

1974

# A report on the Aboriginal Teacher Aide Conference, Pundulmurra, May '74

Mount Lawley Teachers College

Education Department

# Edith Cowan University

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*M. L. O'Brien*

A REPORT ON THE  
ABORIGINAL TEACHER AIDE  
CONFERENCE  
PUNDULMURRA W. A.  
MAY '74

MOUNT LAWLEY TEACHERS COLLEGE &  
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This brief report of the Aboriginal Teacher Aide Conference held at Pundulmurra Technical Education Centre, South Hedland in early May is presented so that the Headmasters and teachers at the aides' schools will have some idea of the topics covered, the skills taught and the general overall result of the Conference.

## 2. THE CONFERENCE

### 2.1 The Location

Pundulmurra Technical Education Centre was an ideal setting for the Conference in that it enabled both staff and participating aides to live in at the same site and so removed any potential problems concerning transport and communication. It also led to a great deal of social interaction between the aides and the staff, and among the aides themselves and this was one of the highlights and greater successes of the Conference.

Facilities at Pundulmurra were excellent and the assistance given by the staff of the centre, notably the Supervisor, Mr. Peter Bennett and Mrs. Pat Grimoldby, was greatly appreciated by all concerned. Its proximity to South Hedland Primary School was invaluable, permitting easy access to classroom situations where theory and ideas presented at Conference sessions could be seen in practice. The help and co-operation of the Headmaster, Mr. Colin Mounsey and his staff was also greatly appreciated and helped to make the Conference the success that it was.

### 2.2 The Aims

The general aims of the Conference were:

1. To stimulate the personal development of the Aboriginal Teacher Aides (ATAs) by broadening their experience and general knowledge.
2. To develop in the ATAs a familiarity with and security in the classroom.
3. To assist the ATAs to become competent in selected classroom skills:
  - a) Supervising children in different situations.
  - b) Using a variety of equipment.



- 2.2 4. To assist the ATAs in the production of a variety of teaching aids and curriculum resources.
5. To stimulate discussion among the ATAs and between ATAs and teachers on the roles of teachers and teacher aides.

The only objective that wasn't really achieved was 3a. Aides had many opportunities to observe teachers supervising children in many different situations, but because of organizational difficulties, there were few opportunities for aides to actually deal with and supervise children in a classroom situation.

### 3. THE PARTICIPANTS.

Aides came from the following schools:

<u>School</u>	<u>Aides Attending</u>
Fitzroy Crossing	Kevin Rodgers, Nancy Brown
Halls Creek	Marjory Cox
Balgo Hills	Pauline Sunfly
Kulumburu	Regina Karadada
Lombadina	Audrey Dugal
La Grange	Nancy Bangu
Roebourne	Dinah Malcolm
Cue	Valerie Williams
South Hedland	Molly Horace
Oombulgurri	Veronica Edwards, Gloria Clarke, Reginald Meehan
St. Mary's - Broome	Mary Bullen, Diane Williams, Janice MacKenzie
Holy Rosary - Derby	Aggie Albert, Esther Bevan, Marion Lanfords, Rosetta Lovell
Holy Rosary - Kununurra	Marjorie Ward
Holy Rosary - Beagle Bay	Teresa Ronald
Jigalong	Grace Elison
Marble Bar	Elaine Clifton
Meekatharra	Cheryl Riley

The extensive range of experience and sophistication among the aides meant that some learnt and achieved more than others. It was, perhaps, a mistake in using geographical location as the criterion for choosing participants rather than using criteria such as experience, education, age or a combination of these. In planning future conferences, these latter criteria will probably be used.

#### 4. THE ORGANIZERS

The Conference was organized jointly by the Education Department and the staff of the Aboriginal Teacher Education Program at Mount Lawley Teachers College, with assistance from Mr. Brian Byrne of the Catholic Education Commission and Dr. Quadros and staff of the Public Health Department at Port Hedland.

