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KAKADU — A Unit of Work for Developing Readers and Writers in Year 10: An Aboriginal Classroom

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This program is based on a unit of work created and taught by Elsabe Bott and Anne Brooks. It was constructed for a Year 10 class of Aboriginal students. The class consists of twenty-five 15-year-olds (approximate age) from the following range of communities: Boroloola; Mornington Island; Elcho Island; Katherine; Ngkurr; Pigeon Hole; Bulman; Tenant Creek; Alice Springs; Tiwi Islands; Alexandra Downs Station and Elliot. This combination of communities changes each year.

The unit fits into a curriculum program which mirrors the Northern Territory Board of Studies Junior Secondary Studies Certificate Course. The students are supported through this course (hence the two teachers allocated to the class). They are 'independent readers and writers who can undertake structured assignments and activities with some autonomy' (National Statement on English for Australian Schools: 22).

However, while the students can read and write, they are second language learners. As such they

need support in working through the curriculum and developing their understandings about the processes of schooling, teaching, learning, reading, writing and speaking which are dominated by Western cultural perspectives. This means that teaching and learning with these students must be particularly explicit about:

- what is being learnt (where it links with what has been done before and where it is leading);
- why this material is important for learning (linking with real life social contexts);
- how this material can be learned (by teaching the processes required and teachers carefully scaffolding every step of the way);
- how learning can be applied in a variety of different contexts in the future.

These students have been selected by their families to attend Kormilda for a variety of different reasons. These include:

- to train for a particular job waiting for them in the community;
- to be successful in Western education; to aim for tertiary qualifications;
- to be able to interact between community and the wider world when necessary; and there are more.

Ultimately they have come to Kormilda to specifically engage with the type of educational experience offered in this school, one which represents to Aboriginal families, Western institutionalised education.

As a result, these 'students often experience dilemmas caused by conflicting demands of their loyalties to both established and new groups. They need to find ways to resolve these conflicts, and to understand how their behaviour is shaped, through language, by the values, attitudes and beliefs of these groups...' (National Statement on English for Australian Schools: 28).

The teachers involved in this unit argue that this unit of work has a powerful impact on the students. The following comments attempt to capture some of the reasons why:

- confronts Aboriginality;
- the students become teachers and knowledgeable;
- provides a context where Western culture meets Aboriginal culture — this is different from being at Kormilda where Western culture dominates, or being at home where the Aboriginal community culture dominates;
- Bill Neidjie, a traditional owner, talks about the paintings, how they are important, and that, before he dies, he wants to pass on the knowledge — it is their heritage, but children also need to learn about Western cultural ways and construct the modern Aboriginal;
- things that concern Aboriginal students are encapsulated in this unit even down to buffaloes and land management;
- issues are explicit and real — mining, tourism, financial futures, hanging on to your culture, moving ahead;
- many of the students realise they are not far from having to make some of these big decisions themselves (about issues such as mining);
- some students come back really critical — 'we won't let 'them' do that to our land';
- conflict between the impact of 20th century culture and traditional owners explicit;

- allows students opportunities to express themselves — some danced every night;
- provides opportunity to compare and contrast Aboriginal cultures — 'those paintings wouldn't be allowed in our culture.'

Because of this impact and the timing of this unit (it occurs half way through second semester after many months focused on learning about formal schooling and learning about the field of the subject), and because of the experience of the camp, it is perceived that the students are ready to work through a process which prepares them for moderation. The experience of the camp builds the field of knowledge which then enables them to complete the work requirements of the Junior Secondary School Certificate.

This program then contributes to an ongoing teaching/learning process which specifically focuses on:

- developing students' understandings of the constructed nature of all texts and helping them to find ways to understand and interpret a range of texts
- alerting students to contextual factors involved in the construction and interpretation of texts, especially the role of the audience in constructing meaning
- teaching students how to write appropriately and correctly in a range of text types for school and other purposes (National Statement on English for Australian Schools: 28).

