



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 : A BEGINNING AT MT DRUITT HIGH

*Stephen Kurtz

In 1988 Mt Druitt High will begin an elective course in Aboriginal Studies. The process for development for this course has taken two years and was on the basis that this course could only get off the ground if it had the full support and involvement of both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and community members.

In 1986 the 32 Aboriginal students enrolled at the school formed a club and called themselves the *Dharruk Koories* (Mt Druitt is in the suburb of Dharruk, which was named after the Aboriginal tribe that originally inhabited the area). The group met weekly with me and the school community worker and quickly formed a list of aims.

The Dharruk Koories hoped to:

- Learn more about Aboriginal culture and history.
- Make school more enjoyable and relevant.
- Improve the image Aborigines have in the school and the community.
- Involve Aboriginal parents in school activities.
- Try to correct biased and racist attitudes held by some members of the community.
- Encourage Aboriginal students to be proud of their Aboriginality.
- Help foster a sense of purpose and direction for the Aboriginal students.

So far the list of student based initiatives has been quite impressive. The Dharruk Koories have:

Previously published in *Teaching History* Vol.21 Pt 4, December 87.

* Teacher at Mt Druitt High who, over the past three years has worked with Aboriginal parents, students and the community worker towards improving educational opportunities for Mt Druitt students.

1. Attended the march at Blacktown for National Aborigines Day.
2. Had guest speakers to the club, including Pearl Bridger, the Metropolitan West Aboriginal Education Consultant, and parents of Aboriginal students.
3. Opened up correspondence with Aborigines in other schools and visited some of them.
4. Attended the Aboriginal and Islander Dance Theatre Company in Surrey Hills.
5. Held a BBQ for Aboriginal students and parents, the principal and members of staff.
6. Designed and screenprinted a Dharruk Koories T-shirt which was sold to members of the school, making a profit of over \$200 to be re-channelled back into the club.
7. Attended a weekend camp at Brewongle Field Study Centre at Sackville.
8. Maintained a scrapbook recording the club's history.
9. Designed and painted an Aboriginal mural on the wall of the school library.

These initiatives have had a positive impact on the school and contributed towards achieving the group's aims. For example, the Aboriginal students are a lot prouder of their Aboriginality and have a more positive self esteem. This is highlighted with the case of a Year 7 girl. Most of her peers did not believe her to be Aboriginal because of her fair complexion. When she was first invited to the meetings she responded, "What for? Being Aboriginal is boring."

The same girl now regularly attends the group's activities and her parents have also begun participating in several of the activities.

Another positive aspect to come out of these initiatives was the co-operation and sharing that went on between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. The mural is a good example of this. A group of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students was formed and they met at lunchtimes to work out the theme and design of the mural. They decided they should show details of Aboriginal Australia before British settlement, the arrival of the First Fleet and conflict between the races, and then the two races working and living together.

In the centre of the mural is the school emblem and the Dharruk Koories emblem. A local Aboriginal artist, Dan Eastwood, assisted with the actual painting of the mural, PEP money provided equipment, and DULUX Paint donated tins of paint.

At the opening ceremony over 50 people attended. It was very moving to see so many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parents and students coming together to recognise the co-operation and sharing that went into painting the mural.

There were also staff-based initiatives. The Aboriginal Studies course was explained and promoted to the school executive at a meeting, and Pearl Bridger, the Aboriginal Education consultant for Metropolitan West conducted an awareness-raising meeting on Aboriginal education for the whole staff.

All these initiatives made laying the groundwork for a course in Aboriginal Studies much easier. The publicity created has aroused the curiosity, interest and support of large sections of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parents and students, as well as the P&C and the staff. What's more, it was evident there was a real need and demand for formalised lessons in Aboriginal Studies.

A series of meetings took place involving the school principal and members of staff, Aboriginal parents and students, the Metropolitan West Aboriginal Education consultant, representatives from Pittuma Aboriginal Reserve Centre, members of the P&C and the school community worker, Lyn Clifton.

