



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 AT YEAR 12 IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA AND NORTHERN TERRITORY

*Adele Pring

Aboriginal Studies is now being taught at Year 12 level in South Australian schools as an externally moderated, school assessed subject, accredited by the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia.

It is a course in which students learn from Aboriginal people through their literature, their arts, their many organizations and from visiting Aboriginal communities. Current issues about Aborigines in the media form another component of the study.

Aboriginal Studies is not a course based on 'white fella' text books about Aborigines.

There are some critics. Some think that Aboriginal Studies should not be taught at this level until there are enough qualified Aboriginal teachers to teach it. Some others think it should be a more 'academic' course with traditional essays and exams.

Aboriginal Studies could easily have become a course which was based on a traditional history course, using 'Western' concepts or ways of looking at Aboriginal culture, but this didn't feel right. History text books did not seem the appropriate way of learning about what was felt to be a dynamic living culture. Aboriginal people themselves should be the experts and resource people for the learning to be appropriate.

The course is approved by the South Australian Aboriginal Education Consultative Committee.

Consultation with the Aboriginal Studies Curriculum Committee, many members of which are Aboriginal, showed that they wanted the course to include some practical components, including

.....

**Aboriginal Studies Curriculum Writer (Secondary), Aboriginal Studies Team, South Australian Education Department, Harewood Av., Enfield, S.A. 5058.*

learning directly from Aboriginal people. Several ideas were put forward such as field trips, Aboriginal literature, recording of oral histories, learning in small groups and use of good film.

A syllabus writing group was formed which included two Aboriginal Studies curriculum writers, one of whom had had several years experience teaching secondary Aboriginal Studies to predominantly Aboriginal students. These two writers met regularly with the remainder of the group which included a S.S.A.B.S.A. curriculum officer, two Aboriginal teachers and a lecturer in Aboriginal Studies. Consultation occurred extensively and regularly with Aboriginal people and teachers involved in the area throughout South Australia as the course evolved through many developmental drafts. Feedback was very positive, especially from Aboriginal adults who were feeling that it was a course which they would like to enrol in themselves.

Some of the challenges we had to keep in mind throughout the course development were the following. We wanted it to be a course which:

- Aboriginal students would want to enrol in and be successful in.
- Non-Aboriginal students would find relevant and interesting enough to choose, given an already wide choice at Year 12 level.
- Interested, caring teachers could teach without necessarily having academic qualifications in Aboriginal Studies (which few do).
- Involved Aboriginal people as resource persons as experts about their own culture and issues.
- Learning included not only historical knowledge but skills would be developed in critical analysis and awareness related to issues affecting Aboriginal people.
- Developed communication skills between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in a variety of settings.

Aboriginal Studies requires students to present a range of work for assessment. Critical analysis of Aboriginal arts and literature; Aboriginal history through film; and contemporary issues affecting Aboriginal people forms 60% of total assessment. Submissions can be presented in a variety of forms as long as they meet course objectives. A further 10% of assessment

involves a community project, the aim of which is to foster communication between students and Aboriginal people and organizations, and hopefully to give something in return. Some students have presented displays during NAIDOC week about Aboriginal organizations in their community for their community projects.

A field trip journal and report based on the students' field trip, an essential part of the course, is a further 10% of the assessment. The aim is for students to learn about the traditional life of a particular community, the invasion history of that area and to observe present day aspects. Field trips so far have been to Kakadu, the Flinders Ranges, Lake Condah in Victoria, the Coorong, Gerard Community in the Riverland and to Adelaide.

The final 20% of assessment is for a research project which could be on any of a wide range of possibilities which could include recording oral histories, researching an issue like 'black deaths in custody', contemporary Aboriginal music and musicians, surveys of attitudes, photographic presentations and many others. Some students' research projects will provide resources for their communities and future students.

We feel that by studying this course, students are better prepared for further study in the tertiary field if they choose this, are better able to understand and respond to social and political issues, have a greater understanding of all aspects of Aboriginal culture, will be confident in communications with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, and be better prepared for any career which involves working with Aboriginal people or any minority group.

It has been an exciting course and a challenging one to write and implement. The enthusiasm of students and teachers is very encouraging. Students have gone on to further tertiary study as teachers and one is studying for a B.A. in Cultural Heritage Management in Canberra.

When writing the course we especially did not want Aboriginal students to enrol and then fail, but nor did we want it to fail them by not being challenging enough academically. Nobody wanted a watered down course. We were aware that many Aboriginal people may enrol as adults and that they, and many other younger Aboriginal students, though not all by any means, may have difficulty with a course based on a lot of 'heavy' reading and traditional essays.

We did not want non-Aboriginal students to pass this course without developing a real understanding of present day Aboriginal people and culture, which was a danger if the course was based on text books alone. We believed that all students needed to have contact with Aboriginal people otherwise paternalistic or racist attitudes could slip by unchallenged.

