1995. The Embassy returned to the front pages of the newspapers this year (2012) when activists marked the 40th Anniversary of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra ACT.

**National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee**

National Aboriginal Day grew out of protests against the treatment of Aboriginal people. Since 1946 the 26th January has been celebrated as a national day for all States and Territories and is known as Australia Day. Citizenship ceremonies have been included in Australia Day activities ever since (66 years), for migrants who have moved to Australia from many countries throughout the world and have applied to be accepted as Australian citizens. The 1967 Referendum took place only 46 years ago (2013) which altered the Australian Constitution to allow Aboriginal people to be counted in the census as Australian citizens. Maybe there are parents and grandparents of students enrolled in schools, who are Aboriginal and 46 years old or more, which means they were not Australian citizens before 1967. Now Aboriginal people acknowledge 26th January as a ‘Day of Mourning or Survival Day’. Aboriginal people have formed committees to lead discussion against social inequality and continued disadvantage in many Aboriginal communities.

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On Australia Day in 1938, protestors marched through Sydney streets. Aboriginal people gathered on the Sunday before Australia Day from 1940–1955 to acknowledge the Day of Mourning. In 1955 the Aboriginal Day date was moved to the first Sunday in July, not to protest but to celebrate Aboriginal Cultures. The National Aborigines Day Observance Committee was formed to co-ordinate cultural celebrations across the country. The date was also changed to the second Sunday of the month in July 1956 and became a day for Aboriginal people to celebrate their heritage and cultures. By 1974 the celebrations were extended from 1 day to 1 week and included Torres Strait Island people and their cultures. NAIDOC is celebrated from the 1st Sunday in July through to the 2nd Sunday in July.

Each year a theme is selected by the NAIDOC committee and a capital city hosts a ball where awards are presented for outstanding achievements in a variety of areas. Last year (2012) the theme was “Spirit of the Tent Embassy 40 years on”, and the host city was Hobart, Tasmania. Schools have become involved in activities to support celebrations and learn about aspects of Aboriginal Cultures through the participation of Aboriginal community members in school activities. Annual themes and the history of NAIDOC can be accessed on http://www.naidoc.org.au/about/national-naidoc-committee

Because of the changes made to the school terms in NSW, National Aboriginal Islander Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) celebration week falls within the school holidays. This is why schools have organised activities to embrace Aboriginal history and cultures, either a week before term holidays or the week after the term holidays. Often pressure is placed on Aboriginal community members to actively participate as a voluntary resource to support school NAIDOC celebrations.

**National Aboriginal Education Committee**

An interim committee for the Australian Schools Commission was established by the Whitlam government on 12th December 1972, chaired by Professor Peter Karmel. The Schools Commission took the advice provided by Karmel: 1973 (p106) for the urgent need to a co-ordinated national policy approach in Aboriginal Education. The following terms of reference invited a form of political action in Aboriginal Education service provision. According to Schwab: 92 (1995):
The National Aboriginal Consultative Group (NACG) was appointed in 1974. According to the terms of reference, the Consultative Group was asked to present a viewpoint to the Commission on:

- Present policies and educational provision in respect to Aborigines;
- Present patterns of administering funds for the education of Aborigines;
- Specific matters, the Group feel are of importance in respect to the education of Aborigines (Aboriginal Consultative Group 1975: 2).

The NACG was superseded by the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) in 1997 to provide advice and direction in Aboriginal Education across Australia. The new Committee comprised of a full-time Chair and 18 part-time members represented by each State and Territory of Aboriginal people who were employed or had an interest in Aboriginal Education services. These interests were drawn from Pre-school to Adult Education provision inclusive of Traditional Cultural perspectives. The NAEC was chaired from 1977 through to the abolition of the organization in 1989, by Aboriginal scholars and people who had insight into the value of education in Australian society. Stephen Albert from Western Australia was the inaugural Chairperson, followed by the late John Budby from Queensland then Professor Paul Hughes from South Australia, then the late Dr. Errol West from Tasmania, and the final Chair was Lynette Crocker from South Australia. A major strategy to influence change in Australian society was through education. The NAEC worked with State and Territory education departments to incorporate Aboriginal Studies throughout curriculum.

Errol West was born in Launceston, Tasmania on 20.6.1947. His traditional lineage is the Emeratta tribe of Northern Tasmania. His spirit to be was created on the islands of his ancestors who were annihilated and the remaining descendants were dispossessed in the Bass Strait area. Errol received only five years of formal education and that in numerous schools on the islands and mainland of Tasmania. He accompanied his mother and father as they followed the cycle of seasonal work open to Aborigines in the late forties and early fifties. With the support and constant encouragement of his family, he re-entered education and studied to be a primary school teacher. Errol is presently Chairperson of the National Aboriginal Education Committee-the Commonwealth Government's principal policy advisor on issues regarding...
Included in a paper delivered at an In-service Course for teachers of the Metropolitan South-West Region of NSW in 1981, West highlights the need for Aboriginal community participation in education programs.

*The NAEC believes that it is specifically within, and through the education system itself that Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders can make an initial contribution, both to their own people and to non-Indigenous Australian people. A contribution which, as time goes on will have an impact of immense importance on the whole of Australian society.*

In his role as Chairperson, West could see the need for educational skills to be honed to deal with the changing sophisticated technology being introduced to Australian society. He also highlighted the fact that if you belonged to a minority group in this country, a higher standard of education must be achieved to function on a daily basis on a level playing field. He projected that without adequate English literacy and numeracy skills, any group which cannot manage these essential survival skills will become reliant on others in the general population. While the NAEC was involved in providing educational advice to Ministers and Department heads at the National level, State advisory committees duplicated this process in State and Territory jurisdictions. A consultation network needed to be structured in order to stimulate community participation in Aboriginal education service provision. This structure would apply to urban and rural schools.

The NAEC had encouraged the establishment of State and Regional Aboriginal Advisory Groups to advise State Ministers and their Departments, Regional Directors and schools relevant to Aboriginal Education. By 1981 Western Australia as well as other States including NSW had established their structures, or were in the process of establishing Regional groups. At this time the National body worked in close consultation with States and Territories through the common membership on each of the organisations. The three tiered structure promoted the concept of a two way consultative
process at all levels. Bob Morgan, John Lester, John Heath and Davina Tyrell were NSW members on NAEC.

At the same time as the AECG committee kicked off in 1977, Bob was appointed to the NAEC: ... I (Bob Morgan) became a member of the NAEC. Which was also a great experience, because we were talking earlier about empowerment and involvement and control and everything – well, at that stage, the late ‘70’s right up to the mid-’80’s, the NAEC was a powerful, powerful Aboriginal Education body, distributing funds and negotiating directly with Ministers about funding: yeah it was very powerful and I’m saddened that we do not have that type of forum around today.74

In 1979, there was seventy two qualified and practising Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander teachers in Australia and far fewer numbers qualified in all other University disciplines combined. In an attempt to rectify the disproportionate number of Aboriginal people participating in the teaching profession, the NAEC set a national target of one thousand Aboriginal teachers to be teaching in classrooms by 1990. Universities across the country received an injection of funds to improve their programs in support of the NAEC higher education target. This target was achieved. Universities across the country designed teacher training courses to meet the needs of Aboriginal people, therefore increasing retention rates. The following description is one of the courses offered through the University of Western Sydney (UWS) Macarthur.

During my employment at Macarthur I completed a Primary Teaching degree through enrolment in the Aboriginal Rural Education Program (AREP) from 1983 to 1988. An intake of fifteen people was invited to take up studies in the Faculty of Education for the first time under this program. Students attended face-to-face teaching blocks of two weeks and weekends in addition to employment responsibilities. The majority of students were those employed in Aboriginal Education provision and drawn from towns across NSW. Of the fifteen students enrolled, only three graduated. They were George Day from Deniliquin, Mindy Gibbs from Walgett and Laurel Williams from Casula. Since then changes have been made, but originally higher education opportunities were opened up to country centres, which have proven to be successful and assisted in meeting the NAEC targets set to graduate one thousand Aboriginal teachers by 1990.

Another mechanism that offered support to all Aboriginal Support Centres located in NSW and ACT Universities was the Aboriginal Higher Education Network. This organisation was open to staff employed in the Centres to become members. A

74 Parbury, 2010: 31-32
significant activity that I became involved in was membership of a delegation to carry out a protest to the Federal Government against proposed changes to ABSTUDY. Several people from across the Higher Education sector spent a week in Canberra to develop strategies and arguments to present at a meeting with Federal Education Minister Vanstone. The meeting had some success in delaying the inevitable changes that were introduced in January 2000. This is another example where the power of governments through legislation and policies will always uphold their own forward planning (Laurel Williams).

Since the abolition of the NAEC several committees have been appointed to provide advice to governments on Aboriginal Education, but none have been proven to be as successful as the NAEC. Under the co-ordination of NAEC, conferences were held to inform participants about pertinent topics relating to Aboriginal Education nationally. After the dissolution of NAEC (1989) these conferences faltered, until 2000, when each State or Territory has taken on the responsibility to host the renamed National Indigenous Education Conference. In 2009 the efforts of NAEC members were honoured at the 5th National Indigenous Education Conference held in Hobart during a breakfast dedicated to the lifelong contribution of this organisation and their members. A background paper written by Professor John Lester (NSW) Emeritus Professor Paul Hughes (SA) and Kaye Price (Tasmania) was presented as a part of the conference proceedings. The document reviews the history of National Aboriginal Education Conferences held since 1976 until 2009. The entire document is included as an important part of Aboriginal Education history (attachment 2). NAEC members came from across Australia and the Torres Straits. This paper has brought back some memories of my attendance at NAEC Conferences: Katoomba, Bendigo, Goulbourn, and Wirrina. Over the years I have participated in many State, National and International Aboriginal Education Conferences where I have learned about the possibilities open to Aboriginal people through education. I have met so many people from around the country who have influenced my own thinking when listening to paper presentations and participation in conference workshops. This kind of learning is priceless when it is presented from an experiential cultural perspective.

My attendance at a National Conference which conjures up positive memories is the Katoomba NAEC Conference of 1980. John Budby was the NAEC Chairperson and Bob Morgan was the NSW AECG President. Joyce Woodberry and I were nominated
by the NSW AECG to support the Yr 12 student forum held on the first day of the Conference. Lydia Miller was included in those numbers. This was the first time I was privy to observe so many Yr 12 Aboriginal students gathered in one room. I continue to attend student activities today because of the hope those students instilled in me that young Aboriginal people can achieve wonderful things if given the opportunity.

(Laurel Williams)

More than six hundred delegates attended the Tasmanian conference where it was reported that the education outcomes for Aboriginal people were unacceptable. Geraldine Atkinson from the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association felt as though Australia had regressed. She stated in an interview with the ABC news:

*We do need educational programs with good leadership and have teachers that are ensuring children know exactly who they are and what Aboriginal children can achieve.*

An international expert Lorna Williams says the problem stems from schools ignoring Aboriginal history in the classroom and not helping Aboriginal students enough, “I think it’s more than embarrassing”, she said.

The NAEC has been replaced by representation from each State and Territory under the structure of the National Indigenous Education Consultative Body (IECB). The NSW AECG is the only organisation that continues to operate under the original structure of using a process of election by the membership to appoint the Executive and Management Committees. Other States and Territories have Chairs appointed by specific State and Territory Ministers of Education. I include here a list of the 2012 Indigenous Education Consultative Body chairs that are responsible for Aboriginal Education advice when requested by relevant Commonwealth and State Ministers. This group meets regularly and is attended by the Chairperson or their representative.

### Indigenous Education Consultative Body

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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Chair</th>
<th>Chairperson</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>Cindy Berwick</td>
<td>NSW Aboriginal Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.aecg.nsw.edu.au">www.aecg.nsw.edu.au</a></td>
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75 Atkinson: ABC News report 23.11.2009
76 Williams: ABC News report 23.11.2009

People Places and Pathways in NSW Aboriginal Education
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<td>Ms Carol Gartlett</td>
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<td>WA Aboriginal Education &amp; Training Council</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Northern Territory</td>
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These people or their representatives are consciously or subconsciously operating as cultural insider interpreters when providing advice to governments, in order to develop policies and programs for implementation in their specific States and Territories. The difficulty arises when Aboriginal people are expected to transfer the diverse needs of Aboriginal people to fit into a mainstream Australian compartmentalised service provision. The current national advice appears to be disjointed and un-coordinated in terms of Aboriginal community input and Aboriginal Education service provision.

*We are part of, yet apart from, the multicultural society of Australia. We are the Indigenous people of Australia.*
The Native Title Decision

After ten years of legal argument the High Court of Australia found in favour of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their rights to land title, also known as the ‘Mabo’ decision. On the 3rd of June, 1992 after a decade of litigation, the High Court ruled that the land title of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders is recognised at common law. This meant that the idea that Australia and the Torres Strait Islands were unoccupied prior to invasion was proven to be incorrect in the highest court in the land. The only problem with this decision was that claims to land are only valid on vacant crown land, national parks and possibly some leased land. In addition, no native title claim is automatically recognised in law. Aboriginal claimants have to prove they have continually maintained their traditional cultural practice, through the Australian court system. Given the outcomes of colonisation and the historical policies and practices implemented over two hundred years, this can be a very difficult process for many communities in Australia. There are very few Aboriginal people who can present legal argument, which proves without a doubt that the use of land is necessary to carry out continual traditional cultural practices. It appears the guidelines are in favour of colonial land users in contemporary Australia.

The Mabo judgement is a very important step towards the achievement of justice in Australia. This decision does not provide any privileges for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people that no other Australians already enjoy, including access to formal education provision. It still leaves Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at a disadvantage when measured against other Australians. There is no guarantee of compensation for past injustices or protection of cultural heritage and lore.

In 1993 the Keating Government introduced the Native Title Act to deal with the implications of the Mabo decision. The Native Title Act 1993 set forward procedures for dealing with Native Title claims and retrospectively validated the interests of non-indigenous landholders. In an historic compromise, indigenous groups accepted this validation process in exchange for guaranteed rights to negotiate.78

77 West, 1981: 5
78 Native Title, 1: http://rodhagen.customer.netspace.net.au/nativetitle.html accessed 26/03/2013
The Mabo decision needs to be strengthened through appropriate legislation in negotiation with Native Title owners. Eddie Mabo was a member of NAEC and represented the Torres Strait Islands.

The following example is an outcome of six years of meetings and negotiations to be recognised as traditional owners of the land proposed to be developed by the NSW Lands Department.

Eleven years after the Mabo decision, the NSW Native Title Services Ltd. (ntscorp) advised community members that a Native Title application could be made over a proposed development located at Tuncurry on the mid North coast of NSW. After lengthy consultations with Aboriginal descendants of:
* William Cunningham (born in 1850) and Jane Clarke.
* Sam Leon Senior (born in 1855).
* Daniel Slater (born in the 1860’s) and Jane Anderson.
* Çoomba George Simon (born in 1860) who married Amelia Slater.
* Robert Clarke (born 1840).
* William Ridgeway (born in 1840) and Sarrah Reid.

A Native Title application was registered with the Federal Court of Australia in the New South Wales District Registry. Countless meetings followed over the next six years with representatives of the NSW Government and Lakkari Traditional Owner Aboriginal Corporation Board of Directors to negotiate arrangements acceptable to all parties. Finally an agreement was signed off in November of 2009. The following vision statement was developed at a Governance Training session for the Board of Directors:

*Lakkari Traditional Owner Aboriginal Corporation are descendants of Aboriginal families who live in Worimi/Biripi country situated in Forster on the mid north coast of NSW. We are steering a responsible cultural, socio-economic future for our community with pride and respect in Aboriginality and our cultural heritage.*

As the inaugural Chairperson of Lakkari, I must say the lengthy process undertaken will only produce positive results if education is used as a tool to reach long-term targets and goals. This is an opportunity to achieve underlying principles of self-determination (Laurel Williams)

A challenge launched by ntscorp on behalf of the Traditional owners of Forster/Tuncurry lands, in the Land and Environment Court of NSW found that Native Title had been extinguished under a section included in the 1993 Act:

5. Where the Crown has validly and effectively appropriated land to itself and the appropriation is wholly or partially inconsistent with a continuing right to enjoy native title, native title is extinguished to the extent of inconsistency. Thus native
title has been extinguished to parcels of the waste lands of the Crown that have been validly appropriated for use (whether by dedication, setting aside, reservation or other valid means) and used for roads, railways, post offices and other permanent public works which preclude the continuing concurrent enjoyment of native title.\footnote{Native Title, 4: \url{http://rodhagen.customer.netspace.net.au/nativetitle.html} accessed 26/03/2013}

The only option left open to Lakkari was to negotiate for some compensatory measures. In 1998 the Howard Government amended the Act in a manner which makes it very difficult for Aboriginal groups to make claims under the Native Title Act.

\textbf{Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission}

The Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC)) operated from 1990 until 2005. This organisation was established under Bob Hawke’s Labor government to be the voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Individual Commissioners were elected by Aboriginal people who had registered to vote on the mainstream polling roll. The Chairpersons of ATSIC were:

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<td>Lowitja O’Donoghue</td>
<td>1990 until 1996</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gatjil Djerrkurra</td>
<td>1996 until 2000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Geoff Clark</td>
<td>2000 until 2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lionel Quartermaine</td>
<td>2003 until 2004</td>
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After thirteen years of operations, ATSIC was reviewed and presented recommendations which gave greater control of community funding arrangements to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at the Regional level. The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (Amanda Vanstone) stated that the review undertaken by the Labor Government had concluded that ATSIC has not connected with Indigenous Australians and was not serving them well. In 2003 Clarke (Chairperson) became involved in legal proceedings related to allegations of his involvement in gang rapes in the 1970s and 1980s. ATSIC was also investigated for financial corruption.

The government’s plan was to abolish ATSIC along with the Regional and State structures. Leading up to the abolishment of ATSIC Prime Minister Howard announced the disbanding of ATSIC and made a statement in Parliament in 2004, that “the
experiment in elected representation for Indigenous people has been a failure”. The Howard government introduced legislation into Federal Parliament to abolish ATSIC on 28\textsuperscript{th} May 2004. After a delay the ‘Bill’ finally passed through both houses of Parliament in 2005. ATSIC was formally abolished at midnight on 24\textsuperscript{th} May 2005.\textsuperscript{80} The dismantling of ATSIC was seen by many people as being harmful to Aboriginal people. What it does indicate is that Aboriginal people are powerless against the Australian Government, regardless of which party holds the power.

\textit{The National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families.}

The Inquiry was established in 1995 by the former Attorney-General, the Hon. Michael Lavarch MP, in response to increasing concern among key Indigenous agencies and communities that the general public’s ignorance of the history of forcible removal was hindering the recognition of the needs of its victims and their families and the provision of service. The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care organisation and Link-Up (NSW) Aboriginal Corporation campaigned for a national inquiry into the issue.

\begin{center}
\textit{The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) President, Sir Ronald Wilson, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Mick Dodson, took primary responsibility for conducting the hearings of the Inquiry. In each region visited, an Indigenous woman was appointed as a Co-Commissioner. They were: Annette Peardon, Marjorie Thorpe, Dr Maryanne Bin-Salik, Sadie Canning, Olive Knight, Kathy Mills, Anne Louis, Laurel Williams, Jackie Huggins, Josephine Ptero-David and Professor Marcia Langton.}\textsuperscript{81}
\end{center}

Submissions from organisations and testimonies from individuals were received and heard from December 1995 through to October 1996 from all States and Territories. Several meetings were held within State and Territory jurisdictions where questions were asked of government representatives and stories were listened to from individuals who came forward to share their experiences. Some of the major issues identified by myself, as Co-Commissioner for NSW, which emerged from the evidence provided, are the following:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{80} ATSIC: 2005 \url{http://www.comlaw.gov.au/Details/C2005A00032}
  \item \textsuperscript{81} Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997: 18
\end{itemize}
**Access to Records**

Not everyone was able to understand the process necessary to access archived personal records. For those people who had gone through an education system which provided them with the literacy skills to read their own records, other traumatic challenges were faced by many. Justification needed to be validated why the government removed children from their families. In many cases the truth was not recorded. The following examples illustrate that authorities lied when justifying the implementation of racist policies. Some were that “one or both of the parents were deceased”. Survivors later on in their lives were able to trace their families only to find their parents on many occasions were still alive. The Inquiry found that many children were told they were unwanted, rejected or their parents were dead, when this was not true:

*I remember this woman saying to me, “Your mother’s dead, you’ve got no mother now. That’s why you’re here with us”. Then about two years after that my mother and my mother’s sister came to The Bungalow but they were not allowed to visit us because they were black.*

82

Allegations of children being at moral and physical risk due to being under the care of alcoholic parents or in the company of family members who drank alcohol were reasons regularly used by authorities. An unbelievable reason was one embedded in my memory, that two year old children were sexually promiscuous. For hundreds of thousands of children, cruelty and assimilation replaced Aboriginal cultural learning:

*We were told that our mother was an alcoholic and that she was a prostitute and she did not care about us. They used to warn us that when we got older we’d have to watch it because we’d turn into sluts and alcoholics, so we had to be very careful. If you were white you did not have that dirtiness in you ... It was in our breed, in us to be like that.*

83

Cultural gaps were created because children were placed in non-Aboriginal managed institutions and with non-Aboriginal families:

*When my great, great grandmother was taken to work on a station near Coonabarabran, she was not allowed to use her tribal name. No Aborigines were.*

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82 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997: 15
83 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997: 15
She was given the name ‘Jane’. Since then my people have not known what tribe they came from or what land was taken from them.\(^84\)

Morgan: 1987 in her true story about her family reproduces her mother’s story of removal:

*I have no memory of being taken from my mother and placed in Parkerville Children’s Home, but all my life I’ve carried a mental picture of a little fat kid about three or four years old. She’s sitting on the verandah of Babyland Nursery, Her nose is running and she’s crying. I think that was me when they first took me to Parkerville.*\(^85\)

People who were removed from country will find it very difficult to claim Native Title rights under the current guidelines.

**Genocide**

Sir Ronald Wilson stated that the Inquiry concluded that the forcible removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children was a gross violation of their human rights. It was racially discriminatory and continued after Australia, as a member of the United Nations since 1945 committed it to abolish racial discrimination. Genocide is not only the mass killing of a people:

*The essence is acting with the intention to destroy the group, not the extent to which that intention has been achieved. A major intention of forcibly removing Indigenous children was to ‘absorb’, ‘merge’ or ‘assimilate’ them, so Aborigines as a distinct group would disappear.*\(^86\)

Through this process, not only was Aboriginal community breakdown a result of the high numbers of children removed, family breakdowns soon followed when the realisation of powerlessness, guilt and blaming became entrenched. The fabric of cultural continuity was torn apart for many families, supported by the policy of assimilation being implemented on Missions and Reserves for the remaining adults and the distribution of exemption certificates.

**Lack of Acknowledgement**

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\(^84\) Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997: 15  
\(^85\) Morgan S., 1987: 304  
\(^86\) Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997: 27
In many instances, throughout the hearings government and departmental representatives who delivered evidence on their behalf were careful not to indicate any acknowledgement of responsibility for their involvement in the removal process. On one occasion at the Redfern hearing, a question related to the storage of individual files and records and therefore possible retrieval of evidence for use at the hearings. In response by a Departmental official, a fire was reported to occur at the old powerhouse in Sydney, where records were kept. Overnight investigations into the records of reported fires at that venue were unable to show that any such fire had occurred.

The roles of churches and missions were pivotal to the ongoing success of child removal. Babies born to unwed mothers were reported to church representatives who had an arrangement to accommodate the babies in church homes. In return for care and accommodation the churches would receive financial payments from the government agency responsible. Placement of the children became a much easier task when church congregations placed their names on a waiting list to foster or adopt Aboriginal children in the best interest of the child. Matrons of hospitals who had expectant mothers in labour wards would notify the churches as soon as the children were born so that they could be whisked away quickly.

Aboriginality
Loss of continual cultural connection for Aboriginal people creates a high level of emotional, mental and cultural distress. Generational stress is felt by hundreds and thousands of people who were disrupted from practising traditional culture. Add to those numbers the thousands of people from the “stolen generations” and it is impossible to count a finite figure of people who continue to suffer. For those people who underwent an intentional brainwashing strategy to make them assimilate to non-Aboriginal ways of thinking, many will never recover.

Miller: 1985 makes reference to the removal of Aboriginal children from their parents influence as having an underlying motive:

This was a deliberate government drive to destroy Koori identity.\(^{87}\)

Miller shares knowledge about his own family under this legislation:

\(^{87}\) Miller: 1985, 159
Early in 1941 my mother and her sister Dorothy were sent to Cootamundra and the three smaller children were sent to Bomaderry. Later that year my grandmother gave birth to twin girls, Jean and June, and they, too were taken away to Bomaderry.  

A NSW Review of Aboriginal Education was announced during 2002 by the Minister for Education and Training Dr Andrew Refshauge. A strong sense of Aboriginality was one theme uncovered in the investigations and reported in 2004:

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

Contained in a submission by the Link-up organisation forwarded to the HREOC Inquiry consolidates one of the affects of separation for Aboriginal people. A question posed by the magistrate overseeing a custody battle asked, what the most common issue was that impacts on everybody who has been through removal. The response was:

_I suppose loss of identity. You grow up and you don’t know who you are. You just don’t know. The terrible loneliness of it all when you can’t really say that it is just one thing. I was lucky I knew that I was Aboriginal. What about these poor things that grew up and were told that they Spanish or some other exotic thing?_  

Not only are individuals removed from their family, they are removed from Aboriginal community and Culture.

_I did not know any Aboriginal people at all, I was placed in a white family and I was just – I was white. I never knew, I never accepted myself to being a black person until – I do not know if you ever really do accept yourself as being ... How can you be proud of being Aboriginal after all the humiliation and the anger and the hatred you have? It’s unbelievable how much you hold inside._

Often people who have suffered this kind of mental stress look for solutions that are harmful to any type of healthy recovery. Alcoholism is one way to deal with issues that are painful to face. Denial is another method used by people who prefer to place pain in another dimension of space. Suicide is a permanent option for many people who cannot deal with the continuing hurt.

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88 Miller: 1985, 159  
90 Link-Up (NSW) and Tikka Jan Wilson, 1997: 165  
91 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997: 15
**Compensation**

A call for economic compensation has been reported through uninformed media channels as being the priority for Aboriginal people due to the level of greed that exists in Aboriginal communities. There are some people who will take court action to claim compensation for the traumatic experience suffered under this removal process. To date the difficult legal challenges that face Aboriginal people who go through the court system when claiming land rights, is just as difficult for those people of the “stolen generation”. There are many aspects of compensation that are not tied to individual monetary transfers from the Australian budget. Included in the Inquiry report is a framework for individual claimants to use as an indicator for future legal procedures:

* A person who was a forcibly removed child should get a lump sum amount for compensation unless the removal was justifiable. The inquiry did not decide how much that should be. In addition to the lump sum, anyone who can prove harm caused by forcible removal (of themselves or a child or a parent) should be compensated for that harm on the grounds of:
  * Racial discrimination
  * Pain and suffering
  * Disruption of family life
  * Loss of native title rights
  * Economic loss
  * Arbitrary deprivation of liberty
  * Abuse
  * Loss of cultural rights and fulfilment
  * Labour exploitation
  * Loss of opportunities

Australian governments should establish a National Compensation fund so people do not have to go to court to be compensated for the wrongs done to them.92

After listening to some of the horrific stories presented throughout the hearings, I do not believe any amount of money can be printed to pay for the pain and suffering some of those people have undergone because of the process of removal. Personally I believe that could be one of the reasons why the previous Prime Minister (John Howard) refused to apologise on behalf of Australia for the atrocities endured by the “Stolen Generations”. He made this point very clear at the National Reconciliation Conference held in Melbourne in 1997, where the ‘Bringing Them Home Report’ was launched.

**The Stolen Generation Apology**

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92 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997: 30
After the launch of the Report schools and all church denominations spontaneously apologised to the “Stolen Generations”. I witnessed many activities that offered an apology in city and country areas alike. A resolution was put to the NSW Parliament in 1997 where many Aboriginal people attended in the gallery to witness this historic occasion. The Speaker of the House introduced the topic:

Order! Pursuant to a resolution adopted earlier today, the House will proceed with the motion to be moved by the Premier and with the address to be given by Nancy de Vries. The Chair notes the presence in the gallery of a number of members of the Aboriginal community who have been in some way affected by the policies involved in this debate. The Chair also acknowledges the presence in the gallery of Carol Kendal, Lola McNaughton, Jean Carter and Barry Duroux of the Aboriginal community organisation Link-Up: Laurel Williams, Co-Commissioner of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission’s national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, Linda Burney, of the Council for Reconciliation, and Aden Ridgeway, of the New South Wales Land Council. The Chair also acknowledges the presence in the gallery of the teachers and students of St Vincent’s College Potts Point, who have made a special trip here to listen to the debate.93

Nancy de Vries was escorted onto the floor of the Chamber and invited to address the audience. After Nancy shared some of her own experiences as a result of being taken away and telling her story of how her children have been affected, Bob Carr presented the motion:

I move that this house, on behalf of the people of New South Wales:

(1) Apologises unreservedly to the Aboriginal people of Australia for the systematic separation of generations of Aboriginal children from their parents, families and communities.

(2) Acknowledges and regrets Parliament’s role in enacting laws and endorsing policies of successive governments whereby profound grief and loss have been inflicted upon Aboriginal Australians.

(3) Calls upon all Australian Governments to respond with compassion, understanding and justice to the report of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission entitled Bringing Them Home, and

Reaffirms its commitment to the goals and processes of reconciliation in New South Wales and throughout Australia.\textsuperscript{94}

After the debate the motion was carried by majority rule. It took eleven years and a change of government for the “Stolen Generation” to hear an apology from the Federal Government (2008). The Prime Minister Kevin Rudd put forward an apology on behalf of the Parliament of Australia before a capacity gallery with previous Prime Ministers and representatives of the “Stolen Generation” who were seated in the Chambers. The atmosphere in that place was electric. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced:

\textit{Today we honour the Indigenous peoples of this land, the oldest continuing cultures in human history. We reflect on their past mistreatment. We reflect in particular on the mistreatment of those who were Stolen Generations – this blemished chapter in our nation’s history. The time has come now for the nation to turn a new page in Australia’s history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence in the future.}

\textit{We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians. We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country. For the pain, suffering and hurt of those Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry. To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry. And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry. We the Parliament of Australia respectively request that this apology be received in the spirit in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation.}

\textit{For the future we take heart resolving that this new page in the history of our great continent can now be written. We today take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians. A future where this Parliament resolves that the injustices of the past must never, never happen again. A future where we harness the determination of all Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to close the gap that lies between us in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity. A future where we embrace the possibility of new solutions to enduring problems where old approaches have failed. A future based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility. A future where all Australians, whatever their origins, are truly}
equal partners, with equal opportunities and with equal stake in shaping the next chapter in the history of this great country Australia.95

The motion was endorsed and the decision embraced by a standing ovation of resounding applause. I did notice that there were only a few of the journalists in the media section of the gallery that stood and joined in the applause. The majority in that section remained seated. Tears flowed freely in emotional response to finally hearing words that struck the hearts of many people directly and indirectly affected by the past appalling practices. After the formal procedures were heard speeches from various people were given outside the Chambers. Performers entertained the large crowd on the lawns of Parliament House and individuals had an opportunity to catch up with people they may not have seen for many years. This event heralded a bitter-sweet closure for some members of the “Stolen Generations” and a step into a new journey of healing for others. Where to now? Even though a new page can commence in writing Australian history into the future, the words will be hollow if action is not taken to implement the recommendations contained in the ‘Bringing Them Home Report’: 1997.

**Kooris Come In All Colours**

I know I’m a Koori, I’ve learned from my kin.

But sometimes I’m questioned on the colour of my skin.

I’m questioned on this by both black and white,

To me my culture and identity is my legal right.

My Aboriginality, I’ve searched for so long,

But the doubts of others make it hard to belong.

If you would not make judgements on just what you see,

Then maybe, by chance you’ll see the real me.

By Carol Kendall (Link-Up Co-ordinator 1995)96

I have used this poem to close Aboriginal Cultural Awareness training sessions on hundreds of occasions. A strategy I use to educate participants about cultural disruption since “Invasion” is to present a modification of the Walpiri Kinship System (The

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96 Kendall, 1995: unpublished
Kinship Game). There is a focus on the removal period to illustrate the emotional and cultural implications that grew from that practice, in addition to how it has a generational impact. Carol’s words so aptly describe how people feel when they are placed in an environment of cultural exclusion. Thanks go to Vanessa and Belinda (Carol and Bruce’s daughters) for allowing me to continue to use this poem as an educational tool to increase the knowledge of people about the ‘Stolen Generations’. When Carol wrote this poem she had gone through a process of going home to her family. She was able to express the challenges faced as an Aboriginal person removed from family, culture and community. Carol and Bruce Kendall have passed away, but their memories will remain in the hearts of many people that touched their lives through Aboriginal Education and the work of Link-Up.

**Reconciliation**

The Reconciliation movement became operational in Australia under the direction of Prime Minister Hawke’s Labor government during 1990, when Lowitja O’Donoghue was appointed as the National Chairperson through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989. Dixon publicly spoke against the Reconciliation movement which put him offside with many Aboriginal people. He called the Council the “Kiss and Make Up” tribe. Dixon makes his position clear by making the following statement in ‘A History of the Political Struggle: A Personal Point of View’ DVD:

> I will never ever support Non-Aboriginal people for stealing our land and introducing weapons of mass destruction like the canon, muskets and diseases.97

Dixon has travelled along a political pathway for most of his life. He has identified a need to nurture leadership with young Aboriginal people as he did when Gary Foley, Bertie Williams, Michael Anderson and Billie Craigie were 16 or 17 years old. He made it clear that our leaders are making a mistake by not training our young people in politics. He leaves us with a plea to get into the establishment and make permanent positive change for Aboriginal people. In 2005 Dixon identifies the rhythm of Aboriginal Affairs as being either a surge or a lull. We are in a lull at the moment, but out of the lull leaders will emerge. He shares his personal thoughts of ‘Chairman Chicka’:

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97 Dixon, 2005: Jumbanna the Indigenous House of Learning DVD
All men are my brothers, all women are my sisters, and all Aboriginal people know the earth is their mother. If people would adopt this philosophy, there would be no more wars or no starving children.98

Aboriginal people have been providing insight to Australian political situations, since they started to organise and educate themselves to better understand the social and political operations of the dominant culture, for the betterment of Aboriginal communities. While research activity continues to put forward a perspective from an academic perspective, I believe that the Aboriginal perspective will diversify research outcomes depending on the level of insider knowledge and experience of the researcher and the topic undertaken. The headlines read on a press release from The Hon. Peter Garrett MP (dated 6th December, 2011), ‘New education advisory group to help close the gap’. Minister Garrett stated that The First Peoples Education Advisory Group was an important step toward closing the educational gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. This committee will serve a three year term. The advisory group members (2011) are:

* Chair: Emeritus Professor Paul Hughes David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research SA.
* Professor Mark Rose, Phd, M Ed Admin, BA, Dip Teach, Deakin University.
* Deputy Chair: Dr Kaye Price, PhD, M Ed, B Ed, Dip Teach, University of Southern Queensland.
* Ms Judith Ketchell, Executive Principal of Taigai State College Thursday Island.
* Professor Steve Larkin, Pro Vice Chancellor Indigenous Leadership, Charles Darwin University.
* Professor Muriel Bamblett, AM CEO Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency.
* Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney PhD Dean of Aboriginal Education, University of Adelaide.
* Professor Peter Buckskin, Dean David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research SA.
* Ms Dyonne Anderson, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals’Association.
* Ms Cindy Berwick, NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group.

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98 Dixon, 2005: Jumbanna the Indigenous House of Learning DVD
These people will be judged through historical time and space to see if the advice provided in the political arena, will bring change to the social disadvantage of many Aboriginal people in this country through the social determinant of education.

This chapter has already highlighted the vast number of people who have become involved in policy development through the provision of advice and participation on committee activity. These people will always remain on the beach of Aboriginal Affairs as leaders in the Aboriginal political struggle for justice. Comment is provided as a window of understanding into a selection of Commonwealth policies which is the driving force established after the 1967 Referendum to rectify the social disadvantage of Aboriginal people. John W. Harris wrote quite aptly in a paper titled ‘Aboriginal Education in NSW, The Past, The Present and the Future’ which he presented at a Conference for teachers of Aboriginal children in 1976 at Nowra NSW:

If the present has been shaped by the past, then the past and the present is already shaping the future. 99

The social disadvantage of Aboriginal people cannot be “boxed” into categories without understanding that health, housing, employment and education intersect with each other.

This chapter has highlighted some of the political and historical activities that have assisted with shaping the current social circumstance for Aboriginal people in Australia.

The next chapter will provide the reader with examples of educational reports and reviews, as evidence of how they have affected the development of policy and programs in the provision of Aboriginal Education. These policies are the catalyst for the implementation of State policies, programs and guidelines to be implemented by State and Territory Education Departments and then Aboriginal sectors across the Educational portfolio. Without positive policy driving change in education provision, Aboriginal people will always remain on the bottom rung of the Education ladder. Aboriginal authors share some insight into improving outcomes for Aboriginal students. Listening to people involved in Aboriginal Education presents interesting cultural challenges within the learning environment. Chris Sarra presents strategies in a

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99 Harris, 1976: 9
publication produced for the Australian College of Educators for the Quality Teaching Series in 2003. Sarra discusses the lessons he learned when he became the first Aboriginal Principal of Cherbourg Primary School and served from 1999-2002. Education is a vehicle of change for Aboriginal people. The following quote from Ken Wyatt’s maiden speech in the House of Representatives as the first Aboriginal member of the lower house, is used to lead us into the next chapter and listen to learn what the possibilities might be:

*I used education as the way to change my life to get to where I am now and I believe that a quality education is the key to success for any young Australian.*

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Chapter 3: Listening To Learn  

(Literature Review)

Introduction

As we boarded a time capsule in the previous chapter, we trekked into the past eighty years to listen to stories told by many people related to the political struggle faced by Aboriginal communities across Australia. Dixon: 2005, reminded us through a recorded lecture of how politicians and politics have kept Aboriginal people excluded from equitable social living conditions as citizens of this country. It is through legislation in Federal Parliament that some inroads have been made to gain access to educational opportunities. Some significant historical issues were discussed to establish a framework of where Aboriginal education is positioned as a social determinant in Australian history. A paper presented at the ‘Australian Social Policy Conference’ by Keenan: 2009 emphasises the need to reconsider educational frameworks when developing social policy for Aboriginal people:

*Culturally inclusive social policy in the area of Indigenous education is fundamental to achieving social justice. Inquiries and reports such as the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991) and the Bringing Them Home Report (1997) highlighted the impact of past policies on poor educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians.*

Limited Academic Publications

As an Aboriginal researcher involved in this research project, it is important to listen to other Aboriginal people through their oral recollections and written documentation. For this reason I have selected authors who have had a high level of experience in the Aboriginal Education arena. Some of these authors have taken their rightful place to bask in the sun on the ‘beach’ of Aboriginal Affairs. Some are still continually working as cultural insiders to influence educational and social change for Aboriginal communities and the broader Australian society. When searching for published material specific to Aboriginal Education in both libraries located in Newcastle University, there were very few Aboriginal authored publications on the shelves. It is for this reason a section of this chapter will analyse the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Education Policy by

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Keenan, 2009: 4
discussing the history, evaluation and implementation stages from an Aboriginal community viewpoint. This study considers the influence social policy has had on Aboriginal Education service provision. Reviewers Mellor and Corrigan, Australian Education Review: 2004, raised complaints about the lack of accessible published material in Aboriginal education outcomes. Paul Hughes and members of the Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Committee believe that Aboriginal voices are presented in unpublished conference papers and shared in formal and social communication. The reviewers complained that by not recording ideas of Aboriginal voice in written form for public access, disadvantages researchers:

\[ It \text{ is not a tradition that easily connects with...especially one as formal as that of the scholarly academic or policy research community.}^{102} \]

The point made by Mellor and Corrigan confirms my suspicion that Aboriginal truth is not confirmed until is presented in an acceptable academic written format.

A perspective from a National viewpoint sets the policy umbrella in place that has influenced State and Territory policy direction in Aboriginal Education since the 1970’s. A strong statement made by Tripcony: 2003, warns against the failing of policy when inaction is evident:

\[ The \text{ past thirty years have brought enormous changes in Indigenous education in terms of policy, curriculum and overall directions. The Commonwealth government initially led these changes, but policies are only as good as their implementation.}^{103} \]

Toward the final section of this chapter detailed analysis of the National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People: 1994, A National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: 1996 – 2002 and the MCEECDYA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–2014 will uncover the connection between Commonwealth policy documents and State and Territory implementation. Outcomes will be explored from an Aboriginal community viewpoint in NSW utilising the structure of the NSW AECG. A brief overview

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102 Mellor & Corrigan, 2004: 49
103 Tripcony, 2003:46
highlighting the participation of the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) with the formal education sectors will complete the chapter.

**Uncovering the Obvious**

Interesting outcomes are revealed for Aboriginal education between 1975 and 1995 through The Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR), ‘Twenty years of recommendations for indigenous education: overview and research implications’: Schwab R.G. :1995, research publication. The focus on access, participation and equity as emerging themes, echoes stories put forward by Aboriginal leaders in the 1930s and are continuing until today. It is well known in Aboriginal communities that social determinants impact on positive and negative educational outcomes. The establishment of missions and reserves created sub-standard living conditions for the majority of Aboriginal people in Aboriginal communities. The lack of support shown by Aboriginal people to establish separate Aboriginal community schools, as reported by Schwab, is a reflection held by members of Aboriginal communities who remember the days when they attended mission schools. Those schools which operated during the 1930s and 1940s were viewed as being discriminatory and were instructed by untrained teachers and alcoholic mission managers.

After reading materials written by academics involved in Aboriginal Education provision and being employed in Aboriginal Education services for thirty six years at various levels, I believe that Aboriginal people who are employed in Aboriginal specific areas of service, are operating as “insiders” within organisations. Whether people do this consciously or sub-consciously is worthwhile investigating. A following definition of ‘Insider’ describes many Aboriginal people who fit these criteria, who work in the Aboriginal Affairs industry, for the purpose of this study:

\[ n, 1 \text{ person who is within an organisation etc} \]
\[ n, 2 \text{ person privy to a secret.}^{104} \]

The secrets are not the exclusive domain of Aboriginal people. Often it is the secrets withheld by the people within the power base that cause the highest level of frustration.

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104 Moore, 1996: 565
experienced by many. The role of Aboriginal people employed in the Aboriginal Education portfolio is to explore and discover strategies to assist positive educational outcomes that enhance the cultural heritage of Aboriginal learners with integrity, based on principles of self-determination. This task has been undertaken by hundreds of people with some success, but a major effort is needed if there is to be any hope of ‘Closing the Gap’ between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people’s social outcomes. More broken shells will be deposited in the furrows that line the shores of the Aboriginal Affairs ‘beach’.

**Consultation at a National Level**

For decades increased funding arrangements provided by State and Federal governments have also increased the opportunity for employment of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Aboriginal Affairs. Policies and programs are developed with the advice of Aboriginal people who are usually employed within the organisations. Aboriginal Education policy documents will give names of committee members who are repeatedly involved as policy advisors to governments and respective departments.

At a national level, representation has been offered from the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) and in States and Territories Aboriginal community advice has been sought from specific Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups throughout the early 1970s and 1980s. A former NAEC Chairperson (West) expresses the frustration felt by many Aboriginal people who fought repeated battles with politicians and bureaucracies at the Commonwealth level to change policies that impact on Aboriginal Culture through Aboriginal Education, in his poetry:

**Sitting, Wondering, Do I Have A Place Here?**

_The breast of Mother Earth bore me_

_Yet long I host a shell of emptiness_

_A human husk winnowed in the draught of history_

_My essence ground on the mill of white determination._

_I fight though mortally wounded, life blood and spirit ebbing away_

_In the backwater of despair, caused by long-winded politicians’_
Promises and administrator’s cumbersome gait

Another realisation of my hopelessness produces: another promise

Implementation of a band-aid gimmick

You had better hurry it’s getting late, red tape, budgets, strategies

Rape!

Return me to my beloved land, let me be me, do not you understand

All I want is a private dying in the arms of my Mother earth

She too is suffering: as a mother must when her children are ripped

Away from her love, and the safety of her arms, no more to be cradled

Tenderly caressed by her heavenly smouldering essence.

Errol West

The National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People: 1994 provides discussion and direction to improve the educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through the implementation of twenty one identified goals (attachment 3). The following comments imply that outcomes for these specific groups of people are at a level well below results for other Australians across the education sector:

The Hughes Report concluded that in ‘1988 Aborigines remain the most severely educationally disadvantaged people in Australia’. The Report’s recommendations included setting specific targets for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s participation in all sectors of education.

1988 was a significant year in the history of Australia and clearly a potentially volatile situation in relation to Aboriginal politics. During conversations at meetings and among Aboriginal people, split loyalties between country and culture, became evident as publicity about the Australian Bicentennial celebrations drew closer. Thousands of people participated in a non-violent protest by marching from Redfern Park to Hyde Park in Sydney. Prominent orators presented their interpretations of the Bi-centenary and the repercussions that Cook’s landing has had on Aboriginal people in the ensuing two hundred years to the audience, while police officers on horseback stood by ready to control the crowd. There was no control needed. Later hundreds of people travelled to

\[105\] Gilbert, 1988: 173
\[106\] National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, 1994: 3.
Kurnell, the place where “Captain James Cook landed for the first time on Australian soil at Inscription Point on April 29th 1770”, to participate in a symbolic all-night vigil to guard against invasion. While this political action drew Aboriginal people together from every aspect of Aboriginal Affairs, groups of people gathered together who were aligned to health, housing, education, employment and Aboriginal land councils. Traditional people from the Northern Territory danced and sang in language around the campfires arranged on the flat ground near the shoreline of Botany Bay, while groups tried to shelter on the surrounding grassy slopes from the cold breezes that blew across the hillside. As everybody huddled together under blankets, coats, sheets of cardboard and anything that would shield us from the cooling elements, reflective discussion took place about the day’s activities and messages spoken. It was an expectation that everyone would stay awake the entire night.

Eventually the majority of onlookers fell asleep except a couple of elderly people who stayed awake all night talking about “the good old days and societal change”. The woman involved was 67 years old at that time and is turning 92 in 2013. Nan, as my family knows her as, still tells me stories of her memories growing up in Grafton and Taree with her parents Harriet (nee Dumas) and Jack Neville. She was denied access to public education provision and only learned essential numeracy and literacy skills. Stories shared by self-taught educated Aboriginal people like Nan are valuable components of oral history and must be acknowledged as vital teaching tools. As dawn breaks, a very loud voice echoes across the slopes from a member of the traditional groups seated around the campfires. Someone has given him a loudspeaker. The words shouted were:

“No wonder we lost this part of our land. Everyone must have been sleeping when Captain Cook landed here”.

Those words certainly made people sit up and take notice of the reason why everyone stayed the night. I went to work at the University of Western Sydney – Macarthur Campus, feeling as though my stamina was depleted and guilty of not being able to protect Aboriginal rights through an act of symbolism (Laurel Williams).
As a result of the above feelings, expending more energy into encouraging Aboriginal people to enrol in higher education programs and supporting their progress through to graduation, seemed to be an area I should focus on. At this time across Australia, Aboriginal Support Units were sharing ideas and initiating program development, to increase the number of Aboriginal enrolments in all professional areas of study. There is still a lot of work to be done in the Higher Education sector.

**fig: 6**  

_{Inscription Point-Kurnell NSW_{107}^{107}}

_Segregation in Education_

Aboriginal participation in public education institutions was spasmodic at best up until the 1860s. Any interaction was usually based on the goodwill or kindness of individual people and representatives of the churches. Racist attitudes grew rapidly due to the misunderstanding of non-Aboriginal people observing continued cultural practices being performed by Aboriginal people. Communities were forced to submit to changed behavioural patterns which were imposed on them by the process of colonisation. A belief that Aboriginal cultural practices would be defeated through a process of influence using education as the tool to achieve the Government’s ultimate goal of assimilation is expressed by Fletcher: 1989:

_\textit{One aim of the mixed school was to promote Assimilation in adulthood, an extension of the method of rearing Aborigines in white families.\textsuperscript{108}}_

\footnote{\texttt{http://www.kurnell.com/history.htm} accessed 15/11/2011}
William Shelley came to Sydney in 1800, after being driven out of Tonga by hostile Tongans. His idea was to change the behaviour patterns of Aboriginal people from what was interpreted as ‘savages’ to becoming useful citizens in European society. The Blacktown Native Institution was established to train Aboriginal boys to ultimately become skilled in the farming industry, and the girls to be proficient in carrying out domestic duties. An underlying philosophy driving the training was Christianity. By 1924 this strategy was acknowledged as a dismal failure. Further attempts to achieve the same goals were unsuccessful to an extent. While some individuals were focused on the social circumstance of Aboriginal people, by and large the existence of Aboriginal people was seen to be minimal as expressed by Fletcher: 1989:

*Geographically and socially Aborigines were hidden from colonial view.*

The Public Instruction Act, 1880 made it a requirement for all children of school age living within two miles of a public school to attend at least 70 days every half year. Implementation of this Act soon caused community upheaval when Aboriginal people wanted to attend public schools. Objections to creating a mixed race schooling system were reinforced by threats to withdraw non-Aboriginal children from schools in many towns throughout NSW. At this time in history it was acceptable for Aboriginal people to live in the bush or to reside in makeshift accommodation as fringe dwellers on the outskirts of towns, but it was not acceptable to co-habit with respectable citizens and their offspring in society. To cater for the racial prejudice of non-Aboriginal society separate schools were established for Aboriginal children.

A social policy of segregation followed the official policy of assimilation. Although a Department of Education was established to accommodate compulsory education for all children confusion arose because of the appointment of the Aborigines Protection Board. It became unclear whether the education of Aboriginal children was the responsibility of the NSW Department of Education or the Board. If Aboriginal people did attempt to claim their right to public education and non-Aboriginal parents objected, then their objections needed to be validated on the grounds of ‘disease or immorality’. In most cases objections were upheld which meant that separate schools were

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108 Fletcher, 1989: 18  
109 Fletcher, 1989: p36
established and came under the control of the Aborigines Protection Board (APB). Untrained teachers delivered a form of instruction which usually gave students a third class level of education, regardless of age. In 1853 the Board of National Education reluctantly agreed that Aboriginal people could not be educated regardless of the previous strategies used, therefore concluded that they were dying off and the Aboriginal problem of education would fix itself. According to Fletcher: 1989, some changes were enforced by the 1870s but any political influence to bring about change was led by non-Aboriginal people. Political pressure targeted at the exclusion of Aboriginal people gained momentum which brought about some clear direction for education providers to use when non-Aboriginal parents made objections:

*In all localities where a sufficient number of Aboriginal children can be grouped together for instruction it would be advisable to establish a school for their benefit exclusively, but in places where there are only a few such children, there will be no objection offered to their attending the nearest public school, provided they are habitually clean, decently clad, and they conduct themselves with propriety both in and out of school.*

Public education has always been used as a political football between political parties and the media. The practice of exclusion on demand continued, particularly in country towns where populations of Aboriginal people lived on missions and reserves. This practice was strongly supported by John Perry, Minister for Education (1899-1904). Perry ratified the Department’s decisions made by teachers in 1902:

*He then instructed the Department of Education to direct teachers in all 2,800 government schools throughout New South Wales to exclude Aboriginal children the moment white parents objected to their attendance.*

This policy meant that separate schools needed to be established to provide lessons under compulsory education regulations. Aboriginal Education continued in the vein of segregation without too much protest until the late 1930s, when the NSW Minister for Education confronted a non-Aboriginal community group with a threat to prosecute parents who refused to send their children to school even if Aboriginal children attended. The number of Aboriginal schools established grew from one in 1880 to fifty

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110 Fletcher, 1989: 64
111 Fletcher, 1989: 78
nine in 1968. Two schools were closed and eight were converted to public schools even though they continued to have only Aboriginal children in attendance. The Aborigines Protection Board operated throughout 1900-1930 and had responsibility for improving the inadequate living conditions, discussed in the previous chapter, under the management structure of the Board. Social and economic factors are discussed as having a negative impact on the success of Aboriginal children by Mellor & Corrigan: 2004. Further remarks reinforce the concept of generational continuity in society:

*The combination of factors, when they apply to the lives of individuals and communities, are serious and permanent. When the factors are in operation over several generations, the impact is a compounding one.*\(^{112}\)

A relationship grew between the Department of Education and the Aborigines Protection Board, relevant to the education of Aboriginal people. The Aborigines Protection Act, 1909 did not make any major changes to the education provisions for Aboriginal people, but confirmed the continuation of existing arrangements:

*Whereby the Board normally erected a school building while the Department of Education appointed a teacher, paid the teacher’s salary, provided the normal educational equipment and running costs, and supervised the school through the local inspector of schools.*\(^{113}\)

**Raised Expectations for Aboriginal Education**

Some Aboriginal people had the opportunity to participate in the public education system. It was this experience that raised their educational expectations for their own children. The attitude to Aboriginal people’s capacity to learn is illustrated by the teacher’s expectations evident in classroom situations. These expectations were put in place by the majority of teachers well into the 1960s when referenced by Duncan: 1968 at a conference discussing the role of teachers in Aboriginal Education:

*Children do what is expected of them and I have seen dozens of teachers who expected Aborigines to be “no hopers”. The teacher expected failure and trouble, so he got them.*\(^{114}\)

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\(^{112}\) Corrigan & Mellor, 2004:48  
\(^{113}\) Fletcher, 1989: 95  
\(^{114}\) Duncan, 1968: 192
An incident cited by Fletcher: 1989, describes a challenge by parents at Nambucca Heads in 1915-16. Mrs Ralph and Mr Simmonds were in a mixed marriage and therefore according to the caste system in place at the time had their ‘quarter caste’ children excluded from the public school:

*Mrs Ralph described herself as half caste and her husband as a full-blood white.*

Mr Simmonds made it clear that he was born from ‘old English stock’ and confessed he was married to a quarter caste woman. Local parents objected to the enrolment of these children and threatened to withdraw their children from the school. After 18 months of exclusion and refusal to send their children to the all Aboriginal school, the Department of Education was forced to reverse its previous decision using the “exclusion on demand” policy and admit the children under the compulsory school attendance law. No longer were Aboriginal parents happy to accept a sub-standard level of instruction provided by segregated schools. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s political protests against inequitable rights to social determinants in Australian society, were taking place as discussed in the previous chapter. This kind of support coming from Aboriginal people and members of the Aborigines Protection Board gave many parents the impetus to challenge the education instruction provided to their children. While not all challenges were upheld, this action forced the Department to re-think the methods used to assimilate Aboriginal people through schooling. These types of challenges continued in NSW and forced the Aborigines Protection Board to construct separate schools for Aboriginal education, particularly in country towns. As economic debate became a focus for Aboriginal welfare, social responsibility also became a focus in Aboriginal education. Who is responsible for the Aboriginal people who can easily assimilate in Australian society and who is responsible for children of Aboriginal people living on reserves and missions? The decision came in the guise of the Aborigines Protection Amendment Act of 1940. Assimilation of Aboriginal people was still the target of the now Aborigines Welfare Board, but the powers and administration of the Board changed:

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115 Fletcher, 1989: 115
The deletion of education from its list of duties resolved any ambiguity over Aboriginal Education: the education of Aboriginal children in all its aspects — buildings, teachers, syllabus, equipment and administration was now indisputably, or so it seemed, the responsibility of the Department of Education.\textsuperscript{116}

I agree with the sentiments put forward at the time that the school is the best means of changing a generation stated in Fletcher: 1987, but I disagree with the purpose of ‘Education for Assimilation’ of Aboriginal people. Exclusion on demand was still steeped in the philosophical minds of the majority of non-Aboriginal people.

\textit{Assimilation and Schooling}

By 1940 Aboriginal people were being enrolled in public schools with the prospect of being delivered the same educational instruction as everyone. Schooling was used as a tool to assimilate Aboriginal children to behave and think the same as the dominant culture. The policy of integration at that time was not the reality for Aboriginal people or the schools. Separate Aboriginal schools were still in operation and segregation continued to operate in mixed schools, because of decades of negative race relations. Discrimination against people of difference was embedded in behaviour from both racial groups, manifested through physical confrontation inside and outside school in addition to constant name calling.

Annexes became an answer to appease non-Aboriginal objections to mixed schools. Aboriginal children could come to the public school if they were still kept separate. At Forster there was some hope of implementing the case for integration because the Aboriginal school and the public school were less than a kilometre apart. Reports on race relations rectified that impression. Forster was a completely segregated town:

\begin{quote}
Aborigines were denied entry to the swimming baths, a separate section of the cinema was reserved for them and a night curfew in town was enforced on Aborigines.\textsuperscript{117}
\end{quote}

The Board was concerned about the level of instruction being delivered on reserve schools. While attempting to solve the Forster situation an announcement was made in favour of absorbing all Aboriginal children into white schools, if the Board would

\textsuperscript{116} Fletcher, 1989: 170
\textsuperscript{117} Fletcher, 1989: 178
express its view on the matter. The letter from the Board to J.G. McKenzie, the Director of Education, suggested strategies to implement integrated classrooms. First the absorption of Aboriginal children living within close proximity to public schools, second the appointment of trained teachers for those schools inaccessible due to distance or if these suggestions were not feasible, then the establishment of annexes as a transitional plan, supervised by experienced public school principals. Advice was sought from a senior clerk and also the Superintendent of Primary Education for comment. The attitude of the Aborigines Welfare Board at that time was to educate people to the level where employment in the local community was encouraged:

Their main school syllabus, writing and reading in English, arithmetic, geography and dictation, ran to third grade, primary (during the early 'forties, to fourth) and was well below the standard of the State schools.¹¹⁸

The practice of segregation continued until the 1950s in many communities throughout NSW. A complaint was forwarded to the Director of Education by Aboriginal residents of Tobwabba mission located in Forster. The solution to the Forster situation was not forthcoming because of a bureaucratic bungle made by the senior Departmental clerk. His response to the Director of Education was based on an obsolete policy:

Aborigines lived under primitive conditions, were unhygienic, often immoral, and incapable of satisfactorily handling their own affairs: ... it would be impracticable to absorb Aborigines into public schools because, ... habits and health conditions render their attendance and association with white children objectionable.¹¹⁹

Separate schools remained in place formally from 1943 until 1945 and then the Aborigines Welfare Board convinced the Department to admit children whose parents were in receipt of an exemption certificate into public schools. These certificates allowed people to meld into the general population more easily and could vouch approval from ‘upstanding citizens’ in the white community. Teachers throughout NSW were instructed that children whose parents held an exemption certificate were to be admitted to schools. Uncovering the health guidelines associated with outdated policy opened the doors for Aboriginal families in Lismore. Parents advised the Department of Education that they were prepared to present medical certificates as proof of good

¹¹⁸ Horner, 1974: 13
¹¹⁹ Fletcher, 1989: 180-81
health standards of their children. No longer could Aboriginal children be excluded from public schools on the basis of dangerous health conditions on the assessment of the Principal. Aboriginal children were excluded on the basis of objections by non-Aboriginal parents for as long as 46 years. Avenues for enrolment were opened to children of parents holding exemption certificates, families living in the towns and those of mixed parentage. Increasingly enrolments grew slowly across the State under various conditions. The outbreak of World War II was not only a reason used to enrol children of enlisted men, but it created a situation where some children and their mothers were evacuated from the Northern Territory under threat of destruction by Japanese bombing.

In NSW about 25 children and their mothers were housed at a Church Missionary Society home at Mulgoa, west of Sydney. At the beginning of 1949 repatriation to their home country would have been completed until a 14 year old girl escaped from the bus taking them to Penrith, and then on to Sydney for the train journey back to the Northern Territory. The Teachers Federation showed interest and organised protests against the repatriation of these children. This was the first time for 25 years that the Federation became involved with the exclusion of Aboriginal children from the public education system. The issue hit the front pages of the media causing public pressure to allow Joyce Herbert to remain at Mulgoa with her mother. After this incident the Teachers Federation became disinterested in Aboriginal Education until the 1950s and 1960s.

The appointment of trained teachers to Aboriginal schools had been an issue for over 20 years from 1938 until 1956. Finally the 30 segregated schools still operating in NSW were offering lessons which prepared students for sixth class. Fletcher: 1989 reports vast improvement in outcomes due to the delivery of curriculum by trained teachers, although the results at Nowra are questionable in terms of expectations:

> A recorder (flute) band was making good progress, physical education was commendable, folk dancing was performed excellently, manual work and natural science were well taught, as were other subjects.\(^{120}\)

Questions must be asked if the expectations of academic outcomes for Aboriginal students were the same for non-Aboriginal students and did the syllabus prepare Aboriginal students to perform equitably when enrolled in high school. A 1940 syllabus

\(^{120}\text{Fletcher, 1989: 202}\)
was being taught in Aboriginal schools which prepared the students for a fourth class level. The curriculum for primary schools came under revision in 1950 and the decision to teach the revised curriculum in all schools was made. Unfortunately not all Aboriginal schools were notified of this decision therefore Gulargambone, Boggabilla and Brewarrina continued to use the 1940 syllabus, until being ordered to change by the inspector. Of course this hampered the academic outcomes of Aboriginal students when integrated into the mainstream high school systems. The Aboriginal school at Caroona was sent a less comprehensive course designed for Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory, to trial in NSW. White, who was the trained teacher at Caroona expected to implement the course, did not agree with the course being relevant to his pupils. He also believed that the course was not suitable for most Aboriginal students enrolled in NSW schools. He believed that the syllabus for all schools should be taught in Aboriginal schools. It is obvious that White had higher expectations of Aboriginal achievement than what the Research Branch of the Department of Education reported expectations were in the 1930s. H.L. Craig’s study in the late 1930s showed a general ability test of fifteen year old Aboriginal children scored on average lower than eight year old non-Aboriginal children.

The poor results of Aboriginal students continued for the majority of children as an acceptable expectation until the Teachers Federation showed an increased interest in the 1960s. Alan Duncan was appointed to the University of Sydney in 1963 as a lecturer in Aboriginal adult education. After having a request for the Department of Education to carry out a survey on Aboriginal students enrolled in government schools rejected, he persuaded the Teachers Federation to survey the completion rates of Aboriginal students in secondary education. The following table presented in Fletcher: 1989 (p 278) was used by the Federation to pressure the Department to consider changes in Aboriginal Education. A survey was sent to 200 schools in NSW of which 193 replies were received and 1 were nil returns. The analysis showed that there were just over 500 Aboriginal students enrolled in secondary education. The following figures clearly show that the completion rates of Aboriginal students decline very dramatically after the compulsory school attendance age of 15 years is reached. Education in the public education system was supposed to be the equaliser for Aboriginal children.
These statistics provide evidence related to the failure of previous attempts to increase comparable participation in secondary completions through compulsory education. The outcomes have produced alarming results. The hopes incorporating high expectations espoused by the Aborigines Welfare Board, non-Aboriginal supporters and Aboriginal people were somewhat dashed, although some individuals held strongly to their belief that education would be an equaliser in Australian society:

*I have no doubt in my mind whatsoever, if educated we would have today men sitting in parliament, because every old inhabitant of a country irrespectively of nationality of any occupied country – should have the right to help govern their own people.* (Lester Charles Leon).

**Aboriginal Education in NSW After 1967**

Aboriginal Affairs were prominent in Australian society leading up to the 1967 Referendum. The previous chapter discussed the outcomes as one of the significant events in Aboriginal history which changed the way the Commonwealth government carried out business in relation to Aboriginal people. Only Aboriginal people living in the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory were controlled by policies influencing social determinants at the Federal level, while State governments were responsible in their own jurisdictions for these matters prior to the Referendum.

Interest increased in Aboriginal Education to the point that a National three day summer school to discuss ‘Aboriginal Education and the Teacher’s Role’ was held in Sydney.
during January 1968. There were only a small number of Aboriginal participants in attendance. Mrs P Miller (Pat O’Shane), who later became the first Aboriginal Australian Barrister in 1976 and was appointed the first Aboriginal permanent head of the NSW Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, in addition to being the first woman to become a permanent head of a Ministry in Australia in 1981, attended. Dixon, who led us on a historical journey in the previous chapter, was also among the group.

Presentations at a Summer School held in Sydney early in 1968 to inform teachers of strategies useful in their role as a teacher of Aboriginal children, became an in-service course for participants. Even though there were a small number of Aboriginal participants in attendance the presentations were delivered by non-Aboriginal people. The need for a co-ordinated effort in Aboriginal education was identified by Tatz: 1968 at the teachers’ conference:

Steps have now been taken to establish an Aborigines Education Council in Victoria with co-ordination of activity ... In NSW there exists a well-established Consultative Committee on Aboriginal Education and in South Australia an Aboriginal Education Foundation was established in 1966. The existence of these bodies, and their possible development in other states, could well lead to the eventual formation of a national body.123

The above comments indicate attitudinal changes toward Aboriginal Affairs and also the need to focus on Aboriginal education from a National position involving Aboriginal people. Tatz goes on to discuss the need for education systems to encourage in-service courses in Aboriginal education for all teachers. Many reasons are put forward explaining why Aboriginal people have not achieved at the same educational level as the rest of Australian society. McMeekin implies in his presentation that it is mainly the variance in the level of adaptation to social standards of lifestyle, or being able to assimilate to non-Aboriginal lifestyles that is the core behind failure. He suggests that the Aboriginal child needs to adapt to change, not the school adapt to the child:

Each with their infinite gradations of cultural adaptation poses distinct problems for the school.124

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123 Tatz, 1968: 13
124 McMeekin, 1968: 18
Later in his presentation McMeekin admits that schools have failed to meet the educational needs of Aboriginal children and have not met the principles of assimilation through integration put forward in previous social government policies. Mitchell suggested that Aboriginal children in the school setting bring with them complex diverse issues based on cultural practices and lifestyle. His experience as a head teacher in Western Australia taught him that parental involvement will assist with understanding the connection between community and the school, and the need to reinforce cultural values and local experience in curriculum should be valued instead of promoting prescribed curriculum content such as:

*Thus it is assumed that we will encourage children to comprehend Byron’s poetry: write historically accurate reports on Captain Bligh: divide 47,256 by 38 to two decimal places: and so on. Until a compromised curriculum is devised, all efforts by the most devoted and dedicated will be continuously balked.*

Warren and Duncan submit that Aboriginal children need to acquire skills necessary to gain acceptance and participation in the larger community. Both support the idea that special curriculum provides the flexibility to develop lessons to meet the needs of the students. The skills needed are communication, literacy, numeracy, health, knowledge and natural science. Inadvertently they support (in part) the notion that Mitchell identifies as inappropriate curriculum being taught in the classroom. Assumptions are made by Warren that Aboriginal children lead boring uninteresting lifestyles which is an indication that little is known about the reality of Aboriginal community living. He states in his presentation to other teachers:

*The children need beauty in their otherwise drab lives. Poetry is one avenue through which this can be reached.*

These above literacy skills were performance indicators of success at the time. Other skills in general are reading and money handling while boys need some kind of manual training and for girls training in home management. Warren still had low expectations for the future employment of Aboriginal people. Guiness: 1968 presents the idea that unrealistic expectations are held by young Aboriginal students in secondary education in relation to future employment and how education will benefit choices. In country towns where entrenched racial discrimination affects decisions relevant to employment,

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125 Mitchell, 1968: 73
126 Warren, 1968: 83
often place Aboriginal teenagers in a position of disappointment, disillusionment and depression. In South Australia at Ernabella, reference is made to semi-tribal, semi-nomadic, retarded Aboriginal children who have had limited contact with civilization as described by Craig: 1968. Knowledge gleaned from studies in Indian Education in 1937 was seriously being applied to the Aboriginal education situation in Australia. A concept of ‘one size fits all’ reinforced a popular stereotype developed in Australia by anthropologists and uninformed social researchers. Some teachers develop a stereotype of Aboriginal people’s existence in country towns, while they are enrolled in pre-service teacher training. Often this is due to the lack of Aboriginal cultural knowledge being taught in Universities. Henwood: 1968 describes his experience when his first teaching appointment to an Aboriginal school at Burnt Bridge on the North coast of NSW occurred. Being apprehensive but enthusiastic to work with Aboriginal children he had several questions preying on his mind:

*Would the children speak English? Would they be clothed? What kind of homes would they live in?*  

In 1975, the Aboriginal Affairs (arrangements with the State) Bill, was passed that allowed new arrangements to be negotiated between the States and the Commonwealth. Ratification of a document occurred in September 1975 by the Governor-General of Australia and the Governor of NSW, to assume responsibility for administration, planning and funding of activities designed to promote economic, social and cultural advancement with the expectation of the State to implement the programs:

...it was this co-operative venture, of the Commonwealth government developing policies and programs in consultation with the state, and paying for their implementation and administration by the state, which was the crux of the Commonwealth-State Arrangement of 1975.