Personnel from the Education Department who took part were:

Miss Sarah McKenzie  
Miss Ester Trees  
Mr. John Read  
Mr. Doug Hubble

ATEP staff from Mount Lawley Teachers College were:

Mrs. Carole Reed  
Mr. John Sherwood  
Mr. John Bucknall  
Mr. Ed Brumby

#### 5. TIMETABLE

Monday 29th April:	Participants arrive and settle in
Tuesday 30th April:	Art and Craft - John Bucknall Physical Education - Doug Hubble
Wednesday 1st May:	Social Studies - Brian Byrne
Thursday 2nd May:	Reading - Sarah McKenzie Art and Craft - John Bucknall
Friday 3rd May:	Health - Ester Trees and Public Health Sisters Aboriginal Education - John Bucknall
Saturday 4th May:	Free Day - visits to Port Hedland and environs
Sunday 5th May:	Picnic - Turner River
Monday 6th May:	Mathematics - Doug Hubble Art - Doug Hubble
Tuesday 7th May:	School Equipment - Doug Hubble Health - Dr. Quadros (Public Health Dept.)
Wednesday 8th May:	Story Telling - Ed Brumby Art and Craft - Doug Hubble Excursion to Mt. Newman port facilities
Thursday 9th May:	Bilingual Education - John Bucknall

Late afternoons and evenings were taken up with sporting and social activities.

## 6. SUBJECT REPORTS

### 6.1 Story Telling

The main aims of this session were to introduce the aides to the various desirable techniques and roles of story telling.

The aides listened to several taped stories from different countries read or spoken by people with different accents and rates of speech. Discussion covered such features as accent, speed of speech, language level and difficulty (including vocabulary and sentence structure), interest factor, length of story and attention span, cultural differences and appropriateness to the Aboriginal situation.

The various roles of story telling (i.e. as an end in itself, as extra material in Social Studies and as motivation for art, craft, singing and other lessons) were also discussed.

The session was not a complete success for many reasons. The main one, perhaps, is that the aides could not understand some of the taped stories and so lost interest. This was valuable in itself, in that, hopefully, they realized the virtues of choosing the right story or stories for the right occasion and at the right time.

The follow-up to the discussion was a story writing period in which aides were asked to write down one of their favourite stories. The results were mixed and led to the abandonment of the original plan to print a collection of the stories for aides to take back to their schools.

### 6.2 Reading

The purpose of the session on Reading was to introduce the aides to reading in a general way, to observe reading activities in an open school situation and to prepare practical reading aids for use in their own schools.

The session began with a film on Open Schools and was followed by a visit to the South Hedland Primary School where the Headmaster, Mr. Colin Mounsey gave the aides a general briefing on why we teach reading, where reading begins and an outline of some of the materials and books available in schools. A tour of the school, observing some reading activities followed and aides were able to see group work and various reading games and aids being used effectively.

6.2 The session concluded with aides preparing their own reading aids and games for use with their own classes. The success of this program was demonstrated in the way many of the aides continued their preparation of aids and games in their own free time, often giving up movie nights to do so.

### 6.3 Mathematics

The Maths session was along the same lines as that for Reading with an introductory discussion session followed by a visit to South Hedland Primary School to see group work in Mathematics involving the use of various aids and games. A demonstration lesson for children in a remedial group was particularly valuable.

Aides were also able to inspect a large range of materials available in their own schools and were given a general introduction to the use of Cuisenaire rods. Again, aides were able to prepare their own aids and games for their own classes.

### 6.4 Social Studies

This project was a simulated one, with aides acting as a class of school children. They participated in large and small group discussions and planning sessions on a project examining aspects of community life. In this project the aides were divided into small groups and toured the local community, in particular the local shopping centre, noting and later reporting on their 'findings' just as a class of primary school children would.

Aide participation and initiative was successful, as some of the final reports demonstrated. Many of the aides expressed their enjoyment of this exercise in their assessments gathered at the end of the course. Being at the beginning of the Conference, it enabled many of the aides (and the staff) to get to know each other a little better.

### 6.5 Health

The multiple aims of this course were achieved through films, excursions and talks and demonstrations by visiting Public Health Dept. personnel. The films, covering various aspects of personal and community health and hygiene were well received, though there was more individual comment than involved discussion from and by the aides. Visits to the local hospital and reserves helped to bridge gaps in experience though several of the aides expresses some reservations at visiting the reserves, feeling that they were encroaching on to other

## 6.5 Health (cont)

people's lives. The hospital visit, however, was quite successful. Talks by the doctor and nurses were well received and a great deal of interest was shown in the talks on maternal and child health and welfare.

Aides were also able to observe and experiment with materials and equipment available in schools and many prepared their own charts and aids for use with their own classes.