It is also designed to develop understanding, concepts and skills related to the following genres in both oral and written modes: argument, discussion, poetry, narrative, and description.

The book, *Kakadu Dreaming*, by Anne Brooks (1993) was used as a model for written narrative. It is a story based on a group of Kormilda College

students going on camp to Kakadu and the fictional adventure they have while camping. It was used as a model because of its high interest level, relevance to the focus and context of the students, and because it is an explicit representation of narrative structure (orientation, complication, resolution, coda).

Kakadu Dreaming

The Program

Time: Third quarter, 10 weeks, 6 English periods a week

Class: Year 10, supported Junior Secondary Studies Certificate course, Kormilda College, Darwin, Northern Territory

The Class — Student Needs

Whole class: to develop understandings, skills and concepts about:

- schooling;
- 'what is an issue?';
- point of view (to really think about and formulate opinions, to understand that opinions are based on a point of view, to understand that there are different points of view, and to understand that a point of view needs to be supported by evidence to be valid);
- to take the risk that your point of view may be challenged and to move off safe ground;
- a range of genres (emphasising that communication takes different forms—they are not all recounts) including argument, discussion, poetry and narrative;
- genres are constructed for a range of purposes and for different audiences;
- make believe and using the imagination;

- learning in different environments (learning while on camp and learning in the classroom)
- paragraphs;
- learning how to keep drafts and final copies for future events (Moderation);
- completing a set of tasks for school purposes (Moderation);
- how to manage pressure;
- a range of tasks which can be done without the teacher.

Individuals/Groups

- one-third of the class needed (were ready) to be stretched into trying different genres and understanding within the text writing structures (e.g. opening paragraphs, following/supporting paragraphs, conclusions);
- the rest of the class needed the exposure to different kinds of genres to establish the understanding that writing is used for a variety of different purposes, not just to tell lots of different stories;
- two students needed to continue working on sentences (e.g. full stops and capital letters);
- three students needed to continue working on opening paragraphs (did not worry about conclusions);
- one student needed to focus on remembering to put 'ed' on the end of words;
- one student had begun using complex sentences and so needed help in learning how to use commas and conjunctions properly.



What Can Students Learn Through a Study of This Topic?

(as drawn from Western Cultural contexts)

Concepts

- argument is a development and rationale of one point of view;
- discussion is a presentation of a range of points of view;
- informed decisions are different from emotional decisions;
- poetry can be an expression of feeling and emotion, a response to an experience, a description, and an exploration;
- narrative is a sequence of events structured by an orientation, conflict, resolution and coda
- individuals can collaborate;
- Aboriginality is diverse;
- formal schooling is structured, organised around a timetable and deadlines, and is concerned with completing the best quality work possible by a certain time and often for an immediate school purpose.

Skills

- working under pressure;
- writing in a range of genres;
- working through a writing process;
- working through a reading process;
- camping;
- following timetables and organising time;
- co-operating in groups;
- completing a task;
- keeping work;
- taking initiative.

Particular Language

genre, argument, discussion, narrative, issue, point of view, folio, moderation, might, should, could, would, on the other hand, because, so, makes, enables, must, should, needs to, has to, as a result, consequently, introduction, conclusion, conjunctions, paragraphs, commas.

Particular Knowledge Perspectives

- developing understandings that 'the cultural knowledge which enables the speaker, writer, or reader to recognise and use language appropriate to different social situations' (National Statement on English for Australian Schools: 3);
- a point of view is socially and historically constructed;
- different genres have different structures;
- Kakadu is precious and needs managing because it is a valuable resource;
- Aboriginality is diverse and an individual can develop understandings about other cultural groups;
- schooling is organised through timetables, meeting deadlines, completing tasks, striving for the best quality work possible.

