



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

This article was originally published in printed form. The journal began in 1973 and was titled *The Aboriginal Child at School*. In 1996 the journal was transformed to an internationally peer-reviewed publication and renamed *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*.

In 2022 *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* transitioned to fully Open Access and this article is available for use under the license conditions below.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

The Café Manymak Project

Maggie Young

*Shepherdson College C.E.C.
Galiwin'Ku, Elcho Island, N.T.*



Introduction

The day my class of 10 to 12 year-olds transformed a classroom into a café complete with red gingham tablecloths, travel posters and cooking equipment was the beginning of an exciting, engrossing and most rewarding learning experience.

It all began when I was searching for a different theme for my class of 17 students at Galiwin'ku on Elcho Island. I wanted a theme which would have real meaning for the children and successfully integrate all of the curriculum areas. It would need to be challenging and fun so that the children would want to attend school regularly, as well.

To this end, I knew that Dorothy Heathcote's Educational Drama perspective would be important. She believes that good education should happen in a real life context, should be student-centred with a mutual teacher/student understanding, and be a process of problem solving.

So, having had previous success using Drama, especially role play as a methodology, I began

the Café Manymak Project with great hopes and high expectations of undreamt possibilities.

Outline of the Project

In my Term 1 Program, I wrote:

The aims and objectives are to provide a meaningful environment where the children, through role play, can learn social skills, solve problems in real life situations, learn cooking skills, skills in handling real money, ordering food, literacy and numeracy skills, and emphasise the importance of Hygiene and Nutrition as well.

The project also aimed at empowering the students with a sense of ownership (after all this was the only café on the island!) and heightened self-esteem and self-confidence.

I aimed to teach the children the concept of a café (as some had never been to one), the different roles played (waiter, manager, cashier, etc.), and to progress from serving food to other classes to hosting a teachers' morning tea and perhaps taking the café to the wider community. I wrote:

The outcomes are limitless and the students' literacy skills and confidence in social skills will improve enormously.

Well, this prediction has come true, and I would like to relate some of the highlights and anecdotes of the Café Manymak Project, as well as setting out the learning outcomes which have been achieved.

A Year of Café Manymak

At the beginning of the year, with the assistance of the ESL support teacher, we set up Café Manymak Staff Meetings. This gave the students an opportunity to have a voice in their own learning, as well as learning the rudiments of conducting a meeting. My assistant teacher would translate into Yolngu Matha and there would always be several students clamouring to write the minutes!

The students achieved a variety of literacy skills. Constant repetition of the same words in different contexts meant that the class felt confident in writing independently. One day, a little girl proudly handed me a letter in an envelope she had made. The message said simply:

To Maggie from Café Manymak Staff.

I was particularly thrilled to read it because this was her first effort at real independent writing.

Throughout the year we have written texts in many different genres – menus, invitations, a visitors' book, a staff meeting book, compiled class books, made posters and written thank-you letters.

We worked in small groups and used scaffolding when creating group-negotiated texts so that the children's confidence in their own writing increased and they had high expectations of their achievements.

As well as the obvious Maths learning outcomes of problem-solving with real money and counting customers and their orders, here was a very real opportunity to estimate amounts of food, measure for recipes, create a plan of the café and construct graphs of the number of visitors.

In the area of Health and Hygiene, the students had a heightened awareness of the need for cleanliness and preparing food with clean hands. There was a real need to know about

good nutrition in the planning of menus and choice of recipes (e.g. what would be healthy food for the customers?).

Technology is catered for as well, under the Café Manymak umbrella. We began an email account – 'Café manymak@hotmail.com' and correspond regularly with pen-friends. Sewing was a skill that needed to be learnt too – making tablecloths and banners. A future Arts activity will be screen printing Café Manymak T-shirts, but throughout the year there have been posters, badges and banners to paint, and puppet shows to perform for customers. The links with literacy and circus skills developed further when the children wrote on the whiteboard, *We are the Café Manymak Juggling Staff* after learning juggling. Similarly with stilt-walking, they could then write sentences up high around the room!