This agreement had legal standing regardless of which government was voted into power. In 1970 the Commonwealth introduced the Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme (ABSEG) to encourage the completion of studies for School Certificate and the Higher School Certificate levels for Aboriginal students. The NSW Teachers Federation updated their 1965 survey results and found that in 1971 approximately 600 pupils were

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127 Henwood, 1968: 169  
128 Fletcher, 1989: 298
in receipt of ABSEG and seemed to be reaching higher standards in attendance and staying on longer at school, but were unsure of improved educational outcomes. ABSEG was extended to support all Aboriginal secondary students to increase continued participation in secondary education and therefore potential further educational expectations and improve skills to be competitive in employment opportunities. Since the focus on social determinants which affect Aboriginal people were highlighted by the publicity surrounding the 1967 Referendum many changes were made in the provision of access to education for Aboriginal people.

**Commonwealth Funding for Aboriginal Education Programs**

In October 1973 Professor Betty Watts of Queensland University evaluated the operation and effectiveness of ABSEG. She reported to the Commonwealth Government in 1975 that the overall numbers of Aboriginal students who were enrolled in secondary schools increased substantially. Data reported in 1997 stated that an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander student studying in years 11 and 12 who were in receipt of ABSEG received a monetary value of $1000 per year and a recipient in junior secondary years received a value of $750 annually. The following table reported in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs Quarterly in March 1982, shows a steady increase of ABSEG recipients but does not provide information on levels of schooling or geographic location of recipients within NSW:
Parents and Citizens Associations in schools received $10 per capita Aboriginal enrolment as a grant from 1972 to expend on general school equipment. The Principal was able to use up to 25% of the grant to assist Aboriginal children meet the costs of excursions and other school requisites. Accountability for expenditure of the targeted school grant is difficult to ascertain at this time. Expenditure jumped to $93,000 in 1975/76 financial year which caused refusal of further funding by the Fraser Government and it was discontinued in 1976/77. Whether the scheme had a positive influence on Aboriginal academic student outcomes requires further detailed research.

**Aboriginal Involvement in Education Provision**

Aboriginal Education has undergone continual changes since this chapter reflected on the thoughts of interested academics up until the 1970s. Battles for self-determination in Aboriginal Affairs had been met with resistance, using government policies and strategies as the armory to prevent Aboriginal participation. The interest does not stop at this point, but involvement of Aboriginal people in the policy planning process has gained momentum through education. A national workshop held in 1971 at Queensland University to discuss Aboriginal education endorsed a recommendation that each state

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129 Fletcher, 1989: 302
department of education should appoint a senior officer with responsibility for Aboriginal Education (NSW Dept. Educ. file 71/25454). In NSW Bill Rose was appointed to this position in 1973 with shared responsibility for Special education and Aboriginal Education. An Aboriginal Consultative Group (ACG) was in operation to provide advice to the Australian Schools Commission. Ros Field, an Aboriginal teacher at Mt Druitt, was invited to join the group which included:

*Margaret Valadian, Natascha Mc Namara, Mick Miller, Paul Hughes, Eric Wilmott, John Moriarty, Errol West. And then in 1975 ... a report to the Schools Commission ... establishment of the National Aboriginal Education Committee and State AECGs.*

The ACG provided a report ‘Education for Aborigines’ to the Schools Commission in 1975 which reported two important facets of Aboriginal education delivery related to this study. One was that Aboriginal people should be involved in the administration of Aboriginal education at all levels: the other was that the responsibility for education of Aboriginal children remains the responsibility of the State not the Commonwealth. After the 1975 agreement, discussed in this chapter, the Commonwealth released funds to States and Aboriginal Education which started to snowball. In March 1975 the first Aboriginal Education consultant was appointed, followed in 1976 by Ros Field (nee Ella) as the Aboriginal Liaison Officer and by 1981 the Department boosted the Aboriginal Unit to six members, using Commonwealth funding. The Schools Commission provided funding to assist with meetings held between Aboriginal people interested or employed in Aboriginal service provision, which became known as the Aboriginal Education Committee (1976). This was also the year that the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) was established to advise the Commonwealth Minister for Education on issues effecting Aboriginal Education on a national level. State Aboriginal education consultative committees were established in Victoria, Queensland and NSW. There needed to be a stronger representation from communities across NSW. A model was devised by Bob Morgan, John Lester and Keith Hall to:

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130 Parbury, 2010: 24
Not control to the exclusion of others, but more about empowering the community, about providing an opportunity for them to have a real voice in determining the nature and the scope of education and learning for our children.\textsuperscript{131}

The NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group was established under the direction of the former NSW Minister for Education Paul Landa in 1981, as discussed in chapter five, after Morgan was appointed as a Commissioner on the Schools Commission:

\begin{quote}
The other thing for us to remember is that, prior to the AECG there was no real voice in education, none whatsoever. You know, we had marches and movement and struggles around land rights or the political movement or whatever, but there was never any sort of (education movement). We all wanted education: we all demanded that we have a right to education. I think the bureaucracy and governments thought that we just wanted to attend schools. And ..., but never ever surrendering our Aboriginality. (Bob Morgan)\textsuperscript{132}
\end{quote}

The first elected President was Morgan who was funded in a fulltime position with a budget of $90,000 provided by the State after the Commonwealth withdrew funds in 1981. This assisted the elected representatives to meet four times each year, one meeting being the Annual General Meeting. The organisation grew despite opposition by the NSW Department of Education:

\begin{quote}
It was suggested to me, by one who was at the time attempting to introduce changes in Aboriginal education within the Department that a ‘sandbag’ mentality existed among senior officers: as the waters of change lapped higher, more sandbags were heaped up ... eventually the pressure grew ... nothing could resist it.\textsuperscript{133}
\end{quote}

There was no specific Departmental policy on Aboriginal education at this time. After the Anti-discrimination Board (1978) became aware of the lack of clear direction in how the NSW Department of Education intended to ensure Aboriginal children accessed education services, and how reported prejudice against Aboriginal children was not diminishing in schools, the Department was pressured into developing a formal policy. The Board’s recommendations were critically relevant to the lack of participation by Aboriginal people at the higher levels of administration within the Department. It was also concerned that the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group

\begin{itemize}
\item Parbury, 2010: 33
\item Parbury, 2010: 47
\item Fletcher, 1989: 313-14
\end{itemize}
had difficulty accessing senior officers in the Department in order to offer advice in planning and decision making processes:

*The Board recommended direct access for the group to the Director-General and the Minister of Education.* 134

A report undertaken by The Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly upon Aborigines in 1978 investigated social determinants of Aboriginal communities and the issue of Aboriginal Land Rights in NSW. The select committee included 111 recommendations to Government with 36 focused on education. Generally major improvement needed to be made in all areas to present opportunities of access for the betterment of Aboriginal people. Both reports, the Schools Commission in 1975 and the Select Committee in 1978 placed pressure on the NSW Department of Education to complete a policy on Aboriginal Education, the first of its kind in Australia. The NSW Department of School Education Aboriginal Education Policy was finally released in 1982 and included the involvement of the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group.

**NSW Policy in Aboriginal Education**

This policy included three major aspects of dealing with change in schooling. The first was concerning the rationale of Aboriginal education provision for Aboriginal children, then the aims of Aboriginal education and the implementation of the policy. The rationale emphasis is placed on the teacher to embrace the strengths of Aboriginal people to assist them in making the curriculum appropriate to meet the cultural differences of students in their classroom environment. By focusing on cultural identity and developing classroom activities which reinforce positive self-esteem would reward the teacher and students with positive learning outcomes. Aboriginal Studies is for all children through the study of Australian history before invasion and through to contemporary society. An offer is made from the beginning of the document to invite Aboriginal community participation into the school environment. Many people have criticised the policy. Fletcher points out:

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134 Fletcher, 1989: 321
A fundamental flaw in the policy statement lays in its so-called Rationale. In a rationale one expects to find in precise terms the reason for adopting a particular policy.\footnote{Fletcher, 1989: 332}

He further points out the need for justification of a policy different to the multi-cultural education policy in practice. Perhaps these comments are made without understanding the battles that occurred within the Department that Aboriginal people are the first people of this country and should be treated and recognised as such. Aboriginal people are not the same as other races who have come to Australia from overseas and decided to live here without consultation and agreement from the original owners of the land. There are many lessons that can be learned if the old philosophy of assimilation can be discarded. Educated people need to understand why social justice is a right and not a privilege for Aboriginal people:

\begin{quote}
It is because of annual budget allocations by the Commonwealth government, and the development and implementation of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP) with its related programs that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education has become part of the education agenda for States and Territories.\footnote{Tripcony, 2003: 37}
\end{quote}

**National Education Policy Direction**

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP), emerged as a result of the evidence presented to the 1988 Task Force (Hughes Report). Contained within the NATSIEP are 21 goals to encourage a national effort toward improving education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The structure of the long-term goals for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education is presented in four sections. For the purpose of this study, the first section named ‘Involvement of Aboriginal people in educational decision-making’ will be the focus. Six goals in particular, make direct reference to involvement by Aboriginal community members in the provision of education services:

**Goal 1:**

\begin{quote}
To establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal parents and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and
evaluation of pre-school, primary and secondary education services for their children.\textsuperscript{137}

The goal above provides clear direction for the need to educate Aboriginal adults in order to participate at the school level. Knowledge of education systems and training programs to increase relevant skills must be developed to meet the expectations of this goal. On reflection many Aboriginal people have had negative experiences in the schooling system. History has recorded that up until the mid 1950s Aboriginal children were educated below the standards of non-Aboriginal children:

\emph{One inspector in 1945 argued that, with competent and sympathetic teachers, pupils in Aboriginal schools could reach at least a reasonable Fifth Class primary level before leaving school to enter the work force.}\textsuperscript{138}

Not only were Aboriginal children generally provided a sub-standard level of education, their parents were not participants of planning, delivery and evaluation of education services to their children. Generational ramifications are evidence of the need for mature age students to enrol in adult education courses to have another chance at education. Slowly Aboriginal people are achieving educational outcomes which incorporate skills necessary to develop policy at National and State levels. Prior to the 1975 Agreement between the States and the Commonwealth governments, the Commonwealth Government had responsibility for the administration of educational services for Aboriginal people. Legislation was passed in Federal Parliament that transferred social responsibility for Aboriginal Affairs to all States and Territories. This meant that a shift became necessary, within State and Territory Government Departments to restructure services, in order to meet the demands placed on them by a growing number of Aboriginal people and their supporters:

\emph{Constitutional responsibility for preschool and school education overall rests with State and Territory governments.}\textsuperscript{139}

Goal 2:

\emph{To increase the number of Aboriginal people employed as educational administrators, teachers, curriculum advisers, teachers assistants, home school liaison officers and other education workers, including community people
An example is the Aboriginal Education Officer program operating in NSW. Alan Duncan, who was employed at Sydney University, had developed a pilot program funded by the Aboriginal Education Council to employ Aboriginal people in the public education system. Parbury: 2010 was advised by Duncan that two people were based at Walhallow (Heather Allen) and Weilmoringle (Vera Bynoe) in 1974 as a pilot program. This program has undergone some name changes since 1975, when the first group of Aboriginal Teachers Assistants (ATAs) were employed in schools that had significant numbers of Aboriginal enrolments and was funded by the Commonwealth Government. Some of the first ATAs to be appointed during 1975 in NSW schools were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>George Day</td>
<td>Deniliquin Primary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davina Tyrrel</td>
<td>Mogo Primary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olive Brown</td>
<td>Bidwell Primary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joyce Woodberry</td>
<td>La Perouse Primary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurie Crawford</td>
<td>Brewarrina Central School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Due to the program being so successful the numbers were increased to 30 positions and needed to meet a criteria of thirty or more Aboriginal enrolments before positions were established. Guidelines for employment were developed in consultation with members of the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and the Aboriginal Section within the NSW Department of Education.

My position as Clerical Assistant with the NSW Department of Education in 1980 and my involvement with the NSW AECG put me in touch with a lot of people and access to information about Aboriginal Education. I felt as though real change had to come from young people, and education in the schools was the place for things to happen. Joyce Woodberry always seemed to be able to talk about how nothing got by her at LaPerouse Primary School because she was employed as an ATA, and how the kids at this school were achieving. Olive Brown in the Mt. Druitt area (Western Sydney) was very involved in community activities as an ATA, knowledgeable about issues related to Aboriginal Education, was highly regarded and outspoken. A position was advertised...
at Karuah Primary School which I applied for and was successful.
At this time, professional development through the Aboriginal Education Assistants Course offered at Sydney University was mandatory to educate ATAs about working in schools. Alan Duncan was committed to this program and always considered ways to improve educational opportunities for Aboriginal people. This experience also put me in touch with many Aboriginal people dedicated to improving the educational outcomes for their communities across NSW.

I do appreciate the continued communication between the NSW AECG and especially Bob Morgan who held the position of President of NSW AECG and a Commissioner of the NSW Schools Commission. It made me feel valued in my position as an ATA and also as a member of the Hunter Region AECG. When I returned to Sydney in 1982 I had already enrolled in the Aboriginal Rural Education Program (AREP) offered at the University of Western Sydney – Macarthur Campus, with the aim to become a Primary School teacher (Laurel Williams).

The program has changed names to Aboriginal Education Assistant (AEA) and currently to the current position of Aboriginal Education Officer (AEO). Three of the 1975 appointments have completed teaching degrees. Many more AEOs have completed or are enrolled in University teaching degrees. Supplementary funding provided to schools through Commonwealth grants has increased the employment of Aboriginal people in the positions of Aboriginal Education Workers. These people are reliant on program funding and school global budgets to maintain employment. Tripcony: 2003 strengthens the value of these positions in the following comment:

> These valuable staff must be recognised for the work they do in providing an important link between the school, Indigenous students and families, and Indigenous communities.141

Threats to funding arrangements are continuous. Access to program funding is available to public and private education providers in addition to Aboriginal communities. In recent years the NSW AECG has collaborated with Sydney Institute of TAFE to deliver a Certificate III course in Employment, Education and Training for AECG members and

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141 Tripcony, 2003: p47
Aboriginal community members in various geographic locations across the State. Course content is inclusive of skills training components to help members work effectively with schools and in their own communities. Graduates of this course will become more competitive in the open employment market.

**Goal 3:**

*To establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal students and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of post-school education services, including technical and further education colleges and higher education institutions.*

In 2011 the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs announced a Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs. This taskforce was charged with seeking information from Aboriginal people to support more Aboriginal students to remain at school longer and transition into meaningful employment opportunities. Since the development of the strategy, twenty seven forums have been held across NSW where 3,000 people attended. Early indications of the workshop outcomes reported that Aboriginal people’s input must be at the heart of any strategic developments to ensure linkages to schooling, employment, language maintenance and cultural confirmation is encouraged to meet the aims of Taskforce.

**Goal 4:**

*To increase the number of Aboriginal people employed as administrators, teachers, researchers and student services officers in technical and further education colleges and higher education institutions.*

Information in this area is very limited on a State level without completing detailed research to glean statistical data in order to make informed commentary. At the University of Newcastle discussion at the Board of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education and Training meetings raises concern relevant to the employment of Aboriginal people across the entire University. It appears that the majority of the total numbers of Aboriginal people filling positions within the University are employed at the Wollotuka Institute in administration and academic positions. The current statistical figures reported in 2012 Wollotuka Institute Annual Report identify 46 at Wollotuka and a spread of 29 positions throughout the University totalling 75, inclusive of part-time positions.
**Goal 5:**

To provide education and training services to develop the skills of Aboriginal people to participate in educational decision-making.\(^{142}\)

Goal 5 above not only supports the idea of administrative change highlighted in goal 1, but suggests training should be implemented across the entire education spectrum. Aboriginal Community involvement has been recognised as a vital component leading to successful outcomes for teachers of Aboriginal Studies and teachers of Aboriginal students. A national summer school with the theme ‘Aboriginal Education and the Teacher’s Role’ was held in Sydney in 1968. The purpose of this activity was to better prepare teachers to deal with Aboriginal people when they were placed in a school where there was a high Aboriginal enrolment.

All areas which relate to the teachers role were discussed: pre-schools: primary, secondary and adult education: the need for special training courses for teachers: the problems of literacy and teaching of the vernacular: the effect of Aboriginal communities in the school’s activities.\(^{143}\)

During this period the responsibility of education was disjointed in terms of setting priorities and allocating funds for “special programs” between the Commonwealth and the States. Roper: 1969 writes:

I must make it clear that while the Commonwealth Government ensures that special training is provided for its own teachers for the various levels of education available to Aboriginals in the Commonwealth’s own Territories, training of teachers in the States, is of course, determined by State authorities.\(^{144}\)

Remarks presented by Duncan: 1969 in the concluding comments of a teachers’ conference reinforce the need for educators to review their expectations of Aboriginal student results. This practice of low expectations of educational outcomes for Aboriginal students did not receive much publicity until Sarra had completed his PhD (2002) in Queensland and repeated a quote from Duncan: 1968 to reinforce the concept of promoting high expectations for Aboriginal student outcomes:

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\(^{142}\) National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, 1994: p47

\(^{143}\) Roper, 1969: Introduction vi

\(^{144}\) Roper, 1969: Introduction vii
Children do what is expected of them and I have seen dozens of teachers who expected Aborigines to be “no hopers”. The teacher expected failure and trouble, so he got them.145

While this sentiment was acknowledged 44 years ago by Duncan, and reinforced by Tripcony: 2003 at the second National Australian Indigenous Education Conference, not very much was done about changing teacher attitudes until universities agreed to revamp their teacher training courses:

Teachers must become knowledgeable on matters such as Indigenous values, lifestyles, cultures, languages and contemporary issues.146

Sarra, an Aboriginal educator from Queensland, believes emphatically with raising the expectations of Aboriginal students and communities. When Sarra was appointed to Cherbourg State School, he was the first Aboriginal Principal ever to be appointed to that school and served a three year term during 1999-2002. After getting to know about the school and the Aboriginal community he set about making change. Full details can be found in the ‘Australian College of Education, paper no.5 of the Quality Teacher’s Series, ‘Young and Black and Deadly: for Improving Outcomes for Indigenous Students’:2003, Sarra expresses the need for teachers to take some responsibility for the performance of all children in their classrooms. The call for effective teaching came from the Queensland Department of Education in 1994:

Any teacher expecting improved academic performance from children must offer classroom experiences that observe all of the ‘Principles of Effective Learning and Teaching’.147

Sarra devised strategies to influence the staff, community and students to feel proud to be a part of Cherbourg school. As the strategies were implemented he witnessed a dramatic change:

Many of the strategies presented here are heavily anchored by the need to expect great student outcomes and believe in great student outcomes. All of the team at Cherbourg State School believe it can be done and this is why it is being done! 148

To meet the expectations placed on teachers to produce positive results for Aboriginal students, there needs to be a paradigm shift by universities and education providers.

145 Roper, 1969: 192
146 Tripcony, 2003: 46
147 Sarra, 2003: 8
148 Sarra, 2003: 12
Keenan: 2009 supports a shift in thinking about how curriculum frameworks are constructed:

*In educational frameworks where Western paradigms continue to exclude Indigenous ways of knowing, Indigenous students will continue to experience educational disadvantage.*

Teacher training institutions have a responsibility to equip students with the highest possible professional capabilities to perform their duties at the pre-service stage of their careers. Education service providers have a responsibility to maintain professional teaching standards as employers at the in-service stage of teachers. Both stages can be met in terms of providing Aboriginal Studies course curriculum. Shane Williams: 2003 explains why patterns need to change:

*Within this complex and changing environment, Aboriginal and Torres Strait people continue to assert the right for their children to access quality education services that provide a security of culture and identity, and the best educational outcomes.*

**Goal 6:**

*To develop arrangements for the provision of independent advice for Aboriginal communities regarding educational decisions at regional State, Territory and National levels.*

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014 (MCEECDYA) reinforces the need for a National co-ordinated approach toward improving the educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Agreement has been reached and reported in the preface:

*Governments have agreed to take urgent actions to close the gap between the life outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians. To drive action, the Prime Minister, Premiers and Chief Ministers have agreed through the Council of Australian Governments to six ambitious targets.*

The six targets are:

1. Close the life expectancy gap within a generation:

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149 Keenan, 2009: 4
150 Williams, 2003: 54
151 Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, 2009: 3
2 Halve the gap in mortality rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children under five within a decade;

3 Ensure all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander four year olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years, by 2018:

4 Halve the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade by 2018:

5 At least halve the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020: and

6 Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and other Australians within a decade by 2018.

An expectation put forward in the Preface asserts that future directions in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education should parallel:

...all Australian children to have a high quality, world-standard education to equip them for life in the 21st century. 152

The Education Action Plan is an overview to guide the implementation of strategies for five years (2010-2014). Included in the document introduction is a structure for readers to focus on. When addressing the agreed targets, reference is made to researched evidence that shows why this action plan is necessary. A diagram conceptualising three levels of action National, Systemic, and Local are prescribed throughout the National Collaboration chapter, as guidelines for implementation.

Readiness for school

Early childhood learning is identified as essential if long-term agreements are to be reached. Working with families to promote social and educational preparedness is vital at the pre-school stage of learning. Focus school communities are targeted to produce access programs as a priority by 2013. There are 143 focus schools in NSW.

Engagement and connections

152 Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, 2009: 3
Partnerships with families and communities are elements that lead to educational success for Aboriginal students. Valued collaboration between school staff and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in decision-making processes will produce social capital in communities. Connecting building blocks in early childhood, schooling, health, economic participation, healthy homes, safe communities, governance and leadership is the basis for community empowerment into the future. Emphasis is placed on encouraging students who are pregnant and students who are parents to continue their engagement with education. Reporting and accountability to families and communities is noteworthy. The National Assessment Program-Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is an assessment tool used in Australian schools. Students are tested for their level of skills in reading, writing, spelling and numeracy in years three, five, seven and nine every year:

NAPLAN tests the sort of skills that are essential for every child to progress through school and life. The assessments are undertaken nationwide, every year, in the second full week in May.  

Knowledge of NAPLAN school results and location of Focus Schools will assist in strengthening school and Aboriginal community relationships.

**Attendance**

The link between parental involvement and increased Aboriginal community relationships with schools is a key factor in improving school attendance and retention rates. By sharing evidence based data with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, community driven programs can be developed to target specific schools in an attempt to increase attendance rates.

**Literacy and Numeracy**

Basic English literacy and numeracy competence is essential to participate in Australian mainstream society. While recognition is given to many Aboriginal people being speakers of English as a second language, mastery of standard English is a requirement of Australian education systems. NAPLAN testing in years three, five, seven and nine

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153 Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (http://www.nap.edu.au/naplan/naplan.html)
report statistical data showing levels reached above and below national minimum standards in English literacy and numeracy skills. The Education Action Plan identifies the first three years of schooling to be a priority area when developing strategies to deal with this issue.

**Leadership, quality teaching and workforce development**

School staff were surveyed in 2007 and reported that 71% of early career primary and secondary teachers did not feel they were prepared to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. There was 1% of the total National population of teachers who were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, in 2008. The Education Action Plan identifies a remedy as follows:

*Building a well qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workforce is an important way of potentially reducing the impact of high teacher turnover in school communities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student.*

This strategy is reflective of the NAEC goal of having 1,000 Aboriginal teachers in classrooms by 1990 as a result of the National Inquiry into Teacher Education. Professional development for teachers and principals will be driven by an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Educator Workforce Strategy to be developed by MCEECDYA. Negotiations with the Vocational Education and Training and higher education sectors will discuss strategies to deal with pre-service training in Aboriginal Education. Mandatory Aboriginal Studies course components should become an element for all University programs, particularly for pre-service teacher programs. Focus schools will be targeted to identify best practice strategies useful for high performing teachers and principals, when staffing schools. The concept of a Coalition of Universities based on the New Zealand model should be established.

**Pathways to real post-school options**

Evidence is provided to illustrate the nexus between education and gainful employment. Post-school studies require four elements to encourage successful outcomes which will lead to greater employment opportunities. They are capabilities, opportunities, resources

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and responsibilities. Material and non-material resources need to be available for all people. In a cultural context Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to be active participants in halving the gap in attaining year 12 completions by 2020 when culturally based resources are included in studies. Secondary schools need to be innovative in programming and support to increase potential success of this action.

**Useful References Built Into the Education Action Plan**
Chapter 3: gives providers resource links to assist with implementation of the Action Plan, inclusive of jurisdictional priorities. Each State and Territory has reported their specific priorities relevant to their set of circumstances.
Chapter 4: illustrates how projected achievements will be monitored and reported. Ongoing evaluations will present data useful for tracking educational performance and informing governments, Aboriginal communities and relevant interested consultative bodies. A single online repository will be established to house examples of best practice, reliable evidence and a collection of research publications focusing on Aboriginal issues.
The Closing the Gap Clearinghouse can be found at:

**National Directions**
Among Aboriginal educators, reference is often made to the ‘1975 State and Commonwealth Agreement’, when discussing vital changes relevant to funding arrangements for State and Territory authorities. Thoughts are expressed in Aboriginal circles suggesting that due to the method of funding allocated to education providers, the States are released from their legal responsibilities to provide public education programs for all people. Currently there is a plethora of programs in education, either totally funded or part funded through the Commonwealth, to support Aboriginal educational outcomes. The National Review: 1994, discusses researched evidence relative to the state of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. While some encouraging signs of positive improvements are forthcoming, there are still gaps when measured between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australian student outcomes. Goal 15 of the NATSIEP goals recognises that a gap exists between Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander year 12 students and non-Aboriginal year 12 students even though some improvements have been illustrated:

To enable Aboriginal students to attain the successful completion of Year 12 or equivalent at the same rates as for other Australian students.  

In 2008, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to a number of ambitious targets relating to Aboriginal education, employment, health and life expectancy. These targets are strategies devised to close the gap in outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. A target is set to halve the gap in year 12 completion rates between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students by 2020. The following statistics clearly indicate a steady decrease in Aboriginal attendance in the secondary school sector from year nine. There are several indicators which can be identified which point to the underachievement of Aboriginal students. A compilation of reasons are the legal school leaving age of 16 years in 1992 in Australia, coupled with adolescence and individual learning outcomes, could discourage Aboriginal students from continuing their schooling until year 12. Even more dramatic is the attrition rate between year 10 and year 12. Concern for year 12 completions at a level where individual Aboriginal students do not have a broad range of future career opportunities available due to the low attainment outcomes, has been high on the priority list of the NSW AECG for many years. While retention rates have marginally improved over five years, there is only a trickle of successful students completing year 12 who meet the tertiary entrance score needed to enrol in University studies:

In some cases these gaps are narrowing...but in others the gaps are getting wider

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155 National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (A discussion paper), 1994: 48
156 National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (A discussion paper), 1994: 5
Many Aboriginal people, who managed to complete teaching degrees through University studies, are employed in the Higher Education Sector within Aboriginal Support Units. Support staff develops programs to visit schools in their drawing areas and encourage senior students to consider higher education choices as a career path. National statistics show that twenty years ago the gap between year 12 graduation rates for Aboriginal students and the graduation rates for non-Aboriginal students had increased from nil in 1988 to 24.7% in 1992. Further studies have been publicised which tracked Aboriginal student completion rates across Australia from 1995 to 2009. Statistics reported in the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse resource sheet reveals:

School completion rates for Indigenous students are very low compared with almost every other demographic group in Australia, and more than 30 percentage points below the rates for non-Indigenous students (Long 2009).\(^{158}\)

The Australian Government in 2011, recognised that the target set to halve the gap by 2020 in year 12 or equivalent, attainment rates between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students is a major national challenge. It is also acknowledged that improvement in education cannot be made without other social disadvantages being improved, such as health, housing and employment. Interestingly these are the same social determinants

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\(^{157}\) National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (A discussion paper), 1994: 25
\(^{158}\) Closing the Gap Clearing House, 2011: 3
identified by Dixon and others in the 1930s through to the 1950s when activism continually drew attention to the lack of basic human rights aimed at Aboriginal people. For eighty years and more, social disadvantages are still being highlighted.

**fig 10 Social Determinants in Disadvantaged Aboriginal Communities**

References about what works as effective strategies to close the gap are published by researchers Helme & Lamb:2011, through the Centre for Research on Education Systems at the University of Melbourne. Included in the strategies is the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in planning and provision of education. An aim of the NSW AECG Inc. is:

*To provide opportunities for Aboriginal people to be actively involved in all decision-making that is relevant to education and training through a collaborative consultative process.*

This aim has been modelled on the NAEC and other State and Territory AECGs since the NSW organisation was established in 1979. Various strategies have been put forward over many years to improve educational opportunities for Aboriginal students, by Aboriginal people involved in education community organisations for at least forty years.

**Published Aboriginal Knowledge**

Research Ethics about Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people and their communities had gathered momentum in the mid 1990s. A point is made about the oral traditions of

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159 NSW AECG Inc. Rules of the Association, 2009: 4
Aboriginal people by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) in a discussion paper circulated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tertiary education Units for comment. A guiding principle included in the document highlights the value of Aboriginal people sharing their knowledge through story-telling and their understanding of education:

*Much of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ knowledge is transmitted orally and should be accorded equal status with documented and other knowledge sources.*

This cultural method of sharing knowledge may account for the limited number of documented materials written by Aboriginal authors and therefore unavailable to researchers as an academic reference point. Aboriginal voices in education have been evident at international, national, state and territory and local conferences focusing on social issues that impact on Aboriginal communities since the mid 1970s:

*The rich oral tradition in Indigenous cultures makes talk an important formal exchange.*

In 1994, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Units established in Australian Universities were very conscious of the need to construct research ethics couched in cultural guidelines as necessary protocols for academic researchers to adhere to when dealing with Aboriginal communities. The NSW AECG membership and Aboriginal people employed in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Centres were concerned by the high level of research activity being carried out about Aboriginal communities without proper consultation with the targeted group. In 1993 the Aboriginal Research Institute at the University of South Australia wrote a discussion paper reinforcing the notion that Aboriginal ownership of processes and outcomes of research are generally disregarded and perpetuated by past ethnocentric practices. One of the major issues of concern is the protection of intellectual and cultural property rights of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. By the mid 1990s many papers were presented at Aboriginal Conferences, which illustrated the value of having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed in Universities across Australia and writing conference papers which affect Aboriginal communities. Changes have
been made to research guidelines at a National level after consulting with Aboriginal people. The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies has developed guidelines for research into and about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their people:

At every stage, research with and about Indigenous peoples must be founded on a process of meaningful engagement and reciprocity between the researcher and the Indigenous people.\(^\text{162}\)

Tripcony: 2003 discusses the occurrence of a major change to Aboriginal Education consultation services after the NAEC was disbanded toward the end of 1988 and was replaced with a taskforce chaired by Professor Paul Hughes. The taskforce was charged with the development of a National policy, therefore birthing the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP) in 1989 for implementation in 1990:

The 1990s were years of national activity in education generally, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. For example the NATSIEP was being implemented across all education sectors in States and Territories.\(^\text{163}\)

A national review and analysis of literature relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education was commissioned by the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET), undertaken by Mary Ann Bin-Sallik, Noel Blomeley, Rick Flowers and Paul Hughes in 1994 to investigate key documents published over a ten (10) year period related to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Education Policy. The authors reported that the number of published material used in the literature review linked directly to NATSIEP was limited. While Aboriginal people involved in education provision from pre-school to higher education recognised this policy as the first of its kind in Australia, mixed responses were uncovered. Some publications applauded the co-ordination of services between the education sectors and the changes from annual to tri-annual funding which facilitates more confidence in planning initiatives and programs, while others were critical of the language used to suggest that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should assimilate and fit into mainstream education services. It appeared there was no suggestion of creating any alternative education provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. A co-ordinated response was

\(^{162}\) Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2002: 4
\(^{163}\) Tripcony, 2003: 38
forwarded to the Review on 8th April 1994, on behalf of State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (AECGs), through the Chairperson of the Federation of AECGs Mary Atkinson. The Review is very critical of the National Aboriginal Education Policy (AEP) and identifies two principal reasons for the “failure” of Aboriginal people to achieve high success rates in education. The first reason was being the continuing existence of racism in education systems and secondly the lack of culturally appropriate pre-teaching education. The Federation of AECGs reinforced the consideration of:

*Links between education and other areas of social policy need to be understood.*

It goes without saying that the cycle of poverty is perpetuated if any identified social determinant is excluded from the social continuum. Should this action eventuate, social disadvantage is continued as the consequence. Aboriginal Culture and education cannot be separated from the holistic development of Aboriginal people. Some concern is raised that the AEP is an interpretation of assimilation based on an Aboriginal education deficit model. In the section which addresses Aboriginal involvement in decision making, comment is made that implies community advice through AECGs is not sufficiently independent of State and Territory Governments:

*Is there sufficient independence of Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups from government departments?*

Commonwealth funding arrangements could be seen as creating a barrier to providing full representation of independent advice on Aboriginal education to specific Ministers. It is reported that although an increase of Aboriginal staffing has occurred in the Department of Education Employment and Training (DEET), policy advice is still provided by senior non-Aboriginal bureaucrats. The Report points out the difference between accessing education services and the level and quality of education outcomes. Quality of outcomes is the preferred measurement of successful indicators. Unlike the alleged implications of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advice not being heeded in the development of policy, Sarra: 2003 has a completely opposite viewpoint:

*For many years, Indigenous staff had worked in Cherbourg State School yet had not been consulted about strategic or operational matters. For me it was necessary to listen to their advice on such matters as many of them were local*

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164 National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, 1994: 2
165 National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, 1994: 7
community people and, whilst some may not have had academic qualifications (although many did), they knew the children and the community far better than I ever did.¹⁶⁶

A strategy to improve relationships between students and teachers is the belief that Aboriginal Studies teaching and learning will benefit all students. A racist attitude toward people of difference is a remnant of the “White Australia Policy”.

Leading NSW and Victorian politicians are on record warning there would be no place for ‘Asiatics’ or ‘coloureds’ in the Australia of the future.¹⁶⁷

An announcement made in 1966 was the turning point for this racist policy to be abolished. There was never any recognition of Aboriginal people’s existence or acknowledgement of the richness and value of Aboriginal history and culture under this policy. The Federation of AECSGs firmly believed that historical knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Australia, incorporated as mandatory studies in teacher training courses, will assist in undermining the stigma of racism for all people of difference. The Federation commentary reinforces the connection between Australian society and Reconciliation in the following comment:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies is one of the fundamental keys in eradicating racism and telling the truth about the history of Australia. It must be seen as an integral part to the Reconciliation process and the foundation for every Australian child’s education experience.¹⁶⁸

AEP Support programs administered by DEET need to be implemented to facilitate successful participation in education and training. The Federation asserted that the opposite is the case with some programs. In particular the Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) program was cited as an opportunity to increase parental involvement in education systems, through empowerment. Quite the opposite is the result, when Principals misinterpreted the role of the Principal to determine ASSPA Committee agendas, and interpret funding allocations as a school “slush fund”. If the AEP goals are to be realised, an integrated approach with the intention of social justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people must be a basis for successful results. The

¹⁶⁶ Sarra, 2003: 10
¹⁶⁸ National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, 1994: 12
Federation of AECGs strongly invited models of “best practice” relevant to ASSPA projects to be widely publicised. The closing comments of the Federation response called for cultural self-determination:

_It is about time to allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to really take a leadership role in Aboriginal Education. We are the real experts. Aboriginal Education now is not in our control. We need to give direction. It is about time for DEET and Ministers, Commonwealth and State/Territory, and for systems and providers, to learn to listen to all we are saying, not just what they want to hear._

In an attempt to facilitate an opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island voices to be heard, in the context of state jurisdiction responsibilities and as a result of the identified NATSIEP 21 goals, the NSW Strategic Planning and Monitoring Committee (SPMC) Chairperson, Linda Burney co-ordinated a NSW Conference to implement goal 1:

_To establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal parents and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of pre-school, primary and secondary education services for their children._

The Mingaletta ‘Coming Together’ Conference was held at Port Macquarie on April 26-29, 1994, to develop a NSW NATSIEP Strategic Plan 1996-1998. The then President of the NSW AECG, Linda Burney, was also the Chairperson of the monitoring committee, who encouraged the involvement of Aboriginal community participation. The following NATSIEP priorities were set for the 1993-95 triennium:

- Aboriginal Cultural Programs,
- Community Education and Development,
- Curriculum,
- Early Childhood Education,
- Juvenile Detention and Prison Programs,
- Literacy and Numeracy.
Community education and development is identified as an essential element underpinning the implementation of all 21 NATSIEP goals. This sentiment is reinforced by the Mingaletta Conference workshop participants in 4.0.2 of the Report:

This can only be effective if Aboriginal communities have the knowledge and skills to participate in these processes.\(^{172}\)

After four days of deliberations, one hundred and 126 delegates inclusive of NSW AECG representatives, recommendations were put forward. Appendix four of the Conference Report categorised recommendations into sector responsibility areas. A recommendation related to the Higher Education sector, section 6.4.8. (2) reads as follows:

That each University develop with representation from its Aboriginal communities, a code of ethics for research and Aboriginal community ownership and control of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and languages and that incentives be developed for Aboriginal people to study linguistics.\(^ {173}\)

This recommendation presumes that individual Aboriginal community people have maintained their cultural knowledge and have innate skills, to interact with the political culture of Universities, in order to forge agreements to review course content protected by Faculties and Departments. Contained in the National Review: Bin-Sallik, Blomeley, Flowers, and Hughes: 1994 acknowledges that the higher education sector provided the most useful data for the purpose of meeting the terms of reference of the review. Aboriginal people employed in the University sector should increase their connectedness with Aboriginal communities and take responsibility for community development programs as it relates to policy development and analysis in Aboriginal Education using a community lens. The DEET 1994 Literature Review team reported implementation progress relative to the NATSIEP 21 goals against four formal education sectors. Issues raised in the literature review are presented as concluding remarks in the following section.

\(^{172}\) NSW NATSIEP Strategic Planning and Monitoring Committee, 1994: 6
\(^{173}\) NSW NATSIEP Strategic Planning and Monitoring Committee, 1994: 35
Early Childhood:
The descriptive nature of this section reflects the character of much of the literature which was reviewed. Issues of particular relevance highlighted by the literature for the NATSIEP review concern:

- The need to ensure government policies and programs do not favour secondary and tertiary education at the expense of early childhood education
- The need for NATSIEP to promote co-ordination of funding and curriculum development for early childhood education
- The call to extend the Aboriginal Student Awareness Program (AASSPA) to preschools

Schools:
The comments in this section of the DEET Review are extensive therefore a summary will be presented:

- It is very clear that writings specific to the NATSIEP are very limited. Those that do relate to the NATSIEP are more political than educational in nature and discuss matters at a macro philosophical level rather than a focus on a major purpose, let alone a particular goal. We could find no references for five of the 13 goals, namely 5, 6, 9, 12 and 15 which we believe relate either directly or indirectly to schooling.

The review team makes comment on the abundance of articles available discussing Aboriginal Education, written by teachers for teachers to be implemented in classrooms.

A growth in referencing Aboriginal education in general education articles was noted:

- It was particularly noticeable that reference to Torres Strait Islander students is almost nonexistent. A similar situation exists for secondary education. We know from anecdotal information that reference to the NATSIEP and Aboriginal education programs that cross reference to the aims and goals are contained in the various reports of state and territory departments of education.

TAFE:
There are three key features which characterises the literature reviewed in this section. Firstly, it highlights the need for more research and scholarship in the field of

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174 Bin-Sallik, Blomeley, Flowers, Hughes, 1994: 36
175 Bin-Sallik, Blomeley, Flowers, Hughes, 1994: 26-27
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adult education and training. Secondly, it reveals the lack of empirical data about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in education and training. And third, the literature presents a common analysis of issues related to NATSIEP goal 3 which is concerned with the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in education decision making. The literature is critical that government policies have failed to distinguish between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander control of adult education versus Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being involved in educational decision making. In particular, the literature argues the need for policy makers to recognise and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled adult education providers.

Both independent scholars and government commissioned inquiries highlight the difference between government controlled TAFE, and community controlled provision. While TAFE provision has made significant advances, government policies in particular NATSIEP, should recognise the need to support community controlled provision as both a viable alternative to, and important extension of, TAFE provision.¹⁷⁶

Higher Education:
The issues which the research team believed to be of major concern at the Higher Education level are:

a) The under representation of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in the Schools of Science and Technology. Though universities have been given the responsibility to ensure that students enrol across a wide range of courses this is yet to happen, and their enrolments are yet to have an impact in the science based areas.

b) The low numbers of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islander people employed in universities, their high staff turnover, and the appalling industrial conditions to which they are subjected.

c) The low status given to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory committees within the higher education sector, and the fact that there were no such committees in place in 1990.

d) The opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-indigenous Australians to gain an appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and cultures.

Discussion: There appears to be two priority issues that affect all formal areas of Aboriginal education. One is the need to improve the level of Aboriginal community

¹⁷⁶ Bin-Sallik, Blomeley, Flowers, Hughes, 1994: 18
participation in education decision making that is not tokenistic. The other is the need to provide co-ordinated funding arrangements with States and Territories to improve Aboriginal education provision across all sectors of formal education.

**A National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (NATSIEP) 1996-2002**

The NATSIEP is the 21 long-term goals reported in the AEP compressed into eight priority areas. The following priorities provide key outcomes for the early childhood education services, schooling, vocational education and training including adult education and higher education sectors. This document identifies performance measures and includes a timeline linked to targets so that providers have clear directions and expectations to reach.

- **To establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in educational decision-making.**\(^{177}\)

Principles of self-determination regarding partnership agreements is incorporated into this priority are reliant on decision-making protocols of local, regional, state and national communities. State or Territory and Local AECGs are noted as one way to involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in consultation. Other arrangements need to be investigated in order to be inclusive. Staff employed to provide independent advice could prove to be problematic, because the advice may not be seen as being independent of workplace influences. Acknowledgement is given to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as being expert in the field of Aboriginal education.

- **To increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait people employed in education and training.**\(^{178}\)

An increase of ancillary and para-professional staff in education services has boosted employment statistics but, people in professional and secondary school teacher positions are low. Employment plans on the basis of affirmative action need to be developed. The

\(^{177}\) Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2009: piii

\(^{178}\) Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2009: piii
strategy recognises the nexus between employment and changing the negative vicious cycle of social disadvantage.

- To ensure equitable access of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to education and training services.\(^{179}\)

This Strategy addresses the notion of equitable access for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly due to distance and lacking technology. Considerable barriers of access can be alleviated, if funding availability targeted potential diverse educational opportunities. A feasibility study needs to be funded to investigate an option to establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander University system.

- To ensure participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in education and training.\(^{180}\)

The Strategy points out the difference between access and participation in education, using the foundation of Social Justice and self-determination principles. Barriers are identified that impede positive participation leading to successful outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. All education providers need to be conscious that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, facing racism and prejudice via other students and staff, must have their heritage and identity affirmed through positive activities.

- To ensure equitable and appropriate educational achievement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.\(^{181}\)

In reporting the tensions between mainstream educational outcomes and cultural knowledge scaffolding, the Strategy suggests both forms are needed. Using cultural methodologies of teaching can strengthen students’ identity and cultural values. Literacy and numeracy skills are crucial to successful achievements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The variety of language use, as a form of valid communication needs to be valued and recognised in a learning environment. Consistent reporting and monitoring student profiles are essential to track progress.

\(^{179}\) Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2009: piii

\(^{180}\) Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2009: piii

\(^{181}\) Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2009: piii
o *To promote, maintain and support the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies, cultures and languages to all Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.*\(^{182}\)

Aboriginal Studies need to incorporate language and history both before European invasion and up to the present day through three approaches:
- a discrete course or subject,
- units within other subject,
- perspectives across the curriculum in each key learning area or subject discipline.

Universities are charged with a leadership role by ensuring that every graduate has experienced Aboriginal Studies in their courses.

o *To provide community development training services including proficiency in English literacy and numeracy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults.*\(^{183}\)

The strategy makes reference to the inadequate command of English literacy and numeracy skills because of the denial to education and training in the past. In a modern world, competence in these areas is essential if self-management and ownership of community services is to become a reality. Adult and Community education programs influence empowerment and self-management.

o *To improve NATSIEP implementation, evaluation and resourcing arrangements.*\(^{184}\)

This report identifies changes to reporting mechanisms to better advise the government on the implementation of the NATSIEP 21 goals. Specific sector operational plans must focus on educational outcomes rather than process and information input. A model framework of underpinning principles is provided to direct reporting changes. Agreements need to be consolidated through a co-ordinated approach to reforms by Commonwealth and State and Territories bi-lateral negotiations.

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\(^{182}\) Ibid

\(^{183}\) Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 1995: piii

\(^{184}\) Ibid
National Policy Implications for NSW
The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan’s (2010-2014) NSW section identifies three overarching priorities that have been agreed to by all three schooling sectors. They are:

- **Improved outcomes for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in literacy and numeracy, attendance, retention and completion:**
- **Professional development of the education workforce: and**
- **Engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and communities.**185

The links to education websites focus on policies that directly affect Aboriginal students:

**Web Links**

NSW State Plan

Aboriginal Affairs Plan: Two Ways Together

Keep Them Safe

Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy 2009-2012

Aboriginal Human Resource Development Plan 2009-2012

NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc.

The **NSW State Plan** site allows public access to educational data. Selection of the education topic gives graphic results for 2010, based on National comparison, Aboriginal students and gender. Options available to access Aboriginal students show

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185 Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, 2009: 29
NAPLAN results and provide various links to schools’ current and projected targets for Aboriginal students.  

The *Aboriginal Affairs: Two Ways Together* site gives information to viewers about a ten year plan 2003-2012, then the ability to download the policy ‘Partnerships: A new Way of Doing Business with Aboriginal People’. Seven priorities are identified on the home page.  

The *Keep Them Safe* site is linked to three domains. The Supporting Aboriginal Community domain refers to Child Protection Services in NSW, particularly over-representation in the juvenile justice system.

The *Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy 2009-2012 Training* site introduces viewers to the policy goal, NSW targets, four focus areas, strategies and outcomes to implement the strategy by the Department. Specific strategies are linked to Regions, TAFE NSW Institutes and ACE, Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate and Corporate Portfolio Areas.

The *Aboriginal Human Resource Development Plan 2009-2011* site discusses the rationale which underpins the need to increase staffing levels of Aboriginal appointments in the Department of Education and Communities. Four focus areas are identified as strategies to achieve successful outcomes.

The *NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc.* site home page gives a brief overview of the operational function of the organisation and provides additional links to investigate the structure of the NSW AECG at all levels, in addition to available resources.
Implementation of National Policy: What happened to NATSIEP?

Brendan Nelson, the former Minister for Education, Science and Training, echoes the continual need for a more concerted effort by State and Territory governments to reach the principle of Reconciliation through Aboriginal Education provision in the National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training: 2001. In the ‘foreword’ he acknowledged that marginal progress had been made since the introduction of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy, but also acknowledges that Aboriginal people continue to remain the most significantly disadvantaged group in Australia. The Report reminded governments of the priority areas endorsed by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) in 1995. Throughout the Report, performance indicators evidenced by statistical data were presented according to education sectors and State/Territory achievements. Activities used in different States/Territories were woven into the Report as examples and ideas to be utilised by others. These examples illustrate various ways in which Aboriginal participation in the process of education can occur. Culturally inclusive curriculum, professional cultural awareness training and Aboriginal community participation is seen to be directly linked to quality educational outcomes for Aboriginal people.

Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Support

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014 reflects commitments by governments through COAG to introduce substantial structural and innovative reforms in early childhood education and schooling as outlined in national agreements between the Australian Government and State and Territory Governments.\(^\text{192}\)

To reinforce the assertion made by Penny Tripcony at the beginning of this chapter her quote is repeated in this section for the purpose of highlighting who has the responsibility for the delivery of education services:

\emph{The Commonwealth cannot implement the policies and directions: it is the responsibility of states and territories’ governments to do so.}\(^\text{193}\)

\(^{192}\) Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, 2009: 4

\(^{193}\) Tripcony, 2003: 46
Summary
We started listening to stories about how Aboriginal people were excluded from public education services under a policy of ‘Exclusion on Demand’ by non-Aboriginal community members. Under the administration of the Aborigines Protection Board, Aboriginal children were exposed to sub-standard education instruction in ‘Mission Schools’ and later, annexes in public schools under the policy of segregation. Throughout the first section of this chapter stories were expressed of the need to consider social determinants such as health, housing, employment and education to improve positive outcomes for Aboriginal people. Throughout Australian history policies to assimilate people to the behaviours of the dominant culture has been a goal. The second section of this chapter dealt with reviews and policies that have a direct impact on Aboriginal Education. Some programs discussed were designed to increase the outcomes of Aboriginal students and work toward closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student outcomes. Brief comments are made to inform readers of the participation by the NSW AECG in the implementation of National Policy directions. I would like to thank Lyn Stewart a NSW AECG Life Member and Ken Weatherall NSW AECG Vice President (2013) for providing comment to inform Aboriginal community responses to the NATSIEP goals. These responses are provided in Chapter 10: ‘The Story Continues’ under the heading Aboriginal Community Consultative Processes and Education Providers.
To conclude this Chapter: ‘Listening to Learn’, it is appropriate to close with a comment from Lester-Irabinna Rigney: 2003:

There is no single solution or “magic bullet” to challenges in Indigenous education, but long-sustained intergenerational commitment to outcomes. 194

The next chapter struggles with explaining how to gather Aboriginal knowledge in a community environment, yet meet the requirements of academic research. Bolt: 2009 explains his research methodology as a process necessary when seeking approval by University Ethics Committees:

Research ethics documents which have been developed for the conduct of research within Aboriginal communities (AIATSIS 2000: NHMRC 1999) are designed to ensure previous historical unethical research practice in Indigenous

communities does not become reproduced. The AIATSIS and NHMRC documents provide guidelines for the conduct of ethical research within Indigenous communities are an appropriate starting point for any research project proposing to study Indigenous populations or Indigenous related issues and can directly deal with issues of power. 195

The focus of Chapter 4: Information Gathering Techniques will address preferred culturally acceptable strategies and ethics needed when undertaking research in Aboriginal communities. The research design will be discussed and research techniques explained using a cultural framework. I recall when I was employed in the Higher Education sector that involvement on the National Aboriginal Research Ethics Committee had recommended more stringent guidelines when undertaking Aboriginal research activity. It is pleasing to note those recommendations have been heeded.
Chapter 4: Cultural Information Gathering Techniques

(Methodology)

Introduction
The previous chapter discussed some of the literature published by authors addressing the historical changes in education provision for Aboriginal people and the relationship between social determinants and education in Aboriginal communities. History has revealed that, restrictions imposed on Aboriginal people’s access to public education have instituted generational ramifications. Limited academic publications specific to Aboriginal Education in NSW lead the researcher into a review of policies specifically aimed at Aboriginal Education in the national arena. The nexus between National and State policy was discussed at the stages of review and implementation. Brief commentary regarding the participation of the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) in support of the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 2010-2014 Action Plan, is aligned with formal education provider sectors. These observations are reported in Chapter 10: ‘The Story Continues’ under the sub-heading of Aboriginal Community Consultative Outcomes and Education Providers.

Chapter four discusses philosophical differences between traditional academic methods of gathering information and the need to apply cultural ethics and protocols when interacting with Aboriginal people in the research domain. This chapter will explore what it means to apply cultural underpinnings to research activity as an Aboriginal insider researcher. Authors from various countries add to the argument that teaching and learning for Aboriginal people must be presented using culturally based paradigms. A similar argument can be applied to research activity. A community perspective of how researchers should interact with Aboriginal people in NSW from a cultural position will be revealed in this chapter.

The following section will explain the need to accept diverse Aboriginal cultural ways of collecting knowledge and the use of narrative expression in a language that can be understood by the givers of Aboriginal knowledge. As this journey leads us across the
“beach” of Aboriginal Affairs we revisit a space that teaches us to rest a while and observe how to interact with Aboriginal communities. This “beach” has no distinct boundaries separating itself into Aboriginal service sections, but has slight inclines that subtly allow the observer to understand that the waves will merge into one another to become one mass of water. This approach needs to be appreciated when trying to search out comments in Aboriginal communities.

The Indigenous peoples of Australia, Aotearoa-New Zealand, the US and Canada have quite recently established conditions, by which no research on any Indigenous issue is any longer welcome without consultation ... people /community ... Crazy Bull: 1997, Mihesuah: 1998, Smith: 1999.\textsuperscript{196}

Health, housing, employment and education conditions impinge on each other and are indicators of the well-being of Aboriginal communities. When undertaking research on Aboriginal communities or about Aboriginal people, the well-being of the community needs to be given serious consideration.

**Different Cultural Approaches to the Research Journey**

To explain the difference in approaches to research, Nerida Blair’s description of Western research paradigms and philosophies is a preferred example. Blair: 2008 identifies the components of methodology, methods, theories and disciplines as a brick wall built by the academy to enforce boundaries acceptable to University studies. In the Western model, knowledge is linear and compartmentalised. Blair describes an Aboriginal knowledge system as being holistic and circular. Knowledge is radiated from the centre to outside the circle and then back to the core of the centre repeatedly. While Hughes: 2004, presents an argument for pedagogical change in teaching Aboriginal children in a classroom setting, the same principles can be applied to the research domain in higher education:

*Current theories and methodologies are therefore largely inappropriate and this also contributes to a lack of success of Aboriginal students.*\textsuperscript{197}

Arbon: 2008 argues that some ground has changed in the research landscape through the participation of Aboriginal academics but suggests that control over research activity remains in the control of Western philosophies. She further states that there are traps

\textsuperscript{196} Porsanger, 2004: 115
\textsuperscript{197} Hughes, 2004: 200
that some Indigenous academics have struggled against. These challenges need to be met head on: otherwise Aboriginal people can become blind to essential community protocols and practice. Ultimately Aboriginal researchers will be placed as outsiders in the research debate by Aboriginal communities. Arbon: 2008 warns what the possible outcome could be if cultural elements are not taken into consideration:

We therefore remain entangled in ways of researching that can be detrimental to our original intent and philosophical positions.\textsuperscript{198}

Knowledge in both systems use story to share knowledge. In Western systems the knowledge is closeted and marketed to increase the status of the researcher, while in Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island systems knowledge is shared to benefit the well-being of the community:

Currently, Western research is structured to allow Indigenous academics to engage as individual researchers similar to the way non-Indigenous academics engage in research work.\textsuperscript{199}

The Research Question

The research question weighing on my mind at the outset is, “Have Aboriginal people influenced change in education provision in NSW to benefit Aboriginal communities”? This question is very broad and needed to focus on a particular interface between education and Aboriginal communities. Since I have a longstanding passion about the NSW AECG as a community based organisation and an understanding of the difficulties faced by many Aboriginal people in the public education system, I decided to reframe my question to incorporate both these issues. The research question became an investigation into the impact Aboriginal community has had on education provision in NSW.

Answering the research question is like putting a square peg in a round hole. For the purpose of this study, consider the square peg as being the Aboriginal researcher and the round hole is the Western model of research expectations? Further questions arise that require decisions to be made. How and who do I find out the information from to see if

\textsuperscript{198}Arbon, 2008: 106

\textsuperscript{199}Ford, 2010: 57
there has been an impact on education provision. The term “Aboriginal community” in itself is difficult to identify if the Oxford dictionary definition is considered:

1. A body of people living in one place, district or country
2. A body of people having ethnic origin, profession, etc. in common.\textsuperscript{200}

The diversity of Aboriginal people residing in NSW equates to a range of differences, therefore to confine a focus there was a need to select a specific group/community to work with. A decision needed to be made in consideration of the potential subject variables within Aboriginal communities. This issue will be controlled by utilising a specific group within the NSW AECG. The initial decision to develop a framework using known labels and then reshape them to fit into an Aboriginal application at the implementation stage of research activity is the process I intend to describe. Aspects of research elements described by Crotty: 1998 forms the basis for the following framework.

\textit{The Research Framework}\textsuperscript{201}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{research_framework.png}
\caption{The Research Framework}
\end{figure}

\textit{The Research Design}

Deciding on a methodology which will consolidate the choice of methods I wanted to use in the fieldwork of this project steered me toward ethnography. I needed to apply an

\textsuperscript{200} Moore, 1996: 206
\textsuperscript{201} Crotty, 1998: 1-17
approach that would investigate what Aboriginal people’s perception is of their interaction with public education. After reviewing ways of carrying out research using known Western research methods I thought an Ethnographic Approach using qualitative processes to interpret data, would best fit the topic in question. I have attended several meetings where the idea of using statistical data to investigate social circumstances does not take into account the cultural backgrounds of sub-groups throughout Australia. By choosing ethnography as a methodology to investigate the research question, the tension created by operating as an Aboriginal researcher in an environment dominated by non-Aboriginal theories and methods of investigation, would offer some relief. Ethnography is grounded in a theoretical perspective of understanding and explaining human society and the world they exist in. The concluding comments section of a research report named ‘A review of contemporary research on Indigenous education outcomes’ by Mellor & Corrigan: 2004, makes reference to the absence of Aboriginal voices in research reports. This phenomenon is due to the fact that anecdotal evidence has not had prominence in the academic research community. Reporting an informal conversation has not been utilised in past research practices. Mellor and Corrigan propose that:

*The integrity of the research will be enhanced by formally incorporating the Indigenous voice.*

Researchers are reminded that Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Canada have established conditions which apply to cultural ethics when carrying out research with or about Indigenous people from those countries. Consultation and collaboration strategies must be included in any research proposal before it can be approved by academic ethics committees. Linda Smith: 1999 also emphasises the need for the dissemination of final reports to be written in language that can be understood by the people/community being studied. Smith has articulated the same demands that Aboriginal people have been calling for in past Aboriginal Education conference recommendations in Australia. I had always intended to undertake the principles identified by Porsanger: 2004 in her publication:

*Indigenous methodologies should be designed to ensure that the intellectual property rights of indigenous peoples will be observed: to protect indigenous knowledge from misinterpretation and misuse: to demystify knowledge about*
indigenous peoples: to tell indigenous peoples stories in their own voices: to give credit to the true owners of indigenous knowledge: in order to support them in their desire to be subjects rather than objects of research, to decide about their present and future, and to determine their place in the world.  

Hence, philosophies, theories, methodologies and methods have a relationship with the researcher’s worldview and govern choices of how to construct a framework to investigate the research question. The research design for the purpose of this study has paid respect to Aboriginal people who have a vested interest in Aboriginal education because of their membership of the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group.

**Epistemology**

Aboriginal people are social groups in society based on ethnicity and connectedness to country. An early tension is created between the researcher and the language conventions used in the Western research domain. I need to use an image as a guide through the maze of jargon used in the literature, when authors explain the research process in terminology foreign to my experience. Confusion is often a challenge for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers alike identified by Wilkinson: 2003:

> I grappled with how to develop my “researcher self” and after reading and thinking about a number of theories...

The epistemology for this study is couched in a contemporary Aboriginal social interface within the broader Australian community. While some traditional cultural practices have been disrupted, connection to country and cultural morés associated with traditional memories are embedded in the spiritual essence of Aboriginality. It is highly unlikely that Aboriginal people residing in NSW have not associated with non-Aboriginal social systems and interacted with change and adaptation as a result of past and present associations. The following map is a construction plan outlining my intentions of how to negotiate the intricate academic landscape of the research agenda.

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203 Porsanger, 2004: 117
204 Wilkinson, 2003: 204
Ford: 2010 cites Irabinna-Rigney: 1997 when referring to the construction and affirmation of knowledge and cultures and states the following:

In theorising Indigenous epistemologies I call on the powerful life experiences and history of myself and my community.  

This map is a composite image of proposed strategies to be used and cultural underpinnings of self as the researcher for this project. First and foremost the bottom of the map describes my cultural biography and places me in a location steeped in physical heritage and spiritual belonging to a coastal landscape. English terms are used to reinforce and acknowledge the historical colonial legacy many Aboriginal people have inherited, in addition to maintaining linkages to ancestral identity through Aboriginality. The use of English terminology should be seen as a window into my existence as a Biripi woman living out of country (Awabakal), but also acknowledges incompleteness in terms of traditional practices. The top piece of the map is symbolic of the research focus on nineteen AECG Regions across NSW, bounded by the banks of a saltwater lake. Black dots within the individual AECG Regions signify Life Members who agreed to face-to-face interviews for inclusion in this study. Academia is shown as the water flowing into the mouth of the ocean which can be rough and choppy at times. Within the lake are

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Ford, 2010: 45

People Places and Pathways in NSW Aboriginal Education
pontoons to assist me to stay afloat within the academy when participating in an unfamiliar environment. Surrounding the pontoon named “methods” are shapes depicting the survey tools I will use to collect data. The shapes are fused together to demonstrate the depth and strength of the knowledge holders. Spanning the lake are two bridges that I will use to interact with Aboriginal communities while moving into other cultural countries in NSW and to manoeuvre a pathway through the lake of academia. In Aboriginal society there are no boundaries dictated by time into the future, there is more concern about the here and now. A cultural understanding is that the current footprint laid down by society will determine the future in all aspects of Aboriginal community living. Ford: 2010 reminds us of our obligations when visiting other countries:

Honouring our social morés are essential processes through which we live, learn and situate ourselves as Aboriginal people in our lands and when in the lands of other people. 206

Theoretical Perspectives
I searched out perspectives presented by Indigenous scholars to explore whether their experiences were culturally inclusive in relation to my personal position as an Aboriginal researcher. Jelena Porsanger: 2004, a Saami scholar who has had experiences in Universities in New Zealand and her own university in Scandinavia, writes about perspectives that represent alternative ways of thinking about research processes. Porsanger concludes that:

The main aim of indigenous methodologies is to ensure that research on indigenous issues can be carried out in a more respectful, ethical, correct sympathetic, useful and beneficial fashion, seen from the point of view of indigenous peoples. 207

An Australian Aboriginal scholar Rigney: 1999, urges a researcher to maintain an underpinning philosophy when undertaking research with Aboriginal people:

Indigenous methodologies require scholars to think critically about their research processes and outcomes, bearing in mind that indigenous peoples’ interests, experiences and knowledge must be at the centre of research methodologies and the construction of knowledge concerning indigenous people. 208

206 Ford, 2010: 51
207 Porsanger, 2004: 108
208 Porsanger, 2004: 109
Maggie Walter 2005: discusses the difference between Aboriginal and Western research practices as an Aboriginal academic interested in using qualitative data to highlight facts. Walter stresses throughout her publication that Aboriginal people are applying alternative ways of knowing and living to position themselves as Aboriginal researchers:

*The research view through an Indigenous, rather than a Western, lens is a very different one and one that privileges the Aboriginal voice. Critically, an Indigenous research frame allows for the development of methodologies that reconstruct and reconceptualise research paradigms to reflect Indigenous cultural positions.*

Other scholars Rigney: 1999; Thuiwai Smith: 1999; and West: 1998 support this perspective and features were summarised by Martin: 2001 as recognition of Aboriginal worldviews, honouring Aboriginal social protocols when visiting other Aboriginal people and their lands, recognising the diverse social, historical and political experiences of Aboriginal people and privileging the voices of Aboriginal people in the research environment. All the previous points describe what researchers need to consider when forming questions about Aboriginal people and their communities and must be incorporated into any research design. Identifying as an Aboriginal person does not automatically place the researcher in a privileged position but warns the researcher of their cultural responsibilities when undertaking a research project associated with Aboriginal people.

Ka Kahakalau: 2004, a Hawaiian scholar discusses the characteristics of Indigenous heuristic action research she used as a process when investigating the success of the native Hawaiian Academy. Her statement is presented in a publication ‘Hu’lili: Multidisciplinary Research on Hawaiian Well-Being Vol 1’:

*Research by indigenous researchers must be first and foremost accountable to our indigenous community. In this article, I describe the evolution of indigenous heuristic action research. In addition, I conduct my research in a Hawaiian community, and with the help of the Hawaiian community. Indigenous heuristic action research represents one step toward truly indigenous research methodologies based entirely on native perspectives.*

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209 Walter, 2005: 27
210 Kahakalau, 2004: 19
I agree with the idea of being accountable to members of the NSW AECG and offering assistance to Aboriginal people holding responsible positions, to self assess their own value in the consultative process. The notion of being more involved with Aboriginal communities through the NSW AECG and being accountable to Aboriginal people for the interpretation of the information gathered, is a highly acceptable expectation. In the summary of Ka Kahakalau’s paper she urges Indigenous scholars to develop their own framework based on their own perspective. I need to acknowledge that in an ideal world isolated from external influences, implementing the ideologies expressed by Aboriginal people would be easy, but in reality this is very difficult. The reality is that the researcher needs to discover compatible elements entwined in the academic research domain that will bring the theory to life.

**Methodology**

This project needed to focus on Aboriginal people and the relationship between education and Aboriginal communities. The cultural aspect of interacting with Aboriginal people needs to be considered when undertaking research activity with Aboriginal people. While many Aboriginal people have embraced the electronic technology available to communicate, a preferred mode of interaction is face-to-face methods of communication. Crotty 1998 reinforces the method intended:

*Ethnography, after all, is a methodology. It is one of many particular research designs that guide a researcher in choosing methods and shape the use of methods chosen.*

Burns 1994 makes it quite clear that ethnography does not fit a linear model, but is cyclical through the process of information collection, information analysis and further repetition of previous stages before a report can be produced. Cohen and Manion 1994 describe ethnography as a process of how people express what is important in their lives:

*Ethno methodology, then, is concerned with how people make sense of their everyday world.*

Burns goes on to say that in ethnography the people themselves are the experts, not the subjects to be placed under a lens of inquiry by the researcher. The people are the

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211 Crotty, 1998: 3
212 Cohen & Manion, 1994: 31
knowledge holders. These assertions support the decision made to use ethnography as a methodology to interact with a specific ethnic group of people residing in Australian society. This methodology promotes the notion that scientific quantitative methods of research investigations are selective and narrow whereas qualitative methods are more appropriate when seeking information from societal community groups.

**Methods**

As I read on, the role description of the ethnographic researcher is explained by Burns: 1994 as:

*There are four possible research stances for the participant observer: The complete participant: the participant-as-observer: the observer-as-participant: and the complete observer,*

a) *The complete observer operates under conditions of secret observation and full participation:*

This category could never apply because Aboriginal people would never share any valued knowledge if there was any doubt or suggestion that the researcher was not being honest about why the research was being undertaken and what would happen to the outcomes:

b) *The complete observer is entirely removed from interaction with those under observation:*

This category was not suitable because I wanted to interact with the informants to clarify any questions and for my mob to trust what I wanted to do was useful:

c) *The observer-as-participant is a role intermediate between the first two, where the researcher’s identity is known to the hosts, but he or she remains a relative ‘stranger’:*

This category was getting closer to the preferred description, but because of my involvement in Aboriginal Education, I could never be a stranger:

d) *The participant-as-observer is a similar role, but characterises situations in which the fieldworker becomes more closely involved and identified with the actors.*

This category description fits more closely with how I wanted to interact with the AECG knowledge holders. All of these descriptions did not really resonate with how I wanted to interact with the knowledge holders, but being a participant as an observer

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213 Burns, 1994: 258
appeared more suitable than the others. I understand this to mean, that as a researcher being closely involved with the informant group would probably provide an opportunity for people to trust the researcher and therefore share their knowledge to answer the research question openly and honestly. The methods I wanted to use included the completion of questionnaires and face-to-face interviews. I wanted to present the surveys to the participants in their own communities and talk to Life Members of the organisation in a place of their choice.

*Cultural Decision Making in Research Activity*

A Maori academic from New Zealand Linda Smith: 1999, has formulated the following questions directly connected to principles of respect, reciprocity and feedback. It is time for me to answer the questions before any further decisions are made:

**Whose research is this?** This research arose from an idea of facilitating an opportunity for Aboriginal people to identify what their current educational needs are from an Aboriginal viewpoint. I wanted to do something to formalise the stories being shared at Regional and Local AECG meetings.

**Who owns it?** The content is always the property of the people who provide the information. In this project the Aboriginal members of the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) across NSW.

**Whose interests does it serve?** It is the interest of the researcher. I have often asked myself why I wanted to do this research and the honest response was self-satisfaction and to meet challenges.

**Who will benefit from it?** Education service providers who will listen to Aboriginal people through the AECG structure and Aboriginal students through improved education service provision that meet cultural learning expectations. The outcomes will be useful for the AECG Local/Regional/State management committees to use in planning strategies within their own Regions. The researcher will benefit by conquering the personal challenge set.

**Who has designed its questions and framed its scope?** The researcher has designed the survey questions from an insider position.
Who will carry it out? The Aboriginal insider researcher and members of the NSW AECG Management Committees by agreeing to complete surveys and Life Members who participate in interviews, will carry out the research.

Who will write it up? The Aboriginal insider researcher will write the research report.

How will the results be disseminated? Through written Regional Reports distributed to Regional Representatives at the 2013 NSW AECG Annual General Meeting, prior to completion of the academic thesis. A draft chapter named ‘Voices of AECG Members’ will be reproduced for each Region. Case study chapters will be distributed to the Hunter AECG Management Committee and the Mil-pra AECG Management Committees.

