



Unknown Ancestors: Adam Manning

The education of Indigenous Australians is a story of neglect, exclusion, segregation, assimilation and denial. It is also a story of resilience, recovery and innovation where, for centuries, cohorts of Indigenous Australians campaigned for access to ‘white man’s school’ as well as continuing their children’s cultural education under repressive conditions.

A letter sent to the King of England in 1926¹ by an Aboriginal leader appealing for public school access is one of hundreds of letters, petitions, media statements, protest and lobbying Indigenous Australians undertook.

The situation began to change in the 70s, but there were 175 years of catching-up to achieve, many obstacles to navigate and entrenched attitudes to overcome.

THE RESEARCH CHALLENGE

Working with the department’s [Reconciliation Action Plan \(RAP\)](#) team, Purai will use subject-matter expertise and culturally-responsive research practices to take a critical look at what the department has done in the past, and what needs to be done now and into the future to advance reconciliation and build meaningful connections with NSW Aboriginal communities. As Luke Allan, Senior Project Officer in the RAP team explains:

“It’s an opportunity to draw the line in the sand and commit to a better future where Aboriginal people are seen as equal partners and have agency in the systemic shifts that need to occur to ensure equality and equity in educational outcomes for our kids.”

COMPONENTS DRIVING THE RESEARCH

Researchers from the universities of Newcastle, Wollongong and Sydney will use archival records, oral history interviews and Yarning Circles to conduct the research. NSW State Archives hold a wealth of documents from the late 1700s until the current day. These documents are little-known and notoriously inaccessible, yet they represent the wider attitudes among the people and government of the times.

¹Ms J. Duren to King George V, Buckingham Palace, 14 June 1926, Box 5/14819, NSWSA

TRUTH TELLING IN THE JOURNEY TO HEALING & RECONCILIATION

A cross-institutional research collaboration with the Department of Education delves into the history of education for Indigenous Australians across New South Wales (NSW) from the onset of colonisation to the current day.

As these archival records were mostly written by non-Indigenous people who controlled the education of Indigenous Australian children, it is also crucial to include the oral histories of adults from urban, regional and rural settings. Their educational experiences, ongoing impact and views on teaching and learning will be the focus here.

Yarning Circles with Years 10–12 students will explore their experiences and aspirations in Indigenous education, including the kinds of teaching and learning resources they want in their schools. Yarning Circles have been used by Indigenous Australians for thousands of years providing a safe place for all to speak without judgement.

RESEARCH IMPACT

[The research](#) will be used to write a report and create resources to educate the DoE's workforce and students.

Community workshops will conclude the research where participants will learn how to write their own family/community history and access archives. A mini travelling exhibition showcasing state-wide results, archival documents and educational resources will also accompany the workshop.

BARYULGIL PUBLIC SCHOOL: A CASE STUDY

Founded in 1917, on the NSW north coast, Baryulgil is a microcosm of the history of education in the state. In 1935, prompted by the clean, clad, and courteous rule, the principal told 20 Aboriginal students to leave the school and not come back. There was also pressure applied to their families to move to Woodenbong, a reserve nearly 100km north where an Aboriginal-only school operated. Parents resisted by writing letters, hiring a solicitor to lodge an appeal, protesting, and taking their story to national newspapers. Finally, in a paddock four kilometers away, an Aboriginal school was established delivering a less academically demanding curriculum focused on training the students to be farmhands and domestic servants. The first Indigenous principal (2000 – 2008) at Baryulgil, John Duroux, thought it was important that his students know their school's history.

"It should say to them they fought so hard for us to get to school, let's go on and achieve as much as we can."

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-12-11/baryulgil-public-school-once-excluded-aboriginal-students/9224856>

OTHER BROADER BENEFITS INCLUDE:

- Indigenous Australian experiences represented in a significant report.
- A school curriculum that supports the principal of truth telling.
- Showing hidden truths promoting a more balanced view of history and greater understanding within Australian society.
- Understanding the ongoing impact that racism within educational institutions have had on Indigenous Australians which will assist in implementing better policies.



TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS RESEARCH PROJECT, CONTACT:

Professor Kate Senior or Dr Jacqueline Wright

University of Newcastle

e: truthelling@newcastle.edu.au

p: +61 (0) 4921 7408