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REPORT ON

THE COGNITION SYMPOSIUM AT THE BIENNIAL CONFERENCE
OF THE AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF ABORIGINAL STUDIES
CANBERRA - MAY, 1974.

Betty H. Watts,
Reader in Education,
University of Queensland

The Cognition Seminar was held over two days in Canberra, May 27th. and May 28th.

A wide range of papers was presented by Australian psychologists. Also we were fortunate to have the stimulation of a number of overseas speakers.

The overseas visitors who are well known in studies involving various minority groups were Professor R.W. Brislin and Professor T. Ciborowski from the East-West Centre at Hawaii, Professor H.C. Triandis from the University of Illinois, U.S.A., Professor U. Pareek from India and Professor L.W. Doob from Yale University.

Teachers will, I think, be interested to see the variety of issues that were discussed at the two-day symposium. The program for the two days indicates this diversity

COGNITION

Convenors: G.E. Kearney; D.W. McElwain.

May 27th. 9.15 am. - DIFFERENCE STUDIES

Chairman: M. Argyle.

Brislin, R.W. (Hawaii, U.S.A.):
Methodology of cognitive studies.

Goodnow, J.J. (Sydney):
The nature of intelligent behaviour: questions raised by cross-cultural studies.

McElwain, D.W. (Brisbane):
Problems of problem-solving.

McIntyre, L.A. (Brisbane):
An investigation of the effect of culture and urbanisation on three cognitive styles and their relationship to school performance.

Teasdale, G.R. and De Vries, G.J.A. (Adelaide):
The use of the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities with Australian Aboriginal children.

Kearney, G.E. and Fitzpatrick, D.G. (Brisbane):
Five psychological variables which distinguish between two groups of Aboriginal Australians with different levels of acculturation.

de Lacey, P.R. (Wollongong):
Lifeways and cognitive performance in Australia and the United States.

2.00 pm. - INTERACTION STUDIES

Chairman: A Heron.

Triandis, H.C. (Illinois, U.S.A.):
Intergroup attitudes.

Ciborowski, T. and Cole, M. (Hawaii):
Cultural and cognitive discontinuities of school and home: remedialism revisited.

Seagrim, G.N. (Canberra):

The settlement child and school: intellectual assimilation and accomodation.

Davidson, G.R. (Brisbane):

Learning to learn: the contribution of social learning theory to models of culture change.

Williams, D. (Canberra):

Ordinal scaling of prescriptions and descriptions of behaviour in an Aboriginal community.

Fulcher, D. (Brisbane):

A consideration of the conceptual framework for evaluating the schoolroom performance of the outgroup child.

Kearins, J. (Perth):

Skills of desert children.

Whitelaw, A.J. and Wray, R.H. (Adelaide):

Cognitive and affective factors involved in the education of Aboriginal students in the Adelaide urban area.

May 28th. 9.15 am - TRANSITION STUDIES

Chairman: L. Broom.

Pareek, U. (India):

Orientation toward work and school: cultural context and intervention strategies.

Bochner, S. and Cairns, L.G. (Sydney):

An unobtrusive measure of helping behaviour toward Aborigines.

Bryer, F.K. (Brisbane):

Interpretation of test scores: performance on multiple classification matrix tasks in an Aboriginal culture.

Sommerlad, E.A. (Canberra):

Some cultural differences which have relevance for the education of Aboriginals.

Sheehan, P.W. (Brisbane):

Some methodological implications of cross-cultural research into the imagery abilities of Aboriginal children.

Drinkwater, B.A. (Townsville):

Categories of association in Aboriginal children's English.

Western, J.S. (Brisbane):

Types of respondent participation in the research process.

2.00 pm. - WIDER ISSUES, ESPECIALLY EVALUATION OF INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

Chairman: R.W. Russell.

Doob, L.W. (Yale University, U.S.A.):

Evaluating interventions: an instance of academic anarchy.

