

# REFLECTION ON EARLY DAYS OF SOCIETY AND CULTURE

Anne Hudson – Former Chairperson of Society and Culture Association and teacher of HSC Society and Culture from its inception in 1986.

## Rationale

The following submission captures what it was like teaching Society & Culture at its inception and the similarities between teaching and learning within the course overtime. A reflection borne from an opportunity that arose on Social Media, this work represents the lifelong impact of Society and Culture on its teachers and students



*(L to r) Meegan and Manivah (HSC 1989) with their teacher, Anne Hudson*

I recently had the pleasure of meeting up in a Marrickville coffee shop with Manivah and Meegan, two of my Society and Culture students from the early days of the Society and Culture course. This reunion came about because Manivah decided she wanted to find her PIP. It had been one of the best in the state that year and she wondered where it was now. PIPs were then all hard copy usually with original photographs and the original copy could not be located. Manivah's PIP was a comparison of her life and that of her cousin in Thailand and was titled "A Tale of Two Cousins". It has not turned up yet but it has reminded me of how important and special each PIP was to the students.

Marshall Leaver, who had responded to Manivah's request on Facebook, contacted me and I was delighted to connect with my ex-students and Marshall and find out what were their memories of Society and Culture and reflect on what were my own thoughts as a teacher in those first years of the course. Manivah and Megan said that the lessons were fun and offered a different way of learning. There was a rethinking of 'right and wrong' which got them out of their cultural bubble of normality with which they had grown up.

Marrickville is and was a very multi-cultural area and the ex-students felt that they got to value their culture as well as that of others by doing the course. They said they enjoyed learning about rituals and religions of others and they felt that there was a chance to talk openly about what you felt about things rather than follow the rules and expectations. Megan said that she thought that it helped develop her own identity as well as just seeing things from point of view of others.

I was very fortunate in that I was a teacher in the first HSC of the Society and Culture course. It was exciting but challenging because there was no book to follow as in other subjects. There was a wonderful spirit of support and sharing of resources from teachers all over the state and the Society and Culture Association provided both professional learning (called an 'In-Service'), vital resources and networking options. In the classroom I could use the experiences

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of the students from a wide range of cultures to give examples of different ways of living. My students were not vessels to be filled up with book knowledge but people with lived experience and so much to share. Helping the students with their PIPS often meant spending lots of time with them and getting to know them well.

However, the role of being pioneers had its problems and questions to answer. Such as:

- What does a good PIP look like?
- How long should a PIP be?
- Does presentation matter?
- How can you ensure the fairness of marking something that can be so objective?
- How do you cope with plagiarism?

The beginning years of Society and Culture was a great learning experience for the teachers and students involved. Through the Society and Culture Association a connection was made between Marrickville High (a co ed Multicultural Inner West government school) and Knox Grammar (an all-male private school on the North Shore) and we started on a series of excursions to each others schools. The differences between the schools led to many good laughs. Some fondly remembered stories were:

I had worked very hard to get the students into the best school uniform we could manage and thought had done a good job until the Knox teacher commented that the schools were so different one in uniform and the other in casual clothing or as the Marrickville students said: 'If it is blue, it will do.'

The Marrickville student said: 'What's that strange smell?' I explained that someone was mowing the grass.

Marrickville student: 'I feel sorry for these boys, they only speak one language.'

Marrickville student: 'I feel sorry for these boys, they have such strange names, like Hamish and Angus. Teacher: 'You think they are strange, do you, Spirodoula.'

The early PIPs were mainly handwritten or typed on a typewriter. Books and pamphlets were the sources of information with little or no access to computers. When I think back on those Society and Culture times I think they taught me a lot about societies and cultures but also about teaching and learning itself. As for my two ex-students, Manivanh has had a very successful career in high level banking and Megan is still using her great talent in design. I'm involved in Court Support working with people using the Intellectual Disability Rights Service and I continue to learn more about the society and culture from the people I met.