

SUMMARY

Implications of the Teaching of Aboriginality in Schools – A Case Study of Kurna Cultural Studies in Adelaide –

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Under self-determination and multicultural policies in the early 1970's, urban Aboriginal people began to construct their collective identity, Aboriginality. During the same period, Aboriginal leaders in Adelaide actively pursued their Kurna identity and reconstructed Kurna culture. Today Kurna culture, especially the Kurna language, is taught at several educational institutions in order to raise the awareness of Aboriginal culture among young Aboriginal people. Given the diversity among Aboriginal people in cultural, economic and social terms, though, it is assumed that the views of the local Aboriginal people regarding teaching Kurna culture to all Aboriginal people vary. This study aims to consider the significance and limitations of Kurna cultural studies from the perspective of local Aboriginal peoples.

In Kurna cultural studies programs, in addition to Kurna culture, 'traditional' Aboriginal culture features such as Aboriginal dance and art derived from remote Aboriginal communities were selected and taught to Aboriginal children. Aboriginal leaders selected the cultural elements to be taught, based on the image held by people in mainstream society about Aboriginal culture, emphasising commonality and unity as an Aboriginal people rather than diversity among them. Aboriginal teachers and activists engaged in the development of cultural studies believed that these studies would provide Aboriginal children with the opportunity to reaffirm and enhance their Aboriginality, which would eventually help overcome racism and stereotypes against Aboriginal people in the wider society.

Such attitudes of indigenous elites towards the studies can be regarded as a strategy to adapt to an urban multicultural society. On the other hand, based on the response of ordinary Aboriginal people, it becomes clear that, for them, Kurna culture is something 'foreign' at present and not relevant to their everyday lives, which are highly influenced by western culture. The teaching of commonality-focused Aboriginal culture may also neglect the diversity of their cultural experiences, conflicting with other Aboriginal cultural elements transmitted through generations within each family. Further study is necessary to determine the extent to which Kurna culture becomes internalised by Aboriginal people as pride in Aboriginal identity.