Oeser, O.A. (Melbourne):

Presuppositions and requirements for planning Aboriginal housing in White settlements.

Watts, B.H. (Brisbane):

Implications of cognitive styles for the classroom.

Jones, I.H. (Melbourne):

Stress-induced states among tribal Aborigines psychiatric and psychosomatic correlates.

Holm, N. and McConnochie, K.R. (New England):

Time perspective in Aboriginal children.

O'Brien, G.E. and Plooi, D. (Adelaide):

Development of culture training manuals for medical workers with Pitjantjatjara Aborigines: the relative effect of Critical Incident and Prose Training upon knowledge, attitudes and motivation.

Mr. Bruce Wright, formerly Superintendent of Aboriginal Education in Western Australia (now Superintendent of Curriculum), was in Brisbane after the Canberra Conference and we had a brief moment when I was able to ask him to record some of his impressions of the Conference. These are reproduced below. I must point out that this was a very brief opportunity that presented itself and if there had been a longer time available Mr. Wright would, I am sure, have made much more extensive comment.

Mr. Bruce Wright:

"I would like to make some comments on the significance of the Cognition Conference for teachers and Aboriginal children. There are several points I would like to make. The first is that whereas, two years ago, there were only about six or eight papers presented in the Cognition section of the Biennial Conference, this year I think there were twenty-eight or thirty papers. This indicates a great increase in the number of people involved in this kind of investigation. I think this is a very encouraging sign. There is also a very wide variety in the types of investigation

The second point I would like to make refers to some themes which ran through the various papers. One was cross-cultural testing. I do not think there were any really satisfactory conclusions reached by any of the writers or by the participants in the subsequent discussions. A thing that concerns me about cross-cultural testing is this: generally we test because we want to use the test result to make some kind of evaluation or prediction of the child's success in the situation. I am wondering whether the generally available tests are an effective predictor of success in an academic type of program such as we have in our high schools and, if, in fact, they are accurate predictors of success. Perhaps, although they are culturally unfair, they are efficient predictors of the success of Aboriginal children within the high school system and programs that we have at this stage. Let us look at the alternative. If we get a completely culture fair test which indicates the true mental abilities of the Aboriginal children, what kind of predictions can we make? If we have such a test, are we going to be able to use that as an accurate predictor of their success in general Australian schools and, if not, what sort of information do we really feel that we are going to get from a culture free test designed especially for Aboriginal children? I am not suggesting we should abandon these lines of enquiry, but I think perhaps we need to be putting more emphasis on looking for the perceptual characteristics of Aboriginal children and finding out ways in which they do think and learn. I think this sort of enquiry might yield more positive and constructive results and guidance for teachers as far as teaching strategies are concerned. It is not sufficient merely to produce a measure or indication of the child's place on a normal distribution.

Another discussion that took place was that concerning the emphasis on difference or deficiency. I think there was some

quite useful discussion here.*

A particularly interesting issue that came up throughout the Conference, but particularly in the closing discussion, was that concerning the ethics of intervention programs. Some of the more youthful speakers were rather troubled by this issue. One of the speakers pointed out that if we have a program of *interaction* with a minority group, whether we realise it or not, it is in fact an *intervention* program. For example, surely all school programs are intervention programs. Perhaps intervention might be an emotionally loaded term which we interpret as a negative rather than a neutral word because somehow we feel it is inconsistent with individual liberty, the right of various groups of people to determine their own future, and so on. Perhaps we can avoid some of the ethnocentric aspects of an intervention program provided there is consultation with the minority group at every point along the way. I think any educational program is an intervention program, and the way to avoid the undesirable effects of this would be to have the Aboriginal group or the minority group participating in the decision making, as well as making decisions about the way in which their life style, or that of their children, is going to change."

INTERGROUP ATTITUDES

In reporting to you on the Conference, the first paper I would like to introduce is one on intergroup attitudes presented by Professor Triandis of the University of Illinois. He was concerned to outline a conceptual framework for the analysis of intergroup attitudes, to examine methods for the study of such attitudes and to suggest promising paths of future research.

