

# Research Project Report

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## A Blue Mountains Aboriginal Education Resource Package for the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area



A project funded by the Natural Heritage Trust

Research facilitated by  
the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute

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# Contents

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<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Overview</b> .....	<b>4</b>
Introduction .....	4
Opportunities.....	4
Limitations .....	5
Research approach .....	5
<b>The Research Framework: Process and Progress</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Process outline.....	7
Progress.....	7
Phase 1: Scoping – resources assessment and consultation.....	8
Phase 2: Outcomes.....	14
Phase 3: Future development of resource package.....	16
<b>Examples of models / frameworks</b> .....	<b>17</b>
Worimi History and Culture (Hunter region NSW) - Teachers’ Kit.....	17
OzCo grant.....	17
<i>Earth Journeys</i> , a World Heritage enviro-cultural education program.....	18
Sharing Knowledge Day at Hazelbrook Public School.....	19
<b>Recommendations</b> .....	<b>21</b>
Outcomes from Reference Group meeting	
<b>Appendices</b> .....	<b>23</b>
1. Photo pages of available resources	
2. List of local resources	
3. Survey responses from cultural practitioners and schoolteachers	
4. <i>Earth Journeys</i> project photograph pages	
5. Sharing Knowledge Day, Hazelbrook Public School: schoolteacher survey responses	
6. Sharing Knowledge Day, Hazelbrook Public School: photograph page	
7. <i>Connections</i> quarterly newsletter (December 2007)	

## Acknowledgements

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We wish to pay our respects and dedicate our efforts to the Aboriginal people of the Blue Mountains.

To the Ancestors, those who came before us, who faithfully cared for this land with such skill and from whom we still draw strength and inspiration,

To the Aboriginal people of today, the Traditional Custodians and those from other parts of the country who have made their home here and who work together towards the healing of this place and

To the generations to come, the Spirit Children, for whom we maintain this land in trust that they may benefit from our work here and inherit a country that is happy, healthy and "standing up alive" .....



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Hazelbrook Public School (painting workshop)  
Illustrations: Chris Tobin

# Overview

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## Introduction

Between July 2007 and June 2008, the World Heritage Unit within the National Parks division of the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC), in collaboration with the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute (BMWHI), managed a series of projects under the core project title, Indigenous Cultural Co-management of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area (GBMWA). The overall aim of the project was to support the effective implementation of the GBMWA Aboriginal Co-management Strategic Plan.

Funding, jointly obtained from the federal Natural Heritage Trust (NHT), made this process possible. The Blue Mountains Aboriginal Education Resources Package Project was one of the intended outcomes. A total of \$18 550 was allocated and the project formally commenced at the beginning of July 2007.

## Opportunities

It was the intention of the project to support the principle that it is of increasing importance for children to know the Aboriginal cultural heritage - the stories, songs, dances and games - of their local area. The project also acknowledged a longer-term objective to embed local knowledge within the primary school curriculum in public and private schools.

The grant provided an opportunity to support an already-identified need for an integrated approach to delivering Aboriginal education in primary schools, by undertaking an investigation into what would be required for the development of a comprehensive, local Aboriginal resources package.

A desired outcome was to produce a snapshot view of the existing situation of resources, people and materials, the purpose being to inform the next step in the development of a user-friendly package that could be readily applied in local classrooms.

## **Limitations**

Changes to the initial brief were necessary in order to respect due process. There were major logistical issues to be considered in conducting a project that included the six language groups within the GBMWA.

Given these issues and, in addition, a limited time frame and allocated budget, it was decided to focus on the Blue Mountains World Heritage corridor only which is, respectively, Darug and Gundungurra country.

Funding allowed for up to 560 hours only to be devoted to the project. This covered all administration, research, consultation and reporting time for the BMWHI's Project Coordinator and two consultant Project Designers. Additional hours to complete the report documentation have been given in-kind by the BMWHI.

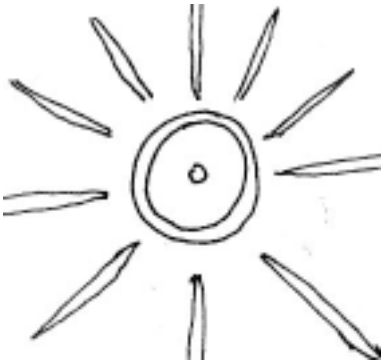
Additionally, an extension for the report submission was requested due to the Project Coordinator requiring compassionate leave for six weeks over the June – July 2008 period.

