

**ABORIGINAL REFERENCE  
GROUP**



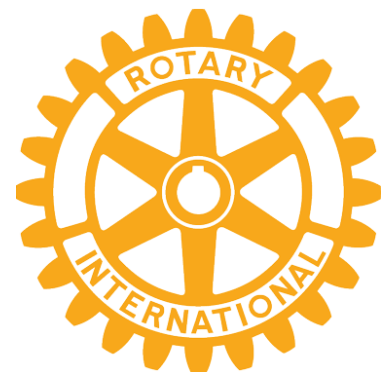
**Research Project Concerning  
a Pilot Education Curriculum  
for Perth Secondary Students About  
Wadjak Noongar History, Culture and Issues**

**Final Report (Short Version)**

**October 2015**

*Rotary District 9455's Aboriginal Reference Group's joint project with:  
the Rotary Clubs of Belmont, Subiaco, West Perth and Western Endeavour;  
the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council; Murdoch University;  
and the WA Department of Education.*

**Rotary**  
**District 9455**



## **Executive Summary:**

*This Executive Summary is more extensive than is usual as it is also being used as a brief version of the full report, to be sent to participants and collaborators who do not want to read the full report.*

The project title is: *Research Project Concerning a Pilot Education Curriculum for Perth Secondary Students About Wadjak Noongar History, Culture and Issues*. This is a Rotary District 9455's Aboriginal Reference Group joint project with: the Rotary Clubs of Belmont, Subiaco, West Perth and Western Endeavour; the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council (SWALSC); Murdoch University; and the WA Department of Education.

The project seeks to assist the WA Department of Education to develop more effective ways of teaching secondary students about Aboriginal history, culture and issues, in the context of the (changing) requirements of the Australian Curriculum. It also addresses related issues regarding the training of teachers at universities and via in-service professional development. The project demonstrates an approach which focuses on local and regional (rather than Australia-wide) information, with the relevant Aboriginal cultural organization playing a key role in curriculum development.

The major long-term objective of this Rotary Project is to raise the general level of understanding of Western Australian people regarding Aboriginal history, culture and contemporary issues. The current low level of such knowledge is a major obstacle to Reconciliation, Recognition (of Indigenous Australians in the Constitution) and advancement of Aboriginal peoples. A complementary objective is to affirm Aboriginal students and build their identities so that they can feel more respected and appreciated as people with a valued culture and history, thus enhancing their self-esteem and enabling them to better achieve their aspirations. This project also advances the general objectives of the Rotary District 9455's Aboriginal Reference Group, providing an opportunity for collaboration between Rotary Club Members and Aboriginal Western Australians.

The project described in this report was developed as Phase 1 of a two Phase overall program. The first Phase involved development of a pilot curriculum for schools in Perth (using a chosen Noongar language group) and the second Phase (if implemented) will replicate this pilot (with significant differences, and learnings from the first pilot) in a regional WA city/town with significantly different demographics and greater reconciliation challenges.

Phase 1 of the overall project has consisted of three stages:

1. Development of the proposal; discussions with potential collaborators; background research; obtaining initial funding (2012 / 2013).
2. Obtaining research approvals and commitments from collaborators; obtaining additional funding; development of a draft curriculum; running a two-day professional development course for collaborating teachers and AIEOs (2014).
3. Finalisation of curriculum materials; teaching of course in 4 schools; evaluation of results of teaching; preparation of the final report (2015).

A detailed summary of project income and expenditure over stages 2 and 3 of Phase 1 is provided. There is also an estimate of in-kind contributions, other than those by Rotarians, and a prediction of the likely cost of a Phase 2 pilot project in a regional WA city/town.

The project has developed a set of 20 pilot (one hour) lessons covering ten topic areas about Wadjak Noongar history, culture and issues. This includes support materials and films for teachers to introduce into the *Humanities and Social Sciences* Year 9 Secondary School curriculum. Materials were sourced from the SWALSC (under an IP agreement), Murdoch University and other reference material sources. SWALSC have endorsed the use of all materials. The pilot course was developed to take into account the WA Education Department's responses to the current requirements of the Australian Curriculum initiative.