Answering these questions makes me feel that the researcher’s cultural integrity, ownership of knowledge and connectedness to Aboriginal communities are challenged in a way that forces a thoughtful reaction to each question. Reflections of the internalised confronting challenges have crafted the sub-headings for the following section.

Informant Description
The NSW AECG Incorporated is an Aboriginal community based organisation consisting of volunteer members who are involved in Local and Regional AECGs throughout NSW. The NSW AECG Inc. is recognised as the principal source of advice, on behalf of Aboriginal communities when discussing issues related to Aboriginal education and training, with the NSW Government and its agencies. The AECG gives Aboriginal people a voice at a Local level and a mechanism to forward their views State wide:

The strength of the AECG depends on the participation of all concerned ie: Education Departments, Schools, Teachers, Parents, Students and the wider community.  

Consultation is a vital element of such a project. Initial endorsement must be requested before any formal interviews can take place. Support needs to be endorsed by the Local and Regional AECGs prior to requesting approval to interact with NSW AECG Regions. This request was made through the NSW AECG President (2008), Cindy
Berwick and the elected Association Management Committee through the organisation’s Endorsement Process (attachment 4). Notification regarding the research process was necessary before proceeding to undertake this activity. Support was provided by the Endorsement Committee of the NSW AECG on 21st October, 2008 (attachment 5), then support for the research project was provided by Minimbah Local AECG on 9th December, 2008 (attachment 6) followed by the Hunter Regional AECG after a presentation at the Regional meeting held on 13th March, 2009 (attachment 7).

The NSW AECG has developed a vast network of Aboriginal community membership since 1977. The history and value of Aboriginal community participation in Education delivery across NSW is a project that needs to be documented in detail. As an active continual Life Member of this organisation since its inception, I believed that the membership needed to be given an opportunity to express their opinion about the impact the NSW AECG has had on their lives and the influence the organisation has had on education provision in NSW from an Aboriginal community perspective.

Because of their participation in the NSW AECG, several individuals will be contacted seeking permission to organise interviews inviting them to express their individual thoughts and stories regarding the level of impact on education provision, from their personal perspective. The three tiered structure of the NSW AECG (explained in detail in Chapter: 5 ‘NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group’) places the responsibility of information sharing at Local, Regional and State levels of the structure. Informants are drawn from Local, Regional and State membership. Consultation is a vital element of this project. If approval was not provided by the organisation at all levels, then there could be no justification for the continuation of this research project.

In order to access Aboriginal Education community knowledge Regional Management Committee members from each Region will be invited to complete surveys.

All members of Regional Management Committees are elected into executive positions, by Local AECG delegates to the Region in accordance with the NSW AECG Rules of the Association. Elections are held at Regional Annual General Meetings for a term of twelve months. Variations in the number of eligible voters are dependent on the number of Local AECGs established within the Regional boundaries. The numbers of delegates
in attendance, or their proxies are eligible to vote at Regional AGMs. Aboriginal membership consists of individuals who may be employed in various positions within education provision or other community organisations or be voluntary parents, grandparents or carers. Only Aboriginal people are eligible to be nominated and vote for Regional Management positions. The experience and diversity among the membership of each Region is not measured for the purpose of this study.

Five Life Members of the organisation agreed to provide recorded interviews to share reflective stories by signing a consent form for participation and identification in the research project report. This small group of people has a collective membership of 119 years. Each member had been actively involved for twenty years plus up until 2010 and has continued their participation. Most have been elected to various positions at all three levels of the organisation. Their stories are presented throughout different chapters of the thesis.

Life Members are insiders who can be identified as shells and pebbles that gently move across the sandy bed of the ocean. There is an admixture of complete and broken pieces of shell that gather in a furrow beneath the waves due to the constant challenges faced through participation in Aboriginal service provision. Further up the beach large shells are sitting on the dry sand basking in the sunshine or awaiting high tide to return them to the comfort of the caressing sea, their families and their communities.

**Research Ownership**

Any stories shared by the knowledge holders will always remain the cultural property of the knowledge holders. Individuals decide how much of their knowledge they want to share with the researcher. In acknowledging this feature of the research process, written responses to surveys have been included as verbatim comment in a second section of relevant chapters (5, 6, 7, and 8) of the thesis. Interpretation of the members’ voices can be judged against original commentary to assert credibility of reporting. All recorded interview material (tapes and transcriptions) will be returned to the members who agreed to tell their stories and agreed to be identified in the thesis. Written components of Life Member interviews included in the text will also be collated and
returned with original material and forwarded to the knowledge holders. All copies of transcripts and field notes will be destroyed after the completion of the thesis.

All original materials containing stories given to the researcher will be held by the researcher until a final draft document have been crafted using the stories. This includes completed surveys held by the researcher from Regional Management Committees, Local and Regional sample survey documents. After cross referencing has been finalised, all original surveys will be shredded.

The following model is a graphic mode of the NSW AECG structure. The image places the Local AECG at the top of the model signifying the strength of the organisation. Circles have been used in the construction to illustrate the cyclical mode of information sharing. Consultation related to the decision making process is transported via a two way cyclical method of information sharing. The intersecting circles symbolise the concept of Aboriginality, an essential element of accepting an elected Management Committee position at all levels of the NSW AECG. Understanding the structure of the NSW AECG is vital when seeking information from the membership.

*fig: 13*  
*NSW AECG Structure*

![NSW AECG Structure](image)

*Purpose of the Research Project*
This investigation will serve two purposes. First to give voice to Aboriginal people when evaluating if Aboriginal community participation has influenced change on Educational Policy and Practices: and second, if Aboriginal AECG members have developed a skills base, which can be utilised in the Education environment and influence successful educational outcomes to benefit Aboriginal students. There are nineteen AECG Regions throughout NSW. Each Region has a number of Local AECGs registered which vary in membership numbers. It is important to remember that only Aboriginal members are eligible for election to Management Committee positions, which means that Aboriginal voices will tell their stories.

Several individuals will be contacted seeking permission to organise interviews to review the participation of the NSW AECG in Aboriginal Education. Their individual thoughts regarding the level of impact on education provision will be recorded and included as narrated commentary throughout the thesis. People will be invited from Local, Regional and State membership to complete questionnaires in order to share their aspirations about education for Aboriginal people.

Past research activity in Aboriginal Education has been reported by researchers who have expressed their findings from an observer position. This study invites Aboriginal participants to tell their story about what is best for them and their communities. It is vital to investigate issues from a “user pay” viewpoint, to measure if the exchange of advice is valued by the organisation in receipt of the advice. By interacting with formal education providers it is of interest to note whether members have honed their skills by participating in the consultative process through membership of the NSW AECG. Of further interest is if those skills can be used effectively in the education environment. This interest is based on the premise that members have skills that are used in all kinds of situations. Open ended questions are designed to extrapolate information to measure the self assessment of both topics. It is important that the knowledge holders themselves are given the opportunity to tell their stories. Regional summaries will be written as narrative stories against the numerical figure identified on the following NSW AECG map.
Survey completions will be placed in four geographical groupings:


Rural: Riverina 1, Western 1, Nth. West 2, Nth. West 1.

Isolated: Riverina 2, Riverina 3, Western 3, Western 2.

The purpose of this strategy is to compare responses between the four geographic groupings in terms of Aboriginal Education priorities, self assessment of members’ skills base and identified positive outcomes. Responses to these questions will be analysed to show if there are similarities or differences between particular Aboriginal communities located in different geographic areas in NSW. Consideration is given to physical accessibility to adult education providers and availability of necessary
resources. Results from the State AECG Committee meeting will also be compared against Regional Grouping results. Comparisons will be reported in Chapter 9: ‘Comparative Thinking Spaces’, of this study.

Scope of Survey Questions

Local AECG Sample Survey
Local Mil-pra AECG members will be presented with a set of six focus questions at a meeting, after a request by the researcher to be placed on the meeting agenda in order to inform potential participants and clarify any questions. The purpose of administering a survey to a Local AECG is to unveil a sample of Aboriginal community attitudes and decision making processes in practice at a local level, located in a city environment. Results will be representative of a demographic membership which can be applied to other local groups in similar environments. The finite details cannot be applied to all Local AECGs in NSW, but this case study will illustrate the broad levels of experiences and length of membership participation by many Local AECGs in NSW. The survey includes a brief introductory profile for completion by the members. All members will be offered an option to participate by completing the survey. All surveys are anonymous and coded for analytical purposes and will be reported in section two of Chapter 6: ‘Mil-pra Aboriginal Education Consultative Group’.

Regional Management Committee Survey
Survey questions are designed to give respondents the opportunity to voice their opinion from an Aboriginal perspective. Open ended questions were constructed to encourage self-assessment and make relevant comment on their own perceived individual skill base. Respondents are encouraged to make observational judgements related to strengths and weaknesses of the organisation and identify future priorities for a two year period. Each respondent of the Region’s Management Group will be given the same questions formatted in the same way. Spaces are made available on the survey instrument requesting respondents to provide written explanatory comments to open ended questions. A space for other comments is provided at the end of the formal questions to give respondents an opportunity to express issues not addressed in the formal questions. There may be ideas put forward to motivate future research activity.
These surveys will be administered in all nineteen AECG Regional Management Committees. All surveys are anonymous and coded for analytical purposes and will be reported in section two of Chapter 8: ‘Voices of AECG Members’.

**State Committee Survey**

The State Committee composition includes representation from each region (19) plus members of the Association Management Committee (9). Copies of the survey will be distributed at a State Committee meeting. The instrument structure provides information regarding the purpose of the survey at the beginning of document. The scope of this survey provides an opportunity for participants to identify their level of interaction with formal education providers, by using a scale question. Responses by AECG members to this question will indicate to the researcher where the majority of effort is placed in the areas of formal education provision. Open ended questions give respondents the opportunity and freedom to express their attitudes to future planning for the organisation. A judgement can be made by applying self assessment tools to measure the individual value of being a member of the State committee. All surveys are anonymous and coded by letter for analytical purposes. Results are reported as narrative summaries, quantitative figures and collated tabulations of individual scores to the scaled question in Chapter 5: ‘NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group’.

**Life Member Stimulus Questions**

The survey instrument is structured to begin with a brief introduction of the purpose for the research. A demographic introductory profile section follows to inform the researcher of the diversity and experience of the group. The same format of questions is asked of five Life Members as the Local AECG sample group, in face-to-face recorded interviews. The questions are only used to stimulate the participant to share stories related to their own experiences and from their own perspective. Free flowing conversation will be encouraged to inform the study.

The researcher will give the participants the opportunity for personal identification of interview information, by inviting Life Members to consent to being identified in the study and having their interview data attributed to them. Selected extracts of voice
translations will be used throughout the thesis with permission of the Life Members interviewed. The scope of the introductory profile provides an opportunity to uncover the diversity among the group and reveal the level of experience across the sample group. The criteria to be nominated for Life Membership of this organisation is to have been a continuous member of a Local AECG for ten (10) years or more, to have been an active and financial member during this period of time and has demonstrated a commitment to the Association. The nomination form must be accompanied by no more than two (2) pages on how the nominee has met all of the above criteria.

**Insider Research Positioning**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics have discussed viewpoints comparing different approaches to undertaking research activity related to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities. Martin Nakata: 2007 reviews the historical development of Standpoint Theory when utilised in research activity. As a Torres Strait Islander person, he highlights the tension between Western ways of carrying out research projects and being an Indigenous researcher:

> *This is experienced as a push-pull between Indigenous and not Indigenous positions* ...\(^{216}\)

Nakata further states:

> *This, then is not an Indigenous way of ‘doing knowledge’. Nor would standpoint theory allow that it is enough for Indigenous students (or academics) to authorise themselves solely on the basis of their experience.*\(^{217}\)

I believe the articulation of “Standpoint Theory” by Nakata: 2007, gives Aboriginal researchers permission to bring their own cultural experience to the research question, particularly when the topic involves Aboriginal people and their cultural interface in the research domain. The researchers inherent knowing can interpret information provided from a viewpoint of shared cultural knowing with the group being researched.

For the purpose of this study the positioning of a cultural insider is not concerned with observing the interactions of Regional Management Committees and education...
providers, but is interested in what the subjective participants have to say through voice and story. My personal standpoint is based on my cultural heritage as a Biripi woman first and foremost in addition to being a long term member of the informant group, which places me in a position of being an insider. The following model incorporates honouring Aboriginal cultural and social morës as I travel into many lands across NSW. As an insider researcher, historical and political contexts are diverse but similar in cultural and social experiences. Voices of Aboriginal people are privileged through narration of survey outcomes. Aboriginal Education is one key to improving social change into the future. Listening to Aboriginal community aspirations pays respect to the value of expectations expressed by Aboriginal people.

**fig 15: Aboriginal Knowledge Sharing Model**

The Aboriginal Knowledge Sharing model is a physical expression of community responsibilities when discussing issues known by members of the particular community. This model is also an image showing how Aboriginal voices and story are used in decision making processes. Robust discussion may originate due to a difference of opinion related to practice and ceremony based on cultural knowledge. It is the community’s responsibility to consider a resolution. The implementation of decisions will influence future cultural practice in the community. The intersecting circles demonstrate the concept of cyclical communication before and after decisions are made. Aboriginal knowledge sharing in determining decisions is the responsibility of each level of the community to pass on the outcome of discussions.
Support for the decision to position myself as an insider researcher is drawn from Reuben Bolt: 2009 when he acknowledges the insight of Foley in his thesis:

\[\text{And given that an insider researcher has similar experiences of the study population, they are familiar (to various degrees) with the ontology, worldview and various perspectives of the community. (Foley 2000)}\]^{218}

Insider researchers must take serious responsibility for the issues of accountability for the research design, obligations of reciprocity and respect for informant participants involved in the research.

**Voice Interpretation**

Language interpretation will be based on insider knowledge of the informant group by the researcher. Grammar will be edited in respect of the storytellers but the meaning will not be contaminated. To analyse the responses to question (7) in the Regional Management Committee surveys, three categories have been established in an attempt to provide consistency of voice interpretation across all Regions.

**Community Participation:** this category attributes those answers related to interaction with education providers by AECG members and community engagement activities.

**School Relationships:** this category attributes activities directly related to schools and educational programs.

**Regional Initiatives:** this category attributes programs/issues pertinent to the Region. Responses to question (8), which asks for identification of priority areas may change, depending on the viewpoints of individual delegates elected at Regional Annual General Meetings across the State. Priorities have been reported as identified by the survey respondents. Four categories have been established in an attempt to provide consistency of voice interpretation across all Regions.

**Aboriginal Studies:** this category attributes responses referring to knowledge about Aboriginal people and their culture.

**AECG Capacity Building:** this category attributes activities which increases a skill base for members as an outcome of community participation.

**Student Issues:** this category attributes issues directly related to Aboriginal students.

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\[^{218}\text{Bolt, 2009: 81}\]
**Education Providers:** this category attributes issues and programs related to education providers across the education systems.

All responses to “Other Comments” presented in regional surveys are reported verbatim in respect of those Aboriginal people who put forward their additional thoughts and are included in the body of text. All other verbatim responses to Regional survey questions will be included at the end of Chapter: 8 ‘Voices of AECG Members’, allowing easy accessibility to allow for membership scrutiny and therefore researcher accountability. Recorded stories shared by Life Members of the NSW AECG will be transcribed into written form, by an external associate of the researcher, and then transferred onto a transportable computer device. Verbatim responses will be included in the transcripts. If pauses take place during the voice recorded interviews, utterances are acknowledged as speech patterns used while taking time to process thoughts. Speech patterns of this kind will not be included in the final story. In respect of the knowledge holders, minor grammatical editing has excluded “ummmms” and “ahhhs” to allow sequential communicative commentary. The meaning of the recorded communication has not been contaminated therefore shared stories have not been compromised.

**Narrative Reporting**

The following model references a cultural standpoint when making decisions in research design. The connection of developing strategies and understanding Aboriginal people’s mode of sharing their knowledge as community members when undertaking research is essential to the entire process from beginning to end. Being a member of the NSW AECG does not exempt individuals from remaining an Aboriginal member of the community and owning the responsibility that is attached to both entities. The bridge cementing the combination of both entities is cultural heritage. Claiming Aboriginality to gain membership of the AECG brings with it responsibilities that reflect the knowledge held by the community. Stories shared by representatives of the community need to be honoured and reported in a form understood by the knowledge holders. Every representative who crosses the bridge into the NSW AECG structure takes with them a bag lined with community responsibility, cultural ethics and personal integrity. Responses to survey questions will be reported as narrative stories drawn from the
verbatim responses. It is important to use language that is understood by Aboriginal people without oversimplifying the inscriptions in the report, but moving away from using jargon reminiscent of academic terminology in report writing.

Fig 16: **Shared Aboriginal Storytelling Model**

This section is probably the only opportunity in the research design process where the principles of self-determination can be expressed in totality. Of course this means nothing if the challenges are not faced while upholding cultural ethics incorporated in the research design. Since 2009 I have utilised a small steering committee to ensure ongoing consultation and monitoring of researcher activities. The composition of the committee includes Rachel Small (Regional Representative) and Ken Weatherall (President) Hunter Region AECG to monitor the researcher’s ethical performance throughout the life of the study. I complete this section by responding to internalised confrontational challenges. I believe by positioning myself as a cultural insider researcher I will maintain cultural integrity, a respectful relationship with the knowledge holders who are prepared to complete surveys on behalf of the Local AECG membership. Personal interaction with Aboriginal people from different countries will promote a connectedness to Aboriginal communities.

**Initial Decision Making in the Research Process**

My journey started when I had to complete the Universities’ Ethics Application to undertake research for a higher degree. This process was foreign to me as I successfully completed a Masters of Education through course work. I wanted to seek the opinion and thoughts of Aboriginal people who had some experience with education provision. The initial proposal seemed clear and could be supported by published documentation.
‘The NSW Review of Aboriginal Education: 2004’ in Chapter four (4) makes reference to “Applying Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge” in the context of Aboriginal community participation:

Each clan and community of Aboriginal people has developed their own special ways of being, knowing, doing things and saying things that are unique to their people and their communities. Ways that may appear similar on the surface, but which bear marks that make them unique to their people alone. This is the source of the Aboriginal Cultural knowledge spoken during this Review.219

Decisions had to be made about who should be approached and how to gather relevant information. Consideration had to be given on how to produce a submission in a format acceptable to the academy. One dilemma for me was to acknowledge the formal requirements of the University of Newcastle’s Ethics Committee and maintain respect for Aboriginal knowledge held in Aboriginal communities.

Who Would Inform the Study?

The purpose of the research was to investigate the impact that Aboriginal community people have had on education provision in NSW. The research topic is very broad even when consideration is given to two elements of the question. This topic included Aboriginal community and education provision as the focus. I needed to narrow the focus to encapsulate both of the broad elements identified in the topic and at the same time provide credibility for the study. I believed that it would be valuable to seek the opinions and thoughts of Aboriginal people through a recognised Aboriginal organisation, the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG). This decision to seek out approval for members to participate as informants through this organisation grew out of a concern that the research product would not be accepted by the academy as being valid if Aboriginal community members were selected randomly. Having to continually justify why decisions are made in a cultural context becomes very tiresome. Surely an organisation recognised as the prime provider of advice to the NSW Government through the Minister of Education and the Department of Education and Communities would validate responses from the organisations’ membership. Research over many years has identified the need for parental and school support being vital to successful outcomes for students. In this instance the NSW AECG structure is charged

219 The NSW Review of Aboriginal Education, 2004: 202
with a mandate to advocate on behalf of Aboriginal parents in support of Aboriginal students. Some members of the AECG are not necessarily parents but may have a family relationship with students in formal education institutions. I believe the correct decision was made.

**How to Collect the Information**

Often challenges present themselves which cause personal conflict for Aboriginal people employed in service provision areas and being a member of an Aboriginal community organisation. The challenges arise when they are forced by their employer to comment or make decisions that may directly affect their community in a negative way. Often they are the “go to” people when needing to consult with Aboriginal communities. In most Aboriginal education circles this process is commonly known as “car park consultation”, because it saves the bureaucrat’s time and they can tick the box when questioned by community stakeholders whether they had consulted with Aboriginal people. Of course they can respond in the affirmative. There have been occasions when community members have challenged the Aboriginality of people employed in the public service, due to decisions made that do not meet the community’s expectations. I believe Aboriginality is not a piece of apparel that can be worn like an overcoat and removed when operating in a different environment. The duality of roles for some, as elected AECG Management Committee members and Aboriginal people employed in the education service portfolio, would enrich the knowledge gleaned. A decision was made to target Regional AECG Management Committees across NSW to complete questionnaires that would be used for data analysis and then narrated in the final report. Although mailing paper surveys would be less expensive and easier to administer, a decision was taken to visit as many Regions as possible in the quest to have surveys completed. Interacting with Aboriginal people is the only way I could enforce my own beliefs and understanding of cultural protocols.

**Meeting Ethics Committee Requirements**

Justification of why, when, how and where I would collect the data became an issue of clarifying and answering these questions before I could do anything. This process is more difficult than I first thought. These decisions did not sit very comfortably with my usual method of interacting with my own cultural group. This does not mean that there
are no planning or approval requirements to be met when interacting with Aboriginal people, but the actions are different. For example the need to present a risk assessment protocol, after I included a plan to attend meetings that would be held in Regions and holding face-to-face interviews with some Life Members of the organisation in their place of choice, was mystifying. There was no expectation to visit any hostile environments where any risk to my safety would be an issue. After needing to justify, after a few resubmits, the way of doing things in a cultural context dented my confidence to continue in this alien landscape. I felt as though the Ethics Committee members, who were going to give me permission to carry out the data collection process, knew very little about the informant participant groups and the associated cultural protocols necessary to even get past the front door. I learned that assumptions cannot be made about anything or anyone. Jeannie Herbert: 2003 expresses her knowledge of other Aboriginal people facing similar challenges:

*Weir, an Indigenous academic, argued in her Ph.D. theses that there was an obvious tension between Indigenous postgraduate students contributing Indigenous knowledge into a system that would appear to marginalise those students who do not conform to Western knowledge traditions.*

**The Research Tools**

By using ethnography as a methodology bound by the role of participatory researcher, survey questionnaires needed to be constructed for each of the informant groups. A generic information statement is used as an introduction to the research survey. The following information was provided as an explanation of the purpose of the survey:

*Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. All information provided will be kept anonymous. The information will be used to inform the researcher (Laurel Williams), about the involvement of NSW AECG Inc. Members in the delivery of Aboriginal Education across the spectrum of Education provision. Survey data will be incorporated into a PhD thesis being studied through Newcastle University. The title of the thesis is: ‘People-Places-Pathways in NSW Aboriginal Education’. The question being investigated is: How has Aboriginal Community participation impacted on Education provision in NSW?*

**Introductory Profile Local AECG Survey Sample**
Region where you were nominated for membership:
In what year were you awarded membership: __________ Male or Female please circle.
How many years have you been a member of the NSW AECG? __________
Have you held any elected positions within the organisation?
Local: 
Regional: 
State: 
The above section will reveal the demographic profile of the group and will be used in the final report in section two of Chapter 6: ‘Mil-pra Aboriginal Education Consultative Group’. This information can be used as a sample of other Local AECGs in a city environment and applied as a generalisation to similar environments.

Focus Questions
Descriptive and explanatory forms of questions have been incorporated into the Local AECG sample survey questionnaire.

a) Are you or have you been employed in an Aboriginal Education service delivery area? If yes please provide brief details: (if insufficient space please attach details)
Question a) adds to the profile of the group and provides terms of reference for the respondents by including employment and Aboriginal Education service delivery as components of the sentence structure and named spaces to indicate appropriate places to write answers.

b) Have you participated on any Aboriginal Education committees? If yes please provide a list including approximate time of membership, (e.g. 3yrs DET Equity Committee).
Question b) adds to the profile of the group and provides terms of reference for the respondents by including an example in brackets.

c) Do you think you have made an impact on Aboriginal Education provision? Yes or No. In your own words write a statement that explains how you have or have not, influenced decisions made.
d) Do you believe the NSW AECG has influenced changes to Aboriginal Education in NSW? Yes or No. In your own words provide comments to justify your response.
e) Do you think you have increased your knowledge relevant to Aboriginal Education through your participation in the NSW AECG? Yes or No. Provide comments to justify your response.
Questions c), d) and e) provide an opportunity for respondents to self evaluate the impact of AECG participation on education provision from a personal and organisational perspective. Explanations of answers are encouraged to yes and no responses to all three questions.

f) Have you any further comments?
Point f) gives respondents an opportunity to address any topic of their choice that has not been covered in the survey questions.

Thank you for your participation.

Flexibility is built into the overall survey instrument by using open-ended questions other than the demographic profile group of questions. The scope of the demographic profile provides an opportunity to uncover the diversity among Local groups and reveal the level of experience across the sample group. Spaces were made available on the survey instrument requesting respondents to provide written explanatory comments to responses. The design of the questions facilitated an opportunity for stories to be shared which are focused but unrestricted. Two face-to-face interviews will be carried out with a Life Member and a previous long term member of this Region to enhance the description of innovations launched by this Region. Local sample case study survey results are reported in the second section of Chapter 6: ‘Mil-pra Aboriginal Education Consultative Group’.

**Regional Survey Instrument**
Information is provided as an explanation for the purpose of the survey consistent with the Local AECG sample survey discussed previously. This will assist with clarifying any questions that may arise to respondents who receive surveys by mail, in addition to acting as an introduction to the questionnaire.

**Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Questions**
Descriptive and explanatory forms of question construct are included in the eight focus questions for completion by the Regional Management Committees across NSW. It is considered to be less expensive and less time consuming to mail survey questionnaires to scattered geographic informant groups Burns: 1994. To use this method of data collection is not supportive of Aboriginal ethics and protocols. Some Regional
Committees did receive copies of survey instruments by email or post, but only after direct contact with members at Annual General Meetings and constant phone and email communication. Self administered completion of the instrument acknowledges the willingness of informants to provide truthful answers. Every opportunity is provided for freedom of voice in written responses. Questions are included in section two of Chapter 8: ‘Voices of AECG Members’ of the study.

Open ended explanatory questions are devised to inform the purpose of the study. The instrument was designed using language which could be understood easily by the focus group without inferring over simplicity. Terms of reference were built into the questions to alleviate confusion and provide some focus for participants. The construction of the questionnaire encourages responses based on the individual’s experience, participation and knowledge of the role of Regional AECG Management Committees. Surveys were administered by various methods and all respondents were given an option to participate by completing the survey. Some were completed at a Regional AECG meeting after distribution by the researcher with an option to return by mail to the researcher. This method of participant/researcher did assist with informing the respondents about the purpose of the study and also to clarify any queries the group may have. Some Regions were sent copies of the survey after constant communication by phone or email with the Regional Secretary, Regional President or Regional Representative taking place. A NSW AECG Field Officer had agreed to assist with survey completions in isolated Regions while attending those Regional Committee meetings. All surveys were anonymous and coded for analytical purposes. Results were reported as narrative stories for each numerical region corresponding to the NSW AECG map, in section two of Chapter 8: ‘Voices of AECG Members’.

**Regional Sample Case Study**

The same eight focus questions identified in the previous section were completed by the Hunter Regional AECG. The group were presented with the Regional Management Committee survey at a Regional Meeting. All completed surveys are anonymous and coded for analytical purposes. This strategy provides a sample case study of a country AECG Region. While this Region may not be representative of other Regional
operations throughout NSW, there are some similarities in terms of operational functions with formal education providers in other Regions. Results were reported using graphic images combined with narrative summaries in section two of Chapter 7: ‘Hunter Aboriginal Education Consultative Group’, of the thesis.

**State AECG Committee Survey**

Information is provided as an explanation for the purpose of the survey consistent with the Regional Management Committee in addition to Local and Regional AECG sample surveys. An Introductory Profile section at the beginning of the survey provided information to build a demographic profile of the State Committee at that particular time of administration in relation to gender, length of membership at a decision making level and years of AECG membership (2009).

**Focus Questions**

Seven questions incorporate open-ended items and one scaled item. Question 1 was considered to be a warm-up question where respondents can draw on their own experience. Question 2 was purposely designed to encourage State Committee members to reflect on what was happening in the Region or community they are representing. Question 3 requests respondents to react to terms of reference outlined. Question 4 was designed to extrapolate self assessed information to collate as a collective response in the final analysis. Question 5 encouraged respondents to assert their opinion in terms of membership application at Local, Regional and State levels, when identifying future priorities. Question 6 invited representatives to score a measurement of influence on education providers by marking a scale of fixed alternatives between 1 and 10. The responses to this question indicated what the spread of interaction was between AECG representatives and education providers. Question 7 was designed to assert their individual perceived measurement of impact on education provision.

A space was added to the survey named ‘any further comments’, as an opportunity to raise any issues not addressed in the survey.

**Cultural Underpinnings and Research**

Through my active participation in the NSW AECG since 1976, I have become familiar with most of the Regions across NSW and feel confident that a relationship of trust has
been developed between the membership and the researcher. The following explanation is an understanding of how practices used in traditional Aboriginal contexts are used in a contemporary Aboriginal community environment. Understanding the consultative process used in the NSW AECG organisation and the Aboriginal cultural responsibility of sharing knowledge is paramount to being welcomed in Aboriginal communities. The term ‘lore’ is used in a cultural context related to traditional Aboriginal rules and practices taught to children at a very early age. The following descriptions of headings used in the Shared Aboriginal Storytelling Model illustrated as figure 16, is my reflective interpretation as an insider researcher.

**Aboriginal Storytelling in Aboriginal Communities**

### Cultural Knowledge
Local Aboriginal people maintain cultural knowledge relevant to their cultural country, family kinship responsibilities and experiences. Maintenance of this knowledge is shared through storytelling and voice to younger generations in a traditional context. Change in cultural practices and lore have brought with it methodological changes when maintaining and sharing knowledge. Many aspects of knowledge are passed on using written modes of storytelling while upholding respect for cultural protocols and the original knowledge holders.

### Communal Resolve
In traditional environments, Aboriginal people have used a model of community responsibility through discussion among Elders of the group. Issues of ceremony, relationships and conflict have been resolved by many as opposed to individuals. Current contemporary Aboriginal communities use the group principle of decision making by bringing representatives together to discuss and determine suitable outcomes relevant to ceremony, relationships and conflict. In contemporary Aboriginal communities, links to traditional methods of cultural practice is evident in successful Aboriginal organisations.

### Political Influences
Decisions made by Elders effect members of country in a traditional setting. Unpopular decisions often cause difference of opinion among clan members. Challenges create unrest and suspicion within the cultural country leading to further discussion among Elders, in order to reach a decision suitable to all clans within the cultural country. In contemporary Aboriginal communities, experienced, respected members of committees discuss matters that influence Aboriginal interest groups. A consensus decision making process is used to allay fears surrounding unpopular decisions.

**NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) Role**

**Local AECG**
The Local AECG groups hold the cultural knowledge specific to their community and implement protocols on how an interface between education providers and themselves should occur. Through membership voices can be heard and ideas shared. It is the responsibility of the local members to actively participate by listening to shared stories and offer ideas to resolve issues that may arise.

**Regional AECG**
Elected delegates from local groups come together on regular occasions to share stories about what is happening in their communities to a larger gathering. Decision making processes are introduced to determine the outcome of difficult issues and situations in Aboriginal Education. These people are able to transfer their ideas and information from their own members to broaden the knowledge base in a cultural context and source available educational opportunities through Regional AECG Management Groups. The elected delegates have a communal responsibility to feedback knowledge learned and decisions made to the local membership.

**State AECG**
Representatives have been elected to speak on behalf of local community members in addition to having decision making powers that will have political influences on Aboriginal education service provision. These discussions take place at least three times a year with the expectation that the representatives in attendance at State AECG
meetings will provide feedback to the local community membership through Regional delegates. The communication cycle is not complete but is continual at all levels.

Similar decision making processes are used in the Aboriginal community storytelling model and in the three tiered structure of the NSW AECG model. Communication responsibilities are parallel in both models through group representation. Both models operate in traditional and contemporary environments throughout many Aboriginal communities, depending on the situational circumstance. Cultural heritage is symbolic of a bridge that links both models to each other.

**Cultural Heritage**

Traditional practices may change because external influences are applied to members of the cultural group. Values and beliefs of inherited teachings, ground individuals in their own experiential presence. Belonging to a racial group of people steeped in cultural history and diversity is determined by an individuals’ level of cultural knowledge and relationships to cultural country.

At the intersection of cultural knowledge, communal resolve and political influences, stands cultural heritage which remains the core component of research activity when gathering information from Aboriginal people. Environments may change but the knowledge holders always maintain their Aboriginality.

**Summary**

This research project uses three strategies to collect information needed to illustrate that aspirations held by Aboriginal people have reinforced the need for Aboriginal participation in the educational process. By collecting information from the Aboriginal membership of the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated, Aboriginal community people directly and indirectly involved in the process of formal education are in a position to provide comment and responses to survey questions. There will be individual survey completions from a Local sample case study, a Regional Management Committee sample case study, Life Member interviews and individual story sharing. Responses to surveys completed by Regional AECG Management Committee members, invite Aboriginal people to self assess the quality of advice
provided through a consultative process. Interviews recorded by Life Members of the organisation will be collated and analysed to reinforce or dispute the assertions made by survey responses. Two Case Studies will form sections of the final discussion to illustrate examples of community participation in these localities. Hunter Region and Mil-pra (Metropolitan South West) AECG Regions will provide these examples, from a country and city perspective. Documentary analysis will further validate the differences identified. Both qualitative and quantitative statistical data collection is built into the information gathering methods.

A systematic approach to a study of people in their environment will help to evaluate claims of cause and effect in an Aboriginal education community. By using collected data from this discrete group of people for analysis a validation of the current reality in Aboriginal education from a community perspective is formulated. The information gathering techniques explained in this chapter cannot be applied to other Aboriginal communities outside the focus group. Research designs must be developed within the boundaries explicit to the informant group and in relationship to the cultural underpinning of the researcher.

The ‘2004 NSW Aboriginal Education Review’ reported that average measures of performance between Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students have identified a “gap” which does not appear to be closing. The Report reinforces the validity of information gleaned through the completion of surveys across the NSW AECG network:

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

Final outcomes of the research will indicate whether cultural identity makes any difference to the outcomes when carrying out research activity in Aboriginal...
communities and are there any advantages or disadvantages of positioning yourself as an insider researcher? It appears to me that truth is non-existent until it is published in credible formats in the academic arena. Even if those credible formats are referenced, truth is challenged by others and the knowledge holders themselves. Therefore inscriptions of truth are interpretations of reality by the writers and accepted as truth by the readers.

The next chapter describes in detail the structural organisation and historical development of the NSW AECG. Many people have been identified as being involved at the beginning of an Aboriginal Community organisation in 1976 which continues to function in 2013. Throughout the chapter there is an understanding of who should take their place on the ‘beach’ of Aboriginal Affairs, in particular on the Aboriginal Education patch.
Chapter 5: The NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc.

Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the necessary cultural ethics and protocols researchers must adhere to when interacting with Aboriginal communities and seeking information from the knowledge holders. A methodology was designed specific to the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, to investigate the level of impact this organisation has had on education provision from an Aboriginal community perspective. Images of the AECG structure and a shared storytelling model proposes that traditional Aboriginal cultural practices are built into a process of consultation and decision making when operating in an Aboriginal organisation.

This chapter will be presented in two sections. Section one will describe the historical development of the organisation and identify people who were involved in the early stages of innovation. Operational details of the NSW AECG will be presented in the first section in addition to an ongoing recount of achievements gained at local, regional and state levels. Section two will include responses to a survey presented at a NSW AECG State meeting held at Dubbo in 2009. Questions three and five will be used as an indicator of similarities and differences between Regional and State levels of consultation and will be reported in chapter nine of this study. Verbatim responses complete the second section, in order to uphold the trust members have placed in the researcher to report their voice as a true record of shared knowledge. This strategy will illustrate a connectedness to interpretation of data and reported results. The responses can be accessed easily and scrutinised to match the narrative reporting style, so that the cultural integrity of storytelling is not compromised.

Section One: An Aboriginal Community Structure

What is the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group? The NSW AECG Inc. is an Aboriginal community based organisation comprised of volunteer members who are involved in Local and Regional AECGs throughout NSW. The NSW AECG Inc. is recognised as the principal source of advice on behalf of Aboriginal communities regarding issues relating to Aboriginal education and training. The AECG gives
Aboriginal people a voice at Local and Regional levels so that Regional Representatives can take their viewpoints forward to State Committee meetings:

*The strength of the AECG depends on the participation of all concerned e.g. Education Department, schools, teachers, parents, students and the wider community.*

The following organisations consult with the NSW AECG regarding policies and programs relevant to Aboriginal Education:

- NSW Teachers Federation
- Board of Studies
- NSW Department of Education and Communities
- Catholic Education Commission
- Government and Private Firms
- Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations
- Independent Providers
- Early Childhood Education
- Universities
- NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens.

The NSW AECG Inc. strongly believes that real change in Aboriginal Education can only happen through active and equal involvement between all stakeholders.

**What Is The Current Structure Of The NSW AECG?**

There are 19 Regions throughout NSW. Each Region has a number of Local AECGs registered which vary in membership numbers. Full membership is open to all Aboriginal people 18 yrs and over. Associate membership is open to all non-Aboriginal people 18 yrs and over. Junior membership is open to all Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people between 12 yrs and 18 yrs of age. Nominations for Life membership can be awarded in two categories, full Life Membership and Associate Life Membership. Both categories must meet identified criteria before being considered. The Association is governed by a Constitution known as the NSW AECG Inc. Association Rules. From 2014 the number of Regions will be increased to twenty (20) as a result of a decision.
made at the 2013 AGM to divide the Metropolitan South West: Region 13 into two Regions.

*fig 17:* **NSW AECG Map**

Each Region elects a Regional Representative for a three year term to speak on their behalf at a State level. Regional Management Committees are elected at Annual General Meetings. The positions of management are President, Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary. The Local President and three other elected members become the delegates to the Regional meetings. The Regional Representatives and nine Association Management Committee members form the State Committee. The State Committee meets at least three times per year and holds the Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Sydney. The State Committee plus three elected delegates from each Region discuss issues and vote on resolutions put forward from the conference. Life Members and Associate Life Members can be nominated after meeting the following criteria:

# must have been a continuous member of a Local AECG for ten (10) years or more

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223 www.nsw.aecg.edu.au
been an active and financial member during this period of time
has demonstrated a commitment to the Association and
a nomination form must be accompanied by no more than two (2) pages on how the nominee has met all of the above criteria.

Nominations for Associate Life Membership and Life Membership must be lodged with the Association Secretary by close of business on December 31st each year. Being nominated for Life Membership does not necessarily mean endorsement. The Association Management Committee will make a decision after a rigorous consultative process whether the nominee will be awarded Life Membership. Professor Paul Hughes opened his presentation at the 2011 NSW AECG AGM & Annual Conference in reference to utilising the experience of Life Members:

*We would like to congratulate the AECG for its work over the years and the tapping in of the great resource of its Life Members. The NSW AECG structure is a great example of what can be achieved and it is hoped that other states will follow.*

An announcement was made at the first State AECG meeting held at Campbelltown on 18th to 19th June, 2010 that a Life Members’ Council was established to provide advice and mentoring to the NSW AECG. The intention is that the Council would become a sub-committee of the Association Management Committee and be utilised as a political lobby on behalf of the NSW AECG membership. A role of mentoring Junior AECGs would extend to acting as role models for young Aboriginal people to encourage succession in AECG leadership from an Aboriginal community perspective. The Interim Committee will serve for twelve months to develop a plan to consult with Life Members and Local AECGs:

*Currently John Lester, Keith (Chubby) Hall, Lyn Hall, Margaret Campbell, Pat Cavanagh, Mary Lou Buck, John Heath and Bob Morgan make up the Interim Committee in place.*

The Life Members’ Council will consist of 10 members. 2 Associate Life Members and 8 Full Life Members drawn from various regions and will serve for a period of two years. After a term has been served 5 members ( 1 Associate Life Member and 4 Full

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224 NSW AECG AGM & Annual Conference, 2011: 23
225 The Pemulwuy News letter of the NSW AECG Inc., 2010: 12
Life Members) will vacate their positions and be replaced by 5 other members. At this stage no further progress has been made toward establishing this Council in 2012. Up until 2012 there have been seventy Life Memberships and fourteen Associate Life Memberships awarded. The 2012 Life Member was awarded to Lesley Armstrong from the Central Coast AECG Region.

History
Why did we need the NSW AECG? Education for Aboriginal students after the 1967 Referendum was changing only because of the continual call for equal rights by Aboriginal community members. The groundswell of support for a fair share of social services offered to other Australians spilled over into the Aboriginal Education environment. John Lester and Bob Morgan were invited to present the Life Members address at the 2011 NSW AECG Annual Conference. Lester spoke about the achievements that have been made over the past thirty years in Aboriginal Education. He made reference to the positive working relationship with DET and the seven hundred (700) Aboriginal teachers we have in NSW, but warned the delegates that more needs to be done in a creative way on behalf of the NSW AECGs involvement in Aboriginal Education. Morgan reminded participants of the past situation in Aboriginal Education:

_In the early days, the white people were running the show and making all the decisions and excluding Aboriginal people from being informed. There was no community forum and no community voice and this is one of the reasons that the AECG was formed, to enable Aboriginal people to have a say in education for Aboriginal people._

Alan Duncan had been associated with education service provision at Moonacullah and Woodenbong in addition to links with party politics. Duncan worked closely with Aboriginal people like Ken Brindle prior to the 1967 Referendum. In 1963 the Consultative Committee on Aboriginal Education was formed. Non-Aboriginal people became seriously involved with making a difference in Aboriginal education and renamed the committee to the Aboriginal Education Committee (AEC). This committee relied on volunteers and donations to the AEC to carry out work to increase opportunities and positive outcomes for Aboriginal people. A publication ‘The
Aboriginal Child at School’ is memorable for the untold number of stories that were examples of how to implement teaching strategies to benefit Aboriginal students. The AEC provided financial support through scholarships to assist Aboriginal students in schools and Universities. The focus on Aboriginal inequity rolled on into the 1970s when activists established the Tent Embassy in 1972:

Maxine Mackay remembers growing up in Bourke and starting to feel the groundswell of change for Aboriginal people. Her mother was very strong and always spoke up. Not a lot of Aboriginal people in Bourke had the confidence. You know people would talk and grumble, but not have the confidence—or, their opinions were not invited, either.227

Activists were protesting in and around Redfern about poor living conditions, lack of access to health services, education services and jobs. The information ripple effect came out to country towns and Aboriginal people started to talk up according to Maxine Mackay from Bourke NSW:

And that’s how we started to get things like Aboriginal health, housing, education, because if our kids were at school they were in the IM class. And that’s still an issue.228

Laurie Craddock says the Walgett conferences sowed the seeds that led to the establishment of the AECG. Aboriginal participation in the Walgett Conferences had increased from one to a majority in 1973, as observed by Craddock at the last conference he attended. The keynote speaker was to be John Moriarty but he had to be replaced by Pastor Abel Morgan who impressed on the participants a powerful message:

Now the message was across that Aboriginal involvement in the education of their kids was vital, but up until then it had not quite registered that Aboriginal people needed to have an input at that higher level.229

How did the NSW AECG start? Ros Field, then a young teacher located at Mt. Druitt (Metropolitan West NSW) was invited to join the Aboriginal Consultative Group, set up to advise the Schools Commission on Aboriginal Education matters. After attending meetings held in Canberra for three years, Field met exciting people including Margaret Valadian, Natascha McNamara, Mick Miller, Paul Hughes, Eric Willmot, John Moriarty

227 Parbury, 2010: 21
228 Parbury, 2010: 22
229 Parbury, 2010: 22
and Errol West. These people were very influential in Aboriginal Education at that time. The Aboriginal Consultative Group recommended in a report to the Schools Commission that State and Territory Aboriginal community groups were to be established within a National co-ordinating structure to provide advice on Aboriginal Education matters. In 1975 the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) and State AECGs were to be established. Field held the position of Aboriginal Liaison Officer in the Department of Education until she resigned and moved to New Zealand. Evonne Bolton who was teaching at the Manly Far West School was invited to fill the vacant position. The Victorian Aboriginal Education Consultative Group was established in 1976 to develop processes for the involvement of Victorian Koori community members in decision making regarding education and training provision for Koori students. This goal continues to be the core business of the organisation’s principles of Koori community empowerment.

Morgan, who was employed as a Research Assistant with the NSW Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, had written a paper on the development of a consultative process in Aboriginal Education for NSW. This document had been forwarded to the NSW Department of Education and accepted as a feasible model of operation. A visit was organised through Bill Rose, a senior Departmental officer within the Special Programs Unit, to attend a State meeting being held by the Victorian Aboriginal Education Consultative Group. Morgan, who was to attend became ill, and needed to be hospitalised. An invitation to accompany Bolton and the Aboriginal Teachers Assistant of LaPerouse Primary School Joyce Woodberry, as a replacement for Morgan became an introduction to Aboriginal Education for Laurel Ralph (Williams). Bolton was the only Aboriginal person responsible for Aboriginal Education within the NSW Department of Education at that time.

After the visit to Victoria in 1976 and the increased workload of establishing the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG), I volunteered some administrative services in the NSW Department of Education, Aboriginal Education office. I recall the mounds of paper that needed filing and the tremendous number of phone messages requesting Evonne Bolton to be in, what seemed to be, a thousand places at once. At this stage she was the only person meeting all the demands. Had it not been for
Evonne’s professional tenacity, I wonder if I would have become so passionate about Aboriginal Education. (Laurel Williams)

After many meetings with NSW Government Department agencies and interested Aboriginal people the NSW AECG became formalised in 1979. The Department appointed a President and invited Aboriginal people who had experience in education service provision, to form a Steering Committee. Bolton had been allocated the task of establishing a similar consultative committee as the Victorian model. To undertake this activity she invited known Aboriginal people who had shown interest in moving forward in Aboriginal Education. They were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evonne Bolton</td>
<td>Dept. School Educ.</td>
<td>Aboriginal Unit SEO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret Buck</td>
<td>Murawina Redfern</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joyce Woodberry</td>
<td>LaPerouse PS</td>
<td>ATA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milly Butt</td>
<td>Murawina Redfern</td>
<td>Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Lester</td>
<td>Redfern PS</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norma Williams</td>
<td>Murawina Redfern</td>
<td>Board of Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob Morgan</td>
<td>Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs</td>
<td>Research Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurel Ralph</td>
<td>Casula</td>
<td>Community Member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The working party to establish the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group was formed. This Aboriginal Education Committee set about encouraging additional Aboriginal people to become involved in Aboriginal Education issues at Regional levels. The numbers increased to a level where it became evident by the late 1980s, that Aboriginal people wanted to participate in the education process. Morgan was appointed by the Minister for Education to the Schools Commission when it was established in 1980. Keith Hall had completed his teaching degree at Armidale College of Advanced Education (CAE) in 1982, spent three years as a classroom teacher then returned to
Armidale CAE as a lecturer. John Lester and Barry Thorne also completed their Primary Teacher Training courses through Armidale CAE. Morgan, Hall and Thorne always identified Walgett NSW as their home town and all had a common interest in Aboriginal Education.

Walgett – sometimes known as ‘the centre of the universe’- is a special place in the story of the AECG. Bob Morgan, Keith Hall and Beau Thorne came from Walgett.\(^{\text{230}}\)

**Formalising the NSW AECG**

By 1981 work had been done to encourage a broader representation from Aboriginal communities across NSW. The Department of school education regional structure was used as a template to invite Aboriginal people to participate in this newly established community organisation. Interest and recommendations from Aboriginal people across NSW convinced the Hon. Paul Landa (Minister for Education) to support the regionalisation of the NSW AECG. The Minister requested that Doug Swan (Director-General of Education) send a memorandum to all NSW school Principals. The memorandum contained background information explaining how the NSW AECG was formed and provided advice of how schools could interact with members at inspectorate and regional levels (attachment 8). The following list of people was invited to attend the first NSW AECG meeting to endorse the concept of regionalisation. The meeting was to be held in Bourke NSW.

The Memorandum identified the composition of the NSW AECG as at June 1981\(^{\text{231}}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>Bob Morgan</td>
<td>Haberfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chairperson</td>
<td>Keith Hall</td>
<td>Armidale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Officer</td>
<td>John Lester</td>
<td>Haberfield</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Specialist Areas**

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<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Childhood Educ.</td>
<td>Milly Butt</td>
<td>Redfern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary/Infants Educ.</td>
<td>Keith Hall</td>
<td>Armidale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{\text{230}}\) Parbury, 2010: 27

\(^{\text{231}}\) Memorandum / Director-General of Education (D. Swan), Department of Education: 1981
When Parbury interviewed Aboriginal people for content on the history of the NSW AECG publication he included the following reflection by Hall:

_Coming from Walgett, Keith Hall found the Department’s committee frustrating. It seemed to be mainly to ratify whatever the Director of Special Programs (Bill Rose) wanted to do: members had no direct access to the Minister, or the Director-General, or senior officers. So he yarnd up Bob Morgan and John Lester._

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232 Parbury, 2010: 32-33
Collectively they decided to present a paper to Rose about changing the AECG structure to be more representative of Aboriginal communities in NSW. To everyone’s surprise the proposal was supported which meant that Morgan had to relinquish his position as President:

And that was the start of the New South Wales AECG as a community-based network. All of the members of the Advisory Committee were appointed: they were not voted on or representative of the communities. Whereas the new AECG was designed to be representative of all the communities in New South Wales.  

During 1980-81 the Department of Education’s Aboriginal Education Unit had grown to four people. Bolton had moved on to become the Executive Officer for the National Aboriginal Education Committee. Rose had responsibility for Aboriginal Education under the structure of the Special Programs Unit. Lester was the Senior Education Officer and NSW AECG Executive Officer, Linda Burney and Lynette Riley were Education Officers and Laurel Ralph (nee Williams) was a trainee receptionist. The trainee was delegated responsibility to organise the State meeting in Bourke which meant contacting delegates, arranging travel, accommodation and meal allowances. Constant liaison with delegates to co-ordinate travel in order to meet in Sydney on time to board a bus for overnight travel to Bourke was a nightmare. The final task was to collect cash from the bank to allocate and package meal allowances for all the participants. By the time everyone arrived to leave, all the trainee receptionist could do was to wave goodbye because she was too exhausted to go to the meeting.

In the early days of the AECG at that time we would come down to Sydney and jump on a bus and head off to where the particular conference was going to be held. In those days there was never this TA money, there was never petrol reimbursement to even attend our local meetings. We would all jump in somebody’s car and all go to a regional point and sit down and talk about our region and how we could support our schools and our students and our communities.

Linda Olive, Lower North Coast

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233 Parbury, 2010: 33
234 Parbury, 2010: 22
The NSW Department of Education/NSW AECG Relationship

Aboriginal Education in NSW was snowballing. The Department had agreed to introduce the Aboriginal Education Policy for schools, the first in Australia, which was written in co-operation with the NSW AECG in 1982. The writing team included Chairperson Bob Morgan, Margaret Campbell-Buck, Milly Butt, Norma Williams, Joyce Woodberry, John Lester, Linda Burney, Lynette Riley, Keith Hall, Laurel Williams, Ken Jones, Trevor Cook and Bill Rose. Five support documents accompanied the Policy in an attempt to encourage principals and teachers to embrace Aboriginal Studies and support Aboriginal students to succeed with academic achievements. At the launch of the Aboriginal Education Policy R. J. Mulock: 1982 the Minister for Education stated:

It is New South Wales Government policy that the advancement of Aboriginal communities and better appreciation of Aboriginal culture and society by other Australians both be given urgent attention. The right to make decisions and to determine an appropriate lifestyle within one’s own community, without infringing the rights of others, is basic to all sections of our culturally diverse cohesive society. One form of achieving these aims is seen through Aboriginal Education.235

The Minister of the day made some comments that recognise the high levels of neglect of Aboriginal Education in the schooling systems. He talked about people’s rights to cultural health, as long as this did not interfere with acceptable cultural and social norms of the time. This does not sound very different to attitudes expressed in the 1960s and 70s and could be interpreted as a continuation of assimilation to the dominant culture of Australia in the 1980s. Why is it that the struggles of the 1970s, when Aboriginal activists protested, were beaten, jailed, mistreated in the fight for self-determination, continued to fall on deaf ears.

Morgan: 1982 presented a statement in the NSW Aboriginal Education policy as the President of the NSW AECG:

For too long, generations of Aborigines have failed to gain full value of the benefits of education in a social system that undervalues their heritage and does not support them in the preservation of their culture. It is hoped that, through education, future generations, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, will be able to

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235 NSW Department of Education Aboriginal Education Policy, 1982: 3
exist in a society where one culture is not subservient to any other. We must hope, for a people without hope are a people without a future.\textsuperscript{236}

Morgan reinforced the need for the public education system to make change in favour of educating future generations to be more conscious of the value Aboriginal knowledge can bring to Australian society. He also highlighted the fact that generations of Aboriginal people have not gained the educational skills necessary to compete in Australian society. The last two sentences of Morgan’s statement are especially encouraging and stimulated a decision to remain committed to Aboriginal Education.

Reflections of limited past successes and continual disappointments raise questions of why anyone would want to stay involved with an organisation in a voluntary capacity. Personally, the above sentiment expresses the purpose of my involvement and has influenced my decision to undertake various pathways in Aboriginal Education. (Laurel Williams NSW AECG Life Member).

Dreams are associated with wants and needs. Sometimes individual dreams are a mixture of futuristic aspirations for one or for others. One of the disappointments working in this field is the lack of passion and often the lack of dreams that some Aboriginal people display. While many people are fighting to encourage young people to complete their High School Certificate (HSC), during many student motivation camps, when the question is asked “what do you want to do when you finish school”, a regular response of “I do not know” or a shrug of the shoulders is very disheartening. At one of these motivation camps a comment made by Uncle Reuben Kelly is thought provoking and stimulates motivation, ‘Education Has Its Own Returns’. These returns can be negative or positive depending on the level of involvement and commitment by the individual.

Doug Swan: 1982 the Director-General of NSW Education also made a statement which promotes a duality of purpose of the policy:

\begin{quote}
Aboriginal Education has a dual purpose: to enhance the development and learning of Aboriginal Students, for too long suffering the effects of many disadvantages: and to enable all students to have some knowledge, understanding and appreciation, of Aborigines and their cultural heritage. Aboriginal Studies in
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{236} NSW Department of Education Aboriginal Education Policy, 1982: 4
New South Wales focuses on the understanding of contemporary Aboriginal society and culture through local oral history studies of contemporary Aboriginal communities. It is essential that schools involve Aboriginal communities wherever possible so that effective strategies can be developed within the school to assist this process. For schools with or without Aboriginal communities, local, inspectorate, regional or state Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups may be consulted.\(^\text{237}\)

Swan laid out a plan of how schools can involve Aboriginal community in the implementation of the policy. Since 1982 the Aboriginal Education Policy has been reviewed twice through a consultation process with the NSW AECG structure. The current Aboriginal Education and Training Policy was launched in November 2008. When consultations with departmental authorities occur, values contained in the NSW AECG vision statement will be the foundation for future discussions:

*The NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. promotes respect, empowerment and self-determination and believes the process of collaborative consultation is integral to equal partnerships and is fundamental to the achievement of equality.*\(^\text{238}\)

**Building Community Capacity**

After thirteen years of operations the NSW AECG became incorporated on 18\(^{\text{th}}\) May 1990 under the presidency of Linda Burney. This meant that a formal governance process must be followed. The organisation needed to meet the requirements set out in a constitution, hold an Annual General Meeting to carry out elections and present the Annual Report and provide an audited financial report to the membership. Accountability and credibility of the NSW AECG network needed to be strengthened. In presenting the first Annual Report since incorporation Burney acknowledged the dedication of many people involved in the development and growth of the organisation:

*In particular I acknowledge the vision of those people responsible for the founding of the organisation in 1977 and the efforts of people in the early eighties for establishing the Regional process thereby “putting power into the hands of Aboriginal people”.*\(^\text{239}\)

Burney continued her report by identifying some of the significant activities achieved by the organisation. In November 1990 the NSW AECG vacated government offices

\(^{237}\) NSW Department of Education Aboriginal Education Policy, 1982: 5  
\(^{238}\) NSW AECG Rules of the Association, 2009: 4  
\(^{239}\) NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc., 1991: Prefix
and moved into new premises in a residential area of Cavendish Street, Stanmore. This location would improve community access to the organisation’s secretariat. In 1991 there were eight permanent staff and four casual positions established in the organisation’s secretariat. Success of the NSW AECG brought with it an increased workload. A major component of activity was the involvement of policy development and participation on numerous committees. Reports were presented by the Technical and Further Education Commission: Department of School Education: Teachers Federation: Aboriginal Higher Education Network: Department of Employment and Education at both State meetings held at Port Macquarie in March and Batemans Bay in July. In 1991 there were sixty five Local AECGs established across NSW. In closing the Annual General Meeting Linda especially thanked Gordon Nean who retired as the North West 2 Regional Representative:

If it was not for the community people like Gordon who give up their own holidays to attend State Committee meetings and days without pay to attend Executive Meetings, the AECG would not be as strong and professional as it is. I strongly feel that this sort of dedication and commitment emphasises exactly what the NSW AECG Inc. stands for.240

The first State AECG Conference was held at the ‘Ramada Inn’ North Sydney in 1982. This was the first time a large number of Aboriginal community people came together with a common interest in Aboriginal Education. A delegate at the conference remembers:

My first ever AECG meeting, it was awesome, to see that many Murris in one place at one time. North Sydney, the Ramada. For me, coming from a little country town, to see that many Murris all together, and all with sort of one concern, one voice, one vision I think that’s still carrying on today. I was amazed that just that handful of people, with probably no resources at all, could bring that many people from all over the State, together in Sydney. And basically I still say it was the dawning of a new era, knowing that it was not just me with a vision about education, but pretty much every Murri across the State. And it gave us that opportunity to come together and think, but more so talk. And over the years it’s been as much an educational program for me as any school or TAFE or whatever.241

Carl McGrady

240 NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. 1991: 7
241 Parbury, 2010: 40
Burney had been seconded from the Department of Education to the NSW AECG in the Executive Officer position during the Presidency of Morgan. In 1987 Burney was elected as the President of the organisation and maintained that position for 10 years. The 1998 publication of Pemulwy celebrates three significant milestones in Aboriginal Affairs. They are the Australian Reconciliation Convention, the 20th Anniversary of the NSW AECG Inc. and the ten years Presidency of Burney. A montage of photographs showing Aboriginal people who have been involved with the NSW AECG for the past 20 years is displayed on pages 18, 19, 30, 31, 32 and 33. A timeline highlighting the successful involvement of the NSW AECG for each year is evidence of the organisation’s success. The United Nations International Year of Indigenous People was celebrated in 1993. The AECG was instrumental in negotiating the establishment of another twenty Regional Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers within the Department of Education and Training. The amalgamation of DSE and TAFE promised a new structure and more challenges for the NSW AECG. A major event in 1993 was the World Indigenous Peoples Conference: Education to be held in Wollongong NSW. The entire NSW AECG secretariat moved to Wollongong. The AECG was heavily involved with the organisation of this conference. Williams represented the NSW AECG on the National Organising Committee while Burney and Sheryl Connors were responsible for staging the Cultural Program for the event. In 1997 the Inner City Education Centre transferred ownership of the premises in Cavendish Street Stanmore to the NSW AECG Inc.

**Perceived Achievements**

In February 1994 Uncle Chicka Dixon officially opened the third Annual General Meeting since Incorporation of the NSW AECG. Dixon was a highly respected Aboriginal identity who fought for social justice for his people throughout his life.

*Education is extremely important for Aboriginal people. I had very little formal education. I grew up on the South Coast at a time when Black kids were not allowed in schools. Aboriginal people were just cheap labour and ‘Whitey’ rang the bell for rations at the Mission. You could do a study on Aboriginal education in the prison system. Most of the political Blacks of my era got their ‘education’ in jail – at Goulbourn, Bathurst, Parramatta and Long Bay. The first book I ever read was ‘For the Term of his Natural Life’, and that was in jail in 1948. It is very...*
obvious that ‘Whitey’ is here to stay. There are 17 million of them and we can’t get rid of them. The key for Aboriginal people is education. Aboriginal Education is now happening. 15 years ago there were 3 Aboriginal students at James Cook University. Now there are about 80. I never dreamed that I would see 20 Kooris go through law. Pat O’Shane was the first, then all what I call the ‘black male chauvinists’. From the 1930s to the 1960s the Aboriginal struggle was on the streets – Kooris had to fight for our rights. Now what I hope to see is Kooris as MPs – in parliament where the real decisions are made. Kooris need to get into the political party branches. The little fellas are our future. We must make sure we motivate them in education. It’s no good complaining about whitefellas getting all the jobs if Kooris won’t take our chances. It’s really important that Koori people use their brains – do not just sit on them.  

Has the NSW AECG achieved any positive outcomes since it was established? The question must be asked. In 1994 at the Annual General Meeting Life Member Joyce Woodberry reflected on changes the NSW AECG had experienced over the past seventeen years:

The AECG has grown from a committee of 8 Aboriginal people selected by the Department of Education and meeting a few times a year with a purely advisory role and no access to decision makers. We are now a State-wide incorporated organisation with 82 local AECGs, a local-regional-state structure with representation on decision making bodies at all levels, direct access to the Minister and the DG, to TAFE Managing Directors and Institute Directors, to the Commonwealth – to all authorities and decision making processes in all education.  

Joyce Woodberry Life Member

Contained in the President’s Report is an issue that warns of a breakdown in communication within the AECG structure:

As I said in my last report, the Regional AECG level is this organisation’s problem. We need to work out why this is – and do something about it. This is a challenge that we must meet. It is fundamental to the future of the organisation – and that means fundamental to the future of Aboriginal Education. The Regional AECG level has to be how the community-based advice comes up from the Local AECG level to the State level, as well as how information is passed back to the community base.
This comment was probably indicative of the success of Local and Regional AECG and the increased workload in Regions. Two recommendations were put forward that the NSW AECG investigate strategies and lobby funding authorities to establish an office and employ a person in each AECG Region. After lengthy discussion this option would ease the pressure on people who are employed in fulltime positions and volunteering as members of the AECG. A model core Aboriginal Studies course had been developed after two years of consultations for primary teacher education. In 1994 eight universities across the country had agreed to trial the course. Many changes occurred in the decade that Burney led the NSW AECG. Her closing remarks in the article were:

*I feel very privileged and very proud of being part of the AECG. I know that within this State and nationally, the NSW AECG can hold its head high. I hope I have played a role in that. Thank you once again for the honour and privilege of leading the AECG.*

**NSW AECG President Charles Davison 1997-2004**

A change of President brought with it a change of focus for the organisation. Charles Davison admits in his Annual Report: 1998 at the AGM, that in the past twelve months he had expended a high level of energy in the area of school education. Davison added that other sectors in Aboriginal education were important, but because the AECG started in the Department of Education (DET) and schools have a broad influence on communities, community empowerment was identified as a priority to encourage a higher level of interaction with schools. After lengthy negotiations between NSW AECG Executive, P&C, FOSCO and DET, the Department’s Suspension and Expulsion Procedures were changed to assist parents and caregivers to better understand their rights through the appeals process. The AECG and DET had developed a joint Statement of Commitment to ensure educational equity for Aboriginal communities. This action is seen to be a significant landmark for 1999. Throughout the report reference is made to reinforcing relationships with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Advisory Group, the NSW/ACT Aboriginal Higher Education Network, the Aboriginal Dance Theatre Redfern, NAISDA, the NSW Teachers Federation, the P&C Federation and the Aboriginal Studies Association.
While these organisations are State based it is essential that Aboriginal involvement in the National arena takes place. Issues were discussed at a meeting of Indigenous Education Consultative Body (IECB) chairs to evaluate the effectiveness of the IECB beyond 1999. Davison commented on the need to improve the operations of the AECG network. While some aspects of the organisation appeared to be functioning well, the service to voluntary members from fulltime paid staff in the secretariat should be more effective. He stated that Local and Regional AECGs is the strength of this organisation and need to be active. Davison closed his report with a call to review the way AECG members function:

*Look beyond our own agendas and local concerns to focus on the larger picture, the need of all Aboriginal students and communities in NSW.*

**NSW AECG President Dave Ella 2004-2007**

In 2007 the Annual Conference was delivered a shock blow by the announcement of the resignation of the current President Dave Ella. An interim Chair was called for from the floor. Only one nomination was put forward therefore Ann Dennis became the Chairperson for the Annual Conference and proceeded to read the President’s report compiled by Ella:

*It saddens me that this report has to start with the resignation of my position of the NSW AECG Inc. at the Management Committee meeting held at Stanmore on the 8th February 2007. With increased family commitments, I could no longer fill the role required to be President. I decided to put my family first and tendered my resignation and withdrew my application for election in 2007.*

The report went on to state when he was elected the membership was handed a flagging organisation with very little credibility. By working together this organisation had been turned around within three years to become one of the most respected organisations in NSW and also around the nation. More Local AECGs had been formed which means more parents being engaged with local schools. On reflection the corner had been turned in my second year of office and the NSW AECG Inc. had gone from strength to strength. This only reflects the continued commitment of local members and the hard work applied but the hard work needed to continue to keep the NSW AECG at the top. We need to build on productive partnerships with all stakeholders, schools and

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246 NSW AECG Annual Report, 1998: 9
247 NSW AECG Annual Report, 2007: 29
communities. During this period collaboration with DET had created the devolution of Aboriginal Education to regional DET offices. The outcome was increased involvement in decision making at Local and Regional AECGs. Stronger partnerships with the P&C, Teachers Federation, Principals’ Associations and Aboriginal communities across NSW has provided the opportunity to work together, in searching for innovative ideas to improve support for Aboriginal students and staff.

Delivery of Community Capacity Forums have proven to be successful by the establishment of five new Local AECGs and building links with the Catholic school system around the State. In negotiation with the NSW AECG additional targeted funding for schools with high Aboriginal enrolments have reached agreement with the aim to produce positive academic results in HS and PS levels. The Schools in Partnership (SiP) initiative has 30 schools identified currently with an additional 20 schools to be added in 2006. A new initiative the Targeted Aboriginal Students Strategy (TASS) has 9 schools identified to improve behaviour and attendance in addition to the delivery of cultural education programs. The Targeted School Initiative (TSI) has 5 schools identified who will receive extra funding for three years to improve student outcomes. The Director Generals Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee has the responsibility to monitor the outcomes from the recommendations put forward in the 2004 NSW Aboriginal Education Review.

The 4th National Indigenous Education Conference held in Newcastle was a resounding success attended by 400 delegates and well represented by the NSW AECG. The conference theme ‘Getting on with the job: Indigenous Engagement in Education’ is relevant to the current situation in NSW. Ella stressed that the new Commonwealth funding phase beginning in 2008 is vital for the effective continuation of the NSW AECG. Requirements to meet the Whole of School Intervention agreement will require evidence based reporting by Regional Representatives, against interactive agreements with DET, Catholic Education, Independent Providers and Pre-school systems. This process will take place at State meetings held in Walgett and Ballina this year.

National discussions through the IECB forum are continuing. This forum is a vital link with the Commonwealth to demonstrate the essential link between Aboriginal
community participation and positive Aboriginal educational outcomes. Recognition of the high demands placed on our members means we have to work in collaboration with education providers. We must make sure that there are more decision makers at a local level. Ella completed his report with the following quote:

*The Association has to set ambitious goals with high expectations, and by working together, with a clear sense of purpose, I believe these goals will be achievable and will deliver a better future for the Aboriginal people in NSW.*

**NSW AECG President Carlos Svagelli 2007-mid 2008**

In 2008 Carlos Svagelli as President, reported there had been many gains achieved by the NSW AECG but warned there was still a long way to go and there are many challenges ahead. The challenges are reflected in the inequity of access for early childhood learning, the need for many more Aboriginal students to access higher qualifications through TAFE and Universities and the achievement gap of educational outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in compulsory schooling. Svagelli reported that highlights during 2007 included work around partnerships, building capacity in communities, targeted initiatives and improving AECG services. Strengthening partnerships included the affirmation of the DET/AECG agreement. This agreement was reinforced through the involvement of the NSW AECG on the 1996 NSW Aboriginal Education Policy. Other organisations in partnership are the Catholic Education Commission, the Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood sector, TAFE, Tranby College and Higher Education institutions. The NSW AECG was an active partner in the NSW Aboriginal Education Review carried out in 2004.

To enhance the capacity of Aboriginal communities the NSW AECG has encouraged agencies to include a local and regional AECG presence on committees to provide community comment. Being involved in school based merit selection panels is another strategy to increase community capacity in formal decision making processes. Svagelli commented that Personalised Learning Plans, if implemented properly, will improve home school relationships between Aboriginal families and their communities. To improve services to Local and Regional AECGs there was a Regional Presidents Conference held in 2007. Workshops on financial matters and the roles and
responsibilities of a Regional President will assist with improving the services delivered by Local and Regional AECGs. Visitations by members of the Association Management Committee will further improve the services at a local level. The President closed his presentation reminding participants that they continue to be a strong voice on behalf of Aboriginal people:

> Continued communication, patience and understanding and a firm resolve to sometimes set aside differences and work together toward ... heritage and identity. I hope you will join me on this journey?249

**Communication Networks at the Regional Level**

The following position paper is a result of discussions that have taken place at many State meetings in reference to distribution of documents to Regions from the NSW AECG Secretariat. Complaints had been made in the past that there had been constant communication breakdowns due to information not being passed on to some members of the network.

