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EDUCATION FOR ALIENATION -

OR FOR SELF-DETERMINATION *

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I suppose I have to admit that I could have used Paulo Freire's⁽¹⁾ terms and said "Education for Domination - or Education for Liberation" since most people acquainted with cross-cultural education and education in developing societies would know them. And I certainly do have to admit that there is not much that I have to say that is particularly novel in education. But what I am sure is new in Australia is the deliberate, conscious and consistent effort to apply these ideas in practice in the area of cross-cultural education, in all facets of the curriculum for an educational institution. And so I can give one guarantee about what I say: it may be verbose, and it may even sound abstract, but in the Aboriginal Community College we are trying to do it - and with some success.

But I do not intend merely to give yet another description of the Aboriginal Community College. Frankly, I'm tired of talking about it, constantly repeating myself until I begin to sound like a rather long nursery rhyme. But I am "wrapped" in what we are doing and find this program more stimulating professionally and personally and hence more challenging than anything else I have worked in. I want to deal more generally than merely about this College, because I believe that what we have learnt applies to education in a cross-cultural situation anywhere in Australia and with any minority groups. If I draw my examples from this College, I hope you will tolerate it, and draw your examples from other situations if they are more meaningful to you.

ALIENATION

Some of the things to be said may not be pleasant or agreeable. We try to be nice to everyone, but sometimes there are unpleasant

* Based on a talk given by John Ingram and Bob Randall of the Aboriginal Community College, Adelaide, to the South Australian Chapter of the Australian College of Education in April, 1976.

facts to be faced. One of those is alienation. It is not something to be argued about: it is a fact of life - a dominating, frustrating, destructive fact of life for many members of minority groups in Australia - minority groups such as Aborigines, migrants, slum-dwellers, lower income and other economically deprived groups, and people who are physically different. It is hard for those of us who belong to the majority group in Australia (broadly described, I guess, as white, middle-class, more or less educated, and more or less employed or employable) to accept that people feel alienated - particularly if we are operating the processes of education that are ostensibly aimed at giving everyone a "fair go" and yet that are accused of largely causing the alienation. The alienation of those who are culturally, racially, physically or socially different is a fact - and a fact that education has to take account of.

And so I won't use Friere's terms. He was talking of education for the mass of the people. And in Australia we have a numerically dominating group and a large number of smaller groups that see themselves as being culturally different, or at least with recent origins that are culturally different, from those of the majority group of "dinkum white Aussies". And it is many of the members of these minority groups that feel alienated.

That is hard for us "dinkum Aussies" with our "fair go" for everyone to accept; but it is a basic fact of life for thousands of children and adults in this country. Many Aboriginal students have told me that they never felt at home in school where they were one or two "black kids" in a group of thirty or more whites. One five year old Aboriginal girl told her mother that she told her teacher she was Indian because if the other children had known she was Aboriginal "no one would play" with her. A highly intelligent New Guinean University student in the late sixties (before independence) told me of the enormous sense of relief he felt when he found for the first time that he could love and study his own culture and still be respectable, without having to strive to accept European culture if he were to be respected, something he could never identify with.

DEFINITIONS

Well, I've given one thing that I believe is a fact; that is, alienation. While I am at it, I'll give a couple of other facts. These are much more contestable, but for now let me present them as facts without discussion, since they are relevant to everything else that follows.

First of all, "education". At present, I see education as the complex process by which a person is enabled to cope with and gain

satisfaction from life and the world, as they are now and as they will be presented to him. As such, it must equip him to cope with life and the world as they are now and with changes in them. Education must therefore seek to liberate him by enabling and training him to think for himself, to solve problems for himself, to initiate action and carry it through.

Secondly, "cross-cultural education". I see this as the education of people of one cultural group in the culture of another group aimed at enabling the student to operate in the different culture or in different cultures. "Culture" here refers to social structure, language, arts, technology, government, manners etc, of a group of people. "Cross-cultural education" may also refer to the situation where the educator or teacher belongs to a cultural group different from that of his students. It also refers to the education of people of the Third Culture. People are said to belong to a "Third Culture" when they accept and identify with a system of values drawn from direct experience with two or more cultures.

And finally, I want to narrow the field of this discussion a bit further. We will be concerned with the so-called affective domain. We will not discuss cognitive factors in cross-cultural education. This is not because they are not important; they are of crucial importance at the stage of "content teaching" - that is, at the stage of teaching skills, abilities and knowledge such as science, mathematics, reading and writing, and vocational or technical skills. There is inadequate knowledge in Australia of cognitive structures, concept formation, nature of concepts, thought patterns and problem solving techniques in the people of different cultures, and especially Aboriginal and migrant people. I will refrain from discussing these things, not because they are not important, but simply because I wish to concentrate on other factors, factors that have received very little attention in education in Australia, factors that I believe are crucial in the success or failure of education programs for students of backgrounds that are not Euro-Australian.

