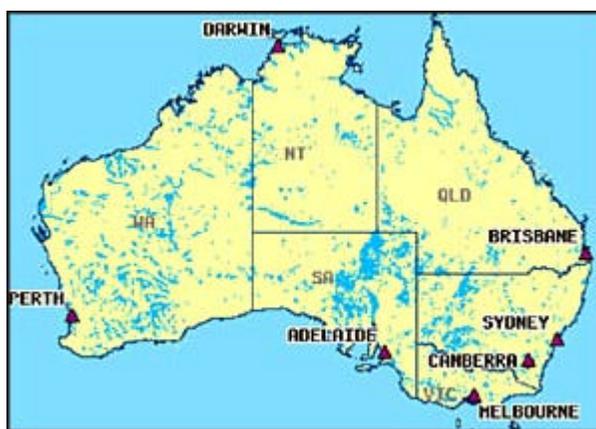


Research on (Aboriginal) Literacy in Australia

By Priscilla George

Ningwakwe/Waawaashkesh Dodem - Rainbow Woman/Deer Clan

November, 2001



With Support from

The [National Literacy Secretariat](#)

Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities

Chippewas of Saugeen First Nation

A project of this magnitude is made possible only through the collaboration and encouragement of many people. I'm the person who was blessed with the trip to Australia. The following provided valuable behind-the-scenes support:

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Gichi Miigwech especially to my mom, Amazing Grace, for always being there, for being my best teacher, for understanding my need to follow the path the Creator has shown me, even when it means going to the other side of the world by myself.

Finally, I have learned on my journey to always acknowledge the Creator for guiding me, for sending me messages and help, even when I get too busy to notice – **ESPECIALLY** when I get too busy to notice.

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Research on (Aboriginal) Literacy in Australia

Background

This is a story of many types of literacy coming together. Lately, I've come to understand literacy as the recognition and interpretation of the symbols and messages that come to us through our Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body, then acting on this information for the improvement of the quality of life (for ourselves as individuals, and collectively).

The Birth of the Rainbow (Holistic) Approach to Aboriginal Literacy

I've been developing a thesis over the past two years, based on my observations while working with Aboriginal literacy programs for almost fifteen years. The Rainbow (Holistic) Approach to Aboriginal Literacy proposes a different type of literacy for each colour of the rainbow. In fact, my thesis builds on work that I did for the Parkland Regional College, Yorkton, Saskatchewan in 1997 for its multi-media kit, Reaching the Rainbow. I was asked to research what the various colours mean, then to suggest a type of literacy for each colour. (They had no way of knowing that my Spirit Name is Rainbow Woman.) This project was overseen by a group of Aboriginal educators from across Canada.

Since then, I've combined the Rainbow model with the Medicine Wheel, and I've proposed a learning outcome for the Spirit, the Heart, the Mind and the Body for each colour. The learning outcomes were adapted from work done by staff at the First Nations Technical Institute, Mohawks of Tyendinaga Territory, Ontario.

I've shared this "work in progress" with learners, Elders and practitioners across Canada. The common view seems to be that the thesis has merit, and that it encapsulates the work that they've been doing. In full presentations of this thesis, for each colour, I speak about an Aboriginal literacy program that is doing exemplary work in that area. As I will be referring to the types of literacy throughout this report, I summarize them here:

The Rainbow (Holistic) Approach to Aboriginal Literacy

Red - the colour understood by some Aboriginal cultures to signify the life-force (bloodstream) of humans and animals. It can mean confidence, which has within it the knowing, the ability to plan, to start a process. Red has been used to denote the First Peoples of Canada. Red represents the **language of origin of First Nations individuals and/or communities**.

- **Awareness - Spirit (Attitude/Insight)** - Aboriginal languages are descriptive, show the interconnectedness of life, embody and transmit the culture.
- **Struggle - Heart (Feelings about Self/Others)** - For a variety of reasons, often not their own, a significant number of Aboriginal Peoples do not know their language of origin. They would like to learn about themselves, and their own culture.

- **Building - Mind (Knowledge)** - Many Aboriginal literacy programs have first language components. Some northern programs are bilingual, and use learners' syllabic skills to help them to acquire literacy in English.
- **Preservation - Body (Skill)** - Learners are recovering the "old" words, producing activity booklets, and are participating in ceremonies using the language.

Orange - the colour understood by some Aboriginal cultures to mean balance, the place of choice where we are taught to exercise self-confidence, self-assuredness, self-control and self-esteem, in order to keep emotions, such as fear, in balance. Orange is used to denote fire. The first source of fire is the Sun, which is the centre of the universe. People are considered to be like the universe, in that they also have a centre, a fire within. For Aboriginal Peoples, that centre is the teachings. Aboriginal teachings have been passed from generation to generation orally. Orange symbolizes **oral literacy** (speaking, listening...);

- **Awareness - Spirit (Attitude/Insight)** - Prior to contact, Aboriginal Peoples had an oral tradition.
- **Struggle - Heart (Feelings about Self/Others)** - When I hear others speak, I actively listen, I relate, I learn, I gain more knowledge.
- **Building - Mind (Knowledge)** - Each and every moment, I acquire more knowledge through listening and/or speaking.
- **Preservation - Body (Skill)** - I listen and speak to others to enhance my knowledge/options.

Yellow - the colour used in reference to the moon, and the gathering of food (in Aboriginal tradition, crops are planted and harvested according to the phases of the moon). Some Aboriginal cultures understand yellow to mean creativity. Yellow refers to the **creative means by which Aboriginal people learned to communicate with others who spoke another language, by using symbols (pictographs, and in contemporary times, artwork, music...) and/or sign language.**

- **Awareness - Spirit (Attitude/Insight)** - The written word is only one way to communicate.
- **Struggle - Heart (Feelings about Self/Others)** - I feel more comfortable expressing myself another way.
- **Building - Mind (Knowledge)** - When I need or feel clarity/centredness, I can (draw, make music, whatever my creative means are...)
- **Preservation - Body (Skill)** - I create to express myself and to enhance my surroundings.

Green - is interpreted to mean growth, going beyond what is familiar, yet remaining true to the teachings. This allows us to live with respect and humbleness. Green represents grass and growing things on Mother Earth. Treaties and understandings with the newcomers often included the phrase, "*as long as the grasses grow and the rivers flow*". Green refers to **literacy in the languages of the European newcomers to this land several hundred years ago, English and/or French, which are recognized as Canada's official languages;**

- **Awareness - Spirit (Attitude/Insight)** - We live in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual society.
- **Struggle - Heart (Feelings about Self/Others)** - I can learn other languages to give me more choices in life, but I do not have to give up my own.
- **Building - Mind (Knowledge)** - What I learn about other languages/cultures reinforces my own, and expands my worldview.
- **Preservation - Body (Skill)** I can teach myself and others through another language, as well as my own.

Blue - which some Aboriginal cultures understand to mean truth. Knowing the truth means staying true to your vision, where commitment is most important. Blue symbolizes the sky. With the coming of the Europeans, the skyline changed, and now contains the tools of technology, towers and satellite dishes that send and receive signals. Blue refers to **the skills required to communicate using technology.**

- **Awareness - Spirit (Attitude/Insight)** - Technology is a large part of everyday life.
- **Struggle - Heart (Feelings about Self/Others)** - Technology is confusing; however, if I don't learn how to use it, I may miss out on an opportunity.
- **Building - Mind (Knowledge)** - I can learn the basics, and build from there.
- **Preservation - Body (Skill)** - I can connect to a larger world through technology.

Indigo - refers to the night-time sky, the dream time, when Aboriginal peoples are more open to receiving messages from the Spirit World. This colour refers to the "third eye chakra", which means "spiritual seeing". Indigo means **the skills required for spiritual or cultural literacy - the ability to interpret natural things, which are seen to be messages from the Spirit World - the sighting of an animal, the shape of a cloud, seeing a certain person at a particular point in time, synchronicity (significant events happening at the same time), etc.**

- **Awareness - Spirit (Attitude/Insight)** - There are realities beyond those we perceive through our five senses.
- **Struggle - Heart (Feelings about Self/Others)** - I often sense or "know" things without being able to explain how or why.
- **Building - Mind (Knowledge)** - I interpret symbols/events to improve the quality of my life.
- **Preservation - Body (Skill)** - I can find the growth lesson in any event.

Violet - is thought to be a healing colour. Some Aboriginal cultures understand purple to mean wisdom, the ability to understand things, to have true power (inner and spiritual), to respect, and to know in a holistic way. Violet refers to the **holistic base to Aboriginal literacy - dealing with spiritual, emotional, mental and physical learning outcomes - striving for balance.**

- **Awareness - Spirit (Attitude/Insight)** - I am Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body.
- **Struggle - Heart (Feelings about Self/Others)** - I feel more centred/balanced when I look after my Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body.
- **Building - Mind (Knowledge)** - I know what activities nurture my Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body.

- **Preservation - Body (Skill)** - I regularly review what I am doing to take care of my Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body.

International Adult Literacy Survey Definition of Literacy

For Aboriginal Peoples, literacy is more than the written word. It encompasses many aspects of life. On the other hand, the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) defines literacy thusly:

"Literacy is the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community - to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential."

In fact, IALS measured three main types of literacy:

1. Prose – the knowledge and skills needed to understand and use information from texts including editorials, news stories, brochures and instruction manuals
2. Document – the knowledge and skills required to locate and use information contained in various formats, including job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables and charts.
3. Quantitative – the knowledge and skills required to apply arithmetic operations, either alone or sequentially, to numbers embedded in printed materials, such as balancing a chequebook, figuring out a tip, completing an order form or determining the amount of interest on a loan from an advertisement.

Finding Out About a Literacy Conference in Australia

In June 2000, I was "*surfing the net*" (blue literacy,) when I found some information about the Australian Council on Adult Literacy (ACAL) international conference, Lens on Literacy, in Fremantle, Australia. The deadline for the Call for Presenters was only a week away. Amongst feelings of doubt and anticipation, I sent the contact person a synopsis of my thesis-in-progress, The Holistic/Rainbow Approach to Aboriginal Literacy. I had already done one presentation on it at a national conference, and it was fairly well-received. I humbly thought ACAL **might** ask me to do a workshop. Just after the deadline, I received an e-mail asking if I would like to be a "*lighthouse presenter*". Figuring that this had to be Australian lingo, I e-mailed back and asked, "*What is a lighthouse presenter?*" I was told that it is similar to a keynote speaker. And I was worried that they MIGHT or MIGHT NOT consider my application!

The next hurdle was funding. Who would pay for me to go there? I asked ACAL, and they said their funding would cover only those out-of-country presenters from third world countries. So, I approached the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU). They thought this might be covered out of mid-year funding. I then sent in an application.

In the past, I've tended to think that once-in-a-lifetime opportunities would evade me. They were always meant for somebody else. However, I had been learning lately that our thoughts contain very powerful energy. To put it simply, what we think, we produce in our lives. Similar to a young child learning to walk, I have been taking tentative steps in thinking positive, seeing the desired result as already happening, involving as many senses in this visualization as I can -

sight, hearing, feeling. Our responsibility is to make sure that what we're asking for is in line with Universal Law.

While the wheels for a trip to Australia were already in motion - I'd been accepted to be a presenter, a lighthouse presenter yet, a funder seemed interested - I was still not sure if this would unfold.

One day, while I was doing laundry, I arrived a few minutes too early to change my clothes from the washer to the dryer. It was too short a time for me to go back upstairs, so I decided to lean against the window and just bide my time. As I put my hand out behind me to balance myself against the window ledge, I slipped a bit, because I had put my hand on a pile of magazines. I turned to see what they were. Right on top of the pile was a travel magazine entitled, Coral Reef Tours. It was about trips to Australia. Synchronicity! (indigo literacy) "*All right, Creator!*" I said. "*I know what you're telling me. I'm going to Australia!*"

I feverishly whipped my thesis-in-progress into good enough shape to submit to ACAL by the deadline, August 18. In addition, I had to keep re-working the MTCU proposal. They could not cover out-of-country travel, but they could pay me an honorarium to do research on literacy in Australia, and it was my call how I spent that honorarium. I was not out of the woods yet. I was hopeful, yet with a tinge of doubt. Amidst my doubts, I pulled out the magazine of Australia, surfed the net again, and tracked down literacy programs that I might be able to visit. My plan was to arrive in Eastern Australia, work my way across the country and end up in Fremantle in time for the ACAL conference.

