



# The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

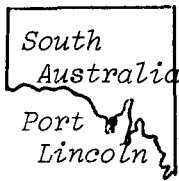
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## ABORIGINAL STUDIES - AN INTEGRATED APPROACH



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The use of Aboriginal Studies "courses" with non-Aboriginal children has long taken a simplistic form to say the least, which has done little to overcome any of the typical white oriented prejudices which have existed for so long.

A brief look at the Social Studies courses reveals that very scant direct attention is given to Aborigines at all. They appear in such imaginative areas as:-

### *Australian Background*

in which children will have opportunity to discover more about native flora and fauna, as well as the Aboriginal race which is native to "their" land.

### *Houses of other People*

- ...  
(5) Primitive people

### *Our natural heritage*

Fauna and flora  
Use by Aborigines

### *Pioneers*

1. The first Australians
2. The Aborigines and the European settlers
  - i) The Aborigines
    - a) The people
    - b) Way of life
    - c) Culture.

### *Fauna conservation*

- 2) Stress balance of nature maintained by :
  - a) Droughts
  - b) Occasional scrub fires
  - c) Food for Aborigines.

### *Flora conservation*

- 2) Stress balance of nature maintained by :
  - b) Uses of Aborigines: food, shelter, canoes, tools, weapons, utensils.

### *Aspects of community life*

### *Migration*

#### 2. Justice through the ages

- 1) Primitive justice
  - a) The family
  - b) Small communities
  - c) Law and religion, e.g.,  
taboo, sacred places

#### 1. Early migrations

- 1) Biblical peoples
- 2) Australian Aborigines
- 3) Red Indians

Obviously the study of Aborigines is not seen as one of any great importance and falls far short of the ideal, whereby a separate course for all children, covering all grades, needs to be implemented.

Why teach Aboriginal Studies? At a recent conference, a group of involved teachers discussed this question and put forward the following:

- . Bi-cultural development is needed to overcome cultural bias.
- . Interaction on a cultural basis helps to overcome negative attitudes.
- . Most bias is based on the assumption that other cultures are inferior.
- . Aborigines are the one group who suffer most from our bias.
- . Aboriginal culture is an integral part of Australia's history.
- . Because we tend to look on anything that is different as deficient, we need to show the *value of difference*.
- . To enable children to understand cultural validity.

The following two aims were stated as being a summary of the multiplicity of aims for such a course:-

1. To develop real knowledge, through doing, in order to achieve empathy with Aboriginal people.
2. To achieve knowledge of cultures - their development, function and operation.

But after considering why, the aims, the "course" and having mustered the resource personnel, the resources, etc., - what then? No matter how sympathetic the staff, how sound the resources, the "what then" becomes the critical ~~issue~~ in the development of any topic.

At Lincoln South, the "what then" takes the form of integrated studies with a strong language component. We believe that for any topic to be successfully covered, the school must come alive with that topic; the children need to be steeped in that topic in as many subject areas as possible; the school literally needs to be dripping with the topic. Aboriginal studies is no different. By integrated we mean that the topic influences as many subject areas as possible, so that a continual awareness and learning environment is created. The following ideas, taken firstly from a Year 7 teacher and secondly from a vertically grouped Prep 1 and 2 class, will hopefully serve to explain our approach. Obviously not all work covered is listed here. Following the ideas from the classrooms, I have included a list of ideas for health and nature science. I stress these are only ideas, but they have been used by teachers in our course. They are not designed to be perfect - which course is?

#### YEAR 7.

##### A. PRE-EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT

1. "THE DREAMING" - Beliefs and traditions about creation. Aboriginal myths about creation were read to the children and then discussion groups were organized to compare the Aboriginal view of the creation and white man's view (both religious and scientific). Similarities and differences were discussed.

2. MYTHS AND LEGENDS - Much work was done in this area, using many Aboriginal myths:

- a) "*Micherin the Dingo*" - this legend was read and the children re-wrote the story in their own words. The important facts were picked out and written on the blackboard, and the story revolved around these facts.
- b) "*The Rock*" by Eric Mack - this was used to illustrate the significance of Ayers Rock to the Pitjantjatjara people, and to illustrate the legends surrounding the formation of the rock (more work will be done in this area).
- c) "*Tiddalik the Frog*" - story from Endeavour Reader Book L2 was read and children were divided into groups and wrote the story in poetry form.
- d) "*Wirratt Wirratt*" - a film narrating an Aboriginal legend and using paintings on rocks to illustrate different parts of the story. This led to talks about how different people record old

stories. The fact that Aborigines have no written language was brought up. This led to investigations of how the Aboriginal people record their stories in paintings, and examples of bark paintings were found to show how a whole story is told in pictures on one bark painting.