**AECG Regional Representative and Regional President Positions**

On behalf of the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Management Committee, this proposal will consider the advantages of amalgamating the two AECG positions named Regional President and Regional Representative.

**Background**

The Regional Representative positions were established in 1981 prior to the formal regionalisation structure of the NSW AECG. To gain economic support from funding bodies, individual people were invited to become members of the Association. The Executive Committee at this time was busy implementing a structure based on the NSW Department of Education’s service boundaries. With this process proving to be successful, the need arose to take the organisation to the next level in terms of democratic practices and community voting rights. Regional Executive positions were established, while the State Committee still utilised the Regional Representative positions to continue discussions and make decisions to increase the participation and membership at State/Regional/Local levels.

Over many years, the roles of the Regional President and the Regional Representative positions have been questioned and have often created confusion and conflict in some Regions. It must be pointed out that these positions have always been voluntary, except for a small operational allowance allocated to the Regional Representative. With the growth of Aboriginal employment in education service departments, and partnership agreements which have been forged over lengthy discussions, some people who hold...
executive management positions are employed in the NSW Department of Education and Training. This situation becomes problematic when both the Regional President and the Regional Representative are not forwarded the same information regarding AECG business from the secretariat. It is an assumption that the communication channels are always open between both positions and therefore assumptions are made that both people are aware of activities and decisions made at all levels that impact on specific Regions. This is not the case when both positions do not receive the same information.

**Physical Residence**
In the large country Regions the probability of the President and the Regional Representative residing in the same town is likely to be extraordinary rather than common. This makes regular personal contact difficult, time consuming and expensive. Aboriginal Cultural practices are further defined by the modern mode of communication using telephones, email, mobiles, and faxes. If either people do not have access to these services, it is likely that communication breaks down or individuals will be hesitant in accepting a nomination to be elected into these positions. This could be a cause of conflict between people when attending State meetings and discover through reporting sessions, that activities have been taking place in their Region that they are not aware of. If there is one point of contact, then communication would be direct and responsibilities would become clearer in terms of passing on information. Should the positions be combined, Local AECGs could be strengthened due to the valuable experience and skill of one of the people who had been involved at the Regional level.

**Personalities**
It must be accepted that not all people are amicable toward each other, whether they be Aboriginal or from any other racial background. Human nature being what it is brings out the best and the worst in people when subconscious power structures affect relationships. This seems to have occurred in the AECG structure. While the NSW AECG cites empowerment through active participation at the local community level, the communication process must be clear:

*The aim of the AECG is the empowerment of Aboriginal communities at all levels through real active participation in all decision-making on all Aboriginal education and training. The community base is fundamental to the provision of Aboriginal advice on Aboriginal education and training.*

This implies that membership at the local level is highly valued by the Association and the effectiveness of making positive change to education systems relies on the discussions and decisions made by Local AECGs. This is true philosophically, but in reality the expectation of the Regional Representative and the Regional President to carry forward all the actions and recommendations to the State meetings is impossible. In some Regions there are many Local AECGs established and in some there are few. It seems that there is a case for the development of Regional Secretariats with people employed in full-time positions to implement the decisions made by Local members. While ever human resources are limited to a voluntary capacity, then carrying out the roles expected of Aboriginal people who work in Aboriginal
education services is not feasible. Personality clashes and personal power struggles will always hinder the potential success of a group. It seems that a belief has grown over many years that a reward for community involvement, under the NSW AECG is to be a member of the State Committee. This idea is a direct contradiction of the philosophy, but when strong personalities are involved, it is difficult to change this understanding.

**Distribution of Information**
In recent years the Secretariat and the Association Management Committee have attempted to rectify the communication breakdown between the Regional positions by disseminating material to both positions. At the last Association Management Committee (AMC) meeting held in August 2007, the Executive Officer had to be convinced that the Regional Representative must receive information as well as the President of each Region. The justification for not sending materials to both was the expectation that the Regional Presidents would pass it on to Regional Representatives. The argument against this process was that if this did not happen, then you may have Regional Representatives attending State meetings not knowing about agenda items and being involved in uninformed decision making. The debate did raise the question of duplication of services and who should be the receiver of materials in the Region. Perhaps some people have easier access to technology than others, but this does not mean that constant reviews of centralised operations are not necessary to improve the functions of the Association. This paper should not be interpreted as a whim of the AMC but seen as an attempt to strengthen the communication channels between the Local, Regional and State structure. Further discussion would take place at the State AECG Meeting which was to be held at Ballina in October 2007.

*On behalf of the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated Association Management Committee.*

Laurel Williams and Marilyn Redman - Batemans Bay State Meeting 2007. 251

The above paper was tabled for discussion, but the issues continue to create confusion. One of the most important components of networking between the three tiered structures of the NSW AECG is communication. If the information flow is disrupted at any of the consultative levels, then the decision making process is compromised. Uninformed decisions will be made by a minority of members or those members who have the topical knowledge through information. In an attempt to increase the information flow, the NSW AECG Secretariat disseminates materials to both regional positions with the expectation that copies will then be distributed to Local AECGs.

If there was one person who had the mandate to distribute and support Local groups to organise workshops, then the feedback to the State meetings would be more consistent and enable members to
form decisions based on consistent information. The discussion regarding the role of the Regional President/Representative at a local level continued in 2011 and again at the Regional Presidents’ workshop in 2013. While the current structure has not changed since the establishment of the NSW AECG, there is no reason why positional reviews could not improve and strengthen the operational functions of the NSW AECG.

**NSW AECG President Cindy Berwick mid 2008-2013 (current)**

Dr Bob Morgan and John Lester presented the Life Member’s address at the 2011 Annual Conference. Lester talked about the many achievements Aboriginal people have made. He presented statistics that highlighted the fact that there were seven hundred 700 Aboriginal teachers in the NSW education system: where in 1990 there was a national target to have 1000 teachers in classrooms. In the Higher Education sector many improvements have advanced to the stage where one university has over 600 Aboriginal students enrolled in various professional courses. Morgan reinforced the gains achieved but stated Aboriginal people could not do it alone. He called for the NSW AECG to build relationships with non-Aboriginal people for the benefit of young Aboriginal people. Morgan closed his presentation with:

> *It has been a privilege to reflect on some of the events and changes from the last 30 years. It is not easy and no worthwhile challenge is easy. If you have got it in you to dream, you have got it in you to achieve.*

The 2011 President’s report included an overview of significant activities involving the NSW AECG Inc. Morgan had completed a review of the State Language Centre and his report recommendations were adopted. A major recommendation was that Aboriginal Languages be housed in communities. A tender submitted to the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs resulted in the Centre for Aboriginal Language Co-ordination and Development responsibility, now sits with the NSW AECG Inc. A professional staff development course, ‘Connecting to Country’ for DET executive and teachers was successfully implemented in several AECG Regions. The Regional AECG Presidents’ workshop has proven to be successful in ensuring local support and communication networks occur. The need for the continuation of a strong advocacy role by the NSW AECG in various areas that effect educational outcomes for Aboriginal people has been confirmed. The NSW AECG advocates that prosecution of Aboriginal families involved

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252 NSW AECG Inc. Annual Conference Report, 2011: 10

People Places and Pathways in NSW Aboriginal Education
in poor school attendance matters, should be heard in the Children’s Court rather than the Adult Court system. This change will lead to increased options in order to deal with individual situations. A highlight was the involvement of the NSW AECGs participation leading to the formation of the Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (CAPO), is another avenue to implement the organisations advocacy role.

Berwick prefixes her 2012 Annual Report with:

*I am proud of the role we play in making sure the Aboriginal voice is heard.*

Berwick stated in the 2012 President’s Annual Report, that the NSW AECG continues to grow. The ‘Connecting to Country’ program continues to be rolled out in AECG Regions across NSW. Recent evaluations indicate that this is the best professional learning activity in Aboriginal Education. Increased numbers of member enrolments in the NSW AECG Certificate III course delivered by TAFE will eventuate in the availability of community capacity in Local and Regional AECGs. A total of 126 Local AECGs are operational across the State at this stage. Partnership agreements at Local Regional and State levels with education providers have grown in the past year. There are fourteen fulltime staff and three part-time staff employed in the Secretariat to support the operation of the NSW AECG Inc. A snapshot of Regional AECG activities is included and reported against regions identified in numerical order in section four.

Section five addresses the involvement of the NSW AECG Inc. involvement in partnership agreements and the role of advocacy. Direct participation with the design and development of policy and programs will influence Aboriginal Education at a National level, through membership of the Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies (IECB). At regular meetings of the IECB, discussion related to the Australian curriculum framework and the Gonski report in addition to many federally administered programs, formed advice that will be forwarded to the Commonwealth government.

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253 NSW AECG Inc. Annual Conference Report, 2012: 5
254 In April 2010, Gonski was commissioned by Julia Gillard, then Minister for education in the Rudd Government, to be chairperson of a committee to make recommendations regarding funding of education in Australia. The findings and recommendations of the committee were presented to government in November 2011, where after deliberations were entered into by the Federal and state governments to consider its content. The committee’s report is known as the Gonski Report. (http://en.wikipedia.org).
The NSW AECG continues to advise the Commonwealth by maintaining membership on the First Peoples Education Advisory Group. Confirmation of the NSW Department and Education Communities/NSW AECG partnership agreement titled, ‘Together We Are: Together We Can: Together We Will’, will continue to be honoured as stated by the newly appointed Director-General at the 2012 Annual Conference. Participation and collaboration with the Public Education Foundation scholarship committee, the Board of Studies, the ‘Indigenous Police Recruitment Our Way’ steering committee, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership at Monash University and the Police Strategic Advisory Council, the NSW AECG is able to provide a voice on behalf of the membership. Berwick completed her report by closing with:

*I’m proud of the NSW AECG’s achievements and the influence we are able to exert to make positive change in education and training for Aboriginal people and their communities. Of course, it is all not possible without the dedicated volunteer members that work tirelessly at the Local, Regional and State level together. It is truly a unique organisation.*

**Recognising the Gap**

The 2004 NSW Aboriginal Education Review Purpose statement, in the opening paragraph makes a statement:

*One of the most evaluated reviewed and inquired about areas of education in Australia is Aboriginal Education. Yet education systems around the nation have been unable to deliver the same levels of success for Aboriginal students as they do for other students. The gap persists despite the efforts of educators in schools and on TAFE campuses. There is reason to believe that what we are currently doing is not working. Put simply, it is time for a new approach.*

In 1982 the NSW Aboriginal Education Policy was embraced as a model for other States and Territories and other education systems to emulate. Some of the problems are the lack of resources allocated to the implementation of the Policy, the lack of a coordinated effort by Education providers and the lack of skill development programs for Aboriginal communities. It is all well and good to consult with Aboriginal people through the NSW AECG network, but to be honest, how many people have the educational background to understand the education jargon used, let alone understand the implications of policy development. Quite frankly, people cannot be blamed for not

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255 NSW AECG Inc. Annual Report, 2012: 5
wanting to learn or become involved in something that does not appear to have any relevance to themselves or their communities. Yet another Report makes recommendations to address the disadvantage of Aboriginal people.

It is worthwhile noting that the National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training 2001 was an initiative of the Commonwealth Government. Reference is made in the foreword to the high achievements of Neville Bonner. When asked by Robyn Hughes in 1992 to nominate his greatest achievement in Canberra he replied:

_I think that it was that I was there. That an Aborigine was there ... it made quite an impact and a difference to the attitudes and thinking of people._

Brendon Nelson (Minister for Education Science and Training) states:

_Whilst some progress in the areas of access and participation has been made since the inception of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education policy, a significant level of disadvantage remains. How successful we are at addressing the education and training needs of this most disadvantaged group of Australians will be a true measure of the success of our education and training systems._

According to the timeline from ‘The National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education’ and Training: 2001, various reports, programs, strategies and committees have been introduced to address the continuing failure of education systems to cater for the needs of Aboriginal students. The Executive Summary of the National Report in 2001 has identified the ‘gap’ that continues to exist between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island student outcomes and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island student outcomes:

_Despite small improvements, serious gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes remain in literacy, numeracy, student attendance, retention into senior secondary education, Year 12 certificates, and some completion rates in VET and higher education._

Although programs have been funded to decrease the ‘gap’ between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island student outcomes, the ‘gap’ appears to be increasing!

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Across all sectors, the numbers and proportions of Aboriginal teachers and Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers (AIEW) were low, particularly compared with the overall representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students within each sector of education and training. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, such as teachers or AIEWs, are integral to creating an Aboriginal presence in education and training. IESEP funded providers are developing approaches to increase the Indigenous presence. An encouraging sign is the numbers of AEIWs studying for professional qualifications, which were discussed above.

The challenges to decrease the ‘gap’ seem so overwhelming that sometimes Aboriginal people have said, “Why bother bashing your head up against a brick wall? Are we really making a difference to the bureaucratic systems that are responsible for the provision of education and training to Aboriginal people?” If the sentiments made by Neville Bonner are considered, then Aboriginal people must participate in order to influence decision-makers to think differently and change attitudes to celebrate Australia’s Aboriginal Cultural heritage and its people. With thinking people on each side of the gap, pushing toward the middle, then surely the ‘gap’ will eventually disappear. Should this be an outcome then education systems can honestly claim that any student has been given equal opportunity to achieve their personal academic goals.

Over many years at National and State meetings documents have been handed out without explanation of the effects they will have at a personal and local community level. It is understandable that the high workloads of Aboriginal people employed in the education industry and trying to uphold the responsibilities of being elected to an AECG Management position is insurmountable. It is impracticable to expect a voluntary organisation to complete all the tasks expected of people holding these positions and to meet the expectations of the membership. Repeated calls have been made by the NSW AECG to provide an understandable community summary to policy documents, but alas people in positions of power, do not implement these requests. Perhaps the Department of Education and Training will provide the kind of resources necessary to implement the recommendations of yet another Review in Aboriginal Education, so that the
insurmountable gap can be narrowed in the very near future, and not wait another thirty plus years down the track for positive change to become evident.

**NSW AECG Inc./DET Partnership Agreement**

A partnership agreement between the NSW AECG Inc. and the Department of Education and Training was forged in 1999 after a lengthy consultative process. Discussions were held at State meetings, draft documentation was distributed and workshopped at Regional and Local AECG meetings across the state and feedback relayed to another State meeting. Final endorsement was supported at the Annual General Meeting of the NSW AECG. A renewed commitment was introduced to reinforce direction in Aboriginal education from 2010–2020. The partnership Agreement is a statement of intent of how the NSW AECG and the Department of Education and Training are planning on working together. An announcement made by the Minister of Education that a restructure of the Department of Education and Communities will be transitioned in 2013 has certainly raised concern about the working relationship between the two entities:

*The strength of the NSW AECG is its community base through its network of local and regional AECGs. This allows Aboriginal people to have a voice in self determining their educational future which will impact on the prosperity of Aboriginal communities.*

The following list is a composition of the elected members of the State AECG Inc. for the next twelve months, excluding the President who is elected for three years. The association Management Committee of nine is drawn from: Metropolitan (3), Country (4) and Rural regions (2). The duality of being employed by DEC in addition to being a volunteer AECG Representative has been raised in discussion at several local and regional education forums.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NSW AECG State Committee 2012</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice President</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
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Association Management Committee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Employment</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jenny Ronning</td>
<td>Central Coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bobbi Murray</td>
<td>Central Coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Anne Dennis</td>
<td>Western 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Leigh Ridgeway</td>
<td>Hunter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Eddie Pitt</td>
<td>Nth. West 1</td>
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Regional Representatives

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Employment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western 1</td>
<td>Alicia Lonsdale</td>
<td>DEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western 2</td>
<td>Maxine Mackay</td>
<td>Dept Human Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western 3</td>
<td>Maureen O’Donnel</td>
<td>Community Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West 1</td>
<td>Terry Hinch</td>
<td>Catholic Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West 2</td>
<td>Alena Stackman</td>
<td>DEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper North Coast</td>
<td>Cassie Ryan</td>
<td>DEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower North Coast</td>
<td>Linda Olive</td>
<td>DEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manning</td>
<td>Sue Syron</td>
<td>Community Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunter</td>
<td>Lyn Brown</td>
<td>DEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met East</td>
<td>Debra Dale</td>
<td>DEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met North</td>
<td>Louis Birk</td>
<td>DEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met West</td>
<td>Kimberley Mathews</td>
<td>DEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met South West</td>
<td>Lyn Martin</td>
<td>Community Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper South Coast</td>
<td>Christian Lotter</td>
<td>University Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower South Coast</td>
<td>Iris White</td>
<td>Community Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverina 1</td>
<td>Deseleen Morgan</td>
<td>DEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverina 2</td>
<td>Ray Woods</td>
<td>NSW AECG (PACE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverina 3</td>
<td>Ron Jackson</td>
<td>DEC</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Of the 28 positions established at the State level there are 15 positions filled by representatives who are employed by the NSW Department of Education and Communities, 2 representatives who are employed by the NSW AECG and 11 positions are represented by other facets of Aboriginal communities external to NSW AECG employment. The question must be asked if this representation is reflective of Aboriginal communities across NSW or due to the number of departmental employees, is the representation reflective of workplace viewpoints. While the Minister for Education (2011) acknowledges a strong partnership between the NSW AECG and the Department of Education and Training, the 2012 composition of the State AECG Committee is placed in a controversial position.

**Conclusion**

There are two questions that need to be considered:

1) Are Aboriginal community viewpoints at the forefront of discussions? and:

2) Are employment links influential in creating the following issues for Aboriginal members who are employed in DEC?

Aboriginal staff employed in the public education system are often challenged by parents and community members as always “sticking up for schools” when dealing with issues related to unacceptable student behaviour. Often Aboriginal people are requested to become involved in matters that fall outside their employment role statements, as a method of resolving issues in a culturally appropriate way. The staff member is then placed in a tenuous position because they feel as though they are required to support their employer and show loyalty to their community when needing to reach an outcome to deal with the student. Should the staff member hold membership on the Local AECG then often they become easy access for their employer in determining whether expected consultative processes are followed in accordance with the DEC/AECG Partnership Agreement.

The distinction between representation as an Aboriginal member of the community or an Aboriginal person employed in an education sector becomes blurred when people are expected to speak on behalf of others in the workplace. Often Government Departments
set rigid timeframes regarding Aboriginal Education. The NSW AECGs three tiered structure requires that extensive consultation should take place when new policies and programs affect Aboriginal people. This process takes time which creates delays with Departmental planning. Community decisions can be hastened by having discussions with easily accessible Aboriginal employees within education systems. Surely subconscious pressure is applied to those people in order to make decisions and complete tasks to meet planned deadlines, when this method of consultation is used.

- Is there a conflict between workplace and community perspectives?
- Does the integration of Aboriginal practices in mainstream policies and programs compromise Aboriginal Culture?

Solutions to these questions can only be answered by the individuals themselves through continually challenging their own decision-making processes. It is only when State Committee members carry out intensive consultation with the Local AECG membership, that the integrity of the NSW AECG Inc. organisation’s aims can be realised:

One of the things we’ve been working with the AECG is about how do we actually work with Aboriginal communities in a collaborative way to make sure that we’re delivering the right programs and the right approaches. Because without the actual input of the Aboriginal community about what works for them in their community with their kids, we can never get it right. So, a number of the things we’ve been working on with the AECG are actually about cementing that close working relationship between the AECG and the Department.

Minister Verity Firth

The vision of the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. is to provide advice on all matters relevant to education and training with the mandate that this advice represents the Aboriginal community viewpoint. The notion of speaking on behalf of Aboriginal people and participation in the decision making process is not a new phenomenon in a cultural context. In traditional Aboriginal settings a council of initiated Elders would discuss issues that affected the entire group. This practice is carried over

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261 Parbury, 2004: 139
262 NSW AECG Inc. Rules of the Association, 2009: 4
into contemporary Aboriginal society on a broader community scale. On reflection, the NSW AECG aims illustrate the way a collective community perspective can be linked to footprints of the past when laying pathways into the future:

To ensure that the functions and powers of members are facilitated with the premise that the most critically important part of the consultative process is the active involvement of Local AECG and communities.

To provide opportunities for Aboriginal people to be actively involved in all decision-making that is relevant to education and training through a collaborative process.

To empower members by providing appropriate and effective knowledge and skills to engage in the development of policies and programs that enhances the unique cultural identity of Aboriginal students and promotes pride in Aboriginality.\[263\]

I would like to close this section by paying respect and dedicating this chapter to those people who were among those listed as the original members of the first State Committee and have passed away up till this date. The following people have taken their rightful place on the beach of Aboriginal Affairs. 1981 Regional Representatives:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western Region</td>
<td>Jim Stanley</td>
<td>Wellington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Region</td>
<td>Evelyn Crawford</td>
<td>Brewarrina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverina</td>
<td>Olive Mitchell</td>
<td>Dareton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Coast</td>
<td>Ann Thomas</td>
<td>Wallaga Lake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Metropolitan</td>
<td>Joyce Woodberry</td>
<td>Little Bay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thank You

\[263\] NSW AECG Inc. Rules of the Association, 2009: 4
Section Two: State Committee Survey Data Analysis

A question structured to identify priority areas at State and Regional levels did reveal the degree of consistency of advice between the State AECG Committee and regions. As Regional Representatives comprised the majority of the committee, their voice reflected their Region’s viewpoint. Judgements made regarding participant responses to completed surveys have been placed in three categories: Community Participation, School Relationships and Local Initiatives. Survey responses to the questions were not placed in priority order. A numerical compilation of category responses identified the priority. Of the possible twenty eight participants, ten surveys were completed.

Seven questions included in the survey ask for self-assessment of an individual’s value through their participation at the State AECG level and the relationship between Aboriginal community and education providers. These questions investigated the level of interaction across the formal education sector as Regional AECG Representatives. The research interest was whether Regional Representatives could take forward a broad level of advice for discussion and decision making at the State level, based on their experiences and knowledge in Aboriginal education. Summaries to each question are presented in section two. Verbatim responses and completed questions are included in this section of the chapter so that respondents can refer to and reflect on originality of voice interpretation.

Question 1: Most significant Aboriginal Education issue?

Summary: Responses clearly indicate that the communication flow between schools, parents, Aboriginal employees and the AECG network is an on-going concern. Eight people raised this issue illustrated by the following comments:

“Delivering information, especially to parents and carers.” and “No consultation with State AECG”.  

Any communication gap in the model of consultation will impinge on the advocacy aspirations of the NSW AECGs Vision Statement contained in the Rules of the Association. This causes a barrier for the delivery of knowledge to parents, who are
expected to become more involved in the education process through increased decision making.

**Question 2:** List the five most important issues.

**Summary:** In order to interpret results, the total responses were divided into three categories: Community Issues, School Issues and Communication Issues. Tabulation of the number of responses allocated to these categories showed repetition of 28 School Issues, 10 Community Issues and 7 Communication Issues. Interpretation of these results could be skewed toward School Issues because of the number of Department of Education and Training employees who were Regional Representatives on the NSW AECG in 2009. Most topics identified by representatives were directly related to schooling which included attendance, suspensions, truancy, and the perceived lack of Aboriginal Cultural Awareness in schools and the implementation of the Aboriginal Education policy. Of the possible 50 responses 5 ‘no comments’ were entered.

**Question 3:** Interaction with Early Childhood Education, Schooling (PS or HS), TAFE, Higher Education, Commonwealth Education Programs or Others.

**Early Childhood Summary:** The majority of respondents have direct contact with Pre-schools located in their local communities. There is no identification of whether the early childhood centres are Aboriginal specific or mainstream services. Two of the centres are attached to schools and interact with respondents through transition to school programs. One of the respondents commented that:

> The current Board of Management feel they do not need to be working with the Regional Representative.\(^{265}\)

Two of the respondents interact with the Early Childhood sector as representatives of the NSW AECG or through discussion at a State policy making level. While representatives acknowledged the benefit of Early Childhood education, it appeared that the relationship relies on the establishment of centres in the local community wherever representatives reside. The current program ‘Schools as Community Centres’ is applauded as a highly successful initiative, as reported in the 2004 review of Aboriginal Education in NSW and is reinforced by the following extract:

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\(^{265}\) State AECG Committee survey data comment: 2009

People Places and Pathways in NSW Aboriginal Education
A facilitator, located at each site, works with local communities, families and service providers in developing and implementing initiatives for a clearly identified target group of families with children 0-8 years, with a particular focus on the years prior to school entry.266

Cross fertilisation of communication between Aboriginal families and Early Childhood education providers is recognised as vital. Employees need to take the opportunity to interact with the AECG in order to broaden the learning opportunities available to early learners.

Schooling PS and HS Summary: This question asked for self-assessment regarding an individual representative’s personal perception of their influence on education provision. Respondents were asked to explain why they submitted their individual responses, in an attempt to measure if people think their membership on the AECG is producing positive outcomes. Eight members implied that their interaction with High Schools and Primary Schools is employment related connected to their individual local schools. One respondent appeared to have a broader focus across the Region which encompasses a range of activities in Aboriginal education and communities. This concept is reinforced by the following survey respondent quote:

\[\text{Work closely with Principals to strengthen Partnership on the need to have Aboriginal staff attend monthly meetings. Support, build and mentor members to take on different roles at functions and activities. Work with Principals the Elders and kinship structure and involve key stakeholders in school activities.}^{267}\]

Generally the focus for school interaction appeared to be work related as opposed to AECG directed. Advice is therefore interpreted as a response from a community perspective by the provider.

TAFE Summary: Three representatives did not interact with TAFE. Two representatives are engaged in negotiating Partnership agreements between TAFE and the Regional AECGs. Promotion of course availability to senior school students and Aboriginal people generally appeared to be where the majority of interaction occurred. One person utilises TAFE to deliver Aboriginal Cultural Awareness training to teachers in schools. Advocacy on behalf of Aboriginal people is another role played by one

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267 State AECG Committee survey data comment: 2009
person through membership on the TAFE Institute Advisory Committee. At the time of this survey being completed, there does not appear to be a consistent role for State Committee members to undertake as representatives in their Regions on behalf of the membership.

**Higher Education Summary:** Three respondents did not have any interaction with higher education. This could indicate that there are no Universities established in their specific AECG Regions. The majority of contact takes place through the workplace when presenting career pathways and opportunities for current school students. Two respondents interacted in their capacity as AECG representatives on University Advisory Committees. While there seemed to be a variety of contact with schools, outside that system contact decreased and is dependent on the interests of the individual members.

**Commonwealth Education Program Summary:** Four respondents did not interact at all with any Commonwealth Education programs. This could be an indication that AECG Regional Representatives were not fully aware of the funding arrangements for the employment of Aboriginal Education Workers in the education systems. Some Aboriginal specific programs are usually funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), by allocating State grants to education providers. This department provides a percentage of funds for the operations of the NSW AECG inclusive of accommodation and travel costs for meeting attendance by members. The majority of Representatives appeared to be unclear in relation to the role of DEEWR in Aboriginal Education services.

**Other Summary:** Eight of the ten State members chose to make no comment to this section of the question. One person identified that they had a relationship with other agencies outside education service providers. Another person noted that parent/carer consultation is a matter of cultural protocol when dealing with Aboriginal Education in communities. It is obvious by the lack of identification that this group of people did not see a major role for the delivery of education administered by the religious sector within their Regions, as education providers. At the adult end of the scale, Community Colleges were not acknowledged as a provider offering courses to Aboriginal people.
Interaction with education providers beyond the public school system needs to be encouraged by the NSW AECG Management Committee.

**Recommendation:**
If Regional Representatives are to advocate on behalf of their local and regional communities, then they must increase their knowledge of opportunities available to Aboriginal people across the education spectrum.

**Question 4:** Influence on Aboriginal Education provision?

This question requested members to self-evaluate the influence they have had on making positive change to Aboriginal Education. Eight members answered yes and two members answered no. The majority of Representatives felt as though they had been influential in the schooling area. For example justification to yes responses were:

- *Established an excellent working relationship with the Senior Education Director (SED).*
- *Clarified my role as Regional Representative and information required, particularly for Regional AECG reporting purposes.*

Most of the influence were assessed as being valuable, when participation on school committees occurred. By implication, the AECG is involved in the decision making process. Both of the no responses are worth consideration:

- *Unable to respond due to the short amount of time I have held this position. A slow process.*
- *I feel I have to work twice as hard to ensure parents are aware of AECG.*

Regional Representatives are elected for a three year term and have usually been involved at a Local level for some time. It is obvious the timeframe to influence change is measured from different individual philosophical positions.

**Question 5:** List three priority areas for State, Regional, and Local AECGs.

This question was designed to reveal if State Committee members are consistent in their efforts across the three levels of membership. In order to interpret results, the total responses were divided into four categories: Community Participation, School Relationships, Local Initiatives and No Comment.
Local

Community Participation 13
School Relationships 10
Local Initiatives 4
No Comment 3

Regional

Community Participation 12
School Relationships 9
Local Initiatives 7
No Comment 2

State

Community Participation 12
School Relationships 3
Local Initiatives 2
No Comment 13

Totals

Community Participation 47
School Relationships 22
Local Initiatives 13
No Comment 18

Summary: Community Participation was ranked as the highest priority at all three levels of operation, School Relationships and Local Initiatives follow in sequential order. An interesting result was the high number of responses in the “no comment” category, particularly at a State level. There is an expectation that State Committee members are elected to voice the opinion of Local members at Regional and State AECG meetings. The intention of the NSW DET/NSW AECG Partnership Agreement cannot be fulfilled, if elected representatives do not actively participate when opportunities are provided to voice the opinion of Aboriginal communities. This concept is supported by the following statement contained in the DET/NSW AECG partnership Agreement:

*The strength of the NSW AECG is its community base through its network of local and regional AECGs. This allows Aboriginal people to have a voice in self*
determining their educational future which will impact on the prosperity of Aboriginal communities.\footnote{NSW AECG/DET Partnership Agreement: 2010-2020}

**Question 6: Education Provider and AECG Interaction.**

The NSW AECG is an organisation established to offer advice to education providers from early years of learning to adult education, inclusive of the concept of life-long learning. Question 6 asked participants to respond to a scale from 1-10 as an indication of their individual interaction across the education spectrum. To determine the level of involvement by State Committee members this question looked at formal education providers. State committee members were invited to make their own judgement on the level of influence they had on making positive change in Aboriginal Education, by operating at a State AECG level. The following grid presents individual responses to Question 6 of the survey. A secondary question is positioned immediately following the scaled question to uncover any connection between individual responses and employment.

**Table 1: State Committee/Education Provider Interaction**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Early Childhood</th>
<th>PS</th>
<th>HS</th>
<th>TAFE</th>
<th>Higher Education</th>
<th>Catholic Education</th>
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Are you employed by an education provider?

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<tr>
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<td>b) &amp; Y</td>
<td>c) &amp; N</td>
<td>d) &amp; Y</td>
<td>e) &amp; N</td>
<td>f) &amp; Y</td>
<td>g) &amp; Y</td>
<td>h) &amp; N</td>
<td>i) &amp; Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary:** After collating individual tabulations of influential self assessment scores, the public schooling areas were ranked the highest. There was a two point difference between Primary and High school involvement. There was a one point difference between Early Childhood and Higher Education involvement. The TAFE and DEEWR sectors were ranked at the same level of involvement. Verbatim data is included in this section of this chapter. Although there are more TAFE colleges established in NSW than Universities, it was surprising that there was a much greater interaction with the Higher Education sector than TAFE services.

Of the possible seventy points an individual could score as their level of involvement, only three respondents totalled above 50% across the formal education spectrum. The remainder fell well below the thirty five point lower level. One respondent scored nil influence. An explanation of why the schooling level scored the highest may be due to the number of respondents employed by a DET education provider. An assumption can be made based on the level of interaction results with the schooling system coupled with employment results to the question following the grid. While there is no identification of where individuals were employed (for reasons of confidentiality) it seems logical that the majority of members who responded to this survey were employed in the public education system. Of the ten respondents, seven were employed by an education provider.

**Question 7:** Impact on Education Provision?

**Summary:** Not all the respondents were confident in measuring the impact they have had through their involvement at a State level. Two respondents made no comment to
this question. It is worthwhile to include comments from two people who articulated their viewpoints very clearly:

I would like to think I have had an impact. It is a slow process, but parental involvement is very poor. It is usually left to the people that actually work in schools to carry out the responsibilities and roles of the AECG.

I think so. ‘Knowledge is Power’. The more knowledge I have in relation to the direction of the AECG and how I can bring that information back to Regional and Local meetings, is invaluable. I also believe that the respect and acknowledgement that the AECG has and their influence, impact on the decisions and changes that can and will be made.\(^{271}\)

Respondent one was conscious that parents can be empowered to influence changes if they are prepared to get involved in the AECG. This respondent was also aware of the responsibility of Aboriginal employees in the schooling system and the pressure placed on them when they have dual roles in the community. Making change takes time and was related to longevity of effort as expressed by this Representative. Respondent two acknowledges the power of knowledge through information. This respondent was aware that distribution of information will create a groundswell of empowerment in Aboriginal communities through active participation in the AECG network and can influence decision making leading to change. Collective consultation in future planning will give direction to Aboriginal education through this community organisation.

**Discussion:** Aboriginal people employed in the schooling system are expected to speak on behalf of parents. This may be due to parents having faith in those employees to have more experiences and better knowledge of policies and procedures in the public education system than themselves. Communication breakdowns occurring between and among Aboriginal people involved in service provision is a continual cause for concern. The consultation model used by the NSW AECG relies on a two-way communication process. When a gap is created between Local AECGs and the State Committee, then the information flow regarding the implementation of policy and programs is compromised.

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\(^{271}\) State AECG Committee survey data comments: 2009
Specific areas of interaction by Regional AECG Representatives appear to be focused on the demographic environment of communities. If educational institutions are not located in the immediate geographic area to the Regional Representative’s “home base”, there appears to be minimal interaction at the Higher Education level of service. A similar sentiment exists outside public education systems.

Community Participation is the priority area identified for attention at the Local, Regional and State AECG levels. This seems to be a contradiction, due to the low number of completed surveys returned and the high number of “no comment” responses recorded. This committee is established to carry the voices and viewpoints of the local membership to a decision making forum. Individuals need to actively participate at every opportunity presented to them, if there is an expectation to influence changes in Aboriginal Education.

The notion of speaking on behalf of Aboriginal people and participation in the decision making process is not a new phenomenon in a cultural context. In traditional Aboriginal settings a council of initiated Elders would discuss issues that affected the entire group. This practice is carried over into contemporary Aboriginal society, on a broader community scale. Reflective comments included in the survey completions illustrate how a collective community perspective can be linked to footprints of the past and lay pathways into the future.
Section 3: State Committee Verbatim Responses

1 What is the most significant Aboriginal Education issue you have dealt with as a Regional Representative?
   Consultation processes
   a) Communication, colour of your skin, some community members won’t give you a go
   b) Raising the awareness of the AECG within Aboriginal communities and education providers
   c) No consultation with AECG, merit selection process, curriculum across all KLA’s
   d) Accessing information, disabilities, school Counsellor and unwillingness to assess
   e) Policies/susensions, attendance, participation of all stakeholders
   f) No consultation
   g) Workshopping the basic outline of the Aboriginal Education Policy DVD
   h) Delivering information, especially to parents and carers
   i) Attending the 1st State meeting

2 List the five most repetitive issues in Aboriginal Education in your Region or Local Community?
   a) Consultation
      School based issues
      Community involvement
      No comment
      No comment
   b) Attendance
      Suspensions
      Parent involvement
      Truancy
      Partnerships
   c) Cultural Awareness for non-Aboriginal staff
      Junior AECG
      Building and strengthening partnerships
      Funding
      Employment (merit selection training for AECG members)
   d) ICT homework centres
      Aboriginal Education Policy
      Panel selection process
      No comment
      No comment
   e) Lack of information filtering down
      Exclusion
      Consultation re: Aboriginal staff in schools
Inappropriate people signing off on documents
Clarification of roles

f) Suspensions
   Attendance
   Parent involvement
   Lack of Cultural Awareness in schools
   Implementing Aboriginal Education Policy

g) Lack of funding
   Lack of consultation
   Lack of understanding of AECG involvement
   Community involvement
   No comment

h) Suspension rates
   No ASSPA
   Part-time Koori kids/students
   Lack of AEO participation
   Community involvement

i) Lack of sustainable funds
   Changing of teachers
   Attendance
   Updating information of school education
   Parents/carers participation in their children’s education

j) Attendance
   Suspension
   AEO’s
   Aboriginal Education Policy
   Welfare

3 How do you interact with?

   Early Childhood Education
   a) Through local pre-school
   b) Through local AECGs with pre-schools within their boundaries. Invite to their activities
   c) Encourage Early Childhood services to become involved with their local AECG, Directors and Aboriginal staff and their families
   d) Through our school – Early Childhood classes. Pre-kindergarten must be turning 4 by July same year
   e) Direct contact
   f) Pre-school to Kindergarten (transition program) supporting schools to identify children and families
   g) Visiting, consulting
h) The current Board of management feel they do not need to be working with the Regional Rep
i) On Management Committee and regular consultations
j) I represent AMC on State Early Childhood Committee

Schooling Education (identify PS or HS)
a) HS
b) HS panels and other meetings. PS meetings related to Aboriginal Education
c) Work closely with Principals to strengthen partnership focus on the need to have Aboriginal staff attend monthly meetings. Support, build and mentor members to take on different roles at functions and activities. Work with Principals the Elders and Kinship structure and involve key stakeholders in school activities
d) PS
e) Direct contact
f) I interact with schools both HS and PS through my role as the ACLO. The role of the ACLO is to support and promote the AECG at a State/Local/Regional level, by interacting with schools and community
g) PS and HS implementing programs, selection panels, introducing Culture, assisting students-community-teachers
h) Through attendance at AECG meetings and merit selection panels
i) Work in HS. Visit feeder PS regularly (twice a week) or some on request
j) I do not as AMC

TAFE
a) No comment
b) Not a partnership, but we are working on one
c) Encourage attendance at AECG meetings, utilise TAFE to deliver Cultural Awareness training
d) No comment
e) No contact. Worker does not return calls
f) Building partnerships with Aboriginal employees and relationships to exchange and communicate information in the community
g) Student programs
h) North Coast ALP committee member
i) Have every day contact with TAFE e.g. Elders program, Junior AECG. Vocational links e.g. TAFE – school program
j) Interviewed by TAFE staff for AECG training module

Higher Education
a) Yr 10
b) UWS Advisory Committee
c) Work closely with CSU and involved in consultations. Have supported and endorsed a number of projects between community and CSU

d) No comment

e) Direct contact

f) As the ACLO attending meetings re: students furthering their education whilst also promoting the AECGs perspective

g) Inviting into 40 schools. Supporting students into tasting programs and supporting 1st year students. Consulting

h) Not applicable

i) Teacher training ACU and CSU. Promoting tertiary pathways

j) No

Commonwealth Education Programs

a) No comment

b) Have not had a chance in this area

c) Involved in a range of programs from Early Childhood to yr 12

d) No comment

e) Direct contact

f) Sit on panels e.g. RAEAC to consult and distribute SRA funding

g) DEEWR

h) Not Applicable

i) Funding, employment, sustainability of initiatives

j) Discussions at AMC meetings

Other (please name)

a) No comment

b) No comment

c) No comment

d) No comment

e) No comment

f) No comment

g) Outside agencies

h) No comment

i) Parent/carers consultation (imperative) protocol

j) No comment

4 As a member of the State Committee, do you think you have influenced Aboriginal Education provision? Yes or No (circle). Please justify your response.

a) No. Unable to respond due to the short amount of time I have held this position

b) Yes. When I am asked to sit on committees within different schools within our area
c) Yes. Enable involvement in a range of school & educational committees. Able to raise awareness of the organisation and educate non-Aboriginal education providers of the importance of involving the AECG

d) No. A slow process. I feel I have to work twice as hard to ensure parents are aware of AECG

e) Yes. Established an excellent working relationship with the SED-clarified my role as Rep & information required-particularly for reporting purposes

f) Yes. By promoting the AECG and consulting with local communities, it has enabled me to have an influence in the decision making process that is fair and equitable

g) Yes. By supporting-seeking advice on the community’s behalf. Implementing programs and preparing to attend programs provided

h) Yes. By selecting the appropriate people for positions within local schools. By offering advice to Principals and Deputies

i) Yes. I am Aboriginal and have experienced the system in the late 1950s

j) Yes. Through dialogue-influencing decision making, contributing knowledge in area of AEO’s and community skills

State Committee Priority Areas

5 List three (3) priority areas that need addressing at State, Regional and Local AECGs.

**Local**

a. Consultation
   - No comment
   - No comment

b. Merit selection
   - Boundaries
   - Partnerships

c. Supporting Locals
   - Supporting Junior AECGs
   - Strengthening partnerships

d. Funding priority
   - Cultural understanding
   - Parental involvement

e. Aboriginal staff to attend meetings
   - Aboriginal staff to report to AECG re: their schools
   - Working with Christian schools to become involved

f. More participation by community, DET and Catholic Education
   - AECG being more active and visual in communities
   - Defining roles and responsibilities

g. Consultation
DET be more aware of the AECVG
How to involve community
h. Encourage more participation
   More involvement with schools
   Governance training
i. Communication links
   Professionalism
   Genuine reason for being a part of the AECG
j. Funding for organisation
   Training
   No comment

Regional
a. Consultation
   No comment
   No comment
b. Communication with members
   Regional Committee
   Consistency in process
c. Setting up and supporting Local AECGs
   Ensuring AECG representation on other education committees
   Sharing ideas for strengthening partnerships
d. Funding priority
   Consultation with Regional Director
   Other Government agencies
e. Workshopping roles of Aboriginal staff
   Cultural Awareness
   Regular meetings (currently working on it)
f. Need a Regional Strategic Plan
   Support from State
   Information transfer from Local/Region
g. Consultation
   DET be more aware of the AECG
   How to involve community
h. Higher rate of participation
   More involvement with schools
   AECG policy
i. Communication links
   Professionalism
   Genuine reason for being part of the AECG
j. Leadership
Communication
Strategic thinking

State
a. Unable to answer as this the 1st State meeting
   No comment
   No comment
b. More communication if asked
   No comment
   No comment
c. Support for Locals
   Support for juniors
   No comment
d. Funding priority
   Refine roles of AMC, Regional Representatives etc.
   Informing Locals
   No comment
   No comment
   No comment
e. ?? need to think about it
   No comment
   No comment
f. No comment
   No comment
   No comment
g. Consultation
   DET be more aware of the AECG
   How to involve community
h. Higher rate of participation
   More involvement with schools
   AECG Policy
i. Communication Links
   Professionalism
   Genuine reason for being a part of the AECG
   No comment
   No comment
j. Skills development of members
   Knowledge of the role and duties of Committee members
   No comment
On a scale of 1 to 10 (1=low & 10 =high) score the level of influence you have had toward positive change in Aboriginal Education, by your involvement at a State AECG level with education providers.

**Table 2: State Committee/Education Provider Interaction**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Early Childhood</th>
<th>Primary School</th>
<th>High School</th>
<th>TAFE</th>
<th>Higher Education</th>
<th>Catholic Education</th>
<th>DEEWR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>b)</td>
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<td>57</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Are you employed by an education provider? Yes or No (circle)

a = Y, b = Y, c = N, d = Y, e = N, f = Y, g = Y, h = N, i = Y, j = Y. 7 = Y, 3 = N

Do you think as an AECG Regional Representative you have had an impact on education provision?

a) I believe I will make an impact on educational provisions as I grow in this role of Regional Rep. Having training skills and more knowledge about the Association will give the empowerment to increase these educational provisions

b) No comment

c) No comment

d) I would like to think I have had an impact. It is a slow process but parental involvement is very poor. It is usually left to the people that actually work in schools to carry out the responsibilities and roles of the AECG

e) Getting stronger, watch me roar. Challenging principals/deputies re: any real issues raised by community or Aboriginal staff. Great participation on panels I ensure my voice is heard

f) I think so. “Knowledge is power”. The more knowledge I have in relation to the direction of the AECG and how I can bring that information back to a Regional and Local meeting, is invaluable. I also believe that the respect and acknowledgement that
the AECG has and their influence, impact on the decisions and changes that can and will be made
g) Yes – always the first point of contact when needing advice and preparation of students
h) A little bit
i) Most have
j) Yes, I believe the DET is listening

Any other comments?

- Thank you. Good luck and best wishes.
- In my area it’s really hard to do your job when I believe I give my role as Regional Rep 100% and always have, but other Regional members shoot you down. I always give a report from each meeting and resources when possible. It’s hard when your Regional meetings are cancelled.
- Accountability is everybody’s business, parents, schools, AECGs, community, students and other agencies. We all must be accountable for Aboriginal Education for all.
- Go girl!!
- There are DET leaders who are not as supportive as they should be which is becoming a worry.
- Stay professional and whole community oriented.
- No influence on Catholic Ed TAFE or DEEWR. These providers do not have dialogue with us in their decision-making.
Chapter 6: Mil-pra Aboriginal Education Consultative Group

Introduction

The previous chapter described the operations of the NSW AECG at a State level. Information collected from members of the State Committee can be compared to Regional survey results to see if priorities are consistent between the state and regional levels. Survey responses were collected from a group of State Committee members in attendance at a State meeting held in 2009. Responses have been analysed and included in section two of the chapter in order to illustrate experiential learning through participation in the NSW AECG network.

This chapter will be presented in three sections. Section one provides a brief historical overview of changes that led to the establishment of the Mil-pra AECG. Highlights of three initiatives introduced by this Region will be discussed as examples of positive Aboriginal community programs. Section two presents an analysis of survey results completed by Local AECG members as a sample within a city Metropolitan Region. Section three provides verbatim responses from Local AECG surveys.

History

In 1981 The NSW AECG became formalised into regions, which combined the current Metropolitan Western Region and Metropolitan South West as one Region (see Chapter 5). Prior to this time members from Liverpool and surrounding suburbs, travelled to Mt. Druitt to attend meetings:

Margaret Campbell remembers being the first AECG Regional Representative having to cover a geographic area from Richmond to Campbelltown via the Blue Mountains. At the Mt. Druitt regional consultation, this region was divided into two Regions and Donnelo Williams was elected as Regional Representative for Metropolitan West. Liverpool/Campbelltown became a Region itself with Laurel Ralph (Aunty Laurel) as representative. 272

Toward the end of 1981 Liverpool AECG established their own Region and signed up members from Campbelltown across to Fairfield, South to Canterbury and West to Cecil Park. The structure was a little different to the other Regions in the State, where all members met as a Region and did not establish Local AECGs at the outset. Being

272 Parbury, 2010: 36
involved in Aboriginal Community activities can be the most rewarding and at the same time the most frustrating work around. The Liverpool Aboriginal Education Consultative Group participated in many ‘ice-breaking’ projects. This section highlights some of them. There were several initiatives started in the 1980s that Aboriginal people should be very proud of. Activities such as:

- The Liverpool AECG School Support Unit:
- The Metropolitan South West Aboriginal Student Awards:
- The Mil-pra Art Exhibition.

The stories shared in this section are told as examples of how Aboriginal people have used oral historical accounts to pass on knowledge. Recollections of lived experiences are provided to record an Aboriginal community perspective in education at a Regional AECG level. The researcher has invited Aboriginal people who were involved in the three activities previously identified to provide information based on their participatory memories.

I think as we start to discuss The Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) the memory is coming back. It was at the beginning of my career, if I keep going back a bit further it was my first exposure to the NSW AECG. It was at those local AECG meetings were I started to learn about teacher training. That exposure came through the Aboriginal Education Consultant who was based at Heckenberg Primary School where my children were going to school. Wendy Holland then started inviting me, as a parent, into the school and then to attend the local AECG meetings where I learnt a bit more about the local University and really that was the start of my educational career. It was really my first engagement in Aboriginal education. Well prior to this I was home with kids.

That was my first opportunity really. I saw myself then as being a community person. I remember the first meeting I went to and not even just the first: it might have been three or four meetings that I attended after that. I would sit in those meetings and would not even understand what people where talking about. But for some reason I was sort of encouraged to go along and it was just sitting in the meetings listening to other people. I remember by going to the local AECG I was sitting in a room of people that had been involved in Aboriginal Education and it was that encouragement of the members that were involved with the Liverpool AECG that really got me started. That encouragement
People Places and Pathways in NSW Aboriginal Education

then got me into that position at the School Support Unit and I think that’s what gave me the grounding in Aboriginal Education. So it was there where people in that room were discussing issues in Aboriginal Education even though I had children at school.

Margaret Simoes, Nowra Local AECG (previously Liverpool AECG)273

Liverpool AECG School Support Unit

The Liverpool Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) School Support Unit was established in 1983 after receiving a grant from the Commonwealth Employment Program. This funding was available to organisations to provide job opportunities for unemployed people. A submission was put forward by the Executive Committee of Liverpool AECG, incorporating goals to encourage Aboriginal school students to attend classes on a regular basis and to support schools in their endeavours to implement the NSW Aboriginal Education Policy in the NSW Department of Education. Entwined in the funding criteria was the need for people to be unemployed and a training component to be delivered for staff relevant to workplace expectations. I (Laurel Williams) had just returned to Sydney from Karuah and was approached by, Lincoln Wood (President) Liverpool AECG, Nerida Blair (Co-ordinator Aboriginal Support Unit) Macarthur Institute of Higher Education and Ian Perdrisat (Aboriginal Teacher) Busby High School, to establish and Co-ordinate the Liverpool AECG Aboriginal School Support Unit. This meant that negotiations needed to take place with the Regional Director of the Department of School Education to acquire Departmental space to set up an office in order to house three full-time staff and ten visiting staff members.

Support from the Department of Education through the Liverpool Regional Director and school Principals procured physical space to house the field staff. After successful negotiations, the Liverpool AECG Support Unit was allocated accommodation in an unused classroom at Heckenberg Primary School. Furnishing the office and purchasing used cars from local business firms became the priority tasks so that the space was operational and field staff could carry out duties. The Aboriginal Home School Liaison Officers were located in specific schools for three days a week, and two days per week...

273 Nowra Local AECG Member Interview
in the office for the purpose of training. In total eleven Liaison Officers were housed in high schools and primary schools across the Metropolitan South West Region. On request these officers provided a service to other schools outside their home base.

As a strategy to increase future employment opportunities for Aboriginal people, five positions were established by the Liverpool AECG in consultation with the NSW Department of Education to sponsor Traineeships which would lead to the completion of Primary Teacher Degrees. The Liverpool AECG employed nine people funded under the Commonwealth Employment Program grant and five members were employed in negotiated traineeships with the Department of Education. A formal interview process was used to seek out potential candidates for the positions. Being an unemployed Aboriginal person and having knowledge of the Metropolitan demography were essential components for filling these positions. After careful consideration by the Liverpool AECG Executive Committee, it was decided to advertise in the local area and seek out local Aboriginal people to fill the positions. After implementation of the interview process, the following people were invited to become involved in an adventure that became the model used by the Department of Education for the NSW Aboriginal Home School Liaison Office Program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laurel Williams</td>
<td>Co-ordinator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Humes</td>
<td>Cultural Officer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara Saunders</td>
<td>Administration Officer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz Fredrickson</td>
<td>AHSLO</td>
<td>Greenacre Primary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brett Ralph</td>
<td>AHSLO</td>
<td>Guise Primary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frances Pinkerton</td>
<td>AHSLO</td>
<td>Lurnea High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken Delaney</td>
<td>AHSLO</td>
<td>Miller Resource Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron Riley</td>
<td>AHSLO</td>
<td>Briar Road Primary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Rix</td>
<td>AHSLO</td>
<td>St. Johns Park Primary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Ruttley</td>
<td>AHSLO</td>
<td>Sarah Redfern High School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Staffing Roles and Responsibilities

**Bill Humes:** was employed as a Cultural Officer and was often called on by schools to support teachers with the organisation of cultural activities. Assisting with the implementation of classroom curriculum relevant to Aboriginal Studies proved to be a valuable human resource for schools. Many occasions arose when Humes was requested to join school excursions that organised visitations to local Aboriginal sites.

**Barbara Saunders:** provided the majority of administrative support for all staff. Heckenberg School Support Unit became well known across the Region in a short period of time. Saunders’ position soon became a referral and co-ordination point for the services of field staff.

**Laurel Williams:** co-ordinated all training agendas for all field staff and monitored activities undertaken by all staff. Delivery of training activities related to workplace expectations was one of the duties of this position. Financial reporting to funding authorities and operational reporting to the Liverpool AECG Executive on a regular basis was a role carried out by the co-ordinator. Responsibility for the day-to-day supervision of staff and acquittal of wages for employees were some of the duties of this position.

The Cultural Officer, Administration Officer and the Co-ordinator were located at the Heckenberg office full-time. Field staff located in various Primary and High schools across the Region were employed to increase the attendance rate of Aboriginal students in the Liverpool Region. Their role was to interact with feeder schools and families to investigate strategies which would lead to regular attendance patterns for Aboriginal students. A secondary role was to support teachers with the implementation of the Aboriginal Education Policy.
Training

Aboriginal people were drawn from across NSW and enrolled in the Diploma of Welfare or the Diploma of Primary Teaching courses through the Aboriginal Rural Education Program (AREP). The course structure enabled students to continue full-time employment and study via a block release program. This was seen to be one of the most successful professional pre-service teaching courses in Australia during the 1980s and 1900s for Aboriginal people in NSW. Gloria Provest, Steve Ruttley, Neva Cullen, Jenny Khan (nee Smith) and Janice Wilson were enrolled in the AREP teacher education course in 1984, delivered by the University of Western Sydney: Macarthur.

The Co-ordinator was responsible for organising and often delivering training activities to all staff. Weekly staff training was delivered by the Liverpool TAFE Outreach Unit and consisted of activities relevant to the officers duties in the schools and the communities they serviced. An emphasis was placed on Communication and Negotiation models. An Aboriginal Perspective was introduced to the western paradigm to maintain a cultural context while learning. Often School Support Unit staff was called upon to participate in planning cultural excursions for students, and provide advice to teachers regarding Aboriginal Studies. It was an expectation for all field staff to always participate in Liverpool AECG events and Aboriginal Education forums organised by the Department of Education. These activities provided the Liaison Officers with Staff Development training that could be implemented immediately. After attendance at every conference, individuals were directed to provide a written report and present an oral seminar at the next training day. This strategy gave everyone an opportunity to practice report writing and public speaking. Because there was a great deal of travel associated with the Commonwealth Employment Program (CEP) positions, cars were purchased for each officer. Some individuals did not hold a drivers licence, therefore driver training became a priority. Everyone was successful under the tutelage of a local Aboriginal community member who had many years experience driving buses. Trainees were held accountable for vehicle use through log book records and using the government mileage system.

In addition to the AREP course Ruttley, Provest, Khan, Cullen and Wilson joined the
School Support Unit staff once a week to participate in the TAFE training course. This became an opportunity to share events and issues which occurred at their specific school locations and collectively discuss possible resolutions and positive strategies for implementation. These activities became a formal section of oral reporting practice for the whole group. The traineeship staff members were included in all Aboriginal Education forums offered in the Metropolitan South West Region and any activities within the Sydney Metropolitan area.

**Funding Arrangements**

After two years of CEP funding and intensive discussions with the NSW Department of Education to provide funding to continue the program, negotiations were stalled. While there is no formal published evidence on record showing statistics relevant to the success of the Liverpool AECG School Support Unit, oral accounts provided by Aboriginal Home School Liaison Officers cannot be discounted.

Informal verbal reports provided by Principals recorded how successful the location of Aboriginal Home School Liaison Officers in schools was. Statistical evidence kept by the School Support Unit showed improved attendance by Aboriginal students across the Region. As a focus for my research I have investigated the journeys, as far as possible, of Aboriginal people who were employed in the Liverpool AECG School Support Unit (1983-1985). Staff changes occurred over the two year operational period of the School Support Unit. I have always wondered what has happened to the original people who were employed by the Liverpool AECG.

*Laurel Williams*

I have been employed with the Commonwealth Department of Education and Youth Affairs, TAFE, Higher Education and Newcastle Museum since working at the School Support Unit. My career pathways in Aboriginal Education have taken me to various geographic places nationally and internationally. An outcome of this research project will be the submission of a PhD thesis addressing the topic ‘The Impact of Aboriginal Community on Education Provision in NSW’. The study comes from an insider perspective, which includes my involvement in the NSW AECG traversing thirty seven years. I am still actively involved in the Hunter Regional AECG as a Life Member and a
member of the Minimbah Local AECG.

*Bill Humes*

Bill and Glenda Humes moved to Canberra where Glenda undertook Law Studies. Bill was employed with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Studies (AIATSIS) in Canberra. The last I heard Bill and Glenda returned to his home State of Western Australia. Information has been provided that Bill has since passed away.

*Barbara Saunders*

I understand Barbara had moved to Melbourne, Victoria. I am not sure whether she is still involved in Aboriginal Education.

*Liz Fredrickson*

I met up with Liz when I was delivering the ‘Bridging Cultures’ Aboriginal Cultural Awareness package for the Department of Community Services at the Tharawal Land Council site in 1999. Liz was employed with the Department in the role of Aboriginal District Officer. I was told that Liz had passed away suddenly in 2004 as a result of a heart attack.

*Brett Ralph*

Brett left the School Support Unit and travelled to many different places while he was a professional fisherman. After several years, he returned to Liverpool and became involved in Aboriginal Education again. Brett stayed employed in Aboriginal Education for two years as the Aboriginal Education Assistant at Guise Primary School. He moved into Welfare services as an Aboriginal Youth Worker at the Campbelltown and Districts Aboriginal Corporation (CDAC) until the doors were closed through lack of on-going funding. His commitment to the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group was reignited and he became enthusiastically involved with the Mil-pra AECG. He was elected onto the Management Committee of the NSW AECG Inc. What I can say about Brett is that he has been to a lot of places, done a lot of things, knows a lot of people and is able to store a lot of knowledge about everything. He married Frances Pinkerton in June 1996.
Frances Pinkerton
Frances became Frances Ralph and continued to work in Aboriginal Education as a Regional Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer (RACLO) in Metropolitan South West Sydney. She also branched into the area of welfare services with Campbelltown and Districts Aboriginal Corporation (CDAC) as a Community Development Officer and more recently as a Youth Worker in a mainstream youth refuge located in Sydney. Frances has remained in this position for the past ten years. They are grandparents of Scott and Charlene’s son Tyson Lee Ralph, which keeps them occupied and gives them reason to dream for a more positive future.

Ken Delaney
I believe Ken found life after the Aboriginal Support Unit very challenging and difficult at times. Unfortunately he became entangled in one of the most debilitating social diseases of our time and eventually died as a result of a drug overdose at the age of 30-32 years.

Ron Riley
After the School Support Unit closed, I think Ron retired and has since passed away.

David Rix
I did hear that David moved back to the South Coast, either Moruya or Batemans Bay.

Steve Ruttley
Steve completed his Diploma of Teaching through the Aboriginal Rural Education Program (offered at UWS Macarthur) while he was employed as an Education Officer with the Commonwealth Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs, Aboriginal Education Section. He is still an Education Officer with the Department of Education Science and Technology and is located in Walgett in Western NSW. I saw Steve in 2005 (at Christine Williams’ funeral) in Mt Druitt. He mentioned that we had been through a lot together in Aboriginal Education. Steve was awarded Life Membership of the NSW AECG at the Annual General Conference in 2010.

Gloria Provest
Gloria completed her Teaching Degree through the Aboriginal Rural Education
Program while employed with the Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs in 1989. She remained involved in Aboriginal Education Services. She has worked with TAFE, the NSW Department of Education, the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Commonwealth Department of Education Science and Training (2006) in the NSW State Office. Gloria is now employed (2012) with the NSW Department of Education and Communities within the Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate.

_Neva Cullen_

Sources advise me that when funding for the School Support Unit ceased, Neva retired from the workforce.

_Jenny Smith_

Jenny married and changed her name to Khan. She commenced study in the Teaching Course through AREP then transferred to Welfare Studies. I believe Jenny became interested in teaching and was employed as a part-time teacher to deliver modules at the Eora Centre in Sydney (TAFE). I understand she was working at Werrington TAFE as a Teacher and is currently back teaching at the Eora Centre in Chippendale. Jenny has continued with her studies and has enrolled in a Post Graduate course through the University of Western Sydney.

_Janice Wilson_

The last time I spoke to Janice was at Carol Kendall’s funeral. She was engaged to be married and was working at the University Of Technology through ‘Jumbanna’.

_Aboriginal Community Link to Commonwealth Education_

The NSW office of the Commonwealth Department of Education and Youth Affairs was able to utilise the entitlements under ABSTUDY to facilitate the attendance of Aboriginal people at conferences addressing issues in Aboriginal Education. Justifying these opportunities became tiresome for non-Aboriginal commonwealth officers who supported the forward movement of social justice for Aboriginal people. Interpretation of National Policy at the Federal level was in conflict with cultural interpretations. For the purpose of this study, action is reported in reference to the NSW office of the Commonwealth Department of Education and Youth Affairs.
Pressure from the NSW AECG recognised the need for Aboriginal people to work with Aboriginal recipients of Federal programs. This was one of the reasons for a new employment strategy to be introduced. Often interpretation of national policy did not take into account the cultural difference of Aboriginal students. The only Education Officers (who identified as being Aboriginal) prior to 1984 in NSW, were John Heath and Lillian Eastwood. Commonwealth Education had employment criteria that insisted on Education Officers having teaching qualifications. There were Aboriginal people employed in administrative positions and as Aboriginal Liaison Officers. Some of these officers were Coral Dessaix, Annette Mashman, Bev Hagstrong and Tom French.

Employment with the Federal Department of Education seemed to be an opportunity for the capacity to understand how and why financial support programs like (ABSTUDY and ABSEG), impacted on Aboriginal people and their participation in the education processes. This was really a period of change in the administration and service provision to pre-schools, schools, TAFE Colleges and Universities. The NSW Office of the Commonwealth Department of Education and Youth Affairs was recruiting Aboriginal field staff to administer Aboriginal Education Programs. The majority of people were non-Aboriginal, who were generally popular with Aboriginal recipients of Aboriginal programs on offer. Some of the officers were Mary-Rose McGrath, Val Mallet, Ken Thompson, Jennie Buckman, Jim Mottee, Ray Keipert, Dick Hall and Terry Hickson. These people either moved into Senior Education Officer Positions or transferred into other sections within the Department to free up staffing vacancies for the provision of Aboriginal employment. The employment criterion was relaxed to take into account the lack of educational opportunity for Aboriginal people to gain teaching qualifications in large numbers.

At this time, University support programs were in place to increase the numbers of Aboriginal trained teachers across Australia. Block release programs became very successful due to the arrangement of being able to work in paid employment while studying. The Aboriginal Rural Aboriginal Education Program (AREP) was the first Welfare/Teaching program to be offered in NSW by the Macarthur Institute of Higher Education (now UWS Macarthur) under a block release structure. Aboriginal people were encouraged to enrol in this course because they did not need to relocate to Sydney to become a qualified Primary Teacher. There had been a consultative link with Macarthur Institute of Higher Education and Aboriginal Education through the Macarthur Advisory Committee. During the late 1970s and early 1980s the link became stronger through the introduction of AREP Primary Teacher Training Education. The
University campus is located at Bankstown, which is positioned within the Mil-pra AECG boundary.

ABSTUDY was utilised to cover travel and accommodation costs for those students who resided in country areas. Adult education training support was offered by the Commonwealth Education Department to new Education Officers Steve Ruttley, Coral Dessaix, Gloria Provest, Laurel Williams, Ricky Walford and Graeme Walker in 1984 under the Directorship of Liz Joyce. Rutley, Provest, Williams and Walford enrolled in the AREP Primary Teaching degree offered at the Macarthur Institute of Higher Education, while Dessaix and Walker enrolled in the Adult Education course offered at the University of Technology. Three of these Education Officers had been employed with the Mil-pra AECG School Support Unit.

Specific education programs for Aboriginal people have been abolished or changed in keeping with name changes of the Commonwealth Education Department. The highly successful financial support program for secondary and adult students ABSTUDY has become very difficult to access. Currently the Youth Allowance is administered by the Department of Human Services. There are no longer field officers who can provide advice about the availability of education courses. Aboriginal people need to go to a Centrelink office in an attempt to apply for educational support and clarify future career choices. Often times the officers are not sensitive to or knowledgeable about the difficulties faced by many Aboriginal people in these circumstances. While ABSTUDY was introduced to support the low socio-economic situation for many Aboriginal families, mainstreaming eligibility requirements has become an additional set of difficult hoops for Aboriginal people to encounter.

Summary
When comments are made about the high rates of unemployment in Aboriginal communities, I reflect on the success of people who were unemployed in 1983-85 and what they have achieved as a result of a community initiative. The Liverpool AECG can be proud of what they achieved in two short years. Not many people acknowledge or know that the Liverpool AECG School Support Unit was the model used by the NSW
Department of School Education to establish the NSW Home School Liaison Office program. There is no published research data to validate this story other than the oral memories of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who participated in the program directly and indirectly.
Metropolitan South West Aboriginal Student Awards

Margaret Simoes (previously Trindal) was among the first group of people to fill the newly established Regional Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer (RACLO) positions within the NSW Department of Education. In this position Simoes wanted to acknowledge the success of Aboriginal student achievements across the Region. The organisation of this activity was a classic example of how the Regional AECG and the Department of Education could work in partnership toward a positive educational outcome. In the past a focus had been placed on the stereotypical achievements of Aboriginal students in the area of sport when receiving awards in the school system. A change needed to be made so that Aboriginal students were recognised in other areas such as attendance, citizenship, academic achievement and the arts. To make this happen Simoes set about organising the Aboriginal Student Awards in the Metropolitan South West of Sydney.

After continual consultation through a ‘Student Awards Committee’ inclusive of AECG representation, and repeated efforts to encourage schools in the Region to nominate Aboriginal students enrolled in their schools, the first Awards Ceremony took place at the Francis Greenway Centre at Liverpool in 1990. Parents and families were invited to witness certificates being received by twenty five Aboriginal students. After the word got around the numbers doubled in the second year. Laurel Williams attended another Aboriginal Student Achievement Awards night held in Bankstown Town Hall some years ago, for Aboriginal students from Kindergarten to year 12 across the Metropolitan South Western Region of Sydney. This area takes in Fairfield, Guilford, Bonnyrigg, Cabramatta, Liverpool, Macquarie Fields, Ingleburn, Campbelltown and Airds. These areas are very densely populated with many different ethnic groups. They are also populated with high numbers of Aboriginal families. About one hundred and fifteen students were recognised for individual achievements in Literacy and Numeracy, Culture, Courage, Commitment, Sports, Key Learning Areas, Leadership and Citizenship.

Linda Burney MP was the keynote speaker on that particular occasion and gave a short speech about her own experience at High School. In her address, she stated how she
wanted to leave school in year 9 and remembered how the Principal yelled at her for fifteen minutes in his office. She went on to say how glad she was now because she was too frightened to leave after that. Burney took the University pathway and became a school teacher, then moved into the NSW Department of Education’s Aboriginal Education Section as an Education Officer, then the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group President, then the Director of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and is now a State member of Parliament for the Bankstown area and the Parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Education and Training (2011). Burney has moved a long way down the track from being reprimanded by that high school Principal. I was so proud to witness the Koori students receiving their awards and to know that their families and communities were there to celebrate their efforts.

Working with people inside and outside the AECG has enabled me to educate a variety of people about Aboriginal matters that are pertinent to Aboriginal student achievements. An example in this Region is the Annual Aboriginal Student Awards. Over twenty years the nominations have grown from thirty to five hundred in 2010.274

Mavis Robinson Life Member NSW AECG
The Mil-pra Art Exhibition started as an idea that Laurel Williams had put forward at a Mil-pra Region AECG meeting. The aim was to identify one activity to celebrate National Aboriginal Week. By concentrating on an event which linked National Aboriginal Week and this community, something would be developed that became identified as a Mil-pra AECG activity. After lengthy discussion the membership agreed to present one thing and make that successful. A committee was formed and then set about organising the art exhibition as directed by the meeting. The very first exhibition invited local Aboriginal people to submit artwork which reflected the United Nations International Theme for that particular year.

Negotiations with Liverpool Council lead to the exhibition being held at the Council’s museum located on the Hume Highway just south of the Liverpool business district area. The organising committee decided to present a bush tucker barbeque offering kangaroo, emu and porcupine as a contemporary method of presenting traditional food. The challenge arose of how to obtain the ingredients. Williams contacted a friend who lived in Goodooga NSW for assistance and advice. Mindy and Wayne Gibbs provided the meat and emu eggs from their landscape and placed them on ice. Brett Ralph and Williams drove to Dubbo on the Friday and returned with the frozen goods. A small group of people offered assistance and prepared emu egg omelettes, emu and kangaroo steaks and garden salads to be served as a light luncheon meal on Saturday, immediately following the official art exhibition opening.