Highlights

The visit of two chefs from Rydges Plaza in Darwin was a definite highlight. This created such a flurry of literacy activities, and was a most enriching experience for the students. Steve and Emilo cooked delicious food in the café's frypan, answered questions (How do you become a chef? Can you play football?). They marvelled at the students' written work, took home the fairy bread recipe, and later sent a copy of the *Rydges Bulletin*. In it, they had described their visit and noted, to everyone's delight, 'These kids are amazing!'

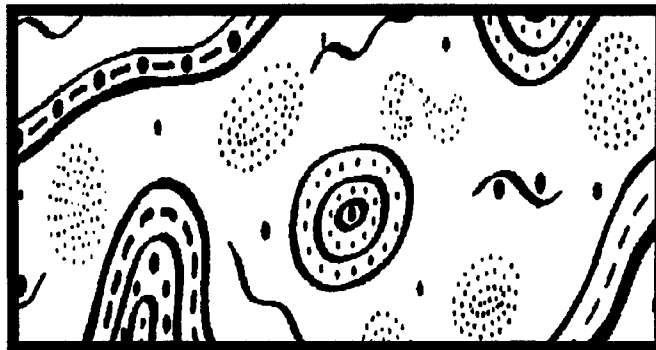
When the school hosted visiting basketball teams for a week, Café Manymak provided milkshakes and cakes. Children from visiting schools wrote copiously in the Visitor's Book and a favourite comment was, 'Milkshakes! In the Wilderness! Your mob should open a shop!'

Already the students were increasing in confidence in social situations. They could show customers to their seats, be courteous, take orders, and ask for comments in the Visitor's Book. At the same time, they were

learning to co-operate and work as a team in their roles as cashier, waiters, manager and cleaners.

A Staff Morning Tea was another exciting venture, when it was decided to have candles, balloons and hastily-made paper doilies for decoration. Once again, writing took place as children wrote welcome independent messages on the balloons, and around the walls. This sense of ownership, autonomy and responsibility for their own learning was developing more and more.

Recently, the Café Manymak branched out into the community, with a Morning Tea at the one general store, where clothes were pushed aside to make way for gingham covered tables, menus, copies of *Vogue* and the *Melbourne Age*, and a display stand of the children's written work. This was a real link with the community. Not only could the students show that their work was valued and meaningful, but they had the opportunity to increase their self-esteem in the eyes of the whole community. After all, this was a first for Galwin'ku! In the evaluation comments, one student began writing 'I like ...' (and then crossed it out) 'No! I LOVE being a waitress.' Customers were enthusiastic, with the 'Fantastic!' and 'Well done!' comments in the Visitor's Book. The children liked the comment – 'At Café Manymak, the cake was manymak, so were the staff. They were friendly, talkative and courteous', which seemed to sum up the general feeling at the ALPA store morning tea.



Conclusion

In 'What has worked' (and will again) reporting on Strategic Results Projects¹, it was stated that :

the distinctive factor they all shared was a fundamental and fixed belief in the value of what they were doing and the prospect of success.

This is certainly true of the Café Manymak project – the students and community value their work and see it as relevant and meaningful. Students can work at their own level in a real-life context, and everything is set up for them to succeed. Using Drama as a methodology (drama itself being a universal language)

has given more meaning to writing tasks. There have also been many opportunities to use Yolngu Matha alongside English, giving a balanced, bilingual perspective. The Café structure has also allowed for flexibility in creating new and wider experiences in learning.

Above all, the children have increased confidence, pride and self-esteem, and have taken control (with direction) of their own learning. It is an exciting, worthwhile dynamic project which has increased attendance and captured the children's imagination. Even when a new topic is introduced, the class always manages to steer it back to the café – Café Manymak is so successful it has taken on a life of its own!

¹ *What has worked (and will again): The IESIP Strategic Results Projects, Commonwealth of Australia 2000, p. 5.*