WARNING

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this document contains images or names of people who have since passed away.
THE DIPLOMA OF TEACHING (EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION) WELCOMES ITS FIRST AITEP STUDENTS

On a typically beautiful North Queensland day in late July 1984, in an atmosphere of considerable excitement and enthusiasm, 23 Aboriginal and Islander students enrolled in the first ever Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) offered in the north of the state. The students enrolling in the program come from many different parts of Queensland; from places as far apart as the Torres Strait Islands, Weipa, Mt Isa, Cairns, Townsville, Brisbane, Rockhampton, Mackay, and Birdsville. In addition to the range of geographical settings from which students come, they also come from a wide range of experiential backgrounds; some of them are school-leavers, some of them have been working either as Teacher Aides or Assistant Teachers within the education system in Queensland, some of them have come into the program with no previous experience of working with children. All of them have convinced us and themselves that they do want to embark upon a course of training which will prepare them to become teachers of young children. The National
Aboriginal Education Committee submission to the National Enquiry into Teacher Education in 1979 highlighted the need for specially designed training programs for Aboriginal and Islander peoples, and indicated that Teacher Education Programs should have a high priority. Part of the reason for this is the virtually unique contribution that Aboriginal and Islander teachers would make to the Australian Education system.

The planning committee had taken note of this potential contribution by including in the proposal a set of existing statements. Firstly, Aboriginal and Islander children are provided with Aboriginal and Islander teachers as role models. Of all adult groups, teachers are uniquely visible to children. The aspirations of Aboriginal and Islander children can be developed as they realize the possibility of attaining such status occupations as teaching. Second-ly, Aboriginal and Islander teachers may make their particular contribution of understanding and providing for the special needs and interests of Aboriginal and Islander children. And, thirdly, Aboriginal and Islander teachers can provide, for children of the dominant group in our society, important perspectives related to cultural pluralism. In addition, social justice demands positive intervention programs to compensate, at least in part, for the injustices of the past that live on in the present condition of Aboriginal and Islander people. If we move on to a qualitative dimension, the need for Aboriginal and Islander teachers is equally strongly stated. There are now a large number of preschool centres and infant classes in Aboriginal and Islander communities and in other communities with a significant population of Aboriginal and Islander people. Not only would a pool of Aboriginal and Islander Early Childhood Educators enable the Queensland Government through the Department of Education to increase its activities in Early Childhood Education in remote communities, it would also increase the number of creative and satisfying work opportunities for Aboriginal and Islander people. The University is well aware of the value of meaningful educational experiences provided by fully qualified, professionally trained teachers for Aboriginal and Islander children, both before and at the beginning of formal primary schooling. In this way it could be expected that the total schooling experience of Aboriginal and Islander children would be more appropriate, more relevant and, in consequence, attended by greater school success.

The Early Childhood Education staff: Greg Miller, Helen McDonald, and Helene Hipp.

If we return now to the day in July 1984 when the first students were enrolled, what sort of program were they about to undertake? The program is seven semesters (three and a half years) duration. The extra semester is seen as a vital part of the structure of the program, in that it provides the additional subjects for the first three semesters, which give students the kinds of background skills which it is believed they must have in order to realize their full potential in the Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood Education). Running through the program is a strand of Education Studies: these deal specifically with development and learning in young children, and the strand has been designed to have a multi-disciplinary approach to developmental patterns in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children, and, as the course widens towards the end of the third year, these subjects will apply the various theoretical constructs, which students have learnt, to modern day Australian Education.
second strand is the one of Cultural Studies: included in this strand are the subjects of Linguistics, Aboriginal and Islander Expressive Arts, Traditional Aboriginal and Islander Life, and a Community Study. This strand is designed specifically to explore cultural differences which students working with Aboriginal and Islander children need to understand and use as part of their teaching strategies. A third part of the program is the strand called Professional Studies, and it is here that the various curriculum subjects which teachers will be required to teach in schools, are developed. For example the subjects of Movement Education, Art, Social Studies, Music, Maths, Science, and Language Arts feature in this strand. As students go into their third year of the program, they will study such subjects as Teaching English as a Second Language and Interpersonal and Intercultural Communication.