- e) *Different ways of recording*. Each child chose a myth and re-wrote it in a shortened form while still including the important facts. The other half of the paper was used to illustrate the same myth using the Aboriginal method of recording stories.
- f) *Music - Corroborees*. Using the music of the Mornington Island Dancers, different groups made up a corroboree, again illustrating a story. Children in other groups were to guess what the story was.

### 3. WAY OF LIFE

a) Each child had a copy of typewritten notes entitled "The Aborigines of Central Australia". These were used as a basis to give an insight into the way of life of some Aboriginal tribes. A list of questions was included at the back of the booklet for children to answer. Other aspects of the Aboriginal way of life were covered in the Health and Nature Science lessons given by Mrs Gameau.

b) Two films entitled *People of the Western Desert* were also shown, and aspects of tribal life were illustrated in these. One entitled "Weapon Making" showed in detail how certain weapons were made.

### B. COMING OF THE WHITE SETTLERS AND POST-EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT

1. "THE ABORIGINAL STORY". - Most of the work about post-European settlement centred around this booklet, and a book entitled *The Australian Aborigines*, by R.M. Trudinger. Areas of discussion included:-

- .. The effect of European diseases on the Aboriginal people.
- .. How white settlement affected tribal life.
- .. The significance of the environment to Aborigines.

A question sheet was also included with this booklet, with questions asking for the children's opinions and feelings.

### 2. LANGUAGE

a) Composition entitled "I am an Aborigine", in which children write about their feelings and the strange things they see when they

come to a mission station for the first time.

b) A comparison between a tribal Aborigine and self. Table ruled up with different sections -

|                      | Aborigine | Me |
|----------------------|-----------|----|
| a) Weapons and tools |           |    |
| b) Food              |           |    |
| c) Dwellings         |           |    |
| d) Rituals           |           |    |

### C. OTHER AREAS COVERED

#### ART

Aboriginal Art. - Shape of platypus on a sheet of paper to be coloured and designed in the same way as Aboriginal bark painting. Crayons used but only browns, black, dark orange and grey.

Mural. - Silhouettes of Aboriginal figures in foreground with painted background. Children lying on paper used to get accurate shapes.

Silhouettes. - Children drawing own silhouette pictures with yellow-red background.

#### CRAFT

Aboriginal doll - children made a life-size doll using hessian stuffed with paper. Weapons, ornaments etc. made from wood, papier-mache, beads etc. Ornaments painted with Aboriginal designs and doll decorated.

#### POETRY

"On Walkabout"

"Corroboree" - Kath Walker

"Civilization" - Kath Walker

## NOVEL

Read to children. "Hughie" by David Martin - story about an Aboriginal boy living in a small bush town.

## WRITING

Aboriginal words to practice letter formations - *corroboree*, *didgeridoo*, *boomerang*.

## AREAS STILL TO BE COVERED

### I. *The Rock*, by Eric Mack.

- .. Ayers rock and its significance to Europeans - tourist attraction, area of beauty etc. Children to do research on Ayers Rock and find out everything about it.
- .. Significance of "Rock" to Pitjantjatjara people. Myths and legends surrounding it.
- .. Formation of the Rock - myths revolving around formation.
- .. Large papier-mache replica of "The Rock" with different areas labelled according to myths associated with them.

### II. Aboriginal Town Planning in relation to Aboriginal camp layouts.

- . Relationship between camp layouts and "dreaming" or totemic groups.
- . Significance of camp layouts.
- . Modern planning of towns for Aboriginal communities.
- . Children drawing up own plans.

## VERTICALLY GROUPED PREP 1 AND 2

## BOOKS USED

*Djugurba - tales from the Spirit Time; The Aboriginal of Australia; Hail - Killing Emus, Going for Euros, Chasing Kangaroos; The Rainbow Serpent; Bush Walkabout; Ngari the Hunter; Children of the Desert; Tales from the Dreamtime; The Australian Aboriginal - in colour; Australian Wildlife; Australian Animals; Reptiles of Australia; Wandini; The Lost Boomerang; Tales from the Dreamtime.*

plus, SLIDES, FILMS, T.V. PROGRAM - "In the Bush".

