

Santa Sabina College (SSC), Strathfield
Speakers: Rebecca Harcourt and Aunty Ali Golding
Contact Details: r.harcourt@ssc.nsw.edu.au 02 97450190

Bridging Our Communities:
Opening the Door of Reconciliation in our Schools ©
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This workshop offers the opportunity to share the holistic focus and experiential approach to Reconciliation at Santa Sabina College, a K-12 College in Strathfield. Through sharing three case studies, our speakers will share how we can all learn from each other in partnership, creating exciting and mutually beneficial opportunities through the curriculum and beyond. These include: developing events and projects for our students with our local Indigenous Elders and young people; extending our learning of Indigenous People's lives and experiences through a spiral and integrated approach across our academic and pastoral curriculum and a nine day Immersion Experience: *Walking the Songlines* with our *Anangu* Elders. Through sharing our approach, our experiences and what we are learning, it is hoped participants will take away ideas, from the simplest to the more ambitious, with possible models to build on in their schools. Participants will have the opportunity to see live ceremony and examples of students and the wider Community's learning presented through a range of medium, such as film, poetry, photostory and art. There will also be an opportunity for participants to ask questions. This year Santa Sabina College was awarded a *Certificates of Merit Achievement Award*, by the government funded body: *Dare to Lead* for its involvement in Reconciliation.

Background Paper ©

Welcome to Country- Aunty Ali Golding

Aunty Ali Golding is from the Biripi Nation. She lived in Redfern, Sydney for over 22 years and now resides in Little Bay, Sydney. As an Elder, Aunty Ali is an Ambassador of her People. She is regularly invited to officially address through traditional *Welcome To Country* and *Smoking Ceremonies* at international, national and local conferences, cultural events, spiritual and ceremonial gatherings as well as appearing as a guest on television programmes such as *Living Black*. Aunty Ali is an experienced Educator who has much experience of speaking at schools, colleges and universities throughout NSW, regularly sharing her own personal stories and experiences of her People. Students engage through listening, questioning and sharing to deepen their understanding of Indigenous lives today and throughout History. In June 2004 Aunty Ali graduated from Nungaliya College, Darwin, in the Northern Territory with the Diploma of Theology. Through the Women's Reconciliation Network Santa Sabina College has been fortunate to develop a close working relationship with Aunty Ali and her extended family. Highlights include, a six week period in 2005 where Aunty Ali and her daughter Victoria were Artists In Residence.

Introduction – Rebecca Harcourt

Rebecca Harcourt is currently a Drama Teacher at Santa Sabina College. Since returning to Australia in 2003, after living abroad for 20 years, she has spent much time working with Indigenous Communities in NSW, Central Australia, and Queensland, in particular bringing together young people from Indigenous and non-Indigenous backgrounds. As an educator, with much experience in theatre, facilitating cross cultural groups and working with government in Europe, she is passionate about building bridges across our Communities within Australia, believing shared opportunities not only increase awareness and understanding but bring much joy to all our lives. Becky is involved with the Women's Reconciliation Network and Indigenous Community Volunteers.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this land on which we meet today, the Gadigal people of the Eora and Dharug Nations. I would also like to acknowledge Aunty Ali Golding as our Elder and honour the gifts that she has brought to our Community at Santa Sabina College, one of which you have just experienced with her official Welcome. And to thank and welcome you all to our workshop.

As you may be aware, SSC is an independent Catholic K-12 College in Strathfield that draws on its Dominican Heritage through its ethos and practice. At the heart of this, the College recognises and encourages an active involvement and commitment to learning about Reconciliation. This is perhaps best shaped by our Principal, Sr Judy, who shares:

“ understanding and learning are important but just as significant is that our hearts and minds are committed to Reconciliation”.

The cultural backgrounds of our student population is primarily non-Indigenous. In our session today, Aunty Ali and myself hope to share with you some of the learning and activities that take place at SSC, not only for our students but our Community as a whole. Drawing primarily on examples from the last few years, but set within a longer context, we hope to share some of our journey in which our Community has learnt much from our Indigenous partners through both celebration of our incredible Indigenous Heritage and by taking the courage to acknowledge and identify the effect of how our relatively recent (200+ years) shared history and society continues to impact on the lives of Indigenous People. In essence, aspiring (and I stress ‘aspiring’) to how we may seek, as educators, ways to bring our Communities closer together in support of friendship,

recognition, understanding, shared experiences and change which ultimately can be a blessing for us all.

