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ABORIGINAL STUDIES IN MOUNT ISA

The Kalkadoon Cultural and Locality Education Group

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Just occasionally you hear of a really exciting project being undertaken. The Kalkadoon Cultural and Locality Education Group is one such project.

The highly enthusiastic and motivated team has been unearthing and collecting a wealth of information which they are feeding back into both primary and secondary classes around Mount Isa. At present they are working under the limitations of a Schools Commission Special Projects Program grant, with no guarantee of continued funding once the initial grant is spent.

Too often, due to lack of resources and/or interest, Aboriginal studies in Queensland schools is merely a superficial glance at what is a culturally rich, diverse and many faceted society. The booklet *Aboriginal Studies in Queensland Schools*, developed by the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Committee, and published by the Education Department, is too often gathering dust in some obscure corner of the school both unknown and unused by most of the staff.

Hopefully, the Kalkadoon Cultural and Locality Education Group will receive the kind of support that will enable their project to become an integral and continuing part of the schools in Mount Isa. To provide a better picture of the activities of this group I have reprinted two articles. The first is part of a press release by Sunset State School in the *North-West Star*, Wednesday, 11th March, 1981.

At our last staff meeting we had several guest speakers. One of the guest speakers was Jenny Czislawski, who is the Program Director of a newly formed group called *The Kalkadoon Cultural and Locality Education Group*. This

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group offers schools an educational program which will widen all children's horizons by providing real experience so that the children may obtain relevant social studies skills. Included in these skills are: collecting, recording, collation, analysis, interpretation and evaluation.

The experiences the children have in the field are supplemented by activities within the school including mime, drama, music and language arts activities, such as creative writing, Aboriginal mythology and studies in multi-cultural work.

As a bonus, the children have an opportunity to learn traditional craft work and participate in a bush survival course. As well as providing a scheme for all school children to learn about the Aboriginal way of life the group aims to foster in the Aboriginal child a pride in his identity and in the European child an appreciation of an ancient culture in harmony with nature.

Behind all this work is a very hard working team - Program Director Jenny Czulowski is supported by the Treasurer, Carrie Rankine (Field Consultant); Mr Val Crowley, who teaches dreamtime stories, historical knowledge and who understands many of the tribal ways; Mr Gibson, who is the Aboriginal Ranger and teacher of Aboriginal relics; Auntie MacNathan, who specialises in food gathering; Mrs Major, field consultant and Mr Arthur Peterson, cultural teacher.

The following is an extract from a letter by Jenny Czulowski, Program Director.

...I am writing to you on behalf of our team to let you know about our activities...

Mrs Major, our Field Trip Director, has worked tirelessly since March 2nd. She has driven 500 children over rough country to Painted Rocks (in her own vehicle), cooked 3 dampers each trip two to three times each week, worked with the children at school visits as well as on the field and spent much time gathering bush foods for teaching purposes...

From Grades 3 to 7 we take children on field trips. They learn the stories behind paintings and how the paint was mixed and applied. Mr Peterson teaches the children out in an open air classroom on a high rocky area facing the paintings.

The Aboriginal ranger, Mr Gibson, speaks of the paintings' archeological value and of the vandalism on the paintings.

On a number of occasions we have visited an Aboriginal stone axe quarry and spear point factory 13 miles from the Painted Rocks area. At this site Mr Peterson shows how a spearhead is attached to a spear. The ranger explains the use made of the various types of chippings and how to recognize them. Some of them were used as tools, others to make decorations on coolamons etc.

While the children walk several hundred yards to these sites, back at the habitation site Mrs Major prepares the damper and Mrs Rankine attends to the tea and damper for about 39 people.

While the children eat their damper Uncle Val, an elder, tells the children dreamtime stories as they sit in a big semi-circle. He also tells stories of historical significance - many of them from first-hand information.

Mr Peterson demonstrates strengthening of a spear (which he has selected on site) over a fire. He makes a woomera and then gives a spear throwing demonstration.

The children then learn a traditional funeral dance to the music of a didgeridoo and they learn the correct clapping rhythm as they dance. We are in the process of having 30 sets of clapsticks made. The children learn other songs and other rhythms.

Mrs Major and her helper explain native food recognition and give lots of interesting and really unique information that she is gathering from the old people living in Mount Isa. She collects the wild foods that are available and those that are not available are taught using photograph albums that our team would like to publish along with information gained from Kalkadoon people.

Bush survival methods are taught also - in particular how to find water sources.

At the end of the week we follow this up with a school visit. The ranger, Mr Gibson, shows films and explains artifacts. Mrs Major demonstrates grinding seeds on an

original grindstone which we found several hundred miles from where it was quarried. It is very large and heavy.

Mr Peterson (Naminamee) dresses and body paints himself in the age-old tradition. He is allowed to paint only his own particular marking - that of the Goodidowa dreamtime.

Arthur demonstrates how to use firesticks and light a fire.

Children are taught the traditional damper that was made from gathered dried seeds and formed a major part of the Kalkadoon diet. Even a type of baking powder was produced by grinding certain seeds to add to the flour.

Through this program we are learning much information from the old people which we feel is extremely valuable and would certainly be lost if our group had not been motivated to seek it out...

We have as a team visited Kalkadoon High School and discussed with the principal establishing a Historical Resource Centre in the school library where evidence of Kalkadoon success models (past and present) may be on file or on display. The principal was happy to approve the concept.

Our big concern is future funding. We feel it is vital for this work to be continued and we are looking for a proper wage to be paid to Mr Peterson and also to Mrs Major who will be liaising with all Mount Isa schools, as I can give only this year for this time-consuming and, frankly, very intensive work.

Significant Aboriginal Studies in school programs is still a rare occurrence either as specific units or integrated throughout the curriculum. Teachers are neither trained nor adequately equipped in this area. It is essential, therefore, that schools look to those people in the community who can assist. This is what the Kalkadoon Cultural and Locality Group has done. Where such a group does not exist, schools can still draw on the skills, personal backgrounds and perspectives of the Aboriginal community in their area.

I would recommend that teachers refer to the Education Department publication *Teaching Aboriginal Studies in Queensland Schools*. The booklet provides suggestions in various subject areas from pre-school to grade 12.

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