

TAMARA'S WEEKEND  
A PRIMARY SCHOOL UNIT IN KOORIE STUDIES

J.V.CASPERSZ (St. Francis of Assisi School, Melbourne)  
V.WALKER (Aboriginal Catholic Ministry, Victoria)  
K.SIMKIN (La Trobe University)

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Section One: Introduction

Our education system has always seen a need to teach its students about Aborigines, albeit to a varying degree and purpose. At best, this was poorly done as the methodology and content were always a reflection of the perceptions of Aborigines held by Europeans at any given time.

Since teachers and parents of today have themselves been a product of the same education system, our task in dismantling the cycle of inaccuracy and cultural stereotyping is a difficult one. Most children's perceptions of Aborigines are further limited to what is commonly portrayed by the media - the semi-traditional lifestyle of the Western Desert regions. Little or no recognition is given to the large urban population living a modern lifestyle at our doorstep, with its rich cultural heritage and strong sense of its Aboriginality. The child's understanding of Aboriginal lifestyle gained by such limited exposure is usually transferred to all Aborigines, wherever their location. This often comes with the belief that all participate in the more publicised activities, such as throwing boomerangs or eating witchetty grubs.

What has long been needed is a curriculum ideology that strives to redress the historical imbalance in our teaching of Aboriginal Studies. Fortunately, there is evidence that such a view is gaining support by educationalists. Aboriginal Perspectives in the Curriculum (Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, 1991) as it has come to be known, denotes a philosophy insisting that Aboriginal studies be taught from the perspective of the Aborigine. It follows then, that Koorie leadership be allowed for teaching and content decisions.

A large stumbling block immediately faces the teacher intending to implement such a policy. This is the lack of up-to-date educational materials designed from a Koorie point of view, and resources leading students to greater awareness of urban Koories today in the local situation. The kit Tamara's Weekend is a response to this need.

Section 2: Background to the project.

The project was the result of a collaborative effort between Jude Caspersz, a non-Koorie Primary teacher and Vicki Walker, co-ordinator of the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry, Melbourne. Having taught in the Northern Territory, Caspersz had been exposed to educational materials about the local Aboriginal culture, for mainstream students. Now

teaching in Melbourne, he joined the Aboriginal Perspectives Cluster group of the Catholic Education Office (CEO).

Walker was often invited by the CEO to talk to members of the cluster group about Koorie culture and concerns. She was soon invited by Caspersz to meet the staff and students at his school. An effective working relationship was established based on a growing mutual respect. This allowed Caspersz to feel comfortable in approaching Walker about the idea of combining both their respective skills and expertise in creating a teaching tool for Koorie Perspectives. The original idea was to design a picture book based on the everyday life of Vicki's four-year-old daughter, Tamara.

At this time Caspersz was studying for his Bachelor of Education (Multiculturalism) at La Trobe University. His lecturer Keith Simkin, posed the challenge of writing a curriculum unit. Thus, the project expanded. Initially, the goal was to produce a slide kit. However, members of the cluster group advised that this would not be as convenient for teachers' use as would be a video format.

Section 3: The Story

The story is presented from the viewpoint of a young Koorie girl living in suburban Melbourne. Immediately, one's perception of Aboriginality is challenged, as Tamara's physical features do not correspond to the viewer's likely expectations of a Koorie child. As Tamara's weekend unfolds, we are given a glimpse of the Koorie family and culture, its extended networks and strong sense of kinship. With some reflection, students can make striking comparisons and contrasts with their own cultural mores.

Our journey with Tamara allows us to witness the preparations and excitement leading up to National Aboriginal Children's Day. Students can share Tamara's growing understanding of this important annual Koorie celebration, and on a deeper level, some thought-provoking elements of post-contact history ("the Stolen Generation").

#### Section 4: Aims of the Project

Sections four and five of this paper are a summary of material provided for teachers in the kit accompanying the curriculum unit. For the full version, see V. Walker and J.V. Caspersz, *Tamara's Weekend*, 1992.