My niece, whom I had not seen in years came into town, and we had dinner together. She wanted me to meet her new partner. As I hesitantly told them that I'm hoping to maybe go to Australia, he informed me that he has family in Australia. So many synchronicities! He explained that in addition to a passport, I need a Visa. The travel agent should take care of that. I checked my passport and it had expired. I called a lawyer I've known for a few years - she agreed to sign the form. Within two hours, the necessary paperwork was done, including the trip to the Passport Office! I had learned, when things go smoothly, it's meant to be.

One day, I got an e-mail from Peter Goulding, formerly of AlphaCom, an electronic conferencing system for literacy programs in Ontario. I had not seen Peter nor talked to him in ages. He had forwarded me some web-sites on Australia. How could he possibly have known? (I did encounter him later that year, and asked him how he knew. He did not know. He was just "moved" to send the web-sites to me.) Again, I said to myself, "*Okay, Creator. Sorry I'm giving some doubt energy to this trip. Thank you for sending me another sign that I'm going.*" I went to a travel agent and arranged for a September 1st departure, figuring I would cover the trip out of my own pocket if need be.

In late July, I was heading downtown on the subway in rush-hour traffic to meet some friends for dinner. We were celebrating the birthday of one of my dearest friends - a confidante, a role model. I had started to tell people that I was making moves to present at the ACAL conference; however, I was still holding back, because, "*What if it did not happen?*" As I stood there hanging onto the pole, pondering whether I should bring up the topic of Australia at dinner, I noticed a

red t-shirt in my peripheral vision. I looked up. Right smack dab in front of me was what could only be an Australian Aboriginal woman wearing a red t-shirt with a map of Australia on it. "*I finally get it Creator! Yes, I'm going! Forgive my human frailties. I'm working on them.*"

Sure enough, mid-August, I got a phone call from MTCU, informing me that they were covering half of what I had requested. They were asking the [National Literacy Secretariat](#) (NLS) to cost-share, and they could not guarantee the NLS response. I would have to wait. Pay-dirt! I could afford to cover the other half, if it came to that. I started to tell my friends, family and co-workers that I was going to Australia. They thought I was going to the Olympics. While I did not even know the Olympics were on, it turned out that I would be in Sydney just prior to their opening.

Preparing to go to Australia

In the meantime, I was having trouble setting up an itinerary in Australia, because I was not hearing back from people. However, I had heard back from a Dr. Jean Searle that she had put my request on an e-mail discussion group of literacy practitioners in Australia. As soon as I heard the positive response from MTCU, I started getting a flurry of responses to my e-mails - confirming meetings (blue literacy). Through these e-mails, I realized that Indigenous seemed to be the term in use when referring to Aboriginal Peoples.

I did more surfing the net to arrange accommodations. I asked the people with whom I would be meeting for accommodation information. I opted for mainly bed-and-breakfasts. They are family-run. As a woman travelling to the other side of the world alone, this is important. I would not be an anonymous guest. I would be one of a handful of guests. The owners would know my name and provide me with information - bus-routes, places to have lunch and/or dinner, etc.

The travel agent had provided me with full-colour magazines. I read up as much as my busy schedule would allow. I found out that Australia is an independent Western democracy with a population of more than 17.6 million. It is one of the world's most urbanised countries, with about 70 per cent of the population living in the 10 largest cities - and I would be visiting at least half of those cities - Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth and Fremantle.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people totalled 265,378 at the last census, nearly 1.5 per cent of the population. Two-thirds of the indigenous people live in towns and cities. Many others live in rural and remote areas, and some still have a mainly traditional way of life.

Before the arrival of European settlers, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples inhabited most areas of the Australian continent, each speaking one or more of hundreds of separate languages, with distinct lifestyles and religious and cultural traditions in different regions. Adaptable and creative, with simple but highly efficient technology, Indigenous Australians had complex social systems and highly developed traditions reflecting their deep connection with the land and the environment. This sure sounded familiar!

Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are ethnically and culturally different. Historically, Aboriginal people have lived on mainland Australia, Tasmania and many of the continent's offshore islands like Groote Eylandt, Bathurst and Melville in the Northern Territory.

Torres Strait Islanders come from the islands of the Torres Strait between the tip of Cape York in Queensland and Papua New Guinea and have many cultural similarities with the people of Papua New Guinea and the Pacific.

I went to Thomas Cook Foreign Exchange to get Australian money. It is colourful, large, with a cellophane insert on the left hand side, along with the always present picture of a political figure, such as a king or queen, on the right. At that time, the Australian dollar was equal to .85 Canadian money (quantitative literacy).

On September 1, 2000, I left for Australia by way of Vancouver, Singapore and Korea - with no word yet from the National Literacy Secretariat. I booked my entire trip on faith - and on my credit cards. (I later learned in Australia that September 1st is the first day of Spring. Their seasons are opposite to ours, and change on the 1st of March, June, September and December.)

On the way to Australia, I consulted various maps (document literacy), and was aware when our plane flew over the equator and the International Date Line, the imaginary line on the Earth that separates two consecutive calendar days. That is, the date in the Eastern hemisphere, to the left of the line, is always one day ahead of the date in the Western hemisphere.

In Australia

Queensland

On September 3, I arrived in Brisbane, where it was 15 hours ahead of Toronto time, and the Chippewas of Saugeen First Nation, where my family lives. It was an exercise in quantitative literacy figuring out the best time for me to phone home to let them know that I had arrived at my first destination safely.

It is strongly recommended that, when traveling, we adjust ourselves as quickly as possible to the current time zone, so I decided to go for a walk to the nearest grocery store. It was another exercise for me in left-right orientation when I saw that vehicles travel on the left side of the road (yes, the steering wheel is on the right side of the car). Even the traffic lights were placed differently. I decided that the safest thing to do for now was to stand in with a group of people, and cross the street with them.

I knew, from previous travel to other countries, that I needed to get a phone card. I bought one for \$50, knowing that I would be in Australia for three weeks, and that I would need to make several calls home, as I made my way across the country (quantitative literacy).

Figuring out the telephone system was another challenge. Even some of the terminology was different - a hache key meant a pound key. There was an overseas code to dial as well - in fact, a different one for each country almost! I felt in my heart and spirit what learners go through as they try to make sense of all these symbols around them.

While I managed to buy some groceries, I was too tired to cook, so I got brave and ventured into a restaurant. Again, I encountered different terminology. A "*white coffee*" means "*coffee with*

cream". Also, Australian people like to shorten words - telies are telephones, presies are presents, etc. It was a bit puzzling at first, but I felt a real sense of accomplishment as I started to catch on.

Paying for the meal, trying to recognize and to add up the different coins - quantitative literacy - was almost too much for somebody who had been traveling the better part of two days, sitting in a cramped space, where the only exercise we got was a trip to the washroom! By six o'clock in the afternoon, I could not handle the pressure headache across the top of my head anymore, and I laid down "*for a few minutes*". I woke up the next morning, raring to go!

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Carolyn Ovens, Director, Community Skill Sharing Centre, picked me up at the Kangaroo Point Holiday Apartments. I accidentally walked around to the right side of the car to get in, though, because I had forgotten that the passenger side in Australia is on the left. (spatial literacy). On the way to the school, Carolyn explained to me about church-run or state mission compounds - similar to our residential schools in Canada.

AIICS has been operating since 1986. Initially, AIICS focussed on primary schooling, then moved into secondary education. Lately, it has incorporated a range of community-based education and training services for adults, including youth. Their aim is to more closely link education and training with employment and enterprise development.

The adult portion of the school is called The Kulkathil Community Skill Centre. It was established through a \$720,000 grant from the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA). Kulkathil has had a community literacy program on campus over the past two years. Kulkathil is an Aboriginal word, which broken down means: '*kulka = spear, thil = bearing*'. Spear making prepares one to hunt and gather. In a figurative sense, Kulkathil is arming people with spears, i.e., knowledge, skills and tools. But Kulkathil does not disregard the spears the learners come with - prior knowledge, including from their own culture.

My first encounter with staff was a young Aboriginal man who teaches in the digital literacies class. One of his first comments to me, after the usual pleasantries common to indigenous peoples as to our nation/language of origin and what part of the country we're from was about the "*lots of money that Aboriginal Peoples in Canada got from the federal government, along with an apology for residential schools*". I enlightened him as to the difference between an "*apology*", which has legal and financial liabilities, and an "*acknowledgement*", which was what we actually got. I told him that this money would be spread out over 5 years. I also told him that part of those monies would be filtered off for the bureaucratic/administrative layers, and that the rest would eventually filter down to the people, after they met the stringent criteria of the grant application process. I told him the number of First Nations communities in Canada (approximately 630, not including

urban), and how dividing this into whatever is left after the bureaucratic/administrative layers actually resulted in a small amount to successful applicants (quantitative literacy). His response was, "Oh, just like the Commonwealth." I later realized that the terms "Commonwealth" and "federal government" are used interchangeably in Australia.

In this young man's class, twenty-one long-term unemployed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders learn to develop web-sites (blue literacy). The unique focus in this classroom is to use web-sites as a way of teaching about, transmitting and preserving Aboriginal culture. "Digital literacy" functions on a number of levels:

- operational - how to use the technology
- cultural - how the technology can be used in community contexts (e.g. researching family genealogy, access government services, entertainment)
- critical - understanding how media are manipulated for certain purposes, creating new kinds of courses of Indigenous training.

Kulkathil is equipped with industry quality information technology equipment which includes:

- a large meeting room/presentation space
- one large group training workshop and classroom space, incorporating (15 networked PC workstations and the capacity for networking 15 laptop PC's (which can also be used as a mobile computer laboratory)
- an office/administration space
- a technical workshop and training space
- a 'high end' multimedia training and production laboratory.



That is, participants use state-of-the art technology to learn a marketable skill. The Kulkathil spaces have not replicated the institutional look. Rather, their offices and classrooms have large panels that incorporate the painting style of an Indigenous artist in Cooktown, David Michael. Indigenous Australian art features the use of tiny coloured dots to make up the shapes. The walls and furniture in the classroom are colour-coordinated with the panels of artwork.

Kulkathil's objectives are as follows:

- provide access to the intermediate labour market (ILM) to Indigenous people so that they are in contact with the world of work and decrease the number of people who are long-term unemployed;
- offer recruitment focussed on both the needs and wants of Indigenous people who are encouraged to join voluntarily, but whose motivation is based on financial independence and employment opportunity;
- provide links that allow a combination of work experience and training;
- provide appropriate access to skills that foster proper management to achieve individual or business success;
- foster indigenous philosophies in terms of how training is delivered, encourage independence and a working knowledge of employment/training rights and workplace health and safety legislation;
- develop a system of educational and training reciprocity that is conducive to sharing and managing knowledge and community responsibility;
- develop the capacity of Kulkathil to operate on both a large and small scale enterprise focused approach to community development.

I was madly scribbling notes (green literacy), when Carolyn asked me if I would like to just print out material from the Kulkathil web-site (blue literacy). She showed me how to get into the web-site, and I proceeded to print out pertinent pages. However, I was having trouble with the printer. In trying to work out the problem, I had lost track of the time (quantitative literacy). I was late for my next appointment - Elie Skoien, the speech pathologist.

Carolyn took me to Elie's office. A young woman told us that Elie was down the hall speaking with a woman from Canada about literacy. Caroline and I were both puzzled. I am the woman from Canada that Elie was supposed to be speaking to about literacy. Down the hall we went. Sure enough, there was Elie speaking with a woman from Canada.

When I did not show up at the appointed time, Elie went to the office to find me. However, she went to the main office, rather than the office of the adult section of the school. Because she had forgotten to take my name with her, Elie walked into the office and asked, "*Is there a woman here from Canada?*" A student placement, Helen, from Griffith University, was just signing in. She replied, "*I'm from Canada.*" Elie said, "*Come with me. We're supposed to talk about literacy.*" The bewildered student followed her, thinking her assignment must have been changed.

After Helen and I were introduced, I asked her where she was from in Canada. She said she was from out west, but that her husband (who was also on placement to AIICS from Griffith) was from the Chippewas of Rama First Nation, which is another Anishnawbe community not too far from my own home community. (Synchronicity - indigo literacy) Helen and I agreed to meet at Tea Break, when she would bring her husband, Justin.