Four Senior High Schools and Colleges were identified in collaboration with the WA Education Department to teach the pilot Wadjak Noongar curriculum to year 9 students in Term 1 of 2015; although two schools subsequently chose to offer the curriculum over 20 weeks during Terms 1 and 2. In preparing for teaching the curriculum, teachers were offered a 2-day Professional Development (PD) short course in early December 2014 (in collaboration with Balga Senior High School), including a cultural experience with Wadjak elders. Dr. Turk (Project Manager) was largely responsible for developing and delivering this course, with the assistance of Aboriginal teacher, Donnelle Slater. Ten teachers participated in the PD program, together with senior Education Dept. personnel, Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEOs) and Rotarians. Following the PD program, and detailed feedback from teachers, the pilot curriculum was revised by Dr. Turk, before being used in 13 classes in the four Senior High Schools and Colleges (not named in this report due to confidentiality requirements). Aboriginal Elders participated in 6 lesson sessions across the schools, as part of incursions and there was also an excursion during the course at most of the schools.

The methods of evaluation used for the project were approved by the Department of Education and by Murdoch University's Research Ethics Committee. They involved: review of literature on past and contemporary efforts to implement courses about Indigenous Australians; student feedback (via a pre- and post-course questionnaire); teacher feedback (in writing and via interviews); and input from senior Education Department staff/consultants (via interviews). The original plan was to involve university Masters students for this aspect of the project. However, as this was not possible, a Research Associate, Dr. Pia Lebeck, was engaged to undertake most of this work. Once Dr. Lebeck and Dr. Turk completed the evaluation, the information was incorporated into the project's Final Report prepared by Dr. Turk, with assistance from Bruce Dufty and other Rotary people involved in the project.

A set of 13 principal research questions was developed. The Evaluation Phase, which sought to produce findings for each of the research questions, involved four Sub-Projects:

- A: Investigation (via interviews with teachers) of difficulties secondary teachers encounter in teaching about Aboriginal history, culture and issues and strategies to address these problems (including collaboration with local Aboriginal cultural organisations).
- B: Investigation (via interviews with Dept. of Education staff) of curriculum issues concerning relevant current WA teaching courses and development of responses to the Australian Curriculum. This included consideration of the relationship between generic Australia-wide information and material regarding local Aboriginal language groups and the relative virtues of teaching about Aboriginal history, culture and issues within a single course or as topics within standard subjects (History; Geography; Literature; Art; Science, etc.).
- C: Investigation (via interviews with teachers who taught the pilot course) of the effectiveness of the pilot curriculum and recommendations of improvements for its on-going use and for Phase 2 project(s) in other parts of WA.
- D. Review of the results of the pre- and post- course questionnaire completed by students who were involved in the classes for the pilot study, calculation of statistical results and interpretation of qualitative data.

Analysis of the data produced by these four Sub-Projects led to a total of 90 project findings across the 13 research questions. For each finding, where practicable, a notation is provided indicating which participant (in Sub-Project A, B or C interviews) provided a response supporting that specific finding; providing a 'provenance trail' from the interview data. The research team suggests that all stakeholders carefully consider these findings and take steps to address the issues identified and investigate the suggestions for future actions.

The findings of the project include that the pilot Wadjak Noongar curriculum should continue to be taught in the four schools involved in this project and in other Perth secondary schools. It is therefore recommended that the curriculum materials be revised in accordance with

suggestions made by teachers. Approval should be sought from SWALSC who, together with Rotary, hold the IP rights, for on-going use of the revised curriculum materials.

