



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.

Book Reviews

The Lardil People of Mornington Island (Kit)

J. Binnlon

Aboriginal Community College, Port Adelaide, 1987, maps, student handbook (viii + 75 pp.), teacher handbook (x + 42 pp.), video.

A Changing Culture: The Lardil Aborigines of Mornington Island (Kit)

P. Memmott and R. Horsman

Social Science Press, Wentworth Falls, NSW, 1991, audio-cassette, colour slides, student text (viii + 382 pp.), teacher guide (xxiv + 191 pp.).

Reviewed by Alex Barlow

The Lardil people on Mornington Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria have been successful in having their culture and history brought to the attention of the Australian people. The unfortunate killing of an arrogant missionary in October 1917 brought media attention, with the *Brisbane Courier* finding space among the war news to devote a column to the killing, 'Treachery of the blacks'. Later missionaries were more successful at establishing good relations with their indigenous 'parishioners'. So much so that, since the 1970s, people like Dick and Elsie Roughsey, Larry Lesley, Henry Peters, Jackson Jacob and many others have actively presented their culture through their publications, through film, through the sale of arts and crafts objects and through the performances of the Mornington Island Dancers.

Now come two multimedia learning sets, fully supported and approved of by most of the senior Lardil men and women: seventy-four of them listed in one set as authors, contributors and

advisers, and twelve appending their signatures to a letter of approval in the other. Joan Binnion's *The Lardil People of Mornington Island* was published in 1987 by the Aboriginal Community College in South Australia. Work on this kit began in the mid-1970s and the college is to be commended, along with the author, for bringing its long and difficult task to a successful conclusion. Paul Memmott's and Robyn Horsman's more elaborate set of commercially produced materials, *A Changing Culture: The Lardil Aborigines of Mornington Island*, had an equally lengthy and difficult gestation, and its appearance in 1991 was due as much to the professional support of David Barlow of the Social Science Press as it was to the determination of the authors. While the emphasis in each teaching set varies and the curriculum strategies differ, both sets cover much the same content and are directed at the same school audiences: mainly lower to middle secondary students, but with some application at upper secondary level.

To appreciate the value of these sets, it is important that they be placed in the context of contemporary curriculum development for teaching Aboriginal studies. Social studies is now firmly established as an integral but distinct discipline in all school curricula. It was not always so, but the work of Stenhouse, Bruner and others in the 1960s and early 1970s saw its general acceptance and many insightful developments in social science curricula. Anthropologists were particularly active in the 1970s in attempting to have their discipline accepted as the basis of social science. In the United States, several social science curriculum projects won the support of anthropological associations, either because they relied heavily on anthropological content or because they were fully anthropologically based. Two of these resulted in the production of

Book Reviews

multimedia learning sets for general school use. At the same time, there was a proliferation of similar sets being marketed by commercial publishers.

Without a doubt, the most effective and the most controversial of all of them was *Man: A Course of Studies* (MACOS). It consisted of a detailed study of the life cycle and behaviour patterns of the Pacific Salmon, the Herring Gull and the Baboon, and of the life and culture of the Netsilik Eskimos in Canada. Using film, photographic material, posters, charts and texts, it aimed to set up a comparison between the life cycles, the behaviours and the culture of the chosen examples and those the students could experience and observe in their own societies and cultures. Three basic questions confront the student throughout the course: (a) what is it that makes people specifically human? (b) how do people acquire their human traits? (c) how do people become increasingly human? (Barlow and Hill, 1982: 23). Increasing opposition to this kit came from fundamentalist Christian groups, who objected as much to the sexual explicitness of some of the filmed sequences as to the concepts on human cultures and their development, which they saw as conflicting with their values. But there was also opposition from educationists who were critical of the curriculum design and of the effectiveness of some of the strategies used.

The importance of MACOS and many of the other social science multimedia learning sets that were produced then, and which have been produced since, is that they set out to do two things: firstly, they aimed at providing teachers with a neatly packaged curriculum unit in social science which would be a complete resource in itself, which could be integrated into the standard curriculum, and which would extend and complement the

teacher's own expertise in the subject; secondly, they aimed deliberately at cultivating positive social attitudes and behaviours in students, based on an understanding of the nature of human cultures, the sources of social interactions, the elements of social organisation, and the skills of social communication.

Here it should be said that not every educationist accepts this second purpose as valid. Stenhouse said of the humanities project he was working on in 1969 that 'the main interest of our design is the absence of behavioural objectives from the conceptionalization and the planning of our curriculum', and he added, 'Any sophisticated worker is bound to be aware of the limitations of a design directed towards specified terminal student behaviour' (White, 1975: 394).