Mark Latham was the Mayor of Liverpool in 1984 and officiated at the formal proceedings. The activity was well attended by local Aboriginal people in addition to busloads of tourist buses pulling in for their rest break at the Liverpool information centre located next door. After several exhibitions took place at the Museum, the location had changed to the Regional Art Centre, the refurbished Casula Powerhouse alongside the Georges River. Trish Leveret, the current President of Mil-pra AECG Region (2012) in addition to being a NSW AECG Life Member, discloses some of her reflections in relation to the exhibition:
The Aboriginal Art Exhibition started out before I arrived at Mil-pra AECG. I was not a foundation person involved in the formation of the Art Exhibition but I came along later on and found it to be a really brilliant way that any Aboriginal Artist could present their work. The fact is in those days that we found that a lot of Aboriginal Artists who were producing absolutely brilliant work but they were just giving it to their relatives. Mil-pra AECG members thought the way to show this group’s art was to put on an exhibition. We thought that originally it was only going to be a one day a year thing maybe. You know it was one thing that brought out pride and now we’ve found that every year a lot of Aboriginal artists are producing work just for the Mil-pra Art Exhibition and not showing their work in any other venue, because they do not have the opportunity to show it.

Trish Leveret NSW AECG Life Member

During a taped interview with Simoes, some of the experiences she remembered by being involved in the AECG network was shared:

The Mil-pra Art Exhibition is another example that has inspired many people. I really got a lot of encouragement from all of the Liverpool AECG activities and I believe I still carry it with me. Because of the inspiration that I got from the people around me then, it got me started and I carry that with me as well. I ran into a lady at one of the Australia Day Survival concerts and I did not remember this young woman. She was an artist up in the Liverpool area. She came up and tapped me on the shoulder and she said “do you remember me?” and I said “Oh no I do not”. She said, “you’re the one that got me started doing art in Bonnyrigg Public School”. She then said, “I’m an artist, a known artist now” and added “it was because you got me started”. You know that’s what I think I do a lot.

Margaret Simoes- Nowra AECG

A consultative decision making process continues when organising the Mil-pra AECG art exhibition each year. Some changes have been made to the overall practicalities of coordinating the exhibition, but the original concept continues:
Using the United Nations International Theme as a focus for the Mil-pra Art Exhibition competition criteria was continued to be used for many years. So a lot of Aboriginal artists, who enter the annual Mil-pra Art Exhibition reveal that this is the only place they show their work. It’s quite exciting for them and they look forward to produce an artwork which is seen by the public. Because the artists have the idea that they are painting for a purpose, we’ve got to get the theme out as soon as we possibly can.

We usually have a meeting and a brainstorm to consider themes. Family, children, survival, the Dreamtime, our elders and so we think of what’s a current idea. We brainstorm and come up with lots of different ideas or different wordings and we vote on which one we like the most. When we had the ‘International Year of the Potato’ and things like that we sort of went away from the United Nations theme for a while because the scenes were a bit dicky (dodgy) and it was very hard to put the Aboriginal perspective to it. We could not produce a painting based on that – that’s sort of why we went away from that idea but it does not mean we’re away forever. 277

Trish Leveret NSW AECG Life Member

Many Aboriginal people have been involved in sharing their talents with the Mil-pra Art Exhibition Committee over many years. There has always been a strong connection with UWS Macarthur and the Mil-pra AECG. One of the students worked with the committee to artistically express the international theme for 1994, which was ‘The Year of the Family’. Dean Beale designed and painted three wall hangers as a centre piece for the Mil-pra art exhibition. It is these kinds of talents that lead to successful outcomes when they are incorporated into Aboriginal community activities.

Let me share with you an extract from an assignment written by Beale a University of Western Sydney – Macarthur Bridging Course student in 1993 who designed the centre piece wall hanging:

‘Culture Change and Aboriginal Peoples’

To accurately appraise this change we must first go back to the first fleet and the changes that came with it.

“The year is 1797. An old Eora man is fashioning the shaft of a spear through a fire lit with matches:“

277 NSW AECG Life Member: Interview
using a discarded piece of pottery he smooths the surface, pausing for a moment, he eyes the engraving of a ship which eerily hovers overhead, and meditates. He meditates on the up and coming festivities. Tonight there’ll be song, and dance, and storytelling. Everyone will witness the coming of the strangers at the camp fires tonight.”

*Is the fire any less a fire because it was lit with matches?*

*Is the spear still a spear? Is it made any less effective?*

*Does the ‘corroboree’ lose its significance because the subject matter has changed somehow?*

*Are the singers, the dancers, the storytellers, the artists – living art, are not they all there?*

*Do all these things take away the old man’s Aboriginality?*

*Is he any less an Eora man?*

*The point I’m making here is that Aboriginal Art and Culture is very much alive today. Circumstances have changed, we have not!*

*The stories are still being told. We now use books to relate to our people and the world. We still sing and dance. Now we use drums, guitar and the microphone to accompany us and now our stomping ground is either a stage or it could be a football oval. We still perform!*

*Dreaming tracks are being done on canvas, on fabric and as murals. Aboriginal people have adapted their culture to social change but the spirituality of being Aboriginal is stronger because of such need for change.*

*Culture Change and Aboriginal Peoples Unpublished. (1993)*

Physical artistic imagery and Aboriginal cultural expression is closely linked to individual perceptions and interpretation. Relationships between Aboriginal Education service providers and Aboriginal communities are vital. We have witnessed Aboriginal Cultural interpretation through dance performance and narrative expression on many occasions. We need to reflect on the diverse stimulus that is presented to us as we operate within our professions and communities. Care must be taken that we embrace cultural expressions that are relevant to our own personal experiences. It is impossible to borrow culture from someone else’s experiences and be personally passionate about...
identity. As educators each person can influence identification of Aboriginality in different ways:

- through school activities
- through classroom curriculum
- through TAFE courses
- through pre-schools
- through higher education learning and especially
- through the home environment.

It is important for people to think about how images and expressions of culture can affect Aboriginality. Aboriginal communities are a diverse group of people who express their identity in various ways. An image does not have to fit into a stereotyped package, designed for a “one size fits all blackfella”. As Aboriginal people aspects of culture need to be maintained that are less popular in today’s society. Some essential cultural aspects are family, values and beliefs and respect

- **Family**
  The need to know who your family members are and how you fit into the kinship network is becoming essential in terms of Aboriginality. Identifying as an Aboriginal person is more difficult today because of the changes in cultural practices and genetic changes due to mixed relationships.

- **Values and beliefs**
  Continuation of values and beliefs taught to us by our old people, teach us about our own existence. Passing on stories throughout generations can often become distorted, but the cultural essence of beliefs related to land and community locations are strong because of the repetition of storytelling. Interpretations of values are often mistaken for cultural conflict. It is only because people have differing individual viewpoints related to cultural values that cause misunderstanding.

- **Respect**
  This aspect can apply to many topics. The first aspect must always be self-respect. Without this, individuals will find it difficult to show respect for other people, property and the environment. Individuals need to continually assess personal practices based on the teachings of values and beliefs in a cultural context. Cultural change is influenced
by social circumstance and the environment in which we interact. Expression of Aboriginality changes in accordance with various influences.

The following comments recorded in the 2012 NSW AECG Annual Report will conclude section one of Chapter 6: Mil-pra Aboriginal Education Consultative Group.

Region 13 Met South West: Our Region has participated in a number of events over the year. These include Merit Selection Panels and training for this was provided to members. We were also part of consultation meetings to support schools on ‘Schools in Partnership’, ‘Focus Schools’ and ‘National Partnership’ programs.

We have also been involved in interagency meetings and attend and participate in the regional planning group and work collaboratively with Liverpool City Council and the Department of Education and Communities to run the Mil-pra Art Exhibition and plan with the Department of Education and Communities for the Aboriginal Student Awards.

At the Regional Aboriginal Education Conference we provided information on the AECG and have supported teachers in adding Aboriginal perspectives to teaching units and assist students currently doing Aboriginal Studies by correspondence.279
Section 2: Mil-pra Local Sample Data Analysis

Introduction

This section includes survey responses from a sample of Local AECG members and reports a demographic profile inclusive of diversity and experience. Narrative summaries to each question are presented as a storytelling strategy reflective of Aboriginal cultural practice. Verbatim responses complete the section in order to uphold the trust members have placed in the researcher to report their voice as a true record of shared knowledge. This strategy did show a connectedness to interpretation of data and reported results. The responses can be accessed easily and scrutinised to match the narrative reporting style, so that the integrity of storytelling is not compromised.

Seven surveys were completed in 2009 by Mil-pra AECG members across the Metropolitan South West Region of Sydney. The questions were designed to reveal how much general education experience members bring to the region and whether the members felt as though they were making a change in Aboriginal Education. A demographic profile provided a collective snapshot of time and experience members bring to the AECG.

Demographic Profile

Six out of seven respondents were nominated for membership of the Mil-pra AECG from within the local community. One person had relocated from a NSW country Region. This sample group is dominated by female membership. The only male in this sample group had maintained membership from 1990 till 2009. The collective time spent participating in the AECG network by members who completed the survey was sixty one years. An average period of membership for this sample group equalled eight and a half years up until 2009. It is this level of shared experiences that will strengthen Aboriginal communities when dealing with Aboriginal Education provision. Most members who had held elected positions at the Local level had also held elected positions at the Regional level. Two members of the seven had held elected positions at the State level. This combined experience in governance will support the Local Management Committee in the operational functions of the organisation.
Employment in Aboriginal Education Service Delivery

All but one member was or had been employed by the Department of Education and Training (DET) in Aboriginal identified positions. This sample group of AECG members were spread evenly across the education spectrum, inclusive of a classroom situation or within a specific school setting and operating as a link between schools and Aboriginal communities across the Metropolitan South West Region. This would explain why in this Region there was an identified focus to support Aboriginal students in the classroom setting.

Aboriginal Education Committee Experience

All but one member had gained a wealth of experience through their involvement on various committees within DET. There had been some interaction with the Catholic Education system in addition to being involved in the decision making process relevant to Regional advisory committees in Aboriginal Education. Several members had participated on DET Merit Selection panels as the AECG representative.

Personal Impact Assessment

Only one person felt they have had no impact on Aboriginal Education. The majority of members felt that by having a direct relationship with schools through participation in teacher planning meetings, Aboriginal student support activities, influencing classroom content and being an adviser between Aboriginal communities and schools, changes can be made to benefit Aboriginal students.

NSW AECG Influences on Aboriginal Education in NSW

The majority of respondents believed that this organisation had been able to raise awareness of issues related to Aboriginal Education on a broad societal level. By keeping Aboriginal communities informed about the availability of programs, increased numbers of Aboriginal students will be provided with the opportunity to access resources. Generally Aboriginal communities felt confident to participate in an education environment when members are well informed.
**Increased Knowledge Through AECG Participation.**

All respondents who completed the survey had increased their knowledge relative to Aboriginal Education by being a member of the NSW AECG network. Updated information had empowered members to participate in discussions and decisions at a school and community level. Respondents felt as though they can confidently approach local schools to offer support in school activities.

**Other Comments.**

- *I’ve moved onto Aboriginal Health and realise the value of the AECG and the connections I’ve made.*
  
  *Thanks for the opportunity.*

- *I am worried that, as in the past, individuals with drive make things happen. Without these people things can fall down.*

**Summary**

This sample group of members clearly demonstrated through their responses to the survey questions that being involved in the NSW AECG at all levels of the three tiered structure was empowering for Aboriginal individuals and Aboriginal communities. By interacting with schools, generally members felt they could influence decisions that affect classroom curriculum content. By applying Aboriginal Perspectives to key learning areas, Aboriginality is affirmed and all students gain a better understanding of Aboriginal History and Culture. The summaries to Metropolitan South West Region (13) Management Committee survey responses found in Chapter 8: Voices of AECG Members, agreed with this sample group relevant to positive relationships with local DET schools:

*Building stronger relationships with schools and TAFE services through the DET Partnership Agreement is identified as a positive outcome. Presenting a positive profile to the general public in this Region is a worthwhile effort seen as an achievement in a culturally diverse Metropolitan Region.*

*Building the Metropolitan South West AECG capacity to meet educational expectations may be met by increasing the full membership, is seen as a priority. Having more people to co-ordinate and present community activities will ease the high workload of a few. Continuation of AECG and school relationships will require attention in the immediate future. The availability of Aboriginal Studies*
resources and individual Aboriginal student mentoring is identified as priority areas for the next two years.  

It appears that continual Aboriginal Community development needs to occur to maintain and enhance capacity and participation of local AECG members in Aboriginal Education at an effective level. Some concern was identified in the ‘other comments’ component of the survey that individuals with drive and energy need to actively participate in the growth of the organisation and maintain continuation of the Mil-pra AECG. Should this action be absent then the possibility of organisational collapse is threatened:

*I work with other people and whenever an opportunity comes up for me to encourage others I believe I carry that on. The way I was inspired by others I think I follow that still today. To me it’s about encouraging and empowering our own people because I’ve seen it happen and experienced it myself.*

_Margaret Simoes Nowra AECG Member_

Comments made by both these people reflected on how involvement in this organisation can be inspirational and rewarding wherever you live:

_The NSW AECG has influenced changes to Aboriginal Education because Aboriginal people are speaking out. Aboriginal knowledge is being passed on through education. AECG members are educators who are a dynamic group of people._

_Mavis Robinson Life Member Metropolitan South West Region_

This chapter investigated the perceptions of a sample group of Local AECG members. A generalisation can be made that other Local AECGs in Metropolitan Regions bring with them a wealth of experience and knowledge about Aboriginal Education. An assumption can be made that many members of Local AECGs are or have been employed in targeted positions within school systems, therefore providing an opportunity to be informed about policies and programs in Aboriginal Education administered by schools. Verbatim survey responses complete section two as a convenience to local members who wish to reflect on responses put forward on their

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280 Metropolitan South West AECG Management Committee: Survey Responses.
281 Nowra Local AECG Member: Interview
282 NSW AECG Life Member: Interview
behalf to surveys. Pertinent commentary closes this section of the data analysis:

When I attended school there was no such organisation, also for my children.

When my grandchildren commenced school we have seen how to and been able to assist through the AECG.\textsuperscript{283}

The next chapter describes some activities presented by the Hunter Regional AECG and provides responses to Management Committee members in detail, respecting the voices of local Aboriginal people. Two Regional initiatives will be described to illustrate how Aboriginal community capacity building could be developed if appropriate resources were made available and the successful outcome of a Cultural Immersion program for new scheme teachers and some ‘National Partnership Program’ teachers.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{283} Mil-pra Local AECG: Survey Response}
Section 3: Mil-pra Local Sample Survey Verbatim Responses

Membership Profile

Region where you were nominated for Membership?

1) Liverpool
2) Mil-pra
3) Mil-pra AECG
4) Mil-pra AECG
5) Mil-pra. Met Sth West
6) North West 1
7) Mil-pra

In what year were you awarded Membership? Male or Female, please circle

1) 07-08 Female
2) 2008 Female
3) 2006 Female
4) 2006 Female
5) 1990 Female
6) 1990 Male
7) 1978 Female

How many years have you been a member of the NSW AECG?

1) 2 years
2) 2
3) 3
4) 3 years
5) Over 20 years
6) 19 yrs
7) 12 yrs

Have you held any elected positions within the organisation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local</th>
<th>Regional</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Regional Rep</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep</td>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>Vice president</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer, Vice President</td>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary, Vice President</td>
<td>Secretary, President</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Rep. (delegate)</td>
<td>Regional President</td>
<td>Regional Rep.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a) Are you or have you been employed in an Aboriginal Education service delivery area? If yes please provide brief details: (if insufficient space please attach details)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Place of employment</th>
<th>2 Employment Position</th>
<th>3 Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Lurnea Public School &amp; Liverpool West P.S.</td>
<td>A.E.O.</td>
<td>President of P&amp;C. Panels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) DET</td>
<td>In class tutor. Teachers Aid.</td>
<td>Teacher Aid helping with Koori children in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) DET</td>
<td>AHSLO</td>
<td>Working around attendance issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) DET</td>
<td>Busby Public School</td>
<td>Aboriginal Education Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Bankstown Public</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Year 2. Aboriginal Studies/Arts Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Moree Secondary College</td>
<td>Aboriginal Education Assistant</td>
<td>Student and Community Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b) Have you participated on any Aboriginal Education committees? If yes please provide a list including approximate time of membership, (e.g. 3 years DET Regional Equity Committee):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Committee</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) South West Sydney Regional Aboriginal DET.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) SWS region Aboriginal group. Catholic Education Committee Sydney. Panels, School DET/Catholic parents Committee.</td>
<td>8 years 3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) South Western Sydney Aboriginal Student Awards Committee. Panels Parent Committee meetings.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) AECG Local, Regional, State RAEAC Moree Secondary College Aboriginal Ed Committee.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

c) Do you think you have made an impact on Aboriginal Education provision? Yes or No. In your own words write a statement that explains how you have or have not, influenced decisions made.
1) I hope so. Sitting on teachers planning days to make sure Aboriginal perspective are put in the classroom.
2) Yes. Kids look forward for me to come to school to learn & attendance had improved when I was working at schools.
3) Yes. Attending planning meetings has made a change to the way the education is for all!
4) Yes. Attend teacher planning days & promote inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives in the classrooms & staffroom.
5) Yes. I have put an Aboriginal local viewpoint into the committee as well as an Aboriginal Artist.
6) Yes. I believe by informing the wider community about school issues it has led to greater community participation.
7) No

d) Do you believe the NSW AECG has influenced changes to Aboriginal Education in NSW? Yes or No. In your own words provide comments to justify your response.
1) Yes. More equity & better in-serviced Principals.
2) No. I’ve only been involved with AECG for 18 months.
3) Yes. It’s now on everyone agenda.
4) Yes. Encouraging membership from community members also ensures community is involved in decision making & being kept informed of what’s happening in education.
5) Yes. Specifically as far as what is happening in Ab. Ed. in our State we have great input into Development of resources & programs & funding.
6) Yes. The AECG has provided Ab. Communities with a political voice.
7) Yes. I have seen where children have received tuition & mentoring through the intervention of an AECG member.

e) Do you think you have increased your knowledge relevant to Aboriginal Education through your participation in the NSW AECG? Yes or No. Provide comments to justify your response.
1) Yes. More aware of how important AECG is to education & influence it has over DET.
2) Yes. Find out what is happening in the Education Dept. about what’s going on- eg school funding, scholarships etc.
3) Yes. Being a member and knowing what’s going on in education/community and sharing info with community/schools.
4) Yes. Having children at school has also raised a desire to ensure Aboriginal Education is at the forefront of all.
5) Yes. By staying a member & attending Local/Regional State meetings I find out more about new programs & projects.
6) Yes. It has enabled me to gather information about educational deficiencies within the DET system and how to create strategies to counter these.
7) Yes. When I attended school there was no such organisation, also for my children. But when my grandchildren commenced school we have seen & been able to assist through the AECG.

f) Have you any further comments?

1) No comment.
2) I have moved onto Aboriginal Health & realise the value of the AECG & the connections I’ve made.
3) No.
4) Thanks for the opportunity.
5) Worried that – as in the past – individuals with drive make things happen. Without these people things can fall down.
6) Not today.
7) No comment.
Chapter 7: Hunter Aboriginal Education Consultative Group

Introduction
The previous chapter discussed three Aboriginal community activities organised and presented by Mil-pra Regional AECG.

This chapter will be presented in two sections. Section one will describe two Aboriginal community activities presented by the Hunter Regional AECG and describe a Hunter Regional AECG workshop outcome. An explanation of the regional structure and the Hunter Regional AECG Management Committee survey responses are provided to capture the attitudes and self-assessment value of being involved in the NSW AECG network:

*The Hunter Regional AECG would like to pay our respects to all Aboriginal peoples that reside on the lands of the Awabakal, Wonnorua, Worimi and Kamilaroi nations.*

Regional Structure
Three delegates are elected from within the Aboriginal membership to represent the local committee at a Regional level. The Local AECG President is an automatic delegate and attends four meetings each year. By using the Regional structure, coordination of information and decisions which affect the Aboriginal education community at a local level is discussed. Advice is provided to the Department of Education and Communities (DEC) via consultation between elected Hunter Regional AECG Executive Officers and the Hunter Regional Director of DEC. Geographic boundaries differ between DEC and the AECG. There are two AECG Regions located within the greater Hunter Valley, (Central Coast and Upper Hunter).

**Hunter Local AECGs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hunter Local AECGs</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Itji Marru – Morisset/Dora Creek</td>
<td>Korreil Wonnai – Cessnock/Kurri Kurri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maitland – Maitland/Branxton</td>
<td>Mankillikan – West Lake Macquarie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimbah – East Lake Macquarie</td>
<td>Mooloobinbah – Newcastle/Wallsend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mussellbrook – Mussellbrook/Scone</td>
<td>Singleton – Singleton/Broke</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Aboriginal people reside in communities across the Hunter Region from many Aboriginal countries. Nine Local AECGs transverse the traditional cultural lands of the Awabakal, Wanaruah, Worimi and Kamilaroi Nations. Many Aboriginal people reside in the Hunter Valley who have previously relocated from other cultural nations across Australia. At every Local and Regional AECG meeting a Welcome or Acknowledgement of Country is presented as a reminder that many AECG members are out of country but respect the need for cultural protocols to be followed.

In 2005 I had the honour of being invited to be the keynote speaker at a Hunter Institute of TAFE Student Awards Presentation at Kurri Kurri Campus. This current research project reinforces the need for Aboriginal people to participate in the formal education process if the expectation of *Community Participation* in schools is to be met. This focus area is identified as the second highest positive outcome in the Hunter Regional Management Committee AECG question seven data analysis. To grow Aboriginal community capacity an individual skill base needs to be nurtured. This keynote address offers some thoughts about role models and the level of cultural subtlety continually existing in Aboriginal communities.

‘*Education Has Its Own Returns*’ (*Uncle Reuben Kelly* quote)

I would like to acknowledge my presence on Wanaruah land and pay my respects to Aboriginal people in attendance at this Aboriginal Education Awards Ceremony.

I have called the topic for today ‘Education Has Its Own Returns’. Many years ago I was employed with the Commonwealth Department of Education Employment and Training (DEET) or currently known as the Department of Education Science and Workplace Relations. That’s the mob that looks after ABSTUDY. The Parramatta Office became very involved in organising and presenting motivational camps for Aboriginal high school students. We would invite representatives from various organisations to showcase career opportunities and identify educational pathways needed to enter into a career choice. We would also invite Aboriginal people to talk about their experiences and offer advice to young people. Around 1985 *Uncle Reuben Kelly* (from Kempsey) came along and shared his stories about his own education.
He did not have the opportunity to go to a public school, or enrol in a TAFE college to gain qualifications to enter a University. He was a boilermaker by trade and was employed at the University of Sydney. After working for hours, he liaised very closely with historians like Stanner and Elkin to assist with research and the recording of Aboriginal history. This was a man who would have been about 47 years of age at that time. Uncle Reuben had a quiet presence about him, which implied wisdom beyond his years. He was an initiated man and spent a lot of time travelling to different places throughout Australia. Imagine the wealth of knowledge Uncle Reuben would have acquired through his experiences. He would have witnessed Aboriginal Cultural changes through the impact of ‘colonisation’. He lived through the years of racist policies and practices aimed at Aboriginal people. He battled with his traditional Aboriginal teachings and the process of ‘assimilation’ that exists in Australian society. This reminds me of how clever Aboriginal people have been because of the cultural changes that have been imposed on us. It is only two hundred and seventeen years since the ‘Invasion’. If you take off 50 years of that time and allow for isolation and the establishment of non-Aboriginal settlement to really impact on traditional practices, then we have been able to deal with a mammoth amount of change.

The last time I saw Uncle Reuben, before he passed away, was in Kempsey at his nephew’s wedding in 2001. He still remembered the days when he would come along to the DEET Aboriginal motivation camps and talked about how important education is for our young people. He died eighteen months ago (2003) at the age of 78 years. Twenty years ago (1985) it was Uncle Reuben who identified the theme for the motivation camp where he was invited to be the guest speaker: ‘Education Has Its Own Returns’.

Let’s analyse that phrase. I think of a boomerang whirring through space and coming back to the thrower. I can see a group of Koori students who have just finished school, walking down the road and then coming to a crossroad with a signpost that identifies TAFE, University, Apprenticeships, Traineeships and Employment. After checking out the options open to them they make their way along a pathway of their choice. I can see another group of Koori’s, a little older than the first, walking along another track and they come to a signpost that identifies TAFE, Centerlink, Beach, Pub, Club, Mates Place, and then they make their way along a pathway of their choice.
Having the opportunity to gain knowledge also brings with it responsibility. For Aboriginal people there are four levels of responsibility:

1. Self:
2. Family:
3. Aboriginal Community:
4. Others.

**Self:** Throughout my teaching sessions I have always tried to get people to look at ‘Self-determination’ in a practical way. Every individual has to make decisions and choices about their own lives and futures on a daily basis. For a TAFE student, decisions have to be made whether to get up out of bed and organise yourself to get to class. When in class another decision whether to actively participate in gaining knowledge from whatever is on offer for the day. Learning does not only take place in the classroom, your classmates and other people on campus have stored knowledge just busting to come out. Libraries are full of information if time is spent researching an insurmountable array of topics. When it comes down to it, it is up to the individual to tap into those opportunities. Education surrounds the individual for the taking. When you get it, do not lock it up in a cupboard, and let it go mouldy. Use it. What is the use of heaps of certificates if you do not apply the skills you have been taught or have learned for yourself?

**Family:** Aboriginal people have always identified family as being a high priority in a Cultural context. Sharing gained knowledge with family is an expectation of Aboriginal Culture. Why would you let someone get ripped off” or “make a fool of themselves” if you knew that was going to be an outcome? By encouraging other members of the family to access knowledge, is one way of accepting the responsibility of gaining a meaningful education.

**Aboriginal Community:** In some circles of Aboriginal Affairs, I have heard the statement that we are short of Aboriginal leaders. Many Aboriginal communities will agree. Maybe people are waiting for the re-birthing of positive role models like Charles Perkins, Vincent Lingiari, Bob Bellear, Oodgeroo, Eddie Mabo, Charles ‘Chicka’ Dixon, Gary Foley etc. Times have changed and leadership is recognised in a different
way in modern Australia. Think about the women in the Northern Territory, who can see the physical damage affecting people as a result of petrol sniffing, alcohol abuse and domestic violence and what it is doing to their communities and the action they have taken to stem the diseases. Think about Koori achievers in the public media and how they are modelling behaviour for the young. Think about what you have achieved yourselves and what you can do with the skills you have gained through education. Anybody can be a leader in their own way.

**Others:** As people coming out of a society which has a history of negative stereotyping of Aboriginal people, we have the responsibility to change attitudes of the broader society. This does not mean we have to go out of our way to preach about Aboriginal Studies or to look like a “Walking Flag”. I believe it means to interact with other people in a positive way to educate people about our history and culture in a modern context. This will take patience, pride in Aboriginality and stored knowledge about Aboriginal Australia. Shame if someone asks you a question of your thoughts on Land Rights for example and you respond with a shrug of the shoulders and an “I dunno”.

Hey! There comes that same lot that was at the crossroads with the signposts of TAFE, Centerlink, Beach, Pub, Club or Mates place. I am interested in what they have been up to for the past two years. After having a yarn, this is what happened to some of them after they chose their different pathways.

**TAFE:** Ken completed the Diploma of Aboriginal Studies and he enrolled in a Teacher Training Course at the Catholic University.

**Centerlink:** Rachel ended up on CDEP for a year, started a traineeship with Maitland Manors and is in the final year of a Landscaping Course at TAFE.

**Pub:** Mary said she was just on her way to catch a bus for the drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre.

**Club:** Des had a job as a Bar Manager. He got busted for driving under the influence of alcohol (DUI) and is on his way to weekend detention.

**Mates Place:** Sean just got out on parole from Cessnock. He asked me if I
wanted to go with him to visit his mates in Kempsey lock-up.

Some people learn some do not! What about that other mob? I’m going to do a ring around.

**TAFE:** Jade completed the Ship Building Course at Tighes Hill and now he’s working at the Moolooabinba dry dock at Newcastle.

**University:** Pat completed the Diploma of Business at Maitland. She was accepted into Newcastle University and enrolled in a Degree in Business Management for 2008.

**Apprenticeships:** Bob finished the Course at Kurri Kurri TAFE and has been offered a job in a vineyard in the Barossa Valley. He said he might learn what he could and come back to the Hunter Valley and start up his own vineyard.

**Traineeships:** Nathan did the University course in Health Management and holds a senior position in NSW Health Department (Aboriginal Health).

**Employment:** Nick got a job with Tighes Hill TAFE and is now in charge of the Security Section.

Yes, Uncle Reuben was right. Education Has Its Own Returns. The returns can be positive or negative.

What am I doing with the skills I have learned over my time in Aboriginal Education? I am currently writing a thesis as a component of a PhD study at Newcastle University. The topic is called ‘People Places and Pathways in NSW Aboriginal Education’. The underlying assumption is that Aboriginal community have had an impact on education provision in NSW. The structure of the thesis is based on my involvement as a Life Member of the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (NSW AECG) along with many other Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. I have visited different places across NSW to listen to AECG members tell their stories from a local viewpoint. I have taken many pathways because of this research. Allow me to share a couple of pieces from the study.

**Dedication:** I dedicate my reflections and perceptive images of people who I have had
contact with over thirty years of involvement in Aboriginal Education:

To my children and grandchildren, family, friends, colleagues and to people who are interested in the history of Aboriginal Education:

For those who want to know about some of the identities that were/are dedicated to making positive change to Aboriginal Australia:

To those Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who commit their time and energy toward a to-morrow that unveils a dark past and weaves an enlightened pathway into the future.

People say, "Our children are our future". Yes this is true, but if our children do not know their own Aboriginal past and how the constant pressure to change the present is applied by many people, then our grand children, great grandchildren and those unborn children of the future, will find it difficult to appreciate the value of Aboriginal people they may never ever know. Those Aboriginal people, who have played a role in historical and social changes, must take the responsibility for telling the stories. If adults can encourage young people to grab the opportunities and use them in a positive way, then they can stand up and claim to be proud, dignified Aboriginal individuals. I would like to share a small part of that history through personal memories.

For all of you here today, congratulations on your achievements and think about how you can use the skills you have gained through your experience at TAFE.

Laurel Williams:2005

There are many people who sub-consciously present themselves as role models throughout an individual’s life. The following comment written in the Hunter Regional AECG Management Committee survey clearly illustrates how subtle role modelling can influence and change the behaviour of people in Aboriginal communities:

I have grown from a shy person who did not think I had anything valuable to give, to an extremely positive, confident person who is able to support others and commit to more. I love being involved in the AECG at all levels. The friendships that I have made are valuable. 

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285 Williams, 2005:Unpublished
286 Hunter AECG Region: Survey Response
Hunter Region AECG Community Development Program

Background

Repeated reviews in Aboriginal Education have made reference to the necessity for parental participation in the education process of their children. Once again, community development is essential to reach those expectations, and is endorsed by the 1994 National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

“...that part of the solution to improving children’s educational experiences lies in providing appropriate support, education and training to their parents.”

The Hunter Regional AECG Management Committee data analysis clearly provides a link to the involvement of Aboriginal community participation as a secondary priority over the next two years. Aboriginal Education is a service for Aboriginal people and knowledge about Aboriginal communities and their Cultures. The Hunter Regional AECG recognises that participation in the education process, by Aboriginal community members, is a mammoth task. After lengthy discussion a suggestion was endorsed at the Hunter Regional AECG meeting held at Maitland (28.8.09) to investigate the possibility of utilising Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), Parent and Community Engagement (PaCE) funding to develop a program that would empower AECG members. Learning basic skills at the Pre-school and Primary School level is essential toward successful academic outcomes at the Senior High School level. Statistics show that Aboriginal students are below the National benchmarks compared to non-Aboriginal students. Education systems generally place students into classes each year, according to their age, not according to their academic levels. Robust discussion and debate at the Regional meeting concluded that the proposal to DEEWR should target the Primary school sector. The investigations were in accordance with the philosophy of the NSW AECG Inc. and the future directions of the Hunter Regional AECG, as indicated in the Regional Strategic Plan (2010 – 2012):

Goal 1: Engage in activities to improve the educational outcomes for Aboriginal students.
Goal 3: To empower Local AECG members to become more actively involved in Education and Training.

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287 National Review of Education For Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander People, 1994: 10
288 Hunter Regional AECG Strategic Plan: 2010 – 2012
The aim of the Hunter Regional AECGs Parent and Community Engagement Program is to empower AECG Members, through knowledge of education operational systems and policies that affect successful outcomes for Aboriginal Primary School students. The following identified goals were included in the PaCE funding proposal.\footnote{Hunter Regional AECG PaCE Submission to DEEWR: 2009}

**Goals:**

- To increase the participation of Aboriginal parents and carers of Primary School students to engage in schooling:
- To increase the academic successes of Aboriginal students:
- To increase the Aboriginal membership of Local AECGs:
- To offer training that will increase the knowledge base of Aboriginal AECG members:
- To foster a positive relationship between Aboriginal communities and Primary Schools.

To implement the underpinning principles of consultation promoted by the AECG, the Hunter Regional AECG Management Committee requested that Rachel Small, the Regional Representative in 2009, investigate and complete a PaCE funding proposal to implement recommendations from the 28.8.09 Maitland meeting. Small was able to complete this task as a voluntary member of the Hunter Regional AECG. A workshop forum was organised to develop program activities relevant to Primary School students. The Management Committee from each Local AECG, Primary School Principals, and DET Hunter Regional ACLOs, TAFE, Early Childhood and DEEWR representatives were invited to participate in the program design workshop. The Hunter Regional AECG Management Committee was responsible for the co-ordination of the developmental stage. A second ‘Train the Trainer’ workshop would include the President and Vice President from each Local AECG in an attempt to ensure sustainability of the program and could be rolled out at a local level. Once the Development and Training Package was complete, it was intended that a Project Officer be employed to deliver and co-ordinate the program over a three year period. It was recorded that on-going monitoring, evaluation, reporting and program improvement is essential to the successful empowerment opportunities for AECG members. The
planning forum was an outstanding success which produced the following draft Training Activities to be incorporated into a staged program.

**Policy Awareness**
- NSW Aboriginal Education Policy
- DET Suspension Policy
- DET Student Welfare Policy

**Primary School Programs**
- Student Personal Learning Plans
- Transition Programs

**Skills Development**
- Interview Panel Participation
- At Home Parent Support
- Acknowledgement/Welcome To Country

**Knowledge Training**
- Enrolment Procedures
- Complaints Procedures
- Partnership Agreement DET/AECG
- Roles and Responsibilities of AECG
- Roles and Responsibilities of DET Staff
- Roles and Responsibilities of Aboriginal DET Team
- Understanding and Participation in School Plans

**PaCE Proposal**
Small as the Regional Representative wrote a paper to be presented to DEEWR staff on 10th November, 2009 which includes the purpose and aims of the proposal.

*In accordance with the philosophy of the NSW AECG Inc. and the future directions of the Hunter Regional AECG as indicated in the Regional Strategic Plan (2010-2012), the aims of the Hunter Regional AECGs parent and community engagement program is to achieve the following over a 3 year period.*

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290 Hunter Regional AECG PaCE Proposal Purpose, 2009:1

People Places and Pathways in NSW Aboriginal Education
To avoid introducing a short term project with the potential for incompletion of meeting identified targets, the Hunter Regional AECG Management Committee advised that the proposal should seek funding to employ a full-time project co-ordinator to complete the tasks associated with the program. Each of the following aims is linked to the empowerment of Local AECG membership:

1  

To empower Hunter AECG members, through workshops, to gain the confidence to be able to better inform non-AECG members of the role of the NSW AECG.  

It was envisaged that the workshops would share the historical development of the NSW AECG Association so that members would understand and appreciate the value of Aboriginal participation in the education environment. Often past achievements are accepted without detailed explanation. To understand the responsibility attached to accepting nominations for election to Local and Regional Management Committees, members would receive information related to governance training within an incorporated organisation. By empowering AECG members with knowledge there was an intention that a working relationship with schools would provide opportunities for positive outcomes. One outcome would be the development of partnership agreements through collaboration between Aboriginal communities and schools:

2  

To improve the quality of the relationships between Aboriginal communities and schools through AECG endorsed and facilitated workshops. These workshops would provide Aboriginal communities with the opportunity to gain knowledge of and better understand relevant DET policies.

Several policies setting out guidelines that affect the operations of schools have been excluded from the knowledge base of most Aboriginal parents and their communities. Workshop activities are designed to analyse specific policies that directly affect Aboriginal students. For example Suspension, Student Welfare and DET Aboriginal Education and Training policies would be reviewed:

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201 Hunter Regional AECG PaCE Proposal Aim 1, 2009:1  
202 Hunter Regional AECG PaCE Proposal Aim 2, 2009:1
To further promote the Hunter Regional and Local AECGs through the development of promotional resources. Through training and empowering AECG members a human resource would be available in local Aboriginal communities. Untapped skills can be utilised to support classroom teachers when implementing the DET Aboriginal Education Policy. Through the implementation of this program the students would gain an increased sense of belonging and pride in their Aboriginality. The Hunter Regional AECG recognises the valuable contribution that parents can make in supporting the academic success of their children.

**Delivery Processes**

There would be five phases of delivery, subject to final funding approval by DEEWR.

**Phase one** was the endorsement of a draft proposal by the Hunter Regional delegates after presentation at the Regional meeting held on Friday 20th November, 2009. There is an expectation that the proposal would be approved by DEEWR, which meant that someone needed to follow-up priority tasks. For local decision making to be actioned, the Regional AECG delegates needed to authorise the Regional Management Committee to become incorporated so that funds could be allocated direct to the local organisation for management and administration. As all members at the regional and local levels of the AECG are volunteers, an interim co-ordinator needed to be appointed. An Expression of Interest would be open to all current full Local AECG members to apply for the Project Co-ordinator position should the proposal be funded. To expedite the selection process a selection panel comprising of the current Regional President, a Life Member and an independent representative from DEEWR would be established. Phase 1 proposals were endorsed in 2009.

**Phase 2** was the developmental stage of the program content. A two day workshop would refine a training package based on the draft training activities identified at the August 2009 workshop. A Hunter Region AECG Community Development Program workshop was held at Kurri Kurri TAFE on 23rd and 24th August 2010 which included all Hunter AECG delegates and representatives from Pre-schools, Primary Schools,
DET, Catholic Education, TAFE and DEEWR. The task was to identify content and resources required to implement the program. Implementation of the DET/Hunter AECG Partnership Agreement was honoured by organising teacher relief for AECG delegates to attend the workshop and advice was given to any delegates who were employed under the Norta Norta program to negotiate employment requirements with their specific Principals.

**Phase 3** was a ‘Train the Trainer’ workshop to include each Local AECG President and Vice President to train as program facilitators. This strategy would ensure the potential sustainability of the program should the President be replaced at the next Annual General Meeting. Training workshops would be delivered in Local AECGs with the support of the regional PaCE Community Development Co-ordinator.

**Phase 4** was a strategy designed to monitor and review the program on a regular basis. Each participating member will receive a journal and a questionnaire to record ongoing activities associated with program delivery and evaluation. These records could be used as a reporting mechanism for Regional AECG meetings in addition to providing the PaCE Community Development Co-ordinator with anecdotal evidence useful for DEEWR progress reporting and monitoring purposes.

**Phase 5** would be the evaluation stage of the program. A process would be organised where Local AECGs would provide formal responses to a survey vital for the acquittal of DEEWR funds. The evaluation process would be designed to incorporate any improvements necessary to continue the rollout of this program.

**Community Development Program Progress Report**
Phases 1 and 2 were highly successful. All identified goals were reached. Phase 3 had commenced when DEEWR advised the Hunter Regional AECG that funds were being withdrawn in 2010 unsettling the completion of the proposal. The funding agreement was signed off for three years commencing in 2010 till 2012. Unfortunately only five Local AECGs had the benefit of offering the program to their members by the end of 2010. It is disappointing that a genuine community capacity building program was
undermined by DEEWR not upholding their end of a funding agreement. An extract of the original funding agreement is provided:

*fig: 18  Extract of DEEWR PaCE Funding Agreement*  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOW IT IS AGREED:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>Agreement period</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1.1. The operation of this Agreement in relation to any particular Schedule commences on the date specified in the schedule.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2. Subject to clause 1.3 and unless otherwise specified in the Schedule, the term of this Agreement is for the Funding Years 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3. <em>We may in exceptional circumstances, by notice to you, extend the term of the Agreement for the purposes of certain specified activities for a period up to 30 June 2013.</em></td>
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While the funding agreement identifies 2009 in the document, funding was not dispersed till 2010. The developmental work carried out by Rachel Small was supported through arrangements between DET and Hunter Regional AECG as a result of discussions held at the Hunter Regional Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee (RAEAC). The above contractual extract clearly states what the funding agreement period is. The Hunter AECG is reticent in entering into any further agreements with DEEWR in this Region.

In 1994, strategies were identified by the Commonwealth to increase positive outcomes for Aboriginal children in education. Efforts should be aimed at the early years of learning to reap the benefits in the long term as opposed to a “band-aid” approach. At a national level a statement appears in the National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People that supports this concept:

*Strategies which encourage strong parental involvement in the design and delivery of education services appear to be more successful in promoting learning, particularly where parents are involved in preschool and the early years of primary school.*

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294 DEEWR Funding Agreement, 2010: 2  
295 National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 1994: 9
The Hunter AECG PaCE Project and the Cultural Immersion Program are examples of positive Aboriginal community activities. By working with education service delivery agents, Aboriginal people can become empowered by knowing and understanding how systems can benefit educational outcomes.
Hunter Regional AECG Cultural Immersion Program

Background

The Hunter Regional AECG was invited to present a three day presentation using the framework constructed by Dr. Shayne Williams under the direction of Cindy Berwick (President NSW AECG) as a pilot for a Cultural Immersion Program.

Dr. Shayne Williams completed a doctorate in 2007 through Deakin University (Vic).

As an Indigenous academic, and as a strong Aboriginal community fella, I am wholly committed to our core principles of empowerment, self-determination and cultural sovereignty. I assert our right to academic autonomy over our ontology, our epistemology and our worldview.²⁹⁶

Williams identifies two core principles that underpin the cultural integrity of the ‘Being Culturally Aware Becoming Culturally Inclusive: A Pathway to Cultural Competence’ conceptual framework on page 10 as:

1) Community empowerment:
   And,

2) Cultural self-determination.

The author highlights the fact that identified timeframes and funding pressures did not allow for essential cultural principles of “yarning” to be carried out throughout the development of this framework. Williams refers to recommendation: 2 in order to express his feeling about conflict between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal epistemology:

That Aboriginal cultural development takes precedence over and above externally determined departmental needs, priorities and expediencies.²⁹⁷

He also reinforces and acknowledges the value of local Aboriginal people’s cultural interaction with communities through recommendation ten (10):

That the knowledge and expertise of our peoples at the community level be embedded into every aspect of this programme from design and decision making through to presentation.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ Williams, 2010: 8
²⁹⁷ Williams, 2010: 82
²⁹⁸ Williams, 2010: 83
Cultural Immersion Program Development Process

A decision was taken at a Hunter Regional AECG meeting held on 26th February 2010, to accept the invitation from the State AECG to pilot the above program. To implement this decision a Program Development Committee was nominated to design a program based on the NSW AECG framework. The Hunter Regional AECG Management Committee endorsed Rachel Small, (Regional Representative) Ken Weatherall, (Regional President) and Laurel Williams (NSW AECG Life Member) as the Committee and was charged with this task. It was important to consider the multiple numbers of cultural countries involved in the Hunter Regional AECG geographic area. The working party felt that local Aboriginal organisations and people must be a core component of the program. A workshop was held at Laurel Williams’ house the following week, where the following program emerged.

Program Topics

**Day 1: 26th May 2010, Awabakal Country - TAFE Newcastle Campus Tighes Hill**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Presenter</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smoking Ceremony</td>
<td>Paul Gordon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Welcome/Acknowledgement to Country</td>
<td>Paul Gordon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introductions</td>
<td>Ken Weatherall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political History of Australia</td>
<td>Michael Donavon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncle Chicka Dixon DVD</td>
<td>Ken Weatherall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AECG/DET Partnership Agreement</td>
<td>John Oates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AECG History DVD</td>
<td>Ken Weatherall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Visits Newcastle/Lake Macquarie</td>
<td>Michael Donavon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Day 2: 27th May 2010 Wanaruah Country - Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Presenter</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome / Acknowledgement to Country</td>
<td>Linda Pont</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinship Game</td>
<td>Laurel Williams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive Curriculum</td>
<td>Laurel Williams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs and Aspirations</td>
<td>Ken Weatherall</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Day 3: 28th May 2010 Worimi Country - Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Council**
Welcome to Country

Making Community Connections

Speaking Proud

Evaluation

The committee decided to present the program at three different locations to illustrate to participants that the Hunter Regional AECG incorporates several Aboriginal countries. Rachel Small was employed to co-ordinate phase 1 of the Cultural Immersion Program through support from the DET Hunter Regional Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee (RAEAC).

Aboriginal identities from across the Region attended the last day of the program and were kind enough to share some of their experiences both personal and professional. The following people participated in this activity:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
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<td>Tony Martin</td>
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**Participant Evaluations**

Extracts taken from the program evaluations have been included to demonstrate the resounding success of the three days presented by the Hunter Regional Aboriginal Education Consultative Group. The voices of teachers and principals are vital in assessing their personal value of Aboriginal cultural learning opportunities made available by Aboriginal communities. These comments should not be interpreted as an assessment of the course content but should be measured as learning and teaching
experiences by participants. Two verbatim comments by teachers have been included in each summary pertinent to each question and are highlighted.

Evaluation Summaries

Q 1: Has this program furthered your knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal history, culture and society?

Teacher Participant Summary

All teachers who completed evaluation comments to this question stated that the program had given them an increased understanding of Aboriginal history and culture. The activities presented provided opportunities to broaden their knowledge of contemporary Aboriginal communities through listening to shared personal stories. This program enabled participants to review their teaching practices and consider strategies to apply Aboriginal perspectives to curriculum content.

I am now comfortable and feel equipped to successfully incorporate Aboriginal perspectives and ideas into my classroom and the wider school community, on a daily basis, rather than the typical routine of only incorporating activities during NAIDOC week.

Generally participants felt empowered to interact with Aboriginal families in an informal situation. Participants disclosed that the value of talking to respected Aboriginal community identities had enhanced their understanding of Aboriginal society in a local context. Several comments made by teachers inferred that they felt more comfortable to invite Aboriginal community into the classroom as guest speakers to support teaching about Aboriginal issues.

I feel more empowered to now help all students with the cultural knowledge and understanding. Non-Aboriginal students will be better served by learning about Aboriginal Australia. More importantly, I feel better equipped to include Aboriginal community members and families in the education process.

Q 2: Did you have any cultural or educational expectations prior to undertaking this program?

Teacher Participant Summary

Not all the participants responded to this question. Those who did had expectations of learning how to interact with Aboriginal communities and what cultural protocols they
should be aware of. Several people were open to learning new knowledge and to build on previously learned information.

*I was not sure what to expect in terms of what would be taught. However the activities were real eye openers in lots of different ways.*

An expectation was also to understand how to incorporate cultural perspectives in teaching practices and curriculum content.

*I wanted to know more about what I could do each and every day to inspire Aboriginal students to engage with school and value their education. I was dissatisfied with the idea that the culture was incorporated in some events or classes but then forgotten about in the general classroom.*

Q 3: Has this programme changed any previous perceptions or understandings that you may have had about Aboriginal people and/or Aboriginal culture?

**Teacher Participant Summary**

Responses indicated that teachers among this group who have some understanding of aspects of Aboriginal culture, stated their knowledge had been enhanced by listening to stories and participating in activities presented in this program. Perceptions had been clarified of how strong connections are between people who have common experiences in Aboriginal Education.

*It showed me how close Aboriginal families are and made me really appreciate their relationships, connections, culture and love for the land. I really appreciated being given a closer look into Aboriginal culture.*

The power of sharing personal journeys and experiences in conjunction with physical interaction with Aboriginal people, brings with it a deeper understanding of how past histories affect circumstances for current generations.

*I am more aware of Aboriginal Australia. I will challenge my knowledge of Australian history. I am aware of what really happened to Aboriginals and their culture through*  

Q 4: Will this program influence how you will approach teaching Aboriginal history and culture?
Teacher Participant Summary
Participants implied that their approach to their role as educators would influence future generations in Australian society. In a local context establishing links with Aboriginal communities will support the implementation of the Aboriginal Education Policy.

This program has inspired me to make more effective connections with the Aboriginal students in my class/school and their families. I have a deeper understanding of Aboriginal culture and this will give me greater confidence in my teaching of Aboriginal history and culture.

Teachers commented that by consciously placing Aboriginal history and culture at the forefront of their teaching practice, application of Aboriginal perspectives would become easier. By challenging personal knowledge from past schooling experiences, strategies may emerge in order to gain new information to stimulate classroom activities.

Aboriginal education will not be treated as a single unit, based on a particular time. I feel confident to encompass Aboriginal Education across all KLA’s and learning styles (or at least try!!)

Q 5: Do you feel that this program will influence your approach to teaching Aboriginal students?

Teacher Participant Summary
Many key factors presented in this program will influence a renewed approach to teaching Aboriginal students. Generally teachers have been aware of different learning styles but can focus on building strengths in the area of Aboriginal Education.

Be more aware of their cultural background. Be more communicative with parents. Try to teach to cater for individual learning styles.

Learning how important Aboriginal community involvement is in the educational process for Aboriginal students and how support is available through the Hunter Regional AECG network is a valuable resource. Information gleaned from this course will motivate some teachers to be proactive in seeking parental support to confirm student Aboriginality.

I want to take a more active role in the Aboriginal students within my school. I will apply the knowledge and skill I have been exposed to during this course.
Q 6: Do you feel that this program will influence how you approach Aboriginal parents and community members?

**Teacher Participant Summary**

Participants who responded to this question acknowledged that parents and Aboriginal community members are valuable resources to support the education of Aboriginal students in the classroom setting. Inviting Aboriginal people to participate in meaningful school activities will help to change the cynical image of schools being an uninviting space to a place where positive innovative learning happens.

*My teaching will endeavour to go beyond the classroom to engage family and community members. I learnt how important it is to do this.*

Through participation in this program, school staff is aware of the community links available to them through consultation with Aboriginal organisations.

*I will use a range of methods to approach parents and community members such as talking on the phone, visiting homes, informal conversations, AECG assistance will be beneficial to this process.*

Q 7: Can you foresee any challenges and/or impediments to implementing what you have learnt through this program?

**Teacher Participant Summary**

Those participants who responded to this question believe that personal change does not necessarily mean that everyone will readily accept new initiatives in Aboriginal Education. One of the major challenges will be to remain positive and deal with the attitudes of colleagues who might not have had the opportunity to be exposed to new knowledge and information referencing local Aboriginal communities.

*All the teachers at my school need to complete this program and some teachers might be reluctant to incorporate activities, lessons, Aboriginal perspectives in their classroom.*

Participants also recognised the reluctance of Aboriginal parents to become involved in school and classroom activities on a regular basis. To maintain confidence in teaching Aboriginal Studies in the classroom, requires continual learning and support from Aboriginal people.
Parents not wanting to be part of the school. Restrictions of curriculum (in some areas). Making sure that what I’m teaching is accurate may challenge how I teach (especially to a class of 30 children).

Q 8: Would you recommend this program to your teaching colleagues?

Teacher Participant Summary
Only one participant responded to this question. The comment implied that this participant enjoyed the activities but suggested the program was too long. The comment is recorded as stated.

Comment: Highly, I think all teachers should be involved in 3 Days activities and the kinship game, maybe condensed into a 1 day course.

Three Hunter Regional AECG participants responded to evaluation questions. A summary is presented as a synthesis of individual comments recorded.

Hunter AECG Participant Summary
Newly appointed teachers should have a better understanding of how to work with Aboriginal families through participation in this program. By listening to Aboriginal presenters and individual personal stories, the Hunter Region is diverse and dynamic in terms of Aboriginality and historical experiences. The popular stereotype of Aboriginal people, based on traditional social images, cannot be applied in this region because ‘Kooris Come In All Colours’. Aboriginal parents should be encouraged to participate in the educational journey of their children and realise and appreciate the value of education for future generations. School and Aboriginal community engagement can lead to positive outcomes for all children.

Added Verbatim Comments:

This program was an excellent mix of content (what), strategies for school and classrooms (how) but most importantly where to start and the people/organisation there to help (who). Thank you!
I felt this course strengthened the values I’m trying to set in my classroom and allowed me to network to help support what I’m doing. Thank you for this opportunity it was fantastic.
Wonderful! Can’t wait to share at my staff meeting.
This program was delivered in a very professional way. The cultural site seeing was a highlight and the dreamtime stories and journeys of the speakers was great too. More bush tucker would be great for next time.

**Discussion:** Comments throughout the evaluations were generally positive. Question 8 of the Hunter Region AECG Management Committee survey identified ‘School Relationships’ as the highest priority for the next two years. The success of the Hunter AECG Cultural Immersion Program falls within the realm of building positive school relationships with those schools that participated in the three day Cultural Immersion Program.
**Hunter Regional AECG Vision Statement**

The Hunter Regional Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) will continue to build a platform based on the empowerment of Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups:

To empower and support all members in order to provide the highest level of informed decision-making within Aboriginal Education: and

To ensure culturally appropriate delivery of education and training programs for Aboriginal learners leading to equitable access and achievement outcomes for all Aboriginal people engaged in Education and Training in the Hunter.\(^{299}\)

These statements are endorsed in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy in goal 5:

*To provide education and training services to develop the skills of Aboriginal people to participate in educational decision-making.*\(^{300}\)

**Hunter Regional AECG 2012 Management Committee Composition**

The current Regional committee has been elected to represent Aboriginal Education from a community perspective for the next year. One of the concerns raised in the past is the number of representatives who are employed with the Department of Education and Communities.

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**State Delegates**

| Regional Rep. | Hunter DEC | Muloobinbah | Lyn Brown |
| Hunter DEC    | Itji Marru |             | Roddney Groves |

\(^{299}\) Hunter Regional AECG Promotional Pamphlet.

\(^{300}\) National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, 1994: 47.
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Of the 7 positions established at each Local level totalling 63, there are 50 positions filled by representatives who are employed by the Hunter Department of Education and Communities, while 13 positions are represented by other facets of Aboriginal communities. The question must be asked if this representation is reflective of viewpoints presented by Aboriginal communities or due to the number of departmental employees, is the representation reflective of workplace standpoints. Of the 5 positions established at the Regional Executive level, there are 4 positions filled by representatives who are employed by the Hunter Department of Education and Communities, while 1 position is represented by another facet within an Aboriginal community.

A further question raised was whether Aboriginal community viewpoints are at the forefront of discussions or are employment links influential in creating the following tensions for individuals:

- Conflict between workplace and community perspectives
- Intangible thought processing of educational cultural application
- Effective integration of Aboriginal practices in mainstream policies and practices.

In her publication Frances Peters-Little: 2000, makes reference to the possible conflict felt by Aboriginal people when discussing the tension and complexities of Aboriginal people employed in the public service area:

Many Aboriginal community workers feel that they are being torn between their positions as community workers and the people they service.\(^{301}\)

Experience in public service areas provides individuals with knowledge which can be empowering and then leads to growth of Aboriginal communities. Solutions to these issues can only be answered by the individuals themselves by continually challenging their own decision making processes.
Hunter Regional AECG Complex Challenge Workshop Report

Background

This workshop was designed as a result of participation in the ‘Stronger Smarter Leadership Training Program’. Roselea Newburn and Laurel Williams were recommended to the Hunter Region Department of Education and Communities to be included in the program for 2012, as representatives for the Hunter Regional AECG. As an outcome of the training, one of the activities expected participants to provide a presentation based on a workplace challenge during the training. The P&C representative joined Newburn and Williams in discussions to develop a strategy to increase the membership numbers of both organisations. The concept of a “Yarning Circle” was incorporated into the process in order to encourage individual engagement. This strategy was repeated at the first Hunter Regional AECG meeting to be held in 2013, with the purpose to address concerns about the high numbers of Associate members drawn from DEC as opposed to Aboriginal membership of Local AECGs.

Hunter Region AECG Workshop 2013

Goal: Identify three strategies to increase Aboriginal membership in Local AECGs.

Workshop Organisation

- Six small groups were organised with four or five members participating at random.
- Each member was invited to name at least one idea to increase Aboriginal membership at the Local AECG level.

Group 1

- Advertise Local AECG in the school newspaper
- Place posters in the school/workplace foyer
- Make phone calls to parents
- Consider times and dates of meetings – use a variety of geographic areas
- Welcome children and cater to their needs
Group 2
- Organise an open day to provide information to the public. Make sure males and females know they can come
- Provide food at meetings
- Utilise Junior AECGs to encourage their parents to get involved
- Have meetings on a transport route or provide transport. Have toys or colouring in activities for younger children
- Make meetings at times suitable for parents

Group 3
- Every member to bring a friend to the next meeting
- Meetings to be well publicised in papers and in local schools
- Take a uniform publicity approach. Establish links to websites, easily identified
- Promotion through other inter-agencies. Advertise the organisation through health, doctors, Samaritans and any community based groups
- Set meeting times accessible to community eg not at 3.00 pm

Group 4
- Organise a barbeque meet and greet activity
- Hold a sporting competition
- Access community events (parents, students, AECG)
- Organise parent workshops (e.g. passing on cultural knowledge)
- Take meetings to community
- Include AECG promotion in school information days (Kinder and year 7 information days)
- Utilise Newsletters

Group 5
- Consider transport
- Consider time of meetings
- Advertising essential
Hold parent/community friendly meetings
Consider appropriate venue

Group 6
- Local representative to get out in the community, not executives
- Post meeting dates in school newsletter, website, phone apps
- School to promote AECG better, signage posted around local schools and shops
- Join school P&C and Aboriginal Focus Groups
- Get involved in supporting Junior AECGs “put a face to a name”

The next stage of the workshop invited the small groups to identify in priority order the three most important strategies for their group to implement.

Group 1
1 Advertise by placing posters in foyers of workplace, brochures, leaflets
2 Promotion through social media
3 Personal phone calls (times & dates etc)

Group 2
1 Have meetings on a transport route or provide transport. Have toys or crèche activities for younger students. Provide food for the families eg BBQ or bring a plate
2 Use Skype / connected classrooms
3 Organise open days. Promote at markets, shopping centres include positive male and female promotion.

Group 3
1 Promotion and Publicity
2 Every member to bring a friend to the meeting
3 Accessibility for meetings


**Group 4**

1. AECG information to be included at information days (Kindergarten to Yr7)
2. Promotion activities at sporting events
3. Take meetings to the community

**Group 5**

1. Advertising essential
2. Consider time of meetings
3. Consider venue

**Group 6**

1. Post signage in schools, shops, Aboriginal services etc.
2. Local representative out in the community
3. Local representative out in the community

All priorities identified were collated to establish three collective priority areas of focus for the Hunter Regional AECG. The most popular areas are:

1. Advertising/Promotion using the suggestions put forward in the small group discussions,
2. Accessibility of meetings taking into consideration the suggestions expressed in the small group discussions,
3. Organise user friendly meetings taking into consideration the suggestions expressed in the small group discussions.

A future direction was endorsed by the members, that the three priority areas be implemented across the Region by Local AECGs for the rest of this year (2013) and report back at the Regional AGM to evaluate if these strategies were successful. Note: Membership statistics should be monitored inclusive of Full Members, Associate Members and Junior Members.

The following comments recorded in the 2012 NSW AECG Annual Report will conclude section one of Chapter: 7 ‘Hunter Aboriginal Education Consultative Group’.
Region 9: Hunter

Hunter Regional AECG is represented by nine Local AECGs: Mankillikan, Mooloobinbah, Itji Marru, Singleton, Mussellbrook, Minimbah, Maitland, Korreil Wonnai, and Youyoong Local AECGs. Our Local AECGs work tirelessly to promote AECG in the community and in schools and as a result we have twelve functioning Junior AECGs in our Region. They are: Cessnock HS, Mount View HS, Kurri Kurri HS, Rutherford Technology HS, Hunter Sports HS, Mussellbrook HS, Singleton HS, Francis Greenway HS, Dungog HS, Hunter River HS, Irrawang HS, Tomaree HS. Hunter Regional AECG is committed to increasing community membership and has developed a Regional Website, member’s resource pack which consists of a folder containing hard copies of AECG information, an AECG USB with electronic copies of information and a member’s resource PowerPoint overview to support our Local AECG members. Local AECGs have continued to engage in developing and signing off their own Local Agreements. Our commitment to the State and Hunter Region Partnership Agreement is demonstrated by our ongoing active participation in numerous Regional Committees such as RAEAC, Scholarship Advisory Committees, Merit Selection Panels, National Partnership Committees and Local Management Groups.  

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Section 2: Hunter Regional Data Analysis

I would like to thank members of the Hunter Region AECG who completed the Regional Management Committee surveys, which is the basis for this Case Study. Eight questions were distributed to all NSW AECG Regional Management Committees. The surveys were presented at a Hunter AECG Regional meeting held at Toronto High School during 2010 to delegates from nine Local AECGs. Each Local AECG was represented by the President and three elected delegates. Of the 21 members present, 20 surveys were returned. Verbatim responses are presented in Chapter 8: ‘Voices of AECG Members’ under the sub-heading Region 9: Hunter, in section two named Regional Survey Responses.

1) Level of Experience and Knowledge needed.

Responses from the surveys were placed into two categories:

Willingness to Learn/Commitment to Aboriginal Education.

Eleven members stated that it was not necessary to have had experience and knowledge of Aboriginal Education to participate in the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, at a Regional level. The following sample comment was made:

It is not necessary to have a high level of knowledge in Aboriginal Education and training however having the willingness to learn is essential.

This Region believes that having a commitment to Aboriginal Education and participating in the AECG organisation will enable members to learn from each other.

2) Aboriginal Education Policy Knowledge.

Nine respondents identified that varied levels of knowledge and experiences was necessary to participate in the operations of the AECG at a Regional level. The following sample comment was made:

I believe everyone needs to be aware of the current Aboriginal Education and Training Policy.

The majority of respondents believed that detailed knowledge of the policy is not necessary but an overview of the document would empower Aboriginal community members. An awareness of what the implications of the Aboriginal Education Policy would be useful to support Aboriginal staff employed in DET.
3) *Formal Qualifications*

Twenty respondents stated it was not necessary to have completed a formal qualification. Several respondents added comment to their “no” responses. A sample comment follows:

> No. However I think a mentoring system would be beneficial, depending on the position you undertake. For example if going for Secretary, some administration skills would be helpful.

Clearly members who completed the survey indicated that experience and knowledge can be gained by participating as members on Local AECGs and Regional AECG Management Committees.

4) *Strengths of the Regional Management Committee*

Strengths identified by the respondents highlighted the diversity, collective experience and combined knowledge of people involved in the Regional Management Committee. These strengths not only focused on education but also the nexus between Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal cultural practices and education. The responses provided also supported the idea of belonging to a group of people who express common goals, which will lead toward a better future for Aboriginal communities by participating in education:

> Gives Aboriginal people a voice that will be heard to better understand our position in society in general, not just education.

An additional theme highlighted as a response, is the positive communication that exists between people, regardless of longevity of membership in the Hunter Region.

5) *Perceived Weaknesses of the Regional Management Committee*

Members identified the lack of time available to volunteer membership as a weakness for the organisation. There is also some concern that a majority of the members are employed within the Department of Education and Training, which could influence discussion and ultimately influence decisions that impact on the relationship between themselves and their employer:

> Too many DET staff representing local community. More outside DET need to be involved although everyone manages to wear two hats.
Generally respondents felt that while there are several restraints placed on the membership due to the voluntary capacity, the work carried out by the Hunter Regional AECG members of the Management Committee is very valuable.

6) **Skills Needed**

Many respondents stated that a passion and commitment to Aboriginal Education is a clear indicator of skills necessary for active participation. Some governance skills are identified as being useful as a committee member, but not essential:

*I think the only skill needed is to be willing to be part of a team and a commitment to Aboriginal Education.*

The above comment made by many delegates gives a clear indication that to be involved at a Regional Committee level is, that an expectation of commitment to the NSW AECG network is placed on each of the elected office bearers.

7) **Skills and Knowledge Gained**

None of the respondents stated that they had not gained any knowledge or skills by participating in the Regional Management Committee meetings. Communication skills were accredited as one aspect which led to personal growth and confidence building as an outcome of active participation. The following comment supports this assertion:

*Incredible increased level of confidence. Increased knowledge of Departmental systems. Increased networks around the country – meeting new people.*

Some respondents made comment that feeling safe in this environment encouraged a feeling of being confident to speak out without being judged.

8) **Three Positive Outcomes Achieved**

This question presented to the Hunter Regional AECG Management Committee meeting, elicited responses from delegates elected to represent the established Local AECGs. Three categories: Community Participation, School Relationships and Regional Initiatives are designed to organise raw data into consistent patterns for the purpose of analysis. Responses to the survey indicated that School Relationships have been the most positive outcome for the Hunter Regional AECG. The following table showed that 50% of respondents agreed that efforts should be placed into working with schools. Building positive relationships is very worthwhile as a voluntary member of
the Regional AECG. Some of the comments identified issues related to student suspensions, but members are prepared to collaborate with school staff to help resolve situations.

**Table 3: Hunter Region  Positive Outcomes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hunter Region</th>
<th>Community Participation</th>
<th>School Relationships</th>
<th>Regional Initiatives</th>
<th>No Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The NSW AECG and the Regional structure is a voluntary organisation that sets its own workloads in accordance with Local/Regional member availability. While a limited number of voluntary members are not in fulltime paid employment, attempts to respond to provider requests mean there are often unmet demands for AECG services. Three categories: Community Participation, School Relationships and Regional Initiatives are designed to attribute responses in organised patterns for the purpose of raw data analysis.
The majority of responses clearly indicated that the Hunter Region’s priority should be confirming positive School Relationships for the next two years.
Further analysis of raw data identified five broad areas to approach when applying energy and efforts in the category of ‘School Relationships’. They are reported in priority order:

1. No Comment
2. Employment
3. Policy Focus
4. Cultural Education
5. Student Focus
6. Early Childhood Education

The highest ranking response is allocated to the “no comment” space made available on the questionnaire. Respondents identified employment of Aboriginal people in the school sector as being the priority area. It seems that members felt that having direct contact with Aboriginal people in the school environment would lead to greater academic success for Aboriginal students. The effects of Aboriginal Education policy implementation is identified as an indicator of the participation of Aboriginal students in classrooms. The Department of Education and Training (DET) Expulsion and Suspension Guidelines in addition to DET’s Aboriginal Education Policy is seen to be influential on outcomes for Aboriginal students. Equal weight was given to Cultural Education for students and school staff. Respondents believed that confirmation of identity can be included in the classroom by presenting Aboriginal perspectives in curriculum. Student Success and Early Childhood Education categories follow in that order.

**Summary**

The Hunter Regional AECG Management Committee (2010) has identified a correlation between positive outcomes and school relationships for Aboriginal student success. Responses to a question addressing priorities provided clear direction for the Hunter Regional AECG to address over the next two years. Throughout 2010 at all four Hunter Regional AECG meetings, minuted attendance records indicated an average of twenty five voting members attended each meeting. The number of people in attendance at Regional meetings showed that members were committed to the AECG network in this Region. Members were passionate about working with schools in particular, based on the belief that this action will encourage positive outcomes for Aboriginal students.
Other Comments

Friendships and knowledge gained within this organization is both encouraged and on-going.
Keep up the great work!!
I have grown from a shy person who did not think I had anything valuable to give, to an extremely positive, confident person who is able to support others and commit to more. I love being involved in the AECG at all levels. The friendships that I have made are valuable.
Meetings should be held twice a term.
Until DET and all schools get on board with the Aboriginal Education Policy, Local AECG and Regional AECG will forever be a struggle.
When funding for Aboriginal programs are discontinued, programs are gone, Aboriginal faces gone from schools.
There needs to be a presence in the front office of schools.
In fifteen years of working with our kids in schools, the AECG is the most positive group, in my opinion, to hit the schools and community in one package.
You fullas are just plain Deadly.
I think it’s great that we are starting Junior AECGs to get our kids into the future.
AEO’s, community, students, need more support from our DET Special Education Directors.
The continual adaptation of the committee in light of what was in the past to now, we have come a long way.
Communication between community and DET.
Improving community involvement in education.