The group presented ideas and suggestions on the content and format the new Aboriginal Studies course would take. These were written into a draft program by staff and presented to the group for approval. At the final meeting when the program was finished almost 40 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members of the local community were present - the largest parent meeting the school had during the year.

The final program was submitted for approval as a school-based course and approved.

What we have now is a course in Aboriginal Studies that has the full support and involvement of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parents and students and the staff. Sufficient numbers of students have chosen the course for it to run in 1988 and D.S.P. funding will help it in its first year. There will be problems such as providing adequate resources and ensuring enough students choose it each year to keep the course running, but because the foundations have been built on student and community support the feeling is one of confidence.

MT DRUITT'S ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDIES PROGRAM

RATIONALE

This elective has been designed to meet the needs and requests of an increasing number of students in the school. There are over thirty Aboriginal students in the school and a growing number of non-Aboriginal students who wish for some in-depth information and practical experience in Aboriginal Studies.

Although Aboriginal perspectives have been incorporated into all subject areas and an Aboriginal Club has been formed, these students would like formalised classes on Aboriginal history, culture society and issues.

The course has the full support of the local Aboriginal community. During 1986 and 1987 there have been seven meetings, attended by Aboriginal parents and students of Mt Druitt, the Metropolitan West Aboriginal Education consultant, representatives from Pittuma Aboriginal Resource Centre, members of P&C, the principal, the school community worker, and teachers. The ideas presented in this document were all formulated at these meetings.

The content areas and the skills presented in this program are unique to this course at Mt Druitt High and the course fits into the total curriculum changes of the school, especially the goal of improving retention rates amongst Aboriginal students.

AIMS OF THE COURSE

Knowledge

Students to acquire, through classwork, individual and group research, community work and field studies the knowledge of:

- who are Aborigines and what is Aboriginality.
- how Aborigines live today - urban, country, traditional.
- famous and successful Aborigines (biographical study).
- Aboriginal language.
- the history of the Dharruk tribe (pre and post contact).
- contemporary Mt Druitt - community groups/resources/services.
- differences within Aboriginal communities.

- one other culture, e.g. Nth American Indians, Maoris.
- Aboriginal dance, music, art, craft, living skills, legends.
- contemporary Aboriginal issues.

Skills

- students to be able to do group and individual research using a wide variety of resources.
- students to be able to detect bias, prejudice and discriminatory attitudes from various sources.
- students to be able to communicate and co-operate with sections of the wider community, e.g., pre-schools, Pittuma resource centre.
- students to be able to analyse conflicting evidence and make judgements based on historical evidence.
- students to be able to collect evidence from the local community on Aboriginal history (some Aboriginal parents have already come forth with material).

Attitude

- an appreciation that Australia has a black history as well as a white history.
- an appreciation and increased awareness of the value and contribution Aboriginal culture and history have made to the wider Australian community.
- to promote better understanding and mutual respect between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and hence the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members of the Mt Druitt community.
- an increased awareness of discriminatory attitudes and stereotypical thinking by sections of the community.
- an appreciation that history is not just concerned with books, but is open to many other sources of information and creative expression.
- for Aboriginal students to develop an improved sense of personal worth through the acceptance and appreciation not only of their specific Aboriginal identity but also of their role in the wider Australian community.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Pittuma Aboriginal Resource Centre, Mt Druitt.

Liaison with Aboriginal teacher aides at neighbouring schools.

Murrawena Aboriginal Child Care Centre, Mt Druitt.

Local Aboriginal artist - Dan Eastwood.

Aboriginal Artists Gallery - Kent Street, Sydney.

Eora Centre, Glebe.

Australian Museum, Sydney.

Aboriginal and Islander Dance Theatre Company.

Brewongle Field Study Centre.

Metropolitan West Aboriginal consultant, Pearl Bridger.

STUDENT VIEWPOINT - Sharon Roach, Year 10, Mt Druitt High

*(Reprinted with the kind permission of
Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker) and Clevo Koorie Newsletter 4:1)*

During 1986 and 1987 Aboriginal students at Mt Druitt High School came together and joined a group called the Dharruk Koories.