## **Research approach**

The intention was to look at what resources were needed by schools and the opportunity was taken to question those working in the field, both Aboriginal cultural practitioners and schoolteachers, to determine their requirements. The survey results provided a clear assessment of what gaps exist and offer a useful and appropriate strategy to adopt in applying Aboriginal education within local primary schools.

The project was managed in two phases. The first (August - December 2007) involved an assessment of existing Aboriginal educational resources within the Blue Mountains and Western Sydney region, drafting a survey questionnaire and consulting with local Aboriginal cultural educators and practitioners and schoolteachers from randomly selected primary schools. Phase two (January - June 2008) involved collating survey data, reviewing options of instructional design and education programs and, in consultation with a reference group, determining the process for the development of a resource package. These recommendations from the reference group for the development and implementation of a curriculum-relevant product shape the third phase, beyond current funding.

Initially, the resource package would focus on the two languages within the Blue Mountains and Western Sydney region, the Darug and Gundungurra. Once developed, financial support will be sought to reproduce the package for the other language groups within the GBMWHA.



# The Research Framework: Process and Progress

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## Process

### **Phase 1: Scoping – resources assessment and consultation**

**Timeframe:** August – December 2007

**Tasks:**

**A:** Form project team and establish framework

**B:** Resources assessment and consultation

### **Phase 2: Outcomes**

**Timeframe:** January – June 2008

**Tasks:**

**C:** Compile survey and resources list

**D:** Analyse outcomes

**E:** Report preparation, submission and distribution

End of existing project with current NHT funding

Proposal for development:

### **Phase 3: Resource package – production, training and application**

**Timeframe:** July 2008 – 2009

**Tasks:**

**F:** Identify and seek additional funding

**G:** Test, train and apply package

## Progress

### Phase 1: Scoping – resources assessment and consultation

(August – December 2007)

#### Task A: Form project team and establish framework

The BMWHI Information and Education Coordinator, Bronwen Maxwell, set up and facilitated the project, including allocating the budget and timeframes. She established a project team, comprising people with complementary skills and backgrounds.

Chris Tobin was contracted as a consultant Project Designer. Chris is of Darug descent. His background and work is as a cultural practitioner, teacher and artist. He has collaborated on the design and implementation of the enviro-cultural education program, *Earth Journeys*. He is currently employed as an Aboriginal Discovery ranger with the DECC.

Teekee Marloo was also contracted as a consultant Project Designer. Teekee is of Palawa (North/ Midlands) descent and has lived in the Blue Mountains for many years. She is a cultural practitioner and artist and presides on the committee of the Aboriginal Cultural Resources Centre (ACRC). Teekee has worked with the BMWHI assisting with the research project, *Mapping Country*, conducted within the Institute over two years from early 2005. She has casual employment with the DECC as an Aboriginal Discovery ranger.

Bronwen Maxwell worked as Project Coordinator and is currently the BMWHI's Education and Information Coordinator. Bronwen is non-Aboriginal. Over the past five years, she has acquired a thorough working knowledge of local school systems and curricula. Through her work of designing, managing and implementing a Blue Mountains World Heritage Enviro-Cultural Schools Program, *Earth Journeys*, she has developed and established relationships with many schools in the Blue Mountains and Penrith regions.

## **Task B: Resources assessment and consultation**

The key goals were (i) Assessment and (ii) Consultation

### **(i) Assessment**

An assessment was done of existing Aboriginal educational resources within the Blue Mountains and Western Sydney region and included:

- visits to local libraries
- web searches
- meetings with creators of resource material and
- field trips to examine models of programs being delivered

On 3rd April 2008, Den Barber (Aboriginal Co-Management Officer, DECC World Heritage Unit), Teekee Marloo and Bronwen Maxwell visited the Muru Mittigar Aboriginal Cultural Centre at Penrith Lakes.

Den, Teekee and Bronwen later visited the State Equity Centre (Whalan), an extensive state library and resources repository where materials are available to public school teachers. Teachers from private schools are able to borrow materials at a small cost. The librarian, Leigh Mutton, expressed an interest in purchasing any material specifically created for the Blue Mountains. Currently, they have none.