#### PHONICS

- .. Used letters of "Aborigines" to make lots of smaller words.
- .. Introduced "ake" words in connection with snakes and "oo" words with didgeridoos, kangaroos and boomerangs.
- .. Introduced "w" words on witchetty grubs and "eg" words in connection with turtle eggs.
- .. Talked about weather in Central Australia - made lists of "hot" words.

#### WRITTEN LANGUAGE

- .. Made books. Children drew pictures and teacher wrote children's sentences.
- .. Children wrote own stories about Aborigines.

#### SOCIAL STUDIES

Animals and reptiles; river life; ways of getting food; food; different tasks for different members of tribes; weapons and tracking; homes and shelters; art work.

#### ANIMALS AND REPTILES

Dingo; kangaroo; wombat; snakes; goanna; anteater; possum; emu - appearance; harmful or otherwise; why they survive in such areas; ways given animals for protection; habits.

#### RIVER LIFE

Crocodile; turtle; fish - appearance; ways Aborigines catch these; how they are cooked and eaten; things made from shells, skins etc.

#### WAYS OF GETTING FOOD

For example, smoking out possums; poisoning water holes to dope birds and emus; spearing fish; netting parrots; digging in burrows for wombats; spearing kangaroos etc.

#### FOOD

Animals, fish, reptiles, nuts, berries, honey, water lilies, seeds, beetles, eggs, honey bees, witchetty grubs, mud crabs, shellfish, yams, broilgas, leaves, ants, locusts.



## TASKS

Hunter - brings home catch, waits till others have eaten before he eats.

Women - mind children, seek food, prepare meals.

Medicine man - relies on plants etc. for medicines

Elders - council.

Children - help seek for food; boys learn use of art and weapons etc.

## WEAPONS

Spears, shields, spear thrower, wirris (fighting sticks), boomerang (made from tree roots or natural elbows of trees), stone axe, stone knife, scrapers.

Instruments - bark buckets, canoes etc.

What is used, how made, uses etc.

## SHELTERS

What Aborigines use as materials for wiltjas. Why portable - not often permanent. Furniture. Dogs for warmth etc.

## ART WORK

How Aborigines make their paints; bark paintings; cave paintings; paint bodies for special ceremonial occasions; only paint things they have seen and dreamtime painting.

## DRAMA

Mime - hunting for food - bringing back the catch - cooking - eating, etc.

## MUSIC

Making didgeridoos, clapping sticks etc. Joining in with recorded music - making our own.

## ART-CRAFT

Made wiltja using bark and scrub material; didgeridoos from cardboard rolls; cardboard boomerangs; mixed clay, added powder paint, painted on bark; crayon pictures; built open fire; painted large designs (similar to cave paintings); used cardboard rolls to make snakes; used egg cartons for crocodiles; used boses for turtles; Gestetner sheets on weapons, kangaroos and Aborigines.

## NATURE SCIENCE

Amphibians; things that grow in Central Australia.

## HEALTH

Bush nursing; Flying Doctor.

## HEALTH AND NATURE SCIENCE

Health III - VII : Making "damper" using grass *Panicum Decompositum*.

Science III - V : The anatomy of a boomerang.

Health IV - V : Disease - the non-Aboriginal influence.

Health IV-V, VI-VII: The human body - based on Topical Dictionary by W.H. Douglas.

Health/Science VI-VII: Male life cycle (basic only comparison with non-Aboriginal cycle.)

Science V, VI, VII: Spear and spear thrower (using resource centre materials.)

Health VI: Water birds as food.

Health IV: Food to eat

Health VI and VII: The uses of a wooden dish (using resource centre materials.)

Health VII: Shelters and town plans of today.

Health V, VII, III, IV: Distribution of food

Science III - VII: The Mulga tree.

- Health V : Ranges of food utilised.
- Health IV - VII: The maku (witchetty grub).
- Health III - VII: Foods eaten by traditional people
- Health IV and V: Animals hunted for food.
- Health VI and VII: Material possessions and the role of men and women.
- Science IV and V, VI and VII: Fire making.

As stated earlier, the two areas listed have their faults, and they are only two areas taken at random from the work of 14 teachers. It perhaps also needs to be pointed out that our resources included the following:

Aboriginal resource centre - part of the school library.  
Aboriginal library project books.  
Supernumerary teacher in Health and Nature Science.  
Aboriginal teacher aide.

This school would appreciate hearing from other Junior Primary and Primary Schools which are taking courses in Aboriginal Studies.

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