



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*.

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BOOKS:

TEACHING ABORIGINAL CULTURE IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

"A very exciting book of a superb project..." So writes Rosalie Sluggett, Adviser in Aboriginal Education at Port Augusta, South Australia. She had just read *Teaching Aboriginal Culture in Primary Schools*, a report by Kelvin Hill, a Queensland teacher, on a project funded by the Schools Commission Innovations Program. The report has been published by the Education Information Retrieval Service and is available free of charge from this dissemination service.

In his report, Kelvin Hill describes how children from a group of primary schools in Northern Queensland learnt about Aboriginal culture under the tutorship of tribal elders. In other words they learnt about local Aboriginal culture at first hand, direct from the Aboriginal people themselves. Sixteen practical lessons were devised, covering various aspects of Aboriginal life from "Making a Fire" to "Musical Instruments". These lessons are described in ingenious detail by Kelvin Hill. For example:-

Preparation and Cooking of Foods - Vegetables, Fruits and Nuts

Materials: Crushing and grinding stones, digging sticks, carrying bag. Samples of variety of berries, fruits, nuts, yams, etc.

- Lesson:**
- a) Display of different food items, where they grow, how obtained, preparation for eating.
 - b) Use of grinding and crushing stones using the nuts which formed the staple food, digging stick, carrying bag.
 - c) Emphasis on migration patterns associated with foods available - only enough taken to meet needs, preservation of environment.

In this area there were two nuts which were staple foods. One was a nut from a tree which the early settlers valued as a building material. Consequently the Aboriginal environment and food supply was drastically upset. Captain Cook saw the Cooktown Aboriginals eating the other kind of nut. He fed these nuts to the ship's company, who became violently ill. (The Aboriginals had a special method of preparation for the nuts). Children were told the method for preparing the bardil nut.

Children previously had the impression that anything cooked by open fire was held over the fire on the end of a stick. They were amazed to find the Aboriginal had developed unique ways of doing things. How did the Aboriginal carry eggs down the mountain without breaking them? He suspended each egg in special, large leaves hung from a cord around his waist.

A fish was cooked Aboriginal-style, and sampled by the children. They were shown how all items needed for cooking were obtained directly from the environment - even the 'plates' (special leaves).

Kelvin Hill also discusses the origins and implications of the project and his experience of working with Aboriginal people, showing warmth and humanity and an obvious affinity with the landscape and people of Northern Queensland.

There are many cities and towns in Australia with an Aboriginal community. Many of these people, if approached with respect and genuine interest, would be prepared to consider assisting in developing a program of the kind he describes. There is no reason why the idea need be restricted to primary schools.

This account of a piece of real educational innovation is offered to all teachers interested in developing a genuine course of Aboriginal Studies.

Get your copy of *Teaching Aboriginal Culture in Primary Schools* by writing to:

E.I.R.S.
Wattle Park Teachers Centre
424 Kensington Road
WATTLE PARK SA 5066

EIRS is responsible for disseminating the final reports of Innovations projects. Kelvin Hill's report is just one of a thousand or more! Why not enquire what other reports are available in your fields of interest.

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