Learning Behaviours

- reading for a range of purposes;
- writing for a range of purposes;
- organising and managing time effectively in order to meet deadlines;
- completing and keeping tasks over a long period of time;
- revising work over a period of time and persevering with an extended text;
- doing things that an individual doesn't particularly want to do.

Work Requirements

- drafts and final presentations (for Moderation) in four genres: argument, discussion, poetry, narrative;
- completion of a camp booklet.

Evaluation

Evaluation of this unit of work rests with meeting the criteria (see Appendix A for complete details of folio requirements), established by the Northern Territory Board of Studies for the Junior Secondary Studies Course in English.

Appropriate Audiences

Conservation Commission; Kakadu National Park; Bill Neidjie; other students at Kormilda; Kormilda College Library; teachers; moderator.

Events Which Led Up to This Unit

The first half of the year is spent introducing and developing understandings about formal schooling at Kormilda (because many of the students have arrived at Kormilda for the first time) and formal learning in the subject English. Study therefore includes: literature study; reading and writing a range of texts; exploring the human world through the eyes of different authors from different cultural contexts and different times; oral presentations; age relevant themes and issues (friendship, childhood memories); independent reading, writing and speaking; working through a process; and being aware of deadlines and future events.

Along with these experiences the students begin their Year 10 with a range of expectations. These include: they will be working through the Junior Secondary Studies Certificate curriculum; they

will complete the work requirements for this course in the form of a folio; they will complete an exam; that the year will be difficult and full of hard work; they will be going on a camp to Kakadu; and that this year is a special year and that they are a special group ('it will be hard work and it will hammer your self esteem at times but because you are having a go you are special'). All of these expectations have a history (built by other students who have been through the year) and become a mystery (many of the terms and experiences described by others are not familiar and therefore strange). These characteristics combine to create an air of excitement (in looking forward to what is perceived as a good experience — the camp) and nervous tension of the unknown.

This unit then, represents a culmination. By the middle of the year the unknown is now more explicit but the pressure is on to perform. The camp finally occurs and so the climax of the year is reached. This combination makes all of the work possible.

Other Considerations

- This unit, while challenging the students to take risks, also validates who they are. Because Kakadu, Aboriginal traditional owners and Aboriginality come into sharp focus, the unit validates their culture and their experiences and stresses the high value placed on Aboriginal culture and land and mining rights. It also allows scope for the students to express who and what they are as Aboriginals in modern Australia.
- The experience of the camp (where students hear talks by rangers about the park, hear Bill Neidjie — a traditional owner and poet — describe his feelings and concerns about Kakadu and Aboriginal people and his hopes for the future, and tour a mining camp) raises

many issues (should people pay to enter the park?, should crocodiles be culled?, should the park be mined?) and provides stark contrasts in points of view. This makes it the most appropriate context within which students can explore the curriculum requirements. It is immediately real and relevant and therefore worthy of significant study.

- Reading Bill Neidjie's poetry about Kakadu, hearing him speak about his work and his people (which may be starkly different from their own Aboriginal experience), and being surrounded by the environment which is the basis of his poetry, is another significant sub-plot within this unit.
- *Kakadu Dreaming* (Brooks, 1993) provides a shared reading experience which not only focuses on a camp to Kakadu (like the one the students have just experienced) but also provides a model for their own narratives.
- A large proportion of the written work produced by the students throughout the year has been in recount form. However, by the beginning of this unit the students are ready (because they are now experienced with the terminology and expectations of this type of course) to be challenged and extended to look at issues and articulate ideas (encouraging them to develop their own opinions, rather than just accepting what the teacher says), work more formally, and to work at making something better (to work through a process).
- Throughout the unit it is important that it is remembered that these students are second language learners and, as a result, all expectations, processes and language used must be made explicit. Time (more time than would normally be given to students

studying these genres in their first language) must also be given for students to work through understandings and processes. Teachers must be sensitive to possible confusions and work towards the construction of cohesive understandings. For this class the teachers therefore constructed contexts which would foster effective learning with learners who were using English as a second language. These contexts included limiting the number of choices to avoid confusion. Teachers ensured that tasks for each lesson were realistically achievable, explicit and completed by the end of each lesson (e.g. 'by the end of this lesson you must edit your discussion'). They also ensured that resources were readily available so that students didn't 'waste' time trying to find information when the task of writing a discussion was more important for this unit's purposes.

