



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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Education.

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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

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introduction is a worthwhile contribution to Aboriginal studies in its own right.

Following the introduction, there is a section on how to use the encyclopaedia, containing a summary, a guide to authors' initials, a list of abbreviations, notes on orthography, content and structure, and a key to the use of entries, all of which are easy to understand. An extensive list of further readings is provided at the back of each volume, as well as relevant readings being mentioned after each entry. Cross-referencing throughout is excellent.

The set was received at my school just in time for the unit I planned to conduct with Year 4 students during Term 3. As a part of their English program, students were required to undertake research and write a biography of a 'notable' Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person. Students were able to choose from a list of 100 or so names of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. From that list, they chose sixty-five names, most of which could be found in the encyclopaedia. However, it was disappointing for the students and embarrassing for me when 'notable' people such as Coral Edwards, Alana Harris and Robyne Bancroft could not be found in the work.

It was necessary to photocopy the particular sections required, as the volumes are too heavy for young hands and continued use contributed to our copy falling apart. Most of the students found the entries easy to read and understand, especially as there is no extraneous information. The concise entries would also provide an excellent starting point for older students to undertake more thorough research.

The encyclopaedia has many useful attributes for school students. The division between entries is well spaced and each of the headings appears in

large dark print. A full page is devoted to each letter of the alphabet and the text is larger than normally found in works of this nature, which is especially user-friendly. Of importance to the young reader is the interest (a picture or a map) on each page and, in this respect, the encyclopaedia is well illustrated and very clearly set out. The provision of a map with a large location dot (e.g. Peramangk) next to an entry gives a great deal of information. Some photographs are accompanied by names, while others are not. Where information is omitted, it was unavailable.

There is a comprehensive entry guide divided into subjects, regions, states, groups, authors, time line and index, although there are no page numbers to assist in locating these entries. Because this is a reference work, I am surprised that this is the case.

From my point of view, it is disappointing that only the non-Aboriginal Ted Egan is listed, whereas the Aboriginal Ted Egan has made a significant contribution to Australia. A real plus was to find information on James Unaipon (although there is a photograph of David Unaipon next to the entry). Another disappointing aspect is reference to 'Aboriginal culture', which detracts from the way in which many cultures are portrayed.

Another puzzling aspect of the entries is the mixture of past and present tenses. An example is found in information about the Nuenonne (pp. 807-808). While the first three paragraphs are written as an account of the past, the final paragraph advises readers 'To learn more about the Nuenonne today ...', presenting somewhat of a paradox.

Overall, the *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia* is a resource that is very much needed and the skilful presentation of the material is a

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bonus. It is not meant to be a comprehensive work, but for primary school students it is adequate. Along with colleagues, I am looking forward to using the accompanying compact disc, which will bring the entries to life.

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Aboriginal Languages In Education

D. Hartman and J. Henderson (Eds)

Institute for Aboriginal Development Press, Alice Springs, 1994, ii + 389 pp.

Reviewed by Melanie Wilkinson

This is an invaluable compilation, reflecting the wide-ranging development in Aboriginal language and culture programs during the last twenty years. This has been a time of dramatic change for the place of Aboriginal languages in schools and their recognition by governments and wider society. The process of establishing and developing programs is far from complete. It is also complex. There is a growing group of people who have been involved in the process and who have had time to reflect on the situations in which they have been involved. The views of several such people are presented in this volume.

The book is made up of twenty-eight articles. The first presents an overview of the issues. The rest are presented in two sections. The first section, ten articles, offers descriptions of particular programs. The second section is entitled 'Issues'

and consists of seventeen articles, covering a broad range of topics which reflect on local situations, particularly types of language contexts, state/territory approaches, curriculum design, assessment, literacy, the development of training programs for Aborigines involved in language programs, and issues that have been raised and debated in the literature.

The situations described reflect an increasing support for programs in a range of contexts, from bilingual programs for first-language speakers to heritage programs where there are no living speakers.

The authors are teachers, teacher-linguists, principals, curriculum developers, academics from the fields of education, linguistics and anthropology. All the contributors have had first-hand experience in school programs or the delivery of training for those involved in such programs. The book is thus a reflection on the actual practice of supporting maintenance of Aboriginal languages and culture in schools. It is not about policy development providing support for Aboriginal language maintenance *per se*, nor does it provide details of curriculum for particular programs.

The editors, who themselves have had many years' experience in language programs within Central Australia, have appropriately identified their audience as teachers and others directly involved in language/culture programs, education administrators and policy-makers.

Much of the early development in language and culture programs occurred with the introduction of bilingual programs for schools in Northern Territory communities where Aboriginal languages were first languages. As these were relatively well resourced and ongoing, there have been personnel around with time and experience