WHAT IS ALIENATION?

And so we come back to the beginning: Education for Alienation or for Self-Determination. Let us think a little more about alienation - and since we are concerned with the affective areas of human personality, let us think of it as it has been described by Bob Randall in his song *Mix-up Man* -

*Mix-up Man **

The Missions changed my life
By just making me have one wife.
The Welfare gives me food -
To do nothing must be good.

(Chorus).

Who am I? What am I?
What will happen until I die?

My father had a will:
When hungry he'd go and kill.
If I sit and wait
I'll be eating off a plate.

Some say if you be white
Living will be all right.
When sober I be sad
When drunk I'm plurry glad.

Might be I get a job.
For grog I make a few bob.
As far as I can see,
It's the only thing left for me.

So what is alienation? I suppose that most simply it is a feeling of not belonging with those people around about you. For groups of people, it is a common feeling within the group that their group does not belong with the dominant group in society. Certain other feelings commonly accompany this sense of alienation :

- . a feeling of not being wanted; of not being able to communicate;
- . a feeling that one would not be listened to if one did try to communicate;
- . a feeling of not being good enough; of not being able to do anything; of being ashamed - often expressed as shame of one's skin or of one's people;
- . a feeling of being pushed around, told what to do, of being controlled by others;
- . a feeling that one can't do anything so why try;
- . a feeling of indecisiveness, of being unable to make decisions;

* Reproduced with permission of Bob Randall

- . a feeling of not being part of the general community and consequently of not really knowing or being able to use what the community has to offer the individual;
- . a feeling of wanting to get away, to escape from being unwanted - without knowing what can be escaped to, to create satisfaction and completeness.

In brief, there is a dominating feeling of powerlessness that inhibits all activity outside of one's own group.

To most of us it is hard to appreciate the effect of this sense of alienation, this sense of powerlessness. Leo Hannett says :

To be a coloured person in a white world, defined and controlled by whites, is a unique experience that only coloured people can relate. (2)

Yet it should not be so difficult: we have all had similar if limited experiences; for me, if I am taken out of my known areas of activity and placed in a situation I loathe, for instance at a social function such as a ball, I suddenly become totally inept and unable to communicate. Certainly I can explain how this came about, but I certainly cannot explain why it still happens. Those of us who are not sportsmen, - how often have we felt, on going in to bat (always 10th or 11th place), that we were no longer the dynamic educator solving massive educational problems, but a weak, inarticulate being to be spurned? And said, after the event, "I was beaten before I started?"

The emotions were dominating in those situations and prevented any abilities or potential there was from being expressed. These are not very different experiences from those of the alienated member of a minority group - except they are isolated and avoidable in our lives. And for some members of minority groups they are life itself when they are operating outside of their own cultural context. Leo Hannett describes the same thing :

It is shameful to see Niuginean tribal leaders who, in a traditional village setting, hold their heads up high in rightful pride, once in front of a white man, however insignificant that person may be, melt before the white man's very eye in total submissiveness, filial obedience as it were, and deep obeisance." (3)

I was first struck by this when I observed Papua New Guinean men, who I knew in their village context as respected men or national sporting heroes, act in a timid and hang-dog way in the expatriate dominated office, before the scathing tongue of insensitive expatriate women or arrogant "mastas".

Many Aboriginal students have told me that all their lives they have been unable to hold their heads up when walking down the street - they have always been ashamed of their black skins. Another said that all his life he'd been told what to do - he'd never been allowed or able to think for himself. Another said that whenever he was in the street everyone seemed to be watching him and he never felt "at home" anywhere as a result.

CAUSES OF ALIENATION

So, if this alienation and its concomitant sense of powerlessness is so dominating, and if education is concerned with enabling a person to cope better with life as it is presented to him, it has to be a concern of education; frankly, unless it can be dealt with and transformed into a dynamic propulsive force, instead of a shaming, restrictive force, very little else in education is of any consequence.

And yet, I am not going to deal here with the causes of alienation in detail, other than by inference. They are only too obvious. I want to spend more time on how alienation and powerlessness can be avoided or overcome, and by inference this will suggest the causes.

