



Students from Yandeyarra in Western Australia's Pilbara region take part in the role-playing activities organised through the Parliamentary Education Office's Outreach program.

Parliamentary education on the road

While nearly 70,000 young people visit the Parliamentary Education Office (PEO) in Canberra annually, many others have the PEO's programs delivered to their own doorstep. Each year, staff from the PEO travel throughout Australia, running parliamentary education outreach programs in town halls, schools and at state parliaments.

This year the PEO has already visited Melbourne's western suburbs, as well as Adelaide and Perth. Throughout the next few months the PEO's Outreach program will take in Longreach/Barcaldine, the Gold Coast, Alice Springs and Darwin, Mackay, the so-called Iron Triangle at the top of Spencer's Gulf in South Australia, Broken Hill and Western Australia's Kimberley.

The PEO has been paying increasing attention to some of Australia's more remote communities, and has been building networks with Aboriginal educators. Last year the PEO delivered special programs in the Pilbara region in the north west of Western Australia. This visit broke new ground for the PEO because it included programs for schools in very remote areas including an Aboriginal community school. The visit developed the idea of a regional program in which all educational institutions are targeted over an extended period of time, in this case two weeks.

A highlight of the Pilbara visit was a program for students at an Aboriginal community and its state school at Yandeyarra, about 120 kilometres south of Port Hedland. This type of program is distinctive because it targeted Aboriginal students, their teachers and other adults in the community.

Local MPs, both state and federal, played a major role in the whole program. The State Upper House Member for the Pastoral and Mining Division, Tom Helm, attended all classes at Paraburdoo, Tom Price and Newman. Barry Haase, the Federal

Member for Kalgoorlie, took an active part in the program and attended classes throughout the Pilbara, along with Western Australian Senators Alan Eggleston and Jim McKiernan.

The PEO adapts its Outreach program for each local community it visits. A parliamentary education program in the mining town of Roxby Downs included an exercise that involved students in investigating the hypothetical proposal to site a low-level nuclear waste facility at the Roxby Downs Airport. The student program concluded with a role-play of a parliamentary committee and debate on a hypothetical bill. The program drew attention from the media, and Adelaide's ABC Radio 5AN broadcast one of its afternoon programs from the school hall.

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A different kind of Outreach program was held in Albury-Wodonga specifically for Legal Studies students. PEO staff conducted a workshop to develop decision-making skills and to show students some ways in which they can function as effective representatives of the students who elected them.

The students learned skills such as lobbying, negotiating, making compromises, defining issues, arguing cases and communicating with voters. These skills were developed in a cabinet role-play that was based on the local issue about where to locate a new freeway in Albury. In the role-play the students were given choices about how they can make decisions both in the role-play and in their real life roles as student representatives. It was possible to see that student confidence and basic skills grew even within the one and a half-hours of the workshop.

Whenever the PEO visits regional and remote areas, PEO staff conduct teacher professional development programs. These introduce primary and secondary teachers to the various learning materials produced by the PEO. The PEO also holds training sessions on the efficient use of the PEO web site. Teachers participate in role-plays that help them both to improve their own knowledge of parliament and to develop techniques that they can use in their own classrooms.

One of the PEO's key objectives is its work in reaching out into the community. This year, the PEO is broadening its series of Little Lunch Sitings at Parliament House, Canberra to make it more suitable for adult audiences. The PEO is also working with the ABC to promote student involvement in talkback and similar radio programs through ABC regional radio stations. Throughout the year, many thousands of Australians will learn about the role and operations of their parliament through PEO Outreach. For more information telephone toll free 1800 808 533, fax (02) 6277 5775, or email: info@peo.gov.au



The Parliamentary Education Office delivers Outreach programs to students and teachers throughout Australia, including to these students from Yandeyarra in Western Australia's Pilbara region.