

Mr Tom Stephens; President; Hon Derrick Tomlinson; Hon Helen Hodgson; Hon Barry House; Hon Mark
Nevill; Hon Peter Foss

ABORIGINAL CHILDREN, EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

Urgency Motion

THE PRESIDENT (Hon George Cash): I received the following letter this morning -

Dear Mr President,

At today's sitting it is my intention to move under Standing Order No 72 that the House at its rising adjourn until 9.00 am on 25 December 2000, for the purpose of discussing the need for initiatives to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal children attending schools in remote communities in Western Australia.

Yours sincerely,
Derrick Tomlinson MLC
Member for East Metropolitan Region

Point of Order

Hon TOM STEPHENS: At 12.01 today, on my return from Broome, I placed in your office a letter written in the following terms -

At today's sitting it is my intention to move under Standing Order No 72 that the House at its rising adjourn until 9.00 am on 25 December 2000 for the purpose of discussing the urgent need for the re-establishment of the Select Committee on the Finance Broking Industry.

I seek your ruling, Mr President. In this House we regularly have debates that distinguish between subject matter; for example, a motion to suspend standing orders that would otherwise prevent a subsequent motion being debated. I understand there may be a view that the urgency letter I have written to you would in some way fall foul of Standing Order No 98, which relates to matters that anticipate other debates.

Before you so rule, Mr President, I ask you to consider the following argument: The letter I sent to you identifies a motion that is different in substance and character from other matters on the Notice Paper, in the same way as a motion to suspend standing orders is different in character from the subsequent motion that would be considered by the House. I ask, therefore, that you not rule my motion out of order but enable it to be considered.

Ruling by President

The PRESIDENT: The member is correct about the standing orders. A letter was delivered to my office at 12.01 today, as were a number of other notices of motion, but I will get to those in a moment.

The Leader of the Opposition has argued that in a motion to suspend standing orders to debate a matter on the Notice Paper, it would be necessary to raise matters related to that. If Hon Tom Stephens' motion to suspend standing orders is agreed to by a majority or by 18 members - an absolute majority - Standing Order No 98 will have no effect. However, that is not the intention of the Leader of the Opposition's urgency motion today.

The Leader of the Opposition proposed originally to move a motion for the purpose of discussing the urgent need for re-establishment of a select committee on the finance broking industry. Motion No 1 on today's Notice Paper is the same motion; that is, the substance is exactly the same. It was a matter to which I gave consideration. It seems to me that all the matters that are necessary to be discussed in the urgency motion could be and no doubt will be discussed when the House considers motion No 1. It would be a manipulation of the standing orders to move a motion that contravened Standing Order No 98 for the purpose of getting, in effect, to the substance of motion No 1 on today's Notice Paper. That is why it was ruled out earlier. I advised the Leader of the Opposition that it was out of order. I will not debate the issue.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: I want to be sure that we know the situation for the future. Why would that debate be out of order when a different issue was being debated; that is, it would be free of the argument for the re-establishment of the select committee and no other matters were anticipated, except that it was now urgent?

In your ruling, Mr President, would you please find the words that will clarify for the future understanding of the practice and custom of this House, how such a ruling makes sense.

The PRESIDENT: I will repeat myself. An urgency motion framed in such a way as to attempt to overcome Standing Order No 98, which deals with anticipation of debate on a motion or a matter on the Notice Paper, is not in order. It is not a case of distinguishing what is and what is not urgent. I have already said that when motion No 1 is moved, no doubt all the matters that the member will want to raise at this stage will be raised.

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The Leader of the Opposition cannot use an urgency motion to overcome Standing Order No 98 - to shove it out of the way; it does not work that way.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: I will not dispute that ruling; I accept that it now stands.