The aim of the video package is to expose students to contemporary Aboriginal lifestyle in Melbourne. Secondly, it is to give teachers a valuable educational tool to introduce or reinforce a variety of concepts or topics integral to urban Aboriginal society today. These include Family/Kinship, Koorie organisations, Koorie celebrations, National Aboriginal Children's Day, Aboriginality/Koorie Identity, Koorie history, Conflict, "The Stolen Generation".

From the trialling of the video it was found that teachers greatly appreciated the way in which their students can identify with Tamara and see her being "like us". This no doubt,

is an advantage. One very important vehicle in promoting intercultural understanding is to lead the students into a study of the similarities between two cultures. There is a need for young people to extinguish certain misconceptions of Koories being worlds apart from them in looks, habits and lifestyle.

It is a concern of the authors however that students may begin to see Koories as being so much like them that the former have no claim for a separate identity. National Aboriginal Children's Day was not chosen by accident to be central to the theme of the story. It celebrates the Koories' success over a concerted attempt to assimilate them into the mainstream.

*Tamara's Weekend* was intended to dispel schoolchildren's more 'exotic' perceptions of Koories. These misconceptions tend to reinforce the difference between the two cultures. However, a very important objective was to encourage also a firm recognition in the viewer that Koorie culture is unique. While students can see numerous similarities between themselves and Tamara, they must be led to see also several very important differences.

An implication of this is the very strong attempt to keep the message, content and flavour of the program Koorie-based. Unlike some other resources available, *Tamara's Weekend* is made from a purely Koorie perspective. Not surprisingly then, the Koorie perspective of family, culture and history is presented. This may challenge the previously held views of the audience. Thus, it is critical that audiences be given some orientation to Koorie perspectives before viewing and de-briefing after viewing.

Overall, the fundamental objective of the program is to promote reconciliation between Koories and non-Koories by providing a window through which greater understanding and education can take place. The authors hope that the video will cause some change in all students by challenging their assumptions about Koories.

#### Section 5 : How to use the kit

The following are some suggestions on how to use the video according to the philosophy of an integrated curriculum. The reader will need to amend the following information according to the specific needs and experiences of his/her students.

1. Preview the video and choose a theme with which *Tamara's Weekend* can be used. You may become aware of the need for further information or reading before proceeding.

2. Contact a member of the local Koorie community. Check that your aims are in harmony with the attitudes of that Koorie community.

3. Give students a pre-test based on the one given in the booklet and appropriate to the theme you have in mind. (Refer to Section 7). This diagnostic activity should test students' perceptions of Koories according to the chosen theme - the same questions are rephrased to the students after the video, as a form of evaluation of

what has been learnt from the program.

4. The trialling revealed that students are more likely to give stereo-typical responses to the pre-test. After reviewing your students' responses, you may decide to hold some discussion to help alleviate some of these misconceptions, before showing the

video. Use the children's responses as a framework for preparing the input required. Alternatively, Tamara's Weekend may be used to help you initiate some of this discussion.

5. Check through the Script for any terms and expressions that may be unfamiliar to your students. These should be displayed on the chalkboard and discussed prior to viewing. (A section of the booklet is devoted to the explanation of Koorie terms and expressions used.) It is particularly important that the students are made aware of the existence of a Koorie vernacular and its use in the video.

Refer to Koori English, Victorian Ministry of Education, 1989.

6. Introduce all the locations mentioned in the story and listed in the teacher's booklet. Students would find it beneficial to locate these on a map or directory and actually see or mark in the proximity to their home suburb or town.

7. Give the students cues to look out for specific information you wish to address before showing the video. This is especially important as the video has a duration of only ten minutes, while providing a large amount of information. The booklet lists a number of suggested pre-cues, based on themes likely to be used with the kit.

8. Before showing the video, give a brief introduction. This should advise the audience that Vicki Walker is the narrator of the story, the mother of Tamara, and the co-ordinator of the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry, Melbourne. In addition, the audience should be made aware that all but six of the people appearing on the video are Koories.