Professor Triandis analyzed the conditions which result in conflict between two groups. He discussed group access to resources, type of goal interdependence and amount of contact between the two groups. He concluded his analysis by suggesting:

Professor Triandis:

"Particular ecological-historical and economic conditions result in 'real' conflict between two groups, in relationships

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*Editor's note: I plan to introduce, in the next issue, an extended discussion of this issue.

where one group has better access to resources than the other, to particular ways of thinking about social environment, to particular intergroup attitudes and to segregation or intergroup conflict. A similar kind of analysis is needed to understand integration. We need to start at the antecedent side of the sequence. Economic conditions do change and can turn contrient interdependence into promotive interdependence. For example, when automation results in very high wages, the advantages of paying something less to a particular group vanish, since even with the wage differential the wages are high. At that point the exploited group may become more valuable as a consumer. Increasing the market can help in the development of lower costs due to higher volumes of production. Once the other group is seen as a consumer, it is to the advantage of the mainstream that it also have money with which to become a 'big consumer'. Hence development, or increasing the standard of living of the exploited group, becomes a *common* goal.

I see the historical-economic antecedents which lead to groups with promotive goals as the necessary but not the sufficient conditions for integration. The sufficient conditions require:

- a. some convergence in the subjective cultures of the two groups, as well as,
- b. some learning of how to interact with members of the other group.

Convergence. The analysis that I provided earlier made the point that subjective culture and intergroup attitudes are the products of the objective historical and economic conditions of the two groups. Once the economic conditions become similar, due to the operation of economic factors, the subjective cultures will also become more similar. The more similar the activities of two groups the more similar their subjective culture. For example, around the world we are observing a 'tourist culture' - affluent people from many lands whose activities are classified as tourism. We find these people behaving rather similarly, and although I have no data on this subject, I guess that their subjective cultures would not be particularly dissimilar. The activities themselves, the roles, the environment in which they operate *create* a good deal of similarity. It makes little difference whether the visitor to the Acropolis is an American, a German or a Japanese. In broad outline the behaviours (looking, buying Coca Cola, taking pictures, sending post cards) and

experiences will be similar. Of course there will be a substantial residual of differences, due to the type of education and culture that each group has experienced, but we should not forget that these differences occur in a framework of essential similarities."

Teachers will I think, be particularly interested in Professor Triandis' views on the achievement of integration. By integration, he means learning to live with people who have different subjective cultures and he points out that interpersonal relations are difficult when people have different subjective cultures.

Earlier in his paper he had pointed out:

Professor Triandis:

"that behaviour was said to depend on behavioural intentions, norms, roles, self-images, the affect toward the behaviour and the perceived consequences of the behaviour. Each of these contributes an element of subjective culture. People with different subjective cultures will have different antecedents of their behaviour. In interpersonal relationships the most important factor is perception of what causes the behaviour of the other. (1) For example, if we see a mother beating her child, we will evaluate her behaviour in one way if we believe that the cause of this behaviour is that she is ill-tempered and in a different way if we believe that the cause of this behaviour is that she thinks that by beating her child she will improve the child's behaviour. When we come from a culture where no one believes that beating a child improves his behaviour, and we see the mother beating the child, we are likely to infer that she did this because she is ill-tempered and hence to dislike her. This would not be so if we come from a culture where most people believe that beating is good for the child. What this illustrates is that the beliefs we have about the causes of behaviour of others are crucial to our liking of those others. The more similar are the beliefs of the *actor* and the *observer* about the causes of the actor's behaviour, the more will the observer like the actor.

This leads to the argument (2) that when people make *isomorphic attributions* about behaviour they are likely to have a better interpersonal relationship than when they make non-isomorphic attribution. By isomorphic attributions I mean that the observer attributes the same or very similar causes to the behaviour of the actor that the actor attributes to

himself. By making isomorphic attributions the observer is also likely to make attributions that are relatively more complimentary to the actor, since the actor generally attributes his own behaviour to more socially desirable causes than does a random observer.