Elie explained to me the intake process with the children in the school. The incidence of Otitis Media is high in the Aboriginal population of Australia (40 - 70%, with episodes higher in school-aged children as compared to less than 5% for the general population). Otitis media is an

infection of the middle ear. Older children will often complain about ear pain, ear fullness, or hearing loss. Those affected are unable to hear and replicate certain sounds. Ellie assesses the children, and builds an individual phonics-based program for each student, whereby they have tutors for 3 hours a week. Ellie mentioned that the students love their programs, enjoy working with their tutors, and want to know when it's their turn. On our way to the Tea Room to meet Helen and her husband, I noticed several Aboriginal students happily working with their Aboriginal tutors.

Where do the dollars come from for the tutors? Under Australia's National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, there is an Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS). The ATAS offers supplementary tuition and other kinds of study help to Indigenous students at all levels of education. The Scheme makes qualified tutors available to help Indigenous students who need assistance with their studies.

The aim of the ATAS is to help Indigenous students achieve educational outcomes comparable to those of other Australians. When approving tutors, the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) gives preference to qualified Indigenous people. DETYA tries to make sure that students and parents are happy with the tutor before any contract is approved.

At Tea Break, I met Helen and her husband, Justin. They were delighted to meet another Anishnawbe - in Australia yet! Helen was working towards her Bachelor of Education to become a teacher. Justin was there to teach artwork to the students. Helen was working on a thesis, The Role of Drama in Literacy; however, she was considering changing it, because she was not getting the support she needed. Immediately, I shared with her a shortened version of the presentation I was going to be doing in Fremantle later on that month. Helen got excited again about the possibilities of her thesis. (Synchronicity - indigo literacy)

Helen and Justin both asked me where I was staying. I told them, and they said they would be by to get me the next day to take me home with them. When I met with Carolyn again, she said that staff of Kulkathil were crying with delight over my meeting another Anishnawbe at their school, and that I would be staying with his family.

The Gumurri Centre
Griffith University
Mt. Gravatt Campus
Phone: 011 61 7 3875 5814

Helen and Justin took me to the Gumurri Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research, Education and Student Support based at Griffith University, Mt. Gravatt Campus. This is where the indigenous teaching students hang out, and either get help from the Coordinator, Barry Malezer (e-mail: B.Malezer@mailbox.gu.edu.au), or they help each other. The Centre is equipped with computers so that students can do their assignments and/or use the Internet (blue literacy). (This is how Helen and I kept in touch after I came home to Canada.)

Barry stated that many of the students are on ABSTUDY. At that point, I was hearing so many acronyms and different terms that I just nodded knowingly, all the while wondering, "What is

ABSTUDY?" I used my context skills to conclude that it must be monies available to Aboriginal students to help with their studies.

Barry proudly showed me a map of Indigenous Australia. Barry loves to show this map when he teaches people about the indigenous people of Australia. He said that it counters the myth of pan-Aboriginalism - they are all the same.

Prior to contact, there were between 600 and 700 distinct "tribes" in Australia. Each had its own territory, as well as its own political system and laws. Some languages were similar. The 600-700 tribes spoke, amongst them, between 200 and 250 languages. (At least 50 are no longer spoken by anyone. A hundred or more languages are spoken by just a few elderly or middle-aged people, but are not being learned by children. No more than 20 or 30 languages are in a reasonably healthy state; that is, being used in everyday life and being learned by children - red literacy.)

Australian languages have grammars as complicated as those of any other language, and similarly large vocabularies of several thousand words. Across the languages, some words recur. There are also similarities of grammar. Australian languages have a rich cultural heritage - long narratives and song cycles have been handed down from parent to child for thousands of years (orange literacy).

Barry and I are Aboriginal Peoples on two different continents, on opposite sides of the world, yet our people have an oral tradition that transmits much of the culture and the language. Australian languages are now being written in a phonetic alphabet, with one symbol for each sound. These Australian alphabets are being used for books, and in newspapers.

In the early 1970s, bilingual education was introduced in some Aboriginal communities. Children learn to read and write in their language of origin first, and later switch to English (green literacy). This is a major factor in ensuring that some Aboriginal languages will survive.

The languages are also being modified. Speakers of Aboriginal languages have evolved words and phrases to describe introduced technology, social structures and activities, and other changes that have occurred since European contact. Sometimes they borrow words from English; sometimes they make up new words. Many Aboriginal people are deeply concerned about the state of their languages. Language centres have been established in different parts of the country to keep the languages going.

Just before Helen, Justin and I left the Gumurri Centre, Barry provided me with my own copy of The National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2000-2004. This is an initiative of the Commonwealth Government of Australia, March 2000. (Upon my return to Canada, I provided a copy to Deborah Young, Policy Advisor, [National Literacy Secretariat](#))

The National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

The introduction from the Minister, the Honourable Dr. David Kemp, MP, Commonwealth Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs, says this:

"Until Indigenous Australians can choose from the same range of futures as other Australians, we are not achieving our national's promise as a democratic society."

Pertinent statistics include:

- Seven out of every ten Indigenous students in Year 3 (which is how Australians refer to grades) are below the national literacy standard, compared to just three out of ten for other Australians
- On average, Indigenous students miss out on up to one day of schooling every week, compared to around just three days every term for other Australian students
- Some 18% of Australia's 'at risk' youth are Indigenous – you will recall earlier that I mentioned Indigenous peoples make up approximately 1.5% of the population

(This reminded me of the findings of the 1991 Aboriginal Post-Censal Survey in Canada where there was a similar disparity between Aboriginal Peoples and non-Aboriginal Peoples for many socio-economic factors - quantitative literacy)

The strategy further states that

"...every child commencing school from 1998 will achieve a minimum acceptable literacy level and numeracy standard within four years...acknowledges that, for Indigenous Australian children we need to put in extra effort, resources and will to achieve our goals...This means ensuring all Indigenous Australian will competently speak and understand Australian Standard English and have the numeracy skills to manage their lives. This should not be at the expense of Indigenous communities' desires to use their own languages, or to revitalize or regain languages that may have been threatened..."

This strategy, which was launched in March 2000, extends across preschool and school systems. Supplementary funding designed to support improved educational outcomes for Indigenous students include:

- The aforementioned Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS), which offers supplementary tuition and other kinds of study help to Indigenous students at all levels of education, from primary school to TAFE and university. It makes qualified tutors available to help Indigenous students who need assistance with their studies, and provides funds for the establishment of Homework Centres set up by local groups of parents and community members. School students and trainees can receive up to five hours help from a tutor each week.
- Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Programme (ASSPA), which brings the parents of Indigenous preschool and school children together to help their children at school. Eligible activities include: contributions to the purchase of special equipment and teaching resources to help raise Indigenous participation and attendance; activities which get Indigenous parents more involved in the school and in their children's education; promotion of greater parental awareness of their responsibilities towards their children's educational success; educational and sporting excursions organized as part of the school programme; nutrition and health education programmes; local, school-based educational projects (including curriculum development) for Indigenous school and preschool students; other activities which might increase the educational participation of Indigenous

youth; and, promotion of Indigenous culture in the school or preschool, including National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Celebration (NAIDOC) activities (sounds like June 21st, our National Aboriginal Day in Canada).

- Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP), which is designed to assist education providers improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students - applicants must be a non-profit organization, be an incorporated body, and supply a statutory declaration, which identifies students, dates of birth and whether the students are full-time equivalent or, in the case of the preschool sector, the number of hours per week that each student attends.
- Aboriginal Study Assistance Scheme (ABSTUDY), which helps Aboriginal students with: living expenses through the payment of a Living Allowance and, for some students, a Remote Area Allowance; accommodation expenses through the payment of Rent Assistance, boarding fees or residential costs; education expenses for school fees, books and equipment, incidentals, Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) fees and some other costs for Masters and Doctorate students; fares at the beginning and end of the term or semester (for students who have to live away from home to study) or for residential schools, field trips or testing and assessment activities; and, prescription medicines through the payment of a Pharmaceutical Allowance.

Greg Douglas, Nathan Campus, Griffith University

On my second night with Helen and Justin, we went to have dinner with Greg Douglas, who heads up the Aboriginal Student Centre at Nathan Campus. Here I got an Indigenous perspective on history in Australia. Australia is in the initial stages of Towards Reconciliation, the goal of which is:

"A united Australia which respects this land of ours; values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage; and provides justice and equity for all".

Throughout the evening, I learned that there are many issues that the Aboriginal Peoples in Canada have in common with the Aboriginal Peoples in Australia. We both had a time when our children were removed from their familial homes, and sent to missions. In Australia, boys and women were often abducted from Aboriginal camps to work for "*white people*" - either on fishing boats, or as domestics. The whereabouts of Aboriginals had to be identified. Any offenders were taken from the area by police and sent to penal settlements.

By the 1920's, The Aboriginals were the target of the "*Roundup*" policemen, who would go to the settlements, stations and camps to find school-aged children to take to missions. (This took place for a period of about 150 years up to the early 1970s.) Australians refer to the people affected by these activities as "*The Stolen Generation*". Many of these activities were done under the auspices of The Aboriginals Preservation and Protection Act of 1939. Later, Australian Aboriginal people were given exemption cards, which meant that they were free from mission life and that their children (whose names and ages had to be identified on the exemption card) couldn't be taken away from them.

I also learned that there is a movement to acknowledge and to teach authentic Aboriginal and Islander history. Later, I found out that the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 's

1997 Bringing Them Home report recommended that a National Sorry Day be held each year. A decision was made in 1998 to rename the day the Journey of Healing (May 26). In fact, May 27 - June 3 is National Reconciliation Week. This week was chosen because it is framed by two landmark decisions for Indigenous Australians. The 27th of May is the anniversary of the 1967 Referendum in which Australians voted to remove the Constitutional clauses that discriminate against Indigenous Australians. The 3rd of June is the anniversary of the High Court of Australia's Native Title ruling that recognised prior Indigenous occupation of Australia, i.e., it overturned the myth of *terra nullius* - nobody **that mattered** (highlights mine) lived here before the land was "*discovered*". Further, July 4-11 is NAIDOC Week. The National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee declared a week for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to celebrate their history and culture. National Aboriginal and Islander Day is actually July 9.

The next day, Helen and Justin took me to Glasshouse Mountain, one of the sacred sites of the Aboriginal Peoples of Australia. I was very much refreshed by a day of being surrounded by the beauty of Mother Earth.

September 8th, International Literacy Day

On September 8th, I went out for the day with Dr. Jean Searle, Faculty of Education, Griffith University. We went to The Greek Club for International Literacy Day activities by the Queensland Council for Adult Literacy (QCAL). Participants were honouring the volunteers (whom some people said were the "*heart*" of literacy), and hosting the QCAL Annual General Meeting. Several speakers highlighted issues such as:

- Making government accountable;
- Seeing literacy as a natural bridge to empowerment; and,
- Having former learners become tutors

As well, I was given a few minutes on the agenda. Though I should have expected it, I had to rely on my "*orange literacy skills (speaking)*" and wing it. I commended participants for their focus on learners as the most important people in the program. I suggested that Australia and Canada have this in common.

Dr. Searle teaches at Griffith University in a pre-service teaching or training course (Bachelor of Adult & Vocational Education, or the Bachelor of Training, plus post-graduate qualifications). One of the majors within this degree is an Adult Literacy & Numeracy major, which enables graduates to teach adult literacy within Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and senior high school in Queensland. TAFEs are similar to our Community Colleges of Applied Arts and Training. The major consists of 4 subjects – Literacy at Work; Teaching Literacy & Numeracy; Working Text (Introduction to Functional Grammar and Discourse Analysis), and an Independent Literacy or Numeracy Project). All subjects are available in flexi-distance mode. After the AGM, Jean and I had lunch with Dr. Geraldine Castleton, Research Fellow, Centre for Literacy and Language Education Resources, Mt. Gravatt Campus, Griffith University. Geraldine is part of the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australia Research Consortium

(ALNARC), which represents a national collaboration between five university-based research centres.

After lunch, Dr. Searle, Dr. Castleton and I went to Old Parliament House for a debate around literacy: "*Is it the main meal, or a side course?*" I had to really use my orange literacy skills of listening to keep up with the debate. The moderator and the participants spoke rapidly in their Australian accent, and many of their comments were peppered with acronyms!