But briefly, a couple of points on causes. Firstly, alienation and powerlessness are nearly always associated with a belief that whatever I am is not good enough, especially when I am out of my own group: I, in myself as I was born, am unworthy as compared with others. And somehow this belief has grown in many people almost from birth. Something in society or in their schooling has caused it.

Secondly, we have to be aware that the schools are teaching far more than the skills, abilities and pieces of knowledge listed in syllabuses and teaching programs. Far more important, lasting and dominating than these things that make up most teaching programs, are the affective qualities of human personality, the attitudes, emotions, self-concepts, values, beliefs etc. that are taught and learnt "between the lines" of the teaching programs: acceptance or rejection and alienation; curiosity or passivity; submissiveness or initiative; subordination or respect for self and others; self-respect and confidence

or shame and hate and fear; awareness of others and of society, or alienation and a fringe existence; respect for and active acceptance of diversity, or fear and low regard for difference and non-conformity. These "between the lines" qualities are difficult to teach and even impossible to identify to teach in a single lesson or series of lessons. But they must be taught and can be taught (though not by traditional methods) if people are to be allowed to be people, valuable in themselves, for what they are, and are not to be coerced into a change that they can never accept, to be something they never can be, and do not want or need to be.

Bob Randall has described it this way:

Let me loose.*

I stand on the corner
Of a big city street,
So alone with so many around,
I feel neglected and unwanted
As I stand on the corner.
Why can't I be accepted as I am?

(Chorus)

Oh let me loose,
Get off from me,
And leave me as I am
For my back is bended and low.
I try to stand with the load
That you put upon me.
Just get off now
And let me walk alone.

You have taken all I had
And all I'll ever want to be.
All I ask is for my will to be mine.
You have taken my wife
And my children too;
Oh please let me keep my spirit with me.

People walking pass by me
Hurry on as they go,
Always searching for their selfish desires.
Is there a way I can make them
Stop and listen to me
Or are their ears now deafened to my cry?

* Reproduced with permission of Bob Randall

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT?

So far I have said that it is an incontestable fact that many members of groups other than the dominant cultural groups feel alienated and hence powerless. I have said that the causes lie in the wider society, and certainly also in the schools. But what can be done about it?

Certainly the answer is nothing simple: it is not an hour a week devoted to Aboriginal studies; nor is it including non-western music and art in our music and art programs; nor is it simply ensuring the unconscious bias of the media against non-whites and non-conformity is redressed.

First of all, I believe that things can be different: numerous adult Aboriginal students have suddenly said to me, "You know, for the first time in my life I'm not ashamed I'm black"; or, "Until now I just wasn't aware of what goes on in society. I don't know what I've learnt, but I know I am more aware of things going on and how things happen."

Now, let us consider what I believe are two crucial aspects to being a human being:

- 1) I suggested that education is a complex process that aims to enable people to cope with life and the world better, and to gain satisfaction from them. A person's activity, large and small, in life can be seen as a series of processes; of making decisions, carrying them through, and taking the consequences of the decisions made and the actions that follow. I might emphasize that it is a process of decision-making, not a process of accepting decisions made for you - unless you have already voluntarily and wholeheartedly committed yourself to accept someone else's decision. And then one has become less than human. I have no proof for this: I simply believe that people are like that, and that the manner of decision-making and of accepting decisions made is therefore basic to the achievement of one's life goals, and hence basic in education.
- 2) I also believe that your ability to function in the community is directly affected by your self-respect, by your ability to look the world in the eye for what you are; that dialogue can only take place between equals who each see themselves as equals; that only when you respect yourself can you function amongst others, especially amongst others who are different from yourself; and that only when you know where you are going

in life and that this is your choice, that you can come to grips with life in meaningful activity. And hence I believe these things must be basic in education.

Now it seems to be that decision-making is something like a car: petrol is needed to run it, but without an engine there is no use for petrol. Petrol is analogous to the facts or content relating to a situation needed to make a decision. The engine represents the affective factors of personality. The major and primary factor in making decisions and carrying those decisions through has little to do with content or knowledge of facts: it has to do with the largely affective factors of identity, self-respect, self-image, relations with others, life goals etc. Only when these factors, the motivating and enabling factors in personality, are in order is it worth talking about facts, content, knowledge, skills, etc. Only when the engine is in working order do you worry about whether there is petrol or not.

Ultimately, then, cross-cultural education must be concerned with developing in each person a sense of belonging with the whole community, while retaining individual identity. For people can never be satisfied or content having to conform to standards and values imposed by others, but must determine their own standards and values for themselves, make their own decisions, initiate their own actions, and find respect for what they are and not for what others want them to be.

So what are the factors involved in this sense of powerfulness and how can it be developed?