The main aim of this group was to find out more knowledge of Aboriginal people. The group has done many things since forming. Some of them include a camp, marching through the streets of Blacktown during Aboriginal Week 1986, painting an Aboriginal mural at Mt Druitt High School and, most recently, writing up an Aboriginal electives course to be taught at Mt Druitt High School in 1988 to inform Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students about Aboriginal people and their culture.

Altogether in the group there are about 20 students, all of Aboriginal descent. I am one of those students and have been in the group from the start. I have learnt many things about Aboriginal people that I didn't know before and I think that the group has been really good because all of us have not only learnt things about Aboriginal people, we have also had fun doing it. Not only Aboriginal students have been involved but also their parents. My parents aren't normally involved in many things around the school but they have been behind myself and my brother 100% in this group. They have helped with the mural and also with the writing of the Aboriginal electives course. Aboriginal students are now well-known and they have a stronger identity. This has shown them how to be proud of themselves and their culture.

MT DRUITT HIGH'S ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS PROGRAM

Course Contents	No of Hours	Objectives	Assessment
<i>Aboriginal Culture & Heritage</i> *Who are Aborigines? - includes Torres Str Islanders *Why should we know about Aboriginal Australians? *What is Aboriginality? *How do Aborigines live today? - urban (city & suburbs) - country - traditional - how are these lifestyles different? - how are they changing? *What are the stereotypes? *Biographical Study: - does not have to be a famous Aborigine. Could be someone successful or interesting. - Some suggestions: - Bennelong, Pemulwuy, Colby, Wylie; P.McKenzie, Aborigines in local Govt, Oodgeroo Noonuccal (K.Walker), J.Governor, E.Cawley; L.Rose, A.Namatjira; - Sir Douglas Nicholls, Ella Brothers, C.Perkins, N.Bonner, D.Gulpilil, Aboriginal Rugby League Team 1987, - Aboriginal Cricket Tour of England 19th Century, D.Eastwood.	10 weeks or 25-32 hours	<i>Knowledge</i> *students to understand the terms Aborigine and Aboriginality. *students to compare and contrast different Aboriginal lifestyles (urban, country, traditional). *students to know several successful Aborigines from various fields. *students to gain the knowledge of some common Aboriginal words. <i>Skills</i> *students can define terms. *students can locate and use evidence from a range of sources. *students can compare and contrast lifestyles of Aborigines. *students can research and present information on Aboriginal personalities. *students can make and sustain a growing glossary. *students can make use of community resources. <i>Affective</i> *students can appreciate the diversity in Aboriginal lifestyles today. *students can appreciate the contribution to society of individual Aborigines. *students gain an awareness of and critical eye towards stereotypes.	These are the modes of assessment for the first two units: <i>ABORIGINAL CULTURE AND HERITAGE</i> and <i>THE LOCAL AREA</i>. They are to be completed by the end of first semester for the school half-yearly report. 1. Research assignment on a Biographical Assignment (10%). 2. Research assignment on a tribe of your own choice (10%). 3. A class objective test on concepts, terms and skills (20%). 4. Classwork, including bookmark, an oral mark and group work mark for the interviewing (20%). 5. Half-yearly Rank Test. A content and skills test (40%).
<i>The Local Area</i> *History of the Dharruk Tribe - - geography & location - pre-history - social organisation - economy and material - early contacts (1788-1800)	10 weeks or 25-32 hours	<i>Knowledge</i> *students gain an understanding of the history of the Dharruk tribe (pre and post contact). *students to gain an understanding of contemporary Mt Druitt and the Aboriginal services available.	