This is actually a general principle of interpersonal relations, although it is particularly helpful in analyses of culture learning. For example, if the husband spends too much time at the office and not enough time at home, he might attribute this behaviour to ideas such as 'I am responsible', 'I am trying to earn more money for my family', 'I am a diligent person', etc. If his wife uses the same attributions to explain the behaviour there is likely to be martial harmony. On the other hand, if she thinks that 'he loves his work more than he loves his family', 'he is too ambitious', or what have you, this is likely to lead to martial discord.

Now the essential problem in intercultural relations is that the attributions that people make are most likely to be non-isomorphic. Actors and observers tend to make non-isomorphic attributions *even when they belong to the same culture*. Actors tend to see the same behaviour as caused by internal factors (the actor's personality). This phenomenon has been found in numerous studies (3). Thus, the interpersonal relationship is difficult even without the cultural barrier. Cultural factors make it even more difficult by adding differences in norms, role perceptions, self-images, expectations about the consequences of an action and the values of these consequences."

I am sure that teachers will find much of interest in the preceding analysis by Professor Triandis. Do non-Aboriginal teachers and Aboriginal students and Aboriginal parents make isomorphic attributions about behaviour? How well do each of the two groups (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) understand the differences that Professor Triandis refers to in norms, role perceptions and self-images, expectations about the consequences of an action and the value of these consequences. As teachers, how can we become more knowledgeable about the subjective culture of the Aboriginal students whom we teach?

INTERVENTION PROGRAM

As Mr. Wright said, there was much discussion of evaluation programs and the philosophy behind evaluation programs during the two days of the symposium. The ethics of intervention must concern everyone in any way involved with intervention programs. Professor Doob from Yale who has been active in intervention programs in various countries throughout the world presented a careful analysis of the evaluation of intervention programs and I am sure that you will find some of his analyses and considerations extremely helpful to you as you think through your own position on this issue.

Reported below are four of the major aspects which he raised. It would be useful to us as educators, I think, to consider these aspects and the ways in which they are reflected in the educational programs that we offer to Aboriginal groups.

Professor Doob:

"CONSENT

The first question to be raised concerning the beneficiaries is the degree of their consent. In the West, perhaps elsewhere, most of us strongly favour not merely consent but informed consent. Why should interveners attempt to attain informed consent? The ethical argument assumes a somewhat non-deterministic position which one can only state and then everyone - intervener, investigator, beneficiary, and reader - may record assent or dissent: human beings want and should be given the freedom to choose among the alternatives that confront them, and that freedom tends to vanish or at least to be diminished if they do not know the consequences of the choice offered by the intervener and if they do not have the option to refuse to be a beneficiary. If individuals believe in informed consent, moreover, and they become convinced during or after the intervention that they have been misinformed, at some point they are likely to react unfavourably to the intervention, a reaction that can interfere with whatever learning the intervention requires.

FEASIBILITY AND GROUP RECEPTIVITY TO CHANGE

The intervener's goal must not only be formulated in advance, but must also be feasible. Unless it appears feasible to the beneficiaries, they may not cooperate (if they have the choice) or

they may not give their informed consent. ...

A change is likely to seem acceptable or to be accepted by one or more persons:

1. when it is not in conflict with those of their traditional beliefs and values which are proving satisfactory;
2. when it appears to them to have advantages which can be intelligently demonstrated in the present or which are anticipated in the future;
3. when it is in accord with the modal personality traits of their society or group or with a goal they are seeking;
4. when it makes demands whose components they have already learned or feel confident they can learn; and ...
- ... 5. when it is introduced by persons whom they consider important and who have adequately consulted them or their respected leaders.