People Involved With This Unit:

English, Social Education, Science, Maths teachers; Year 10 students; Bill Neidjie; Rangers and Tour Guides at Kakadu National Park; Mining personnel.

Future Directions

The unit described above ultimately aims to model and provide an experience of formal schooling at a Secondary level of study. The students are 'supported', in that they are explicitly scaffolded throughout the course by two teachers. Some complete the Junior Secondary Studies Certificate and move on to a Year 11 course. These students are ready to be challenged further and to expand their school experiences, while at the same time are able to grow towards a more independent approach to study. Others are given the

opportunity to work through the experience again with the same level of support (ideally with

different curriculum content) in the following year. For some, this is the final year of schooling.

Appendix A

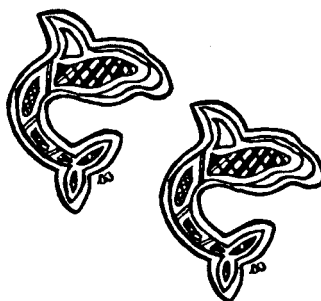
Overview of the Teaching/Learning Sequence

What	Why
1. Discuss camp and write up itinerary on blackboard. Discuss previous year's experiences using Year 11 students to tell their stories.	1. Set the scene and create expectations that this will be hard work but that camp is a rewarding experience.
2. Watch video on Kakadu and teacher charts on the blackboard the important aspects and issues arising while watching (issues include mining, feral animals, tourism, traditional ownership, crocodile culling).	2. Build the field of the focus topic by recording, and make issues arising explicit. Model note taking.
3. Revise video using points extracted and written on the blackboard.	3. Revise and reflect on understandings gained from the video and establish what is an issue.
4. Describe upcoming unit of work and set work requirements. Map onto a chart and timetable.	4. Establish goals for the unit of work. Map time in order to set expectation that students will be responsible for managing their study time.
5. Students copy down points extracted from the video and chart work requirements onto a photocopy of a blank term timetable. Keep this timetable in their folio and teachers and students regularly refer to this timetable in order to keep on task throughout the unit.	5. Record information and work requirements for future reference.



What	Why
6. Teachers provide a range of reading material about Kakadu and relevant topics. These are available in the classroom for reading either for specific information in order to complete work requirements, as wider reading, or for interest. The students are encouraged to explore this material throughout the term and record their reading in their folios.	6. Explore the field as perceived by others. Record information where necessary.
7. Model 'discussion' genre and construct a chart which documents generic structure (introduction, discussion points, conclusion). Highlight when a discussion is appropriate and the range of possible audiences for this genre. Use one of the issues arising out of the video — <i>Should crocodiles be culled?</i> — and construct a discussion paper on the blackboard. Encourage students' contributions. Once constructed, discuss why an essay like this might be written, by whom and for whom. Students record generic structure, purposes and audiences in their own folders.	7. Make structure, purpose and audience explicit. Record for future reference.
8. Students can choose an issue from the list compiled from the video and decide on an audience and a reason for writing a discussion. Once decided, individuals construct their own discussion. Teachers work with individuals on their drafts. This is the beginning of a long process which is revisited throughout the term. The focus here is to begin the process.	8. Use a model to construct their own discussion. Create own discussion with support in order to develop understandings and skills in the construction of a discussion, drafting, revising, editing and publishing their work.
9. Introduction to 'argument' genre — divide class into two groups with a teacher working with each group. Use topic question 'Should people pay to enter Kakadu?' (which comes from the list of issues arising out of the video watched in the first lesson). Either taking the affirmative or the negative response to this question, each group lists a range of supporting arguments for their response.	9. Make genre explicit. Construct and record arguments in note form.