Another pitfall was to spend so much time learning about traditional Aboriginal culture that too little time would be left to learn about contemporary culture and issues as well as the invasion history. None of these aspects can be understood well alone. We decided to adopt a flexible approach because the course is for one year of study which is a relatively short time and because students who enrol would already have a range of background knowledge of various aspects of Aboriginal history and culture. Students who have undertaken Aboriginal Studies previously, as more and more students will have done, would not need to spend even more time studying traditional culture while others who know very little would need more time on this aspect.

Several excellent videos and films have been made documenting the 'European invasion' history, and these, it was felt, should form the basis of learning about that part of Aboriginal history, rather than again, spending most of the year reading this in text books. Films and video would be analysed by students for cultural and historical accuracy by reference to other sources including Aboriginal people and timelines.

Contemporary issues and culture are learnt through involvement with Aboriginal people and through their organisations and communities as well as their literature and arts. Students could learn how the traditional culture is being adapted through living examples like the batik work by women at Ernabella and Utopia, and through rock music like that of *Warumpi Band* and *No Fixed Address*.

There have been plays in recent years like Eva Johnson's *Murras* and forthcoming *Mimini's Voices*, Bob Maza's *The Keepers* and Jack Davis's *Barungin*. Recent Aboriginal literature like Sally Morgan's *My Place*, Eric Willmot's *Pemulwuy*, Archie Weller's short stories *Going Home Stories*, and Ruby Langford's *Don't Take Your Love to Town*, together with oral histories recently published like Miriam Dadleh's *Fair Devil Sticky Beak* and Lallie Lennon's *Maralinga* (both published in *Australian Short Stories*) and *Survivors in Our Own Land* which documents history through the words of Aboriginal people, are all excellent

resources for learning the Aboriginal perspective of Aboriginal history as well as being examples of positive contributions Aboriginal people are making.

Too often, academic courses have looked at Aboriginal history and Aboriginal 'problems'. Our course does not try to hide any problems, but through its approach acknowledges that Aboriginal people themselves are the best ones to decide their own future.

Archie Weller's short stories present a sometimes dismal life for urban Aboriginal youth but the fact is that he has written and had published these very emotionally moving stories and has written them extremely well. So many exciting developments are occurring with Aboriginal people at present through film making, acting, poetry, music, art, dance, literature and in various political settings that by studying Aboriginal contemporary culture and issues through this approach, one cannot help but be impressed by the positive nature of developments even though they sometimes reflect negative issues.

We recommend the developmental process, content and methods we have used as a basis for senior secondary Aboriginal Studies courses generally. Copies of the syllabus document and guidelines for teachers are available at a minimal cost from:

The Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia
134 Fullarton Road
Rose Park SA 5067

THE EORA CENTRE - TAFE, NSW

The EORA Centre is primarily for Aboriginal Visual and Performing Arts and has been a part of NSW TAFE since it opened four years ago. The EORA Centre aims to promote and reflect positive images of Australian Aboriginal people and to encourage individual creativity, discipline and self-expression. It is located in Redfern, Sydney, and is an educational centre for Aboriginal people. It is possible to progress from being unable to read or write to matriculation in the friendly supportive atmosphere of the EORA Centre. The Centre is available for part-time evening classes.

For information - Ring (02) 699 6741, or write, or visit EORA Centre, Winns Building, 199 Regent Street, Redfern, Sydney, NSW, 2016.

ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER PEOPLE WHO ARE
INTERESTED IN BECOMING
TEACHERS (AITEP PROGRAM)

OR
COMMUNITY WELFARE WORKERS (AICWEP PROGRAM)

James Cook University of North Queensland is now receiving applications from Aboriginal and Islander people interested in tertiary level programs in TEACHING or COMMUNITY WELFARE.

The following courses commence in 1990:

(a) EDUCATION

- Early Childhood
- Primary
- Secondary

b) COMMUNITY WELFARE

If you are a current Year 12 student, or are over 19 years old (with or without Year 12) you can receive information about all of these courses by writing to:

AITEP Applications
School of Education
James Cook University
TOWNSVILLE Q 4811

or by phoning : Debbie Travis (AITEP Early Childhood Education)
on (077) 814359
Beth Meehan (AITEP Primary/Secondary)
on (077) 814641
Robyn Lynn (AICWEP Community Welfare)
on (077) 814898

APPLICATIONS CLOSE: Friday, 20 October, 1989

If any Aboriginal or Islander person is interested in a career in any area of study other than Education and Community Welfare offered by James Cook University of North Queensland, such as Nursing, Law, Commerce, Science, etc., write and request information about special entry to these courses. Write to:

The Registrar, James Cook Univeristy, Townsville Q 4811