Point of Order

Hon TOM STEPHENS: My next point of order relates to the receipt of what I understand was the fourth letter seeking that the House consider a matter of urgency. Did that letter conform in every way to the requirement of the standing orders that it be delivered to the President two hours before the House sits? If it does conform, at what time was it delivered? Is it a requirement of the standing orders or simply the custom, practice and protocol of this House that an urgency motion of that sort be made available to the Opposition and other members of the House? I have not received a copy of any such letter, nor has the protocol been observed. On that basis, perhaps the member will now withdraw it.

Hon N.F. Moore: Why not withdraw yours?

Ruling by President

The PRESIDENT: I have been asked a number of questions, one of which is: Does this urgency motion conform to the standing orders? I have read it and established that it does conform. As to whether it was delivered within the period required by the standing orders, that occurred. Some members may not be aware that a number of urgency motions were delivered to my office today. One was said to be delivered at 12.01 pm. Another letter, from another member and addressing another issue, was delivered later. About four minutes after that, the Leader of the Opposition came into my office and withdrew the first motion on the basis that he had been advised it was out of order. He then submitted another urgency motion. A fourth urgency motion was then delivered to my office.

The member concerned decided to withdraw the second urgency motion. When the Leader of the Opposition came to my office, I indicated that that motion had been withdrawn. He indicated that he would return to his office and prepare for his speech on tidal power. The Leader of the Opposition approached me while the bells were ringing and said he wished to withdraw his second urgency motion. I said that that was acceptable and that I would move to the next motion, which I have read to the House.

The issue of the standing orders requiring a member to circulate an urgency motion to other members of the House has been raised previously; in fact, I think the Leader of the Opposition was one of the members involved in discussions about this issue. I will not read out the former President's ruling, which was made on 28 August 1991, but in essence it states that there is no obligation under the standing orders for an urgency motion to be distributed. Any distribution was deemed to be entirely at the discretion of the member proposing to move the urgency motion. As I understand it, that has always been the situation.

Debate Resumed

The PRESIDENT: To return to the motion at hand, the member will require the support of four members in order to move the motion.

[At least four members rose in their places.]

HON DERRICK TOMLINSON (East Metropolitan) [3.45 pm]: I move -

That the House at its rising adjourn until 9.00 am on 25 December 2000.

At the outset I will respond to the Leader of the Opposition. If I have offended against a convention of the House, I sincerely apologise. The leader might understand that I am unpractised in moving urgency motions. In the 11 years that I have served in this place, I have never before moved one. I was under the obviously mistaken impression that the President's office circulated copies of the motion. Therefore, through ignorance, I breached protocol. I apologise not only to the Leader of the Opposition but also to the House.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: The member has forgotten that he has moved two urgency motions prior to this motion: One in this Parliament and one in the previous Parliament.

Hon DERRICK TOMLINSON: Pages 6 and 7 of this morning's *The West Australian* deal with a report of an investigation by the Human Rights Commission and comments made by the Human Rights Commissioner, Mr Chris Sidoti. I heartily concur with the headline: "Schooling in outback gets appalling report". Mr Sidoti is quoted as sayin -

"No State is doing it well enough, only 17 per cent of indigenous students in rural WA are completing Year 12."

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I found that very interesting, because in 1975, as a senior research officer with the Australian Council for Education Research in Hawthorn, I undertook an analysis of university entrance figures throughout Australia on behalf of the then Tertiary Education Commission. I reported to the commission that annually until 1975 less than 1 per cent of Aboriginal persons had qualified for entry to a university, or, as it was then generically called, "tertiary education". Less than 1 per cent of Aboriginal persons achieved matriculation. The definition of "Aboriginal" used at that time was that used in the 1967 census; that is, a person who identifies himself or herself as Aboriginal and who is accepted by his or her peers as Aboriginal. I was not referring to persons living in remote communities who might be described as full-blood Aboriginals; I was reporting on the whole spectrum of persons in Australia who identified themselves as Aboriginal. The situation was appalling, because at that time about 25 per cent of the wider population qualified for entry to university.