What	Why
10. With teachers taking the lead, the groups then role play an argument/debate. Teachers record arguments on the blackboard.	10. Articulate group constructed arguments. Report. Argue orally, in an informed and considered manner. Record information.
11. Teachers discuss the range of purposes and audiences for the argument genre. Model argument genre using points made during debate, and chart structure. Students copy down structure and then use this structure to write their own argument. (Choose a topic from the list made during video watching). Teachers work with individuals to get the students started.	11. Establish field, tenor and mode of an argument. Record structure for future reference. Construct their own texts using models.
12. Teachers refer to timetable in folios and students note that they have begun two of the work requirements. These are now regarded as work to be continued throughout the term and completed by a certain date. Emphasise drafting process and revising in particular. Teachers establish with individuals their own particular goals for the unit (refer to student and class needs).	12. Model managing study time and emphasising independence in the learning process.
13. Read a range of Bill Neidjie poetry in preparation for the camp and the environment of Kakadu, and meeting Bill Neidjie.	13. Contribute further to building the field and build anticipation of the camp. Foster serious approach to learning. Explore poetry genre.
14. Camp: • Yellow Waters tour; • guided tour through Ubirr art sites; • talk with Bill Neidjie about Kakadu, Aboriginal ownership and the future of Aboriginal people; • visit to park headquarters and view displays; • panoramic slide show of seasons at Kakadu; • slide show at Gunlom on birds and animals of the national park; • guided tour of Ranger Uranium Mine; • look at scale model of Kakadu and Ranger Uranium Mine;	14. Continue building the field. Information and experiential input. Shared experiences as a class group.



What	Why
• write poetry (modelled on Bill Neidjie poems) at the falls at Gunlom; • visit Noarlangie Rock; • visit Anabongbang billabong.	
15. Back at school reflect on camp experience.	15. Reflect and consolidate camp experiences.
16. Re-visit work requirements and timetable. Add poetry to the list of work to be continued. Students continue working on discussion, argument and poetry. However, teachers now encourage students to use their experiences from the camp to enrich their writing.	16. Re-establish work commitments and the development of independence in learning paths. Continue in the creation of their own range of texts. Revise what they have done in the light of their new-found knowledge and experience.
17. Whole class and individuals read <i>Kakadu Dreaming</i> by Anne Brooks (1993).	17. Shared reading experience and modelled reading. An extended reading experience.
18. Chart the sequence of events and highlight the fiction and complication. Do a plot profile. Establish that some of the purposes of this genre are to entertain, to explore, to reflect, and to represent human experiences.	18. Make narrative structure explicit.
19. Retrace the sequence of events in their own camp.	19. Reflect on camp experience from the point of view of constructing a narrative.
20. Choose appropriate points in this sequence of events and model fictitious narrative complication ('this is your opportunity to tell lies' or 'gammon'). Using examples from this jointly constructed text and <i>Kakadu Dreaming</i> to highlight narrative structure.	20. Model fiction and complication. Narrative is different and special because of these components.
21. Students begin constructing their own narratives and teachers work with individuals.	21. Creating using models.

What	Why
22. Transform, synthesise and create.	22. The rest of the term is devoted to working with individuals as they complete their work requirements. At appropriate times the teachers will stop the whole class or gather groups with similar needs to revise, re-teach, emphasise, or teach new aspects as they arise. The shared experience of the camp is also revisited constantly throughout the term to highlight teaching and learning points, or as reflection points for the class. Other students' work is also used to provide models for individuals while all work is devoted towards achieving the best quality possible.
23. Complete work requirements and meet deadlines.	23. Submit for moderation.
24. Critically reflect and plan for future learning.	24. Receive external results and responses and reflect on what was done well, what needs to be improved, and how these things can be done better in the future.

