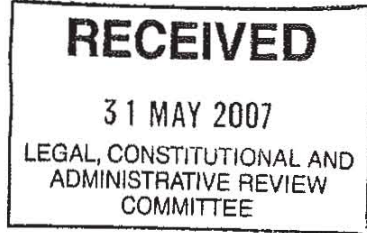


No 13

Zoe Picton

From: Valda Wallace
Sent: Thursday, 31 May 2007 5:44 PM
To: LCARC
Subject: Response to the Hands on Parliament document

Attachments: Response to LCARC.doc



Response to
LCARC.doc (44 KB)

Please find attached my response to the Hands on Parliament document for consideration.

Thank you,
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Valda Wallace
Deputy Head
School of Indigenous Australian Studies
James Cook University
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The Research Director
Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane
Qld 4000

Dear Madam Chair,

Thank you for inviting me to participate in the interim evaluation of the HANDS ON PARLIAMENT RECOMMENDATIONS.

I am responding to the sections relating to education from a general perspective, I work in higher education and I am also involved with the community through my participation on the board of directors of two community organisations, one is a health service and the other an alcohol relief service. I acknowledge the amount of work that has gone towards the development of programs and projects to address the issues relating to education; however I am not seeing any outcomes for all of the work.

To move forward we need to acknowledge that the Bjelke Petersen government left us with a legacy of oppression resulting in learned racism being rife in Queensland and policies being created by non-Indigenous middle class Australians. Education is the answer to eliminating poverty, poor health and oppression. The education curriculum of the 1960s provided students with the knowledge and skills to read, write, do arithmetic, cook, sew, use a keyboard, mothercraft etc the standard was such that students leaving school at the age of fifteen were actually employable in jobs in administration and office work and other areas. School leavers had skills that could be used to look after themselves and their families in the future. Many of the Indigenous people who hold positions in the hierarchy of organisations or have gone on to further education are graduates from this era.

Currently there are three crucial factors missing from Education Queensland's curriculum, that is the ability to teach children to read, write and do arithmetic, life skills and the true history of Australia. There is no expectation that *brown skinned* kids will go onto university, therefore they are only encouraged to think about vocational courses. Those students who are forceful in seeking to complete subjects necessary to enter university are barely tolerated and are rarely supported by teachers. Children attending schools in remote areas have a level of literacy far below that of children attending a school in an urban area. Poor

levels of literacy and life skills results in young people being unable to compete in the job market, difficulties in understanding how to access resources and unable to take care of themselves and their children. The current curriculum expects that parents have the knowledge and skills to provide children with assistance and support in completing homework. This is not only an issue for Indigenous parents but also parents from non English speaking backgrounds or parents who may be illiterate or have poor literacy skills. More emphasis is placed on the wearing of school uniforms and material possessions than good educational outcomes, and children are penalised when parents are encountering financial hardship. Many schools will not allow children to attend school without a uniform that often includes enclosed shoes and a hat, children who do not have access to a computer are thought to be disadvantaged and there is an expectation that parents can afford to pay for extras such as excursions.

Many Teachers in primary and high schools are not aware of the true history of Australia; in fact I believe that very few teachers are aware of the impact that government policies and the introduced patriarchal social system has had on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is not unusual for students studying towards an education degree to admit that they did not know about Australia's history and the government policies that almost destroyed a nation. Many question why they were not told and why it is not part of the curriculum, the education system was used as a vehicle for assimilation, it now needs to be used as a vehicle to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples with the knowledge to develop the life skills necessary to make improved life choices.

I am aware of at least one Indigenous female who graduated with a Bachelor of Education (Primary) in 2006 and still has not been able to find full time employment in North Queensland. Another Indigenous female who graduated with a Bachelor of Education (Primary) in 2004 had to beg for a casual position filling in for a teacher who went on maternity leave from the Normanton Primary School. Having Indigenous teachers working in schools provides balance in decision making as Indigenous parents may not have the knowledge or confidence to challenge or question the schools policies. Since settlement, non-Indigenous teachers have been making decisions and choices that often impact negatively on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and their children. The impact of the oppressive years of the Bjelke Petersen reign have resulted in generations of people lacking the confidence to speak out against authority and unfortunately teachers are perceived as authoritarian figures.

I believe that every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child is entitled to an education that is equal to that provided to every non-Indigenous child. The quality compromised programs that have been developed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children do not provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to be competitive in the job market, hence the high levels of unemployment. In fact these programs do not even provide the students with a level of literacy/knowledge that allows them to make informed decisions about

caring for themselves upon leaving school nor are they able to care for their future children. A person can not care for themselves or their children if they do not know how to, so much emphasis is placed on the expectation that everyone can read, write and comprehend English. Each year thousands of dollars are spent creating posters, programs and teaching tools, however these are all useless when many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults do not have the literacy skills necessary to make sense of these resources.

Valda Wallace
30th May 2007