Part 1: Working in Partnership

A key philosophy that has worked particularly successfully in engaging our students and staff has been in creating a place for celebration in an Act of Reconciliation, the only event outside key Christian celebrations that is marked each year at SSC. The holistic approach to this event has deliberately varied from year to year to promote fresh approaches to our learning and participation, draw on what is happening within the wider Community in relation to Reconciliation and encourage a series of memorable events.

Past events include:

- please refer to slides, thank you to Fran Kelly, © SSC

As you can see, many of these events honoured the presence of noted Indigenous Elders and speakers, such as Aunty Ali, Uncle Max, Marie Melito-Russel, Shelly Reys and Aden Ridgeway. The events enabled a rich educational dialogue to occur between our Communities through ceremony, story, art, writing, ritual and celebration with emphasis on active student participation and reflection, not only during the Act itself but in the careful and extensive preparation and in considered reflections in classes afterwards.

I would now like to invite Aunty Ali to share her perspective on our Act of Reconciliation event in 2001, where she presided and how this impacted on her as an Indigenous Elder.

Aunty Ali invited to comment on the year she did smoking ceremony and each House prepared speech – spoken by House leader

Through the Women's Reconciliation Network* (WRN), I was fortunate in

forming a close friendship with Aunty Ali which now extends to her family.

**see Appendix 1 'Around The Kitchen Table'- an invaluable Video and workbook resource produced by WRN.*

The reason I mention this, is that our friendship became a catalyst for building further the partnership between Aunty Ali, her family and our College.

In 2004 Aunty Ali graduated from Nungaliya College in Darwin with the Diploma of Theology. As part of her vision in her role in Ministry for her People in NSW Aunty Ali needed a space to create her Banners for Baptism, Weddings and Funerals. In sharing her vision with me, together we were able to put together successfully, a proposal for herself and her daughter to be Artists in Residence at SSC for six weeks in 2005.

I'd now like to invite Aunty Ali to share with you her thoughts on this experience and how it impacted on her life and her family.

Aunty Ali speaks

[Accompanied by slides of residency © SSC]

During the residency, students from every campus- including our early childhood and primary classes had the opportunity to spend time with our Indigenous Artists. Students were able to hear stories, observe the creation and symbolic meaning of Aunty Ali's banners as well as creating their own banners with Victoria.

In years 6-12 students visited through specific curriculum classes such as RE, Art, HSIE and Drama where Aunty Ali and Victoria would tailor their talks to relate to specific areas of learning. Students and staff could also informally visit during recess and lunch; a time which often opened up conversations and reflections that reached beyond expectations.

Our Act of Reconciliation in this year became a celebration of this residency through a number of special events. A school assembly of ceremony, dance, reflections and talks involving both members of Aunty Ali's family and the SSC student body. A liturgy celebrating a sharing and acknowledgment of our spiritual beliefs and rituals. Year 6 Drama students created a series of performances, based on their direct learning about Indigenous lives and history from the Goldings, and performed these for our primary school students. As well as an open evening for our Community to meet with our Artists in Residence and share in the experience of our students and staff.

** Anecdote- Some students shared these experiences and at times new perspectives about Indigenous Lives with their families and at times this challenged family perspectives in a positive way*

This period extended our model for Reconciliation, through first-hand opportunities to listen, learn from and be with Indigenous People for a longer time period, in a place that serves not only our desires as non Indigenous people to learn but that has at its consciousness the desire to serve, in a culturally appropriate way, the desires voiced by our Indigenous People.

*(NB A report detailing the proposal, approach/models and outcomes of this residency is available from R. Harcourt as a **pdf** document. It includes detailed feedback from the artists, staff and students across the College Community.)*

This model was extended in the following year, where I set up a Reconciliation Camp at our outdoor Campus, Tallong in the Southern Highlands with our Drama Ensemble and the local Indigenous Youth Group: Ngunungulla Dancers from the Yamanda Aboriginal Group. The possibility of this connection was made through the support and proactive links our Principal, Sr Judy had made with one of the traditional owners, Elder, Aunty Val Mulcahy from the local Wodi

Wodi Clan. Aunty Val regularly visits our students when they are on Camp

- Primary, Middle and Secondary students.