Mr Sidoti's report compares the performance of Aboriginal students who met or exceeded literacy and numeracy requirements with the performance of non-indigenous students. The percentage of year 3 indigenous students who achieved the benchmark in literacy in 1999 was 55 per cent, compared with 86 per cent of non-Aboriginal students. In numeracy, 60 per cent of Aboriginal students achieved the benchmark compared with 87 per cent of non-Aboriginal students.

I gave evidence to the Human Rights Commission. I warned Commissioner Sidoti against making those sorts of comparisons. I advised him that one should not compare unlike entities and that it would be wrong to compare Aboriginal with non-Aboriginal. It is wrong to compare the performance of students from low socioeconomic status with those from high SES. They are chalk and cheese. The variables that affect the educational outcomes of those students according to their background determinants are significantly different, and because of the difference in those variables, it is wrong to compare outcomes. However, Mr Sidoti has obviously not taken that advice because he has compared Aboriginal with non-Aboriginal, or indigenous with non-indigenous, as the term is used in the reports. I can understand why Commissioner Sidoti should make that comparison, because he is talking about equality. If one is to argue about equality, one can only argue on the basis of comparison with the norm. The norm in mainstream Australian society is predominantly a non-Aboriginal norm. When one compares the Aboriginal with the non-Aboriginal norm, yes, the results are appalling; schooling in the outback gets an appalling report.

That confirmed a position adopted by a committee that I chaired in 1994 on behalf of the then Minister for Education, Hon Norman Moore, on schooling in rural Western Australia. In part 7 of its report on remote community schools, page 97 reads -

The levels of educational achievement of Aboriginal children are cause for serious concern. Previously published analysis of MSE -

That means monitoring standards in education -

- results showed Aboriginal students generally have low levels of literacy and numeracy. Certainly, the performance of the most able matched that of the more able non-Aboriginal students, but the general achievement of Aboriginal students was significantly below the average for non-Aboriginal children.

That confirmed earlier reports to which I will refer. We found that in mathematics year 3, Aboriginal students' mean score was 300 and for non-Aboriginal students it was 350. In reading, the mean score for Aboriginal students in year 3 was 160 compared with a score of 310 for non-Aboriginal students in year 3. There is at least a standard deviation difference, and a standard deviation difference in statistical terms when comparing educational outcomes is a chasm.

That report of 1994 reflected a similar analysis of literacy and numeracy reported in 1976. I say "reported" advisedly because in 1975-76 the Australian Council for Educational Research undertook on behalf of the Commonwealth and State Governments a national survey of standards of literacy and numeracy, trying to establish what the benchmark was because until then there had been no national benchmark of performance in literacy and numeracy for Australian students. That 1976 report found an appalling difference between the performance of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, particularly Aboriginal students in rural and remote communities throughout Australia. So bad were those results that the States vetoed their publication, as they were entitled to do as signatories to the agreement with the Australian Council for Educational Research. They did not want those results made public.

I am grateful to Commissioner Sidoti for reinforcing those results in the recently published report. In 1994 the committee, having observed these appalling differences between indigenous and non-indigenous students, made some recommendations about enhancing education in remote communities in Western Australia. We recommended the remote teaching service. We assumed that one of the great problems was the constant turnover of teachers in remote community schools. We argued that if there could be greater stability of teachers

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in those schools, there would be continuity of educational programs and hence, we hoped, an improvement in educational outcomes. We argued for a minimum of three years and an optimum of five years.

The Government of the day responded to that. The remote teaching service is an outstanding success. Teachers are staying in those schools and enjoying it. However, so far there has not been a demonstrable improvement. I use the word "demonstrable" because I would advise against too complete an analysis in such a short time. I would argue against a comparison of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. It would be far more effective to compare like with like and compare the performance of a cohort over time, but that is another argument.