Running throughout the strand is a course in Teacher Development which aims to give students both insight into, and development of, skills in working as a teacher. Early Childhood Education is contained in this strand and the focus of these subjects is to give students an awareness of how Early Childhood Educators have come to be at the stage they are now. The fourth strand of the program is a three-semester segment which we call additional subjects; these are Study Skills and Written Communication, both of which are designed to meet the needs of students who may not have completed secondary education or who need some development of existing skills and knowledge before they go into the various curriculum subjects in second year. There is also a segment of Maths and Maths Enrichment and an introduction to Music.

So the overall conceptualisation of the program is that it is distinctly and deliberately bi-cultural. As such it is unique in Australia. The Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) will qualify graduates to teach in kindergartens, pre-schools, and the early grades of primary schools. This specialisation in the education of young children will involve the students in completing teaching practices in a range of centres which cater for the educational needs of young children, both Aboriginal and Islander children, and other Australians. Such centres will be pre-schools, Kindergartens, and grades 1, 2 and 3 of the Queensland Department of Education State System. There will also be what we call a community practice, where the students will complete a teaching practice in a school or educational setting inside an Aboriginal or Islander community. This feature follows in the tradition set up by the AITEP primary course already here at the University.

As this edition of AITEP News goes to press, 22 of the original intake of 23 students are nearing the end of their first semester: the one student not still with us has transferred to another program for purely personal reasons.

Since they began in July, the students have also, as part of their program, undertaken a three-week teaching practice in Queensland state pre-school centres. For a number of reasons, students were allocated to pre-schools both within and outside the city of Townsville. Some students undertook this teaching practice in Cairns, Innisfail, Charters Towers, and Ayr and we anticipate that, as the various intakes enrol in the program, we shall increasingly look further afield for teaching practice places for the students. With a very small number of exceptions, all the students are currently living in one of the University halls of residence. Indications are that they have settled in quickly and happily and are finding university life much to their liking. This does not mean to say, of course, that there were no instances of early home sickness because there were, but the program has a network of support staff offering both personal and professional guidance, counselling and support to anyone who needs it at any time. The kinds of requests that are made to staff vary greatly in nature and include the usual kinds of advice on assignments, tutoring with subjects in the course, liaison with the Commonwealth Department of Education,
help with financial matters, and the genuine concern that we are here to provide the best possible learning and living environment for all students. One of the important ways in which this group cohesion and openness is portrayed is in the inclusion of the current students in the interviewing procedures for the next intake. The 22 students currently enrolled in the course were invited to make major contributions to the interviewing of potential students and it was reassuring to see that the current students were able to explain and describe the program in positive terms to the applicants for next year’s intake. As this semester begins to draw to a close, the students are busily engaged in completing end of semester assignments, preparing for examinations, getting ready to dance at various dances, preparing to eat at various dinners, and ultimately to say good-bye to us for a few weeks while they enjoy a hard earned and well deserved vacation.

Greg Miller
Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Education
(Co-ordinator Dip. Teach. (ECE) AITEP).

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies has compiled a news service: Australian Aborigines in the News. This is an indexed compilation of newsclippings on microfiche. It could provide a valuable information resource for Aboriginal communities, teachers, journalists, researchers, and anyone interested in current events in Aboriginal society. There are over 6000 news clippings per year including news items, commentaries and editorials. For more information write to:

Valerie Chapman
Library Director
GPO Box 553
CANBERRA ACT 2601

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

At the end of semester 1, Early Childhood Education students were asked to write about how their first semester of university life had compared with their expectations before they began their course.

Lela Ara

When I first received my letter stating that I was accepted in the course, I was very scared — scared of all sorts of things that crossed my mind. My first thought was about leaving my family and friends behind and starting a completely new life on my own. One of my biggest fears was how I would cope with tertiary studies.

Eventually I managed to overcome my fears by talking and asking questions about university life. Having received all encouraging information, I finally settled down. I decided that I would have a go at it.