When it comes to producing multimedia social science learning sets, we seem to have more than our share of 'unsophisticated' workers in Australia. It is very evident that every major multimedia learning set produced in the social science curriculum area here has as its basic aims, when it deals with Australian cultures, the establishment of positive attitudes towards difference among Australian peoples, whether that difference is cultural, linguistic, physical or of any other kind. Along with the development of social attitudes goes the development of interactional skills, aimed at enabling all Australians to operate effectively in a society where difference is accepted, valued and encouraged.

Reference to Aboriginal peoples can be found in Australian school texts from the late nineteenth century on. It is now well established that these references were generally inaccurate and served to establish highly prejudicial stereotypes of

Book Reviews

Aborigines and their cultural lifestyles (Hill and Barlow, 1978, 1985). Research surveys of all State and Territory education systems, undertaken in the 1970s and 80s, revealed that Aboriginal studies was not a significant part of either the primary or the secondary school curriculum; that such studies as were done focused on their cultural material, especially hunting and gathering techniques in remote and inhospitable environments; that teachers continued to draw on outdated text material; and that teachers generally were not aware of the latest anthropological and archaeological research which, since the 1960s, had begun a complete re-evaluation of both historic and contemporary Aboriginal lifestyles and cultures. Other research indicated that teachers proposing to introduce Aboriginal studies in their social science curriculum or in any other area of the curriculum may need first to reassess their own attitudes towards Aborigines (Chambers, 1981).

In view of this, a continuing thrust in the process of refining the quality of Aboriginal studies in schools has been the introduction of Aboriginal studies as a necessary element in the pre-service education of teachers. Along with this went the development of curriculum resources that aimed, as much as possible, at helping students through simulation and real-life experiences to come to an understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal cultures past and present.

The first of these multimedia learning sets in Aboriginal studies was known as the *People of the Western Desert* kit. It was produced by Margaret Simpson for the NSW Department of Education in 1976. Designed as a follow-up unit to *MACOS*, it is a complex course which requires teachers planning to use it to undergo in-service training in its use. In evaluating this course, Marji Hill (1981: 80) describes the in-service training

as a major component of the course. In contrast to the actual content of the kit itself, the in-service course's emphasis is on 'learning to understand the values of Aborigines and coming to terms with the concept of the invisible culture' (Hill, 1981: 110). The effectiveness of the course, in leading students to an appreciation of the traditional cultures of Aboriginal people in the Western Desert, thus depended on teachers themselves understanding and valuing those cultures.

The importance of the teacher's own attitudes in the effective teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island studies is stressed in the teacher's manual of the elaborate set of materials produced by the former Curriculum Development Centre in Canberra in 1982, called *The Aboriginal Australian in North Eastern Arnhem Land*. Like *MACOS* and *People of the Western Desert*, it uses a case study approach 'to improve the knowledge students have about Aborigines and the attitudes they hold towards them' (Williams and Fidock, 1982: 15), 'to enable students to examine themselves, their society and their culture', and thus 'to prepare [them] for life in a multicultural society'.

To achieve these aims, the materials provided (texts, audio-tapes, videos and slide sets) deal with the necessary knowledge acquisition. Appropriate learning activities have been suggested for the teacher to use to help students acquire the desired social skills and to develop the attitudes that the set of materials aims to establish. Thus the curriculum aims are set out clearly, as are the ways to achieve them.

It is left to the teachers to adopt these aims, to apply the strategies intelligently within their own classrooms, to set their own objectives and to evaluate the effectiveness of their own programs.

Book Reviews

Where departmental policy allowed it, teachers were encouraged to undertake in-service training in preparation for using the kit. Failing this, a set of teacher training materials was provided as part of the whole kit. In so far as teachers accepted the aims of the kit, endorsed the values it proclaimed and held the attitudes it promoted, they could use the curriculum effectively with the assistance of the training offered.

There is a hint, here, of one of the major problems that have arisen in relation to the use of these multimedia sets of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island learning/teaching materials: in-service training of the teacher who wants to use them has proved to be essential. A kit produced about the Aborigines of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), simply called *Aboriginal Studies Kit*, was eventually rejected, the main reasons being that it had not been developed in sufficient consultation with Aboriginal people from the region, that it did not incorporate information on the contemporary Aboriginal scene in the ACT, and that it did not adequately advise teachers on how its aims could be effectively achieved. Add to this the tightening educational budgets, which have led to all the educational systems rigidly limiting funding for in-service training, and the problem of these carefully constructed but complex course units becomes evident.

As a consequence, the trend is away from multimedia sets of training/teaching materials constructed as course units, to an emphasis on pre-service teacher education and on the production of a wide variety of resource material, in various media forms, which offer the sensitive and able teacher reliable source material to use in their own course programs in Aboriginal and Islander studies.