We argued for a greater number of Aboriginal teachers in these schools. The Government has responded to that. Notre Dame University in Broome has an outstanding program for the education of Aboriginal teachers. In 1994 when we visited Notre Dame University, it was running that program as a contract from a Brisbane institution that was funded by the Australian National Training Authority. Notre Dame University wanted to run that program. The only way it could do it was to contract with the institution in Queensland. That program is now running, funded by the Western Australian Department of Training and Employment, and is having great success. However, the numbers are too small. If we are to address the cultural differences that beset Aboriginal education in remote communities, it is essential that a greater number of Aboriginal teachers, rather than non-Aboriginal teachers who are alien to the culture of their students, be trained and accepted as teachers in those schools rather than as teacher aides.

We still have a long way to go. Let me argue the mistake of our 1994 report. We were trying to impose upon the remote community Aboriginal schools a European or an urban mainstream model of education that depends upon linear thinking and linear logic. It does not suit the Aboriginal way of learning. I do not know what the Aboriginal style of learning is but I know that our schools argue for linear thinking with inductive and deductive reasoning. Aboriginal people, according to some of the literature I have seen, are not linear thinkers at all, if anything they are iconic thinkers. They perform very highly in tests on spatial relationships. If instead of thinking in two dimensions, as the non-Aboriginal person is educated to do and taught to do - I am not saying that an Aboriginal person is not capable of it - educationalists started thinking in three dimensions, not simply laterally, according to a spatial relationship, they would start emulating the Aboriginal style of thinking. If we are to have that style of thinking, there needs to be a quite different model of education.

HON HELEN HODGSON (North Metropolitan) [3.59 pm]: My contribution will be fairly brief, because this area has been taxing my mind and research for a while now. In fact, two days ago my party passed a request to the minister's office for a briefing on exactly what is happening with Aboriginal education, but this debate has overtaken the time in which we have been able to organise such a briefing. Much of what I have to say is based on what I know to date, which will not necessarily incorporate the strategies that the Education Department is currently using.

Everyone in this Chamber recognises that Aboriginal students are obtaining lower educational outcomes. The real tragedy of this is that it is education that will most likely allow our Aboriginal students to achieve and be able to compete in a culture and environment that is essentially foreign to most of them. We need to find strategies and ways of dealing with these lower outcomes being achieved.

To put another perspective on it, this is typical of a dispossessed culture. When one looks at cultures around the world that have been dispossessed through invasion, colonisation or whatever we may term it, in most cases that native culture has ended up with people not being assimilated very well, having lower levels of education and health, and experiencing all the difficulties we see within our Aboriginal communities at the moment. We need to find effective strategies that will deal with these issues in order to give these kids a chance in the white man's world.

I concur with the comments made by Hon Derrick Tomlinson about benchmarking issues. For some time we have been cautioning about the testing that is being carried out in all of our schools. It is not just a matter of comparing indigenous and non-indigenous performances; it is a case of comparing performances in different schools in which children come from different backgrounds. We think that the trend towards benchmarking is a problem in that if the results are used inappropriately, we will end up with distortions, and policy decisions will be based on information that is not necessarily accurate.

I know a lot of work is being done on various programs. Last week a number of questions were asked about the Aboriginal school in Bunbury. I am aware of the development of the Aboriginal school in Midland, and a lot of remote communities are doing some good work as well. However, we must be conscious that we are not dealing with a homogenous culture of indigenous people; we are dealing with different groups. The problems for urban Aboriginal students, as represented by the school at Midland, are completely different from the problems that are faced in the outback. Some parents in my electorate have worked in the education system for many years and

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have dealt with schools with Aboriginal students. Those parents taught at Warakurna in the Central Desert for two years, and it was one of the most challenging postings of their time in the education system.

Hon Peter Foss: Do you know what Warakurna means?

Hon HELEN HODGSON: I probably do not know the full name. The strategies must be tailored to the communities that are affected by it. One of the problems with government responses is that they try to develop an overall strategy, but this is not sufficiently flexible to deal with the differences in different places. When I have my briefing on the Aboriginal education strategies, I will be watching to see how flexible those strategies can be when it comes to the different issues between remote communities, urban communities and the rural communities that sit in between, where people are not as isolated, their culture is no longer intact, yet they still have different issues from those faced by urban Aborigines.