I also had other doubts concerning this course; for instance, how I would interact with my peers and about living in the residential halls. I was very tense when I first saw and met different people. Now the six months is over and I actually completed the first six months. I very much enjoyed the company of my colleagues in Early Childhood Education and appreciated the fact that WE HAVE MADE HISTORY.

I’m also thankful for the other AITEP students and staff, especially Greg, Helen, and Helene for making this course interesting and enjoyable. In the
back of my mind, I will always remember the first six months and I am looking forward to seeing everyone next year. Life’s going to be very boring over the holiday — not staying up till six in the morning doing assignments.

LELA ARA

Early this year I received a letter from Helen McDonald about being accepted to do the ECE course. I was scared. I thought, to be a university student, you must have a brain like a computer. To me, men would walk around wearing suits and ties. Women would walk around wearing high heeled shoes, and have their hair done up really high.

I thought the subjects would be pretty hard. Thinking of all the thick pages of reading I would have to go through worried me. I imagined the lecturers being grumpy and looking down at you through their glasses. Also I was worried about the terminology that I would be using doing science lessons and studying. Thinking of all the subjects I would be doing, I couldn’t go to sleep. Even the very first day at college, meeting lecturers and students really scared me stiff.

During my first prac-teaching, I made a big breakthrough to what I really was. The amount I’ve absorbed during the study has changed me completely to make me more confident and have the ability to confront the teacher and children in a teaching situation. I’ve learned many things that I was not aware of.

I’m looking forward now to completing this course and being a fully qualified teacher, and going back to the community to teach my people. Sharing the skills and knowledge I’ve gained will better the standard of education in the Torres Strait Islands.

DALASSA PAU

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION STUDENTS GET THEIR TOES WET.

One of the required elements of the Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) is the successful completion of a Teaching Practice in each semester. In first semester, this involved each student spending three weeks as a student teacher in a pre-school. Last year these three weeks were the last week in August and the first two weeks in September and students were allocated to a pre-school in either Cairns, Townsville, Charters Towers, Ayr, or Innisfail. It is hardly necessary to say that the students viewed the prospect of this initial contact with a combination of feelings. All were excited by the early opportunity to work with young children; all were anxious to acquire some teacher like behaviours; all were positive about seeing the practice as an invaluable time for early confirmation that their choice of course was a correct one; some were apprehensive about being the only black face in a sea of white ones; a few were simply worried about their personal ability to integrate successfully into the relatively unknown environment of a pre-school.

So, on the 27th August 1984, the students set out to sample their first real experience of working as student teachers. We asked the supervising teachers to treat the first two or three days as a kind of orientation experience, letting the students come to understand how the pre-school
operated, what kinds of children came to the sessions, to make some early observations as to the various needs that the children might have, and to gradually become aware of the kinds of teaching strategies and learning situations that pre-school teachers create in their centres. Some of the students had to make major adjustments in order to cope with the cultural shock associated with the transition from learner-role to teacher-role; some quickly showed signs of high potential. Many of the reports received from supervisors have noted students' willingness to learn, willingness to take advice, and willingness to react positively to that advice. I am sure that we will all agree that such open relationships are vitally important to the development of students' personal and professional competence. We have been sincerely grateful to the supervising teachers for being willing partners in such open, learning, supportive relationships.

The three full-time members of the Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) Program paid regular visits to each of the pre-school centres where students were practising their teaching, and these visits not only helped students come to terms with some of the changes and requirements they were experiencing, but also gave ECE staff the opportunity to form and cement good working relationships with teachers in schools and this relationship will continue to be the backbone and prerequisite for the continued success of the program. When students came back to the University after their teaching practice they were invited to describe the kinds of experiences that they had personally undergone. They were not invited to be critical of what they had seen or experienced in any other way other than to make themselves aware of what changes, if any, the teaching practice had brought about. Some of the comments are worth quoting in full because they indicate that students received a warm welcome from both teacher and children.

