



# The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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## KOORIE PRIMARY STUDY CENTRE ULLADULLA

*A report by Nell Mooney, Co-ordinator; Lee Casey, Tutor; Jan Allam, Cheryle Hughes and Lorraine Carriage, voluntary helpers.*

At the Ulladulla High School Aboriginal Homework Centre, we discovered a need with upcoming sixth class students for the basic 3Rs. It was incomprehensible how children could reach high school and still not be able to read and do basic mathematics.

Enquiries to Charles Dougherty, Regional District Inspector at the time, and Nerida Tyler, Regional Aboriginal Educational Consultant, resulted in information on organisations able to help. We received polite refusals from several groups, but the Norman Catts referred our submission to the Aboriginal Education Council (NSW). Our request for funding and tutor allowance was accepted and on 21 November, 1988, we held our first Study Centre.

The co-operation of the principal of Ulladulla Primary School, was invaluable to us. She supplied rooms and equipment for our use. She had been approached earlier about a Study Centre but felt the need did not exist. After she monitored our students' progress for a year she realised the need did exist and she has been a constant source of assistance and support ever since.

We did a thorough check of all three primary schools in our area and listed families with Aboriginal students. We advertised in the local papers and held several meetings with parents together with the principal and our tutor.

The meetings were held to form a committee, make our submission, let families get to know one another, discuss the books and materials required, and decide on a day for the Centre. We also discussed the needs of the children. We started with only six children but in the new year, numbers grew to 13 and they have fluctuated ever since with families leaving the district etc.

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\*Reprinted with permission of the Aboriginal Education Council (NSW) from their newsletter *Duran-Duran*, February 1990.

The Centre operates on Monday afternoon from 3.45 to 5.45p.m. The children receive drinks, food, and hugs on arrival, and after they kick balls up the trees, beat one another up, tell you about their week, etc. we commence 'work'. Our original aim was to increase their skills in the basics, but in practice this is not always possible. The small children are totally sick of school by 3.45 and so we have created unstructured ways of learning.

Things we have done with the children include -

- \* Splitting into groups to do supermarket comparisons. The children get a list of items, go to different shops, bring back their list, find the cheapest price for some sneaky maths and graphing results;
- \* Beach visits for measurement, weight and distance, with rock collecting thrown in;
- \* Library visits to familiarise the children with a strange building and make them comfortable with public facilities;
- \* Taping children speaking on their experiences at the Centre, for communication skills.
- \* Two local people (a sociologist and a behavioural psychologist) volunteered to play 'games' with the children at the beginning of each term to assist in their personal development.
- \* Reading books they borrow from the Library.
- \* Creative writing from a sentence given to them; or a line for a silly poem.
- \* On good days, maths tables, addition and subtraction etc. (if you can sneak them in without them noticing);
- \* We tried exercises at the start of each session thinking this might get rid of excess energy, but it only made them hyperactive;
- \* Crossword puzzles, jigsaw puzzles;
- \* Involvement of High School Homework Centre students to help as a peer group and provide inspiration to the children to work. They seem to respond to the older children and it certainly assisted one child, who was the inspiration for the Centre in the first place, as she came regularly to the Centre and learned skills she had missed, under the pretext of tutoring the smaller children.

\* Visits were arranged by ambulance and police. The ambulance man came and talked to the children and frightened the life out of the principal, who thought someone was injured. The lesson we learned from this was - report all visits to the principal before they occur.

The police have not been yet (we will tell the principal first) but they are to discuss 'stranger danger' and possibly make the children comfortable with local authority.

\* Videos of Aboriginal art work and experience of Aboriginal people have been shown;

\* Excursions to local areas for bush tucker and medicine;

\* Inter-school social activity, e.g., a barbeque at the end of term with Primary, High School and Shoalhaven High Homework Centre;

\* Rockpainting lessons, midden visits, visits to Aboriginal communities;

\* Reading legends and stories to the children while they do craft work.

The benefits are two way. We have found a great deal of affection from the children, which is most rewarding. We are learning patience and tolerance as none of us have small children any more. The bonding between the children and the adults is extraordinary. Two children in particular have learned to tolerate each other, which had been a problem for both teachers and parents previously.

As local AECG President, Nell Mooney, our co-ordinator, has been called on several times to interact between parents, children and teachers when problems have arisen. Reports from teachers indicate several students' progress has improved academically and all students' social skills have definitely improved.

When craft lessons are held, each of us receives a present from the children. At Christmas we all got cards which were made by them.

Although we feel we still have a long way to go and must constantly revise our approach to the Centre and what we hope to achieve, we feel that the bonding between the children and their sense of identity is an essential element fundamental to their learning process.

The actions of the children are a constant source of amazement to the adults, like the time we decided after a Library visit to give them an early mark because it was raining. We were castigated severely by ALL of them and forced to return to school in the pouring rain for ten minutes of reading because their time was not up.

We recommend all communities to form a Study Centre in their local Primary School as the rewards are numerous, and we hope this report will inspire others.

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