Some of the issues that are being faced at the moment, particularly in remote schools, include lingual skills. Many Aboriginal people might be bilingual or trilingual, but English is not one of those languages. Because there is so much overlap, some native Aboriginal languages are still intact in many of the remote schools. That is what I mean when I say that the issues are different in urban schools. Here we are going back to teaching the Nyoongah language. The difficulty we have here is that many Aboriginal people still do not cope with English very well. They speak Creole or a variation of that, which means they can understand and be understood, but it does not help when it comes to testing the areas of reading and writing.

In his concluding comments, Hon Derrick Tomlinson said that there are different perceptions in the way in which a person relates to his or her environment. As a former teacher, I was told that I had to be conscious of different learning styles and to try to adapt what I was doing so that people with different learning styles had a chance to learn properly. I have always found the issue of spatial awareness intriguing, especially since I heard about a young Aboriginal man who was tested. It was recommended that he would do very well as an air traffic controller. The problem was that there was absolutely no way that that young man would have withstood the training, the education needed - he did not have the basic standards - and even the environment in an air traffic control tower. That relates directly to my experiences as a university lecturer. When we take people into an educational environment, we are putting them in a closed room. The lecture rooms in universities have no windows, and that is a deliberate architectural decision so students are not distracted by what is going on outside. To put an Aboriginal person in a closed room and expect that person to cope and learn effectively is something that is so alien to the way in which those people relate to their environment that it is just another barrier they must overcome. I learnt about that one day when I sat next to an Aboriginal person on an aircraft. He had to have the window seat. He could not face the thought of not being able to see at least the sky or the sea over which we were flying, because he got claustrophobic. It is part of the way in which those people have always related to their environment. We must take that matter into account when working around educational programs.

I recognise that limited funds are available for these sorts of programs. Some federal and state funding is available. With further notice I would have been able to work out the amount from my budget papers. Putting that aside, it is important that we target those funds properly and that we structure the programs to make them flexible enough to deal with the different circumstances and, ultimately, that we do something to give these kids

a chance to compete and survive in the world into which they are going. There are enough strikes against them already. Without a decent education, it will be very difficult for them to make a decent future for themselves.

HON BARRY HOUSE (South West - Parliamentary Secretary) [4.08 pm]: I am pleased to support the motion moved by Hon Derrick Tomlinson. I acknowledge that much work needs to be done in this area. When I was asked to become the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education, in my initial discussions with the minister we identified two areas that required work: One was the Aboriginal education area and the other was physical fitness and wellbeing. Unfortunately, we are seeing a steady decline in the fitness and wellbeing of students in this State and, I dare say, in Australia and western society generally.

In terms of Aboriginal education, we as legislators, administrators and even taxpayers are very frustrated that literally billions of dollars have been directed to Aboriginal communities over the years, yet we have seen no great advancement in measurable outcomes in housing, health and education. However, it does not mean to say that we should give up the battle.

There is a myth that only Labor Governments tend to allocate resources to Aboriginal education and other Aboriginal issues; the reality, of course, is far different. I will spend a couple of minutes telling members what is being done by the Western Australian and the Commonwealth Governments to deal with the issues addressed by Hon Derrick Tomlinson's motion concerning initiatives to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal children attending schools in remote communities in Western Australia. It does not concern only remote communities; we should also include Aboriginal students across the board. Each year, about \$105m is spent on

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Aboriginal students, including strategies that focus on areas such as literacy and numeracy, attendance and participation and health. It is acknowledged that the per capita costs of educating many Aboriginal students are considerably higher due to isolation and special needs. That figure of \$105m comes from the State and Federal Government's commitments to Aboriginal children. There are two dedicated primary schools for Aboriginal students in this State. By interjection the other day, Hon Mark Nevill said that there are many Aboriginal schools - of course there are many Aboriginal schools in Aboriginal communities. In Bunbury, the Djidi Djidi Aboriginal school, which was opened in Carey Park in 1996, caters for students from kindergarten to year 2. Currently, that school is taking students up to year 3.