I would like to thank members of the Hunter Regional AECG Management Committee for participating in this survey. I would also like to thank those members who took time to write additional comments.
The next chapter includes data collected from each AECG Region across NSW. Two Regions registered nil returns for completed surveys, they are Manning and Riverina: 2. Analysis of survey responses have been collated into categories for the purpose of consistency regardless of the number of surveys collected from each Region. Narrative summaries of surveys are reported in numerical order as identified on the NSW AECG Regional map. Chapter 8: ‘Voices of AECG Members’ is presented in two sections. Verbatim responses are included in section two so that easy access to comments and stories can be perused by the story tellers.
Chapter 8: Voices of AECG Members

Introduction
The previous chapter discussed two examples of activities presented by the Hunter Regional AECG. These examples have been identified as positive outcomes expressed through survey results in response to question (7) by the respondents. A graph illustrates the percentage of members who indicated which category had produced the most positive outcomes across the Hunter Regional AECG. Another graph in response to question (8) identified priority areas that members of the Hunter Regional AECG should focus their efforts on for the following two years.

This chapter will be presented in two sections. Section one will present qualitative data using a story-telling style of writing. A narrative method of reporting has been used, to present responses from the survey results, in keeping with recommendations put forward at Aboriginal Education forums over several years. The recommendations request that research reports and policies designed to target Aboriginal people be written in a language so that Aboriginal community members can understand the findings and written expectations. Individual responses have been incorporated into the focus question summaries as evidence of recorded data used.

Section two includes verbatim responses to complete the chapter, in order to uphold the trust members have placed in the researcher to report their voice as a true record of shared knowledge. This strategy will illustrate the connectedness to interpretation of data and reported results. The responses can be accessed easily and perused by the knowledge holders to match the narrative reporting style, so that the integrity of storytelling as a knowledge sharing process is not compromised.

There are nineteen AECG Regions throughout NSW. Each Region has a number of Local AECGs registered which vary in membership numbers. Full membership is open to all Aboriginal people 18 years of age and over. Associate membership is open to all non-Aboriginal people 18 years of age and over. Junior membership is open to all Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people between 12 years and 18 years of age. Only Aboriginal members are eligible for election to Management Committee positions.
Regional summaries will be reported against the numerical figure identified on the following NSW AECG map.

Fig. 19  NSW AECG Regional Map

Regional survey responses to (8) questions have been analysed and reported against the numerical figure allocated to each AECG Region (see figure: 18 above). The following questions are designed to extrapolate information from members of the Regional Management Committees and to provide an opportunity to voice an opinion on behalf of the Local AECG membership within the Regions. Responses to survey questions have been collected over a three year period. Each Regional AECG has been forwarded a copy of their specific report for distribution to the Regional membership, inclusive of all verbatim survey responses and individual question summaries. An oral presentation of the thesis structure and copies of the draft Chapter 5: ‘The NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group’ was provided at the NSW AECG Annual General Meeting held at the Novotel Hotel, Brighton-le-Sands, NSW in 2011. This practice
upholds the initial agreement relevant to the endorsement process between the researcher and the NSW AECG network.

**Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Questions**

1. What level of experience and knowledge in Aboriginal Education and Training is necessary to actively participate in the operations of the NSW AECG Inc. at a Regional level?
2. Is it necessary to have formal qualifications to be elected as a member of the Regional Management Committee?
3. What are the strengths of the Regional Management Committee?
4. What are the perceived weaknesses of the Regional Management Committee?
5. What skills are needed to actively participate on the Regional Management Committee?
6. What skills and knowledge have you gained by being a member of the Regional Management Committee?
7. Identify three positive outcomes achieved by the Regional Management Committee.
8. Identify three priority areas in Aboriginal Education that the Regional Management Committee should address in the next two years?

Question (7) invites members to highlight positive outcomes achieved by the Regional Management Committee. In an attempt to provide consistency across all Regions three categories have been established to analyse the responses.

**Community Participation:** this category attributes those responses that are related to interaction with education providers by AECG members and community engagement activities.

**School Relationships:** this category attributes activities that are directly related to schools and educational programs.

**Regional Initiatives:** this category attributes programs and issues that are pertinent to the Region.

Responses to question (8) which asked for identification of priority areas may change, depending on the viewpoints of individual delegates elected at Regional Annual General Meetings across the State. Priorities have been reported as identified by the survey respondents. There are four sub-categories established in an attempt to provide consistency across all Regions.
**Aboriginal Studies:** this category attributes responses that refer to knowledge about Aboriginal people and their cultures.

**AECG Capacity Building:** this category attributes activities which increases a skill base for members as an outcome of community participation.

**Student Issues:** this category attributes issues directly related to Aboriginal students.

**Education Providers:** this category attributes issues and programs that are related to education providers across the formal education systems.

All responses to ‘Other Comments’ presented in regional surveys are reported verbatim in respect of those Aboriginal people who put forward their additional thoughts and have been included in the body of text. All other responses to Regional survey questions are included at the end of this chapter allowing easy accessibility for membership scrutiny. Verbatim responses complete section two named ‘Regional Survey Responses’.

Each Region was presented with an explanation of why the survey completion was requested, either through personal attendance by the researcher at a Regional AECG meeting, or by making phone contact and email communication with a member of the Regional Management Committees or by making personal contact with the Regional Representatives at a NSW AECG Annual General Meeting. The following Regional NSW AECG Management Committee Focus Group information was provided:

*Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. All information provided will be kept anonymous. The information will be used to inform the researcher (Laurel Williams), about the involvement of NSW AECG Inc. Members in the delivery of Aboriginal Education across the spectrum of Education provision. Data collected, will be incorporated into a written PhD thesis and presented through enrolment at Newcastle University. The title of the thesis is: ‘People-Places-Pathways in NSW Aboriginal Education’. The question being investigated is: ‘Has Aboriginal community participation impacted on Education provision in NSW’?*

The following extract from the NSW AECG Rules of Operation clearly show that no qualifications are necessary to be elected as a member of the Management Committee.

**Section 4 Duties of the Management Committee**
Part 1 Criteria for Election to the Management Committee

1.1 Persons seeking election on the Association, Regional or Local Management Committee must:

(i) be a full financial member of the Association;
(ii) be endorsed by their Local AECG members;
(iii) be a permanent resident of New South Wales;
(iv) have experience and knowledge in Aboriginal education and training;
(v) demonstrate a commitment to the principles of confidentiality; and
(vi) uphold the fiduciary responsibilities and Rules of the Association (see Nomination Forms in the appendix to these rules).304

All responses to ‘Other Comments’ are presented in regional surveys and are reported verbatim in respect of those Aboriginal people who put forward their additional thoughts.

Region 1: Western 1

Western 1: Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group

After making requests for surveys to be completed at the 2010 and 2011 NSW AECG Annual General Meetings no surveys were completed. Regional Representatives were approached at the State meetings held in the Central Coast and Hunter Regions during 2011 and attendance at a meeting held in the Western Region (Dubbo), in addition to phone and email communication. Only (1) survey had been completed. I would like to thank the Western Regional President for the effort taken to return this survey by mail.

Focus Question Summary

Experience, knowledge and cultural confidence are needed when standing for an elected position on the Regional Management Committee. No formal qualifications are necessary. Strengths of the AECG identified by this participant is Aboriginal community participation at the “grass roots” level and not necessarily by DET staff. Elders are valued members of the Western 1 Region. Perceived weaknesses are identified as not being fully representative of the towns located across the Region, which could be due to the vast distances between Aboriginal communities. A lack of commitment was a response recorded as a perceived weakness.

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Communication, listening and cultural competence are skills needed to actively participate at Regional meetings. The experience and knowledge gained by this member was identified as building a good network in education, recognising the need for empathy toward those in need and hearing about other people’s work has developed skills useful to an individual. Friendships established through membership and keeping honest open communication are attributes needed when setting goals to achieve positive outcomes. Priorities to be addressed are generally better educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. Specific suggestions are that resources need to be properly allocated in order to maintain sustainability of Aboriginal programs in addition to pathways into Higher Education (at affordable prices). These activities need to be enhanced for this Region.

Other Comments

Having information readily available for community to access is needed (e.g. funding, health, and housing).
I do see genuine partnerships.

Region 2: Western 2

Western 2: Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group

Copies of surveys were provided to delegates at the NSW AECG 2011 Annual General Meeting. Approaches were made to the Regional Representative at the State meetings held at the Central Coast Region on 17\(^{th}\) to 19\(^{th}\) September 2010 and Hunter Region on 24\(^{th}\) to 26\(^{th}\) June 2011, in addition to repeated phone contact to the Regional Secretary. In May 2012 surveys were handed to AECG representatives from Warren, Nyngan and Cobar at the presentation of the Western 2 ‘Connecting to Country’ forum. Only (2) surveys were completed.

Focus Question Summary

Being passionate about participation in Aboriginal Education and having local knowledge is needed to actively participate in the NSW AECG. Both respondents felt that formal qualifications are not necessary to participate at a Management Committee level, but general knowledge about Aboriginal Culture and education systems are very
useful ‘tools’ to have, in order to assist schools and parents involved in Aboriginal Education.

Being active and voicing opinions about issues that affect Aboriginal Education at Local/Regional/State levels are identified as strengths in this Region. Having passionate people to communicate concerns are beneficial to the community. Making sure that all gatherings and meetings are open and transparent should avoid potential miscommunication. Written and oral skills will support the Region when raising local issues. A genuine commitment to Aboriginal Education will strengthen the Management Committee. Awareness of who the key local people are has increased the knowledge base of a member of this Management Committee. Communicating with other people within the network was an illustration of increased confidence as an individual. Voicing concerns about issues has left a feeling of empowerment and individual strength.

Both respondents identified the delivery of ‘Aboriginal Cultural Awareness’ training as a positive outcome to strengthen community partnerships with the Local AECGs and schools. Networking with other passionate Aboriginal people becomes stimulating, encouraging and maintains enthusiasm and active participation.

Changing the attitudes of teachers toward Aboriginal Education was identified by both participants who responded to the question relevant to positive outcomes, as being an activity worthwhile expending future voluntary energy. Increased Aboriginal community participation through the AECG structure and imparting knowledge through Aboriginal Perspectives would be a method of reaching set goals. There was a feeling that covert racism is operational in schools within this Region.

Other Comments

Thank you for your contribution to our forum.
The fight and struggle continues for practice and delivery of culture. Why should we have to ask for permission to be embraced in cultural activities?
Region 3: Western 3

Western 3: Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group

After making requests for surveys to be completed at the 2010 and 2011 NSW AECG Annual General Meetings, State meetings held in the Central Coast and Hunter Regions during 2011 and attendance at a meeting held in the Western Region (Dubbo), in addition to phone and email communication, the State AECG Field Officer administered the surveys on behalf of the researcher. Unfortunately questions 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 were not completed due to incorrect copying of the survey questions. Follow-up efforts were made by the NSW AECG Field Officer to have the “missed questions” completed, but to no avail. I feel the questions that were answered should be included in this research project. The number of (8) surveys are partially completed.

Focus Question Summary

This Region believed that knowledge about the NSW AECG was beneficial but it is vital to have knowledge about the community you are representing. Communication skills are necessary in providing feedback relevant to Aboriginal Education and to the membership. Employment experience with an education provider was identified as being very useful. The majority of participants did not think it was necessary to have formal qualifications to be elected but felt Management Committee members must have knowledge about education systems.

This Region ranked Education Providers as the highest priority category when planning to expend energy on future projects. In particular, relationships should be developed between schools and the Local/Regional AECG. Increasing the level of community participation in Aboriginal Education should be addressed with a fair level of intensity. Cultural Awareness programs presented by Aboriginal community members were identified as an activity which could produce positive results. “No comment” to the question regarding priorities was recorded in (2) spaces.

Other Comments

We need to work hard to get more Aboriginal people in leadership roles and continue to build the capacity of community members.
Aboriginal Education is important to non-Aboriginal students and communities as well and should be a focus of the AECG too.
All departmental agencies working together. Stuff the red tape and boundaries.
AECG a great education voice.
Just being a part of the AECG is something good for the future of our children.

Region 4: North West 1
North West 1: Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group

At a Regional meeting held on 13th May, 2010 at Inverell (7) respondents completed the surveys. North West 1 had (7) Local AECGs established at this stage. North West 1: Region and North West 2: Region came together to form a “Super Region”. Members were informed that North West Region 1 or 2 would be used as markers to identify responses relevant to the respondents’ Region. Each member was then requested to mark their survey accordingly. The surveys were distributed, by the researcher to both groups of representatives, collected and separated according to Region 1 or Region 2.

Focus Question Summary
This Region felt that being able to represent local communities within the Region through a two way communication process was important for information sharing within the networks of the AECG. The skill to understand the ramifications of policy development and implementation was a requirement for members in order to support the committee operations at a Regional level. Possessing a sound knowledge of the organisation and providing support to all Local AECGs was evidence of active participation.

The majority of respondents felt it was not necessary to have formal qualifications to be elected, but felt that knowledge and understanding of the NSW AECG Constitution would be an asset to the Management Committee. One respondent felt that having the experience associated with formal studies was very helpful. “No comment” was recorded by (1) person to this question relevant to the necessity for completion of formal qualifications to be elected to the Management Committee.
There were mixed feelings expressed about the strengths of the Management Committee in this Region. Recorded comments indicated the need to co-ordinate efforts collectively by increasing the membership and to participate in group discussions when identifying future strategic direction. “No comment” was recorded by (1) person to this question. Geographic remoteness and lengthy travel times appeared to be problematic in this Region and was identified as a weakness within the Region. Inconsistent information sharing between Local AECGs and between other Regions was identified as needing improvement. Knowledge of the organisation and life experience was a criterion for active participation in this Region. Basic business management skills were valued, coupled with a passion for Aboriginal children’s educational success.

Knowledge about the AECG philosophy and operations are equated to an increased skill base. Knowledge about education systems and program availability would assist when communicating with parents. “No comment” was recorded by (2) people to the question of skills and knowledge gained. The responses recorded as “information” and “talk” have been accredited to the community participation category as positive outcomes. If this assumption is valid then community participation was clearly identified as a popular achievement by the Management Committee. Improved school relationships could be seen as a positive outcome evidenced by increased Aboriginal staff being employed in schools. “No comment” was recorded by (1) person to this question.

The need for AECG capacity building was evident in this Region. Through constant liaison with Aboriginal school staff, as a “flow on” effect opportunities will be presented to support students. Aboriginality is raised as needing attention, either through cultural confirmation or clarification of school processes.

Other Comments

Let’s keep working together.
Region 5: North West 2

North West 2: Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group

Respondents completed (8) surveys at a Regional meeting held on 13th May 2010 at Inverell. North West 2: Region had (8) Local AECGs established at this stage. North West 2: Region and North West 1: Region came together to form a “Super Region”. The surveys were distributed by the researcher to both groups of representatives, collected and categorised according to Region 1 or Region 2.

Focus Question Summary

This Region felt that local community knowledge and a basic understanding of programs and policies in Aboriginal Education linked to a desire and commitment for the education of children was needed to actively participate at a Regional level. Being able to interact with all facets of the community was identified as being valuable to the Regional functions.

The majority of people did not think formal qualifications were necessary to be elected for a Management Committee position. People should be confident to speak out and represent all members across the Region to be effective. Active involvement through sharing information and knowledge appeared to have produced a united front across the Region. Recognition of support from within the organisation and education providers had strengthened the Management Committee members’ resolve to work toward reaching common goals. Time and travel distances could be a reason why there seems to be a lack of involvement by more community members. Communication across the large geographic area of this Region created barriers to information flow and could be seen as weaknesses.

Clearly the wish to operate as a team member was a skill that illustrated active participation. The desire to support children in education by using good communication skills enhanced the strategies designed for successful outcomes. More knowledge about Aboriginal Education Policies and Programs and the implication of being involved in the AECG had reinforced the value of the Regional Management Committee. Being
able to raise issues across the Region highlighted the need to speak up on behalf of Koori students in schools.

It was interesting that the high number of participants did not take the opportunity to identify positive outcomes achieved in this Region. “No comment” had been accredited to (14) of the (24) spaces available. The relationship between education providers and the AECG was acknowledged as a positive outcome. Increased community participation could be enhanced further by holding combined Regional meetings.

“No comment” recordings of (11) indicated that discussions relevant to future directions needed to take place within this Region if collective priority goal setting will be achievable in the future. Clearly AECG capacity building should be the major focus in the short-term. Student issues need to be addressed to produce long-term positive gains.

Other Comments

I am happy to say by being involved in schools and talking to kids – who are becoming confident in talking to us by not getting shamed.
Keep up the good work.
More funding for our kids to attend academic and sporting events.

Region 6: Upper North Coast

Upper North Coast: Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group
Surveys were presented by the researcher at a Regional meeting held at Lismore on 25th June, 2010. There were (8) Local AECGs established at this stage and (4) delegates are nominated to attend the Regional Management Committee meetings in addition to the elected Executive Committee members. At this meeting, there was some concern about the lack of attendance. Delegates took surveys away to be completed and forwarded to the researcher. Three completed surveys were returned.
Focus Question Summary

A working knowledge of all education system structures was desirable but not essential. Understanding the educational jargon used within the education system would assist active participation in schools for Local /Regional AECG members.

All respondents answered no to the necessity of formal qualifications to be elected as a Management Committee member, but felt there are other attributes needed to reinforce the philosophy of the NSW AECG. Educational knowledge, experience, transparency, honesty and personal commitment were traits of current members valued in this Region. The Partnership Agreement between North Coast DET and the Regional AECG was seen as a strength across the Region by all the respondents. Understanding the local needs of this area provided opportunity to apply interesting program solutions.

External expectations placed high demands on members of the Regional Management Committee. Inconsistent attendance by some Local AECG delegates delays meeting processes and forward progress which was identified as a barrier to increasing strengths in this Region. An open-minded attitude to ideas put forward to resolve conflicting viewpoints was desirable. Thinkers with forward planning insight can provide solutions to the tedious work required to actively participate in the operations of the Regional Management Committee. Sharing information and being aware of a variety of communities was valued as an asset to the Regional Management Committee.

This Region felt that a co-ordinated approach to matters that affected the Region had been a really positive outcome, measured against active results achieved. Increased community participation meant improved networking across the Region. Active participation in school activities ensured AECG involvement in education decision making.

Efforts needed to be shared equally between the categories of AECG Capacity Building and reinforcing positive participation with Education Providers across the Region. Through DET/AECG partnership arrangements and discussions relevant to social policy
changes which affect educational outcomes, strategies could be produced to deal with these issues. Shared ideas put forward by Local AECG members should provide alternative methods of addressing student issues.

Other Comments

Maybe some sort of information package (fact sheets etc.) could be developed as a “Membership Package” to enable a greater learning for members.

Region 7: Lower North Coast

Lower North Coast: Regional AECG Management Committee

Surveys were presented by the researcher at a Regional meeting held at Port Macquarie TAFE on 17th March, 2010. There were (3) Local AECGs established at this stage. While there were more members in attendance, delegates took the surveys with them saying they would forward them completed, to the researcher at a later date. Completed surveys were returned by (3) members.

Focus Question Summary

Some educational knowledge could be useful, but not essential. A passion for education will open doorways to gain further knowledge and experience needed. It was definitely not a requirement to have formal qualifications before being elected on Management Committees. Passion for education should be accredited as a qualification.

The most important strength in this Region was local input and the desire to focus on ideas to influence positive change. Consistent attendance by all Local delegates to Regional meetings would ensure Local AECGs have the opportunity to receive important feedback. Geographical distance could be considered as a factor why some delegates are unable to attend. The complexity of tasks associated with Aboriginal Education was very time consuming for voluntary members in addition to professional responsibilities, which present difficulties in juggling workloads for some individual members.

People skills combined with governance knowledge could encourage active participation by Management Committee members. Being secure in Aboriginality and
some knowledge of Aboriginal Education issues, can only produce positive outcomes in local decision making.

Confidence in listening to balanced points of view in order to create change in Aboriginal Education had heightened members’ awareness of policy procedures. An understanding of how policy guidelines were implemented had supported partnership arrangements and networking.

Building and confirming improved school relationships, particularly at a Regional level, was cited as the most positive outcome in this Region. Increasing community participation by supporting Local AECGs was recognised as a continuing effort that had cemented positive relationships. Confirming positive relationships with education providers across the Region was a very worthwhile activity.

Identified priority areas for this Region’s Management Committee to address were equally shared between AECG Capacity Building, Student Issues and Education Provider categories. It was interesting that an increased focus to be given to all areas of education provision from Early Childhood to University level was identified. This indicated awareness that AECG participation is designed to interact with all levels of the education portfolio.

Other Comments

There is a need for more support from State in training and capacity building of a Region.
Aboriginal mob have always fought for change to get access for an education.
Getting organized and working from a structured place, helps to organise the energy.
No matter what is happening it is needed and we would not be here with all our gains, if this structure was not available. Sometimes it has been tough as issues have surfaced, but when it is out it gives the opportunity to sort it out. I’ll always stay involved no matter what issues are on the ground.
Thank You (signed)

Region 8: Manning

Manning: Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group
Copies of surveys were provided to delegates at the NSW AECG 2011 Annual General Meeting. The Hunter Regional Representative and the NSW AECG Field Officer attended a Regional meeting held at Taree on 8th April 2011 to present and collect surveys on the researcher’s behalf. Surveys were left to be returned by post. Approaches were made to the Regional Representative at the State meetings held at Central Coast Region on 17th to 19th September 2010 and the Hunter Region on 24th to 26th June 2011, in addition to repeated phone contact to the Regional Secretary.

Nil Returns

Region 9: Hunter

Hunter: Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group

Surveys were presented by the researcher at a Regional meeting held at Toronto HS on 21st June, 2010. There were (9) Local AECGs established at this stage. The Hunter Regional Management Committee was inclusive of the Local AECG President, plus (3) elected Local delegates (who must be full members) from each Local AECG and the Regional Representative, plus the elected Regional Executive Committee. Surveys were completed by (20) respondents.

Focus Question Summary

The majority of respondents felt that no experience was needed to become involved at a Management Committee level. Members felt that knowledge would come by regular attendance at Local AECG meetings. Many respondents felt that knowledge of the DET Aboriginal Education and Training Policy and involvement with DET was needed to actively participate in this Region. All respondents answered “no” to the question of the necessity to hold formal qualifications before accepting a nomination for election on the Management Committee. Additional comments suggest mentoring programs and willingness to learn would qualify people for election.

The shared vision and cohesiveness of the members within a diverse group of people with various levels of knowledge and experiences was recognised as the strengths of this Region. Positive relationships between members were evident through teamwork.
Members felt that the Regional Management Committee was a voice to improve the position of Aboriginal people in society, not only in education.

The availability of members, who volunteer their time in addition to employment commitments and the limited number of community delegates outside DET staff, created a challenge for this Region. Some general meeting procedure skills were identified as useful when linked to knowledge and understanding of DET and AECG procedures. These skills can encourage active participation. The ability to listen and learn was a skill recognised as valuable for AECG involvement.

It was obvious that increased knowledge had increased the confidence of members to communicate with education providers and discuss issues that affect Aboriginal Education. Being part of a network that was active and passionate about the AECG was very encouraging. The balance between Community Participation and building School Relationships was shared fairly equally as positive outcomes in this Region. Regional initiatives such as signing the DET/AECG Partnership Agreement, Hunter AECG presentation of the Cultural Immersion Program and approval of the PaCE submission to DEEWR, were also recognised as positive outcomes. “No comment” was recorded in (10) spaces to this question.

Education Providers are ranked as being the highest priority for the Management Committee to focus their energies on in this Region. An increase in Aboriginal staffing employed at the school level should be addressed in addition to securing Aboriginal program funding. “No comment” was recorded in (11) spaces to the question relevant to priority setting for the future.

Other Comments

*Friendships and knowledge gained within this organisation is both encouraged and ongoing.*

*Keep up the great work!!*

*I have grown from a shy person who did not think I had anything valuable to give, to an*
extremely positive confident person who is able to support others and commit to more. I love being involved in the AECG at all levels. The friendships that I have made are valuable.

Meetings should be held twice a term.

Until DET and all schools get on board with the Aboriginal Education Policy, Local AECG and Regional AECG will forever be a struggle.

When funding for Aboriginal programs are discontinued, programs are gone, Aboriginal faces gone from schools.

There needs to be a presence in the front office of schools.

In fifteen years of working with our kids in schools, The AECG is the most positive group, in my opinion, to hit the schools and community in one package.

You fullas are just plain Deadly.

I think it’s great that we are starting Junior AECGs to get our kids into the future.

AEO’s, community, students, need more support from our DET Special Education Directors.

The continual adaptation of the committee in light of what was in the past to now, we have come a long way.

**Region 10: Metropolitan East**

Metropolitan East: Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group

After making requests for surveys to be completed at the 2010 and 2011 NSW AECG Annual General Meetings, State meetings held in the Central Coast and Hunter Regions during 2011, in addition to phone and email communication, only (1) survey had been completed. I would like to thank the Metropolitan East Regional President for the effort taken to return this survey. It is interesting how difficult it was for the Regional President to collect completed surveys, when the NSW AECG Secretariat is located in this Region. Apparently at this time there had been disharmony among some members of this Region, which created a situation that made it difficult to encourage members to complete and return surveys. This advice was provided by the Regional President

**Focus Question Summary**

Knowledge and an understanding of past struggles and how they affected the present situation, as well as an understanding of current issues was seen to be essential to developing a future plan. No formal qualifications were necessary to participate in the AECG structure.
A strength identified by this Region was the willingness to work as a team to provide a united front and was outweighed by individual agendas which can be identified as a weakness and used as a tokenistic approach to solutions offered by DET.

A willingness to learn about Aboriginal education, in addition to having writing skills was needed to actively participate in the operations of the Management Committee. Speaking skills, curriculum knowledge, negotiation skills, policy understanding and translation of education specific terminology are skills gained by this participant through involvement on the Regional Management Committee.

A new Regional Management Committee was identified as a positive outcome for this Region. Training in Governance skills and supporting established Local AECGs were identified as priorities for the immediate future. Negotiating Partnership Agreements with DEC across the Region should be allocated energy provided by the Management Committee.

**Region 11: Metropolitan North**

**Metropolitan North: Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group**

Surveys were presented at a Regional meeting held at Dee Why on 12th October 2010. After the Regional meeting business concluded, a barbeque of fish and salads was provided by the members for lunch. The meeting was held in a local park which was an ideal setting for this Aboriginal community business gathering. The Regional Management Committee had incorporated business with pleasure surrounded by an informal environment to encourage member participation. This Region does not have identified “pockets” of Aboriginal communities living across the Region. Members are keen to utilise different venues to encourage interest and participation. Thank you Metropolitan North for the experience and your hospitality. Surveys were completed by (6) members at the meeting.

**Focus Question Summary**

While a basic understanding of Aboriginal Education and Training policy was valued as an advantage, knowledge of the local community brings with it experience useful to influence change. Personal empowerment increases confidence, passion and
commitment to actively participate in a responsible manner. This group had two schools of thought. One section thought that formal qualifications are not necessary, but feel that some training relevant to the AECG organisation was a useful tool to be acquired. The other section identified varying levels of qualifications are needed that will lead to a higher level of professionalism for the Regional Management Committee members.

This Region felt that local opinion being raised at the State AECG level about local issues provided opportunity for positive discussion. Awareness of Regional activities and general community service provision was cited as strengths of this Region. Utilising expertise in these areas can only produce positive outcomes. Time, transport availability, limited membership, cultural isolation and Local AECG availability to attend meetings were included in a list identified as issues needing review. There appeared to be many variables that could be considered to strengthen the operations of the Regional Management Committee.

While a variety of existing skills among the membership was highly valued, clearly commitment to the organisation and good communication skills are needed to actively participate on the Regional Management Committee. It appeared that personal growth had increased by being involved at the Regional level. Confidence to challenge educational injustices for Aboriginal people and knowledge of education systems had enhanced the skill base of Management Committee members.

Clearly Regional Initiatives have been identified as the most positive achievement of the Regional Management Committee. An effort to increase the involvement of the Aboriginal community through the establishment of Local AECGs was recognised as a priority. “No comment” was recorded by (1) person when listing their third priority item. Efforts need to be applied to the AECGs Capacity Building through an increase of Local AECG membership. Training needs must be offered to members in order to strengthen the Region as a collective. The relationship between AECG and schools would be improved if Aboriginal Education Policies were implemented at Local and Regional levels. The Department of Education and Communities structure through Local Management Groups, linked to the Regional AECG structure could serve this
purpose. There were (3) “no comment” responses recorded by respondents when identifying priorities for the Regional Management Committee to focus on.

Other Comments

*Throughout my long journey in Aboriginal Education, I have always thought about what my Mother, Aunties, Uncles provided to my education. The passion, the strong sense of family – the caring of others. These are values we should always remember. Thank you for your passion.*

**Region 12: Metropolitan West**

*Metropolitan West: AECG Regional Management Committee Focus Group*

Surveys were presented by the researcher at the Regional AECG meeting held at Hazelbrook PS on 25<sup>th</sup> August 2010. Some members took the surveys with them to post at a later date. A completed survey of (1) was returned. Included in this Region’s data analysis are (3) completed surveys.

**Focus Question Summary**

This Region felt that to participate at a Regional AECG level, a demonstrated commitment to the organisation was needed. Some knowledge and experience in Aboriginal Education was valuable. Formal qualifications are not necessary to be elected as a Management Committee member as stated by (2) people, but thought that knowledge and experience can be gained by working in the Region. A suggestion was made that a person can be a member of the Management Committee due to their level of experience, but (1) person felt that formal qualifications were necessary.

Sharing knowledge about Aboriginal Education with others and overseeing activities within the Region were identified as strengths in this Region. Not working as a team and trying to solve every problem presented, needs to be reviewed. Addressing issues, in the context of being “politically correct”, can be problematic due to people being over cautious when using language to communicate. Knowledge and commitment to AECG policy guidelines are skills required to actively participate at Local and Regional levels. Being able to relate to people is a skill needed for a Regional AECG Management Committee position.
Management skills and knowledge of the education system are identified as valuable skills gained. Public speaking was a skill gained through teamwork when discussing Aboriginal Education issues. Encouraging community participation in education was highlighted as the most positive outcome for this Region. Support for Aboriginal Education in schools and through Aboriginal Studies courses, were also identified as positive results. Student Issues and AECG Capacity Building are ranked as equal priorities in this Region. Aboriginal Studies was considered as one area that needed attention. When identifying their third priority for the Regional Management Committee (2) people made “no comment”.

Other Comments
All Regional and Local AECGs should work in partnership with each other. Leave differences with anything or anyone at the school. Aboriginal Education is everybody’s business and everyone should know this. It is a positive group striving to benefit Australian society.

Region 13: Metropolitan South West

Metropolitan South West: Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group

In 2009 the researcher attended a meeting held at Gandangara Land Council office and presented the research project to those in attendance. Some members had completed the Local Members survey to be included in Chapter: 6 ‘Mil-pra AECG’, Case Study data collection and became confused with the difference between both questionnaires. After several attempts to collect responses, surveys were emailed to the President of Mil-pra AECG for distribution to the elected Management Committee in 2011. Members completed (3) surveys and returned them by mail.

Focus Question Summary

Experience working with the community and being able to communicate with people at all levels was seen to be vital when actively participating in the operations of the NSW AECG at a Regional level. Some knowledge of Aboriginal Education and programs available would benefit the organisation. All respondents felt it was not necessary to have formal qualifications, but active participation was needed with Local AECGs within the Region. Keeping communication channels open between Local groups and providing answers to local queries were recognised as strengths in this Region. Help
from the Regional Management Committee to co-ordinate and support Local committees are identified as an additional strength offered by the committee members. The variations of viewpoints are seen as a unifying thread that elicits healthy discussion across the Region.

Sharing the workload among members could be improved. Individuals needed to think about the benefits to the whole community, rather than a selective focus on some sections of the community. Communication through negotiation and listening to learn from a wide spectrum of people would only produce positive outcomes for the Region. Training in a broader range of skills can encourage more people to increase their active participation in Regional tasks. It was felt that formal meeting skills and writing skills have increased the confidence of members to overcome shyness in an education environment.

Building stronger relationships with schools and TAFE services through the DET Partnership Agreement was identified as a positive outcome. Presenting a positive profile to the general public in this Region was a worthwhile effort that was seen as an achievement in a culturally diverse Metropolitan Region.

Building the Metropolitan South West AECGs capacity to meet educational expectations may be met by increasing the full membership and was seen as a priority. Having more people to co-ordinate and present community activities would ease the high workload of a few. Continuation of AECG and school relationships will require attention in the immediate future. The availability of Aboriginal Studies resources and individual Aboriginal student mentoring are identified as priority areas for the next (2) years. When setting future priorities (1) “no comment” was recorded.

Other Comments

Despite upheavals lately in Mil-pra, all Locals have become more active. Schools still try to get us to sign documents without consultation but Locals are not putting up with this. Do need (as always) more members doing more so will work on delegation next year.
Region 14: Upper South Coast

Upper South Coast: Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group

The Upper South Coast AECG elected Executive members (4) completed the surveys that were presented by the researcher at a Regional AECG meeting held at Ulladulla on 23rd May 2009.

Focus Question Summary

Cultural knowledge and community experience would be an advantage to actively participate in this voluntary organisation. An understanding of the organisation would be very useful. To be elected as a Management Committee member, (3) out of (4) respondents did not feel it was necessary to have formal qualifications. To be elected as President of the Regional Management Committee (1) person believed that formal qualifications were necessary.

Raising local issues with education providers and providing support to Local AECGs were recognised as strengths of the Management Committee. Travel distances between members’ homes and employment commitments present challenges for some members of the Management Committee.

Being aware of educational issues that impact on Aboriginal students and then voicing ideas to reach resolutions are skills valued in the role and responsibilities associated with elected Regional Management Committee positions. Listening and learning from other people’s experiences are methods of developing personal skills in this forum. Receiving information and knowledge had refined skills to continue involvement at the Regional level. Community Participation and Regional Initiatives shared the ranking for the most positive outcomes achieved by this Region. The energy used to encourage school relationships had been acknowledged as valuable.

The major focus for this Region should be consultation with education providers across the education spectrum. Building AECG Capacity by encouraging community membership requires attention. There is some concern that student suspension was an
issue. When identifying priorities (2) spaces were recorded as “no comment” to this question.

Other Comments

*Glad to be of assistance. Good luck to you.*

*I like what you are doing. The research when completed may make a “big” difference. Good on you Laurel.*

*The Local, Regional and State AECG is an important organization for the betterment of our children’s education.*

**Region 15: Lower South Coast**

*Lower South Coast: Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group*

Contact had been made with the Regional Representative at a 2011 State Meeting held in the Central Coast Region at Foresters Beach 17th and 19th September 2010 and the 2011 State AECG AGM, in addition to leaving several phone messages for the Regional President. All previous contact had been unsuccessful. After making phone contact with a Lower South Coast Regional Management Committee member, an arrangement was made to email a copy of the surveys to be distributed at the last Regional AECG meeting to be held for 2011. Before the end of 2011 (5) completed surveys were returned by mail. Thank you for this effort.

**Focus Question Summary**

Basic knowledge in Aboriginal Education was identified as being desirable to understand the relationship between schools and communities. Being Aboriginal was seen to be necessary to actively participate in the operations of the NSW AECG. By having an interest in Aboriginal Education, experience can be gained. All respondents felt that no qualifications were needed to become a member of the Regional Management Committee. “No comment” was recorded by (1) person for this area of investigation.

Commitment to Aboriginal Education by a few Local AECG members was expressed as a valuable strength in this Region. Networking and sharing information across the Region was recognised as a method of increasing a positive educational model in the community. Acknowledgement of the connection between Local, Regional and State
operations was also cited as a strength in addition to the AECG being a political lobby to Government.

The problem of time to meet more often was compromised by members being voluntary and holding full-time positions. The geographic vastness of the Region and workload timeframes, presents limitations to enable co-ordination of all Regional Management Committee members’ availability. The lack of support from the NSW AECG State office was identified as a weakness.

Communication skills was identified as the most important attribute necessary to actively participate at this level, followed by good English literacy and organisational skills. Some educational knowledge was valued, coupled with community knowledge to actively participate on the Regional AECG Committee. Broad Aboriginal Education knowledge and school based interactive skills have been gained through membership. Some personal growth had been accredited to membership participation.

Community participation was seen as the most positive outcome in this Region through networking and information sharing. Positive school relationships were valued by participating in school activities and providing advice. The Aboriginal Education portfolio across the Region provided an outlet to raise issues pertaining to Aboriginal children’s educational outcomes.

AECG Capacity Building was identified as a priority for this Region. Funding needs to be provided in order to offer Aboriginal Awareness raising programs, particularly for schools. Student issues such as attendance, retention and suspension was a concern. Merit Selection panel training was seen as a skill that will increase positive community participation with schools. The revival of Aboriginal languages was identified as a priority and could be seen as a method of cultural confirmation for Aboriginal people.

Other Comments

This is the only voice in Education that Aboriginal people have. It needs to have a more respectful profile and positive promotion.
J----- made me fill this out really quickly and I’m sorry that I’ve had to rush this form. Thank you though for the opportunity to participate.

Region 16: Riverina 1

Riverina 1: Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group

Surveys were given to the Regional representative at the 2011 NSW AECG Annual General Meeting held in Sydney, for distribution to the Region’s Management Committee. Members of the elected Regional Executive Committee did complete the surveys and returned them by post.

Focus Question Summary

This Region felt that some knowledge and experience was needed but not essential to actively participate in the operations of the Region. Using the Local AECG as training to actively participate at a regional level would be beneficial to individuals. Being able to read and write at a reasonable level was identified as being very valuable. This group was split between the need for formal qualifications and having a general skill base coupled with experience and knowledge about the AECG as necessary to be elected to the Regional Management Committee. Involvement of Aboriginal people in education at all levels was noted as the required key to progress.

Open communication, teamwork and local input were cited as strengths in this Region. Understanding the diversity of opinions was a trait used to strengthen the Management Committee. A perception was evident that the Regional Committee can solve all local problems. This is unrealistic. Being a voluntary organisation leads to unwillingness to take on leadership roles within the organisation.

Listening, administration, communication, written and verbal skills, and confidence are among the variety of skills needed to actively participate on the Regional Management Committee. To be empathetic toward others while resolving conflict was cited as a challenge, but valuable to the group. Being able to understand the political role the AECG possesses would be beneficial to the Region. While a raft of skills has been gained, recognition of the struggle to overcome educational disadvantage was a confronting reality check.
Increased Community Participation was cited as the most positive outcome in this Region. Building relationships across the education portfolio was identified as another positive approach for attaining positive outcomes. When requested to identify three positive outcomes achieved, (1) person recorded “no comment”.

Clearly the priority for this Region was to build AECG Community Capacity through increased membership, teamwork and offering training programs. Strategies need to be developed to improve the relationship with education providers, particularly schools. Student attendance needs to be addressed and optional education pathways provided to meet the needs of Aboriginal students dealing with the recently introduced increased school leaving age for students.

Other Comments

*Regional AECG should have a home base in the rural areas. Outdated resources makes AECG look bad and behind the times on our webpage. We are not moving with the technology and constantly saying that the Board of Studies is responsible, is a poor excuse for the State AECG.*

**Region 17: Riverina 2**

Riverina 2: Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group

Copies of surveys were provided to delegates at the NSW AECG 2011 Annual General Meeting. Surveys were left to be returned by post. Approaches were made to the Regional Representative at the State meetings held in the Central Coast Region on 17th to 19th September 2010 and the Hunter Region on 24th to 26th June 2011, in addition to repeated phone contact with the Regional Representative.

**Nil Returns**

**Region 18: Riverina 3**

Riverina 3: Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group

Surveys were given to the Regional representative at the 2011 NSW AECG Annual General Meeting held in Sydney, for distribution to the Region’s Management Committee. Members of the elected Executive Committee did complete the surveys,
Focus Question Summary

This Region had high expectations of people involved in the AECG at the Regional level. A total commitment to education, steeped in Aboriginal cultural knowledge and overlaid by a high understanding of how the AECG operates, was at the forefront of participation requirements. Being aware of the “big picture” in education and the effect on individuals at the local level was an expectation held by Local members. All respondents answered “no” to the need to complete formal qualifications before being elected on the Management Committee, but reinforced the need to have a commitment to education and the willingness to learn. The emphasis for this Region was the effort put into supporting Local AECGs and was identified as a valuable strength. By maintaining strong Local groups, the Region would gain long-term benefits. An inconsistent interpretation of information could cause differences between Local and Regional membership. Local AECGs need to be encouraged to deal with local issues and the Region can then support local decisions. Again a personal commitment to Aboriginal Education and local community knowledge about local needs, are the skills needed to actively participate in this Region. A sound knowledge of Aboriginal Culture and the educational relationship to local communities would enhance participation at the Regional Management Committee level.

Respondents felt that extended knowledge and increased committee operational skills have produced higher levels of confidence to complete complex tasks. Working with a team of like minded supportive people can only produce positive outcomes. The focus on developing school relationships through specific school based programs are clearly identified as the most positive outcomes in this Region. Community participation during NAIDOC and presenting a cultural perspective at community openings was cited as a positive way of raising the profile of the AECG.

AECG Capacity Building through the establishment of Junior AECGs within communities was a high priority for this Region. Recognition that other sectors of the
community should be encouraged to participate in the AECG organisation was also desirable. Extended Aboriginal Cultural training would be an additional building block for the capacity of members to broaden their skill base. Efforts should be directed toward developing closer relationships between schools and parents through education systems knowledge. When identifying their third priority (1) person recorded “no comment”.

Other Comments

*We have a very strong committee here. Our Junior AECG would like to come to the State meeting in Sydney to see how it’s run.*

*Being an Aboriginal in Education you must have a solid base of knowledge and understanding of your own cultures, schools and communities.*

*Need more Junior AECG in Regions.*

**Region 19: Central Coast**

**Central Coast: Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group**

The surveys were presented to representatives, by the researcher, in attendance at a Regional Meeting held at the Ourimbah Campus of the University of Newcastle, Gibali Centre, on 28th May, 2010. Surveys were completed by (9) respondents. Representation from each Local AECG (5), established at this time participated in the Regional meeting: Gosford, Mingaletta, Moorabilby, Wyong and Koorawa.

**Focus Question Summary**

The majority of respondents believed that no experience and knowledge was necessary to actively participate in the operations of the NSW AECG at a Regional level. A few people felt that community and educational knowledge would assist the Regional operations. All members responded that no qualifications were necessary to participate on Local or Regional Management Committees. One person noted that good writing and reading skills were valuable when seeking election to the Regional Management Committee. A strong community and education focus shared by a diverse team of people was identified as the main strength in this Region. Individual skills brought together under strong leadership, ensured a unity enjoyed during this Region’s forward progress. A “no comment” to the question relevant to Management Committee strengths was recorded by (1) person. Time availability in addition to family responsibilities
present challenges for volunteers who also have employment commitments. A “no comment” to the question associated with perceived weaknesses was recorded by (1) person.

To be pro-active in actions was acknowledged as a necessary skill required for active participation in this Region. A variety of personal attributes were identified as being valuable for membership on the Regional Management Committee. A “no comment” to the question relevant to defining active participation was recorded by (1) person. A variety of skills have been gained by being involved at the Regional Management Committee level. A broader and deeper knowledge of Aboriginal Education and applying that knowledge across several schools and communities had given some members a sense of empowerment.

Clearly the high level of effort put into increasing school relationships was recognised as the most positive outcome in this Region. A regional initiative, particularly the Regional AECG Resource folder, was acknowledged as a concrete result of productive energy used by the Regional Management Committee. Increased community participation should follow due to the establishment of new AECGs. A “no comment” to the question related to positive outcomes was recorded by (1) person.

This Region had identified the need to increase AECG Capacity Building as the priority for the Regional Management Committee to focus their energies. Continuing to work more closely with education providers by delivering Cultural Awareness training for staff and compulsory Aboriginal Studies in Primary and Secondary schools, would be a benefit to the Region. “No comment” to the question related to future priorities was recorded in (9) spaces.

**Summary**
An interpretation of emerging themes presented through the shared Regional stories is included in the following commentary. Having experience and knowledge in Aboriginal Education to participate in the operations at all levels of the NSW AECG is not a criterion to be fulfilled before accepting nomination for election to any Management
Committee position was expressed by the majority of participants. Members felt that being enthusiastic, passionate and fully committed to Aboriginal Education and the functions of the organisation are highly valued. By harnessing the collective traits displayed by the majority of members, development of worthy strategies can be designed to inject positive educational change beneficial for Aboriginal students across the education portfolio.

Whether formal qualifications are necessary for election on Management Committee positions was confirmed as a resounding “no”. While some skills are useful to interact with education providers, being conscious of Aboriginal community needs was identified as an essential element to promote successful outcomes in an educational environment. Expression of Aboriginality and more importantly maintaining Aboriginal Cultural knowledge was seen to be vital to establish a level of professional respect among school staff while representing the AECG. Active participation was recognised as being involved in discussions to develop ideas leading to progress and solutions to issues that are challenging. Attending meetings without being involved was not acknowledged as active participation.

Strengths and weaknesses of Regional Management Committees were evident in the responses provided through survey commentary. Many of the Regions highlighted the fact that open communication and teamwork was needed to complete programs successfully. The category of Regional Initiatives far outweighs the inconsistency of regular attendance by full members, and was expressed strongly by some members. Geographic distance and the high workload expected of Regional Executive were identified as major weaknesses. Due to the voluntary nature of the NSW AECG, activities are limited to resource availability and goodwill offered to Regional and Local activities as a result of Partnership Agreements signed off between Local AECGs and Local DEC Management Groups. Members who bring individual knowledge and experience of DEC policies and procedures are highly valued and often form the basis of ongoing long-term friendships. Many members cited their involvement with the AECG as the catalyst for personal growth and confidence building. Individual skills
learned and educational knowledge gained was welcomed as empowering in their private situations and encouraged further involvement in Aboriginal Education.

While several positive outcomes were being achieved at Local and Regional levels, the majority of activities were measured through Aboriginal Cultural implementation of program delivery. It was the activities that reached a number of non-Aboriginal school staff in affecting attitudinal change that was highly productive. It appeared that Aboriginal people through AECG membership are open to getting involved with negative situations in an attempt to benefit individual students and educate schools about Aboriginal Culture and history.

The opportunity to identify priority areas which require Regional Management Committee attention in the immediate future showed some disappointing results. The people who were elected to represent the Local membership were invited to put their ideas forward and many did not take up the invitation. It appeared to be a contradiction of information presented when glowing commentary was made about positive outcomes in response to one question and then write “no comment” to the following question when there is a flow on effect between both questions. This could be interpreted that there needs to be training programs designed to clarify roles of elected personnel on Regional Management Committees and communication skills training courses need to be offered to Local and Regional AECG membership.

Throughout the Regional responses comment was made in reference to the membership of AECGs and also being employed by DEC. While being in the employment of an education provider was recognised as an advantage to the organisation, the duality of roles need to be very clear when reporting issues and providing advice at the Local/Regional AECG meetings.

Information gleaned from voices of Aboriginal people located in Regions will be compared to State AECG responses in the next chapter, in order to match similarities and identify differences between Regions. The membership has been grouped into four Regions using the following criteria:
All coastal Regions, excluding Sydney Metropolitan Regions have been allocated to Country. Regions west of the Great Dividing Range, north to the Queensland border and south to the Victorian border will be allocated Rural. Other Regions meeting Victorian, South Australian and Queensland borders will be allocated Isolated for the purpose of comparison between groupings.

Categories allocated in Chapter 8: ‘Voices of AECG Members’ have been used and then tabulated to provide a quantitative number for each sector. This section of Chapter 9: ‘Comparative Thinking Spaces’ will compare the responses relevant to the need for formal qualifications, positive outcomes and priority areas between Metropolitan, Country, Rural and Isolated AECG Regions. The purpose of this analysis is to consider the influences geographic location has on the participation of Aboriginal people in the decision making processes, related to Aboriginal Education. A comparison between the State AECG Committee data and Regional data will reveal the nexus regarding advice provided by the Regions.

NSW AECG Report Distribution

This section is placed here to uphold two elements identified in the research design. As a cultural insider researcher I have taken seriously responsibility for the issues of accountability and obligations of reciprocity to informant participants involved in the research project.

Accountability

By including verbatim responses immediately following the survey results, stories and voice can be easily accessed and scrutinised. Cultural accountability to the knowledge holders involved in this aspect of the study is paramount to maintain continuing trust of cultural insider researchers.

Reciprocity

An unwritten promise to provide feedback to the knowledge holders involved in this research project is taken seriously. My perception of reciprocity in terms of responsibility to the informant group is that Regional AECG Management Committee members have the right to expect feedback. As a method of payback for sharing their
knowledge with me and placing their trust in me to honour their stories in a respectful way, a preliminary report was produced. Chapter: 8 ‘Voices of AECG Members’ was copied for each Region throughout NSW and handed to the Regional Representative in attendance at the NSW AECG 2013 Annual General Meeting. Electronic copies were made accessible to be downloaded onto transportable devices via NSW AECG secretariat staff at the meeting. The preliminary report included the following contents:

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Section 2: Verbatim Regional Survey Responses

Region 1 Western 1

Western 1 Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group

1 Experience and knowledge necessary.
   a) Need to have experience, knowledge and cultural confidence/difference.

2 Formal qualifications.
   a) No.

3 Strengths

4 Perceived Weaknesses
   a) Not fully represented. Distances. Lack of commitment.

5 Skills needed to actively participate
   a) Communication skills, listening skills and cultural competence.

6 Experience and knowledge gained.
   a) Good network. Empathy. Develop own skills by hearing about other people’s work.

7 Positive outcomes
       Friendships
       Setting goals and achieving them.

8 Priorities
   a) Better outcomes for Aboriginal students.
       Sustainability of Aboriginal programs.
       Pathways to Higher Education (at affordable prices).

Other Comments
Having information readily available for community to access is needed (e.g. funding, health, and housing).
I do see genuine partnerships.

Region 2 Western 2

Western 2 Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group

1 Experience and knowledge
   a) Dedicated passionate person in regards to the AECG structure.
   b) Experience and knowledge of Local area. Nurture the knowledge and give to those who do not know so that the awareness and contribution is filtered to Regions and State level.

2 Formal Qualifications
   a) No, just knowledge.
   b) No. The knowledge you learn from family, growing up and life’s journey is a valuable ‘tool’ of knowledge.

3 Strengths
   a) The driving force for Regional area’s to become active in the community, building partnerships and strengths. A voice at a Local level for representatives to take issues and concerns back to State level.
b) Communication. Right people – active in community, passionate.

4 Perceived Weaknesses
b) Have not heard of any.

5 Skills needed
a) Commitment

6 Skills and knowledge gained
a) Awareness, who the people are (identify) locals. Information passed on.
b) Strengths – voiced my concerns. Empowerment.

7 Positive Outcomes
a) AECG Partnerships.
   Connecting to Country delivery.
   Networking with each Local.
b) Delivery of Connecting to Country
   Networking with other passionate Aboriginal people.
   Representation at a State level.

8 Priority areas
a) Teacher attitudes
   Cultural practice
   Cultural Perspectives
b) Teacher attitudes
   Hidden racism
   More cultural networking

Other Comments
Thank you for your contribution to our forum.
The fight and struggle continues for practice and delivery of culture. Why should we have to ask for permission to be embraced in cultural activities?

Region 3 Western 3

Western 3 Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group

1 Experience and knowledge
a) Members should at least have a detailed knowledge of the issues important in Aboriginal Education. It would be good if they have already worked in the system.
b) Should have a working knowledge of AECG function, but do not need training certificates.
c) All local Aboriginal bodies and government agencies, local community and traditional owners, Dept. of Education & Training.
d) Knowledge of community.
e) Voluntary, willing to support community. Helping kids get the best education they deserve.
f) Important to have community knowledge. A willingness to learn about education policies.
g) At a level that you’re able to bring back appropriate information that is going to further our Local AECG. Someone who can communicate effectively.
h) I believe all areas of experience & knowledge are O.K. as these sessions can be a great time of learning.

1 Formal qualifications
a) No. But it would be an added benefit.
b) No but must have knowledge of education.
c) No.
d) No. Community/Education orientated.
e) Yes.
f) Treasurer will need formal finance training. Have awareness about Code of Conduct.
g) Not necessary for formal qualifications but the knowledge to help Aboriginal education.
h) No, but certainly need ongoing commitment to Aboriginal Education.

1 Strengths
Incomplete

2 Perceived weaknesses
Incomplete

3 Skills needed to actively participate
Incomplete

4 Skills and knowledge gained
Incomplete

5 Positive outcomes
Incomplete

6 Priorities

a) To continue to advocate for increased community engagement and consultation.
Value the importance of Aboriginal workers & Aboriginal community people have made to the Region.
Make sure Aboriginal Education is Everybody’s Business.

b) Community engagement.
Student retention (programs).
Cultural significance.

c) Cultural Awareness.
Improving individual Aboriginal children’s outcomes and NAPLAN, all not just those below the NAPLAN.
To develop all Aboriginal Staff/students in training and develop in all areas of leadership.

d) Parental involvement.
Attendance/retention.
Payment in ABSTUDY.

e) Remote areas.
Smaller communities
No comment.

f) Building on community partnerships and relationships.
Getting more familiar with Local community workplaces.
No comment.

g) Funding to have further Indigenous workers with the schools.
Help with attendance.
Retention.

h) Cultural Awareness for all staff.
Support and prepare Aboriginal Teachers to take on Executive positions.
Better method of staffing ‘hard to staff’ schools e.g. Wilcannia, as incentive do not always attract the right people.

Other Comments
We need to work hard to get more Aboriginal people in leadership roles and continue to build the capacity of community members.
Aboriginal Education is important to non-Aboriginal students and communities as well and should be a focus of the AECG too.
All departmental agencies working together. Stuff the red tape and boundaries.
AECG a great education voice.
Just being a part of the AECG is something good for the future of our children.

Region 4 North West 1

North West 1 Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group

1 Experience and knowledge necessary.
   a. Read and write policies.
   b. For one, getting out there and supporting the Locals in remote areas. Not just “dropping in” once in a blue moon and talking to the Principal, who knows “Jack shit” about our kids and our communities.
   c. Be able to read, write and willing to learn about policies that effect our children in schools.
   d. All of the training that’s needed.
   e. Some.
   f. Knowledge of Elders. Experience of the workplace that you work in.

2 Formal qualifications.
   a. People need to have an understanding of the rules of the Association.
   b. No!!
   c. No comment.
   d. Knowledge of what the AECG stands for would be helpful.
   e. If needed there should be more communication.
   f. No.
   g. Yes it does help. You can also learn off others in the committee and in the communities.

3 Strengths.
   a. To get together with information that effects our local communities, schools, parents, students and to improve education for students to finish their HSC.
   b. Ability to communicate information and know the workings of the AECG.
   c. Do not know, it’s full of crap. Help/support stays in the city.
   d. Having an understanding of the problems in their Locals and Region.
   e. No comment.
   f. The Management Committee. Is only as strong as its Committee.
   g. To help in education and strengthen Aboriginal communities and get more people on the committee.

4 Weaknesses.
   a. Travel times. No communication within NW 1 and NW 2. Not supported by others in Region.
   b. Remoteness: For some reason we do not exist. ACLO’s need to be made accountable as well as “Bural Gulgas” in the AECG. There is no support for us in remote areas whatsoever.
   c. Travel time. Lack of information from other Regions.
   d. Travelling to meetings.
   e. Communication.
   f. Not members as in young people and most of it stays in one town.

5 Skills needed to actively participate.
   a. You need to have some expertise in all the roles that are needed.
   b. Knowledge of AECG community and passion.
   c. Experience.
   e. Experienced people need to attend. It’s very vital for our children.
   f. Life.
   g. Management skills e.g. business.

6 Skills and knowledge gained.
   a. My skills have been excellent since joining the AECG. I have learned more about education.
   b. The undercover programs and funding as well as AECG workings.
c. No comment.
d. The problem Aboriginal children are having in the school. Stress from teacher not knowing how to communicate with Aboriginal families.
e. No comment.
g. I gained skills and knowledge and how things work with the AECG.

7 Three (3) positive outcomes achieved.

a. More Aboriginal teachers.
   More workers in the schools.
   More parents are understanding how important education is to their children.

b. Information.
   Information.
   Information.

c. Talk.
   Talk.
   Talk.

d. More Aboriginal teachers and workers in the school.
   More parents are being involved with their school.
   Parents have been more positive about education.

e. No comment.
   No comment.
   No comment.

f. Lower retention rates.
   Communication with school.
   Teachers.

g. More communication.
   Consultation.
   Accountability towards country remote areas.

8 Three (3) priority areas to address in the next two (2) years.

a. Aboriginality.
   More AEO’s.
   Suspension rates.

b. Programs.
   Funding.
   Information.

c. No comment.
   No comment.
   No comment.

d. Confirmation of Aboriginality.
   Employment of more AEO’s.
   Support for workers.

e. Be strong and positive.
   Further education and training.
   No comment.

f. Lower retention rates.
   More Aboriginal culture in schools.
   No comment.

g. Address the “Tick The Box” on all student enrolment forms in all schools.
   No comment.
   No comment.
Other Comments:

Let’s keep working together.

Region 5   North West 2

North West 2 Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group

1  Experience and knowledge necessary.
   a) To actively participate, there should only be the basic understanding and a desire to help the children.
   b) Some experience of the inner workings would be an advantage, but the experience is a necessity.
   c) Rules of the Association.
   d) None – as we are trying to get the community involved.
   e) You should have knowledge of your local communities. Be able to do public speaking.
   f) Know and understand the Aboriginal Education Policy.
   g) Local knowledge – commitment to the cause and having people skills so as to communicate to all of the community.
   h) You need to have an understanding of programmes and policies and know your community needs etc. and inter-agencies.

2  Formal qualifications.
   a) No.
   b) Would be an advantage. You gain more knowledge by being actively involved.
   c) No.
   d) No.
   e) I do not think it’s necessary to have formal qualifications. As long as you know what you are doing.
   f) Should be able to be confident within communications within any community.
   g) Not necessary, but to have knowledge of the education system and be confident in delivery of service.
   h) Probably not. An advantage to have good communication skills, confidence to be able to do public speaking and know and represent local community/any communities.

3  Strengths.
   a) Good communication, strong commitment by Locals at Regional level.
   b) Unity in goals of the community.
   c) United cause. Varied interesting speakers. Food.
   d) To help the Locals.
   e) To know the AECG inside and out. Being able to communicate information to everyone.
   f) Strong experienced speakers. Numbers. Have school/local community support and Principal support.
   g) Support from: community, schools, Principals also teachers, Dept. Of Education, AECG Local/Regional/State and family support.
   h) Numbers, experience, strong speakers, active involvement, Principal/school support.

4  Perceived weaknesses.
   a) Distance from each other.
   b) Vast distances to travel takes up more time.
   c) Time management. Travel. Communication over a vast area.
   d) Communication.
   e) Time management.
   f) Vast distances to travel. Lack of community involvement.
   g) Lack of support from all involved.
   h) Travel, time, lack of community involvement.

5  Skills needed to actively participate.

a. Communication and a desire to help the children.
b. Experience outweighs skills.
c. Participation and listening.
d. None. Just to be there for the children.
e. Knowledge of all AECG Communities.
f. Communication, interpersonal skills, willing to be part of a team (team-member).
g. Commitment to attending. Team member. Leadership qualities.
h. Experience and passion, interest and willing to be part of a team.

6 Skills and knowledge gained.
   a. Better organisation skills.
   b. More knowledge of the “black politics” involved in Aboriginal Education.
   c. Learnt more about AECG rules and regulations.
   d. To watch my spelling.
   e. I’ve learnt about other communities and what they are doing in their towns.
   f. Aboriginal Education Policies and Programs.
   g. To be able to speak clearly and concise about what’s happening in my community and to our Koori kids in schools.
   h. Admin skills, local knowledge – Aboriginal Education Policies and Programs. How important it is for the committee to exist.

7 Three (3) positive outcomes achieved.
   a. This meeting.
      No comment.
      No comment.
   b. No comment.
      No comment.
      No comment.
   c. Liaison with the DET.
      Improvement with education skills.
      Being there for our students.
      No comment.
      No comment.
      No comment.
   e. Information.
      No comment.
      No comment.
   f. Principal support.
      School support.
      No comment.
   g. Bringing communities together.
      More involvement by Junior AECG, when supported by Local AECG.
      No comment.
   h. Support from Principals.
      No comment.
      No comment.

8 Three (3) priority areas to address in the next two (2) years.
   a. No comment.
      No comment.
      No comment.
   b. No comment.
      No comment.
      No comment.
   c. Keeping kids at school.
      Positive reactions to new policies.
      Good meetings at Local, State and Regional meetings.
d. Aboriginal children’s attendance.
   No comment.
   No comment.

e. Information.
   Funding.
   Programs.

f. Cultural Awareness.
   Community involvement.
   No comment.

g. Strengthen community through promotion of Aboriginal Education.
   No comment.
   No comment.

h. Suspensions
   Cultural Awareness.
   Community involvement.

Other Comments:
I am happy to say by being involved in schools and talking to kids – who are becoming confident in talking to us by not getting shamed.
Keep up the good work.
More funding for our kids to attend academic and sporting events.

Region 6    Upper North Coast

Upper North Coast Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group

1   Experience and knowledge necessary.
   a. I think at least some knowledge of education and structure is necessary, but not essential.
   b. I’m new at Regional level, but actively involved over numerous years with Locals. It helps to have an understanding of what’s happening in school even if only to know what some of the acronyms used constantly.
   c. Working or basic knowledge and understanding of all education systems government, non-government, independent and pre-schools etc.

2   Formal qualifications.
   a. Not really, but the ability to balance workload and responsibilities are great attributes.
   b. No.
   c. No – if this becomes the case, then we would lose the intent and context of what AECG is for and about, especially community and parent engagement and participation.

3   Strengths.
   a. Knowledge, experience, transparency, honesty and commitment are some of the strengths we possess, whilst pursuing local issues.
   b. This committee seems to have a vast range of knowledge about community participation and courses run. Many worthwhile and interesting programs were mentioned – great to be used in different Locals. Partnership between Regional AECG and DET evident.
   c. Commitment to a certain extent by some members. Knowledge base of some members. Building relationships and partnerships. Great understanding and knowledge of issues/needs of our area

4   Perceived weaknesses.
   a. Exterior expectations sometimes drain our energy. Regional executive and the other roles we play can hinder productivity.
   b. Getting a quorum when some Locals are a no show.
   c. Across the board, knowledge and understanding of all education systems in NSW.

5   Skills needed to actively participate.
a. Good communication, fair go (attitude), problem solving, democratic, negotiation and conflict resolution skills.
b. An interest. The ability to sit for a stretch of time. The ability to work out acronyms or to ask for clarification.
c. Working knowledge or basic understanding of education systems. Strategic planning skills. Lateral thinking.

6 Skills and knowledge gained.
a. Understanding and awareness.
b. Shared knowledge is always a valuable thing.
c. Great awareness of individual communities and working together sharing information.

7 Three (3) positive outcomes achieved.
a. 99% actions carried out from recommendation. Increasing interagency relations (wider community).
   PACE program undertaken and funding secured.
b. A co-ordinated approach for Locals within the Region. The appropriate place to decide issues for State AECG.
   Great networking.
c. Active involvement in the Regional DET Policy Liaison Group. Active participation and protocols in DET Merit Selection panels. Great working relationship of Regional AECG and DET North Coast.

8 Three (3) priority areas to address in the next two (2) years.
c. Community and Parent Engagement (real aspect). Alternative ways to address Student Retention and Engagement. Development of partnerships, protocols and policy strategies etc.

Other Comments
Maybe some sort of information package (fact sheets etc.) could be developed as a “Membership Package” to enable a greater learning for members.

Region 7 Lower North Coast

Lower North Coast Regional AECG Management Committee

1 Experience and knowledge necessary.
a. Some knowledge may be necessary, but I feel that people could succeed without.
b. None to begin with. You need passion for education first and the other stuff on AECG will grow as you get involved.
c. A history of the knowledge of Aboriginal Education is vital. As it has changed over the years.

2 Formal qualifications.
a. No.
b. Definitely not!! Again a passion is the qualification.
c. No.

3 Strengths.
a. Local input can be heard.
b. An opportunity to build constructive and directed focus on areas to target the passion and interest of people and their desire to see change happen from beginning to end.
c. Local people from grass-root level people can have their ideas and skills identified and feed through to Regional level.

4 Perceived weaknesses.
   a. Getting to a Regional distance and geographical locations can be hard to attend.
   b. The tasks at hand can be very complex and time consuming. However this can work as a strength, because our mobs been fighting for change and will keep doing it.
   c. Local representatives do not always attend. Through missing out on important information presented at Regional meetings.

5 Skills needed to actively participate.
   a. Governance skills regarding roles and responsibilities of the Regional Management Committee.
   b. An open mind and kind heart. A connection to mob and identity is essential. Again the desire is good, because it will be sustainable when it gets through.
   c. Mediation and negotiating skills and some knowledge on Aboriginal Education issues.

6 Skills and knowledge gained.
   c. It has heightened my awareness of the positive and negative aspects of Aboriginal Education State wide.

7 Three (3) positive outcomes achieved.
   a. A voice to the SED – Aboriginal Education. Sharing of ideas and programs. Strengthening support to Locals.
   b. Getting the North Coast Regional Director to sit down and yarn about being and committing to the Partnership. Ensuring schools are hiring Aboriginal people for identified positions in schools. Getting Aboriginal Student Liaison Officers in the North Coat Region. Placing ASLO’s in more areas.
   c. Good relationships with DEEWR, DET, TAFE. Good relationships with Local AECGs. Good relationships with local Aboriginal communities.

8 Three (3) priority areas to address in the next two (2) years?
   a. Supporting Locals and establishing more. Keeping our schools accountable. Including Universities and TAFE.
   b. Building strong and functioning Local AECGs. Focusing on getting community people involved. Not people who are working in DET. They are needed but the grass-root mob must be supported to attend. Much clearer criteria on confirmation of Aboriginality for schools. It requires discussion.
   c. Early years School outcomes TAFE students.

Other Comments:  
There a need for more support from State in training and capacity building of a Region. Aboriginal mob have always fought for change to get access for an education. Getting organized and working from a structured place, helps to organize the energy. No matter what is happening it is needed and we would not be here with all our gains, if this structure was not available. Sometimes it has been tough as issues have surfaced, but when it is out it gives the opportunity to sort it out. I’ll always stay involved no matter what issues are on the ground. Thank You (signed).
Region 8  Manning

Manning Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group

Nil Returns

Region 9  Hunter

Hunter Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group

1  Experience and knowledge necessary.
   a.  None. Knowledge derives from participation.
   b.  At least an understanding of DET policies and Regional expectations.
   c.  None.
   d.  You need to have a fair idea of AET due to the jargon used at meetings.
   e.  I have had minimal experience so far but feel, as I gain experience and knowledge, my confidence to become more actively involved will increase.
   f.  I had no knowledge but have learned a lot from listening and asking questions.
   g.  I believe everyone needs to be aware of current Aboriginal Education and Training Policy.
   h.  An Understanding of how AECG runs at a Local level. Some understanding of DET processes.
   i.  It is not necessary to have a high level of knowledge in Aboriginal Education and Training, however having the willingness to learn is essential.
   j.  Regular attendance is needed. Commitment to Aboriginal Education and community is needed. A want to learn about policies and committees.
   k.  Involvement in schools, so you understand and know what is going on. A basic educational background.
   l.  If you are involved with DET, you have some level of experience and knowledge in Aboriginal Education and Training. For many parents and community members the knowledge and experience is gained firstly through Local AECG so that you are able to move through to Regional.
   m.  To work in the school and to want to learn a lot more about Aboriginal Education.
   o.  None. Participation at the Local level is all that’s needed.
   p.  Regular attendance of Local AECG meetings.
   q.  No experience at Local or Regional level is needed.
   r.  Experience is not necessary at a Local or Regional level. By becoming a member of the Local AECG you are showing a commitment and passion for Aboriginal Education.
   s.  None as you gain experience and knowledge while participating with the AECG.
   t.  The highest possible plus commitment.

2  Formal qualifications.
   a.  No, as workshops and experience comes from being a member.
   b.  No.
   c.  No.
   d.  No, experience is gained through being involved in AECG.
   e.  No (knowledge is necessary). That might negate membership by unqualified community members.
   f.  No it is all about caring and understanding.
   g.  No. Aboriginality is needed to be a member of the Local AECG.
   h.  No.
   i.  No. However I think a mentoring system would be beneficial, depending on the position you undertake. For example if going for Secretary, some administration skills would be helpful.
   j.  No, because you’re always learning and have a chance to gain better experience.
   k.  No.
   l.  No. What is required is a passion and willingness to work with people in an endeavour to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people in Education and Training.
   m.  No.
n. No.
o. No. An understanding of policies is an advantage not a requirement.
p. No.
q. No, but any qualification members have is transferred to the Regional Management Committee.
r. No it is not necessary to have formal qualifications.
s. No.
t. No.