Aboriginal Australian Art

On Saturday, Justin, Helen and I went to an authentic Aboriginal art store, so I could buy souvenirs from the "*real*" people rather than those mass-produced for tourists. We were treated to a demonstration on the didgeridoo. The young man explained the various ways of producing sounds by using different breathing techniques and hand positions. He then played a song for us, while using hand movements that told a story (yellow literacy). He explained the story as he played the song. A person literate in the movements would be able to decipher the story for himself/herself. He also gave us a bit of history of the "*didge*".

Traditionally, an Aborigine would go into nature and listen intensely to animal sounds, not just voices but also the flapping of wings or the thump of feet on the ground. The Aborigine would also listen to the sounds of wind, thunder, trees creaking, and water running. The essences of all these sounds were played with as much accuracy as possible within the droning sound of the didgeridoo. For the Aborigine, the observation of nature immediately requires a state of empathy, which leads to an imitative expression.

What is a didgeridoo?

1. Possibly the world's oldest musical instrument
2. A wind instrument originally found in Arnhem Land, Northern Australia.
3. Is made from limbs and tree trunks hollowed out by termites (insects).
4. Is cut to an average length of 1.3 metres and cleaned out with a stick or hot coals.
5. Was used as an accompaniment to chants and songs.
6. Produces a low pitch, resonant sound with complex rhythmic patterns.
7. In some tribal groups only played by men, but in most groups by men, women and children.
8. Traditional various forms of the didgeridoo were found in Central Australia around Alice Springs.



9. The Didgeridoo is the sound of Australia.
10. Indigenous Australians say that "*If the earth had a voice, it would be the sound of the Didgeridoo.*"

That evening, it was with mixed feelings that I said good-bye to Helen and Justin at the Brisbane airport, as I left for Sydney – sadness because I was leaving them, gratitude for their generous hearts and spirits, and anticipation for the next leg of my journey. (I had found out through Jean, that Bondi Beach, where the bed-and-breakfast was that I just "*happened*" to pick on the Internet (blue literacy), was also the site for the Beach Volleyball Events at the Olympics. Jean also told me that Sydney went through a major "*face-lift*" in preparation for people from around the world coming to the Olympics.)

In Australia, I was flying Ansett Airlines, the official airline of the Olympics. Ansett offered special airfares for in-Australia flights. Synchronicity for me, because it reduced my costs (indigo literacy), AND it also meant that I got to see several Olympic teams taking in the sights of Australia.

New South Wales

Faculty of Aboriginal Studies
Eora Centre
33 Abercrombie Street
Chippendale
New South Wales 2008
Phone: 011 61 2 9217 4878
Fax: 011 61 2 9217 4072

On Monday morning, I met with Darryl Griffen of Eora College. Eora is in Redfern, a part of Sydney with a concentrated Aboriginal population. Most of the approximately 400 students are Aboriginal. Eora is the result of a merger between a community center and the Sydney Institute of Technology, part of a state system known as TAFE, Technical and Further Education, similar to our community colleges (CAAT - College of Applied Art and Technology).

Darryl himself is Aboriginal, one of few Aboriginal staff in TAFEs. At Eora, students can combine Aboriginal studies with basic literacy training, or earn diplomas in visual or performing

arts. Darryl explained that Eora instructors, within the guidelines of TAFE courses, make the activities as "*real life as possible*".

Eora has an Aboriginal Arts and Cultural Practices course. It runs 20 hours per week for a year. There are no formal educational requirements for this. However, preference is given to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people.

This course is for Aboriginal people who want to gain basic training in a variety of visual arts/craft areas. It provides an introduction to practical and theoretical aspects of arts and crafts, and awareness of local resources, facilities and local cultural practices. It also prepares people for work in community arts and/or cottage industries, if they want to create, promote and market arts and crafts.

Participants learn how to develop visual arts skills and practices that reflect an awareness of their own identity and culture, and a pride in Aboriginal heritage. It gives them access to further education/training opportunities in mainstream courses and an opportunity for them to express their abilities in ways that meet their community aspirations.

Some of the subjects include:

- Family Kinship & Identity I
- Aboriginal Cultural Values
- Aboriginal Art History I and II
- Inter-Cultural Communication
- Cross Cultural Relations 1

This course articulates into some other courses, and participants may get advanced standing for some modules.

Tranby College
13 Mansfield St. Glebe
New South Wales 6027
Phone: 011 61 2 9660 3444
Fax: 011 61 2 9660 1924

That afternoon, I met with Yvonne Jackson, Director of Studies, Tranby Aboriginal College. Tranby is situated in Glebe, another part of Sydney with a concentrated Aboriginal population. Tranby has been providing Aboriginal-directed education since 1958. It was pledged in 1957 by Reverend Hope, an Anglican minister, to the Australian Board of Missions (Anglican) Christian Community Co-operative "*for use as a Training Centre*" for the development of Co-operative practices for Aborigines.

By 1995, over 12,000 Aboriginal students from all over Australia, as well as the Torres Trait Islands, Papua New Guinea, The Solomons, Fiji and New Zealand, had either attended the College or taken courses externally. Over the years, the student intake has increased from 25

annually to 170 in 2000. The emphasis has changed according to community demands. They encompass trade skills, foundation literacy and numeracy skills and tertiary preparation.

Tranby offers three day courses for members of Indigenous communities, and one evening course for the non-Indigenous community. Recognition of prior learning is available. All courses are nationally accredited by the Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board. The courses are:

1. Advanced Diploma of Applied Aboriginal Studies. Graduates from this course will be qualified to enter a range of Aboriginal positions within Aboriginal communities, organisations and agencies (government and non-government), engaged in work with Aboriginal peoples either as field workers, consultants, advocates, negotiators, and educators. Modules include: a) Identity/Research (understanding identity by exploring family culture and history told by those who lived it - the Elders - as well as researching family/community; b) Self-Determination and Social Justice (understanding self-determination and social justice issues - equality, access, equity, knowing your rights); c) Protection and Assimilation: (understanding how protection policies and attempts at assimilation denied Aboriginal people their culture and identity - the ways culture survived); and d) Invasion and Genocide (looking at the full impact on Aboriginal Peoples and how they have survived)
2. Diploma of National Indigenous Legal Studies. The Human Rights Commission established the National Indigenous Legal Curriculum Development Project. The Project has now developed the first national, accredited legal training courses addressing the legal and human rights of Indigenous peoples. This diploma course gives nationally recognised qualifications for those who work/want to work as legal field officers; those who want to continue on with university level studies in law; and, those seeking general knowledge of the law for use in their communities. Topics are worked through both off-campus and at Tranby, with the support of teachers, mentors and tutors. The course is hands-on, practical, and directly related to the legal needs of indigenous communities. Recognition is given to knowledge and experience already acquired. The course gives working knowledge of areas such as criminal law, customary law, the court system, arrest and bail, juvenile justice, the prison system, human rights, Native title, family law, and international law relevant to indigenous communities. This course also includes skills such as dealing with conflict, conducting negotiations, writing technical/legal documents, interviewing clients and computer skills.
3. Diploma of Development Studies - Aboriginal Communities. This course has been specifically designed by Aboriginal Elders and community members to meet the needs and aspirations of communities and community organizations. It respects the fundamental importance of the empowerment of Aboriginal communities. Specific areas covered include: economic development, self-determination, politics of Aboriginal development, Principles of Cultural Protocol, Communication Skills, Workplace Training, Community Planning, Social Action Campaign Skills, and Skills for Negotiation with External Agencies and Government Departments. Each course participant is required to build a community profile, and to develop a specific project for community benefit.

While Tranby does not have a specific literacy module, instructors address literacy in all of its modules. The day courses are held over two years, and are delivered one week at a time (these weeks are called blocks). There are six blocks per year. That is, the indigenous students come in from all over Australia to take these blocks. Travel to Sydney and e-mail allowance is paid for by ABSTUDY. Those who are employed are still entitled to travel/accommodation/meal allowance for each block week of study at Tranby. Accommodation is at the UniLodge Hotel nearby.

At Tranby, the students are sometimes also the Elders of their community. Tranby endeavours to reflect indigenous culture in all aspects of its operation.



Even the shape of the walls reflects cultural values. The classrooms are in circular buildings. When students sit in a circle, it means that no one is in front and no one is behind, they are all equals. In the space between the main building, and the circular library/classrooms is a beautiful garden, where plants grow in abundance that are indigenous to the parts of Australia from which the Aboriginal students come.

The library, also in a circular building, has more than 5,000 books, journals and videos which document Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander culture and history, and the continuing struggle for justice.

As part of its community outreach, Tranby runs Black Books, a store which offers a range of Aboriginal education materials, from children's stories to teacher training books.

Tranby costs over \$2 million a year to run. It is financed by 70% government funds, and 30% public donations.

Just as I was about to leave Sydney, I'd heard that one of the Nigerian athletes had lost his life. He was run over by a car. My hosts speculated that the cause of this accident was the difference in traffic – cars traveling on the left side of the road, and coming from the opposite direction from a lot of other countries. I was truly grateful that I had devised my own coping strategy when I arrived in Australia. I was a lot more comfortable now about crossing streets (spatial literacy).

Victoria

Melbourne

My next scheduled stop was Melbourne. Here I was to have met with Liz Suda of the Flemington Reading and Writing Program. When I arrived in Melbourne, I called Liz to confirm. Liz's daughter answered the phone, and called out to her mother, "*Somebody on the phone with an accent wants to speak to you.*" Strange – I thought they had the accents. Liz explained that we could squeeze in a bit of time, but that something had come up that could not be deferred. Our meeting

would have been tight, especially since I had three weeks' worth of luggage to cart with me from the bed-and-breakfast to a meeting place downtown, then off to the airport. Further, Bill Gates was in town for the World Economic Forum, and people were demonstrating in the streets, thereby making traffic slower than usual. Liz and I felt it would be easier all the way around for us to make arrangements to speak to each other at the Lens on Literacy conference (see "[Conversation with Liz Suda](#)").

I looked up a map of Melbourne (document literacy) and found the following place where I could learn more about Aboriginal education and/or culture.

Koorie Heritage Trusts Inc.
328 Swanston Street
MELBOURNE, Victoria 3000
Phone: 011 61 3 9669 9061
Fax: 011 61 3 9669 9872

It's interesting the warm welcome you get when Aboriginal People, even from another country, recognize you as "*one of them*". The staff took me on a brief tour, and provided me with the Koorie Education Kit.

Objectives for Student Understanding

- Koorie culture is a living culture. It is not and never has been static. Aboriginal people not only adapted to change, they effected it. Aboriginal people are not and were not primitive. They simply lived in a society that was different, though not inferior, to British society.
- Prior to Europeans coming to this country, Aboriginal people had a very healthy diet and followed a rich and satisfying lifestyle. The European invasion impacted upon this lifestyle in a devastating way and it has taken two hundred years for Koories to begin to recover.
- Aboriginal culture is intrinsically bound to the land through stories of the creation ancestors. These "*Dreaming*" stories gave people a framework within which to live. They gave law, religion and social cohesion to the people The relationship to the land is still very important to Koories today.
- Aboriginal people were illegally dispossessed of their land and much of their heritage. Over the past two hundred years they have been subjected to physical, psychological and emotional abuse by the dominant invaders, while never ceding rights to their land. Today, they are taking political steps to redress this situation, e.g. Native Title Legislation.

The six themes in the kit are:

1. The Use of Language
2. Family, Lore and Law
3. The Land Our Mother (things sure are sounding very familiar)
4. Making a Living

5. Leisure Activities
6. Science and Technology

Each theme unit has Teacher's notes (with sections – 300 years ago; Colonial Period; Towards the Future and Basic Understanding), Suggested Activities, and Further Reading.

As well, there are Activity Sheets, a Resource List, and a Suggested Videotape List, and the following Message to Teachers:

My name is Deborah Harrison. I completed the Diploma of Education through the Institute of Koorie Studies at Deakin University in 1994.

I recently started work at the Koorie Heritage Trust as a Cultural Education Officer. My role at The Trust is to promote the use of the Kit in all schools, and especially schools in the Melbourne Metropolitan area.

The Koorie Education Kit is designed as an aid for all teachers and, in particular, non-Koorie teachers. The Koorie Heritage Trust believes that maximum benefit for all students can be gained if this kit is used with the co-operation of a local Koorie community representative.

The Koorie Education kit is not designed to address any of the concerns, disillusion or other alienating stress factors currently causing many Koorie parents and students to fear the Victorian school system.