The place and purpose of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies in the whole school

curriculum is still far from settled. Should perspectives on Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders permeate the whole curriculum in all schools? Or should such studies constitute a separate curriculum in their own right? Or again, should they consist of course units at separate levels in the general social science curriculum? Those schools with a significant enrolment of Aboriginal and Islander students seem to favour an emphasis on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies in their social science curriculum, and they frame these studies mainly for their Aboriginal and Islander students. A corollary to this kind of thinking is that some schools have argued no need for any but the most cursory reference to Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in their curriculum, since they have no students enrolled from either of these communities, and few, if any, Aborigines and Islanders in their school region.

I have had occasion to argue elsewhere the cultural appropriateness of non-Aboriginal teachers and tertiary educators designing and presenting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies courses specifically for Aboriginal and Islander students (Barlow, 1985). Implicit to this issue is the recognition of the reality in our education systems of cultural colonialism and thus of the need to distinguish between cultural education and studies into the cultures of other people. The right to educate members of a cultural group in their own culture must surely lie with those of the group with authority to teach their culture. Equally, the right to teach a specific culture to anyone outside that culture still lies with the members of that culture. It is for them to say what can be taught, how it should be taught and who, apart from themselves, might be competent to teach it.

This is one of the major problems Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders have with the teaching of

Book Reviews

Aboriginal and Islander studies generally throughout Australian schools. Too frequently they are given little, if any, say in what is taught about them and in who teaches it. If schools do consult with their local communities, it will rarely be at the level of what those communities want taught either about themselves or about Aborigines and Islanders generally. Rather, the schools are more likely to be seeking approval for a program they have already designed, with little or no effective consultation beforehand.

With this as the educational reality as far as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies in Australian schools are concerned, the problem of the case study approach to such studies becomes apparent.

The diversity of contemporary Aboriginal and Islander social and cultural contexts in Australia was highlighted in a model developed in 1979 by the then National Aboriginal Education Committee (Willmot, 1981). Using as factors levels of geographic, social and economic embeddedness in the whole Australian community, and levels of observance of historic traditional institutions, it showed very clearly just how diverse are the lives of Aboriginal and Islander people today. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisers to the various education systems have insisted that studies of their history, cultures and contemporary situations should reflect this diversity. At the same time, most school community groups have stated that they see their own communities as constituting the core study in any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies program to be initiated in schools within their region.

In this approach, case studies of other Aboriginal or Islander cultures have their place as evidencing contemporary diversity, or as providing

illustrations of historical cultural lifestyles. Either of the two case studies of the Lardil people of Mornington Island which form the basis of this review could be fitted in to any school's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies program. Of course, the local community's approval should be sought first.

The main theme of the Memmott/Horsman kit – the concepts of culture and change, the level of language and the content and structure of the material quite certainly make it more useable at middle to upper secondary school level. The Binnion kit, on the other hand, is generally more suited to upper primary and lower secondary use. The choice between them lies with the teacher's and the local community's decision as to when such comparative material should be introduced into their program, as well as to the objectives they have set at these school levels.

Both kits are prescriptive, requiring teachers to follow the designed curriculum closely. As Binnion says in her teacher handbook, 'special treatment of the material is needed if the aims of the study are to be achieved'. She also sees such an approach as being of great assistance to teachers 'new to Aboriginal Studies', whose inexperience will be compensated for by sticking to the script. The teacher's guide in the Memmott/Horsman kit is even more detailed, setting out for the teacher five units covering forty-five lessons, for each of which there are aims, content, focus areas, concepts and vocabulary, important issues for the teacher, other references, activities and various questions to pursue relevant to culture and culture change.

Neither kit leaves much to the inventiveness and the initiative of the individual teacher. Both require that any teacher using them should devote time to understanding the overall aims of each

Book Reviews

curriculum, and to mastering its structure. For some teachers this may be an inhibiting factor. On the other hand, those teachers who take the trouble to understand what the kits set out to do will certainly find either one a useful unit to fit into their own school programs. However, and this is the most important fact to note about them, neither of these nor any of the other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies kits that have been produced, forms a complete course in Aboriginal and Islander studies. They can and do provide useful course units to be integrated into a Years 1-12 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies curriculum, provided that the particular curriculum approach on which the local Aboriginal and Islander community and the school have settled lends itself to the use of such materials.