Other principal recommendations are as follows:

1. The proposed Phase 2 project should be undertaken in at least one WA regional city/town with involvement of several secondary schools and one or more cultural organisations representing the local Aboriginal language group. A summary of the likely funding required is included in the report.
2. Any proposed teaching about Australian Indigenous peoples' history, culture and issues needs to be carefully integrated with the latest curriculum framework from the WA Department of Education and the manner in which it implements requirements of the current version of the Australian Curriculum.
3. Teaching *all* students about Australian Indigenous peoples' history, culture and issues is very different to teaching *Indigenous* students about other aspects of the curriculum. However, it is important to understand, and take steps to address, the particular difficulties that some (perhaps many) Aboriginal students may have with aspects of teaching about their culture(s), especially initially. Two potential examples are: Aboriginal Students may be embarrassed to admit that (because of their personal history) they have little cultural knowledge/understanding; and/or Aboriginal Students could be embarrassed (or indignant) about a non-Indigenous person teaching them about their culture.
4. Probably the most effective approach to teaching about Indigenous history, culture and issues (within the broader curriculum framework) is to have a synergistic combination of (probably short) stand-alone courses on this specific topic and also incorporation of a suitable amount of discussion of relevant Indigenous knowledges, perspectives, and examples during teaching about any topic in any discipline at any year level. It is critical that these integrated approaches to teaching are well structured so that there is a proper progression of aspects of teaching in a sequence from year to year, without inappropriate repetition, focusing on the ideas appropriate to that year level and the nature of a particular class (given that students will have different life experiences, intellectual abilities and cultural backgrounds).
5. During teaching about Indigenous history, culture and issues, the formulation and execution of effective approaches to providing students with engaging activities, leading to appropriate skills development, is probably as important as having access to a suitable range of content-based curriculum materials. A critical aspect of these activities is comprehensive and respectful discussion of topics, in a manner suited to the level of knowledge and maturity of any particular class, especially for students in the usually argumentative and formative years around school year 9.
6. For any set of curriculum materials, it is necessary for a teacher to select from available materials and teaching strategies and alter and creatively combine them to produce an engaging and effective educational experience for their particular students on that day. There are so many variables relevant to this process that it is impossible to create curriculum materials (including teaching strategy options) that cover all possible combinations of student needs and appropriate responses. Rather, the curriculum materials should be complete enough, and as user-friendly as possible, to facilitate the teacher undertaking the task of tailoring the lesson to the students' needs on each occasion. Thus, providing teachers with the skills and tools (and adequate time to for this task) is critical to the success of the teaching and learning. Teachers who collaborate on a teaching program (perhaps under the guidance of a Head of Learning Area) can assist each other to make the task as easy and effective as possible.
7. The selection and training of teachers so that they have appropriate levels of knowledge, attitudes and enthusiasm is critical to the success of teaching about Indigenous history, culture and issues. This needs to be incorporated into the education program of all undergraduate teachers, especially if the Australian and/or

WA curriculums require teaching of Indigenous material across a wide variety of discipline areas. However, in any year, the number of new graduate teachers is likely to be vastly fewer than those teachers who have graduated some time ago, perhaps as long as 40 years. Hence, effective in-service Professional Development (PD) in this area of teaching is vital and should be focused on development of attitudes as well as knowledge and teaching strategies, probably via at least some element of immersive cultural experience with Aboriginal elders, preferably 'on-country'.

8. While it is important to include in the curriculum discussion of Indigenous Australians from other language groups, and regional and national issues and government policies and practices, it is likely to be most effective for most of the curriculum materials to be about the local language group. Hence, local and regional Indigenous individuals and cultural organisations should be involved to the maximum extent practicable in the design and development of curriculum materials, teaching activities (including incursions and excursions), evaluation of teaching programs and training of teachers at university and especially during in-service PD courses. Indigenous individuals and organisations should be appropriately remunerated for their assistance in these processes and for the use of Intellectual Property. Although the development of local aspects of curriculum in all WA regions may seem a difficult task, the resources expended will be repaid via more effective teaching and learning and improved collaboration between schools and their community (including Aboriginal parents and organisations). The development of local and regional cultural materials to insert into a generic state-wide curriculum could be productively integrated with PD (and/or 'cultural competency' training/certification) for teachers. AIEOs from the local language group could play an important role in the development of local materials.