Sharing Knowledge Day at Hazelbrook Primary School, the first event of its kind in the Blue Mountains, was held on the 28<sup>th</sup> May 2008. It was organised by a parent, Prue Adams, in collaboration with another parent, Gundungurra man David King. Chris Tobin and Teekee Marloo participated as cultural practitioners. Bronwen Maxwell attended as an observer. Details of the event are posted under the heading "Examples of local models / frameworks of programs", page 17.

A database was created from the information gathered. A resources list was then compiled and later distributed to the AECG and the ACRC.

## **(ii) Consultation**

Consultation was conducted through a survey and interview process with local Aboriginal cultural educators and practitioners. A questionnaire was sent to teachers at randomly selected primary schools. Several meetings were also convened.

- **Survey:** The intention was to obtain a sampling of a cross-section of local cultural practitioners and schoolteachers. A questionnaire addressing key issues was drafted around five key areas: A. Experience, B. Promoting your Work, C. Existing Resources, D. Identifying the Gaps and E. Objectives. Questions posed to schoolteachers focused on matters regarding ease-of-contact with Aboriginal practitioners and/or community members. The questionnaire and collated responses are tabled in the appendices. Chris Tobin and Teekee Marloo conducted interviews with twenty local Aboriginal cultural educators and practitioners. Bronwen Maxwell interviewed four teachers and principals at schools across the Penrith and Blue Mountains areas.

A lot of time was allocated to the interview process. Chris and Teekee believed it was imperative to engage directly with each of the participants. The process was extended into the early months of 2008 due to the Christmas period.

- **Meetings:** These were held regularly with Den Barber (DECC) to inform each other on the progress of the respective projects. At the time, Den was coordinating the Cultural Landscapes Management Strategy and delivering programs and workshops.

*Thursday 22nd November 2007:* At the BMWHI Chris Tobin, Teekee Marloo, Den Barber and Bronwen Maxwell convened a meeting which was held with the Gundungurra Tribal Council and which included President Sharon Brown, Uncle Geoff and Tony Cooper. Shaun Hooper attended at Sharon Brown's request. There was a discussion about the Gundungurra language and literacy pre-school kit, which the group is endeavouring to develop. The material is based on a project created by a Dharawal language group in the Kiama region of NSW. The Gundungurra project was identified as especially important and requires funding for continued development.

*Wednesday 23rd April 2008:* A meeting was held with Bronwen Maxwell and ACRC Coordinator, Brad Moore. The aim was to keep the ACRC informed of project developments. Also discussed was the proposed reference / review group meeting. There was some question about who should be included on the day and what processes should follow.

*Thursday 1st May 2008:* A meeting held with identified creators of local resources included Shaun Hooper, Brad Moore, David Ryan, Den Barber, Chris Tobin, Teekee Marloo and Bronwen Maxwell. Shaun, an Aboriginal researcher, has created a database of his research on local plants based on Aboriginal botanical knowledge. This information could be adapted for primary school level but requires ample funding. David Ryan, a non-Aboriginal filmmaker, collaborated with the ACRC (Brad Moore) to create a DVD, *Time Pods*, a contemporary storytelling by local elders. The production involved teaching young Aboriginal people how to work with technology and to apply it in conducting interviews with their elders. The DVD is available from the ACRC. There are plans to continue updating the material thereby reflecting current stories, such as Uncle Brian's invitation and attendance at Parliament House for the National Apology to the Stolen Generations on the 13<sup>th</sup> February 2008.

There was lengthy discussion about the need to create material that is user-friendly and appropriately targeted. It was felt important to consider the kind of information that is made accessible and which in turn, will assist teachers in recognising what is culturally appropriate for their area.

It was stressed that there are protocols to be observed in developing educational material and suggested that all language groups in the area scrutinize any resource list before it is distributed. A good example of this in action can be observed at Mungo National Park, part of the Willandra Lakes World Heritage Area. Here, the three languages groups, the Paakantyi, Mutthi Mutthi and Ngiyampaa people, have representatives who, with National Parks and Wildlife Service of NSW, jointly manage Mungo National Park.

It was also raised that the ACRC website should be flagged as an identified useful cultural resource. However this would require further financial support for a

person to develop and maintain this component.