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody made 339 Recommendations addressing health, housing, education, employment, youth issues as well as custodial issues. The Recommendations were tabled in Parliament in April 1991, yet State and Commonwealth governments are still being very slow to properly address the issues affecting Koorie people.

The Royal Commission acknowledged that many of the difficulties facing Koories today are the result of past and present stereo-type attitudes held by mainstream society.

The Koorie Heritage Trust believes in being proactive in its efforts to educate Victorian students about the wealth of cultural heritage still available through contact with local Koories.

To the 98% Primary School students today who are not Koorie, this Koorie Education Kit is made to help them. The Koorie Heritage Trust encourages Koorie students to take pride in their heritage.

With teachers being positive in their use of this Koorie Education Kit and involving local Koorie community participation, Koorie students will see their people and culture being presented with pride and dignity, rather than as Museum curios to be scorned and ridiculed.

I was grateful for the synchronicity (indigo literacy) that provided the opportunity for me to visit the Koorie Trust Fund. Aboriginal Peoples believe that everything happens for a reason. Not being able to meet with Liz meant that I found this kit, with its aims so similar to our own here in Canada.

The energy in Melbourne was high. In fact, on my way back to the bed-and-breakfast, I saw a large number of policemen on horseback. I wondered about this. However, I was also in front of a secondhand bookstore, where I've been known to immerse myself for hours. In I went. When I came back out, I found myself in the midst of a demonstration. Ah, yes! The World Economic Forum (WEF) was happening in Melbourne. People were passing out flyers (green literacy), and a parade was coming down the street. Now, I understood why there were policemen on horseback. They were there to control the crowds. The lead "*parader*" was a person on stilts and dressed as Satan. He was carrying a trident, with dollar signs on it, and the pupils of his eyes were also dollar signs (yellow literacy).

Add to this that the Olympics had begun, and one could almost feel the combination of anger (from the WEF) and excitement (from the Olympics). I was starting to hear about Cathy Freeman, and to see posters of her everywhere. Ms. Freeman was the first Indigenous Australian and the first Australian woman to win a gold medal at the world athletics championships in Athens in 1997. At 24, Cathy had already won more than 24 international races and set eight Australian records. She was named Australian of the Year in 1998. Beyond her goal of winning gold at the Sydney Olympics, she is considering a career in TV and radio documentaries. '*The sky's the limit as far as I am concerned*', she says.

The energy from the Olympics was slowly and steadily increasing as I left the Australian state of Victoria for my next destination.

South Australia

My next trip was to Port Augusta in South Australia. I caught a flight into Adelaide, then rode on a bus two hours' north. I was going into the aridlands, where temperatures can sometimes be fifty (50) degrees in the shade (quantitative literacy). Fortunately, I was there in Australia's spring (Canada's fall). Port Augusta is also considered "*the springboard to Flinders Ranges and the Outback*"

Ian Henderson
Executive Manager
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Port Augusta Campus
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E-mail: ianhende@sp.tafe.sa.edu.au

Spencer Institute of TAFE covers the largest geographical area of any institute in South Australia. Its Aboriginal Education Program offers a variety of education/training programs to

Aboriginal communities in urban, regional and remote locations. This program works towards meeting the training needs of Aboriginal students in the Port Lincoln and Port Augusta prisons.

Entry Level Training Certificates are for people who have not been at school for a long time, or for those who feel they need to upgrade their skills. Vocational Certificates have been developed in response to training needs identified by Aboriginal communities and organizations within South Australia.

I met with one of the tutors, who explained to me that there are core and elective modules, which each student has a given number of hours to complete in order to earn a credit – a requirement of Australia's National Reporting System. Some modules have prerequisites. For example's sake, I'll say a student is required to complete a module in 80 hours. When I asked the instructor what happens if they do not complete the module within the 80 hours, she became quite agitated. She said that, often the students do require more hours; however, the institute could only claim the 80 hours for reporting (and level of funding) purposes. On the other hand, if a student finished the module in less hours, the TAFE could still claim the 80 hours – which does not happen very often. Also, if the students don't meet their learning outcomes, the TAFE doesn't get paid. There is a periodic audit. The instructor said the amount of administration is "*shocking*", and will be "*the death of me yet*".

The instructor shared an example with me of some work that she is doing with an Aboriginal learner, Ivan, who is 80. When Ivan's wife was sick, he had to go shopping for the food. The tutor made a map of the supermarket (document literacy). Together, Ivan and his instructor worked out a strategy. They worked with pictures of food, and mock lists. Her main concern as the learners work through their activities is not "*the right answer*"; rather, she wants to hear their rationale for why they're doing things a certain way. The instructor said that lifeskills is prevalent. I thought I should clear up our respective understandings of lifeskills. She meant the day-to-day activities to cope with life – appointments, banking, etc.

Through Australia's Remote and Rural and Training System, a distance education program is available. One of the main concerns is that the student must have somebody at home to support them in their studies. The book used in this system assumes minimal knowledge. Learners are required to demonstrate their knowledge of the concept. They are encouraged to give their rationale on a tape recorder, over the phone or in a letter (students cover the postage). In this system, there is mandatory telephone contact once a week, which contributes to building trust and rapport.

While there is a generic assessment that can be used by instructors, students are encouraged to do self-assessment. Work samples are kept in student files. I could see similarities in the struggles of Aboriginal literacy practitioners in both Australia and Canada, working to best meet the needs of their communities, while juggling factors such as distance, along with the administrative requirements that tax their time and energy.

The next day, I caught the bus back into Adelaide for the weekend. My hostess at the bed-and-breakfast provided me with information so that I could visit the following place:

Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute
253 Grenfell Avenue
ADELAIDE, South Australia
Phone: 011 61 8 8224 3220
Fax: 011 61 8 8224 3250

I was treated to another didgeridoo demonstration. The older Aboriginal man who gave the demonstration was joined by his friend, who had just come back from a tour of Western Canada - another synchronicity! They told me about their Aboriginal Health Centre, and said that I would find a wealth of information about issues impacting Aboriginal Peoples in Australia.

After lunch in Tandanya's cafe, Red Kangaroo Running, I headed directly to this health centre. My map (document literacy) indicated that the centre was within walking distance.

Nunkuwarn Yunti of South Australia Inc.
182 - 190 Wakefield Street
Adelaide, South Australia 6000
Phone: 011 61 8 8223 5217
Fax: 011 61 8 8232 0949

The Centre's librarian showed me around the building, introduced me to various staff, and explained some of the issues that they deal with in their clientele – issues so similar to ours in Canada, such as diabetes. She then gave me a copy of the Australia's Draft Declaration for Reconciliation.

Speaking with one voice, we the people of Australia, of many origins as we are, make a commitment to go on together recognizing the gift of another's presence.

We value the unique status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original owners and custodians of traditional lands and waters. We respect and recognize continuing customary laws, beliefs and traditions.

And through the land and its first peoples, we may taste this spirituality and rejoice in its grandeur.

We acknowledge this land was colonized without the consent of the original inhabitants.

Our nation must have the courage to own the truth, to heal the wounds of its past so that we can move on together at peace with ourselves.

And so we take this step; as one part of the nation expresses its sorrow and profoundly regrets the injustices of the past, so the other part accepts the apology and forgives.

Our new journey then begins. We must learn our shared history, walk together and grow together to enrich our understanding.

We desire a future where all Australians enjoy equal rights and share opportunities and responsibilities according to their aspirations.

And so, we pledge ourselves to stop injustice, address disadvantage and respect the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to determine their own destinies.

Therefore, we stand proud as a united Australia that respects this land of ours, values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, and provides, justice and equity for all.

I also learned that the Chairperson for the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, Evelyn Scott, voices her support for the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. In Scott's view,

"The key to success is learning and working together, and this strategy involves governments, schools, teachers, students, communities and health organizations working together to produce results."

Scott went on to say,

"I believe education is the key to reconciliation, and I support the consultative approach that the government has taken in creating this strategy."

Western Australia

I left Adelaide and flew over the Great Australian Bight and the Nullarbor Plain to Western Australia. In Perth, I was treated to dinner by Patsy Konigsberg, Curriculum Support Officer, and Program Coordinator of the ABC Project of Two-Way Literacy and Learning (more on that starting on page 33). With us was Glenys Collard, a traditional Nyungar woman, who is the Aboriginal Training and Development Officer. I much enjoyed the opportunity to share perspectives in a relaxed environment.

I realized part way through dinner that I had come in with different assumptions than those of my hostesses. As Patsy and Glenys talked about their work in the schools, I asked about adult literacy. I explained that, in Canada, our focus was on adults, with work with families (including children) being an add-on, depending on the priorities of the government that funding cycle. Patsy and Glenys informed me that, in Western Australia, it's the other way around. The focus is on the children, with components involving adults being an add-on.

Glenys asked me what I knew about literacy in Australia. I said that I had reviewed a curriculum package while I was working at the AlphaPlus Centre, and that I was quite impressed. Glenys asked me to name the package. When I told her, her remark was, "*Oh, that was done in the*

"wadjela" way." Given the tone of her voice (none too complimentary), I assumed "wadjela" to be "non-Aboriginal". I was correct.

The next day, I met with two women, one of them indigenous, working within Adult Basic Education programs in the Prison Education Centres.

Ministry of Justice
ABE Programs, Prison Education Centres
Phone: 011 61 8 9229 6550
Fax: 011 61 8 9470 1130

Terri Hughes was the coordinator of the regular ABE programs, while Jane Tittums coordinates the Indigenous ABE programs. For reasons of confidentiality, I was not taken to the prison. However, staff shared the following information with me. There are three types of Prison Education Centre programs:

- A pilot in workplace literacy
- Adult basic education classes - mainly for those who cannot read or write
- Flexible delivery - for independent learners

Tutors use the Certificates in General Education (CGEA) modules (see [next page](#)) in either a one-on-one or small group setting. The state is flexible with the number of hours a learner requires to complete a module. The Prison Education Centres usually develop their own resources. The main challenge is developing a package that is interesting to the students, yet meets the requirements of the CGEA. Some of the curriculum teaches students to examine their value systems critically, asking such questions, "*How do you feel when you see how indigenous people are depicted in the media?*"

With the change of government in June of this year, there is an increased emphasis on vocational training. Staff feel that the indigenous students lose out with such an emphasis.

Terri and Jane had me do a presentation on Aboriginal Literacy in Canada to Aboriginal instructors at the Kurungkurl Katitjim (Coming Together to Learn) School of Indigenous Australian Studies, Curtin University. The staff was quite intrigued with the many issues we had in common.

From there, I was taken to Central TAFE to meet Wendy Smith, Aboriginal Programs Coordinator. Wendy's students were happy that an Aboriginal woman had come from the other side of the world, and was going to spend time with them. They were quite accustomed to Aboriginal leaders from Canada meeting with their Aboriginal leaders, never with them. They had prepared lunch for me – barbecued kangaroo!

I was asked to do a presentation on Aboriginal Literacy in Canada. Wendy's students enjoyed the validation of ways of expressing themselves, other than the written word. Then Wendy asked if it were possible to do an e-mail penpals program between her class and Aboriginal students in Canada (blue literacy). I said, "*Definitely!*"

I learned a couple of months later that the portable in which this class met had burned down. Wendy and I corresponded by e-mail about this. Wendy shared with me how she and the students were dealing with their loss. Wendy immersed herself in her artwork (yellow literacy). The students talked about the loss amongst themselves to resolve their feelings (orange literacy). Just this week, I sent an e-mail to Wendy to inquire as to whether things were in place to consider the e-mail program again. I await her reply!

The next morning, I met with Jim Thompson, who coordinates a statewide curriculum network for Adult Basic Education in Western Australia. His main focus is moderation of assessment, professional development, and curriculum projects. It was here that I got to see what the instructor in Port Augusta was talking about when she said the administrative part of literacy would "*be the death of me yet*".

Certificates in General Education

Jim Thompson
Adult Literacy Services Bureau
Western Australia Department of Training
c/- WA Fishing & Aquaculture Centre
Fleet St.
Fremantle WA 6160
Phone: 011 61 8 9239 8271
Fax: 011 61 8 9239 8075
E-mail: thompj@FREMANTLE.training.wa.gov.au

Jim shared with me a number of information sheets on the new certificates. They are the Certificates in General Education (CGEA). These certificates allow adults to study for a formal credential which gives them credit for improving their reading, writing, mathematical, oral communication and general education skills. Certificates can be awarded at three levels, with the highest level being equivalent to Year 11 of secondary education.