Postscript: Wednesday 24th October 2007 marked a special day in our journey with the Wodi Wodi Clan. In partnership, Elder Aunty Val Mulcahy, our Principal Sr Judith Lawson and Director of Tallong Mr Paul Holmes unveiled the new names, as chosen by Aunty Val, of our buildings at our Outdoor Centre in the Dharwal Language. Trish Levitt and Louise led the smoking ceremony involving SSC staff, yr 9 students and the Ngunungulla Dancers from Yamanda Aboriginal Youth Group.

The premise of our Drama Reconciliation Camp was to create an opportunity for our students and the Youth group to engage in fun and shared experiences, to enrich, extend and exchange our skills and create an Opening Ceremony for our 2006 Act of Reconciliation event: the Santa Knockout. An event involving students Aged 3 – 18 from both SSC and our local Koori Communities in Sydney, and Tallong. I would now like to share with you a couple of clips of this event filmed by a group of our students and an excerpt from a video created by Rachel Pow, at that time in year 11 about our experiences at Camp.

[DVD- Clip from Knockout- Speech & performance]

[Video clip- students' reflections]

Part 2: A K-12 approach –learning within the curriculum

A HSIE Colleague of mine, Jenny Lee, asked me to share the following anecdote from a recent experience with her year 10 History class at SSC.

As is often noted, many Australians can recall with ease the names of Native American Clans but find it difficult to recall one or two of our Indigenous Clans within Australia. When Jenny asked in conversation with her students if they could name some of our Indigenous clans, she was impressed with the result and the ease with which they identified their knowledge:

Eora & Dharug- that's the land we're on, we know that from assembly

(At SSC Assemblies and other occasions, we always open with Acknowledgement of Country and where possible led by one of our Indigenous students. There are also a number of prominent plaques on our Campuses acknowledging the traditional owners)

Meriam- we know that because of Mabo

Gurgingi – we know that because of Vincent Lingarri,

Pitjantjatjara – we know that because of Camp and Immersion

And of course WIK country.

This perhaps reflects well how our students are able to articulate their knowledge with ease and from a range of integrated experiences through the curriculum and beyond. We would now like to share some examples of how students are encouraged to apply and extend their learning about our Indigenous heritage and communities within specific curriculum areas to not only meet learning outcomes but enhance their appreciation of their own relationship with Indigenous People. As many of you will be aware, within the mandatory year 10 History course in NSW, students are asked to focus on the Aboriginal Experience.

One particularly successful approach in our HSIE department has been to create an experiential task that encourages debate, independent learning, assessment of different perspectives and mastering ICT resources. Students are asked to create a powerpoint presentation.

[Slide of task on screen © SSC]

I would now like to share an example from one student's project who is currently in year 10.

[Project slides on screen © SSC]

Through placing the responsibility of the task in a creative, sourced as well as analytical framework the task appeals to a range of learning styles.

Students are aided in their task through a wide range of prepared resources that can be accessed online through the Intranet such as an excerpt from a the recent documentary, “*Women of the Sun: 25 years on*”; a link to the “*Bringing Them Home*” report. This complements well, class discussion and teachings that also draw on excerpts from memorable films created by Indigenous programmes such as *Message Sticks* and *Living Black*.

Reinforcing this experiential approach is the annual event of *The Festival of Ideas* where our students, alongside students invited from schools in the local vicinity engage in a series of live debate and presentations. This year, to mark the 40th anniversary of the 1967 Referendum, included a talk by Aunty Ali and her daughter-in-law Karen Kelly who shared their experiences as Indigenous People of this event and how it has impacted on their lives. I would now like to invite Aunty Ali to share an insight with you about her experiences in relation to the Referendum, such as she shared with us on that day.

[Aunty Ali speaks]

Just as you have now experienced, through framing the students’ learning with first hand personal accounts of the harsh realities of past and current injustices, it moves their learning beyond an academic study to a personal appreciation of its impact on the lives of Indigenous People.