Hon Bob Thomas: To year 4.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I understood that it was to year 3 currently and would extend to year 4 next year. Either way, it is authorised as a "cater to" school at the moment with some special permission to take extra students. It has around 85 students. About 15 per cent of those students are non-Aboriginal kids. Their parents have deliberately placed them in that school so that they can be brought up with an emphasis on Aboriginal ethics. We discussed some of those issues relating to the Djidi Djidi School during question time. I am convinced from my observations that the school is doing an excellent job. The teachers are extremely dedicated and the parent community is extremely committed. Their biggest problem at the moment relates to the tenure over the site. They want to remain at the current site. It is a very small site; it was a kindergarten and is owned by the City of Bunbury. A lot of work is being done to try to secure a permanent site. The old Picton Primary School has been suggested as one possible site. However, that creates another problem because a community school is using the Picton site.

Hon Bob Thomas: The Aboriginal community does not want to be located at Picton; it wants to remain in Carey Park. It does not want to be pushed out to the fringes again. The minister is not on top of this issue.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I look forward to hearing the member's contribution later. The Djidi Djidi school has indicated that it is there to stay and is performing a valuable service in that community for Aboriginal students. As has been mentioned, Perth's first Aboriginal government school is being built at Midland. That is a \$4.5m community college for Aboriginal education, which will open next year as a kindergarten to year 3 school. It will eventually grow to include year 10 and possibly up to years 11 and 12. It is an important initiative from the State Government.

In terms of teaching and learning, a computerised student monitoring system is being used in the goldfields and the mid west to track the movements of transient Aboriginal students and to maintain records of their school work. I know that many people who are familiar with remote areas in Western Australia would agree that that is a problem. The aim is to improve attendance and continuity in students' education as they move between schools. As a teacher, my first teaching appointment in 1973 was at the Eastern Goldfields Senior High School. I taught there for a year in classes that included several transient Aboriginal students. It is not easy for teachers or students when students move from classroom to classroom, from school to school and from community to community. Aboriginal students' curriculum materials have been introduced for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

The Aboriginal Speakers/Elders program, through which local Aboriginal identities present cultural programs in the schools, has been implemented. That has been a valuable initiative. I am familiar with the program around the Busselton-Margaret River area where the Webb family, headed by George and Vilma Webb, play a significant role in not only Aboriginal schools, but also other schools in relaying elements of their culture to the young children. It is interesting to find out when talking to them that a major frustration is that white kids are more interested in their culture than are Aboriginal kids. That tends to frustrate George and Vilma, but as Aboriginal elders in that community they perform a valuable service.

The vocational education and training program in schools is relevant for many Aboriginal students. Some 42 per cent of Aboriginal students participate in the program compared with 27 per cent of the general student population. The growing emphasis on vocational education, particularly in high schools, is perhaps more relevant to Aboriginal students than to the general student population.

There are a host of other initiatives, and I will mention a couple of them. The State Government has set a target of almost doubling the number of Aboriginal employees in the government school system from 1.6 per cent of the work force to 3 per cent by the end of the year 2000. That 3 per cent more adequately reflects the proportion of Aborigines in the total population - although that cannot be done in absolute terms, as we have already heard. A new career path for Aboriginal and Islander education workers has been established.

A mentoring program for all Aboriginal staff has also been set up to foster professional development, career progression and a supportive environment. I am aware of several schools at which that mentoring program has

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been established and is proving valuable to the school communities and the students. Each year, 10 scholarships are offered to Aboriginal people to cover an undergraduate teacher education course. - I understand the amount contributed towards this is \$30 000. Ten cadetships for AIEWs and Aboriginal teacher trainees are provided to increase the number of Aboriginal teachers in schools. Initiatives are being implemented and much more needs to be done, but this Government can proudly rest on its record.