There are four streams, or subject areas:

1. Reading and Writing
2. Oral Communication
3. Numeracy and Mathematics
4. General Curriculum Options – this option is based on the Key Competencies, and provides the means of delivering generic key skills, or being a vehicle for subjects such as science, Aboriginal studies, vocational skills, creative arts, study skills, etc.

These streams can be offered at four different levels. Each level of each stream is called a module. For each module, there is a set of competencies, or learning outcomes, which the student must achieve to be seen to be competent at that level. The number of hours for completion of each module is 80 (recall my example from Spencer TAFE in Port Augusta). The Reading and Writing Stream is organized around the four main social contexts in which Australian society functions:

1. Family and social life
2. Workplace and institutional settings
3. Education and training contexts
4. Community and civic life.

This stream has four domains:

1. Literacy for Self-Expression – focuses on aspects of personal and family life, and the cultures which shape these
2. Literacy for Practical Purposes – focuses on forms of communication mainly used in workplace and institutional settings and in communications with such organizations
3. Literacy for Knowledge – focuses on sociological, scientific, technological, historical and mechanical theories and concepts which are relevant to education and training
4. Literacy for Public Debate – focuses on matters of public concern, and the forms of argument, reason and criticism used in the public arena.

It is encouraged that these domains not be seen as separate or autonomous.

The Oral Communication Stream is the one I was most interested in, as I believe the written word is only one way to communicate. It is organized around some of the different purposes in social life:

1. Active listening – covers the non-interactive incidents of listening when the participant's role is primarily as receiver of information. Examples are listening to a radio broadcast, watching a play, watching a TV documentary, listening to a guest speaker or student presentation, listening to a friend tell an anecdote, following instructions on a pre-recorded message such as telephone banking
2. Oracy for practical purposes – covers a range of transactions or oral episodes around the transfer of information, such as exchanging and obtaining goods and services, giving instructions, gathering and providing information such as interviewing a neighbour about his or her personal experience of migration for a classroom project, or giving an oral presentation.
3. Oracy for problem-solving and exploring issues – covers discussions such as a class discussion about an issues in the news to discussions about reallocating domestic responsibilities in a family setting.

The Numeracy and Mathematics Stream sees numeracy as making meaning of mathematics and sees mathematics as an important tool to be used efficiently and critically. The four domains are:

1. Numeracy for practical purposes – addresses mathematical aspects of the physical world to do with designing, making and measuring. It incorporates maths related to the appreciation and application of shape and measurement.
2. Numeracy for Interpreting Society – relates to interpreting and reflecting on numerical, statistical and graphical information of relevance to self, work or community

3. Numeracy for Personal Organization – has as its focus the numeracy and mathematical requirements for personal organizational matters involving money, time and travel
4. Numeracy for Knowledge – is introduced at level 3, and deals with mathematical skills needed for further study in mathematics, or other subjects with mathematics underpinnings and/or assumptions.

The first seven General Curriculum Options learning outcomes, based on a report Putting General Education to Work are:

1. Collecting, analyzing, and organizing information – focuses on the capacity to locate information, sift and sort information in order to select what is required and present it in a useful way, and evaluate both the information itself and the sources and methods used to obtain it
2. Planning and organizing activities – focuses on the capacity to plan and organize one's own work activities, including making good use of time and resources, sorting out priorities and monitoring one's own performance (Reminded me of the Self-Management and Self-Direction Domain of the Ontario Learning Outcomes Matrix)
3. Communicating ideas and information – focuses on the capacity to communicate with others using the range of spoken, written, graphic and other non-verbal means of expression
4. Working with others and in teams – focuses on the capacity to interact effectively with other people both on a one-to-one basis and in groups, including understanding and responding to the needs of others and working effectively as a member of team to achieve a shared goal (This, too, reminded me of the Self-Management and Self-Direction Domain of the Ontario Learning Outcomes Matrix)
5. Using mathematical ideas and techniques – focuses on the capacity to use mathematical ideas, such as number and space, and techniques, such as estimation and approximation for practical purposes
6. Solving problems – focuses on the capacity to apply problem-solving strategies in purposeful ways, both in situations where the problems and desired outcomes are clearly evident and in situations requiring critical thinking and a creative approach to achieve an outcome
7. Using technology – focuses on the capacity to use technology, combining physical and sensory skills needed to operate equipment with the understanding of scientific and technological principles needed to explore and adapt systems. The definition of technology therefore includes equipment and materials, as well as patterns of operations, and systems of ideas and principles.

An eighth outcome is informed by the final report on Cultural Understandings as the Eighth Key Competency (1994):

8. Identifying, analyzing and applying the practices of culture – focuses on the capacity to use an understanding of the cultures and cultural issues applying in a given context. This understanding is developed through recognition and analysis of the organizational and personal cultures and cultural issues involved in any activity. This understanding can then be applied to carry out the activity successfully

Practitioners are encouraged to integrate the four streams "...to promote a holistic approach to teaching and learning..." Similarly, practitioners are encouraged to conduct assessment in an integrated manner.

ABC Project of Two-Way Literacy and Learning

Patsy Konigsberg/Glenys Collard
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East Perth, Western Australia 6004
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The next day, I met again with Patsy Konigsberg and Glenys Collard. They took me to meet with Aboriginal Curriculum Support Officers in the Western Australian government. Patsy provided me with the most interesting material that I found in Australia. Patsy and Glenys work in an ABC Project of Two-Way Literacy and Learning. This is a professional development project for educators that:

"...seeks to influence the socio-cultural and linguistic climate of Western Australian government schools so they become more attractive and effective for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students."

The project derives the ABC elements from the following foundation principles:

- A – accept Aboriginal English (explained on the next page)
- B – bridge to Standard Australian English
- C – cultivate Aboriginal ways of approaching experience and knowledge

This project alerts teachers to the fact that:

"...schools commonly perpetuate values and ways of doing things that are more familiar to some students than they are to others...encourages educators to reflect upon the culture and the value systems implied in school routines, classroom strategies, management procedures, teaching resources, etc."

Since 1994, the Education Department of Western Australia has been conducting research on Aboriginal English. Much of this research has been conducted jointly with Edith Cowan University. The Education Department and the university feel they have made significant progress in terms of understanding not only the sound system and grammar of Aboriginal English, but also of the meanings and rules of usage that are embedded in the dialect, and how they can be different to those embedded in Standard Australian English. Aboriginal English is the name given to

"...a range of varieties of English spoken by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and some others in close contact with them which differ in systematic ways from Standard Australian English at all levels of linguistic structure and which are used for distinctive speech acts, speech events and genres."

Not only does Western Australia recognize Aboriginal English, it has an Aboriginal English policy:

1. Aboriginal English will be valued and recognized by Education Department Schools in Western Australia
2. The education department will provide curriculum support to foster the valuing and recognition of Aboriginal English

The Government of Western Australia defines Aboriginal English thusly:

- The name for a range of types of English spoken by many Aboriginal people. It is a dialect of English like Scottish and Irish and many other "*Englishes*"
- English words with Aboriginal meanings
- The home language of most Aboriginal students in our education system
- The language which Aboriginal people use to identify with each other and to express a distinctively Aboriginal world view
- Another dialect of English which has a different set of sounds, many different words, its own rules for making sentences and different ways of being used by its speakers
- A recognized system of communication between Aboriginal people throughout Australia

That is the dialect of English spoken by Aboriginal Peoples is not seen as "*broken English*" to be fixed; rather, it is seen as a bona fide dialect.

The Two-Way project supports:

- Aboriginal participation in education (for Aboriginal students, Aboriginal teachers and Aboriginal support personnel)
- Equitable and appropriate achievement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (especially with respect to literacy and numeracy)
- Maintenance of Aboriginal culture and linguistic heritage.

This training is conducted jointly by an Aboriginal person (Glenys), working alongside a non-Aboriginal person (Patsy). It honours the wealth of cultural and linguistic knowledge that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people bring to the school. While Glenys and Patsy work within the Western Australian government, they have also given this workshop in other states of Australia.

I read through Two-Way English: Towards More User-Friendly Education for Speakers of Aboriginal English published by the Education Department of Western Australia, 1999. The following key points jumped out at me:

- ...despite the fact that English is a "*many-ways*" phenomenon, it tends to be treated educationally as if it had only "*one-way*", with the implication that the other ways, which people might associate with less powerful sectors of society are wrong
- Of particular interest was language which demonstrated ways in which speakers' different expectations or different meanings could cause a breakdown in communication in the

- classroom (something with which we grapple here in Canada, but not only in the classroom)
- Many problems can be avoided if we recognize and value a student's home language at the same time as presenting Standard Australian English as an alternative code appropriate in different circumstances. Students can be encouraged to use two codes rather than be corrected for using Aboriginal English. This avoids the negative consequences of being "*shamed*" for speaking the home language.
- Researchers and teachers frequently ask questions in order to get informants or students to talk. But this often does not work with Aboriginal English speakers, especially where the respondent knows that the questioner already knows the answers.
- Remember that it's just historical accident, not intrinsic linguistic superiority that selects standard dialects, and that [so-called] nonstandard dialects are just as rule-governed as standard ones are.
- Other bidialectical programs in operation include one in De Kalb County, Georgia (Harris-Wright, 1987) which has been operating successfully for the past twelve years, programs for speakers of **American Indian English** (Leap, 1992) (highlights mine) (There was even reference to Black English)

(Additional note – I could not find any information on American Indian English on the Internet. However, the bibliography section of this resource has the following citation - "Leap, W.L. (1992) American Indian English. In J. Reyhner (ed.) *Teaching American Indian Students* (pp. 143-153). Norma, OK: University of Oklahoma Press

- Indigenous students were progressively marginalized by even the most well-meaning teachers, through a complex set of factors including differences in communication styles and values stressed at home (e.g., independence and cooperative learning).

The more I pondered the concept of Aboriginal English, the more I began to question whether the assessment approach used in Eastern Australia, where the assessor pinpoints sounds that the student cannot hear and/or replicate is being confounded by Aboriginal English. Because I am not a linguist or a speech pathologist, I put this question out there for further consideration.

The Conference

Lens on Literacy International Conference
Esplanade Hotel
Fremantle, Western Australia
September 21-23, 2000

Thursday, September 21, 2000

Aboriginal Welcome: Wadumbah Dance Group

What a treat it was to see Aboriginal dancers perform for us. While the leader told the story ahead of time, it was not difficult to see by the dancers' facial expressions and movements what the storyline was. (yellow literacy)

Welcoming Address

Dr. William Jonas

Aboriginal a& Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commission & Race Discrimination
Commissioner

Dr. Jonas spoke on his experiences in the institutional educational system. Mainly he stressed learning the "*formula*" required by that system, and using it to his advantage.

Friday, September 22, 2000

Keynote: Mecak Ajang Alaak

Teacher's Work: An African (Sudanese) Experience

Mecak spoke about the difficulties that students with a non-English speaking background face when undertaking further study. In Africa, this is compounded by poverty. While Mecak did not use the terms "*racism*" or "*oppression*", he related personal experiences – such as being put in jail for very little reason. It is a testament to Mecak's determination that he persevered, and made a difference in his own life, and that of others

Workshop: Richard Walker

Rotary International Lighthouse Campaign for Alleviating Mass
Illiteracy Among Women

Richard spoke about a Concentrated Language Encounter (CLE) approach that has been successful with the following groups:

- children in formal schooling;
- adults with a particular focus on women;
- children who have missed out on formal schooling; and,
- special groups, such as disabled children.

At that time, the Rotary International Literacy and Numeracy Task Force had pilot projects in Asia, Latin America, the Southern Pacific, southern Africa and the northern Africa-Mediterranean region. Richard's workshop focused on the program for women. Activities involved teaching the women to read and write while doing real-life activities such as sewing and weaving (yellow literacy)

Workshop: Sarah Hopkins
Mathematics Constructed within a Cultural Context

Sarah talked about the attitudes, values and beliefs influencing the math curriculum. She challenged workshop participants to think about the attitudes, values and beliefs that we, as literacy/numeracy practitioners, communicate in our program delivery, discourse, assessment and materials. Sarah suggested that students are engaged by the relationships we have with them.