9. Invite feedback and discussion about the content of the video, using the "Debriefing" section in the booklet.

10. Invite a member of the local Koorie community to chat to your students. Compare/contrast the latter's culture, lifestyle and experience with that of Tamara's family.

11. Evaluate the unit based on your objectives and on a comparison of the students' responses to the pre and post viewing tests (refer to Section 7). In what ways have their knowledge and attitudes changed? What other types of experiences do they require as a result of this?

#### Section 6: Extension activities

Your Koorie contact may have ideas on how you could further extend the students' learning from the video. The following are some suggested extension activities given in the booklet.

1. Have the students compile a chart with the following headings:

Similarities	Differences
(How Tamara is similar to me)	(How Tamara is different to me)

Ask students to brainstorm ideas for each heading. Interesting comparison and discussion could follow. Having worked through the program, the list of similarities suggested by the students may be now quite extensive.

2. Invite a member of the local Koorie community to visit your school. Have the students compare and contrast the latter's lifestyle and experiences with that of Tamara and her family.

3. Take your students on an excursion to St. Georges Road, Thornbury. Various points of interest there are described in the booklet.

4. Plan and reflect on the music of Archie Roach, especially Took the Children Away ("Charcoal Lane", Mushroom Records 1990).

5. Students could write poetry, or compile written or pictorial reports on information gathered from the video and discussion exercises on attitudes/feelings held by Koories.

Possible topics: Koorie Families, Culture.

6. Expose students to other stories about Koorie children and Koorie experiences. (See References for some examples).

7. Senior students could research the role and history of various Aboriginal

organisations, especially those linked to people who appear in the video.

#### Section 7: Evaluation

After working through the unit, the teacher will likely wish to evaluate his/her students' change in knowledge of and attitudes to urban Koories. The booklet provides twelve post-viewing questions for this purpose. These are set out on page 6. By repeating several questions posed prior to watching the video, this evaluation tool allows the teacher to directly relate the students' level of understanding prior to watching the video with their perceptions now.

#### DIAGNOSTIC TEST/EVALUATION OF CHANGE IN KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES

Questions before the video:

1. What do you know about Aborigines?
2. Describe what you think an Aborigine looks like?
3. Brainstorm what you think an Aborigine today might do/eat/celebrate.

4. How and where do Aborigines live?

5. What do you think about Aborigines?

Why? Questions after the video:

1. What do you know about Aborigines?
2. Describe what you think an Aborigine looks like?
3. Brainstorm what you think an Aborigine today might like to do, eat or celebrate.
4. Where do you think Aborigines live today?
5. What sort of foods would an Aborigine be likely to eat today?
6. How often did Tamara use the word "Uncle" or "Aunt" in the story?
7. Do you think all those people were really her uncles and aunts? Why/Why not?
8. What does this tell us about the Koorie child; Koories in general and Koorie families?

9. What sort of things are important to Vicki/Joan/Aunty Marg?

10. What did you learn from the video you didn't know before?

11. Has the video changed you in any way? Why?/How?

12. How would you feel or react if you learnt that Tamara was moving in next door?

In May 1992, a trial of the video was undertaken with a range of primary classes around Melbourne. The above questions were presented to each group. In keeping with the suggestions in the booklet, the diagnostic questions were given prior to the children

watching the video, while the latter were presented after viewing - that is, questions One to Four were repeated. This, it was believed, would provide the closest approximation to change in awareness and attitudes.

Below are some responses that were received from students in the trial, for questions one (knowledge about Koories) and twelve (attitudes towards Koories). Responses have been divided into two categories: "Stereo-typical" and "non stereo-typical". The former relate to responses that reveal children's tendency to transfer their perceptions of Aborigines in the Outback and of the past to present-day urban contexts. These were discussed above in Section One, "Introduction". Responses were selected for the second category if they represented in any way the child's awareness of Koories living today, in the local situation. These may be positive or negative. Statements have been grouped together according to their common images. The number appearing after each group represent the number of responses a particular message tallied.