3 Strengths.
a. Individuals bring both knowledge and time in a traditional sharing manner. Knowledge in participation.
b. Good leadership and social skills plus experience of community knowledge.
c. To communicate to other members their knowledge.
d. Deadly support and advice for members at Local levels and to delegates. Regional Management Committee at present have a wide selection of experiences.
e. Gives Aboriginal people a voice that will be heard to better our position in society in general not just education.
f. Knowledge, understanding and asking questions.
g. Good relationship with DET. Working in the same direction/goals. Respect of each other and knowledge of Elders and vision – shared with new members.
h. Sharing knowledge in terms of cultural, support group, processes, what is working or does not work. The variety of backgrounds that work towards a goal e.g. DET/community/Life Members. The position/respect that the Committee demands.
i. Relationships that are formed.
j. Different opinions. Different schools and communities.
l. Unsure. I’m only new to Regional team. Prior knowledge is mainly with Western Sydney. (Campbelltown area AECG).
m. To form partnerships.

4 Perceived Weaknesses.
a. Non participation from some community member.
b. Lack of follow-up and time availability.
c. When they do not communicate.
d. All being volunteers to the organization and most having full-time careers. Lack of time and commitment of some people on the Management Committee and everything being left for others.
e. No comment.
f. No comment.
g. Time – volunteers often working to be more supportive to schools and families. Funds—to provide equipment needed and resources. Directory of details and contacts for schools to use.
h. The amount of times they meet per year. The heavy reliance on volunteers and the amount of training offered to them before being asked to take on executive positions. Getting information to the ground base levels of DET eg teachers.
i. The fact that it is all volunteer work and can be very time consuming.
j. We have no weaknesses: it’s every other person that is too stubborn to understand what is needed for our kids futures!!
k. Lack of commitment. Lot of volunteer work. Time consuming.
l. Unsure.
m. A lot of volunteer work and it is time consuming.
n. We all have weaknesses that become strengths and we learn from our brothers and sisters.
o. No comment.
p. Too many DET staff representing local community. More outside DET need to be involved although everyone manages to successfully wear two hats.
q. Availability. Time. Distance travelled.
r. Time. Availability. Run by volunteers. Distance to travel at times.
s. Lack of commitment. Time available. Distance travelled.
t. Communication – time as these positions should be identified.

5 Skills needed to actively participate.

b. Good leadership skills and a willingness to learn.
c. None.
d. Being able to follow directions and giving input from your point of view. Skills to be able to take minutes and do secretarial and treasurers work. Not being ‘big noters’ and talk over people.
e. Confidence.
f. Understanding and meeting other Aboriginal workers.
g. Passion to improve education for our kids. The ability to exchange ideas. Willingness to share with our local community.
h. Public speaking, cultural awareness (to feel as though you are making valid contributions). Understanding of DET and AECG procedures.
i. The ability to learn and communicate.
j. None. Because in everyday functions you are always learning from other people.
k. Just a little bit of knowledgeable background.
l. Passion, commitment and a willingness to listen and learn to move toward creating genuine change in education and training.
m. Learn and listen.

5 Skills and knowledge gained.

a. Communication, collective team work, collating information.
b. Incredible increased level of confidence. Increased knowledge of departmental systems. Increased networks around the country – meeting new people.
c. To communicate with other members.
d. Proactive confidence in speaking and updating my knowledge of Aboriginal Education.
e. Confidence – skill. Knowledge – was not aware that we (as Aboriginal people) had as much of a say as we do.
f. Rules, understanding, what is out there.
g. Professional attitude and behaviour. Contacts who is active in trying to improve our students education. Knowledge of places and services for our people.
h. Extended network of contacts. A bigger and more valid understanding of the “real” issues our Aboriginal students, communities and DET employees are facing. The realization that I can make valid contributions and difference in Aboriginal Education.
i. I believe my communication skills have improved and my knowledge of procedures.
j. An ability to understand processes. A good group of people to support ya)
k. I have gained a lot of skills and knowledge and also made friendships with people who can help out more.
l. A better understanding of the power structure and that the Local AECG is the driving force for Regional and State.
m. What rights I have in a school setting.
n. More historical information about our people, shared knowledge that has enhanced my own. Knowing how much I love these people that share my passion or our kids.
o. Being a part of the Regional Management Committee has given me a better understanding and strength to take information back to my Local.
p. I have gained a sound knowledge of and commitment to the philosophy of the NSWAECG.
q. To be more outspoken and to have researched what I speak about. More knowledgeable. More confidence to speak about different subjects.
r. More confidence. More knowledge of Aboriginal education. To be more outspoken.
s. Organisational skills. Verbal communication skills. Confidence – believing in what you say. Feeling OK that what we say, we won’t be judged.
t. I am building skills and knowledge slowly the more meetings I attend. I’m building more confidence as I go also.

7 Three (3) positive outcomes achieved.
   a. Partnerships with DEEWR/DET and TAFE. Collaboration within community.
      Collaboration within schools.
   b. New community program. Increased level of promotion.
      Increase in membership of new Local AECGs.
   c. Education. No comment.
      No comment.
   d. Implementing new policy. Strong active Regional AECG.
      Accepting of new members and giving support to achieve more.
   e. Support for community members. No comment.
      No comment.
   f. Education. No comment.
      No comment.
   g. Accountability – Funds distributed being used on Aboriginal students. Schools feeling they have support in Aboriginal Affairs. Role models for our children.
   h. The Partnership Agreement. The up-skilling of our members in many areas. Changes in attitudes to “signing off” on programs.
   i. PACE proposal. Resolution of conflicts.
      No comment.
   k. PACE approved. Cultural Immersion program. Partnership Agreement.
   l. Unsure. No comment.
      No comment.
   m. Partnership Agreement. Cultural Immersion program.
Become very proud.

n. Government connections taking notice of our feelings about education.
Local schools trying harder to accommodate Aboriginal students and their needs.
Unleashing great new talent among people who thought they did not know much.
o. Pathways.
PACE.
Workshops.
p. Regional Partnership Agreement.
Strong connections between Local AECGs
Regional AECG.
q. A better deal for Aboriginal students in schools.
Teach our teachers about Aboriginal Education.
Stand up for the rights (in education) of Aboriginal students and community.
r. A better deal for our Aboriginal students in schools.
Opportunities for more of our people to be employed in the DET.
Stand up for the rights of our people and be informed and confident to do so.
s. Better deal for schools and students.
Teach the teachers about Aboriginal Education committee.
Stand up for the rights of education for ourselves and students.
t. Making schools honest when consulting AECG in decision making.
Starting the Pathway awards for kids and parents/community etc.
Keeping me involved in AECG and empowering me.

8 Three (3) priority areas to address in the next two (2) years.
a. Suspension rates.
Ongoing participation to years 12.
Community involvement.
b. Increase level of consultation.
More paid positions.
More Cultural Knowledge into schools.
c. The rights of our children to knowledge.
Push the Government more for money.
No comment.
d. Workshops on Aboriginality.
Longer meetings.
Early Childhood.
e. Junior AECG – get our kids involved now, so that they can have a say.
No comment.
No comment.
f. Proof of Aboriginality in schools.
No comment.
No comment.
g. Aboriginal people in the schools to support children once above the Naplan base.
Relationships between families and schools.
Offering resources to schools to further develop schools knowledge on local Aboriginal culture.
h. Continue to up-skill and promote the AECG at a local level.
To acknowledge and begin to develop/up-skill current Regional members for future executive positions within.
To encourage and develop more locally based programs for schools – starting at Pre-school Primary level, rather than the top e.g. Pathways seems Secondary up awards.
i. Communication processes with and between schools and school principals and staff to be more concrete.
More Aboriginal workers within schools.
No comment.
j. Aboriginal workers as part of school team, not just there to make up numbers.
History.
No comment.
k. More Aboriginal workers in the schools.
   More representatives to the Upper Hunter area.
   No comment.

l. Looking at more AEO’s.
   Working with DET to create more permanent employment for Aboriginal workers in our schools.
   Programs being funded that schools make them stable for or kids, not funding gone.

m. Have more Aboriginal workers in the school.
   Have more Aboriginal workers in the front office.
   No comment.

n. Expulsions/suspensions and their alternatives.
   Connecting more pre-schools to schools.
   Regular health checks back in schools.

o. Early Childhood – emphasis the need for our young children to attend.
   Transition to High School – Are Aboriginal students transitioning well?
   Community participation – Through PACE, the Hunter AECG will hopefully engage parent, community in Aboriginal Education.

p. Implementing the Aboriginal Education Policy throughout the all Hunter/Central Coast Schools.
   No comment.
   No comment.

q. Close the Gap.
   Inform students of their rights.
   Further inform teachers about Aboriginal Education.

r. Closing the Gap.
   Communication between community and DET.
   Improving community involvement in education.

s. Closing the Gap.
   Informing our community/students about their rights.
   Further inform the schools about education with the schools throughout the Region (teachers).

t. Partnerships between DET and AECG – AEO’s.
   Stop DET making decisions for us and bullying in their sly ways.
   Junior AECGs for the future.

Other Comments:
Friendships and knowledge gained within this organization is both encouraged and on-going.
Keep up the great work!! I have grown from a shy person who did not think I had anything valuable to give, to an extremely positive, confident person who is able to support others and commit to more. I love being involved in the AECG at all levels. The friendships that I have made are valuable. Meetings should be held twice a term.
Until DET and all schools get on board with the Aboriginal Education Policy, Local AECG and Regional AECG will forever be a struggle.
When funding for Aboriginal programs are discontinued, programs are gone, Aboriginal faces gone from schools.
There needs to be a presence in the front office of schools.
In fifteen years of working with our kids in schools, The AECG is the most positive group, in my opinion, to hit the schools and community in one package.
You fullas are just plain Deadly.
I think it’s great that we are starting Junior AECGs to get our kids into the future. AEO’s, community, students, need more support from our DET Special Education Directors.
The continual adaptation of the committee in light of what was in the past to now, we have come a long way.

Region 10 Metropolitan East

Metropolitan Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group

I. Experience and knowledge necessary.
a) An understanding of past struggles and how they affected the present, as well as an understanding of current issues is essential to developing a future plan.

2 Formal qualifications.
a) No.

3 Strengths.
a) Willingness to work as a team and to provide a united front.

4 Perceived Weaknesses.
a) Individual agendas can allow for a tokenistic approach by DEC.

5 Skills needed.
a) Willingness to learn, writing skills and negotiation skills.

6 Skills and knowledge gained.
a) Speaking skills, curriculum knowledge, negotiation skills, policy understanding and translation of education specific terms.

7 Positive outcomes.
a) New Committee.
   No Comment.
   No comment

8 Priorities.
a) Training in Governance skills
   Negotiating Partnership with DEC.
   Support Locals.

Region 11 Metropolitan North

Metropolitan North Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group

1 Level of experience and knowledge.
a) an advantage
b) I think having a basic understanding of Aboriginal Ed& Training allows a basic level of participation but access to better understanding and thorough knowledge of Aboriginal Ed. Policies means Regional members have the confidence & empowerment to make real changes.
c) Knowing your community is necessary to actively participate in discussions, actions to support our children and families to excel or complete school.
d) Passion and commitment, basic knowledge helpful.
e) Experience comes from local knowledge of community. However gaining experience within the roles and responsibilities of a committee is necessary to actively participate within the role of the committee, and also having knowledge of the policies/constitution.
f) Yes – the experience and knowledge empowers you to take on board the responsibility.

2 Formal qualifications.
a) Some.
b) No, but access to and a willingness to learn the intricacies of applicable policies.
c) Not necessarily, though governance is a great tool to have.
d) No.
e) Yes I would agree. Training should be given, the roles vary Secretary, Treasurer, Vice President and President.
f) Yes – qualification = professionalism

3 Strengths.
a) Getting the message out
b) Having a voice that feeds into the NSW AECG at a State level. An opportunity to support and build Local AECGs separately and together.

c) The Regional Committee’s strength has the voice from our local mob to State level.

d) Commitment from the Management team. Development of relationships with local Councils, GP Division, TAFE.

e) Awareness of what happens right across the Region – it’s also equally Regional Management Committee Reps aware of the local community issues to raise at the Regional level.

f) Commitment and expertise in other service providers within our local and regional members.

4 Perceived weaknesses.

a) Getting the people in community to contribute.

b) Finding time and space to meet when all members can attend. Especially when Locals are many and the Region is too big.

c) Probably distance of travel to meetings.

d) Numbers – small community – isolation. Lack of money and programs.

e) Not aware of local education issues.

f) Transport.

5 Skills needed to actively participate.

a) Commitment.

b) Confidence, willingness to learn and able to communicate.

c) Passion and energy.

d) Good communication, negotiating skills, listening skills, attention to detail, commitment and compassion.

e) Good communication skills, confidence, public speaking, presentation skills.

f) Commitment and knowledge of community.

6 Skills and knowledge gained.

a) The community is only as strong as the involvement.

b) Confidence to challenge injustices in the Education of community.

c) A Better understanding of Aboriginal Education Policy. Keeping computer minutes. Holding a meeting – Chairing.

d) Increased confidence. Understanding of DET system.

e) N/A.

f) Networking skills, knowledge gained from others, listening, passing information onto others.

7 Three (3) positive outcomes achieved.

a) Starting Local AECG.
Creating a voice in State level.
Empowering others to set up Local AECG.

b) Our Regional Awards.
Supporting new Local AECG.
No comment.

c) Regional Agreement with DET, TAFE
State Agreement signed.
Aboriginal Education Policy signed off.

d) Regional Excellence Awards.
Attend Regional Aboriginal Education Planning Committee.
Attend Regional Peak Working Group (Northern Sydney Institute of TAFE)


e) Discuss Local issues at Regional meetings.
Represent our Local committee.
Bring back knowledge of what’s happening across other committees.

f) Inaugural Regional Excellence Awards 2009.
Positions on the tiered structure of TAFE (NSW).
Position on Regional Aboriginal Education Planning Committee.

8 Three (3) priority areas to address in the next two (2) years.
a) Principals to be more accountable. 
Initiate LMG and use it. 
Incorporate Aboriginal Studies in Major and not Minor in schools.

b) Building Local AECG. 
Better understanding of Aboriginal Education Policy for Local and Regional AECGs. 
No comment.

c) Principals to be more accountable to their school plans/Aboriginal Education. 
Initiate LMG and use as a communication tool. 
Incorporate Aboriginal Studies into minor Curriculum.

d) Increasing Local AECGs. 
Increase numbers of people involved in Local AECGs. 
Promote AECG in the Region.

e) Strengthening Local membership. 
No comment. 
No comment.

f) Strengthen the Partnership Agreement. 
Community Engagement (bringing mob together). 
Accountability.

Other Comments
Throughout my long journey in Aboriginal Education, I have always thought about what my Mother, Aunties, Uncles provided to my education. The passion, the strong sense of family – the caring of others. These are values we should always remember. Thank you for your passion.

Region 12 Metropolitan West
Metropolitan West AECG Regional Management Committee Focus Group

1 Experience and knowledge necessary. 
a) That you can demonstrate a commitment and knowledge of Aboriginal Education. 
b) Firstly have energy to participate, commitment. Secondly some education knowledge through experience. Thirdly a degree. 
c) Have a commitment to the State AECG.

2 Formal qualifications. 
a) No. That you have knowledge of the NSW AECG. 
b) Yes – however, if experience puts them there for a while, they can be involved. 
c) No. You can get experience while being a worker for the Region.

3 Strengths. 
a) To oversee what is happening within their Region. 
b) Bringing pockets of information of education peoples and places together for others. 
c) Knowledge of Aboriginal Education.

4 Perceived weaknesses. 
a) Working together as a team. 
b) Political over correctness. 
c) You can’t solve every problem.

5 Skills needed to actively participate. 
a) Knowledge of the Local and Regional guidelines within AECG. 
b) Human Resource skills. 
c) Knowledge and commitment.

6 Skills and knowledge gained. 
a) Public speaking and working as a team.
b) Management skills. Knowledge of local area and her people. Knowledge of the educational system.
c) Knowledge of AECG business. Management skills and knowledge.

7 Identify three (3) positive outcomes achieved.
   a) Supporting Aboriginal Education.
      Monitoring Aboriginal programs.
      Supporting parents/community.
   b) Bringing people together.
      Organisation of people.
      Promoting Aboriginal Studies.
   c) Working with parents.
      Working with community.
      Supporting schools.

8 Identify three (3) priority areas to address in the next two (2) years.
   a) Suspension in schools.
      Attendance.
      No comment.
   b) Every school has Aboriginal Studies at all levels of education.
      Employment of the best people for the job within Aboriginal Education.
      No comment.
   c) Supporting students.
      Leadership in the community.
      People working as a team.

Other Comments
All Regional and Local AECGs should work in partnership with each other. Leave differences with anything or anyone at the school.
Aboriginal Education is everybody’s business and everyone should know this.
It is a positive group striving to benefit Australian society.

Region 13 Metropolitan South West

Metropolitan South West Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group

1 Experience and knowledge necessary.
   a) Experience working with the community.
   b) Not necessary to have experience in Education but needs to have a level of knowledge in meetings and talking to people of certain levels.
   c) Experience with working with schools and organisations that service our schools/community. Knowledge of Aboriginal Education policy and Regional programs.

2 Formal qualifications.
   a) No.
   b) No.
   c) No. Only necessary to be actively involved with Local AECG.

3 Strengths.
   a) Keep all Locals communicating.
   b) Co-ordination. Answering or getting answers for Locals. Help with organisation for Local committees.
   c) They come from Local AECGs. They come from different districts having varied views. They are strong Aboriginal education lobbyists.

4 Perceived Weaknesses.
a) Some do more work than others. Communication.
b) Continue with same members as most feel they are too busy to stand.
c) Some may be too dominant and want control. Some have individual agendas.

5 Skills needed.
a) Communication.
b) To listen, learn and being able to converse with wide range of people.
c) Communication, panel training, negotiation skills and delegation skills.

6 Skills and knowledge gained.
a) Only new. Learned how to run a meeting and do minutes.
b) Confidence, overcome shyness, public speaking and knowing how meetings are run.
c) How to run a meeting. Report writing and minute taking. Regional Aboriginal programs.

7 Positive outcomes.
a) Sending information to Locals. Helping schools get information.
Panels.
b) More positive attitude from general public.
Stronger partnership with TAFE and DET.
More involvement with other community groups.
c) Opened up/strengthened partnership with DET/TAFE.
More positive contact with schools.
More information getting to the community.

8 Priorities.
a) More communication. Get more members. Get financial help to be independent.
b) More attention given to individual students.
More attention given to schools with minority of students.
No comment.
c) Get more adult Aboriginals in Mil-pra Art Exhibition. Continue to make resources for teachers.
IEP’s need to be followed up more closely.

Other Comments
Despite upheavals lately in Mil-pra, all Locals have become more active. Schools still try to get us to sign documents without consultation but Locals are not putting up with this. Do need (as always) more members doing more so will work on delegation next year.

Region 14 Upper South Coast

Upper South Coast Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group

1 Experience and knowledge necessary.
a) It would be an advantage to have some experience and knowledge but is not necessary. The AECG is a community based organization that operates with voluntary people.
b) As AECG is voluntary I believe no training is necessary. However knowledge and understanding of the organization is vital.
c) Cultural knowledge and community experience.
d) Be involved in community and education.

2 Formal qualifications.
a) No it is not. Many of our members are people/parents/carers and do not hold any formal qualifications.
b) As President yes. Policies and Departmental Protocols need to be known. AECG Constitution awareness of the Association.
c) No each individual brings their own qualifications.
d) No.

3 strengths
a) The strengths are to ensure support is provided to local AECGs and their members. Ensure that the regional MC work collaboratively for the betterment of Aboriginal education for our children.
b) Support and participation on Aboriginal Education Policies, Strategies Empowering Aboriginal people to have a voice and make decisions and consult with Departmental bodies.
c) Cultural and community strengths.
d) Taking local issues to education people. The Regional Directory.

4 Perceived weaknesses.
a) Distance between members, work capacity/commitment, pressures put on you re: your dedicated commitment to the position, capacity to fulfil the role of each position.
b) N/A.
c) Support. Distance. Regional boundaries.
d) Distances members have to travel to meetings.

5 Skills needed to actively participate.
a) Communications, initiative, support, leadership, community awareness, educational issues that impact on our students.
b) Awareness and updated training on responsibilities of the role.
c) Community knowledge. Having a voice. Listening skills.
d) Being involved in Aboriginal Education. By being involved in schools.

6 Skills and knowledge gained.
a) Sharing of skills and knowledge, vast amount of information, resolution of issues, strategies to adapt to situations.
b) Understanding the structure of AECG Inc. Building better partnerships with DET. Empowering young members to be involved and encouraging to pursue a higher position. To extend to State level.
d) You learn so much by being at these meetings. Listening to guest speakers.

7 Three (3) positive outcomes achieved.
a) Establishment of new Local AECGs in the Region.
Support for each member and the Local AECGs.
Effective partnership with Regional DET.
b) Elections of positive Executive members.
Regional Reps-Regional Awards.
Regional participation in consultative processes for all DET bodies.
Created power to State level.
c) Consultation with Regional Office (DET?).
Making Locals stronger.
Making members and associates aware of issues affecting our students and our communities.
d) Excellence Awards through TAFE.
Excellence Awards in Aboriginal Education.
Excellence in Aboriginal Studies Awards.

8 Three (3) priority areas to address in the next two (2) years.
a) Address issues Re: suspensions of students.
Awareness raising of AECG to Principals and SED’s.
Work in partnership with education providers to ensure equitable outcomes are achieved by our students.
b) Early Childhood.
Senior Education Uni’s.
Community participation.
c) Really highlight Aboriginal Education to the wider Dept. staff.
   Make our whole AECG stronger.
   Have more “Community People” in management roles.
d) Early Education for our students.
   No Comment.
   No Comment.

Other Comments.
Glad to be of assistance. Good luck to you.
I like what you are doing. The research when completed may make a “big” difference. Good on you Laurel.
The Local, Regional and State AECG is an important organization for the betterment of our children’s education.

Region 15        Lower South Coast

Lower South Coast Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group

1 Experience and knowledge necessary?
   a) Basic knowledge is desirable but not mandatory.
   b) No experience is necessary, but to have some knowledge of your local community to assist with educational input in schools.
   c) Experience living as an Aboriginal person in an Aboriginal community.
   d) You would need to have some basic knowledge and the more knowledge you have the better.
   e) Have an interest in Aboriginal Education. Be Aboriginal.

2 Formal qualifications.
   a) No.
   b) No.
   c) No.
   d) No comment.
   e) No.

3 Strengths.
   a) Commitment by a few Local AECGs.
   b) To network with Local AECGs and inform community members of events happening within their local schools and what’s happening with the AECG at a State level.
   c) Shared commitment to Aboriginal Education. Working to put forward and promote activities, ideas/resources/information, that are working in Aboriginal Education and sharing these.
   d) Commitment to Aboriginal Education by a few dedicated people.
   e) A voice to Government.

4 Perceived weaknesses.
   a) Community participation.
   b) Members at a school and community level not being able to all meet at the same time.
   c) We are over a large area and it can be difficult to all meet. Time – time – time we all work full-time.
   d) There are none. We have a very supportive group. Only weakness is due to the lack of support from State Office.
   e) Not enough time to meet often enough.

5 Skills needed to actively participate.
   a) Communication.
   b) Educational knowledge and community knowledge.
   c) Good communication skills and good organizational skills.
d) Sound literacy skills, experience in Aboriginal Education and schools systems.
e) An interest and the ability to communicate.

6 Skills and knowledge gained.
a) Better understanding of Aboriginal Education and issues.
b) School events, community events and meeting AECG members from other Local AECG groups.
c) Knowledge of a committee e.g. minutes, general business, business arising, notice of meetings etc.
   How a meeting is run.
d) I have gained skills in meeting management, panels for merit selection. I have significant.
e) Knowledge in things about Aboriginal Education.
f) To listen and be non-judgemental.

7 Three (3) positive outcomes achieved.
a) Knowledge up to date.
   Selection panel participation.
   Community support to all Local AECGs.
b) Educational Programs.
   Community getting together and being aware of programs within the school level.
   Networking with all Local AECGs.
c) Information sharing.
   Networking.
   Hearing about positive programs.
d) Involvement at Regional Aboriginal Education portfolio.
   Having a voice for Aboriginal children within our Region.
   Current knowledge of all things Aboriginal.
e) Sit on panels for positions in schools.
   Help Locals to facilitate meetings.
   Give advice to schools.

8 Three (3) priority areas to address in the next two (2) years.
a) Funding from State AECG to run programs.
   More Local AECGs.
   More training for Selection Panels.
b) Attendance.
   Community Engagement.
   Cultural Awareness.
c) Language: Revival of Aboriginal languages.
   Attendance – Retention – Suspension.
   Cultural Awareness in schools.
d) Selection Panel training.
   More funding from State.
   Attendance issues in Local/Regional schools.
e) Attendance issues.
   Student Suspension.
   Community participation.

Other Comments
This is the only voice in Education that Aboriginal people have. It needs to have a more respectful profile and positive promotion.
J----- made me fill this out really quickly and I’m sorry that I’ve had to rush this form. Thank you though for the opportunity to participate.

Region 16 Riverina 1

Riverina 1 Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group
1 Experience and knowledge necessary.
a) Same knowledge and experience is needed to actively participate in the operations of AECG at a Regional level as the State.
b) I think you need a couple of years at a Local level before you can actively participate at a Regional level.
c) You need to be able to read and write.
d) A high level is required.

2 Formal qualifications.
a) It is not necessary to have formal qualifications, however it would be more beneficial to have some formal qualifications in administration, running meetings, reading, writing etc.
b) No, just experience and knowledge about AECG. We need to get our people involved in Education at all levels.
c) Some formal qualifications would be needed.
d) You do need qualifications to be on the Regional Management Committee, to understand what is expected.

3 Strengths.
a) The strength of the Region is its open communication, partnership and its local input into the Regional Management Committee.
b) Team work and understanding that people have difference of opinion about things.
c) Some areas they are strong in strength.
d) The Regional Committee has lots of strengths. They need to know their organization. How the school – education – town – works and its policies and political agenda.

4 Perceived Weaknesses.
a) A perceived weakness is that Regional AECG can solve all the problems that Local may have, or may encounter.
b) Lack of members willing to put their hand up to take on a leading role at a Regional level.
c) Communication, resources is a perceived weakness.
d) Every organisation has weaknesses. Regional AECG weakness is that it is only a floating organisation. It has no real base like a lot of other organisations.

5 Skills needed to actively participate.
a) Listening skills. Written and verbal skills. Conflict resolution skills. Empathy. Communication skills. Knowledge of schools and how they operate.
b) Knowledge and understanding of AECG business. Confidence to speak up in front of people and to have an open mind about everything.
c) Listening skills, communication and empathy.
d) All skills, administration, community knowledge and partnerships. Also to be politically informed.

6 Skills and knowledge gained.
a) All of the above and management skills.
b) Stress, overworked “Ha Ha”. I have learned to be a leader of my people. I have gained a greater knowledge of the Education system.
c) All of the above!
d) I have gained a great understanding of the struggle we have and the political crap we have to deal with. But no-one is solving the problems. We are only advisors and our strength lies in the greatness at a State level.

7 Three (3) positive outcomes achieved.
a) Training and development.
Communication skills.
Listening skills.
b) No comment.
No comment.
No comment.
c) Team commitment.
The partnership commitment.
A voice for the AECG at all levels.
d) Commitment to positive outcomes for all Aboriginal people.
Acknowledgement of education bodies such as schools, TAFE, private providers and the Catholic system.
Team players.

8 Three (3) priority areas to address in the next two (2) years.
a) Training and development of new members.
Certificate 111 in Employment Education and Training.
Membership of AECG members at Local levels.
b) More AEO’s in school.
More participants from families and parents.
Working as a team (all the time) and respect everybody.
c) Partnership – equity!!
Membership at all levels.
Student needs for 17 year age (provide pathways). As truancy and non attendance at school is an issue.
d) Regional offices to be established at Regional level at school, DET etc.
Membership at all levels.
Up to date resources at State level.

Other Comments.
Regional AECG should have a home base in the rural areas.
Outdated resources makes AECG look bad and behind the times on our webpage. We are not moving with the technology and constantly saying that the Board of Studies is responsible, is a poor excuse for the State AECG.

Region 17 Riverina 2
Riverina 2 Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group
Nil Returns

Region 18 Riverina 3
Riverina 3 Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group

1 Experience and knowledge necessary.
a) A total commitment to education.
b) I know the level of Aboriginal Cultures in this area and understanding of the people from here.
Understanding, knowledge of how the AECG runs.
c) Good/high level of Aboriginal Cultures and understanding of it. Good/high level of understanding and knowledge of big picture of education.
d) To be totally committed and have an interest in the big picture.
e) A commitment to education

2 Formal qualifications.
a) No.
b) No, because if the committee is willing to learn more.
c) No, just very high commitment and willing to learn.
d) No.
e) No.

3 Strengths.
a) Not to change things but to support Local AECG.
b) The strengths that we use to be involved in meetings, add to the support of the Local people.
c) The strength of Regional, the reason for the Regional are to support Locals with their initiatives.
d) To be a support to Local AECGs.
e) Support to the Local AECG.

4 Perceived Weaknesses.
a) Every local community is different. Information changed by Regional Committees that can cause issues.
b) Not having some of our Local business involved.
c) Weaknesses if Region over ride Local decisions, change info or fail to see that Local’s can deal with issues in their communities. If needed Regional support on request (all Locals).
d) It is possible that some Regional committees see their role different to others. For example giving more advice than support.
e) Every local community is different if information changed by Regional Committees, it can cause issues.

5 Skills needed to actively participate.
a) Communication skills, general management skills, broad knowledge of community and cultures.
b) We need a committed person that has knowledge and understanding of communities needs and Aboriginal Education.
c) A fully committed person that has knowledge and understanding of the big picture, community and school education.
d) I think having sound knowledge of education, schools and communities and view the big picture.
e) Communication skills, general management skills, broad knowledge of communities and cultures.

6 Skills and knowledge gained.
a) Management, confidence and team work.
b) I have gained administration skills by organizing meetings with the local people. Had meetings with the AEO at school with the support of AECG members.
c) I have gained administration skills, speaking skills and knowledge of State operations.
d) Collating information into Newsletters, books, programming and organizing excursions.
e) Confidence, Aboriginal knowledge and leadership.

7 Three (3) positive outcomes achieved.
a) School social.
   NAIDOC days.
   Community openings.
b) Support the PACE Program.
   Junior AECG at Coomealla HS and Coomealla AECG.
   SiP’s Program at Coomealla HS.
   c) Supported PACE Program in Dareton district.
      SiP’s Coomealla HS.
      Dareton PS SiP’s and PACE Programs.
d) Supporting SiP’s program at Coomealla HS.
   Supported the PACE Program in Sunraysia District.
   Supported the SiP’s and PACE Programs at Dareton Primary School.
e) School socials.
   NAIDOC days.
   Community openings.

8 Three (3) priority areas to address in the next two (2) years.
a) More Junior AECGs.
   Parents need to know more about school education.
   More Associate members eg. Police and Public Servants.
b) Training in Aboriginal Cultures.
   Meeting the local Aboriginal people.
   Involvement of Junior members at State meetings.
c) Be trained in Aboriginal Cultural traditions.
To be able to link to Aboriginal Culture in today’s society.
No comment.
d) Attention and retention.
Implementation of the AEP.
Alternative programs to prevent suspensions.
e) More Junior AECGs.
Parents need to know more about school education.
More Associate members, e.g. Local Council, police, public servants.

Other Comments.
We have a very strong committee here. Our Junior AECG would like to come to the State meeting in Sydney to see how it’s run.
Being an Aboriginal in Education you must have a solid base of knowledge and understanding of your own cultures, schools and communities.
Need more Junior AECG in Regions.

Region 19 Central Coast

Central Coast Regional AECG Management Committee Focus Group

1 Experience and knowledge.
a) Personal experience, up to any educational institution experience—so none or any.
b) No.
c) Community + education knowledge. Governance/compliance procedures can assist.
d) To be actively involved in Aboriginal Educational community.
e) No.
f) No.
g) None.
h) No.
i) No.
2 Formal qualifications.
a) No.
b) No.
c) No.
d) No.
e) No.
f) No.
g) No.
h) No. Just good writing and reading skills.
i) No.

3 Strengths.
a) Community focus, networking, communication.
b) Strong community and education focus.
c) Diversity of people i.e. different areas, positions, opinions, origins and gender.
d) Strengths are: the committee as a whole. Differing views to come together.
e) They care.
f) Sharing knowledge within the education department.
g) To be kept informed about Aboriginal strengths and issues in schools and community.
h) Good communication.
i) Excellent members working together in relation to support all in Aboriginal Education. All proactive members with a great leader.

4 Perceived Weaknesses.
a) Time constraints. Varying levels of employment – salary sacrifice.
b) Time constraints.
c) Time poor. Same people relied on. Need for more people to share the load.
d) Volunteers for positions. Time availability. Not enough time in the week.
e) Family and travel.
f) Time.
g) Time – availability.
h) No comment.
i) Time management, need to juggle the family. We need a representative to be at the table.

5 Skills needed to actively participate.
a) Passion, communication, pro-active and flexible.
b) Pro-active and sensitivity.
c) Interpersonal communications, governance, constitution knowledge and humility.
d) Advocacy skills.
e) Good people skills.
f) Good communication skills. A knowledge of the DET.
g) To have communication skills. Be able to give reports. Listening skills.
h) No comment.
i) Everyone to be pro-active.

6 Skills knowledge gained.
a) Empowerment, communication and listening skills.
b) Teamwork.
c) Deeper knowledge of who and what is out there in Aboriginal Education. Conflict resolution.
d) No comment.
e) Knowledge of the Region.
f) Communication skills, self-esteem, deeper knowledge of the DET, getting to know proper protocol.
g) Be able to do reports, attend meetings and be able to travel.
h) Empowerment and listen.
i) Working across several schools and communities. Leadership skills.

7 Three (3) positive outcomes achieved.
a) A stronger voice in Education. Opportunities for empowerment. Pathways Awards.
c) Pathways Awards. Information folder. Increased local AECGs

- Get to know what happens in other Regions/areas. Pathway Awards. No comment.
e) It’s all about the kids education. No comment.

f) Pathway Awards. TAFE training. Cultural Immersion Program planning.
g) Principle’s folders. Pathway Education Awards. Setting up new Local AECGs.

h) Pathway Awards. Our AECG Resource folder. No comment.
i) Pathways Student Awards.
Regional folders (promotion).
Working across all schools in relation to Aboriginal Education.

8 Three (3) priority areas to address in the next two (2) years.
a) Cultural Awareness/Immersion.
   Supporting Local AECG’.
   Language programs.
b) Central Coast AECG recruitment drive event.
   Create more Local AECGs
   No comment.
c) Junior AECG.
   Increase Regional and Local membership attendance.
   Cultural Immersion programs.
d) Cultural Awareness for all staff in education.
   More Aboriginal studies/perspectives as compulsory in schools – Primary and Secondary levels.
   More Aboriginal workers in schools –to support students.
e) Aboriginal Education.
   Better management.
   No comment.
f) More members within the community.
   Getting the involvement of Aboriginal parents/caregivers.
   No comment.
g) AECG recruitment drive.
   Training for new members.
   No comment.
h) No comment.
   No comment.
   No comment.
i) Compliance training of Teaching staff in Aboriginal Education.
   No comment.
   No comment.
Chapter 9: Comparative Thinking Spaces

Introduction

The previous chapter shared stories told by Regional AECG Management Committee members who represent Local AECGs in various communities across NSW. A storytelling model was introduced in chapter four to explain what the areas of responsibility are for all three levels of the NSW AECG. The image presented in Chapter 4: ‘Cultural Information Gathering Techniques’ fig: 15, represents the existence of an underlying cultural connection between Aboriginal community knowledge, cultural problem solving and community political action. There is potential to overlay the structural consultative framework of the NSW AECG with a traditional knowledge sharing framework, in order to demonstrate that traditional cultural practices are continued in a contemporary context.

This chapter will present another story, using numerical tables to compare responses relevant to the necessity for formal qualifications, positive outcomes achieved and identified priority areas between Metropolitan, Country, Rural and Isolated AECG Regions. The purpose of this analysis is to consider the influences geographic location may have on the participation of Aboriginal people in the decision making processes related to Aboriginal Education. Regions have been grouped using the following criteria:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metropolitan</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Isolated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan North</td>
<td>Upper North Coast</td>
<td>North West 1</td>
<td>Riverina 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro. South West</td>
<td>Lower North Coast</td>
<td>North West 2</td>
<td>Riverina 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan West</td>
<td>Manning</td>
<td>Western 1</td>
<td>Western 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan East</td>
<td>Hunter</td>
<td>Riverina 1</td>
<td>Western 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Central Coast</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Upper South Coast</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower South Coast</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Geographic Group Comparisons

Analysis of State AECG Committee data will reveal numerical evidence which will give an indication of the similarities and differences of advice incorporated into the thinking of Regional Representatives, State AECG Management Committee members and elected Regional AECG Management Committee positions. Responses have been allocated categories and then tabulated to provide a quantitative number for each focus area.

Verbatim responses have been collated and attributed to the following four categories: Community Participation, School Relationships, Local Initiatives and No Comment. The criteria used to collate responses are consistent between the Hunter Regional AECG Case Study, the Mil-pra Local AECG Case Study, Regional AECG Management Committees and State AECG Committee responses.

Formal Qualifications Comparative Analysis: Question (2) invites respondents to nominate if it is necessary to complete formal qualifications to be elected as a member of the Regional Management Committee. Answers are collated into No/Yes or No Comment categories for each Regional group.

Positive Outcomes Comparative Analysis: Question (7) invites members to highlight three positive outcomes achieved by the Regional Management Committee. To analyse the responses, three categories have been established, in an attempt to provide consistency across all Regions. The following categories are used to form conclusions:

Community Participation: this category attributes those activities that are related to interaction with education providers by AECG members and community engagement activities.

School Relationships: this category attributes those activities directly related to schools and educational programs.

Regional Initiatives: this category attributes programs and issues that are pertinent to the Region.

No Comment: this category identifies any space that has not recorded a response.
**Priority Areas Comparative Analysis:** Responses to question (8) which asks for identification of three priority areas, may change, depending on the specific individual delegate’s opinion, after being elected at the Annual General Meeting. Priorities have been reported as identified by the survey respondents. Responses to this question have been allocated four categories and then tabulated to provide a quantitative number for each focus area. The following categories have been used to form a conclusion:

**Community Participation:** this category attributes those activities which increases a skill base for members as an outcome of community capacity building participation.

**Education Providers:** this category attributes issues and programs related to education providers across the formal education sector. Issues directly related to students are included in this category.

**Regional Initiatives:** this category attributes projects that require implementation in the Region as opposed to Local AECG activities.

**No Comment:** this category identifies any space that has not recorded a response.

**Local/Regional/State Priorities:** Question (5) of the Regional Representative survey is designed to reveal if State Committee members are unified in their voluntary efforts across the three tiered structure of membership. In order to interpret results, total responses were divided into four categories: Community Participation, Education Providers, Local/Regional/State Initiatives and No Comment:

**Community Participation:** this category attributes those activities which increases a potential skill base for members as an outcome of community capacity building.

**Education Providers:** this category attributes issues and programs related to education providers across the education sector. Issues directly related to students are included in this category.

**Local/Regional/State Initiatives:** this category attributes those projects that apply specifically to AECG activities.

**No Comment:** this category identifies any space that has not recorded a response.

**State AECG Committee Expectations**

Results from participants surveyed at the State committee meeting held at Dubbo in 2009, was designed to investigate the consistency of advice provided through the
structured consultative process of the NSW AECG. Question (5) invites the NSW AECG State Committee members to identify three priority areas that need addressing at a Local/Regional/State level of the organisation. The NSW AECG State Committee Meetings provide an opportunity to exchange information drawn from Local and Regional AECG levels of the organisation:

*State Meetings are an effective method for Aboriginal communities to have direct input into policy and decision making at the highest level.*

Table 6: State Committee Expectations for Local/Regional/State Priorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Community Participation</th>
<th>Education Providers</th>
<th>Regional Initiatives</th>
<th>No Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Totals</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

The above graph clearly reveals that the State Committee thinks there should be a greater focus on increasing *Community Participation* as a priority for all levels of the three tiered structure. This could mean that there needs to be an increased number of Aboriginal parents, caregivers, and family members who should become involved on AECG Management Committees in all levels of the three tiered structure. These results are reflective of the advocacy role State AECG Committee members assume. The high

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305 NSW AECG Inc. Annual Report, 2012: 21
number of registered “no comments” to this question are contradictory to the representative role of committee members:

*State Committees provide opportunity for each Region to exchange information, from all levels of the NSW AECG Inc., which provides critical direction for the advocacy work the organisation tirelessly undertakes.*

The responsibility to increase the participation of Aboriginal members cannot be achieved without ensuring that community development programs are offered at all levels of the three tiered structure. An assumption can be made that delivery of skills-based education programs, within a culturally appropriate framework aimed at a broad spectrum of the membership, will result in greater community participation.

**Metropolitan AECG Group Data Analysis**

Regions included in this section are those geographic areas and locations surrounding and including the suburbs of Sydney the capital of NSW, (Metropolitan North, Metropolitan South West, Metropolitan West, and Metropolitan East). Thirteen completed surveys have been analysed for the Metropolitan Group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metropolitan Group</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>No Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan North</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan South West</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan West</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan East</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

The calculations show that completing formal qualifications is marginally higher than not requiring formal qualifications. Comments drawn from survey responses suggest knowledge about the NSW AECG would be beneficial when involved at a Regional management level. Comments inferred that by accessing training relevant to specific elected positions would assist individuals to carry out their position responsibilities in a professional manner. The Metropolitan North Region has ranked yes/no responses as equal in terms of the necessity for formal qualifications. These results could be an
indicator that adult education providers are easily accessible in Metropolitan Regions through High Schools, TAFE and University systems. According to the Rules of the Association, there is no criterion that requires formal qualifications are needed to accept a nomination for election to any position throughout the NSW AECG network. This group acknowledges that completing a formal qualification would be an asset to the Region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metropolitan Group</th>
<th>Community Participation</th>
<th>Education Providers</th>
<th>Regional Initiatives</th>
<th>No Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan North</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan South West</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan West</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan East</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

The Metropolitan Regions have acknowledged the positive performance of *Education Providers* in Aboriginal education followed closely by Community Participation. It was interesting to note that Regional Initiatives are not recognised as a positive outcome across any of the Metropolitan Regions. The Metropolitan North Region appeared to have channelled a high level of energy, volunteered by Aboriginal community members, into the education provider sector to attain positive results. The figures indicate that there was a close relationship between Metropolitan West and Metropolitan South West AECG members and education providers. This could mean that the high numbers of pre-schools, schools, and TAFE Colleges and University campuses are within close proximity to established Local AECGs.
### Priorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metropolitan Group</th>
<th>Community Participation</th>
<th>Education Providers</th>
<th>Regional Initiatives</th>
<th>No Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan North</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan South West</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan West</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan East</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Discussion

The collective priority area for the Metropolitan Regions is increasing positive working relationships with *Education Providers*. This could mean that a large number of AECG members who completed surveys are employed with an education provider, therefore are conscious of the need to direct energy into this area to produce positive outcomes. These results could indicate the major focus of Local AECGs was interaction with school systems in their Regions. The majority of high schools and their feeder primary schools are located in Sydney Metropolitan DEC Regions. While there are no distinct Aboriginal communities in these Regions, it was interesting that the Metropolitan West and the Metropolitan South West Regions have ranked this category marginally higher than the Metropolitan North Region. Both of these Regions fall within the low socio economic target areas of social disadvantage as a social determinant for the measurement of positive educational outcomes. Aboriginal families were spread across the Regions and reside in high numbers in some suburbs in Metropolitan Sydney. The total figures suggest an expectation exists that liaising with formal education providers will be beneficial toward meeting AECG goals and meeting future aspirations for individual Aboriginal people.
Metropolitan/State Comparisons

Table 7: Metropolitan/State Comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Metropolitan Group</th>
<th>State Totals</th>
<th>Metropolitan Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Priority Area</td>
<td>Community Participation</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education Providers</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regional Initiatives</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No Comment</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

The collective priority area for the Metropolitan Group was increasing positive working relationships with *Education Providers*, while the collective responses from the State Committee members, identified the category of *Community Participation* at all levels of the three tiered structure. An interpretation of differences could be that a high number of NSW AECG members are Aboriginal staff employed with DEC. The 2012 statistics included in Chapter 7: ‘Hunter Region AECG’ Case Study, show that of the possible (36) regional delegate positions, (26) are employed with the Department of Education and Communities. Included in Chapter 5: ‘NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group’, the 2012 statistics show that of the possible (28) positions of the State committee, (17) are employed with the Department of Education and Communities. In both cases the majority of Management Committee members were employed by DEC. This interpretation reinforces the notion of there being possible conflict between loyalties to the employer when advocating on behalf of Aboriginal communities. In terms of providing advice as an AECG member when dealing with matters relevant to
DEC, Aboriginal employees could find themselves in difficult positions. It would appear that both groups think that interaction at a local community level was desirable as opposed to exerting energy on regional activities. Encouraging positive relationships between education providers at a local level through the participation of Aboriginal people in planning and decision making processes could be seen as beneficial for Aboriginal student outcomes.
Country AECG Group Data Analysis

Regions included in this section are those country geographic areas located on the East Coast of NSW, (Upper South Coast, Lower South Coast, Central Coast, Hunter, Manning, Lower North Coast and Upper North Coast). The Manning Region did not return any completed surveys. The Country group completed (44) surveys and have been analysed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country Group</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>No Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper North Coast</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower North Coast</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manning (Nil Returns)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunter</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Coast</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper South Coast</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower South Coast</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion
The calculations clearly show that the Country Regions group believes it was not a requirement to have studied at an educational institution and completed formal education courses to be involved at a decision making level. Members stated that no formal qualifications are necessary to participate in an elected voluntary position on Regional Management Committees, although TAFE Colleges and Universities are easily accessible to members.

Positive Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country Group</th>
<th>Community Participation</th>
<th>Education Providers</th>
<th>Regional Initiatives</th>
<th>No Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper North Coast</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower North Coast</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manning Nil Returns</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunter</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper South Coast</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower South Coast</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Coast</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

Community Participation was identified as the area that produced the most positive outcomes for the Country Group. Being involved with Education Providers was ranked as the next most positive result. It was interesting that the “no comment” category was ranked one space higher than the Regional Initiatives category for the Country Group. The following comments illustrated what possibilities could be available to Aboriginal people through Community Participation in education:

In particular up the North Coast Region we used to be very much involved with our TAFE students there as much as our schools. We found that – and still today – a lot of our older folk are going back to TAFE centres and Universities to get the education that they never got so much at school ... It is about empowering our own people and leaders. You know, you do not have to be young to develop leadership skills. Some of our people do take longer to become leaders in their own right. Some have it younger, and some have it older. It depends on the opportunities that our people have been given at that particular time.  

Linda Olive Life Member

Some regional activities have been successful in the Hunter and Central Coast AECG Regions, but no other regional activities have been registered as positive outcomes by the remainder of this group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country Group</th>
<th>Community Participation</th>
<th>Education Providers</th>
<th>Regional Initiatives</th>
<th>No Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper North Coast</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower North Coast</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manning Nil Returns</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunter</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper South Coast</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower South Coast</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Coast</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parbury, 2010: 133
Discussion

The collective priority for Country Regions was directing energy into building relationships with Education Providers followed by Community Participation and then Regional Initiatives. “No comment” was recorded in (22) spaces. An assumption can be made that positive relationships already exist and respondents appeared keen to increase the participation of community members in activities available through Education Providers. Interaction with Education Providers for this group inferred that easy access is located along the East Coast of NSW to a high numbers of schools and TAFE Colleges by AECG members. This calculation could imply that there are concentrated pockets of Aboriginal communities located in country towns on the East Coast of NSW. There are Aboriginal Centres attached to Universities located in Lismore, Newcastle and Wollongong that add to the opportunities to establish positive relationships with the Higher Education sector. The following comments support the participation of AECG members in a variety of forums:

This year the Connecting to Country program was successfully conducted in a number of Local AECGs. This was well received by both community and schools involved. We participated in a number of committees and forums including the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs consultation forum, the Region’s Aboriginal Education Policy Liaison Committee, NSW AECG/CALD Language forums and DEC merit selection panels.307

Country/State Comparisons

Table 8: Country/State Comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priorities</th>
<th>Community Participation</th>
<th>Education Providers</th>
<th>Regional Initiatives</th>
<th>No Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State Totals</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country Totals</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country Group</th>
<th>Community Participation</th>
<th>Education Providers</th>
<th>Regional Initiatives</th>
<th>No Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State Totals</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country Totals</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

The highest priority for the Country Regions was building relationships with *Education Providers*. There are high numbers of the *No Comment* category registered by both the State Representatives and the Country Group. There was no specific education providers identified in the surveys by the Country Group. An assumption can be made that depending on the number of pre-schools, schools, TAFE colleges and University campuses located close to Local AECGs, it is highly likely that maintenance of a positive relationship with these services are continually nurtured. Alternatively there may be a need to establish better relationships with service providers located in other communities. This group demonstrated through responses to surveys that members in these Regions are keen to work with schools to support the encouragement of positive Aboriginal student outcomes.
**Rural AECG Group Data Analysis**

Regions included in this section are those country geographic areas located west of the Great Dividing Range of NSW, (North West 1, North West 2, Western 1, and Riverina 1). The Rural geographic group completed (20) surveys and have been analysed.

### Formal Qualifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rural Group</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>No Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North West 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western 1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverina 1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

Members clearly stated that no formal qualifications are necessary to participate in an elected voluntary position on Regional AECG Management Committees. North West 1 and 2 AECG Regions strongly objected to any suggestion that this would be a requirement for election. Access to TAFE colleges and the Higher Education sector is not a reason for not requiring formal qualifications, because of the location of The University of New England and Charles Sturt University campuses within this geographic area.

### Positive Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rural Group</th>
<th>Community Participation</th>
<th>Education Providers</th>
<th>Regional Initiatives</th>
<th>No Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North West 1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West 2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western 1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverina 1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

Community Participation was identified as the area that produced the most positive outcomes for the Rural Group. It was disappointing to note that the “no comment” category was ranked the next highest for the Rural Group, particularly the North West 2 Region. An assumption can be made that positive working relationships exist with Aboriginal communities and the schooling sector. Evidence is shown by the positive credit given to Education Providers across the Regions.

Rural/State Comparisons

Table 9: Rural/State Comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priorities</th>
<th>Community Participation</th>
<th>Education Providers</th>
<th>Regional Initiatives</th>
<th>No Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>State Totals</strong></td>
<td>56</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rural Totals</strong></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

The highest priority for the Rural Group was Education Providers. The number of participants who recorded “no comment” to this question was the same as the number identified in the State Committee surveys. An extract from the North West 1 section of the 2012 Annual Conference Report was indicative of the value this Region places in Community Participation:

People Places and Pathways in NSW Aboriginal Education
Members of the North West 1 Regional AECG also completed Certificate III in Employment, Education and Training for AECG members. A number of communities in North West 1 successfully delivered the Connecting to Country program.\textsuperscript{308}

These comments demonstrated how the correlation between Education Providers and Community Participation can be increased in a positive fashion. A positive outcome for many Regions across NSW was the rollout of the Connecting to Country program. Local AECGs felt that entrenched popular stereotypes are challenged when Aboriginal communities are involved in the delivery of Cultural Awareness Programs. The following comments highlighted the spread of active participation by Local AECG members:

\textit{North West 2 has nine (9) functioning Local AECGs, Tenterfield, Glenn Innes, Ashford, Inverell, Tingha, Armidale, Walcha, Manilla and Tamworth. North West 2 Regional and Local AECGs are actively involved in developing, participating and presenting the Connecting to Country Program in the Region.}\textsuperscript{309}
**Isolated AECG Groups Data Analysis**

Regions included in this section are those country geographic areas located in what is considered to be the Far West and the Western areas of the Riverina in NSW, (Western 3, Western 2, Riverina 3, and Riverina 2). The Isolated Group completed (15) surveys and have been analysed. There are nil returns registered for Riverina 2 and incomplete surveys registered for Western 3, which includes the question related to positive outcomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Isolated Group</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>No Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western 3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western 2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverina 3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverina 2 Nil Returns</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td><strong>0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

The calculations clearly show that completing formal qualifications was not a requirement to be involved at a decision making level for this group. Members clearly stated that no formal qualifications are necessary to participate in a voluntary elected position on Regional Management Committees. The question regarding formal qualifications returned (15) completed surveys for analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Isolated Group</th>
<th>Community Participation</th>
<th>Education Providers</th>
<th>Regional Initiatives</th>
<th>No Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western 3 Incomplete</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western 2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverina 3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverina 2 Nil Returns</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

Although there only (2) Regional AECG Committee responses registered for this group, Riverina: 3 felt that a positive relationship with Education Providers will produce positive outcomes in Aboriginal Education. The following comments included in the NSW AECG Annual Report from Western 3 AECG Region, highlighted some of the activities their members have been involved with:

Our Region this year has participated in DEC Merit Selection panels and undertook merit selection panel training. We have attended and assisted in planning and delivery of DEC staff development days on Aboriginal education in schools in the Region and conducted a Cultural Awareness program for Broken Hill schools in Term 3 staff development day. We have also attended Department of Education and Communities Regional Principles meetings to discuss processes for consultation and future directions of the AECG/DEC Partnership Agreement in this Region.310

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Isolated Group</th>
<th>Community Participation</th>
<th>Education Providers</th>
<th>Regional Initiatives</th>
<th>No Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western 3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western 2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverina 3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverina 2 Nil Returns</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

Fifteen (15) completed surveys are included in the Isolated Group analysis for this question. The Community Participation category was identified as the area where energy should be channelled in tandem with the Education Providers category. The close relationship between Community Participation and Education Providers could be an indicator that DEC staff undertakes a duality of roles as AECG members. Because of the extensive distances across the AECG Regions in this geographic group, inferences can be made that it is plausible that the AECG/DEC Partnership Agreement supports the relationship between Local AECG involvement and school activities. DEC officers who

310 NSW AECG Inc. Annual Report, 2012: 23
hold positions in both roles have been approved for a transfer of duties when attending relevant DEC/AECG functions.

Table: 10  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priorities</th>
<th>Isolated/State Comparisons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State Totals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Participation</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Providers</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Initiatives</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Comment</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

The highest priority for the Isolated Regions was the *Community Participation* category, while the collective responses from the State Committee members also identified the *Community Participation* category in all levels of the three tiered structure. An assumption can be made that employment status and distances between towns where Aboriginal people reside are met with various challenges. The graph shows a close relationship between Community Participation and Education Providers which probably helps to meet the challenges faced by Local AECGs in the Isolated Group, by offering practical support to Local AECG members.
**Geographic Group Comparisons**

Aggregated statistical data from each of the Geographic Groups have been factored into a comparative chart, to reveal whether information provided by members of the State Committee of 2009 is consistent with Local AECG members’ aspirations.

Table 11: Geographic Group/State Committee Comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priorities</th>
<th>Geographic Group Totals</th>
<th>State Committee Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Participation</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Provision</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Initiatives</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Comment</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

Results relative to priorities between combined Geographic Groups and the State Committee show that the Geographic Group favoured involvement in the **Education Provision** category, while the State Committee favoured the **Community Participation** category. While there are differences in the collective number of surveys for each of the groups, it was interesting that the discrepancies between both focus areas are greater for the State Committee (42) than the Geographic Group (38). The differences between these figures suggest that State Committee representatives are disconnected from the reality of Local AECG activity.
This section investigated the survey results between Regional groupings. Reactions toward classified focus areas by AECG members living in various geographic Regions were examined. Similarities and differences were compared by using numerical data collated from completed surveys. Assumptions are made relative to access to educational resources, physical location of community support networks and social attitudes to Aboriginal education. The Geographic Group completed (92) surveys for analysis. Of the (19) Regions established in the NSW AECG structure, the Riverina 2 and Manning Regions did not return any completed surveys. Variables in the number of returns need to be considered, due to the number of Local AECGs established in individual Regions. Structural differences of Regional Management Committees rely on the number of delegates drawn from each Local AECG. This variable will impact on the total tabulations investigating the differences and similarities between Regional Management Committees thinking spaces.

**Formal Qualifications**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic Groups</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>No Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolated</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Discussion**

Clearly Regional groups felt that it was not necessary to hold formal qualifications to participate on a Regional AECG Management Committees. The Metropolitan Group had identified the need to have formal qualifications, possibly due to easier access to University education and the number of TAFE Colleges established within Sydney Metropolitan regions. The opposite applies for the Country Group although Wollongong University, The University of Newcastle and Southern Cross University are located within the Country Group boundaries. TAFE Colleges are also well represented in the Country Group’s geographic space. The Rural Group had responded *No* even though The University of New England and Charles Sturt Universities are located within this geographic area. TAFE Colleges are well represented in the Rural Group’s physical area. The Isolated Group had responded *No* to this question. Reasons could probably be due to the difficulty people from these communities have accessing adult education institutions in addition to not needing formal qualifications to participate at all Management Committee levels in accordance with the NSW AECG Constitution.

**Positive Outcomes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic Groups</th>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Education Providers</th>
<th>Regional Initiatives</th>
<th>No Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolated</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

The total figures indicated that involvement of Aboriginal people in the category of Community Participation in education provision will lead to positive outcomes. It appeared that the category Education Providers in the Rural Group areas need to become more engaged with Aboriginal communities by encouraging positive participation in learning environments. It was difficult to make a valid summation of the Isolated Group results due to the incompletion of one AECG Region’s survey responses to this particular question. The total figures could be skewed toward positive education provider relationships or show that the educational outcomes gap has widened, needing increased engagement with Aboriginal communities. Other comments made in surveys from Western 3 Region, indicated a willingness to interact with community service providers to improve education outcomes:

*All departmental agencies working together. Aboriginal Education is important to non-Aboriginal students and communities as well as should be a focus of the AECG too.*

Priorities

Table 14: Geographic Group Comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic Groups</th>
<th>Community Participation</th>
<th>Education Providers</th>
<th>Regional Initiatives</th>
<th>No Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolated</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

311 Isolated Group Incomplete Survey Responses: Western 3
Discussion

Collectively Regional groupings have ranked the need for efforts to be directed toward improving the relationship between the AECG network and the Education Providers category. The graph indicated the need is far greater in the country groups than in other groups. Partnership Agreements have been developed between the AECG and the Department of Education and Communities at all structural levels across NSW. A number of Regional and Local AECGs have developed Agreements based on the State model, with DEC Local Management Groups, or are in the process of constructing their own specific Agreements. A closer working relationship with education providers was desirable. This proposed action may be a driving force behind the Education Provider category being ranked so highly. Clearly the Country area group was keen to strengthen relationships with schools. Additional comments from a country group survey reinforced this position:

*I do see genuine partnerships.
In fifteen years of working with our kids in schools, The AECG is the most positive group, in my opinion, to hit the schools and community in one package.*

Summary

Of the ninety two surveys returned, seventy six respondents stated that it was not necessary to hold formal qualifications to participate on Regional AECG Management Committees. Clearly Regional groups felt that commitment, passion and involvement to improve Aboriginal Education services for Aboriginal people were vital for the future of healthy Aboriginal communities.

Increased numbers of Associate members at a Local AECG level could be interpreted as a threat to Aboriginal Community decision making processes. In many local areas the number of Associate members who attend meetings regularly outweighs the attendance of Full members. Alternatively it could be that schools in particular are showing a greater interest in Aboriginal Education through the participation of teachers and principals joining as Associate members on Local AECG committees. A workshop report from a Hunter Regional AECG meeting was included in Chapter 7: ‘The Hunter AECG’, as a strategy to address this issue. Negative generational attitudes toward
formal education provision appeared to be abating, evidenced by the participation of Aboriginal communities in formal education activities. Other comments expressed in Regional surveys provided evidence of why the Community Participation category is rated as a high priority.

We need to work hard to get more Aboriginal people in leadership roles and continue to build the capacity of community members.
AE CG a great education voice.
Just being a part of the AECG is something good for the future of our children.

Throughout 2011 and 2012 Aboriginal community capacity building had taken place through the allocation of resources to the NSW AECG to roll out a cultural awareness program designed for delivery to DEC staff. Most Regions throughout NSW had implemented a three day, ‘Connecting to Country’ program with successful outcomes. Individuals reported a sense of empowerment and confidence as positive outcomes as a result of being involved in the presentation of this program. These sentiments have been repeated in evaluative feedback recorded in various Regional surveys:

Throughout my long journey in Aboriginal Education, I have always thought about what my Mother, Aunties, Uncles provided to my education. The passion, the strong sense of family – the caring of others. These are values we should always remember. The fight and struggle continues for practice and delivery of culture. Why should we have to ask for permission to be embraced in cultural activities?

The previous comments exposed the cultural heritage element which underpins the Shared Aboriginal Storytelling Model. Knowledge holders, at the local community level, transport cultural morés and values into a formal educational arena.

It is disappointing to see the high number of respondents who did not record priority areas in the survey responses. While some members highlighted the fact that the AECG is an opportunity to have Aboriginal voices heard, it seemed to be a contradiction if the opportunity is not taken when offered:

This is the only voice in Education that Aboriginal people have. It needs to have a more respectful profile and positive promotion.
I like what you are doing. The research when completed may make a “big” difference. Good on you Laurel.
It is a positive group striving to benefit Australian society. I think it’s great that we are starting Junior AECGs to get our kids into the future. AEO’s, community, students, need more support from our DET Special Education Directors. The Local, Regional and State AECG is an important organization for the betterment of our children’s education.313

This chapter continued the stories shared by Regions in Chapter 8: ‘Voices of AECG Members’, by moving into a comparison between geographic areas. Numerical tables are presented as a result of categorised survey data correlations. Interpretation of each table and graph was discussed in a narrative style to report the evidence. Three questions had been compared between Metropolitan, Country, Rural and Isolated AECG Geographic Groups focused on the necessity for formal qualifications, positive outcomes achieved and identified priority areas. State Committee responses have been compared to geographic group results to investigate whether the advice provided at State AECG Committee meetings are consistent with reported Regional AECG Committee aspirations.

Chapter 10: ‘The Story Continues’ discusses the need to consider cultural protocols and practices when carrying out research activity with Aboriginal communities. Concluding remarks discuss the progress toward ‘Closing the Gap’ between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educational outcomes couched in a historical and political context. A diagram highlights the impact social determinants have on educational outcomes for Aboriginal people. Findings of this study are discussed in the context of the NSW AECG structure and Aboriginal community participation in the educational process. A snapshot overview is presented to indicate what level of consultation occurred in 2013 with education providers from a NSW AECG perspective. As a gesture of respect to the traditional owners of the country I reside on and the land the University of Newcastle is built on, an Awabakal Dreaming story completes the thesis.
Chapter 10: The Story Continues

(Conclusion and Recommendations)

Introduction

This thesis is couched in a historical and political context pertaining to the policies and practices imposed on Aboriginal people since non- Aboriginal authorities took control of social services in Australia. Some significant events which impacted on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have been described briefly in Chapter 2: ‘The Political and Historical Context’, as an introduction to the effect history and politics have had on the accessibility to education provision for Aboriginal people. Since the 1967 Referendum, which legislated for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be included as people in the Australian Census count, policy changes have continued. The 2011 Census in Australia included forms specifically designed for the use of discrete Aboriginal communities. Media publicity promoted the Census results as being vital evidence necessary for all levels governments to plan for the provision of social service improvements directly affecting communities across Australia. It will be very interesting if the Australian Bureau of Statistics findings report data useful for social analysts to identify priority issues related to Aboriginal Affairs and in particular Aboriginal Education.

Involvement by Aboriginal people in the decision making processes, has been noted in National policy documents and reviews on Aboriginal education and have been included in reports to State and Federal Parliaments over decades. Scepticism arises when the same topics are repeatedly written into documents as aims for improvement. Statistics are used by service providers to confirm that continuing social disadvantage exists for Aboriginal communities. Social determinants of health, housing, education and employment were identified by Dixon: 2005 in Chapter 2: ‘The Political and Historical Context’, when he was involved with FACAATSI during the 1950s. Ideas have been put forward of how culturally appropriate education and training will increase employment opportunities and therefore improve life chances for Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people acknowledge that information technology becomes an additional social divide between the digital ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’. If Aboriginal people do not
harness the technology and use it to benefit their families and communities then educational disadvantage will be perpetuated.

**Research Topic**

This study aimed to investigate whether Aboriginal community has impacted on Education provision in NSW. To inform the topic a decision was made to seek comment from the knowledge holders, through the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. structure. I invited you to join me on a journey of discovery as we travelled across NSW to listen to stories told through the voices of Aboriginal people. Throughout this journey I have analysed many stories shared by members of the NSW AECG through survey completions. I have listened to recorded interviews from a position of experience and respect for the storytellers. I have learned from the knowledge entrenched in story narratives connected to people, place and pathways into the future of Aboriginal Education in NSW. Aboriginal people are the knowledge holders and share their worldview through traditional storytelling. Trust to share knowledge is reciprocated with truth.

**Research Outcomes**

Eight questions were included in a survey completed by AECG members to extrapolate data pertinent to experience and knowledge, strengths and weaknesses, necessary skills required, skills gained, positive outcomes and priorities. Data was collected from (92) NSW AECG Management Committee members inclusive of (17) Regions. NSW AECG Association Committee members were invited to share their knowledge and have their voice narrated in this study. Local AECG members (7) completed a sample survey. NSW AECG Life Members (5) agreed to give recorded interviews that added richness to voice and story through an average of (29.5 years) each of active membership experience. A Local AECG member, with a wealth of experience, shared stories and reflections by agreeing to record an interview.

**Community Impact**

The relationship between the NSW Department of Education and Communities and the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. has been a topic of conversation
for some time now. We have listened to people talk about signing off on Partnership Agreements between DEC and AECGs across the State. There is discussion in Aboriginal communities about tensions being created by being employed in DEC and wearing their AECG hats. In some cases communities would not understand the impact of structural changes within DEC if employees were not involved with AECGs and prepared to explain the possible implications. On many occasions these employees are called upon to explain the intricate details associated with DEC policies and programs, so that members can better work with schools to support Aboriginal students. The opportunity for growth at the local level relies on the interaction between parents/grandparents or caregivers and education providers. Operational structures and functions need to be understood so that Aboriginal people can get the best out of Education systems, in order to improve their position in Australian society.

**Community Capacity** building was found to be an area which needs attention. On-going training programs are required to strengthen the knowledge base of all members of Local AECGs so that a greater pool of skills is available. Aboriginal people have the capacity to successfully deliver cultural awareness training programs to education providers. This is evident by the ‘Connecting to Country’ program evaluations and feedback from Local and Regional AECGs across NSW. During taped interviews with Life Members, a prompt question was used to investigate the level of an individual’s increased knowledge by participating in the AECG: John Heath responded:

*Most certainly, absolutely and I think that is one of the beauties of the AECG particularly at the State level, it does bring people together even at the local level. As an individual you’ve got your own experiences and background and so on, but we can always learn off others and it’s a good opportunity to share with other people regardless of their background. Knowing what is happening in Aboriginal Education is important to us. We do that at the local level through the AECGs, which you would not do if you just considered your own children. Being involved in decisions about policy, you would not have that kind of interaction and then taking those ideas through to the*
Regional and State levels and then to National Committees. It’s just great to be able to learn from others.\textsuperscript{314}

John Heath, Life Member

Aboriginal Community Consultative Processes and Education Providers

Policy and Consultation

Many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have influenced government policy development over many years. Since the National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in 1994 and the development of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP), endorsed by all governments in 1989, co-ordination of policy implementation has been driven by a National agenda. The NATSIEP published 21 long-term goals that came into effect in 1990. Regardless of the cessation of the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, Aboriginal people have continued to influence social change and educational reform. It is clear through the literature review that NSW policy development is driven by the National agenda using the 21 long-term goals identified by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEEDYA).

While the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) was operational, the NAEC was the prime advisory committee to the Commonwealth Government relevant to Aboriginal Education matters. This organisation has been replaced by the Indigenous Education Consultative Body. Currently Aboriginal people who are involved in an employed, elected or a voluntary capacity are operating as cultural insiders and representing Aboriginal communities across the country. They are working with people who can influence changes to legislation and policy direction in Aboriginal Education. A NATSIEP Long-Term goal directly related to the involvement of Aboriginal people in educational decision-making for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education provision, underpins the following section of this study.

Goal 1:
To establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal parents and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of pre-school, primary and secondary education services for their children.

A brief overview of how the NSW AECG currently participates in a consultative process with Early Childhood, Schools, TAFE and Higher Education services aimed at the eight compressed priority areas identified in NATSIEP is presented from an Aboriginal community context. The following information has been provided by a NSW AECG Life Member who has lengthy experience and knowledge relevant to Early Childhood services, the 2013 NSW AECG Vice President and a NSW AECG Life Member who has experience and knowledge of the Higher Education sector.\(^{315}\)

1 Effective arrangements for participation in educational decision-making:

**Early Childhood:** In NSW the Aboriginal Early Childhood Support and Learning Inc. (AECSL) has a role of co-ordination for 117 targeted pre-schools in NSW. Twenty four of these centres are Aboriginal identified with populations between 90-95% Aboriginal enrolments. The remainder have five or more Aboriginal children enrolled and therefore are eligible to receive supplementary funding from the Department of Employment Education and Workplace Relations.