Presentation: Priscilla George
The Rainbow (Holistic) Approach to (Aboriginal)
Literacy

All the way to Fremantle, I pondered drumming and doing a song in my Anishnawbe language at the start of my presentation. I did not take my drum to Australia because it would have been too difficult to pack along with my clothes, videos and newsletters that I was taking for distribution. Part of me wanted to sing, part of me was afraid. Just four months earlier, I had made the commitment to overcome my fear of singing, and to use my voice whenever I was doing the Creator's work. I was rapidly learning that commitment does not necessarily mean there will no longer be fear.

Part way through the morning, Glenys presented me with a curious looking bundle. When I opened it, I found two treasures inside - boomerangs made in the traditional way (not commercialized - smaller at one end), and a set of "ceremonial tapping sticks". Glenys explained that the Nyungar Peoples keep such items as close to their original, natural state as possible. The only "refining" is sanding them down, and putting a smooth finish on them. As I looked at the ceremonial tapping sticks, I was struck by the timing of Glenys's gift (indigo literacy). I knew instantly in my heart that I must sing to open my workshop. I have since then regularly used these ceremonial tapping sticks whenever I do speaking engagements. These sticks represent connection to me. They remind that, as Aboriginal Peoples, no matter where we are, we are connected to each other, with our issues, our beliefs and our traditions. (yellow literacy)

It was indeed an honour to have a full house for my presentation. I felt a tremendous sense of pride in being an Anishnawbe Kwe as I explained the words of the song that I would be singing in my own language, and why. I was calling in the Spirit World to assist me in my presentation. I have enclosed a letter from ACAL re: my presentation ([Appendix A](#)), and a copy of an article that appeared in the Campus Review the week of October 4-10, 2000 ([Appendix B](#)). In addition, I was interviewed by Jill Kitson of the Lingua Franca Radio Station. That interview was aired on the 18th of November 2000 (transcript enclosed as [Appendix C](#)).

After my presentation, Carolyn Ovens (whom I had met in Brisbane) came up to me and said that the Queensland Council for Adult Literacy (QCAL) planned to pursue funding to have me speak at their conference in 2001. (I have since then been informed by Dr. Jean Searle that QCAL was unsuccessful in their efforts, but that they would try again next year.)

Conversation with Liz Suda
Flemington Reading and Writing Program
28 Farnham St
Flemington, Victoria 3031
Phone: 011 61 3 9376 1281
E-mail: flemrw@vicnet.net.au

Flemington works with a cross-cultural community. Students range in age from their teens to their eighties. They offer a variety of courses, covering different subject areas such as: English as a Second Language, Adult Literacy, Media Literacy, Computer Studies and MultiMedia. There are day and night classes. As much as possible, Flemington caters to the needs and interests of their community.

- One such project, Our Nation Has Many Cultures has students doing the following activities: Conversations about their nation to engage people in dialogue around the themes of Australian history, identity and culture.
- Writing about their nation so as to give participants the opportunity to reflect upon many of these issues in writing with the assistance of teachers and a professional writer
- A web of nations to involve students in designing a web site to showcase the progress of the project and to provide a historical overview, links to other federation sites, access to chat environments and materials and resources that other teachers and students can use to learn about the nation of which they are citizens.

The site will be updated regularly as new elements of the project are completed

Saturday, September 22, 2000

Keynote: Suellen Tapsall
"All Aboard" the Borderless Education Bandwagon

Suellen was involved in developing a major technological literacy project in Queensland. Her presentation drew on worldwide research into the realities and rhetoric of borderless education, i.e., globalization and virtualization with a special focus on implications for literacy issues. (blue literacy)

Workshop: Dr. Ceclila Netolicky
Sharing Curriculum to Engage and Meet the Needs
of Post-Compulsory At-Risk and Aboriginal Clients

Dr. Netolicky has developed curriculum packages around the aforementioned CGEA (Jim Thompson - pages 26-29). Dr. Netolicky works with a high proportion of Indigenous Australian clients, who expressed a desire to read and research Indigenous culture. She then extracted texts

from Aboriginal Voices, A book by Liz Thompson that has short "biopics" of Indigenous artists, and developed a number of learning activities using these articles. Students are to do such things as: identifying the purpose of the text, expressing an opinion, or writing a comparative essay

Workshop: Suzanne Crowley

The Government Policy: What Have Literacy Learners to Say? The Impact of May Day 1998

Suzanne reported on research she did into the impact of changes in government policy on the lives of long-term unemployed literacy learners. Older learners felt that an implicit message is, "*You're too old - go away.*" During the discussion period on an assigned number of hours to complete each module, one practitioner voiced that, "*It's bloody criminal what we have to do to the learners.*"

Aboriginal Literacy Materials

I noticed a display table by Language Australia Ltd., GPO Box 372F, Melbourne VIC 3001 Fax: 001 61 3 9926 4780. It had the following materials:

- Deadly eh, Cuz! Teaching Speakers of Koorie English (Deadly is Aboriginal English for "terrific") – based on action research – has an Australia-wide usefulness – the kit includes training ideas and materials; a video and audio cassette, and a number of other Aboriginal English resources
- Making the Jump: A Resource Book for Teachers of Aboriginal Students – focuses on acceptance of Aboriginal students' home language
- Double Power: English Literacy and Indigenous Education – includes case studies
- The Yorta Yorta Tribe – a reader with stories in Koorie English
- Bridging into Small Business – entry-level training program - to support Aboriginal people in developing both a viable business proposal, and the skills required to achieve success

Comments on the Conference

The conference was very well-organized. There were approximately 40 workshops a day, with each workshop being 40 minutes in length. I found this was not enough time for presenters to get into in-depth descriptions of their activities, nor to have meaningful dialogue with participants. In addition, it appeared to me that there was a high proportion of presentations by academics who were doing, or had done, research on literacy.

After a day of six workshops, there was a 45-minute plenary facilitated by a "provocateur" to highlight issues raised during the various presentations.

I felt that fewer workshops, with more time for each, would have allowed for more in-depth sharing. While there was opportunity for sharing at Refreshment Breaks and lunches, lining up for food cut into what little time there was.

Relaxing in Australia, then Coming Home to Canada

Patsy and her family invited me to spend the weekend with them. Their eleven-year-old daughter, Ayela, was delighted with the prospect of a guest from Canada. Ayela suggested that the family take me to "...see *the things for which Australia is known...*"! The family took me to a preserve, where I got to see koalas, kangaroos, and kookaburras.

It was with a full heart that I boarded the plane on Sunday, September 24 to come home to Canada. I am grateful to all the people who supported me on many different levels to have such a meaningful learning opportunity. I still have regular e-mail contact with some people. With Creator's assistance, I will get "*down under*" again! To top it all off, about a week after I got home, I got a call from the Chippewas of Saugeen First Nation telling me that the [National Literacy Secretariat](#) had come through with their portion of the funding.

In looking back, I would have liked to have seen more Aboriginal-specific adult literacy programming. However, I had only three weeks from the time that I started to hear back from people, until the date on which I had to confirm my in-Australia flights. Given that I had less than two months from the time that I first heard about the possibility of going to Australia to the date that I had to have the trip fully arranged, I believe that I had a meaningful agenda. (I could not go directly to the conference in Western Australia, then work my way east across the country, as I already had commitments to do speaking engagements in Canada in October.)

I extend my heart- and spirit-felt thanks again to my home community, the Chippewas of Saugeen First Nation, as well as to the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, and the [National Literacy Secretariat](#) for their support of my endeavours. I trust that this report will provide food-for-thought, as we strive to make our literacy programs better meet the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal learners and communities.

Literacy in Australia and Canada - A Comparative Analysis

Issue	Australia	Canada
Population	Aboriginal Peoples make up 1.5% of the population – 2/3 live in towns and cities	Aboriginal Peoples make up less than 2% of the population – approximately 1/2 live on-reserve
History	Has had state-run and mission compounds Had an <u>Aboriginals Preservation and Protection Act</u>	Has had residential schools Has <u>The Indian Act</u> , with a reserve system
Effects	A Stolen Generation Higher indicators of socio-economic stressors than the non-Aboriginal population	Residential School Syndrome Ethnostress Higher indicators of stressors as noted in column on left
Languages	There were once 200-250 languages, at least 50 or which have disappeared. Only 20-30 are in a reasonably healthy state. Recognition of Aboriginal English - a policy in Western Australia	At least ten languages have become extinct in the last 200 years, A dozen or more are in danger. Only 3 of Canada's 50 Aboriginal languages are flourishing English spoken by Aboriginal Peoples often considered "Broken English", inferior to Standard English
Policy/ Strategy	Has a National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy which applies across pre-school and school systems	There is not yet a national policy. Literacy was mentioned in this year's Throne Speech. On June 22, 2001, there was a National Literacy Roundtable in Ottawa to discuss a National Literacy Initiative

Advocacy/ Support	Australian Council on Adult Literacy - has position papers - Is calling for an Australian Commission for Adult Literacy and Numeracy State and Territorial advocacy Bodies	Has 7 national literacy organizations Annual Literacy Action Days on Parliament Hill, where national, provincial and territorial literacy representatives lobby federal Members of Parliament and Senators
Aboriginal Literacy Programming	Some in Northern Territory, Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia - no state, territorial or national organizations to support	Has a National Aboriginal Design Committee which has hosted the first National Aboriginal Literacy Gathering, 2000, and is setting up up a fully-resourced national office Has the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition, Owen Sound Has the Ningwakwe Learning Press, Owen Sound, where Aboriginal literacy materials are produced for and by Aboriginal Peoples Has 90+ Aboriginal-controlled community-based programs Incorporating the holistic approach - valuing Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body
Research	Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Practice Consortium - to promote research activity in adult literacy and numeracy. The Consortium represents a national collaboration between five university-based research centres - offers a model of research management based on collaborative	Held its first Literacy Research in Gathering in Edmonton July 2001. Ontario has started a Developing a Research Culture Project The University of Alberta has had a Centre for Literacy Research since 1996

research and
responsiveness to
state-based needs

Many literacy
practitioners are now
faculty at universities,
teaching courses on
literacy

Some universities, including
the Ontario Institute for
Studies in Education have
graduate and post-graduate
studies in adult literacy

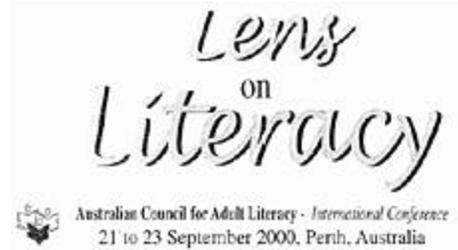
Has had its second
national forum.

Funding

Australian National
Training Authority
provides funds
for TAFEs for
"pathway programs"
including literacy.
Department of
Education, Training
and Youth Affairs
funds schools
State bodies provide
funds for community-
based programming

Ontario has core funding,
with four streams -
Anglophone, Francophone,
Native and Deaf.
[National Literacy Secretariat](#)
provides project funding
Some provinces/territories
provide adult basic
education/literacy funding

Appendix A



Priscilla George
Aboriginal Literacy Consultant National Aboriginal Design Committee
26 Carluke Cres., # 409
TORONTO ONTARIO M2L 2J2
CANADA

Dear Ms. George

On behalf of the committee I wish to thank you most sincerely for your contribution to the ACAL 2000 Conference.

We appreciate that our presenters gave so willingly of their time to ensure the success of the Conference. The feedback we have received regarding the program is positive and we acknowledge that this would not have been possible without the generosity of our presenters in contributing their expertise and experience through sessions such as yours on 'The holistic (Rainbow) approach to (Aboriginal) literacy'.

Many comments have referred specifically to your presentation as being among the most) stimulating and enjoyable of the conference.

Thank you once again for making the effort to travel to Australia. We hope you had the opportunity to see a little of our city and state and enjoyed what you did see.

Yours sincerely

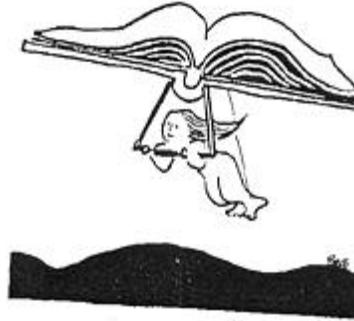
(original signed by)

Dr Jennie Bickmore-Brand
Conference Convenor

November 15, 2000

Appendix B - CAMPUS REVIEW

LENS ON LITERACY



LITERACY/MAUREEN DE LA HARPE

An academic mobilises women ragpickers in India, a Sudanese teacher is imprisoned for trying to teach English in an Islamic country, a Spanish school is transformed to improve access for a gypsy community. The roads to literacy are as varied as the people who travel them, as delegates attending the first international conference hosted by the Australian Council for Adult Literacy discovered in Fremantle last week.

