

**INQUIRY INTO OVERCOMING INDIGENOUS
DISADVANTAGE**

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I am an Aboriginal State Coordinator of Aboriginal Education in the NSW Independent Education Sector. I have spoken with other Aboriginal people in all education sectors in forming my opinions and solutions.

One of the root causes of Indigenous disadvantage is lack of education. Poor education levels lead to poor job prospects, which leads to poor and in a lot of cases sub standard incomes, which leads to poor housing, nutrition and health. This in turn leads to low self esteem and lack of motivation. In order to overcome all of these disadvantages a good quality education is essential be it in the public or private education systems.

The building blocks needed to provide a quality education for Indigenous children start with an “appropriate” pre school education. In saying appropriate I don’t mean a separate pre school for Indigenous children. I mean the normal pre school education enjoyed by “all” children. However the school and its staff need to be equipped both academically and socially to provide quality education for Indigenous students. The school needs to be able to adapt to the child rather than the child having to adapt to the school. This can only be brought about by giving the staff the best quality academic and social training eg training in Aboriginal cultural awareness and Aboriginal learning styles etc. Note I said Aboriginal cultural awareness because too often it is lumped in with training on all cultures and a lot gets skimmed over.

Some other issues that need to be addressed are

- High fees and in a lot of cases because of circumstances no fees.
- Providing a pre-school education in rural and remote areas which in some cases have no pre-school or a pre school is too far away.
- Lack of either Aboriginal pre school teachers or teachers assistants.

Just some barriers that need to be overcome

- The huge capital costs of setting up and maintaining a pre school.
- Where should pre schools be located?
- Who can and is best equipped to provide school staff with the appropriate training to assist in providing a quality education for Indigenous children.
- A drive needs to be set up to recruit prospective Aboriginal pre school Teachers and Teachers assistants at appropriate levels of pay and conditions
- The building of relationships with the Primary schools these children will graduate too.
- Parents as with all education need choice so all possible assistance must be given to the private education system to become involved.

Aboriginal parent/caregivers, community and Aboriginal Education Workers must be involved at all levels in the decision making on these issues not the usual “we know what is good for you “.

The Federal Governments promise to make sure every child has a pre school education is a great vision but both Federal and State Governments need to get together and walk the talk on this one .

Regards

Frank Pearce
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