HON MARK NEVILL (Mining and Pastoral) [4.18 pm]: I did not find much in what the previous speakers said with which I agreed, but Hon Barry House did come closer to the mark on what are the major problems with Aboriginal education. In my view, the two biggest problems are truancy and the mobility of Aboriginal people these days due to better transport. The attendance levels in classes are lucky to be as high as three-quarters of the kids going to school. Often they wander into school at midday instead of 9 o'clock in the morning. Until kids go to school every day, it does not matter what is done with remote teacher programs, the desired outcomes will not be achieved. Some 33 years ago, I taught 50 full-blooded Aboriginal kids at the government school at Balgo Mission for two years. We had no equipment. We received \$3 a year from the Native Welfare Department for a pad, a ruler and a box of crayons - which they ate in the first week. There was no parents and citizens association, and, therefore, there was no sporting equipment or projectors. There was a rock-strewn area around the school. There were fans and water coolers at the school, but the power did not operate during the day. It was a mission and the power operated only at night. It was about 105 degrees or 108 degrees Fahrenheit in the classroom on some of the hotter days. However, those children were better educated than any subsequent generation. When the Whitlam Government was elected, the school was given everything that opened and shut: Grass ovals, airconditioning, power during the day, sporting equipment and libraries. It had everything it could lay its hands on. However, the educational outcomes are worse now because kids do not attend regularly and many of them go to school hungry as they do not have breakfast. The kids I taught did not have middle ear problems. They had a good night's sleep and came to school every day clean and with a full stomach. They were at school at 8.00 in the morning and left at 2.30 in the afternoon. I taught them only in the morning.

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: Was Balgo a mission school?

Hon MARK NEVILL: It was a government school in the mission. I taught the kids until lunchtime and would go for a walk with them in the bush in the afternoon. Otherwise, the day was too long. I learnt much from them in the afternoons in the bush and they learnt a lot of English from me. We spoke only English. Most of those kids were fluent in English. Now, the young people in the Aboriginal communities hardly understand English. The situation has gone backwards. Aboriginal people had a better command of English 30 years ago than they do now.

Money and fancy programs will not fix the problems. Some structure must be put back into the system. It was there during the mission stage but is not there now. Unfortunately, we need a structure that is pretty tough: If the kids do not turn up to school, the parents should not receive their family assistance supplement. Kids would soon turn up if such a system were put in place. It is a matter of choice. The bands play to 3.00 in the morning and the kids wander into school at 1.00 pm. They used to have free milk at school, which was excellent for kids' health, and all the kids had breakfast. Not one student had a dental cavity. These days, teenagers have mouths full of rotten teeth.

Hon Peter Foss: Due only to Coca-Cola.

Hon MARK NEVILL: I would not blame only Coca-Cola; it is also due to many other things. What is happening is very sad. We must implement some tough measures. Commonwealth-state cooperation is needed on things like the family allowance to make sure these kids go to school. If the kids do not get a basic education, they will have poor health, poor job prospects and poor diet. The De La Salle Brothers have run the Balgo school for at least 15 years. It is now a Catholic school and has had great continuity of staff. The kids are taught in the Aboriginal language; originally to year 3 and now to year 6. The teachers do a wonderful job, but the outcomes in maths and English are not much better. Parents in the central desert and the Balgo area have complained to me that too much Aboriginal language is taught in schools. I think that is more of a white wish than an Aboriginal one. I do not pick up on a desire for it and I do a lot of work in Aboriginal communities.

Hon Peter Foss: You get it at the coast, where they do not have the language.

Hon MARK NEVILL: It is the problem of grouping all the different Aboriginal people.

Hon Peter Foss: Desert people do not want it because they know the language is secure; however, seawater people do not have that same security.