"Lens on Literacy" attracted nearly 300 delegates, including 100 experts from countries as diverse as Japan, South Africa, Sri Lanka, India and Spain, who came together to challenge some of the assumptions of Western teaching methods by presenting dramatically different and innovative approaches to the problems faced by communities around the world.

"Literacy does not necessarily lead to empowerment, but empowerment will eventually lead people to want to be literate," claimed Laxmi Sarayan, of SNDT Women's University in Pune, Western India, who has been working with the poorest of the poor women ragpickers and waste collectors who forage in local rubbish dumps for survival and are beyond the reach of well intentioned literacy programs.

Sarayan has been helping the ragpickers to organise and empower themselves. As icons and symbols are strong in their culture, the women were given their own logo and identity cards. To prove to themselves, the government and society that they were economically productive workers and that what they did was not just a means of survival, they formed a trade union. "It now has between 2500 and 3000 members," Sarayan said.

The ragpickers were encouraged to hold public protests and processions to air their concerns. When a policeman propositioned a woman, a sit-in was organised outside a police station and the policeman had to apologise. Now they use street theatre to publicly mobilize opinion; or encourage locals to separate their rubbish into different categories. They compose songs that are written down by children in the community who have been taught to write.

"We ensure that they can represent themselves to government bureaucracies and the media," said Sarayan. "Initially they were not comfortable doing this, but now they are saying, 'We can express our issues better than you'."

She conceded that it was only when the women started setting up bodies like credit institutions that they began to feel the handicap of illiteracy: "It's a slow process, the numbers are very low, but they are also very motivated." They need to be, she told *Campus Review*, because vested interests still prevail in India, and middle and upper class people do not always welcome a changing status quo in which ragpickers aspire to education.

Mecak Alaak, a Sudanese African now living in Australia, spoke on the difficulties of teaching in Africa, particularly in one-party states riven by conflict. Alaak, who was imprisoned by the Islamic government of the Sudan for trying to teach English and other languages in a country where Arabic is the official language, said many teachers in Africa were the targets of governments hostile towards the notion of the teacher in a leading – and therefore questioning – role. They preferred their people to remain uneducated – "because illiterate people can be blindfolded".

Lidia Puigvert, a professor at the University of Barcelona, is setting up a "learning community" in a neighbourhood where gypsies have long been marginalized. As the family unit is strong in gypsy society, families were encouraged to become involved in school activities, and were invited to dance at a flamenco party to help them feel part of the school community.

Now gypsy mothers are organising literacy and numeracy courses for themselves, so that they can help their children, and older people are teaching local history. The project organisers spent a week at the school, talking to teachers about gypsy society. "There was a lot of prejudice to start with and many concerns about extra work, but they finally realized they don't have to be burdened with extra work and expense – they just have to be creative in the way they use teams of parents, old people and volunteers," said Puigvert.

Priscilla George, a Canadian Aboriginal literacy consultant who coordinated the first national Aboriginal literacy gathering in Canada, spoke about holistic teaching involving mind, body, heart and spirit, and the "rainbow approach" in which each aspect of literacy is represented by a colour, based on its symbolism in indigenous Canadian culture.

Appendix C

Lingua Franca No.149

18th November, 2000

Jill Kitson: Welcome to Lingua Franca. I'm Jill Kitson.

This week: the 'Rainbow' approach to literacy programs for Canada's Aboriginal peoples.

One of the speakers at the recent International Adult Literacy Conference in Fremantle was Priscilla George, a Canadian Aboriginal Literacy Consultant who has been working with disadvantaged Aboriginal groups since 1987. Over the last decade she has developed a holistic, or as she calls it: the Rainbow Approach to Aboriginal literacy.

The need for such an approach was demonstrated, she says, by the 1991 Canadian government - survey of nearly 400,000 Aboriginal people, which showed a strong correlation between Government-run residential school, low levels of literacy, and poor socio-economic conditions. To Priscilla George, these statistics were the symptoms of a larger malaise she came to identify as 'ethno-stress'.

Herself Anishnawbe from the Chippewas of the Saugeen First Nation in Southern Ontario, Priscilla George was sent as a child to a residential school for Aboriginal Canadians. So when we talked in Fremantle, I asked her first about her own experience.

Priscilla George: I was actually one of the lucky ones; I had a very good time in school. I learned quickly and I actually graduated and went on to teacher's college, but where I started to notice that literacy was an issue for Aboriginal peoples was when I was working at the residential treatment centre for Aboriginal people with a history of alcohol and drug abuse. And we would read a little bit of our culture each and every day in the talking circle, and that's when I noticed that the residents were really having a hard time with it, and in fact some of the people that I was counselling would ask me to help them write letters back home.

So that's when I realised this was a big, serious issue.

Jill Kitson: I've seen in the paper that you showed me, a lot of the results of the 1991 survey of, I imagine, almost the entire population of people identifying themselves as Aboriginal people in Canada, and it was amazing, particularly for the age group 50-64, how many of them had gone to residential schools with really bad results for them personally. Obviously in your own case, you came through it.

Priscilla George: Well that's because I was lucky. I was only there for one year, but I still know how that affected me. My own memories of residential school are very vague; I remember only the feelings, I don't remember incidents and I remember a lot of fear. But I know that for people that were there, their entire academic life, some eight to ten years, there was a lot of abuse, and in the residential schools the focus wasn't so much on teaching us academic skills as it was teaching us the skills that would help us get a job afterwards, but they weren't the jobs with high salaried positions or access to authority and decision making, rather they were like housekeeping

or trades or things like that. And there wasn't a lot of recognition of our own language, our own culture. I can remember being lined up regularly to get the strap for little misdemeanours, and so you come out of there really feeling a lot of fear, and really learning how to behave in a way so that you're not going to get punished. You learn to anticipate what's going to make people angry, and so you behave in a different way that's not going to get you noticed and get you punished.

Jill Kitson: And it made people feel that there was something bad about being an Aboriginal person, which I think, is at the very heart of the teaching program you've now evolved which is the Rainbow approach, or the holistic approach.

Priscilla George: I guess I would say that this started in about 1990, I just happened to be reading this book entitled *The Power Within*. The people who wrote this book had coined a phrase, 'ethno-stress' and ethno-stress is the disruption of joyful feelings that one should experience as a result of one's ethnicity. But in our community there wasn't an awful lot of ways to teach us to be proud of who we were. As a matter of fact it was very much the opposite way; we weren't allowed to speak our language for a while, they even outlawed our cultural practices. This is the Federal government that I'm talking about. So when I was reading that concept of ethno-stress, I thought that's what's going on here.

So I invited the people who wrote that book to come and meet with me, and we designed a course for the literacy practitioners to teach them, to teach their learners what the historical, social and economic factors were that were leading to ethno-stress, because up until that point, we were starting to feel that it was us, that there was something wrong with us. But as soon as we were able to start identifying the factors that were contributing to this we thought Oh, that's what it is. Well now we can do something about that. How can we address that?

Jill Kitson: So you took the notion of the Medicine Wheel.

Priscilla George: Well in our culture we've been taught that we are comprised of four parts: that's the spirit, the heart, the mind and the body, and in everything that we do, we must endeavour to keep ourselves in balance. So that is, we nurture each of those four parts. In the educational system, unfortunately that hasn't been recognised, it's mainly been focusing on the mind. Sometimes the body. So at least 50% of us has not been recognised, validated or nurtured in the mainstream educational system. And when 50% of who you are is not recognised, then there's an implicit message in that, and as a matter of fact you get out of balance because you're at school at least half of your waking hours. So that's how we've been designing our literacy activities, is looking for ways to nurture each of those four parts.

Jill Kitson: Now are you working mainly with the adult illiterates of that older age group?

Priscilla George: We're working primarily with adults. We take them at any age group actually, because we believe that literacy has intergenerational impacts and if we can address it when the kids are younger, then we'll reduce what happens later on. Primarily we're funded to work with adults but we do have family literacy programs where parents are taught how to read with their children and how to interact with them in a meaningful way.

Jill Kitson: And what's it doing for their languages? Does it mean that more people are wanting to speak the language of their parents or their grandparents?

Priscilla George: Actually a lot of the literacy programs do focus on literacy in our own languages, and the children, there is now a policy in Ontario that where the parents of ten or more children request Aboriginal language instruction, then the school may provide it. So quite often the kids are already getting Aboriginal language in the schools, and then the literacy programs are providing it for the adults, and this means that they can teach each other sometimes.

Jill Kitson: I think you need to explain to the listeners the Rainbow notion of the holistic approach.

Priscilla George: OK. Again, back to the funders. They have this overarching structure that tells us what constitutes literacy, and it's usually literacy in the language of business and commerce, or the official languages which are English and French. But it also focuses mainly on the mind and perhaps even the body. So in our culture we recognise that there are many many ways of communicating with each other, and the written word is only one of them. We also recognise that it's important for us to know our own languages and to be literate in our own languages. So a group that I was working with asked me to develop the Rainbow approach to literacy. So what I did was I went and researched what each of the colours of the rainbow meant, and then I assigned a type of literacy to each of those colours. When I ran it by the national group that I was working with, and they're practitioners from all across Canada, they made some minor revisions and that's what we adopted: each of those colours means a different kind of literacy. I then took it one step further, and took this medicine wheel approach and designed different learning outcomes for each of the spirit and the heart and the mind and the body associated with each of those colours. And it just so happened that about a year and a half ago, I started working with another national Aboriginal literacy group, practitioners from all across Canada, and I showed them the Rainbow approach and asked them if they would like to adopt this for our logo and our vision and they agreed with that, so now I'm just working with practitioners and getting their successful activities and using the Rainbow approach to validate what they're doing.

Jill Kitson: So does it mean you've developed your own teaching materials, or do they come out of the different groups?

Priscilla George: The groups are very definitely developing their own activities and developing their own materials. All we've done, this national committee, is we have found a framework that justifies to the funders why we're doing these kinds of activities and materials in our literacy programs.

Jill Kitson: Now how do the learners present themselves?

Priscilla George: A lot of it's word of mouth. When one person goes to the program and starts to feel better about himself, herself and participates in fun learning activities, then they will let their friends know, and before too long we've got other people coming in. Some of them are there because they have to be there because it's the policy again, of the Ontario government that if

you're on some kind of social assistance, then you need to be involved in either learning a skill for employability or in some way bettering yourself, and that's where literacy programs come in.

Jill Kitson: So are you noticing any cultural effects, I mean, part of the Rainbow scheme is to pick up on people's creativity..

Priscilla George: I'm finding that, and it's not just me, it's the practitioners, are finding that learners are starting to feel better about themselves because it's their skills that we're building on. For example, under the red, the first colour of the rainbow, and we're often called the Red People, we're the First People, First Nations in Canada, so we said that red would be literacy in our own Aboriginal languages. One program found the only woman in the community who knew how to tan deerhides was also a learner in the literacy program. So they asked her if they would teach other people how to tan deerhides. So they sat and talked about it, and she described the process, and as she was describing the process then the group started to put on a flip chart words in our own language that they would need to describe what was going on. When they would go home, then they would talk to their family and friends and they'd come back in the next day with more words, and they were building up more and more of the narrative. And then when they actually sat down to do the activity, it was experiential, then the rule was that they had to speak only in Ojibwe and that they were encouraged to write up stories about it afterwards. They took pictures, they made picture books.

Throughout this process, the woman who of course is teaching everybody how to tan deerhides, she's feeling like she's contributing something valuable; other people are learning this skill and they're going home to teach others. And then they decide the next stage of the plan is OK what are we going to do with these deerhides now that we've tanned them? And so they started to talk about Well what can we make? And what is the cultural teaching that goes with that? And there's more and more words coming in. So the learners are feeling very actively involved in what they're doing, they're feeling empowered, they're feeling proud of who they are because they're learning more about their own culture. The language is coming alive.

Jill Kitson: Priscilla George, Canadian Aboriginal literacy Consultant, speaking to me at the recent International literacy Conference in Fremantle. Appropriately her Anishnawbe Spirit Name is Ningwakwee, which means Rainbow Woman.

And that's all for this week's lingua Franca. Each month's programs are available on the one CD or cassette for \$27.50 from the ABC Tape Service at GPO Box 9994, Sydney, 2001.