It was acknowledged that there are difficulties in addressing how the "known" stories and legends of the Blue Mountains should be told. Non-Aboriginal people have recorded and interpreted stories and as a result, certain questionable stories are perpetuated. This is upsetting for some Aboriginal people and provides a good argument to focus on the contemporary stories as well, which are readily accessible and more personal.

*Wednesday 7th May 2008:* Bronwen Maxwell attended the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) meeting at Lawson Public School. Teachers and principals from mid to upper mountains schools were present. Bronwen gave a brief presentation about the project and the subsequent findings on available resources.

*Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> June 2008:* Approximately twenty people within the community were invited to the Reference Group meeting, however not all attended. The meeting was held at the Katoomba Emergency Centre. Attendees included Chris Tobin, Teekee Marloo, Bronwen Maxwell, Den Barber, Berice Anning (Director of the Badanami Centre for Indigenous Education, University of Western Sydney), Jo Clancy (BMCC Community Cultural Officer), Brad Moore (ACRC Coordinator), Jacinta Tobin (President of AECG), Philippa Reynolds (Discovery Coordinator DECC), Shaun Hooper (researcher), Carol Cooper (author), Prue Adams and David Ryan (non-Aboriginal education collaborators).

Findings from the research were presented to the group along with examples of existing models / frameworks of programs. Specific recommendations from the discussion time are contained under **Recommendations**, page 21.

- **A clear objective was to establish a firm relationship** with the community to encourage support for the long-term aims of the project. This included informing the community of project activities.
- **An article** was sent for inclusion in the December 2007 issue of *Connections*, a quarterly newsletter published and distributed by the World Heritage Unit (DECC) and circulated to all Aboriginal communities in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. A copy is contained in the appendices.
- In October 2007 a **project information page** was posted on the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute's website.
- **An article** outlining the outcomes of the project will be lodged with the local newspaper, the Blue Mountains Gazette.

## **Phase 2: Outcomes** (January – June 2008)

### **Task C: Compile survey and resources list**

Completed. Contained in appendices.

### **Task D: Analyse outcomes**

- **Resource List** – practitioners and materials.

Information collated from the database resulted in the creation of a Resource List and is included in the appendices.

Resource lists, in draft form, were initially presented at the Reference Group meeting. It was suggested they be passed on to the committees of the ACRC and AECG for approval. Once a formal list of practitioners has been checked and approved, the BMWHI will assist the AECG in producing a flyer, which will be sent to schools.

It is intended that the Resource List will inform the decision-making process in creating a resources tool kit. There has been a positive development since initial contact with the State Equity Centre. The AECG President, Jacinta Tobin, has had a conversation with the Centre's librarian, Leigh Mutton, and it was agreed that the Centre would purchase materials to create a kit based on the recommendations of the AECG. The Centre will maintain the kit and assume responsibility for its distribution.

- **Survey**

Key issues resulting from the survey included:

Limited Aboriginal resources were available in Katoomba and Springwood libraries until last year when a funding increase allowed for a small Aboriginal knowledge space within the Katoomba Library. The library is keen to continue building its collection of local resources.

Most respondents felt there was a lack of resources, however some thought that they are too widely dispersed and need to be better collated. One respondent noted that most Darug and Gundungurra projects are self-funded and risk becoming unsustainable. It is known that it can be costly to contract people with specialist

expertise, which in turn can compromise the quality of the finished project and even lead to projects not being completed.

Teekee Marloo's investigation found that there are few local resources, however there are many artifacts, journals, lithographs etc available as archives only, at Sydney University or in the National Library in Canberra.

The majority of Aboriginal participants said that their school experience of Aboriginal education was either non-existent or negative. It was noted that even today, most school activities involving Aboriginal education are occasional and are not part of the curriculum.

Respondents felt that there should be an accessible and highly visible Aboriginal owned-and-run cultural centre in the Blue Mountains. The centre would provide a place for Aboriginal people to meet and share culture. It would also serve as a place of contact for visitors. Given the high visitation to the area, it would provide many employment opportunities for local Aboriginal people to present aspects of cultural heritage.

Most schoolteachers had received little or no Aboriginal education and now wished to embrace change. They said that current education kits are not used unless they are relevant and linked to curriculum requirements and outcomes.