A State Management Team comprising of six Aboriginal females and one non-Aboriginal male, participate in the decision-making process across NSW. Every targeted pre-school has a local Management Committee comprising parents, caregivers and community people e.g. Elders or grandparents, who are involved in decisions that directly affect the specific Centre. Not all targeted pre-schools have a Local AECG representative on their Management Committee. A NSW AECG Management Committee member represents this organisation’s viewpoint on the AECSL Management Committee.

\(^{315}\) NSW AECG Life Member Interviews and 2013 NSW AECG Vice President Interview
There is minimum involvement with the Department of Education and Communities (DEC) pre-schools by AECSL. An opportunity to participate from an AECG representative position is on merit selection panels for identified Aboriginal staffing positions as a panel member. Information about enrolments and availability of employment opportunities are reported at Local AECG meetings. From an AECG perspective consultation is usually by invitation only. Aboriginal advice is sought through DEC Aboriginal staff.

**Schools:** The three tiered structure of the NSW AECG, Local/Regional/State provides opportunities for advice to be provided through the NSW DEC management structure. AECG has membership of Regional Aboriginal Education Committees (RAEC). Some Regional AECG Management Committees hold term meetings with the DEC Regional Director in their regions. While not all Local Management Groups (LMG) have AECG representation on their committees they are encouraged to do so. At the State level, membership on several State and National committees provides an opportunity to influence policy decisions that affect the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islanders. Some examples are the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs, Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood, Roads and Maritime Services, First Peoples Education Advisory Group, Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies and the NSW Department Of Education Director-General Advisory Council.

**TAFE:** The NSW AECG was one of the primary partners of the Indigenous Police Recruitment Our Way Delivery (IPROWD) state steering committee. Discussion related to the delivery and monitoring of this program and participation in decisions that produce positive outcomes of the program is a role of AECG representation. TAFE Institute Advisory Boards invite AECG representation. Presentations by TAFE Aboriginal staff at State/Regional meetings provide information relevant to policy direction to a larger number of AECG members.

**Higher Education:** All Universities are required to establish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory structures which include AECG representation. Another avenue
open to consultation is NSW AECG representation on committees that advise the Federal Minister for Education.

2  Increase the number employed in education and training:

**Early Childhood:** A National Quality Framework was introduced in 2010 to improve services in Early Childhood Centres. Every Centre will require a qualified teacher and all other professional staff must have or be enrolled in a Certificate III in Child Care. The industrial ‘Modern Awards’ requirements will be phased in over a four year period up until 2014. In NSW Diploma of Teaching courses are offered fulltime at Macquarie, University of New England, Newcastle, Wollongong Universities and Charles Sturt University Albury, Bathurst and Dubbo Campuses and Avondale College of Higher Education. A bachelor of Early Childhood Education and the Certificate III in Child Care courses are offered through TAFE Colleges. The difficulty for Aboriginal people is economic (approx. $5,868 per annum) and the length of time without wages, unless scholarships equal to fees plus funding commensurate with earned salaries. Given the history of Aboriginal education Aboriginal people will be placed in a position of disadvantage if individual education backgrounds do not meet the tertiary entry scores of universities.

**Schools:** AECG has representation on scholarship selection panels promoting teacher education for Aboriginal people. The establishment of permanent positions in schools for Aboriginal people is identified as supportive for successful academic outcomes. By advocating on behalf of Aboriginal students to the DEC, staffing arrangements could be increased to improve employment opportunities. By representing the Regional AECGs on RAEACs and the Director-Generals Advisory Council, an advocacy role of the AECG can be fulfilled. Promotion of a professional relationship with the NSW Aboriginal Education and Training Department (AETD) in a joint advocacy role to present statistical data to DEC in support of arguments to establish targeted positions in Aboriginal Education is pursued. AECG representation is requested on DEC merit selection panels for identified Aboriginal positions and where there are vacancies in schools with high enrolments of Aboriginal students. AECG participation is present on
selection panels when choosing people to fill casual employment opportunities through Commonwealth funding allocations of Norta Norta tuition programs.

**TAFE:** Some Regions have a growing relationship with TAFE which may lead to knowledge about the availability of employment opportunities. There is limited involvement in the TAFE employment selection process.

**Higher Education:** There is an unknown level of AECG participation in this area. There may be some discussion at the State level through the IECB meetings.

3  **Ensure equitable access of students to education and training services:**

**Early Childhood:** Transport is an issue for some Aboriginal families. If there is not a bus allocated to the Early Childhood Centre access will be limited for young learners. The costs and maintenance of mini buses have caused a change in funding allocation policies. Inquiries are made at State AECG meetings and local Management Committee meetings related to the availability of transport for families in need.

It should be noted that the Department of Family and Community Services (DFaCS) policy operates under a formula of one staff member per ten children. Teaching staff are required to complete x number of hours per session. Due to limited operational funds and restricted staffing, teaching used to take place on the bus run. This was deemed unsatisfactory that children were not being taught in a pre-school setting. If Early Childhood Centres are not compliant with DFaCS regulations then funds are withdrawn from the second allocation of funds within that year. Parental perception of the value of pre-school education is misinterpreted. Many parents believe these Centres are child minding services and do not understand that structured play is a major component of learning.

**Schools:** There was AECG Membership of DEC State and Regional Equity Committees. There were Local AECG representatives on local school committees to discuss equitable access for Aboriginal students. Ensuring availability of transportation is aligned with the allocation of Behaviour Support Units, particularly in country areas.
in NSW. The State AECG has representation on the Director-General Advisory Council to influence policy decisions in Aboriginal Education. AECG members advocate for Aboriginal participation in Gifted and Talented Students (GATS) programs e.g. school Star Struck presentation.

**TAFE:** Reporting course enrolment opportunities at State and Regional AECG meetings occurs. Tranby College has an AECG position on the College’s Board. Some concern was raised at the 2013 Annual General Meeting related to the introduction of the ‘voucher’ system. Discussion revealed that there is a possibility that many Aboriginal people may not continue accessing TAFE courses due to policy changes.

**Higher Education:** Unsure what level of participation the AECG has with this sector in this area of service delivery in NSW other than membership on University advisory committees.

4  **Ensure participation of students in education and training:**

**Early Childhood:** AECG members are encouraged to promote Early Childhood learning as a benefit for Aboriginal children at Local AECG meetings.

**Schools:** There is AECG participation in Local/Regional/State Advisory Committees. AECG members liaise with DEC Aboriginal staff in resolving suspension of Aboriginal students in an advocacy role in support of parents. There is representation on merit selection panels to appoint culturally aware teachers and administrative staff. AECG representatives are on review panels for DEC programs, examples are Sista-Speak and Bro-speak. Many DEC staff holds Associate membership on Local AECGs. Many Aboriginal students are members of a Junior AECG.

**TAFE:** Promotion of course availability is presented at Regional AECG meetings by TAFE staff.

**Higher Education:** Promotion of course availability is presented at Regional AECG meetings by University staff.
5  Ensure equitable and appropriate educational achievement for students:

**Early Childhood:** Due to the small numbers of qualified Aboriginal teachers in the early years of learning, non-Aboriginal teachers need to be trained effectively to provide culturally appropriate services to Aboriginal children and their communities. Pre-service training institutions need to incorporate Aboriginal Studies in their courses. Teacher quality is recognised as vital for student engagement and achievement. A paper authored by Lester-Irabinna Rigney: provides suggested incentives to grow an Aboriginal workforce:

- *Teaching scholarships exempt from the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS):*
- *More high-quality teacher incentives to go to remote areas:*
- *Allowing students to live in their community while studying:*
- *Addressing institutional, governmental and financial barriers:*
- *An urgent national summit:*
- *Research into Indigenous teacher decline:*
- *More Indigenous male teachers:*
- *Teaching qualification pathways for Aboriginal Community Education Officers*.\(^{316}\)

The NSW AECG should provide strong advocacy advice to State and Federal Ministers and government agencies on behalf of this sector.

**Schools:** Presenting the NSW AECG Connecting to Country program as a professional development program to sensitise school staff about local Aboriginal cultures and environments has proven to be indirectly beneficial for all students. In 2012 Local/Regional AECGs facilitated programs to one hundred and two schools and included government and independent schools. The NSW AECG had involvement in program design and allocation of the ‘Connected Communities’ fifteen schools across NSW. The Local AECG representative will Chair a reference group to provide advice and direction to the school leadership of this program. Local AECG members provide individual support to parents related to student personal learning plans (PLP) in some communities. Members attend Aboriginal student award ceremonies on behalf of the Local/Regional AECG. Participation on scholarship selection panels as an AECG

representative is usual. AECG members are invited to participate in school NAIDOC celebrations.

**TAFE:** NSW AECG Executive members advocate on behalf of TAFE at the State level in an attempt to ensure new policy guidelines do not disadvantage Aboriginal students.

**Higher Education:** Unclear how much participation AECG has at Universities across the State to support this goal.

6  *Promote, maintain and support the teaching of studies, cultures and languages to all Indigenous and non-Indigenous students:*

**Early Childhood:** NSW AECG has representation of National IECBs on the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood to develop and deliver an Australian curriculum.

*The Working Group continues to be responsible for implementing the actions contained in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 21010-2014.*[^317]

**Schools:** AECGs forward recommended Aboriginal community people lists to support the teaching of Aboriginal Studies in the classroom to appropriate schools. AECG members deliver Cultural Awareness programs to teachers. Provide a referral list to schools of Aboriginal artists, Elders etc. Advice is provided on appropriate cultural curriculum content. The NSW AECG lobbies the education system (all stakeholders) to include Aboriginal Studies as a compulsory course at all stages of formal education at National, State, Regional and Local levels. In collaboration with the Board of Studies, the NSW AECG presents Annual recognition awards in year 12 high achievements for an Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student in addition to a nominated teacher of Aboriginal Studies at the NSW AECG Annual General Meeting. During Local AECG meetings it is promoted to Principals that Aboriginal Studies be taught in schools. School staff encourages Welcome/Acknowledgement to Country within the school environment is constantly encouraged. Shared strategies to respect and understand the diversity of Aboriginal communities and cultural protocols are confirmed by nominating

[^317]: NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. Report, 2012: 30
key Aboriginal community people to participate in school activities. By working in partnership with AETD to co-ordinate and support Aboriginal language programs in NSW Public schools, Aboriginal people are invited to provide input. The NSW AECG is responsible for distributing school language funding in 2013. By facilitating Aboriginal community meetings, the AECG network participates in the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs to establish language nests.

**TAFE:** Advice is provided by employees of TAFE at State and Regional AECG levels of consultation.

**Higher Education:** At National and State levels of consultation advice is provided by members who are employed in the University system. Universities are informed about AECG initiatives at Aboriginal Advisory Committee meetings.

7  *Provide community development training services including proficiency in English literacy and numeracy for adults:*

**Early Childhood:** Unsure of the level of AECG involvement in this focus area.

**Schools:** Under the Commonwealth Parent and Community Engagement (PaCE) funding allocation, the NSW AECG and Regional/Local committees deliver programs in partnership with TAFE and DEC schooling, to increase the skill base of Aboriginal parents.

**TAFE:** The NSW AECG, in partnership with Sydney Institute of TAFE, offers an accredited Certificate III in Employment Education and Training course. This course aims to assist members interact more effectively in their roles within the AECG, schools and in their own communities. Communication, English literacy and cultural awareness components are incorporated into course curriculum.

**Higher Education:** Unclear how widespread AECG involvement is in Aboriginal community education activities. A Higher Education representative is invited to present at some Regional AECG meetings.
8 Improve NATSIEP implementation, evaluation and resourcing arrangements:

Early Childhood: The Early Childhood Education area is reliant on advice being provided to the NSW Minister of Education and other government authorities by the NSW AECG representatives, to ensure that policy and funding arrangements meet the needs of Aboriginal early learners. In NSW the peak body dealing with the service provision in this area, the Aboriginal Early Childhood Support and Learning Inc. (AECSL), is not recognised as a genuine member of the peak advisory committee. This organisation feels there is tokenistic membership on the committee, but valued consultation is accepted from the NSW AECG.

Schools: Action in this area is monitored through the DEC committee representations and evaluation of other strategies and programs designed to implement NATSIEP goals at National, State Regional levels. The NSW AECG Inc. continues to work in partnership with the DEC under the Partnership Agreement titled ‘Together We Are-Together We Can- Together We Will’. Partnership agreements are being forged at Local and Regional AECG levels in consultation with relevant DEC structures.

TAFE: Unclear what action is taken in terms of AECG involvement in this particular focus area.

Higher Education: An assumption can be made that this area is discussed at State and National committee meetings.

2012 Indigenous Education Consultative Body Chairs

A National Committee represented by Presidents or Chairpersons of each State and Territory has replaced the NAEC, operational from 1976-1988. The following composition of the IECB is presented to inform readers of who currently represents specific States and Territories in the development, monitoring and implementation of National and State policies that affect Aboriginal Education. Advice provided to Ministers is given from an Aboriginal community perspective. Most positions are ministerial appointments, while NSW remains the only State that follows a democratic election process by the AECG membership at an Annual General Meeting. Only
Aboriginal members who are elected as Regional delegates to the AGM are eligible to vote at the Annual General Meeting in NSW.

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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>Cindy Berwick</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc.</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.aecg.nsw.edu.au">www.aecg.nsw.edu.au</a></td>
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<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Ms Geraldine Atkinson</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Victorian Aboriginal Association Education Inc.</td>
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<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>Rosemaria Brown</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>Tasmanian Aboriginal Corporation for Education</td>
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<td>South Australia</td>
<td>Prof. Peter Buckskin</td>
<td>Chairperson</td>
<td>SA Aboriginal Education &amp; Training Consultative Body</td>
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<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>Ms Carol Gartlett</td>
<td>Chairperson</td>
<td>WA Aboriginal Education &amp; Training Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
<td>Michelle-Charee Abel</td>
<td>Chairperson</td>
<td>ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Consultative Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>Mr Mark Motlop</td>
<td>Chairperson</td>
<td>Northern Territory Indigenous Education Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>Gina Archer</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Queensland Indigenous Education Consultative Group</td>
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The advice provided to the Commonwealth government through the Indigenous Education Consultative Body (IECB) State/Territory structure comprises of Aboriginal people funded through the Commonwealth budget. Over the past ten years, State/Territory education provider policy development and strategic planning have sought advice from Aboriginal people employed in Aboriginal service sections and IECBs. Cultural viewpoints must be challenged by loyalties to the workplace versus loyalties to Aboriginal communities. The above representatives are translating needs in Aboriginal Education as cultural insiders, purely because of their Aboriginal heritage and experiences, in the development of national policy and programs:

In this instance, the Indigenous Education Consultative Body (IECB) plays an important role, both in the monitoring of agreed performance outcomes, and with the provision of ongoing feedback from Indigenous people and their school communities on the impact of strategies, policies and initiatives.318

Eventually these people will become embedded in the Aboriginal Education patch of the Aboriginal Affairs beach.

Community Participation in Aboriginal Education was identified as the priority by State and Regional Management Committees in this study. Survey respondents strongly rejected the idea that a formal qualification is a requirement to actively participate in the NSW AECG. One of the places one can find parents/grandparents and caregivers in all communities are Regional and Local AECGs. When they are invited most are prepared to participate in classroom and school activities. The Local AECGs are established to support education service provision in all systems responsible for Aboriginal Education inclusive of Early Childhood, Schools, Adult Education and Higher Education. As a volunteer organisation the members interact with teachers and officers who provide program funds to education service providers. Decisions at Local levels are made to increase positive outcomes in curriculum delivery that encourages a strong proud sense of Aboriginality for Aboriginal students. The following response clearly highlights the potential personal capacity that can grow from being involved at a Local AECG level.

318 Williams, 2003: 62
I thought I was going to a Bingo game with the AEA from the Local High School one night. I ended up at a Local AECG meeting in the Metropolitan West.

I have developed a lot since I first joined the NSW AECG both personally and professionally. I have completed the Aboriginal Education Assistants Program at Sydney University and then studied for a Diploma in Welfare through the Social Science Faculty at Sydney Uni. I have held three positions in the NSW AECG Secretariat. First as one of the Administration Officers, then next as the Personal Assistant to the NSW AECG President. Finally I was the Executive Officer for the Association. I have moved to the Upper South Coast Region and am very much involved with the Regional AECG and the Local Committee.

Lyn Stewart Life Member

Recommendation 1:

If Regional Representatives are to advocate on behalf of their local and regional communities, then they must increase their knowledge of opportunities available to Aboriginal people across the education spectrum.

Geographic Group Comparisons

Results in terms of positive outcomes and priorities reveal that all geographic groups agree that maintaining positive relationships with education providers are likely to lead to increased successful outcomes for Aboriginal students. The NSW AECG committee results identify the need to focus energy into increasing community participation in Local, Regional and State AECG Committee memberships. All geographic groups strongly feel that formal qualifications are not necessary to actively participate in the NSW AECG Inc. organisation. The groups agree that experience and knowledge about the local Aboriginal community networks will assist members of the AECG to actively pursue the advocacy role expected of the members.

Recommendation 2:

That the NSW AECG actively pursue funding opportunities to employ a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in every AECG Region to co-ordinate and assist with the implementation of Regional AECG strategic plans.
**Education Provision**

Community participation with education providers was identified as a positive outcome from this study. Aboriginal people employed in the Aboriginal Education portfolio are operating as cultural insiders who can strengthen Aboriginal communities at all levels of the organisation by using the NSW AECG consultative process. To ensure informed decisions are made by representatives of the organisation when interacting with education providers, representatives must be confident to question and negotiate strategic developments in Aboriginal Education.

**Recommendation 3:**

*That the NSW AECG develop a consistent Community Development Empowerment plan to ensure effective member consultation with Aboriginal Education service providers across the education spectrum:*

**Education Provider and Aboriginal Community Relationships** are vital to reinforce pride and strength in Aboriginality. Aboriginal cultural interpretation through dance performance and narrative expression has been witnessed at public events in the past. We need to reflect on the diverse stimulus that is presented to us as we operate within professions and communities. Care must be taken that we embrace cultural expressions that are relevant to our own personal experiences. It is impossible to borrow culture from someone else’s experiences and be personally passionate about identity. People need to think about how images and expressions of culture can affect Aboriginality. We are a diverse group of people who express identity in various ways. Aboriginal people do not have to fit into a stereotyped package, designed for a ‘one size fits all blackfella’. Acknowledgement has been given in this study to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who have laid down foundations for Aboriginal people to follow. Everyone must remember the lessons given to Aboriginal people by others to learn from those lessons and share that knowledge to build a better future for those who follow. I charge people employed within Aboriginal Education provision to share the responsibility of giving my grandchildren and great grandchildren better options because of positive educational opportunities for Aboriginal people.
**Cultural Insider Positioning**

The decision to place myself as an insider researcher was ultimately advantageous in two aspects. Firstly I was able to understand the necessity to adhere to cultural protocols when visiting other Regions when ‘out of country’. This was not a difficult practice due to the many observational experiences when visiting many cultural countries throughout my lifetime. Secondly knowing many of the respondents allowed me to establish a level of trust and openness with members I had not met before. By referencing linkages to commonly known Aboriginal identities I maintained a level of trust and rapport throughout the study.

**Limitations of the Study**

The high number of participants who registered ‘no comment’ to survey questions is disappointing. Final results would present different outcomes if all participants responded to all questions. The validity of outcomes reported in this study can only be applied to this particular group of representatives. Value judgements could change annually, relevant to positive outcomes and setting priorities, due to the election process of the NSW AECG Inc. Geographic Group comparisons have been compromised because two Regions registered nil returns and one Region returned incomplete surveys. To present a purely quantitative viewpoint, equal numbers of surveys need to be completed from each of the nineteen Regions of the organisation. This can only be done by examining survey results from the four elected Regional AECG Executive Committee Members for each Region. To investigate any disconnect between the State Committee and the Regions, the same questions need to be canvassed using the State Management Committee and the Regional Representatives.

**Politics and Aboriginal Education**

Since the 1970s Aboriginal people have been formally advising Federal and State governments relevant to Aboriginal Education. There is a difference between Aboriginal politics and mainstream Party politics. Anybody who has been involved in Aboriginal community service provision will understand that Aboriginal politics are used in daily practice. This would be an interesting story to tell, but there is not opportunity to provide a detailed description here. Slowly Aboriginal people are
becoming more involved in mainstream party politics at Federal, State and Local levels. Dixon: 2005 referred to the need to train our people in politics in his recorded Jumbanna lecture. He reminds us “not to abuse politicians but use them” as referenced in Chapter 2: ‘Political and Historical Context’. The following Aboriginal people have been or are involved in the Parliamentary process in various States and Territories up until 2012: 319

**National Government**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neville Bonner</td>
<td>Liberal Senator for Queensland, the first Aboriginal Australian to be elected to the Parliament of Australia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aden Ridgeway</td>
<td>Australian Democrat Senator for NSW.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Warren Mundine</td>
<td>Former National President of the Australian Labor Party.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ken Wyatt</td>
<td>Liberal MLA.</td>
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**New South Wales**

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Linda Burney</td>
<td>ALP MLA, first NSW Aboriginal MP and former president of the ALP. First Aboriginal deputy leader of the ALP in NSW.</td>
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**Northern Territory**

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wesley Lanhupuy</td>
<td>ALP MLA 1983-1995</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Ah Kit</td>
<td>ALP MLA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marshal Bonson</td>
<td>ALP MLA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marion Scrymgour</td>
<td>ALP MLA first female Aboriginal Minister in Australia.</td>
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**South Australia**

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sir Douglas Nichols</td>
<td>First Aboriginal Governor of an Australian state (Governor of South Australia): Pastor with the Churches of Christ in Australia: first Aboriginal person to be knighted.</td>
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**Western Australia**

*Ken Wyatt*  ALP MLA, and Western Australian Shadow Treasurer.


*Carol Martin*  ALP MLA. The first Aboriginal woman to be elected to any Australian Federal, State or Territory Parliament.

Getting excited when there are minimal numbers of Federal and State Aboriginal politicians who are struggling to influence legislation in order to make social and political change for our communities into a brighter future, is irritating. Aboriginal people continuously apply political pressure at all levels of government and expect immediate results from individuals. Aboriginal politicians are facing insurmountable daily challenges of intrigue as they operate in the political environment. These people need to be strong in their convictions to self and community. Aboriginal young people should be talking about making professional choices of all kinds and leading younger generations into a broader range of possibilities as a result of positive educational outcomes:

> I have no doubt in my mind whatsoever, if educated we would have today men sitting in parliament, because every old inhabitant of a country irrespectively of nationality of any occupied country – should have the right to help govern their own people. (Lester Charles Leon).\(^{320}\)

**Social Determinants and Aboriginal Education**

Dixon made reference to the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders 1957 meeting discussions, concerning the inadequate services of double H double E (Housing, Health, Education and Employment). Fifty five years later Australian Governments are still discussing inadequate outcomes for Aboriginal people. In 2012, the following image targets the need to improve social determinants in order to create healthy Aboriginal communities.

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\(^{320}\) Leon, 1966: 6
The National Reconciliation Council: 1995 submission to the Commonwealth Government recognises the correlation between all social services in Aboriginal communities and projected budgetary measures. Substantial funding allocations are required to improve the social situation for the majority of Aboriginal people in Australia. The long term historical disadvantage in Aboriginal communities is largely due to inadequate program funding being allocated to Aboriginal specific social services at a community level. Recommendation 42: of the submission suggests a method to rectify the situation:

*The Council recommends that the Commonwealth identify those areas where direct funding to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander organisations be utilised to avoid suggestions that State or Territory governments are transferring specifically targeted Commonwealth monies away from Indigenous programs. However, direct funding should only be undertaken after consultation with State and Territory governments.*

‘Early Intervention’ is a concept when implemented properly can achieve so much. Positive reinforcement of Aboriginality can only lead to high self-esteem and self-confidence while wanting to learn about different things. When parents are involved and encouraging their children to achieve, parents wonder why Aboriginal students are still
not achieving parallel results as non-Aboriginal students on a broader scale. The recipe for success is said to be learning ability mixed with pride in identity and sprinkled with encouragement. Individuals must have all ingredients working in tandem at an early age and throughout a child’s educational career, to achieve positive outcomes. If local AECG members can help spread the word about the benefits of Early Childhood learning, optional life chances can be increased for young Aboriginal people.

The ‘Closing the Gap’ publicity promoted in the national media is an inheritance of Social Justice for the First Australians, bequeathed to Australian society in 2012 and beyond. Governments have agreed to take urgent action to close the gap between life outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians. To drive action, the Prime Minister, Premiers and Chief Ministers have agreed through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to six ambitious targets:

1. Close the life expectancy gap within a generation:
2. Halve the gap in mortality rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children under five within a decade:
3. Ensure all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander four year olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years (by 2013):
4. Halve the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade (by 2018):
5. At least halve the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates (by 2020): and
6. Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and other Australians within a decade (by 2018).322

Should targets be met, then the well-being of Aboriginal communities’ demographic profile will change.

322 Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, 2010-2014: 3
Early learning is essential in the long-term career aspirations of all people. Aboriginal children need to participate in both Aboriginal Cultural learning processes and early childhood mainstream education systems, to enable them to make choices about social and educational pathways into the future. Parents, grandparents and caregivers play a vital role in shaping cultural and educational expectations for young children.

The Reconciliation Council was established on 15\textsuperscript{th} December 1991 and was abolished on the 1\textsuperscript{st} January 2001. Council members identified as prominent Australians, were ministerial appointments to the Council by the Commonwealth Government. Over a ten year period two terms of office were operational and many people were members (attachment 9). The Council’s vision for Australia is:

\textit{A united Australia which respects this land of ours, values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, and provides justice and equity for all.}\textsuperscript{323}

\textbf{Policy and Consultation}

Many Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people have influenced government policy development over many years. Since the National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in 1994 and the development of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP), endorsed by all governments in 1989, co-ordination of policy implementation has been driven by a

\begin{footnote}
323 Compact '98, 1997: 60
\end{footnote}
National agenda. The NATSIEP published 21 long-term goals came that into effect in 1990 has been driving force for State and Territory education service providers when dealing with Aboriginal Education. Regardless of the cessation of the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, Aboriginal people have continued to influence social change and educational reform. It is clear through the literature review that NSW policy development is driven by the National agenda using the 21 long-term goals identified by the Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEEECDYA). While the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) was operational, the NAEC was the prime advisory committee to the Commonwealth Government relevant to Aboriginal education matters. This organisation has been replaced by Aboriginal people who are invited to inform ministers and departmental bureaucrats in an unstructured fashion. An alternative group of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island people have become organised to meet as representatives of most State and Territory Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander education interests, under the banner of the Indigenous Education Consultative Body (IECB). Currently Aboriginal people who are involved in an employed, elected or a voluntary capacity are operating as cultural insiders and representing Aboriginal communities across the country. They are working with people who can influence changes to legislation and policy direction in Aboriginal Education.

**Storytelling and Teaching**

Storytelling has been used by Aboriginal people as an education tool for thousands of years. Modern Australian society generally believes that traditional links to cultural memories and lore have vanished into the recorded histories of traditional practices. It is my belief that Dreaming stories hold many links to understanding the complexity of Aboriginal society and the valuable heritage left to modern Australia. In respect for the Awabakal people on whose country I am residing, this Dreaming Story has been included to illuminate the number of lessons contained in the storytelling process.
Long, long ago, the moon was a man called Pontoe-boong. He became very jealous of the sun, who was a woman called Punnal. Pontoe-boong grew sick and tired of having to make his long journey across the sky. He felt he was always in darkness. Only on rare times did he feel that the Awabakal people would look up and see his shining face. When you looked at Punnal, the sun’s glowing face was shining every day except when Yura the cloud spirit was making rain. Pontoe-boong was very sad because of this and went into total darkness. He began to think deeply about this and then started to cry. His tears began to fall so much, day after day, that the tears formed a large lagoon. The next time he came close to the earth, the sad lonely moon called to the people on the Redhead hills. “Do not be afraid, I’ve come to bring you joy! Then, all of a sudden, Pontoe-boong noticed his reflection in the water of the lagoon. It was huge and silver in the lagoon of his tears. Ha”, ha!” he cried: “Now the people will be able to come and see me whenever they like”. He was overjoyed and at peace. Pontoe-boong was now happy and returned to the sky. He never forgot the Awabakal people of the lagoon. When he passes their way now, he shines his brightest, lighting the area almost like day. At these times the Awabakal people would gather and hold a corroboree at the lagoon to honour Pontoe-boong, the moon.\(^{325}\)
For Aboriginal people of Newcastle and Lake Macquarie it is vital that these stories are retold to enhance the spirituality of individuals living in the lands of other Aboriginal people and to provide an opportunity for non-Aboriginal people to appreciate the value of a rich and unique culture. Adaptation to cultural change is not new for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. It is important to understand the process of change and identify the positive aspects of such a process. Modification to this Awabakal Dreaming story is a way to remind us that positive cultural maintenance must include the core element of traditional beginnings as a basis for positive outcomes in a modern society. This story can incorporate lessons in English, Mathematics, Science and Technology, Human Society and its Environment, PD-H-PE, Creative and Practical Arts, and Religious Education in classroom practice. Cultural change and modern technology can be linked to traditional Aboriginal teaching styles in an educational environment. It is incumbent on the NSW AECG Association Management Committee to ensure that the following statement is a reality and not just a dream written in words on paper:

_The strength of the NSW AECG is its community base through its network of local and regional AECGs. This allows Aboriginal people to have a voice in self determining their educational future which will impact on the prosperity of Aboriginal communities._

**Responsibility of Consultation**

The consultative process used by the NSW AECG always states that the Local AECGs are the knowledge holders and the power base of the organisation. Local knowledge is manipulated at the Regional level to resolve negative and positive issues, and then taken forward by Regional representation to the State level to be utilised in any future action. The stories told by Regional Management Committee members on behalf of local Aboriginal communities are the core components of this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Local AECG groups hold the cultural knowledge specific to their community and protocols on how an interface between education providers and themselves should occur. Through membership, voices can be heard and ideas shared. It is the responsibility of the local members to actively participate by listening to shared stories</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Communal Resolve.

Elected members from local groups come together on regular occasions to share stories about what is happening in their communities, to a larger gathering. Decision-making processes are introduced to determine the outcome of difficult issues and situations in Aboriginal Education. These people are able to transfer their ideas and information from their own members to broaden the knowledge base in a cultural context. Available educational opportunities are sourced through Regional AECG Management Groups. The elected members have a communal responsibility to feedback knowledge learned and decisions made at the Region to the local membership.

Cultural Heritage

At the intersection of cultural knowledge, communal resolve and political influences, is cultural heritage which remains the core component of research activity when gathering information from Aboriginal people. Environments may change but the knowledge holders always maintain their Aboriginality.

**Fig 23: Aboriginal Storytelling Model**
The above model symbolises the way Aboriginal people share their knowledge using personal storytelling techniques. Through membership of the NSW AECG, individuals communicate Aboriginal Education needs and priorities using a consultative process. The three tiered structure is overlaid here to illustrate how information continually travels from one community to others via a consultative mechanism. At each level of the structure sits particular responsibilities. Researchers need to understand cultural protocols when interacting with Aboriginal communities. I believe there are links to traditional story telling being practised in NSW through the consultative process used in NSW AECG Regions.

**Concluding Remarks**

Dixon: 2005, made comment in his taped lecture about the current lack of leadership in Aboriginal Affairs and stated that we were going through a lull. Dixon feels that out of the lull will emerge leaders. I agree with Dixon to a certain extent, but maybe the leadership in Aboriginal Affairs is going through a change phase, where leaders are identified as tentacles made from masses of shells and pebbles being massaged by gentle waves of knowledge through education. This beach of Aboriginal Affairs has no distinct boundaries separating itself into Aboriginal service sections, but has slight inclines that subtly allow the observer to understand that the waves will merge into one another to become one mass of water. This approach needs to be appreciated when trying to search out comments in Aboriginal communities. Health, housing, employment and education conditions interact with each other and are indicators of the well-being of Aboriginal communities. I believe it is from these tentacles, leaders will emerge in increasing numbers in all aspects of social service provision. If Aboriginal people are to compete on the foundation of equity in Australian society, then I await the rogue wave to toss up strong leaders to take up the mantle for improvement in Aboriginal Education. The traditional Aboriginal teaching technique of storytelling through oral history coupled with written records will ensure that the Aboriginal story must continue into the future.

Thank you to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have paved the pathways and left footprints for future generations to journey to places of success.
through education. They have collectively influenced social change either consciously or sub-consciously by their participation in Aboriginal Education. By their actions they have agreed to lead an insurgence as insider interlopers against cultural, social, and political injustices that continue to exist in Australian Aboriginal communities. Many of these people who are or have been employed in Aboriginal service provision in NSW, have entrenched themselves on the beach of Aboriginal Affairs in the coastal seascape explained in my personal metaphor. Some people will remain on the beach of Aboriginal Affairs to rest and take their rightful place in history and bask in the warmth of the sun, others will struggle against rips, rogue waves and stormy weather to maintain community acceptance while they aspire to sit beside Aboriginal people who have proven their cultural and political success. The furrows that lie beneath the water’s edge will always be inviting for those who have been damaged by the continual challenges faced, forcing them to fade away into the comforting embrace of their families, communities or other options external to Aboriginal Affairs.

NSW AECG Life Members are placed on the beach of Aboriginal Affairs in respect of the work they have done to improve Aboriginal education service provision for future generations:

Today’s world is moving forward in so many ways. Unfortunately, Aboriginal people continue to be left behind. Band-aid fixes through band-aid funding will never ‘Close the Gap’: that date will also continue to move forward. Identity and culture, is the key to anyone’s success, strength and growth. Why do we have to continually fight for ours, the oldest continual living culture?

Rachel Small ,President Youyoong AECG 2013.

Aboriginal people continue to survive. Whether the future of our country is a good one or not depends on all of us coming together. Society must honour our history and enact a vision for the future that respects and values Aboriginal people as the rightful teachers of their cultures and embrace the diversity of our communities.

Ken Weatherall President, Mooloobinbah AECG and NSW AECG Vice President 2013.
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Five Life members and one Local member of the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group agreed to be interviewed at a location of their choice and to be identified in the thesis. As an outcome of consultation, the cassette tapes and a copy of the transcribed recordings have been returned to the knowledge holders. After the written completion of the thesis, all copies of transcriptions and permission forms will be shredded. A list of members who shared their stories follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>When</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deborah Cook</td>
<td>Ballina NSW</td>
<td>26/06/2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Life Member</em></td>
<td><em>Upper North Coast Region</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Heath</td>
<td>Port Macquarie NSW</td>
<td>28/06/2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Life Member</em></td>
<td><em>Lower North Coast Region</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia Leverett</td>
<td>Panania NSW</td>
<td>15/11/2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Life Member</em></td>
<td><em>Met. South West Region</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mavis Robinson</td>
<td>Liverpool NSW</td>
<td>16/10/2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Life Member</em></td>
<td><em>Met. South West Region</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyn Stewart</td>
<td>Ulladulla NSW</td>
<td>3/04/2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Life Member</em></td>
<td><em>Upper South Coast Region</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret Simoes</td>
<td>Nowra NSW</td>
<td>23/05/09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Local AECG Member</em></td>
<td><em>Upper South Coast Region</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Images


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Figure 5: Bishop Garnsey’s Telegram (1972) *Telegram to the Australian Prime Minister* Australian Council of Churches [http://www.indigenousrights.net.au/default.asp?iID=800](http://www.indigenousrights.net.au/default.asp?iID=800) accessed 2/10/2012
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NEW SOUTH WALES GOVERNMENT A.W.B. 14<

ABORIGINES WELFARE BOARD

ABORIGINES PROTECTION ACT, 1909-1943
(Regulation 55)

Application for Exemption from Provision of Aborigines Protection Act and Regulations thereunder

I, ..............................................................................................................................aborigine
(Name in Full) (Caste)

of ........................................................................................................................................
(Full address)

aged......years, pursuant to Section 18c of the Aborigines Protection Act, 1909-1943, hereby make application to
the Aborigines Welfare Board for the issue to myself of a Certificate of Exemption from the provisions of the said
Act and Regulations thereunder. the following provisions

........................................................................................................................................

I HEREBY FURTHER DECLARE THAT -

Strike out any points that do not apply

(a) I have not at any time during the past two years been convicted of drunkenness.

(b) I have not during the past two years committed any offence against the Aborigines Protection Act, Police
Offences Act, or the Crimes Act, or the Regulations pertaining to these Acts.

(c) I understand that in the event of my being issued with a Certificate of Exemption I shall not be eligible to
receive any benefit, assistance or relief from the Aborigines Welfare Board, and, furthermore, I undertake to
provide a proper home for myself and my family.

(d) I understand that in the event of the Aborigines Welfare Board issuing the certificate of Exemption herein
applied for, such Certificate may be cancelled at any time by the board if considered necessary, and in that event I
undertake to return the Certificate to the Board for cancellation immediately upon notification of such cancellation.

(e) I agree to accept the final decision of the Aborigines Welfare Board in relation to the grant of refusal of a
Certificate of Exemption.

The following persons are known to me, and have provided references as to my character. These references are
submitted together with this application.

State Surname,

address and occupation of referees.

........................................................................................................................................

Dated this...................day of..................................19....

Signature or Mark............................................In the presence of:- Name.................................

Occupation............................................

Address..............................................................................................................Note: Witness should be a Justice of the Peace,

Clergyman, Public Officer, School Teacher or Officer of the Aborigines Welfare Board
ABORIGINES PROTECTION ACT, 1909-1943,
SECTION 18C
(REGULATION 56)
CERTIFICATE OF EXEMPTION

From Provisions of the Act and Regulations

THIS IS TO CERTIFY that.................................................................

............................................Aborigine, aged.......years, residing at.........................

.................................................................

is a person who in the opinion of the Aborigines Welfare Board, ought no longer be subject to the
provisions/following provisions of the Aborigines Protection Act and Regulations, or any of such provisions, and
he/she is accordingly exempted from such provisions:-

.................................................................

Issued in compliance with the Resolution of the Aborigines Welfare Board and dated

the.....day of...................; 19........

................................................................. Chairman

.................................................................Member of the Aborigines Welfare Board.

Countersigned by
The Secretary,

.................................................................

Signature of Holder
.................................................................
‘A brief history and background to the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) and their pivotal role in the establishment of National Aboriginal/Indigenous Education Conferences’.

Senior NAEC members with memories equal to elephants and a keen oral history line, rightfully want to put to rest a debate that rages over the actual number of National Indigenous Education Conferences [NIEC]. And in the name 9as history will tell] you can begin to understand the story and history of this conference and the ones preceding it. To the best of our combined knowledge’s and with the guileful eyes of one of the Chairs of NAEC, Dr Paul Hughes, and a member and long time Executive Officer Kay Price, the following will hopefully fill in gaps and assist in the understanding. We should add that in the interests of accuracy some of this detail might be challenged on the margins, which is encouraged and hopefully will help get an even better account of this historic conference.

The first then titled National Aboriginal Education Conference, can be credited to the SA Institute of Teachers and held in Adelaide in 1976 in their offices and this preceded the establishment of NAEC by a year. The host in 1977 was Mt Lawley Teachers’ College in Perth. NAEC’s establishment around that time provided its first input via Paul Hughes into the 1978 conference in Darwin at Komilda College and this would make it the third conference in the series. 1979 saw Queensland University play host in Brisbane with a much more formal input from the NAEC’s John Budby showing leadership. Conference number five saw the emergence of the first State Aboriginal Education Consultative Group taking the lead with Bob Morgan as President, in partnership with NAEC and hosting the next conference at Katoomba in 1980. This conference was noted for two important developments: firstly it was the first conference totally run by Indigenous educators and secondly for its ‘extra curricula’ activities committee, which proved convincingly that hard work and play can mix and this committee became a feature of future conferences. Pleasingly the Indigenous leadership continued into the next conference with the Victorian AECG, led by Alf Bamblett as conference Chair again in partnership with the NAEC at Bendigo in 1981. Conferences number seven and eight were held for two years [1982 and 1984] hosted by the NAEC at Goulbourn in both years, with the
1984 conference being restricted to a selected 100 delegates who were brought together to commence work on NAEC’s policy development prior to the final publication of these important documents in 1996 with both Peter Buckskin and Kay Price playing key roles in its management. Conference nine of this series in 1985 was held at Wirrinna SA and run by NAEC with Paul Hughes in the Chair and Errol West as Deputy and famous for its ‘extra curricula’ work on epistemology and pedagogy. Unfortunately the National Aboriginal Education Conferences took a break which coincided with the NAEC being disbanded around this time.

After a pause in activity the national conference agenda was resurrected and perhaps symbolically a name change for this new series of conferences emerged. The Australian Indigenous Education, like the phoenix, arose through efforts of Edith Cowan University in April of 2000 with a conference theme of ‘Learning Better Together’. Hence the era of the national forum was reborn and the renumbering commenced with the 1st national conference and the subtle movement to the more international nomenclature of Indigenous presenters. Conferences from this point became biannual and in 2002 with the theme of Sharing Success: An Indigenous Perspective the 2nd new series conference was held in Townsville sponsored by James Cook University, from 2-4th July.

The University of Ballarat, at Ballarat hosted the 3rd National Indigenous Conference in the series from 16-18th November 2004, with the theme ‘Partnerships in Indigenous Education’. Pleasingly in 2006 the State AECG movement moved back into the scene with the NSW AECG working in partnership with Newcastle University and the NSW Department of Education and Training holding the 4th NIEC in Newcastle with the theme ‘Getting on with the job: Indigenous Engagement in Education’ from 27-29th November. This brings us up to speed with Tasmania taking the lead and putting their hand up again. In partnership with its AECG, with leadership from the Tasmanian Department of Education and support from the University of Tasmania, the 5th in the new series of national conferences is being held in 2009 [skipping the due date of 2008 because the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education being held in Melbourne]. The theme ‘Strength in Community: Closing the Gap’ further cements the rich Aboriginal/Indigenous education history.
There is talk about perhaps acknowledging this history and reminding us of its past by naming future conferences in the series as 6\textsuperscript{th} of 15 Conference.

*Professor John Lester and Emeritus Professor Paul Hughes.*

NAEC members came from across Australia and the Torres Straits.
Appendix Two
The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP)

Involvement of Aboriginal people in educational decision-making

Goal 1 To establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal parents and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of pre-school, primary and secondary education services for their children.

Goal 2 To increase the number of Aboriginal people employed as educational administrators, teachers, curriculum advisers, teachers assistants, home-school liaison officers and other education workers, including community people engaged in teaching of Aboriginal culture, history and contemporary society, and Aboriginal languages.

Goal 3 To establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal students and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of post-school education services, including technical and further education colleges and higher education institutions.

Goal 4 To increase the number of Aboriginal people employed as administrators, teachers, researchers and student services officers in technical and further education colleges and higher education institutions.

Goal 5 To provide education and training services to develop the skills of Aboriginal people to participate in educational decision-making.

Goal 6 To develop arrangements for the provision of independent advice for Aboriginal communities regarding educational decisions at regional, State, Territory and National levels.

Equality of access to educational services

Goal 7 To ensure that Aboriginal children of pre-primary school age have access to pre-school services on a basis comparable to that available to other Australian children of the same age.

Goal 8 To ensure that all Aboriginal children have local access to primary and secondary schooling.

Goal 9 To ensure equitable access for Aboriginal people to post-compulsory secondary schooling, to technical and further education, and higher education.

Equity of educational participation

Goal 10 To achieve the participation of Aboriginal children in pre-school education for a period similar to that for all Australian children.

Goal 11 To achieve the participation of all Aboriginal children in compulsory schooling.
Attachment cont. National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy

Goal 12 To achieve the participation of Aboriginal people in post-compulsory secondary education, in technical and further education, and in higher education, at rates commensurate with those of all Australians in those sectors.

Equitable and appropriate educational outcomes

Goal 13 To provide adequate preparation of Aboriginal children through pre-school education for the schooling years ahead.

Goal 14 To enable Aboriginal attainment of skills to the same standard as other Australian students throughout the compulsory schooling years.

Goal 15 To enable Aboriginal students to attain the successful completion of Year 12 or equivalent at the same rates as for other Australian students.

Goal 16 To enable Aboriginal students to attain the same graduation rates from award courses in technical and further education, and in higher education, as for other Australians.

Goal 17 To develop programs to support the maintenance and continued use of Aboriginal languages.

Goal 18 To provide community education services which enable Aboriginal people to develop the skills to manage the development of their communities.

Goal 19 To enable the attainment of proficiency in English language and numeracy competencies by Aboriginal adults with limited or no educational experience.

Goal 20 To enable Aboriginal students at all levels of education to have an appreciation of their history, cultures and identity.

Goal 21 To provide all Australian students with an understanding of and respect for Aboriginal traditional and contemporary cultures.
ENDORSEMENT PROCESS

1. The person/group seeking endorsement must extend an invitation to Local AECG’s to participate in the initial development of any policies, programs, papers, research, DVD’s resources etc.

2. Those seeking endorsement must present their initiative to the Local AECG prior to commencement.

3. If these initial phases are not adhered to then the endorsement process will not continue.

4. Reporting back to Local AECG, by those seeking endorsement must be continuous throughout the development.

5. Local AECG’s may endorse the initiative and may present the initiative to a Regional meeting, accompanied by Local AECG meeting minutes, for regional endorsement.

6. Regional AECG’s requesting State AECG endorsement must provide a letter of support from Local and Regional AECG with minutes attached to final written up initiative seeking to be endorsed.

7. The endorsement committee made up from members of the Association management committee will meet regularly to review initiatives seeking state endorsement.
Dear Laurel,

The NSW AECG 2nd State Meeting in Wollongong 18 – 20 September 2008 was presented with a formal process for endorsement of materials being written and produced by individuals and organisations. This process was supported by State Committee Members.

An Endorsement Committee had been selected at a previous Association Management Committee meeting and its members are now active in their role.

Please find enclosed the process to follow to gain endorsement.

In addition can we inform you that if you seek access to minutes of AECG meetings, you will need to come to the Secretariat to research such minutes. AECG policy is that minutes on file can not be removed from the NSW AECG Inc Secretariat.

Thank you for your continued commitment to NSW AECG and Aboriginal Education.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Armstrong   Lois Birk    Lyn Stewart

Endorsement Committee NSW AECG Inc.
21 October 2008
MINIMBAH LOCAL AECG
(Aboriginal Education Consultative Group)

Laurel Williams
11 Kananook Crescent
Belmont 2280

Dear Laurel,

This letter is to notify you that at the Minimbah AECG meeting held on 9th December 2008, a motion was put forward that this meeting supports and endorses your research proposal 'People Places and Pathways in NSW Aboriginal Education.

On behalf of the Minimbah AECG can I wish you success with your studies and offer on-going support throughout your research activities.

Yours sincerely

Roselea Newburn
President

Roselea Newburn
President
Minimbah Local AECG
Phone: 0402317820
Email: Roselea.Newburn@det.nsw.edu
Re: Regional AECC endorsement

Dear Aunty Laurel,

The members of the Hunter Regional Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (HRAECG) are pleased to fully support and endorse your research initiative that you are currently undertaking as part of your studies at University of Newcastle.

The involvement of the Local and Regional AECCs in your research are essential element in determining the level of the active participation of the Aboriginal community members in the educational process.

The NSW AECC, as the recognised peak advisory body to the Minister of Education and Training and the Director-General on Aboriginal Education, is always seeking to increase and further strengthen the involvement of our Aboriginal community members.

The members of the Hunter Regional AECC would like you thank you for kind request for our endorsement and we look forward to making further contributions to your research in the future. We wish you all the best and is confident that your research conclusions will be of a great benefit to all of us as Aboriginal peoples working together to improve the quality of education for our students and their families.

Please feel free to contact me if I could be of any further assistance.


United In the Cause,

Ken Weatherall
President Hunter Regional AECC
9 Harris Street
Fingal NSW 2285
Mobile 0432074249
Email KENNETH.WEATHERALL@det.nsw.edu.au
Department of Education Memorandum to Principals [1981]

NEW SOUTH WALES ABORIGINAL EDUCATION CONSULTATIVE GROUP

The Minister for Education, the Hon. Paul Landy, M.L.A., has asked me to inform you of the role and function of the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group.

The Group was formed in 1977 as an important means of Aboriginal opinion and advice to the Minister and his Department on the implementation and operation of the Aboriginal policies of New South Wales. Its membership is selected by Aboriginal groups across the State following a series of regional and sub-regional meetings sponsored by Aboriginal communities into an Interim and now an Annual with the support of Regional Directors of Education.

The Minister has recently advised that the implementation of the Group had strengthened its role in relation to educational services throughout the State, and I am confident that the Group and its essentially democratic consultative structure will serve the aspirations of the future. This in particular to be exalted with the support of Ms. Helen dynamics, President of the Consultative Group, to the Ministry of Education, when it was established in October, 1981.

A number of regions, municipalities and institutional schools have already consulted with Aboriginal community representatives, as a result of which Aboriginal community representatives have now written to the Consultative Group at each of these levels. Where a school is so located that it does not have access to an Aboriginal community, it may not have a member of the N.S.W. Aboriginal Education Consultative Group. A list of current districts is attached. Contact may also be made with members of the Aboriginal Education Unit who are located at Redfern in the Directorate of Special Education.

You should also be aware that the preliminary work of drafting an Aboriginal Education Policy Statement and an Aboriginal Education Guidelines for Teacher's, together with draft documents, is nearing completion. Aboriginal policies will be of interest to all children and parents, and will be useful in their implementation where a partnership between schools and Aboriginal committees is wide to be developed.

The present of maintaining local, state and regional Aboriginal Education Consultative groups is a particular one, and matters the support and involvement to a confident you will be able to provide.

J. Landy
Director-General of Education

DISTRIBUTION: MICHAEL, W. D. T.
20 JULY 1981
Attachment: 8 cont.

Memorandum

To: "RECEPIENT"

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Denmark House
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Western Metropolitan:
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The first term of the Council ran from December 1991 to December 1994, the inaugural members being appointed on 15 December 1991.


Below are brief thumbnail biographies of the Council Members.

Chairpersons

Mrs Patrick Dodson  
Dr Evelyn Scott

DECEMBER 1991-DECEMBER 1997

Mrs Patrick Dodson was born in Broome, Western Australia, a member of the Yawuru people of the Kimberley. He has wide experience in community affairs, having worked with the Central Land Council, the Aboriginal Development Commission and the Kimberley Land Council. He was a Royal Commissioner inquiring into the underlying issues that gave rise to Aboriginal deaths in custody in Western Australia, before becoming Chairperson of the Council.

DECEMBER 1997-DECEMBER 2000

Dr Evelyn Scott has been involved in Indigenous affairs for more than 30 years and has played an instrumental role in the establishment of Aboriginal legal services and housing societies. She received the Queen's Jubilee Medal for her contribution to advancement of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders and is committed to self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Her honorary doctorate was awarded by the Australian Catholic University in April 2000 for Dr Scott's lifelong work for social justice, women's rights and reconciliation.

Deputy Chairpersons

Sir Ronald Wilson  
The Hon. Ian Viner  
Sir Gustav Nossal

DECEMBER 1991-DECEMBER 1994

Sir Ronald Wilson, AC KBE CMG was born in Geraldton. Sir Ronald has held posts in the Church and Law, including President of the Uniting Church in Australia, former Solicitor-General for Western Australia and Justice of the High Court of Australia. At the time of being Council Deputy Chairperson,
he was Chancellor of Murdoch University and President of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. Sir Ronald is now President of the Australian Council for Overseas Aid.

DECEMBER 1994-DECEMBER 1997

The Hon. Ian Viner AO QC was Deputy Chairperson of the Council from 1995 to 1997. He was the first Aboriginal Affairs Minister in the Fraser Government introducing the landmark Northern Territory Land Rights Act 1976. He is Co-chair of the Western Australian Reconciliation Advisory Group and Co-chair of the State Reconciliation Committee.

DECEMBER 1997-DECEMBER 2000

Sir Gustav Nossal AC CBE, the former Director of the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research, is highly regarded for his research in fundamental immunology and is committed to public health and preventive medicine. He has been Australian of the Year for the year 2000.

Aboriginal Members

Dr Archie Barton  
Mr Sol Bellear  
Mr Kerry Blackman  
Ms Linda Burney  
Mrs Sadie Canning

DECEMBER 1991-DECEMBER 2000

Dr Archie Barton AM is a descendant of the people of the Great Victoria Desert. He is administrator of Maralinga Tjarutja and Chairman of the Maralinga Piling Trust. Dr Barton was South Australian Aboriginal of the Year in 1988 and was made a Member of the Order of Australia in 1989 and in May 1996 was presented with an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Adelaide. He is still involved in the clean-up of the Maralinga lands.

MARCH 1991-FEBRUARY 1994

Mr Sol Bellear, from Redfern, New South Wales, was a Council member while he was Deputy Chairperson of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). Mr Bellear is Chairperson of the Council for Aboriginal Health and Director of the Redfern Aboriginal Medical Service.

DECEMBER 1997-DECEMBER 2000

Mr Kerry Blackman is Principal Director/Consultant of Indigenous Marketing Pty Ltd. A former ATSIC commissioner, he is committed to holistic community development and increasing individual, collective and community self-worth, dignity and security.

JANUARY 1995-DECEMBER 1997

Ms Linda Burney is a member of the Wiradjuri nation of New South Wales and is Director General of the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs. She graduated with a Diploma of Teaching from Mitchell College of Advanced Education, the first Aboriginal graduate from that institution. Ms Burney is an ATSIC Regional Councillor and interim chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander National Training Council.
DECEMBER 1997-DECEMBER 2000

Mrs Sadie Canning MBE was brought up at Mount Margaret Mission in Western Australia and was the first Aboriginal nurse and Aboriginal matron appointed in that State. She received her honour, as well as the Queen's Jubilee Medal, for her contribution to the health needs of the community of Leonora and surrounding areas.

Mr Geoff Clark
Mrs Essieina Coffey
Mr Gatjil Djerrkura
Ms Karmi Dunn
Dr Djiniyini Gondarra

DECEMBER 99-

Mr Geoff Clark, ATSIC's first elected national Chairman, is from the Tjapwueurong tribe of western Victoria. Also serving a second term as the ATSIC Commissioner for Victoria, Mr Clark lives in the Framlingham Aboriginal community near Warrnambool. He was Administrator of the Framlingham trust for 17 years prior to election to the ATSIC Board in 1996.

DECEMBER 1991-MARCH 1994

The late Mrs Essieina Coffey OAM was a member of the Muruwari tribe, but lived most of her life in Brewarrina. She served on the original Council before resigning due to ill health in March 1994, and passed away in 1998. Mrs Coffey worked tirelessly throughout her life for Aboriginal community affairs and was known for her association with the film 'My Survival as an Aboriginal.' She was a founding member of the Aboriginal Movement in Brewarrina and the Western Aboriginal Legal Service and was a co-founder of the Aboriginal Heritage and Cultural Museum at Brewarrina.

DECEMBER 1996-DECEMBER 1999

Mr Gatjil Djerrkura OAM served on Council while Chairman of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. Born in Yirrkala (East Arnhem Land), he is a senior traditional elder of the Wangurri clan. He was General Manager of Yirrkala Business Enterprises (YBE) 1986-1996 and Chairman of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commercial Development Corporation until 1996 and serves on a number of national and Northern Territory boards and committees.

DECEMBER 1997-DECEMBER 2000

Ms Karmi Dunn is the Chairperson of the Northern Territory Area Consultative Committee and is employed by the Northern Territory Department of Education Indigenous Education Branch. She is the former Chairperson of the ATSIC Yilli Rreung Regional Council (Darwin) and former Deputy Chair of the Indigenous Housing Authority of the Northern Territory. She has been a prominent sportswoman, representing the Northern Territory in various sports.

DECEMBER 1997-DECEMBER 2000

Rev Dr Djiniyini Gondarra OAM is the Chairman of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and has served a long career in the Methodist and Uniting Churches. Ordained in 1976, he was awarded the Order of Australia Medal in 1985.
DECEMBER 1997-DECEMBER 2000

Mrs Sally Goold OAM, a registered nurse, is the Chairperson of the Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses (CATSIN) and is on the advisory committee boards of three university schools of nursing. Mrs Goold is also a Member of the Sylvia and Charles Viertel Charitable Foundation, Aboriginal Initiative Committee, and a Commissioner of the Queensland Criminal Justice Commission. She has had a long involvement in nursing, nurse education and Indigenous health.

DECEMBER 1991-DECEMBER 1994

Ms Mary Graham has worked for many years in the Aboriginal community in Brisbane. She has been a board member of various organisations and has researched, advised and written on aspects of Aboriginal culture, history, human rights and current affairs. She also lectures in the Social Work Department, teaching the subjects Aboriginal perspectives, approaches to knowledge, and politics.

DECEMBER 1991-DECEMBER 1994

Pastor Bill Hollingsworth, born at Mossman, Queensland, is a foundation member of the Council. He is also a foundation member of the UAICC Shalom Christian College and Yalga Binbi Community Development Institute. He is currently National Chairperson of UAICC Council of Elders, a committee member of Frontier Services Reference Group, and Pastor of Eternal Life Fellowship at Gordonvale. He is a former member of the NAC and ATSIC Regional Council.

JANUARY 1995-DECEMBER 2000

Ms Jackie Huggins is Deputy Director of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit at the University of Queensland. She is a nationally recognised author, historian and speaker. She is a Council Member of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and was the Queensland co-commissioner for the Enquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families.

JANUARY 1995-AUGUST 1996

Ms Julie Jones is a descendent of the Watjarri people of the Murchison area of Western Australia. She is policy officer in the Land Section of the WA Department of Aboriginal Affairs. She has had considerable involvement with land, medical, planning, prison and sporting community bodies in Western Australia.

JANUARY 1995-DECEMBER 1997
Professor Marcia Langton AM is Chair of Australian Indigenous Studies in the Department of Geography and Environment Studies at the University of Melbourne. She founded the Centre for Indigenous Natural and Cultural Resource Management at the Northern Territory University. She was also Chairperson of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies 1996-1998 and has been appointed General Member of the Order of Australia for her services to anthropology and advocacy of Aboriginal rights.

DECEMBER 1991-DECEMBER 1994

Ms Rose Murray is currently working with Pilbara Arts Crafts and Designs Aboriginal Corporation and Ngalikuru Ngukumart Aboriginal Corporation assisting Indigenous artists to create art and develop markets. She has been a community education worker on domestic violence and a lecturer with the Aboriginal Health Unit Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin University.

DECEMBER 1997-DECEMBER 2000

Mrs May L O'Brien BEM is a children's author, Chair of the Aboriginal Education and Training Council and Co-Chair of the Western Australian State Reconciliation Committee. She received the British Empire Medal for her service to Aboriginal education. She is a Churchill Fellow, a Fellow of Edith Cowan University and was awarded one of Curtin University's inaugural John Curtin Medals. She is also a member of the Board of Directors for World Vision Australia.

DECEMBER 1991-DECEMBER 1996

Professor Lowitja O'Donoghue AC, CBE was Foundation Chairperson of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). A member of the Yankuntjatjara people of South Australia, Professor O'Donoghue is Joint Patron for the National Sorry Day Committee. She was made a Member of the Order of Australia, a Commander of the Order of the British Empire and was honoured as Australian of the Year in 1984. She holds an honorary doctorate from Murdoch University and is currently a Visiting Professorial Fellow at Flinders University.

1994-DECEMBER 1995

The late Kumantjayi (Dr Charles Nelson) Perkins AO was on the Council during his term as Deputy Chairperson of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and was ATSIC Commissioner for the Sydney zone and previously the Northern Territory Central zone. He also served as Chairperson of the Arrernte Council of Central Australia. Kumantjayi Perkins was a well-known Aboriginal leader. He led the famous Freedom Ride in 1965 that highlighted the discrimination and segregation in NSW country towns. Kumantjayi Perkins was Chairperson of the Aboriginal Development Commission 1981-84 and Head of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs 1984-1988. A notable soccer player, he had a great love for sport. He died on 18 October 2000 and was honoured with a State Funeral on 25 October.
Mr Ray Robinson is the Deputy Chairman of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and President of the National Aboriginal and Islander Legal Service Secretariat. He has served as a member of the National Aboriginal Conference and the Aboriginal Housing Land Co. Ltd, Chairman of the Goolburri Land Council Representative Body, and Chairman of the Bidjara and South West Corporation for Legal Services.

Mr Wenten Rubuntja is a senior law man of the Arrernte people of Mparntwe in the Northern Territory. He is Vice President of the Tangentyere Council in Alice Springs and President of the Tangentyere Four Corners Council of Elders. Mr Rubuntja helped promote recognition of Aboriginal law and culture through the Central Land Council, the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority and the Conservation Commission. He is also a renowned artist.

Ms Esme Saunders is a Yorta Yorta woman from Victoria. She is actively involved in Koorie Education and is currently Research Manager at the Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, Geelong. Ms Saunders has been working in Victoria in areas of Aboriginal Affairs for more than twenty years, and in particular in the area of education and Koorie sporting teams. She is currently actively involved in ministry in Barak Outreach.

Mrs Alma Stackhouse OAM is a founding member of the Flinders Island Aboriginal Community Association. In 1989 Mrs Stackhouse was named Tasmanian Aboriginal of the Year and awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia. She has worked for Aboriginal people at both State and national levels since 1974.

Ms Marjorie Thorpe is a member of the Gunnai and Maar nations of Southern Victoria. She lives in Lakes Entrance.

Senator Aden Ridgeway is a Gumbayngirr person born in Macksville, NSW. Before being elected as an Australian Democrat Senator for NSW, he completed a five-year term as President of the NSW Aboriginal Land Council. He has also been a member of the Sydney Regional ATSIC Council and Chairperson of the Aboriginal Catholic Council of the Sydney Diocese, and is currently Chairperson of the Bangarra Dance Company.
Mr Gus Williams OAM is a western Arrernte man from the Ntaria (Hermannsburg) community in the Northern Territory. He is President and administrator of the Ntaria Council and has served on several other major Aboriginal organisations. Mr Williams was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in 1983 for his services to country music and Aboriginal people.

Mr Galarrwuy Yunupingu AM is an elder of the Gumatj clan of Yirrkala on the Gove Peninsula and is a prominent leader in the Northern Territory. He is Chairperson of the Northern Land Council and serves on many government and community committees and industry boards. In 1978 he was honoured as Australian of the Year and in 1985 he was made a Member of the Order of Australia for his services to the Aboriginal community.

Torres Strait Islander Members

Mr John Abednego was the Chairperson of the Torres Strait Regional Authority and has worked with the Torres Strait Legal Service and many local community organisations. He is committed to advancing the Torres Strait region.

Mr Bill Lowah, originally from Thursday Island in the Torres Strait and now resident in Brisbane, has worked in health and education during a long involvement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. He is currently Promotions Manager at the Centre for Indigenous Health, Education and Research in Brisbane.

Pastor Alan Mosby comes from Thursday Island, working as a carpenter and then moving into social work. He is now at Buai Torres Strait Islander Corporation where his duties involve counselling alcoholics and drug users and developing cultural, recreational and social programs. He is a pastor in the Assemblies of God.

Councillor Pedro Stephen is from Thursday Island in the Torres Strait. He is the first Indigenous Mayor of the Torres Shire, Senior Inspector in the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service and is a pastor in the Full Gospel Church. As a maritime engineer, he spent 10 years with the Royal Australian Navy before returning to Thursday Island in 1982.

Representing the wider community
Mr Robert Champion de Crespigny is Executive Chairman of Normandy Mining Ltd which he founded in 1985. He is a Fellow of the Australasian Institute of Mining, a board member of the Business Council of Australia and Chairman of the South Australian Museum.

Mr Ted Egan AM is known throughout Australia as a folklorist, lyricist, balladeer, poet and performer. Mr Egan worked in the former Department of Aboriginal Affairs' Darwin office for 25 years. In 1993 he was made a Member of the General Division of the Order of Australia for his service to the Aboriginal community and to the interpretation of Australian cultural heritage through song and verse.

Mr Rick Farley is the former Executive Director of the National Farmers Federation and the Cattlemen's Union of Australia. He also has been a member of the National Native Title Tribunal and the Australian Landcare Council. Mr Farley now is Co-Chair of the NSW Reconciliation Committee and chairs a number of Government committees.

Mrs Dimity Fifer is CEO of the Victorian Council of Social Services. Previous to this she ran her own business for ten years in conflict resolution, strategic planning and mediation. She has influenced positive change serving on the Box Hill Community Health Centre; Victorian Health Services Review Council; Victorian SRC; and when Commissioner, the initiator of Whitehorse Friends for Reconciliation and the Whitehorse Council's Commitment Statement to Indigenous peoples.

Ms Jennie George was a foundation member of the Council and served until December 1997. In 1983 she became the first woman to be elected to the Executive of the Australian Council of Trade Unions and was President from 1996 until March 2000. She has had a long interest in Indigenous affairs.
JAN 1995-DECEMBER 1997

**Mr Ian Gray** grew up in Melbourne. He was a solicitor with the Aboriginal Legal Service from 1980 to 1986. In Darwin he was Principal Legal Adviser with the Northern Land Council 1987-1990 and Chief Magistrate of the Northern Territory from 1992-1997. He has been an outspoken critic of mandatory sentencing. He is currently Head of the Land and Property Commission of UNTAET in Dili.

DECEMBER 1991-OCTOBER 1997

**Ms Cheryl Kernot** began her political career as an Australian Democrat, becoming Leader in 1993. She was the Democrats' nominee on the Council from 1991 to 1997. Ms Kernot resigned from the Senate in 1997 and, after winning the seat of Dickson for the ALP, she has been Shadow Minister for Transport and Regional Development and currently is Shadow Minister for Employment and Training. Ms Kernot has maintained her interest and involvement in reconciliation since leaving the Council.

DECEMBER 1991-DECEMBER 2000

**Mr Ray Martin** has been a member of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation since its inception. He began his multi-award-winning media career as a journalist with the ABC in 1965. In 1979, Mr Martin joined the Nine Network as a founding reporter for 60 Minutes and then went on to host Midday and A Current Affair.

Mr Martin is the Chairman of The Fred Hollows Foundation, established in 1992 to prevent and treat avoidable blindness in developing countries and to improve the health of Indigenous Australians.

MARCH 1996-DECEMBER 2000

**Mr Daryl Melham MP** was the Federal Opposition spokesperson on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and the Labor Party's nominee on the Council. Before entering Parliament, he was a legal aid solicitor and barrister in Sydney.

DECEMBER 1997-DECEMBER 2000

**Mrs Jenny Mitchell OAM**, is a farmer at 'Leyland' in North Star, NSW. She is the President of the South Pacific Area of the Associated Country Women of the World and has taught skills such as leadership and income-generation to women in the South Pacific. In 1994, Mrs Mitchell was awarded the Order of Australia Medal for her services to the rural community.

DECEMBER 1991-DECEMBER 1997

**Mr Peter Nugent**, MP was the Government's nominee on the Council from December 1991 to December 1997. A former Shadow Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Mr Nugent is currently Chair of the Human Rights Sub-Committee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade.
DECEMBER 1991-MARCH 1996

Professor Margaret Reynolds was on the Council until March 1996 in her capacity as ALP Senator for Queensland (1983-1999). She is currently Visiting Professor in the Department of Government at the University of Queensland, and is the Chair of the Commonwealth Human Rights International Advisory Commission. Professor Reynolds campaigned for the referendum to recognise Indigenous Australians and has continued her involvement in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social justice issues.

DECEMBER 1991-DECEMBE R 2000

The Hon. Helen Sham-Ho MLC is a Member of the New South Wales Legislative Council and the first parliamentarian in Australia of Chinese descent. Mrs Sham-Ho currently is the Chair of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Privileges and Ethics and General Purpose Standing Committee No 3. Since her election to Parliament in 1988, Mrs Sham-Ho has undertaken a wide range of parliamentary duties and served on the boards of several universities. Mrs Sham-Ho is very active in the community, being either member, adviser or patron to over 100 community groups.

DECEMBER 1991-DECEMBER 2000

Mr Ian Spicer AM, of Melbourne, is Chairman of VATMI Industries Ltd and Chair of both the National Disability Advisory Council and the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation Inc. He is a member of the Boards of both the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board (Victoria) and the Joint Accreditation System for Australia and New Zealand. Mr Spicer was formerly Chief Executive of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. He was awarded the Order of Australia in 1983.

DECEMBER 1997-DECEMBER 2000

The Hon Dr Sharman Stone MP is the Member for Murray and the Parliamentary Secretary for the Minister for Environment and Heritage. She is the Government's nominee on the Council. She is an anthropologist specialising in Australian race relations and Indigenous culture and has worked with Victorian Aboriginal Education Services and with Indigenous people in custody. Her books include a documentary history of Australian race relations and government policy.

OCTOBER 1997-FEBRUARY 1999

Senator John Woodley represented the Australian Democrats on Council between October 1997 and February 1999. Through the Uniting Church, he has worked with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for more than three decades. Senator Woodley was elected to the Senate in March 1993 and is the Democrats' spokesperson on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Family Services, Regional Development and Agriculture.