Question One: "What do you know about Aborigines?"

Sample Group One: 28 Year Two children from "School A"

BEFORE THE VIDEOAFTER THE VIDEOStereo-typical:

They draw on rocks.  
Use spears/axes to hunt for things. (6)  
Move to different places. (2)  
They have spirits that they call gods.  
They make paint/paint their skins/pictures  
with mud/hand prints on cave walls. (7)  
They are black/brown. (7)  
Live in the bush/are bush people. (2)  
Have codes.  
Have a good sense.  
Live different to us.  
Live in huts/caves.  
Use/make/throw boomerangs. (10)  
Eat witchetty grubs. (4)  
They use/make didgeridoos. (9)  
Eat yabby/crabs/lobsters. (3)  
Use bow and arrow.  
Make canoes and Kayaks.  
Make tents with straw and sticks.  
They don't go to school. (28)

Non-Stereotypical:

They create a lot of houses to live.  
They live on the land.  
The first people in Australia. (2)  
They once came from Asia.  
Have a Dreamtime.  
Have been in Australia for hundreds of  
years.  
Go to school.

Stereo-typical

They're black/look like black people. (4)

Same as before.

Non Stereo-typical

They got taken over.  
They wear clothes. (2)  
They're not all black/some are white. (3)  
They visit people/their Nana &  
Nono/Nanna and Pop. (3)  
They are nice. (3)  
Now I know about Children's Day/They  
celebrate Children's Day/ They go to the  
Children's Day program. (5)  
They live in Melbourne in houses. (2)  
Some new things.  
They talk to each other nicely.

They have good brains.

They are happy and good.  
They call themselves Koories. (2)  
Go to/eat McDonald's. (2)  
They love Easter and Christmas.  
The Koorie people are the same as us.  
Some kids got taken away from their  
Mums and Dads/In the olden days they  
took away Aborigines. (3)  
They are small.  
They eat meat/eat the same as us. (2)  
I think they should get some land back.  
They celebrate parties and anniversaries.  
They can move to Australia.  
Can go to the park and play.  
Lots of things I don't know.

Sample Group Five: 30 Year Six Students from "School C"

N.B.: These students had just completed an intensive unit on  
"Conflict". Through extensive use of newspaper articles, the  
teacher lead her students to learn much about urban Koories,  
as portrayed by the media.

BEFORE THE VIDEOAFTER THE VIDEOStereo-typical

They are black/brown. (13)  
Do different kinds of dancing.  
Live in Australia.  
Make own weapons.  
Originated from the bush. (2)  
Have no shelter.  
Don't have proper clothes to wear.  
Don't have food to eat like us.  
They paint walls.

Non Stereo-typical

Some live in poor houses.  
Some of them have very big families.  
They work.  
They are very nice.  
People think they are dirty.  
Very supportive to the Aboriginal flag  
and culture/their culture means a lot to  
them. (2)  
Some people think they're no good  
because of their colour.  
Gone through hard times/they're  
unlucky/treated unfairly. (3)  
Some sing like "Yothu Yindi"/"Yothu  
Yindi" was thrown out of restaurant. (3)  
Can become drunk; they just buy and  
drink beer/drink too much. (5)  
Spend most of their time drinking because  
people reject them.  
Many people dislike them.  
They dislike white people.  
The first people in Australia. (2)  
They say they're bums.

Stereo-typical

They lived in the bush with no shelter  
and proper food.

They paint walls.

Non Stereo-typical

Same as whites except different colour  
skin.

Have a normal lifestyle/Lifestyle has  
changed: How/where they live; clothes/  
live like normal people/same as any other  
person in the world. (5)

Eat some of the same food we do. (2)

They're not all brown/black/Can be white

or black. (9)

They love their children.

Call themselves Koorie.

Have a National Children's Day. (5)

Aborigines are friendly/caring. (3)

Children get taken away from their  
parents/kidnapped. (6)

Some people call them names.

Live in all states of Australia.