One student, when asked to say what experiences she had had which made her feel particularly happy, said, "When a little boy came and said that he liked me and said that he wanted me to come back after the holidays I was happy, because then I knew that the children accepted me." She also said she felt particularly happy about this when all the children came and gave her a hug before they left.

Another example which gave her happiness was "when a little boy gave me a flower," and later on when she realized that "my supervisor, the teacher aide and I got along well together." That student had a fairly typical response to the kind of experiences that she gained on teaching practice.

Another student said that she felt particularly happy "when the children gained confidence in me and held my hand during an activity." In response to the same question, another student said that something that made her particularly happy was that the children's parents treated her like a teacher because, to them, "I was a teacher."

Yet another student sums the situation up very positively by saying, "I was happy because firstly, I was made welcome and was able to get along well with the teacher and the aide, and, most of all, the children."

When students were asked whether there was a particular reason why they enjoyed working with children, the responses included this:

"I enjoyed working with young children because they have a certain quality about themselves which I was able to bring out in them."

When students were asked to explain some of the most important things that they had learned from their teaching practice, they provided a long list of important things. The list contained such observations as this:

"There is a lot of in-depth study of each individual child that eventually leads to the selection of each activity. I learned how to get myself to the same level of understanding as the children."
Another one said, "I enjoyed working with children because they were fun to be with and I could communicate well with them."

The same student made a very meaningful comment when she said that she enjoyed working with young children because "they make me feel wanted." It makes us realise, doesn't it, what a vitally important part of a teacher's make up it is that they feel that children want them?

When the discussion of the teaching practice was complete, we asked the students to try to put together the experiences that they had been having in the University as residents on campus, the experiences they had had on the course to date, and the experiences that they had brought back from teaching practice. We asked them to explain what effect the whole course had had on them so far. Amongst the responses were these:

"It has made me a different sort of person, giving me a different outlook on the pre-school system, and showing that when I want to do something slightly different, I can do it by sitting down for a while and thinking about it."

Another student said, "I have gained more confidence in myself: other than being shy, overall I love it."

Another student said, "It has given me more confidence in myself; it has given me a chance to show myself that I can really do something if I put my mind to it."

The same student completed her discussion by saying, "This course has made me more determined to succeed."

Another student explained in considerable detail what effect the course had had on her so far. She said, "It's made me more confident; it's made me realize that there's a lot of work involved in it and, to be successful, I have to be prepared to do what ever is required of me." She added, "The course has made me more determined to succeed and so far I'm really enjoying it." She also added as a kind of after thought (and she wasn't asked to elaborate on this!), "It has changed my social life completely." The student used this exercise as the opportunity to look very closely at herself and to examine whether or not she had made the right decision to embark on a three and a half year program of Teacher Education. Her comment was this: "I have planned to stick to this course for as long as possible; if I finally come to the conclusion that teaching is not really for me then I'll leave."

In conclusion, then, I think we can honestly say that the students enrolled in the first Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) have had a sample of virtually each component that makes up the program as a whole. They have experienced some of the delights and pleasures of being a university student, they have experienced what it's like to exist without a great deal of money, and have also experienced what it's like to exist with a great deal of hard work. They have established a tremendous cohesion amongst themselves as a group and this peer support is an invaluable part of their University life.

Perhaps the final word of this article should be left in the capable hands of one of the students. She wrote, "If I want to succeed it's up to me to work hard and be responsible for my own actions because that could affect my future and career."
VISIT BY NEW ZEALAND PRE-SCHOOL ADVISOR

Late in October Rachel Barrett Douglas visited the university and spoke with the AITEP (Early Childhood Education) students. Rachel is a Maori from Hamilton, New Zealand, and she was in Australia on an ANZAC Fellowship. This Fellowship provided her with an opportunity to study early childhood services in Australia. She was particularly interested in the ways early childhood organizations responded to the needs of Aboriginal and Islander communities.

The ECE students were surprised to find out that there were no programs such as AITEP for Maori students in New Zealand. One of Rachel’s tasks was to look at such programs in Australia and pass on ideas to education authorities in New Zealand.

