



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

This article was originally published in printed form. The journal began in 1973 and was titled *The Aboriginal Child at School*. In 1996 the journal was transformed to an internationally peer-reviewed publication and renamed *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*.

In 2022 *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* transitioned to fully Open Access and this article is available for use under the license conditions below.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

ABORIGINAL STUDIES CURRICULUM
IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA*



D. Craig,
Modbury Primary
School,
Sth. Australia

In March 1977, an Aboriginal Studies Curriculum Committee was officially established by the South Australian Education Department. The committee has representatives from primary and secondary schools, colleges of advanced education, Aboriginal and Historic Relics Section of the Department of Environment, Libraries Branch, and Principal Education Officers. Although meetings of the full committee are held on a regular basis to plan on-going tasks and to review material being produced, the main impetus comes from the five sub-committees that have been formed :-

Primary sub-committee

Secondary sub-committee

In-Service sub-committee

Materials and resources review sub-committee

Aboriginal liaison sub-committee

The co-ordinators of the sub-committees also meet on a regular basis for planning and progress reporting so that the on-going program is continually under review and viable.

A list of tasks has been drawn up and these are in various stages of completion. Tasks are continually being added or deleted as found necessary. The original tasks set up by the committee include:

1. Decision on basic aims and objectives of Aboriginal Studies Courses.
2. Links to total curriculum areas.
3. Materials production.

*This paper was delivered to the National Aboriginal Studies Conference in Alice Springs, July 1978.

4. Liaison with Aboriginal community:
 - a) in vetting materials;
 - b) identification of human resources.
5. To act as a clearing house for locally produced material.
6. Evaluation and authorisation of materials, methods and pupil/teacher resources.
7. In-service:
 - a) initiating new methods and materials.
 - b) pre-service for teachers with Aboriginal children in their classes.
8. Communication to schools.

Very early in our existence we found that there was lively debate on when and to what extent Aboriginal Studies should be introduced into schools in South Australia. It was agreed that, dependent on the environment, the children, and the teaching staff, there are many ways to introduce and develop Aboriginal Studies within the total school curriculum.

On the one hand it could be treated as a subject in its own right. In fact, one school of thought maintains that it should be treated as a subject in every grade of a child's school life. On the other hand it can be studied as part of an integrated studies program at various levels of a child's schooling. This will be referred to at a later stage.

Whichever way it is included in the curriculum, it is essential that all Australian children, regardless of their ethnic background, have the opportunity to develop a greater understanding of Aboriginals as they are today, as well as an honest appreciation of their historic role in Australia's development. This must include an accurate understanding and a valuing of Aboriginal culture and life styles.

With this in mind, the following rationale was adopted for the teaching of Aboriginal Studies in South Australian schools.

The South Australian Education Department believes that an exploration of Aboriginal life, culture and values, should be part of the social education of each South Australian child.

Each child should be aware of:

Traditional Aboriginal culture.

Contemporary Aboriginal culture (tribal, rural and urban).

Effects of cultural conflict on both the invading and invaded cultures.

The child's own underlying values, and the extent to which they reflect his/her own background, compared with the possible alternative values of traditional Aboriginal culture.

PRIMARY SUB-COMMITTEE

This group has set itself the following tasks:

1. To ensure that the new South Australian Social Studies Course recognises that Aboriginal people are an integral part of modern Australian society and that sensitive and positive references are made to Aboriginals in as many topics as possible.

2. To develop two specific units in the new Social Studies Course :

Year 4: Indigenous People - Australian Aboriginals.

Year 6: Indigenous People in Change.

These two units are being fully developed into Teachers' Booklets.

3. In addition to the teachers' reference material, a list has been drawn up of resource material to be produced, and this is in various stages of production. This material is to support the Social Studies Course and can be considered in two sections:-

Written Material and Charts -

Wall charts depicting environment, food, shelters, artifacts, art, dancing and music in various natural environments of Australia.

Master sheets of suggested activities to support teachers in the two units being developed.

A booklet *Aboriginals of Australia* to be used as background information for children. It will include sections on many Aboriginal groups of Australia and will be suitable for copying by teachers for classroom use.

Audio and Visual Material:

Large coloured photographs (35 cm x 28 cm) will be produced by the Educational Technology Centre and will show urban Aboriginals in the community as workers, family groups, people at play, living with others, and groups in the community. These photographs will help to ensure that Aboriginal people are represented in the total Social Studies Course. We have found support amongst Aboriginal people for this phase of our development and many photographs have already been taken.

Sets of audio-visuals which will depict Aboriginals in change.

Sets of audio-visuals to show Aboriginal people in their different natural environments.

These resources are aimed primarily at supporting the new Social Studies Course which is about to be piloted in a small number of schools. This is not to say that it is the only way to deal with the subject in the curriculum. In fact, a group is looking at alternative methods of using Margaret Simpson's *People of the Western Desert*, with modifications which would make it suitable for use in South Australia.

SECONDARY SUB-COMMITTEE

A teacher has also been seconded to work in the secondary areas, especially in conjunction with the new Social Science Course which is being developed. She is currently compiling a booklet which outlines any course, pertaining to Aboriginals, which has been developed in individual secondary schools throughout the state.

Members of this secondary sub-committee are also examining the areas of History, Geography and English in order to establish where an Aboriginal component can be included.