As our HSIE Coordinator Louise Smyth commented:

“It ended in a genuine sense of hope as the students responded spontaneously to our guests.”

Other focuses within the academic curriculum that nurture our students’ connection with Indigenous Australians through their (subject) learning outcomes include:

In Religion Education students examine the Cultural, Spiritual Beliefs and relationships to the Land of our Indigenous Nations, the role of Reconciliation in Australia and the trauma and effects of Dispossession.

In PHPD students engage with prominent Indigenous role models such as Tanya Major, to examine their strengths, resilience and ability to overcome adversities.

In Food and Technology students get to sample some traditional Bushtucker.

In Visual Arts senior students examine the work of Contemporary Indigenous artists such as Tracey Moffat.

In Community and Family Studies students spent an afternoon with Cassandra Gibbs a Gamilaraay woman, learning about Indigenous issues. Cassandra works as the Indigenous Education Officer at the Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education.

In English and Drama students have the opportunity to experientially draw on a number of seminal Indigenous plays, such as Jack Davis' No Sugar and 'Stolen'. In addition many of our students have had the opportunity to go to workshops and productions with Indigenous playwrights, directors and actors, again a great source of engaging with the lives and impact of History on Indigenous People. We also draw opportunity to tailor other areas of the Drama Curriculum towards developing our students' empathy and realisation of Indigenous People's lives, past and present, through the richness of the actor's approach to placing herself in the shoes of others through the embodiment of characters' lives and stories. These include year 11 students playbuilding a Political Theatre Production based on Indigenous Rights; year 10 students drawing on Indigenous sources to inform their Protest theatre assessment task;

a workshop with a Biripi Director from Eora College; Year 6 students creating and performing a welcome song for our Koori guests at the Santa Year 11 Drama students explore a traditional method of Acting in relation to Louis Nowra's play *Radiance*. Through the experiential art of acting, students place themselves in the shoes and world of the three Murri characters that are reunited in North Queensland for the funeral of their mother. Year 12 Drama students engage with the Indigenous 'Everywoman' in Deborah Mailman and Wesley's Enoch's *7 Stages of Grieving*, a play that transgresses the realities of the recent past in Australian History from Invasion to present day. In exploring both plays students engage on a seminal level with the realities that Indigenous people face and continue to face, encouraging students to dismantle any preconceptions they may have had and begin to examine through personal stories the breath and diversity of the Indigenous experience as a result of 'Settlement'.

The Music Department draws much on the diverse range of modern and traditional Indigenous Music and styles, listening and disseminating its various characteristics to influence the students own creativity and appreciation.

Indeed a former SSC student, Joanne Taranto who was working in Yirrkala Community, in the Northern Territory not only presented at an assembly about her experiences, but the following year she brought the Yirrkala student band on tour to SSC for a lunchtime concert for all our students and staff to enjoy.

Indigenous music is not only explored at our Secondary Campus, at Mary Bailey House our pre-schoolers annually enjoy a visit from Aunty Wendy, an esteemed singer who creates songs with the young, local Koori Community in celebration of their lives and experiences.

Encouraging further understanding the library at Del Monte(our primary school)

has introduced a number of *Indij Readers* books that are now in regular use for students from kindergarten to year 5. These “help students to learn to read and encourage and support teachers to explore with their students, contemporary Indigenous perspectives and issues...The stories deal in a relaxed and often amusing way with issues that affect the lives of all children: culture, family, self esteem, pride, setting goals and working toward them, good health, humour, tolerance and school attendance.” [Ref: <http://www.indijreaders.com.au/>].

Our library on the Secondary Campus contains a breadth of excellent Indigenous Resources in a variety of forms such as Books- fiction, non-fiction, Plays, Films: DVD & Video, Newspaper(including Koori Mail) as well as a permanent display of Indigenous Art.

As part of the year 12 Street Retreat, a group of students and staff spend a day with Aunty Ali Golding, a trusted Elder on the Block in Redfern where they engage first-hand with this vital and prominent Community. Experiences such as these can help demystify stereo-types of urban Indigenous people and encourage students to question the portrayal of Indigenous lives such as in the Media. Students can develop their own perspectives based on personal experience, uncover their own truths.