Thus, ideally, a complete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies curriculum will focus on a core local study, gradually building on this by extending the study to related groups in the area, to a survey of state-wide groups and issues and to other contemporary and historical cultural styles in other areas. At the same time, an across-the-whole-curriculum approach would allow more detailed studies of particular aspects of Aboriginal and Islander cultures, and of issues relevant to them, to be introduced in those subject areas and at those levels where it would be appropriate to do so: for instance, in art, music, craft, home science, manual arts, religion, science, literature, drama and other such curricula. Where such complete programs may be operating in schools, kits like *The Lardil People of Mornington Island* and *A Changing Culture: The Lardil Aborigines of Mornington Island* can make a useful contribution.

References

- Barlow, A. (1985) *Aboriginal Studies in Aboriginal and Islander Tertiary Education*. Paper presented at NAEC Conference on Aborigines and Islanders in Higher Education, James Cook University of North Queensland, Townsville, 8-12 July 1985 (TS, 9pp; copy held by AIATSIS Library).
- Barlow, A. and Hill, M. (1982) *Anthropology and the Australian School Curriculum: Report of a Survey May-June 1982*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.
- Chambers, B. (1981). *Why Can't They Be Like Us? A Race Relations Report on the Attitudes of Teachers and Pupils Toward Aborigines*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.
- Hill, M. (1981) *'Aborigines are Smart': Children's Responses to an Aboriginal Studies Course, an Ethnographic Evaluation*. Masters Thesis, The Australian National University.
- Hill, M. and Barlow, A. (1978) *Black Australia: An Annotated Bibliography and Teacher's Guide to Resources on Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.
- Hill, M. and Barlow, A. (1985) *Black Australia 2: An Annotated Bibliography and Teacher's Guide to Resources on Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, 1977-82*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.
- Simpson, M. (1976) *People of the Western Desert* (Kit). Sydney: NSW Department of Education.
- White, J.P. (1975) 'The concept of curriculum evaluation', in M. Golby, J. Greenwald and R. West (Eds), *Curriculum Design*, pp. 387-98, London: Croom Helm.
- Williams, D. and Fidock, A. (1982) *The Aboriginal Australian in North Eastern Arnhem Land: Teachers Manual*, Canberra: Curriculum Development Centre.
- Willmot, E. (1981) 'The culture of literacy', in B. Menary (Ed.), *Aborigines and Schooling: Essays in Honour of Max Hart*, pp. 9-19, Adelaide: Adelaide College of Arts and

Book Reviews

Education.

Editor's Note: This Review originally appeared in *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 1993/Number 2:67-71. We thank *Australian Aboriginal Studies* and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies for allowing us to reprint it here. □

The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia

D. Horton (General Editor)

Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1994, two volumes, 1340 pp.

Reviewed by Kaye Price

The publication of the *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia* was sponsored by the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, the New South Wales Department of School Education, the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Unit and the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. It was winner of the inaugural Centre for Australian Cultural Studies Award in 1994.

Its publication has been welcomed by school librarians and teachers around the country with sighs of relief. For a long time, educators have been calling for Aboriginal studies to be treated seriously in schools, but the lack of authoritative resource materials has been problematic. With the advent of the encyclopaedia, involvement in Aboriginal studies (and Torres Strait Islander studies) becomes much easier.

The encyclopaedia is a two-volume set: A-L and M-Z, presented in a handsome and sturdy slip case, which features paintings depicting aspects of not only Aboriginal cultures, but those of the Torres Strait Islanders. Gender issues have been taken into account in that the covers of the books themselves use paintings created by two women (Jose and Foley) and two men (Onus and Bulun Bulun). Throughout the two volumes, entries contain information about Torres Strait Islanders (e.g. Steve Mam, Eddie Mabo) and South Sea Islanders (e.g. Faith Bandler, Mal Meninga) as well as Aboriginal people and other Australians (e.g. Roberta Sykes, Barrie Dexter) who have contributed to Aboriginal affairs.

The two volumes weigh in at 5.2 kg (2.5 and 2.7), making the set rather difficult for handling by young people and for teachers to slip into a briefcase for lesson preparation at home.

The encyclopaedia contains some 2000 entries about every conceivable aspect of Aboriginal affairs, from adzes to Link-up, and managers to zamia. It is illustrated with around 1000 black and white and colour photographs, maps and drawings. These were contributed by over 200 authors from all over Australia who are acknowledged separately and throughout the work.

David Horton has written a splendid, sometimes moving, ten-page introduction. In it, he says that eighteen million days (50,000 years) ago 'someone in northern Australia dropped a stone artefact – in 1992 the High Court of Australia heard it fall'. Whether or not the time span is correct, the phraseology is somewhat appealing. Horton touches on many aspects of Aboriginal [and Torres Strait Islander] history that are most probably unknown to the majority of Australians. This