IN-SERVICE SUB-COMMITTEE

This sub-committee perceives itself as a vital backing group to the curriculum and materials development sub-committee. Its aims are to assist teachers to use ideas and materials effectively and to foster in teachers positive attitudes, skills and knowledge. Its operation is based on certain basic principles:

Locally based programs are most effective.

Aboriginal involvement is essential.

Priorities are determined on a needs basis; needs, that is, in terms of the local race relations situation and in terms of expressed teacher interest.

Organization of regional conferences is undertaken on the basis of the group providing the program and the school or region managing the administrative arrangements.

Activities during 1978 include:

- . Western Desert Kit conference.
- . *The Aboriginal Child at School*, run at Port Augusta, a town with a large population of Aboriginal people.
- . *Teaching Aboriginal Studies* to be run at Port Lincoln, with local Aboriginal leaders to be involved with the planning.
- . Negotiations will be commenced with Murray Bridge to identify interested teachers and their particular needs so that working conferences can be held next year.
- . A locally organised Western Desert Kit conference which is being arranged for third term in the Central Western District of Adelaide may include some of the modifications recommended at the conference earlier this year.

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES REVIEW SUB-COMMITTEE

This sub-committee was originally the seed from which all our endeavours grew. In 1974 a group which came to be known as the Aboriginal Studies Library Project was formed. A small committee was set up to look into the resource information in schools concerning Aboriginals. They found that:

1. There was a paucity of materials;
2. Schools either did not use, or know how to use, what they had;
3. Aboriginal people were pressing for a more positive approach in the materials which were available to teachers. Funds from the Aboriginal State Grants for Aboriginal Assistance were used to supply a core selection of books to about 50 schools.

Schools were asked to report on:

- . Teacher usage
- . Student usage
- . Suitability of materials
- . Any contentious issues found in the books supplied.

Regular conferences were held, and annotated recommended lists of books were produced for both primary and secondary schools.

The three year period of the project came to an end in 1976, but many of the people who had been involved formed the nucleus of the Aboriginal Studies Curriculum Committee, which was formed in 1977. The materials and resources review sub-committee perceive their tasks as:

1. Continuing to review books and other resources which could be placed in regional resource centres.
2. Maintaining a contact with publishers.
3. Recommending books for inclusion on the free book lists from which South Australian schools obtain their text books and some of their resource material.
4. Previewing sections in encyclopedias that relate to Aborigines.
5. Compiling a list of poems for use in schools. This will include -
 - a) anthologies
 - b) poems about Aborigines
 - c) poems by Aborigines.

They have also recommended that collections of books and appropriate artifacts be established at each regional office for loan to teachers.

ABORIGINAL LIAISON SUB-COMMITTEE

This sub-committee is seen as being the most important overall, and has two main aims:

1. *All material that is finally produced should be vetted by Aboriginal people. Ultimately, there should be Aboriginal input at all stages of our curriculum development. It is hoped that Aboriginal people will, in fact, begin to initiate projects within our South Australian curriculum and will assist in all stages of its development.*
2. *Aboriginal resource people will be identified by this sub-committee so that the Curriculum Committee, individual schools and teachers will be able to make use of local expertise when undertaking courses or developing curriculum at the school level.*

This is one area that is under reorganization, as the majority of Aboriginal people who have expertise in the area of education, particularly curriculum development, are so heavily committed in other areas of Aboriginal advancement that we have encountered difficulties in getting them together regularly to assist.

A State Aboriginal Education Consultative Committee has recently been formed and will greatly assist us in this area of development.

Each sub-committee has been able to successfully involve Aboriginal people, mainly teacher aides, and we are hoping this will achieve input at 'grass roots' level.

CONCLUSION

In South Australia we are indeed fortunate to have a very supportive Aboriginal Education section, and the Superintendent, Mr John Coker, has encouraged and initiated many projects for the advancement of Aboriginal Studies in our schools. We have found that to change teachers' attitudes is a slow process and our endeavours to develop courses and materials have met many frustrations in the past few years.

The classroom teachers we are hoping to reach fall into many categories:

1. Those who are vitally interested and have a strong background of personal experience with Aboriginal people and/or academic study in the area.
2. Those vitally interested, but with no background experience or study.

3. The very good teacher, who has no interest or background experience, but will successfully teach a course if it can be provided.
4. The disinterested teachers who will perpetuate many of the old paternalistic ideas and attitudes if they attempt the topic at all. In fact, it would probably be better if they did not attempt to involve their classes.
5. The teacher who is racially prejudiced and who would require an intensive in-service program.

There are difficulties in deciding how and what should be involved in Aboriginal Studies, but this must not stop the development of relevant courses, because well-meaning teachers will continue to teach the topic in their classrooms, regardless. Therefore the most important facet we must consider in introducing these courses is the in-service training that must accompany them. Written courses and materials without in-service programs cannot produce attitudinal change in either teachers or children, so a great effort will be required to involve the teachers.

The courses that are developed must ensure that Aboriginal people are recognised as having an important place in Australia's heritage and in today's multi-cultural society.



GETTING STARTED ON MYTH...

Br D. Howard,
Primary Co-ordinator,
Christian Brothers,
Broome, W.A.

Myths express what is significant during man's experience, and so communicate at a deeper level than other stories. They should never be treated as pre-scientific attempts to explain how things began. The creation of myths met a much more profound and basic need.

In presenting myths to children, there are many methods that can be used. Rather than just presenting one or two myths and leaving it at that, significance is gained by presenting children with a collection of myths on one topic, for example, creation or