This project has been a very complex undertaking, as it involved input from many stakeholders and detailed and multi-faceted research and curriculum development processes. There were many difficulties encountered, however, all were substantially overcome, albeit with an extension of the duration of the project. The project can be considered as a success with detailed responses generated for the research questions. It has also resulted in a set of curriculum materials regarding Wadjak Noongar history, culture and issues and recommendations regarding how these may be modified for ongoing use.

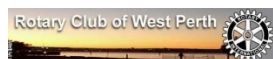
It is hoped that the findings and recommendations will assist the WA Department of Education in its decision-making processes regarding secondary courses about Aboriginal history, culture and issues. The other stakeholders should also receive benefits from the project and this report. This project should facilitate both Reconciliation and Recognition. Education must play a key role in assisting people to understand the need for appropriate recognition of Indigenous Australians in the Constitutions of both WA and Australia.

The principal researchers and everyone involved in the ARG, PRG and PMG gratefully acknowledge the large contributions made by the many people and organisations listed in the acknowledgements section early in this report, including the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council and the WA Department of Education. They would like to especially thank Rotary District 9455 and the Rotary Clubs of Belmont, Subiaco, West Perth and Western Endeavour for their financial support, large in-kind contributions and encouragement.

## Main Project Participants and Acknowledgements:

***Collaborative project involving the following organisations and people:***

### Project Sponsors



- Rotary Club of Belmont
- Rotary Club of West Perth
- Rotary Club of Western Endeavour
- Rotary Club of Subiaco
- Rotary District 9455 – Aboriginal Reference Group

### Project Management

Project Management Group, consisting of:

- Adjunct Associate Professor A. Turk (Project Manager) - Murdoch University
- Representatives (2) Aboriginal Reference Group, Rotary District 9455
- Representatives of sponsoring Rotary Clubs (4): Belmont; West Perth; Subiaco; and Western Endeavour

### Providers of Whadjuk/Wadjak Cultural Materials



- South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council
- Murdoch University Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre and Black Russian Productions (Dr G. Stasiuk)

### Professional Development Program for Teachers



- Adjunct Associate Professor A. Turk (Murdoch University)
- Balga Senior High School – Principal G. Harris; Senior Indigenous Teacher D. Slater; and AIEO's L. Yarran & S. Garlett
- Wadjak Northside Aboriginal Community Group

## Education Providers



Department of  
Education

### Department of Education:

- Aboriginal Education Branch
- Curriculum and Student Services Support
- Evaluation and Accountability Directorate
- 4 Perth Secondary Schools (*not named for confidentiality reasons*)

## Project Evaluation



Murdoch University:

- School of Arts: Adjunct Associate Professor A. Turk and Dr P. Lebeck (Research Associate)
- Human Research Ethics Committee



Department of  
Education

WA Department of Education - Evaluation and Accountability Directorate:  
Approval of Research Conducted on Department of Education Sites by  
External Parties

## Legal Services



- Slater & Gordon – Pro Bono Services

## Project Reference Group

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- Adjunct Associate Professor A Turk (Project Manager) – Murdoch University
- B. Dufty - Rotarian Western Endeavour, Retired Clinical Psychologist and Management
- C. Garlett – Chair of WA Aboriginal Education and Training Council
- S. Forrest - Curtin University, Aboriginal Studies
- R. Isaacs (OAM) - Housing and Management
- H. Rind
- B. Stoeckel-Clayton - Department of Education, North Metro
- S. Harris - Department of Education, North Metro
- G. Barrow - Department of Education, South Metro
- C. Jackson - Department of Education, South Metro
- P. Green - Ellenbrook Senior College, previously involved with WAIS Curriculum
- K. Oakley - Aboriginal Education, Curtin University of Technology
- D. O'Hara - Department of Education, North Metro (participated when S. Harris was on secondment)

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***A copy of the full report, or further details about any aspect of the project, can be obtained by contacting Adjunct Associate Professor Andrew Turk (School of Arts, Murdoch University) at [a.turk@murdoch.edu.au](mailto:a.turk@murdoch.edu.au).***