Teachers would like to see a more integrated approach to local Aboriginal resources. They would like to be better informed as how best to contact practitioners and to be assured that practitioners direct their program at the appropriate age group.

### **Task E: Report preparation, submission and distribution**

- Submit report document and required reporting forms to the funding body, Natural Heritage Trust.
- Distribute report document to education and community groups (including the AECG, ACRC, BMCC Aboriginal Liaison Officer, DECC World Heritage Unit Aboriginal Co-management Officer).

***End of existing project with current NHT funding***

Suggested action for development of resource product

**Phase 3: Resource package – Production, training and application**

(July 2008 – 2009)

**Tasks:**

**F:** Identify and seek additional funding

**G:** Test, train and apply package



## Examples of local models / frameworks of programs

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### **Worimi History and Culture – Teachers’ Kit (DECC Hunter region)**

This beautifully presented and professionally compiled kit was produced with DECC Co-management excess funds of approximately \$30 000. Leanne Ellis, (Hunter Region) Parks Community Relations Officer, coordinated the project. She offered some useful background information as to how she went about the process.

Separate funds enabled an initial survey research and consultation process to be conducted by an independent group, Eco Connections. The findings were used to inform the development of the kit.

A teacher from the Department of Education and Training (DET) was employed to create work-units, which linked with curriculum requirements. It was also intended that the kit link with the Hunter region Discovery Ranger program, following the example of Lake Mungo.

Funds were used to cover only the costs of the design and printing processes and the employment of the DET teacher. The kit costs approximately \$60.00. Its launch at local primary schools was held during May 2008. Free kits were distributed to some schools. A tracking process was put in place to measure its usage and effectiveness.

### **OzCo Grant**

Jo Clancy, Aboriginal dancer and choreographer, coordinated this project. In 1997, the ACRC obtained a small grant of approximately \$3 000 – \$4 000. The project arranged for primary school students to attend the ACRC and participate in a circuit of workshops, which included dance, painting, tools and music.

On the success of one workshop, six other schools were inspired to participate. The series of workshops was an interesting model but unfortunately, the project was not repeated due to lack of ongoing funding.

## ***Earth Journeys***

*Earth Journeys*, a World Heritage enviro-cultural education program for primary schools is cross-cultural, cross-curricular and values-based. The program was designed to engage students in experiential learning and creative application. The teaching program package combines art, science, literacy and cultural activities to deliver a curriculum-integrated series of workshops, field trips and work units for students and teachers. The program was specifically designed to progressively broaden a child's awareness by inspiring a 'sense of place and wonder' for their special environment and in turn, to foster careful stewardship of its natural and cultural values.

The project was created by a group of people concerned with how the local community interpreted the World Heritage status, their identification of place and how to care for it. Bronwen Maxwell was the project coordinator and a concept creator. Wyn Jones engaged with natural sciences, Heather Jones with the arts, and Chris Tobin shared Aboriginal cultural knowledge. The DECC Discovery Ranger program supplied rangers to conduct excursions into "Country".

With the support of the Department of Education, the program has been tested as a model within Blue Mountains and Penrith schools districts since 2004 and approximately 4,000 children have been involved in learning how to care for the natural environment.

### The *Earth Journeys* philosophy

The gum tree (eucalyptus) theme serves as the central icon of *Earth Journeys*. It is also the pivotal learning tool reflecting the interconnection of all processes in the program. Each school is designated their own gum tree, a species particular to their area. Through a unique blend of literacy, science, art and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural sharing, children progressively learn about the interconnection of the tree with its/their environment. The focus on the gum tree acts as an attitude catalyst, encouraging students to develop an appreciation of not just the tree, but also the supporting ecosystems that are important in maintaining a healthy bioregion. Equipping children with this knowledge and insight in such an engaging way encourages them to become attuned to environmental issues.

The program is currently undergoing revision in terms of how it will best be managed.

There are a number of useful resources available, such as the work units (specifically written by DET curriculum consultants) and two short documentary films about the program. It is vital that the knowledge gained through the running of this program is not wasted.

## **Sharing Knowledge Day - Hazelbrook Public School**

At the Sydney school where Prue Adams' children were enrolled, a successful Aboriginal education program was run and Prue was keen to repeat this experience at Hazelbrook.

Prue wrote to the twenty Aboriginal families with children at the school and invited them to become involved.