Powerfulness and belonging :

- identity;
- self-respect or positive self-concepts;
- experience of success;
- personal and group goals (and hope of attaining them);
- knowledge and understanding of one's society
(one's own group and society in general);

All these produce awareness or liberation.

IDENTITY AND SELF-CONCEPT

Identity and self-concept are almost inseparable. Identity refers to personal and cultural or racial identity and this must be positive and seen to be worthwhile, not only by oneself, but by the people around about. Leo Hannett says:

The crux of our problems here in Niugini is the fact that we are not proud of being black and that, apart from general human values that we share in common with the rest of mankind, we also have been richly endowed with our own cultural, social and religious values which make us distinct as people or as a race. The values alone give us our corporate personality and identity as a race or as individuals of that race.(4)

I believe that without this pride in oneself, for what one is, and pride in one's cultural background, both for what it is and what it was, then one is more effectively crippled than if one had lost all limbs: decision-making and activity in the wider community is impossible. One is like a car without an engine. Conversely, I have seen students who suddenly find self-respect and pride in their culture transformed into dynamic people with heavy involvement in their community's activities.

I believe that not only must schools actively create an atmosphere of respect for the representatives of different cultures, races and societies in their community, they must give them the same respect as Euro-Australian culture and society receives: it is good enough to be taught in the schools, not as something exotic and far off, but as something real and alive and here now.

If people have a strong sense of their identity as they are, and positive self-concepts, then the wider society will be harmonious and alive - and much more so than if we seek the impossible and expect all people to conform to some hypothetical Euro-Australian model. We might say that we don't do that now; but any member of a minority group in this country will confirm that there are many subtle and deliberate pressures upon them to conform. For example, consider the pre-school Italian child forced to eat "good wholesome Australian food" in his school each day when he has lived for the past four years on Italian food. Also consider the migrant or tribal Aboriginal child forced to study in English and unable to include his first language in his course. By implication it is not as good or as worthy of study as English or the traditional French, German or ancient Greek or Latin.

EXPERIENCE OF SUCCESS

Success breeds success - or by corollary, success is necessary for success. It is certainly necessary for the development of a sense of confidence, a sense of powerfulness. So much of education involves failure. We say we learn by our mistakes and some teaching strategies involve exercises to find the errors and then teach. So the students learn from their mistakes - yes, they learn to make mistakes, to believe in their failure - and to fail to believe they can be successful. Too much teaching is mistake orientated and so guaranteed to produce failure. I often feel with our students that most of them have become so used to failing in the academic processes of education that, in seeing education as the solution to all their problems, they are not satisfied at first until they are 'getting' academic education and failing in it. It seems to them that what you are given in education is only good enough if you fail in it. If you succeed, then it's not education. How sick our society has become when education is a tedious, painful process of failure, and not the satisfying one of developing curiosity, awareness, powers of thought, and powers of commanding our environment that we come to know when we are older and have thrown off the inflexible shackles of our institutionalized knowledge factories.

PERSONAL AND GROUP GOALS AND KNOWLEDGE OF SOCIETY

Opportunity has to be given for people to determine their own goals in life: to determine for themselves what will give satisfaction in life, in work, in community involvement, in recreation. So a wide and varied range of experiences is necessary, and a wide knowledge developed of the resources the community offers for learning and for survival. And decisions on goals are not easily made, take a lot of time just to think over, and at first are only tentative. But education programs have to be geared to allow for these broad experiences, discussion and evaluation of each other's experiences and for one's own decision-making - with at first, frequent changes in direction as one experiences different aspects of society, one's interests are clarified, and one's goals are established.

As an aside, one might ask how a person of one culture can teach some one of a different culture how to make the right decision. The answer is, he doesn't, and the worst thing he can do is to try. Essentially the role of the educator is to make experiences and resources available to the student, to be available as one of the resources the student may call on, and then leave it to him to determine his own direction. The hardest lesson for a teacher to learn is to

shut up long enough for real education to take place. Having established positive identity and positive self-concepts, having enabled the student to find that he can do things, the educator creates the situation where the student can move in directions meaningful to himself, drawing for assistance on the resources available to him when he needs to.

AWARENESS

Now permeating all this is one's identity: I am what I am, and what I become will develop from what I am. The implication is that the individual himself develops his awareness and determines his own paths in life. I would like to quote once more from Leo Hannett. And this time I'll have to use a dirty word: it is an important example of how the positive identity and pride in oneself for what one is is a dominant factor in personal decision-making and action, and hence must be a prime concern of cross-cultural education.