## 6.6 Art and Craft

This was probably the most successful of the sessions, in that the aides were completely involved in activities for most of the time. Two of the sessions were introduced with films and followed up with activities such as clay modelling, weaving, printing, sand painting, carving and the preparation of a design for a conference T-shirt. The clay models were fired in an open kiln at Pundulmurra later in the Conference and results were highly successful.

## 6.7 Physical Education

Lack of good facilities at Pundulmurra hampered this session, though the informal session on volleyball and netball proved to be highly successful. Thanks to the generosity of the South Hedland High School, the aides were able to play basketball in the school's well-equipped gymnasium.

## 6.8 School Equipment

In this highly successful session aides were instructed in the use of and had the opportunity to use equipment such as radios, cassette tape recorders, movie, slide and film strip projectors, duplicators and Polaroid cameras.

## 6.9 Aboriginal and Bilingual Education

The film "Walk in the Sunshine, Walk in the Shadows" introduced this topic and was followed by a moderately successful small group discussion on the general field of Aboriginal education. A videotape of a demonstration lesson at a Northern Territory school which is involved in a bilingual education program was used as an introduction to bilingual education. Aides, however, were not enthusiastic and expressed the wish that there should be greater attention paid to English rather than introducing instruction in the vernacular.

## 7. SOME COMMENTS

### 7.1 From the Aides

"This is the first Conference I've been to. I had a nice time and everyone was swell in every way. The classes were great and I couldn't find anything worth mentioning to complain about. I'm glad now that I did come to see what everyone else does in their own schools. If the next Conference goes like the first I would be glad to come."

"I've got some experience now of how to teach children. I am looking forward to the next conference."

"The stories we heard on the cassette was a bit hard to understand but I liked it very much. I love to teach children at school especially my own race. Sometimes they are naughty but otherwise they are really good to teach. The trouble is with the children is the teachers don't understand what they say and they don't speak up loud enough and we have to ask them several times till we know what they really want."

"Visiting the school was good. Also the hospital. I don't quite like the idea of visiting the reserve. As the other aboriginal people that live there might think we are prying in on their lives and sort of sling off at the way they live. But that's what we don't do. Even if we all come from different parts."

"I really loved going to the school and I loved watching the films, especially the Aboriginal ones because I understand them very much. The teachers were very good but I didn't understand very much because of their talking. I think the children would love to have their photos taken because they would get very excited. I will try this at my school when I get back."

"I liked the course because I learnt to get along with other people very well and I learnt more about other places and other schools."

"I particularly liked the Social Studies lesson because it helped us to go out and find things out for ourselves."

"I think we should have had more Oral and Written English."

"There wasn't enough English though and there should have been more because this is very important at school. I liked learning how to use the different equipment like the projectors and duplicators."

"At night I didn't like to stay home and watch films or T.V. Every night we did the same thing. I wanted to go down town and watch basketball or to the hotel."

## 7.2 From the Lecturers

"While there was a good choice and rotation of activities, there was a 'lost' feeling in some of the workshops and there was a lack of choice within actual individual workshops."

"The short, to the point talks and informal discussions were most successful and the generally happy atmosphere assisted a great deal towards the success of the Conference as a whole."

"There was some waste of time in organization and more follow-up work in some subject areas might have been better."

"The time was limited and this limited the structure of the course and the depth of coverage within some subject areas. In future courses there should be more detailed planning and more extension work and follow-up activities need to be arranged to make the course more valuable and informative. Teacher aides need to come into more contact with children, especially with a view to trying out some of the new ideas and techniques they have been shown."

"One of the most valuable features was that the aides were able to prepare resources to take back to their own classrooms, though there could have been more time devoted to this type of exercise. It would be wise in future courses to choose a more homogeneous group of aides on the basis of experience, qualifications, situation (remote/urban, semi-urban) or other criteria. One difficulty in this course was the great range of backgrounds and experience of the aides."

"There should have been more specific activities - directive rather than self-directive."

## 7.3 From the Anthropologist

Mrs. Carole Reed, Anthropologist on the ATEP staff attended the Conference as an observer. Her comments follow:

"From an observer's point of view activities were arranged for the achievement of the objectives of the Conference. On both an individual and a group basis, however, progress towards them was not uniform. I would like to discuss some of the factors which seemed to inhibit some activities and those which aided others.

First, the group comprised twenty-two young women and two men. This of course, reflects the fact that far more women than men are interested in a job of this kind and also that schools are more prone to think of a Teacher Aide as being a female occupation. There were times, however, when it appeared that the presence of the two males may have inhibited some discussion,

on the part of the rest; even more striking was the fact that rarely did the young men voice opinions openly. They were much more likely to talk at length with one of the male teachers. From this, I would recommend that any instruction team would need to include both male and female teachers.

