


EDITORIAL: CELEBRATING 30 YEARS – 1973-2003

 In 2003 *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* celebrates its 30th anniversary. Beginning in 1973 as *The Aboriginal Child at School*, the journal was a practical response to a recommendation made at the National Workshop on Aboriginal Education held in May 1971 “that a periodical publication be commenced to provide a medium for the exchange of ideas and developments in the teaching of Aborigines, for the examination of practical implications of research findings and for the recording of Aboriginal achievements” (Watts, 1973, p. 2). Funded by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in Canberra and housed in the Department of Education and later the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit at the University of Queensland, *The Aboriginal Child at School* was published at two monthly intervals. It aimed to provide a medium whereby teachers in the field of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education could share their thinking and their strategies for successful teaching and thereby enter into a meaningful and productive dialogue with one another (Watts, 1973, p. 2). An overarching concern of the journal was to improve and optimise children’s development and the types of pedagogies employed to provide challenging and rewarding learning experiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The journal was enthusiastically embraced by a broad range of professionals and proved to be a useful resource for both experienced and beginning teachers, particularly in the primary sector.

From its infancy then, *The Aboriginal Child at School* played an important role in responding to the challenging and urgent tasks facing teachers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children through the publication of practical information and support; provision of insight and direction in relation to specific problems; fostering research and publication of findings in relevant areas; and acting as a national forum for discussion designed to be an “inspiration to the class teacher, and to that end to be a factor in creating for Aboriginal children a future of dignity” (Beazley, 1973, p. 4). *The Aboriginal Child at School* gave voice to the hope that Aboriginal education should arise from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander initiatives and be expressive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, languages and culture.

It is appropriate that this anniversary issue of *AJIE* asks questions and reflects on the history of Indigenous education in Australia over the past three decades,

pointing to significant changes, gains and lessons for the future in the broad field of Indigenous education. Tamisari and Milmilany provide an historical and critical reading of the emergence and development of bicultural educational programs at the Community Education Centre in the Yolngu community at Milngimbi in the Northern Territory. With reference to the difficulties and achievements of the past and the challenges which lie ahead, they stress the steps taken by both Balanda and Yolngu staff to ensure an integrated two-way education which serves the individual, social, community and cultural needs of Yolngu students. In a similarly reflective way, McConaghy re-examines her groundbreaking work in *Rethinking Indigenous education* (2000) to reposition Indigenous Australian education as a “who” rather than “what” narrative. She asks questions about the ways in which traumatic knowledges and difficult memories about Indigenous peoples, cultures and histories (e.g., the Stolen Generations, colonial violence) are simultaneously constructed, resisted and negotiated in the Australian psyche and by extension Indigenous education. Bin-Sallik then asks us to consider what “cultural safety” has meant historically and what it might mean today for Indigenous students and Indigenous education.

Mackinlay and Dunbar-Hall’s paper picks up on the theme of Indigenous voice in education and focuses specifically on the inclusion and positioning of Indigenous Australian musics in Australian music education in relation to specific pedagogical and political agendas. Long recognised as a vital component of educational practice in Indigenous communities, the authors consider the ways that Indigenous musics have been defined and positioned as colonial objects, examples of postcolonial discourse, and as forms of empowerment for Indigenous students. Like music, the ability to read and write English offers Indigenous students a powerful tool for developing and experiencing academic confidence and success. Rose et al. review approaches to teaching academic English literacy to Indigenous students. Using their work with Indigenous students enrolled in the Tertiary Preparation Course and Diploma in Education (Aboriginal) in the Koori Centre at the University of Sydney as a case study, they reflect upon a technique called “scaffolding” and conclude that they are moving closer to getting the process “right”. Zeegers, Muir and Lin similarly focus on language and position the history of Indigenous Australian languages within colonial discourse. They reject deficit theory representations and describe

ways in which the rich, diverse, complex and challenging features of Indigenous Australian languages such as Kriols, can be used as empowering resources for teacher education and teaching in schools, and further for the development of educational frameworks which support successful learning outcomes for Indigenous students.

Osborne then takes the reader on a journey through the development of education for Torres Strait Islander students through the lenses of relational justice and social access. He covers a broad range of themes including discourse about Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures; the growth of Torres Strait Islander voice in educational research, governance, facilities and staffing; and, the types of pedagogies used, teachers employed, and relationships that exist between Torres Strait classrooms and their communities. Osborne considers what gains if any have been made and questions whether education in the Torres Strait is going around and around in circles or through spirals of improvement. Keeping the geographical focus in North Queensland, York and Henderson provide an insightful discussion of the development of remote area teacher education programs for Indigenous people in this region of Australia (RATEP). They pay particular attention to the integral involvement of Indigenous people in the management of RATEP, the necessary and innovative use of information and communication technologies in the delivery of the program, the evolution of the program as multi-sited and flexible according to student need and demand, and the retention rates of graduates in education settings.

Educational outcomes for Indigenous students are strongly linked to Indigenous well-being and survival. Malin and Maidment pick up on this theme in their review of government policy, intervention and provision of social justice in the context of educational equity and success for Indigenous students. Through discussion of the Irrkerlantye Learning Centre based in Alice Springs aimed at bringing tangible outcomes for Indigenous people and their families, their work highlights how barriers to achieving educational and broader social equality can be overcome. Harrison's paper, the final in this issue, presents a self-reflexive discussion of the way in which researchers "write" Indigenous students in educational ethnography. He considers the dilemmas and politics of representation in Indigenous studies from his own experience as a non-Indigenous tertiary educator and in doing so reconsiders what kinds of methodologies and interpretations are possible in this context.

Together, the 10 papers in this issue of *AJIE* continue what began in 1973 - a dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers, researchers, and educational practitioners aimed at discussing, understanding and ultimately improving the many different ways that Indigenous Australian people experience educational equity and success.

References

- Beazley, K. (1973). Untitled. *The Aboriginal Child at School*, 1, 4.
- McConaghy, C. (2000). *Rethinking Indigenous education: Culturalism, colonialism and the politics of knowing*. Flaxton, QLD: Post Pressed.
- Watts, B. (1973). Editorial. *The Aboriginal Child at School*, 1, 2-3.

Elizabeth Mackinlay & Jackie Huggins
Editors