Rachel, who is a preschool advisor with the New Zealand Department of Education, spoke at length on preschools in New Zealand. This was of particular interest to the students as they had just completed a unit on ECE programs throughout the world. It was good to hear first hand about funding and programs in New Zealand.

Rachel also spoke about the community kindergartens run in particular areas by Maori people. In these the children learn traditional songs and play with traditional toys. The workers there are all Maori. She felt they played a big part in the revival and maintenance of the Maori culture.

After speaking with the students and visiting a number of Townsville preschools, including Kindergarten Headstart, Rachel went on to Brisbane to continue her four month visit.

If you are interested in becoming a teacher through AITEP, write to:

AITEP
School of Education
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TOWNSVILLE, Q. 4811

or telephone (077) 71 8516
“BLACK VOICES”

Black Voices is the latest publication from AITEP. It was launched on April 16th, 1984, by the Vice-Chancellor of James Cook University and will be published twice a year.

The aim of the journal is to provide an outlet for writings by Black Australians and, in a sense, act as a voice for contemporary Black culture in Australia. The journal at present contains only writings by students and graduates of James Cook University. But it is hoped that its base will spread to other tertiary institutions where Aboriginal and Islander students are studying and, indeed, spread to include writings from the broader Black community.

Black Voices will accept for publication any topic of interest to Aboriginal and Islander people. This includes polemic articles on issues concerning Aboriginal and Islander people, articles on Black culture, as well as creative prose and poetry. The first issue contained articles on Land Rights, Black History, and Music of the Torres Strait, as well as stories and poems.

If you want to contribute writings for publication in Black Voices, Vol. 1, No. 3, or want more information on Black Voices, write to:

The Editor,
Black Voices
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SUMMARY REPORT OF RESEARCH VISIT TO TOWNSVILLE

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Anthropology Department
UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND

As part of my 2 year research project into language and culture of Aboriginal and Islander students at University, I recently spent three weeks (28 May - 17 June 1984) in Townsville, working with Aboriginal and Islander students at James Cook University. The purpose of this visit was to find out how Aboriginal and Islander students there participate in University studies — their aims, expectations, methods, styles, and difficulties. As with the major on-going study at the University of Queensland, I was particularly looking for areas of cross-cultural miscommuni-

Diana Eades speaking with tutor Narelle Wharton

cation affecting Aboriginal and Islander students in their University study.

Most of my Townsville research was concentrated with students and staff in the Aboriginal and Islander Teacher Education Program (AITEP), although I also had discussions with three of the Associate Diploma of Community Welfare students, and a student studying History Honours. Unfortunately, attempts to meet with a few recent ex-students of the Faculty courses were unsuccessful.

As with my research in Brisbane, my methodology consisted of both participant-observation studies and informal interview-chats (where possible, tape-recorded for later reference). AITEP staff were most helpful in introducing me to students, both formally and informally. Getting to know students in a range of settings is essential to understanding the context of discussions about their experiences at University. I had many opportunities to talk with students and also to listen as they prepared work together and discussed aspects of their courses. I also got to know AITEP staff who were very open in sharing their experiences, ideas, and concerns about aspects of the course and the AITEP program.

The most striking finding from my Townsville research was the extent of variation and difference among Aboriginal and Islander students in their opinions, feelings, and experiences of University studies, as well as their socio-cultural and educational backgrounds. For example, one student expressed the firm belief that all those students who don’t speak their own
(indigenous) language are not Aborigi-
aland or Islander and have no such culture
or ways remaining. A small number of
students also felt that they are just the
same as White students in their experi-
ences and ways of approaching Universi-
ty studies. But on the other hand, a
considerable number of students stron-
gly disagreed with these views and
talked about definite "murri" styles,
particularly in relation to their expecta-
tions of teacher-student relationships,
student-student relationships, and their
approach to assessment and competi-
tion with other students.

Both direct and indirect inquiries
revealed very few instances where
students had experienced misinter-
pretation or misunderstanding with
lecturers or tutors over what was said
or written. (However, a few students
who speak standard English as a second
(or third) language reported some
difficulties with their non-standard
variations, such as particular verb
 endings).