Course Contents	No of Hours	Objectives	Assessment
<i>The Local Area cont.</i> - conflict with British to 1816. - missions and reserves: 1850-1980 - assimilation: 1900-1980 - the people today - visit Australian Museum. *Mt Druitt today - population and community groups - government role, planning and services - Aboriginal organisations and grants. *Interview skills: contemporary Mt Druitt - What's available, who's around, way of life, influence, etc. - interview technique - planning - editing, writing - summarising - photography - visit local centres *Research assignment - research into an Aboriginal tribe of your own choice - (N.B. None of the Aborigines of Mt Druitt High School are descendants from the Dharruk tribe.) <i>Traditional Lifestyles</i> *Differences with Aboriginal culture survival, lifestyles - - coastal tribes from Sydney area - inland tribe - Murray River tribes - Tasmania	10 weeks or 25-32 hours	<i>Knowledge</i> *students to gain a knowledge of an Aboriginal tribe of their own choice. <i>Skills</i> *students will be able to understand chronology, including terms B.P., B.C., and A.D. *students will be able to make conclusions based on historical evidence. *students will be able to write a questionnaire, conduct interviews, collate and edit information and form critical judgements. *students will be able to do individual research. * students to develop mapping skills. <i>Affective</i> *students can appreciate the local black history as well as the local white history. *students will appreciate history is not just concerned with books but has many forms of expression. *students to appreciate the value of co-operating and getting along with members of the local community. <i>Knowledge</i> *students to understand the differences and diversity within traditional style Aborigines. *students to learn aspects of traditional Aboriginal lifestyles. *students to gain knowledge of one other indigenous group.	These are the modes of assessment for the last two units: <i>Traditional Lifestyles</i> <i>Aboriginal Issues on the 20th Century</i>. They are to be completed by the end of the second semester for the school yearly report.

Course Contents	No. of hours	Objective	Assessment
<i>Traditional Lifestyles (cont.)</i> *Aboriginal Dance - visit Aboriginal and Islander Dance Theatre *Aboriginal Music - visit to school by Aboriginal teachers - display for Education Week *Aboriginal Art - visit Art Gallery and Eora Centre, Glebe *Aboriginal Craft - visit to school by Aboriginal artists *Aboriginal Living Skills - cooking, hunting, shelter *Aboriginal Legends and Yarns - visit and presentation to Murrawena Aboriginal Child Care Centre *Another Culture: Compare and contrast with one of - - North American Indians - Maoris - Papua/New Guineans - Asians	10 weeks or 25-32 hours	<i>Skills</i> *students to put on a display/presentation of skills in traditional life. *students will be able to copy simple Aboriginal arts and crafts *students to be able to present an oral exercise, e.g., on legends/yarns. <i>Affective</i> *students to gain an appreciation of the value and contribution of Aboriginal culture has to the Australian community. *students to gain an appreciation and insight into the diversity of Aboriginal culture. <i>Knowledge</i> *students to develop an understanding of Aboriginal society in the 19th and 20th centuries. *students to understand the effects of culture contact. *students to gain an understanding into contemporary issues, including their backgrounds, and directions for the future.	1. Research Assignment on one other similar culture (10%). 2. Field Study assignment on the Brewongle Camp (10%). 3. A class objective test on concept, terms and skills (20%) 4. Classwork, including bookwork, an oral mark and group work mark for the media file (20%). 5. Yearly Rank Test. A content and skills test (40%).
<i>Aboriginal Issues in the 20th Century</i> *Overview of 19th Century History - Yagan - Myall Creek - protection and separation - pacification by force. *20th Century History - protection policies and reserves - welfare organisations and anthropologists - assimilation policies - 1938 sesquicentenary			

Course Contents	No. of Hours	Objective	Assessment
<i>Aboriginal Issues in the 20th Century (cont.)</i> - education and work in the 1950s and 1960s - Integration Policy - 1965 - 1967, Aborigines officially counted in census - 1970 - strengthening of traditional life *Contemporary Issues - A media study and file on these issues - - land rights - alcoholism/drugs - discrimination - education - art - archaeology - jail *Camp at Brewongle Field Study Centre *Conclusions - - where are Aborigines today?		<i>Skills</i> *Students to be able to detect bias and exaggeration in the media and other sources. *students to be able to critically examine evidence and make judgments based upon it. *students to be able to collect information and build up a media resource file. *students to develop basic living skills - the camp at Brewongle Field Study Centre <i>Affective</i> *students to develop an appreciation and awareness of how Western society has influenced and affected traditional and contemporary Aboriginal society. *students to develop insights into ways in which Aboriginal society can contribute to mainstream Australian society. *students to appreciate the outcomes of culture contact.	