



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*.

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the book, we know very little about the area in which the informants live, while Cowlishaw constantly questions why people in Sydney know so little about their own backyard. On the other hand, she spent years getting to know the town of Bourke and its people and this is reflected in the confident and balanced writings about this well known regional town in New South Wales.

There are enormous differences between the lives of the citizens of inner Sydney and of those living in the west of the city. Since I moved there three years ago, I rise each morning to news of the *sordid* and *scandalous* activities of people living in the west; another murder, a car chase, a drug bust or a drowning. Indeed, Mt Druitt has become a metonym for Sydney's wild west. Cosmopolitan Sydney is scrutinising daily what its western inhabitants are doing, albeit from the safe distance of the inner city and northern beaches. It is the Foucauldian panopticon par excellence; even "an obscene and pornographic spectacle" as described by Marcia Langton (p. 227). Perhaps the people of Mt Druitt would prefer to be left alone, and escape the ongoing scrutiny by media, academics and other outsiders. As Cowlishaw indicates, theirs is largely an existence rooted in family concerns, not in national politics and policy.

Will the author's attempt to interrupt the gross and over dramatised misrepresentations of Indigenous people make a difference to how the cosmopolitans themselves view Sydney's outback? Perhaps our relationships are to be developed through talking rather than through education and understanding. Indeed, it is time that education faced-up to some detailed analysis of its contribution to the lives of Indigenous people in Australia. We often read how education is perceived to be the "whole key" to unlocking a group's access to social and material capital and yet the 50 years of formal Australian schooling available to Indigenous people has provided few benefits, and perhaps with more problems to overcome. Frank Doolan (p. 209) captures the challenge in his exclamation "I know my mob are approachable so why can't whites get through to them?"

■ References

- Cowlishaw, G. (2004). *Blackfellas, whitefellas and the hidden injuries of race*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Cowlishaw, G. (2006). Cultures of complaint: An ethnography of rural racial rivalry. *Journal of Sociology*, 42(4), 429-445.

THE LITTLE RED YELLOW BLACK BOOK: AN INTRODUCTION TO INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIA

Bruce Pascoe with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra, 2008, 1+139pp, ISBN 978 0 85575 61 54

Reviewed by Judith Powell

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The Little Red Yellow Black Book is a revised and expanded version of a 1994 publication by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and takes on the enormous task of being, as the title suggests, "an introduction to Indigenous Australia". The book is a small format, glossy publication of under 150 pages and provides a remarkable survey of the issues, histories and personalities of Indigenous Australia. It is unclear exactly who the audience is: the unnamed authors indicate that the purpose of the book is "so that all Australians (and visitors) might learn of our connection to this land in the hope that we might prosper together as a nation in full knowledge and acceptance of our shared history" (p. 2). This is a grand purpose, only partly realised.

The book is divided into four main sections: Who are We?; Culture and Sport; Participation and Governance; Resistance and Reconciliation. Each section includes a number of chapters and within each chapter there are break-out boxes with case studies, short biographies or details of particular issues. High quality illustrations add to the visual interest. Two large scale maps are included at the end of the book, but more detailed maps would greatly assist the reader, particularly visitors. Not everyone will be familiar with Ernabella, the Riverland, Lockhardt River and other places mentioned throughout the text. The format allows the reader to dip into sections and move around in a style reminiscent of a website, but some of the cross references are odd and it's unclear if they are editing errors.

The attempt to write a book for everyone is a bold one, but is one of the book's problems. By writing for everyone they have can end up writing for no one, and the language swings from clear and simple to complicated and bureaucratic. A primary school student

or international visitor with little knowledge of the details of Australia's history would find the early chapters and their references to missions, reserves and assimilation difficult to follow without the historical context which is not provided until the final chapter on Resistance and Reconciliation. For contemporary Indigenous readers, on the other hand, asserting an Indigenous voice in the chapter "Who are We?" makes a forceful beginning.

Another problem with the book is the awkwardness of language that can't make up its mind. The "authorial" voice swings awkwardly from "we" and "us" to use of the third person, particularly when talking about Torres Strait Islanders. There are some particular comments that result from this odd voice. "We have always been artists" (p. 48), is nothing more than a motherhood statement. Over use of simplistic generalisations also leads to some confusing passages as for example where the statement that "sadly only a small number of our languages are spoken fluently today" (p. 23), is almost immediately followed by the assertion that "Indigenous Australians are among the nation's most skilled users of language" (p. 24). In the first chapter the contradictions are included in the same sentence! "No other continent on earth has this level of homogeneity, and we are unique among the world's hunter-gatherers for the sheer complexity of our social organisation and religion" (p. 5). Homogenous and complex? You can't have it both ways.

The book is, by its very title, "little", so it is inevitable that things will be left out and we will all have our own examples. I was surprised there was no mention of the films *Ten Canoes* and *The Tracker* or of *Imparja* television or the Redfern speech. Everyone will have favourite artists they would have liked included. There will be stories with which we are familiar, and others where we want more detail – and the positive aspect of this book is that it will direct us towards more things to be discovered. Although we have come to dread the next book of lists (another "1000 things to do before we die"), given the all encompassing nature of this book and its multiple audiences, some lists might have been useful. They would have helped direct our further reading or viewing. Similarly a glossary would be useful, particularly for visitors. There is no explanation, for example, of what an "ILUA" stands for or means.

I have been critical of this book and I don't want to be. It is an incredibly useful small reference book and I can see it being widely bought and used – particularly in schools. But it's a pity that it has not been more carefully edited and that the purpose, audience and authorship have not all been more seriously considered.

Together with the *Macquarie Atlas of Indigenous Australia* and, dare I say it, the *Lonely Planet Guide to Indigenous Australia*, this book will serve the important purpose of collating information on Indigenous Australia in a short and simple reference

book, sending readers off to investigate more, and in both those ways play a part in fostering understanding and reconciliation.

ARLATHIRNDA NGURKARNDA ITYIRNDA: BEING-KNOWING-DOING: DE-COLONISING INDIGENOUS TERTIARY EDUCATION

Veronica Arbon

Post Pressed, Teneriffe, QLD, 2008, ii+194pp, ISBN
978 1 921214 40 0

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This is a scholarly publication that shows how Indigenous and non-Indigenous educational stakeholders can begin to understand and work towards the necessity of reconciling differing ways of knowing in a research and education setting. Arbon has gone about this by informing others of how Indigenous perspectives and knowledge of everyday living frames and guides what learning means in a more holistic sense, which is different to past and present Western ideas of formal education. Arbon has spoken about meaning making coming from the experience of "being, knowing and doing" as have other Indigenous writers such as Martin (2008) in talking about outsiders to community. Arbon's is not representative of an essentialist viewpoint of Indigenous belief but has drawn on a differing personal taste in the mouth; an attitudinal shift stemming from the alternative ways Indigenous knowledge and perspectives are perceived.

The existing situation on which Arbon has based this book is that any work done towards reconciling Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing in an effort to include Indigenous people in today's world more fully, is still overshadowed by "those who know best". She maintains that the resulting imbalance continues to tilt the scales in favour of Western approaches to knowledge and sustains a lack of any real change. The central challenge for Arbon has been to question and counteract the "continued submersion of and resistance to Indigenous authority" in matters academic. In an attempt to gain a more equitable mix of knowledge bases for educators to draw upon, she has critically re-examined what is lacking in the decolonising