Hon MARK NEVILL: There is no doubt that the program at Balgo has entrenched the Kukudja and the Walmadjiri languages. A wonderful job has been done, but I am not sure that it has had any net benefit in ensuring that kids finish year 12. I was annoyed when I saw a picture of the Tjukurla headmaster and an article

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reporting that he would not conduct national testing in his school. The program I taught at Balgo was pretty relevant. The *My Word* book had words like "fog" and "ship". I told the superintendent that I wanted to substitute those with "bull", "horse", "cow", "yard", "tank" and "dam" - simple words. He said, "Oh no, you can't do that." The idea was to teach kids phonetics and what words are. I suggested that I write a reading book. The books we were given were about Dick, Dora, Fluff and Nip. The superintendent, in the cultural cringe of the 1960s, waved his finger at me and said, "You must have a PhD from an American university to write a reading book for Aboriginal children." Most of the stuff that is spoken about Aboriginal education is a lot of bunkum. It is almost like Alabama, where there are calls for black-only schools. In 10 years, whites will be knocking on the doors, demanding to get in - although that might be carrying things a bit too far.

The basic thing is to ensure those kids go to school. That will not be achieved through gentle, nice means. Fairly coercive means will need to be used to achieve that. Unless it is done, educational standards among Aboriginal people will continue to fall. I was not a wonderful teacher. I completed the first year of an arts degree in the two years I was at Balgo. I was also the barber for 200 kids. I did hundreds of jobs just to keep myself busy and I really enjoyed it. I did not do all those fancy curriculum activities like writing out everything I planned to do in the next month. Any curriculum item can be made relevant by adapting it the environment around the school. If the class was studying physics and sound, I just tapped on the pipe at one end of the building and got the kids to stand at the other end to see that sound travels faster through metal than air. Simple things like that are needed, not a lot of money. Sister Alice, from the adult education unit at Balgo, told me that the generation I taught is more literate than subsequent generations. They should not be; we did not have any facilities and I was not a particularly flash teacher. The school has everything that opens and shuts now. The problem is that kids do not go to school, when they do they shift from one school to another and they often go to school without breakfast.

Hon Peter Foss: The Mt Margaret people are an even better example.

Hon MARK NEVILL: Beagle Bay and Mt Margaret are both examples. The best-educated Aboriginal people in the State are those who were educated in the missions. It galls me to hear how the missions are denigrated by the new-wave people who have introduced all these policies that are destroying Aboriginal people. That is the genocide: Half the kids I taught are dead.

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: It was Mr Neville who denigrated the missions.

Hon MARK NEVILL: He is no relation to me, but I think people have rewritten the history of A.O. Neville. Some pretty poisonous things have been said about the man. He did a lot of good, which is often ignored when a certain slant on the history is written. We are too interested in politics and not enough in results.

I do not know about linear thinking, to which Hon Derrick Tomlinson referred, but I know that Aboriginals always look to the past. That is why they find it difficult to look into the future. New things are very difficult for them. That is an important point.

HON PETER FOSS (East Metropolitan - Attorney General) [4.28 pm]: This has been a worthwhile debate. I contribute a matter that came to my attention as a minister in another portfolio. It became clear to me that some of the innate capacities of Aboriginal people were ideal for various areas of learning, particularly environmental science. Their ability to think in the way Hon Derrick Tomlinson described meant they were ideally placed to do the sorts of things required by environmental science, such as looking at the land to decide how the environment would be affected by various activities. The problem is that to become an environmental scientist, Aboriginal people must be trained in linear thinking. The ones that are best at linear thinking are able to go to university and get a degree. They then return to dealing with the environment, at which time they must again develop the three-dimensional method of thinking. It has been suggested that it would be considerably better if certain areas of learning were tackled without removing the best abilities from people and picking those who least have those abilities but who are best at linear thinking.

I agree with Hon Mark Nevill that we need to improve the educational outcomes. To some extent we also need to look at how we test those educational outcomes. The year 12 matriculation is rather like an intelligence test. It demonstrates a student's ability to jump through a predefined hoop, and the hoop we are putting up is very much a white man's hoop. We are saying to these people, "If you want a job, you have to jump through this two dimensional white man's hoop notwithstanding you may have capacities in another area". When people are setting intelligence tests they should make sure that those tests are appropriate for the culture of the people they are testing.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.