



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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EDITORIAL



In this, the final issue of the journal for 1994, five interesting and thought provoking articles have been selected. These articles revolve around the need for schooling to include and represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island histories, cultures, languages and perspectives in the curriculum and to involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people in the formulation and presentation of this curriculum.

The purpose of including these aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island life in mainstream schooling is for the greater benefit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island students and their non-Aboriginal peers in the following ways:

- to improve self-esteem and identity among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island students making school more relevant and purposeful; and
- to provide non-Aboriginal students with a balanced view of events which have taken place since colonisation and how these have impacted upon contemporary issues in Australian society and as such to make them sensitive to, accepting and understanding of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peers.

Marion Lawie's article titled *Racially Inclusive Reading For Children* points to the importance of children's literature in the formation of attitudes and ideas. This article illustrates how important it is for children to be exposed to literature which presents real life characters from culturally diverse backgrounds in a range of realistic situations, so that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children can relate to and understand them.

The unrealistic, stereotypical images of Aboriginal people that is portrayed in some children's literature leads non-Aboriginal children to the belief that Aboriginal people no longer exist and makes it difficult for contemporary Aboriginal children to associate themselves with the images portrayed.

Children's literature is a valuable tool in helping children to understand and make sense of everyday events. If presented in a realistic and sensitive way it can help them to develop empathy, compassion and an acceptance and appreciation of who they, and their peers are.

Lawie's article provides a comprehensive review and list of books that teacher's may choose to incorporate in their own programs, with a view to achieving these goals.

Eckermann, Roberts and Kaplan's article titled *The Role Of Participatory Action Research In Aboriginal Education*, looks at how the community can be involved in and contribute to educational research on an equal footing with the researcher. This is a timely paper given that both government and non-government education systems are currently promoting concepts such as the self-managing school and supportive school environments, inclusive curriculum, etc. All of which require the

active participation of the total school community in planning, delivery and evaluation of programs.

The concept of participatory action research follows recent and current thinking. For example, the power relationship between the researcher and their object of study which has been questioned by academics such as Edward Said (1978), has been applied by a number of contemporary Australian academics to the ways that Aboriginal people have been studied, constructed and disempowered by the process (Attwood and Arnold, 1992; Cowlishaw, 1992).

Penny Tripcony's article titled *Valuing Our histories In Schooling And Beyond*, makes further consideration of eminent self-management policies for schools, particularly in Queensland, and how this will allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people to have an input into and provide a balance to the history taught in schools.

By incorporating local history into the school curriculum, Tripcony's paper outlines how teaching will become more culturally relevant to its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island students, and help non-Aboriginal students to be more sensitive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people in their community and to understand how contemporary issues have been shaped by the events of the past.

This paper is directed at members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities, empowering them to contribute to the self-managing process and to research and publish their family and community histories.

Amanda Eibeck's article titled *Teacher Attitudes Towards Aboriginal Children*, presents her perspectives about schooling for Aboriginal children as both a prospective teacher and as an Aboriginal person. This paper highlights Eibeck's concern that many of her peers and indeed some of the teacher's she has observed, do not recognise the need to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island children any differently to non-Aboriginal children.

Eibeck makes the point that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island children to achieve at their full potential, schooling must be meaningful for them. By ignoring their culture and other aspects of their background, learning does not become purposeful and teaching is therefore ineffective.

FELIKS - Fostering English Language In Kimberley Schools - A Professional Development package For Primary Schools, prepared by the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, points to the need for teacher's to recognise Kriol not as a poor version of Standard Australian English, but as a sophisticated language in its own right.

The article encourages teacher's to recognise that Kriol speakers often experience difficulty in mainstream schooling because they are unfamiliar with the Standard Australian English used in the school setting.

By teaching Aboriginal children to understand and use Standard Australian English while at school, the children learn code switching, enabling them to achieve greater success at school while in no way undermining or denigrating their home language.

The Honorary Editors and members of the Editorial Committee would like to take this opportunity to wish all subscribers and contributors a Merry Christmas and Happy 1995.

Regards

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