The dirty word is "Black Power". What Hannett calls Black Power, you could transliterate perhaps as "One's own cultural Power" or "Human Power". He says:

All that Black Power tries to do is to create a sense of self-criticism and self-awareness where one seeks to know who he is, what his values are, and those criteria with which he evaluates his own acts and those of others, instead of continually resorting to those value judgements prescribed for him by others. After all, the notion of being a person implies the realization of oneself as the subject of one's consciousness, acts and responsibility. This is, however, only the first level of self-consciousness. Above this, there is that level of consciousness which is self-assertive or calls for action and self-realization. (5)

He then goes on to discuss what Freire calls "conscientization" or a level of awareness that is propulsive, producing action because of what one is.

As one Aboriginal student said to me (and he is anything but radical or violent or racist):

I wasn't ashamed I was Aboriginal before I came to the College - I've always said I was Aboriginal. But now my sense of identity is different - before I was Aboriginal, and so what? Now I'm Aboriginal and I'm going somewhere, doing something.

This having happened, his academic achievements, like those of many Aboriginal students who have gone through the same process, have been quite remarkable both in terms of his application and his progress.

This is what we mean by awareness or, in Freire's term, liberation. This propulsive force from within a person emanating from his sense of identity and respect for himself is what will fit him into the general community, as what he is, and not as what others simply decree him to be - and it is this that is the ultimate goal of education.

EDUCATION OF THE DOMINANT GROUP:

One final point in the educative process remains to mention here. This liberation, this development of a sense of awareness having taken place, there often comes also a desire or a duty to correct the original cause of the alienation: the failure of the people of the dominant group to accept and respect those of the minority groups. As Friere has said :

This then is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed:- to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well...Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both. (6)

In other words, there is an obligation to develop in the wider community a greater cross-cultural understanding and appreciation of other cultures and peoples, thus removing the basic causes of alienation and oppression.

So, early in the history of the Aboriginal College, the need was felt to develop a greater understanding amongst non-Aboriginal people of Aboriginal people, society and culture. The students began going out to visit schools, clubs, political party branches, church groups, and all kinds of educational institutions, with an Aboriginal staff member, to talk about things Aboriginal and give Euro-Australians

a chance to meet Aboriginal people, to talk with them and get to know their feelings, thoughts, and aspirations.

TWO COROLLARIES

Two interesting corollaries remain to what I have said about the effects of affective personality factors in education:

1. If these affective barriers are overcome, then in Adult Education one finds that the students already have a lot of skills and abilities that can now be applied.
2. More and better academic, vocational and skill teaching will have little or no significant effect until the affective factors are dealt with - hence the failure of much remedial tutoring and Headstart-type programs.

CONCLUSION

To finalize this discussion, I would like to say this:

No one who has not experienced the special problems of minority groups as an individual in one of those groups, can or has the right to determine the solutions for these people. The educator's role is to make resources available and facilitate the people's own decision-making.

To speak more personally, I want neither the twenty year old fresh from school and college with no experience of life other than his own untried idealism and altruism, nor the traditional, unliberated public servant school teacher, who sees life in terms of hierarchical levels of operations and expertise, in terms that are financially accountable, and who sees education as a process of giving from the superior to the inferior, and thus as a process of conditioning subordinates and inferiors to more correct behaviour - I want neither of these to influence my own Third Culture children, to attempt to inculcate into them their predetermined values and goals and absolutes of knowledge. I do not want them to determine what my children should be like or what goals and values they should seek. I want them to show them "life", to develop their curiosity, their humanness and their expressiveness, and to say to them, "Make of it what you will - and if you want me to help, let me know, I'll be around." And I want society to accept them for what they are and for what they might choose to become, even though they might be different in many ways from society's own norms. And if this happens, I believe they will, without effort, accept society, as different from it as they

may be, and will contribute to it something which will make a more homogeneous society, a society more culturally and socially uniform, seem impoverished.

I believe that this is the essence, basis and dominant technique of cross-cultural education. And I believe that all education in this country must now become cross-cultural.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

John Ingram and Bob Randall are foundation staff members of the Aboriginal Community College in Adelaide, South Australia. John, a Euro-Australian, is Principal, and Bob, an Aboriginal, is Officer-in-Charge of the Community Education Unit. The College offers opportunities for adult Aboriginal people who are unable to enrol in any other suitable institution, to continue their education through programs of individual relevance. The Community Education Unit was developed largely through Bob's efforts in an attempt to foster a greater understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal people and culture amongst non-Aboriginal people. Further information on the College and the Community Education Unit is available from the College at -

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