LANGUAGE

The language problem obviously pervades all phases of any intervention. Any? Yes, any. It is clearly acute when the intervener and beneficiaries have different languages, and the greater difference in the linguistic groupings to which their languages belong, the greater the potential difficulties. Even when both have a common language, moreover, they are likely to come from different strata of the society or at least to vary with respect to education or profession, so that they too not only may have linguistic misunderstandings but - which can be worse - they may also be unaware of them. At the beginning the beneficiaries may be called upon to express their felt needs, and people differ with respect to the ability and facility with which they can encode their own needs and feelings. Very convincing evidence from psycho-linguistics demonstrates again and again that peoples in diverse cultures may categorize their experiences quite differently. We ourselves are accustomed to attach verbal tags to our experiences and thus linguistically at least to compartmentalize those experiences, yet this tendency is not universal. Anyone who has ever worked in another culture has known the agony accompanying the

task of trying to obtain a good translation, of testing the translation with a back translation, etc. And the same doubt and frustration accompany the pre- and post-interviews or questionnaires when they serve as the bases for evaluating the intervention.

To our joy or sorrow each of us knows that we are solipsistically encased and therefore language, any language, never can convey precisely what we feel and think. This inevitable handicap dooms the intervener: he cannot expect 'really' to understand the beneficiaries in these respects before or after the intervention. He must be content either with their words or with what he or a surrogate can observe directly or through the reports of others. Observations may be sufficient - the beneficiaries patronize the dispensary, they participate in the new association, etc. - but neo-objective data of this kind must serve, at great or small risk, as indices for the only significant criterion, the internal response of the beneficiaries. I recognize that practical planners and interveners cannot, dare not concern themselves with such philosophical or psychological niceties, but for this very reason we have been witnessing mini-rebellions in the form of protests against our material civilization and the problems it creates. The task may be an impossible one, but somehow we must try, however vainly, not to forget the inner persons as we attempt a final evaluation.

CONSEQUENCES OF EVALUATION

Whatever measures are employed to evaluate an intervention, we can be reasonably certain that individual differences will be manifest. From the intervener's standpoint, these may or may not be in the desired direction. A few converts may be more important to him than a great many when the few are influential carriers of the change and hence affect policy-makers or other beneficiaries. One or two or a handful of individuals who are not affected or are affected adversely by the intervention, on the other hand, may cause damage for similar reasons: the project or the intervener acquires a bad reputation and the enterprise may therefore boomerang.

The unintended consequences of an intervention obviously must be noted and evaluated. Unless this is done, important spinoffs may be overlooked. In the area of modernization, it looks as though a small number of contacts with Western practices and ideas inevitably starts a society on the path toward complete

modernization from which there may be no turning back. Very few political leaders try to close Pandora's box once it has been opened, although of course most of them proclaim quite truthfully that they seek modernization congruent with their own traditions and hence appropriately modified.

The intervener, though hell-bent on proving the success of an intervention, is well advised to assure that any intervention produces both gains and losses from the beneficiaries' standpoint. For most changes demand sacrifices and are painful, and hence these negative marks must be added to the ledger. Interventions that also require beneficiaries to withdraw from their ordinary milieu as they seek to devise innovating procedures or to discover new ideas may produce traumas among them as they re-enter their society or group.

Evaluation must also have a societal or anthropological dimension. Gains or losses that characterize specific beneficiaries, their groups, or their communities may eventually be wiped out or at least altered unless they are somehow incorporated into the institutions in which they themselves are embedded. The most brilliant idea, to be sure, must fail unless it becomes part of normal existence."

References from Professor Triandis' paper.

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2. Triandis, H.C. : *Culture training, cognitive complexity, and interpersonal attitudes*. In Brislin, R.W., Bochner, S. and Lonner, W.J. (Eds) : *Cross-cultural Perspectives on Learning*. Vol. 1. California: Sage, 1974.
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I am sure that you will find the comments made by Professors Triandis and Doob stimulating and thought provoking. You will be interested to know that the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies intends to publish, later this year, revised versions of all papers presented at the Conference and we will keep you in touch with details of the publication.

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