This overall feeling from the James
Cook University Aboriginal and Island-
er students, that cross-cultural com-
munication is not a problem in their
studies, was somewhat in contrast to
the views expressed by a number of
University of Queensland students.
In fact, the major initial impetus for
this research project came from reports
from Aboriginal students in Brisbane of
communication difficulties in their
University studies caused by language
differences.

But there are significant differences in
the participation in University studies
between Aboriginal and Islander people
at James Cook University on the one
hand, and the University of Queensland
on the other. To summarize these
briefly, I would say that Aboriginal and
Islander people have much more scope
to continue their own ways of thinking,
acting, and relating within the struct-
ures at James Cook, particularly
AITEP, than in the structures of a large
University (such as the current situa-
tion of Aboriginal and Islander students
at the University of Queensland).
Aboriginal teaching and learning has
always been person-oriented (rather
than ideas-oriented), and teacher-
training courses within a small institu-
tion are much more person-oriented
than University courses, which focus on
development of ideas, knowledge, crit-
ic thinking, debate, and discovery.
There is much more concern with
personal and social development in
teacher-training courses than in Univer-
sity courses. (This is evidenced in such
areas as course content and class size).

It appears that the significant gap
between the University of Queensland
and Aboriginal and Islander ways of
thinking, acting and relating, is expe-
renced by many students in terms of
miscommunication. There are many
instances where students are in a
conflict situation, trying to resolve
their Aboriginal or Islander approach
on the one hand with the require-
ments of University study on the other.
One example is the need to develop
unbiased, non-personal analyses of
aspects of Australian history. The
approach in the teacher-training cours-
es, in contrast, favours students relating
their research on such a topic to their
own experiences and feelings.

It is expected that my research will
explain the cross-cultural conflicts
which affect Aboriginal and Islander
students in terms of fundamental
differences in approaches to learning
and its social context — a much broader
kind of cross-cultural miscommunica-
tion than was originally perceived.

The contrasts between the participation
of Aboriginal and Islander people in
James Cook and the University of
Queensland will be developed in a fuller
report. It is expected that this report
will shed light on how Aboriginal
and Islander styles are better accom-
modated in the current James Cook
structures and how crucial to Abor-
ginal and Islander people are the
differences between the aims of the
teacher-training course and a University
Arts-Humanities course. It will then be
possible to point to some suggestions
which an institution like the University
of Queensland could consider in order
to more effectively incorporate Aborigi-
nal and Islander approaches to learning.
What I have experienced in university life and its expectations has been delightful different from what I thought it would be.

The tutors' and lecturers' approach to us is completely different from what I expected. I thought it would be something like High School where the teacher/student relationship is fairly formal. However, the AITEP staff is fairly informal. They really do care about whether you pass or not; they are very helpful in every aspect to do with us successfully getting through the course. It was encouraging to find out that everyone in the Early Childhood group is so helpful and considerate towards each other. This I believe keeps everyone going and keeps us from irritating one another.

Life on campus has been surprisingly different from what I expected. Weekends are filled with sporting activities against other colleges. If you don’t fancy that, you might prefer a basketball game or tennis, or a swim in the pool, or working out in the gym. You’re never stuck with nothing to do.

Overall, my expectations of the course and university life, differed greatly from what it really is like. Might I add that it has turned out that the experiences of university are enjoyably different to my expectations before starting.

The first semester of the Course was totally different from my expectation of university life. I expected a tight schedule at the university, such as 8.00 am to 5.00 pm, and didn’t know that there are spare periods due to the lecturers’ programmes. The tutors, lecturers, and students are very personal which wasn’t what I had expected. I expected them to be snobby, unfriendly, and impersonal.

The term was absolutely enjoyable with the help from all the tutors and students. This really makes me look forward to coming back to complete the rest of the course.

The friendly faces, warm smiles, eagerness, and willingness to share always makes me feel wanted and it is nice to know that they do care in every way they can. Even though there are times of depression, friendliness is always contagious, and there’s always a shoulder to cry on.

GATA ALFRED

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