A qualification of the last statement would rest upon the second factor - that of the home background of individual ATAs. This large group included people from a wide range of situations. Among them were some who denied being Aboriginal, but said they were 'coloured' and others who were full-blood Aborigines, they came from very isolated settlements and from large towns. The result was a group whose members varied widely in familiarity with and ease in interaction with Europeans. So great was this variance that the usual protection provided by being a member of a homogeneous group was lacking for the more tribalized among them. There was an easing of this situation after the first week, when some extended kinship ties were traced between some individuals and photographs of home, family and friends were shown around by those who had brought them. By the end of the Conference all were mixing fairly freely with no one unable to join a group either during a scheduled workshop or during the free hours. Just as obviously, however, those who were most publicly vocal were those from a more Europeanized background.

All the ATAs were enthusiastic about their role. They expressed pleasure and pride in what they did and interest in learning more about teaching. They were eager and diligent in constructing teaching aids and listing ideas for aids to be constructed back in their schools. They enjoyed learning to operate the audio-visual equipment and exhibited complete confidence in their abilities to do so.

Of all the activities the group discussions were least satisfactory. There were many reasons for this and it would be difficult to isolate a single cause. Part of the problem was that any group gathered together for the first time are loath to speak out; another factor was the female/male ratio mentioned above. A factor that can be ruled out was any relating to group leadership; the teachers attempting such discussions were practiced in such skills and attempted several techniques at attaining participation.

The primary reason for the lack of discussion skills and confidence appears more likely to be linked to the role of such discussions within the traditional setting. Women are not usually the most active participants in such situations and this was predominantly a group of women. Even when they would be active, the style and form of such discussions are vastly different from European discussions. All these factors resulted in a minimal number of reluctant statements being offered.

To counter this situation the large group was broken into smaller groups, often with a teacher sitting in. After the ATAs became acquainted with each other and with the teachers, these small groups talked quite freely and many opinions were expressed. For the future a technique of small group discussion resulting in recommendations (or statements) from each group for pooling with those from other groups in a blackboard list might, over time, lead to the ability to discuss a topic as a total group.

With experience in the teaching situation and by attending other conferences, some of these factors will be overcome. For a long while, however, teachers participating in such workshops must continue to be aware of individuals who must be approached singly, for friendly, non-probing chats, but who will absorb a lot without outward manifestations of this in a public setting."

## 8. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In most respects, the Conference was a resounding success. The highlight was the way in which aides from different areas, backgrounds and experiences mingled and made friends and learnt from each other. The biggest disappointment, perhaps, was there were few opportunities for the aides to become involved in real-life classroom situations. The relatively informal and relaxed atmosphere of the conference assisted greatly in establishing rapport between organizers and participants. But it has an adverse effect in that some time was possibly lost or wasted in some sessions. Planning for a tighter or stricter timetable or schedule at future conferences would help to overcome this.

There is little doubt that the aides learnt and achieved a great deal apart from enjoying the Conference. All of them expressed the wish to attend any future conferences (should there be any). An important effect of the Conference was that aides were made more aware of their capabilities, the contributions they can make in schools and the roles that they can play. Many of the aides requested further information concerning further training, either full or part-time. This raises the question as to what the future holds for Aboriginal Teacher Aides and what steps must be taken to ensure that this resource is developed for fullest benefit to Aboriginal Education and the Aboriginal community in general.

## 9. FOR THE HEADMASTER

Headmasters at the aides' schools may wonder just what the aides learnt at the Conference and how their newly-acquired skills can be used best. From the preceding it is obvious that, for the most part, the approach to most subject areas was a general one. However, in the specific areas of equipment operation (movie and slide projectors, Polaroid cameras etc.) and the preparation of aids and games for reading and mathematics, many of the aides displayed a high degree

of competence. Encouragement in the use of these skills in the classroom would be a most beneficial follow-up to the Conference.

The organizers would also be grateful for any comments, suggestions or criticisms from Headmasters or class teachers with regard to the Conference and the benefit or lack thereof it had for the aides at their schools. Any comments should be addressed to either the Education Department (Aboriginal Education Branch), or the Aboriginal Teacher Education Program at Mount Lawley Teachers College.





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