Year 11 students have also opted to engage in Community Service at the Redfern Community Centre during NAIDOC week. (Invitation for Aunty Ali to speak)

As a student at SSC of recent years you would indeed experience a rich range of experiences connected to Indigenous lives, from hearing a Dreamtime story by Aunty Ali in primary school, sampling some traditional Bush tucker in Food Technology, to cheering on your House with pride at a Swimming

Carnival where your House has an Indigenous name and banner: Kurrawa, Weeyla, Gungalgala, Mundawora, Teangi. To spending contemplative time in the Dadirri Prayer room, to listening to the experience of Indigenous women at a Women's Reconciliation Spirit Event or learning a local Indigenous language at yr 9 Camp. Where the aspiration is for an openness to generate shared understanding into all aspects of our learning and everyday lives and appreciate our connections. In the hope that through enabling meaningful experiences, students progress in their future lives, where they may be the Politician, Educator, TV producer, Policy Maker, Influencer and Decision Maker working in harmony alongside Indigenous Politicians, Educators, TV Producers, Policy Makers, Influencers and Decision Makers.

Part 3: Experience of Immersion

Lastly, we would like to share about our annual Immersion programme, where, every June/ July, since 2005, a group of students and staff spend 9 days learning and walking the Songlines with the Anangu Elders and their Community.

Again, our Principal, Sr Judy facilitated this opportunity as a result of meeting Pauline Clayton, a sculptor from Melbourne, who has spent extensive time with various Indigenous Communities and regularly prepares and mentors school groups to participate in this Educational Experience provided by Desert Tracks.

[Ref: <http://www.deserttracks.com.au>]

This mentoring and collaborative approach is now embedded in our Community's Central Australia Immersion Programme as we take the mantle to prepare, unpack, celebrate and engage students and staff with this potentially life-changing experience. Staff and students apply through *Expressions of*

Interest and interviews to be eligible for this Immersion experience It is growing in popularity each year with parents now asking whether they can go.

It is an honour to experience ancient and modern-day traditions of Desert life, to learn Inma (Ceremony) through the teaching of LORE from three Songlines with our Anangu Hosts. This unique experience is life forming experience for us all: from sleeping in swags in dry river beds, learning to hunt for Maku (witchetty grubs), cooking Malu (kangaroo) learning Women's business, Language (Pitjantjatjara) and Moiety (kinship relations) through story, visiting Community and the local school. Each year the group captures the essence of their personal and group experiences in photostory, designed posters and a book of photos, poetry, drawings, collage and writings (each participant keeps a journal during the trip). A number of heartfelt presentations are given to our College Community including student groups, staff, parents, the College Board and to Reconciliation Groups. Art bought directly from our Anangu Hosts now sit on each Campus across the College with photos of our students and our Hosts, paving inspiration and recognition of our Immersion Experience for future years. Known as the Sydney girls, our Anangu Hosts embrace us as Kin (family), as a result of our College's commitment to return each year, bringing more young women to come and learn. Embracing Ngapartji Ngapartji – *we give- you give-* students handcrafted gifts, including skirts especially tailored to our Elders request from previous years, and a specially made calendar charting the 12 months from trip to trip.

Before we open the session to questions, I would like to close with a poem written by Nicole Loizou, currently a year 9 student at SSC which perhaps encapsulates at its best, how the many learning experiences currently offered

through our partnerships with Indigenous Communities can personally impact
on the lives of our students:

Rebecca Harcourt Oct 2007

Nganana
(All of us)

I used to follow life
As a tall and shaded tree
Shielded from the real world was I
My safety zone had never stretched
beyond mountains
but now I see a real world
that has always been
I never knew the passion of the elders
I never knew the story from the past
And everywhere I look I see a new growing life
a spirit being that comes forth
Behind every door there is a story
Hidden
Unknown
And soon forgotten
But every young Kunga has a
voice that should be heard
Now to voice the unknown to the world
All the wisdom that has been gained
will now be shared
Beyond rivers
Beyond mountains
Beyond roads
Through all the hearts that have
shared the same suffering
We will stand
We will heal
We will reunite
all heart and minds of all kinds

Kunga = young girl in Pitjantjatjara

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Appendix 1._ Around the Kitchen Table