Teachers expressed an interest in having access to Aboriginal resources, which could be linked to curriculum. Prue assumed the role of coordinator and decided that the first step for the school to take was to hold a one-day program. With the large number of students, it proved logistically difficult to fit everything into one day. A resolution was reached in which different levels had a specific workshop for their year, the idea being that the program would be held annually, giving students the opportunity to progress to another workshop the following year.

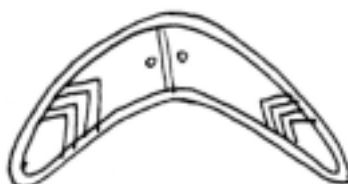
The day's program began with a "Welcome to Country" by Aunty Mary King and Aunty Lyn Stanger. Both the national and Aboriginal flags were raised. Adam Hill, a renowned schools performer, played the didgeridoo. The school, students and teachers alike, dressed in red, black and yellow. The whole school, led by Carol Cooper, sang the Kookaburra Song from Carol's Gundungurra songbook. The bush food garden, complete with ceramic sculptures made by students, had a formal opening. Morning tea provided an opportunity for teachers, all parents and practitioners to meet and exchange ideas.

A dense and well-organised program schedule saw a number of cultural practitioners participating in classroom activities over the course of the day. Special guest Adam Hill, well experienced working in schools, gave a "whole of Country" perspective to his workshops.

Positive outcomes from the day are that Aboriginal children at Hazelbrook School demonstrate a heightened pride in their culture, the school flies the Aboriginal flag and teachers are keen to have increased presence of cultural practitioners.

Following the Sharing Knowledge Day, Prue Adams conducted a survey with a range of teachers to monitor responses, the results of which are supplied in the appendices. The survey will serve as a useful guide for further developments of the program concept. It is hoped that the Hazelbrook School will repeat the program next year and that other schools are encouraged to adopt it.

At a recent meeting of the AECG it was noted that there have been encouraging expressions of interest from a number of other schools. The next stage is to look at options of how best to support them. The day at Hazelbrook School cost approximately two thousand dollars and did not include the hours worked by the Coordinator, which were volunteered on this occasion.



## Recommendations

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### Outcomes from the reference group meeting:

- To hold further meetings to progress this project.
- To use the term “Aboriginal” instead of “Indigenous” in all documentation and reporting. Terminology is important, complex and can be contentious.
- To seek funding to support a coordinator position within AECG, currently a volunteer position. The position requires an office space and telephone. Teachers need a reliable contact point. This would be logistically difficult to contain within the ACRC as they have now outgrown their premises.
- To seek further support for the local AECG committee.
- To update and keep resource information current. Nominate an organisation to house and maintain the database of current local resources. Funding permitting, the ACRC is the obvious choice as it is the only existing body able to fulfill the role. The organisation serves all Aboriginal people and works respectfully with Traditional Owners.
- To build people capacity and identify the organisations and the practitioners attached to them. Map more than the material resources. Include a description of individual’s skills and training. Work contextually and thematically. A formalised structure of partnering by these organisations, the ACRC, UWS, AECG, BMCC, NPWS and BMWHI would enable a sharing of resources, finance, in-kind support and development of future resources.
- To build on teacher training qualifications and skills of cultural practitioners for delivery in schools and investigate training options offered through the Aboriginal Cultural Education Program at TAFE NSW, Wentworth Falls. It is important how the content of Aboriginal education is delivered and conveyed.

- To investigate creating opportunities for the Aboriginal Discovery Ranger program to enable Aboriginal community members to be more involved in conducting cultural activities. This would enable people to share culture without them having to set up as a private business, which entails prohibitive costs. The program should also have better link-ins with any resource materials produced.
- To investigate options of linking with the Living Libraries program established at Katoomba Library. This could provide other employment opportunities for cultural practitioners.



# Appendices

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**Appendix 1.** Photograph pages of available resources

**Appendix 2.** List of local resources

**Appendix 3.** Survey responses from cultural practitioners and schoolteachers

**Appendix 4.** *Earth Journeys* project photograph pages

**Appendix 5.** Sharing Knowledge Day, Hazelbrook Public School:  
Schoolteacher survey responses

**Appendix 6.** Photographs from Sharing Knowledge Day at Hazelbrook Public  
School

**Appendix 7.** *Connections* quarterly newsletter (December 2007)