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## "THE IMPLICIT CONTRACT"

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Havighurst (1970) talks of an implicit contract between the home and the school. By this he means that -

The parents contract to prepare their children for school entrance, both cognitively and affectively. They further contract to keep him in school and to make home conditions appropriate for his success in school. The school contracts to receive the child, teach him as well as it can, taking account of his strengths and weaknesses and the ways he can learn most effectively...the education of the child is successful only when both parties carry out their obligations fully.

...Sometimes, one or both parties fail to understand the nature of these obligations. (p.313)

Watts (1972) notes that this could be particularly true of "the socially disadvantaged parents of this country, nearly all of whom fail to meet the terms of the contract", but points out that the schools also fail "by failing to understand how the children of these families can learn most successfully".

Havighurst, however, is using the phrase "socially disadvantaged" in the understanding that it is a term of convenience, not a universal definer. Terms like "deprived" and "disadvantaged" are complex and relative concepts, explains Scott Peter (1975, p.2), as "...there are many areas of deprivation...poverty, culture, language, literacy, scholarship,...and sex". In a way then, we might all be seen to be "disadvantaged" to some degree. This may seem to be splitting hairs, but there is an inherent danger in labelling (labelling) any individual or group. The intellectually lazy can and do seize upon the psychologists' findings as a reason for inaction. The assumption is that socially and economically deprived children from racial minority groups will almost without exception do badly at school.

The idea is nonsense. In a Newcastle, England study (Ed.Jnl. of the Assoc. of Education Committees) of children from a "class

ghetto" (slum), it was found that Indian children easily outstripped academically their 'English' and West Indian counterparts. The superiority of the Indian achievement, it was concluded, stemmed mainly from aspiration and parental encouragement. This display of "parent power" seems to vindicate Havighurst's idea of the "contract".

But, as Ann Dummett (1973) makes clear, the Indian, as a 'darkie' is as subject to the evils of racial discrimination in employment, housing etc. as is the Negro West Indian. In fact, this discrimination has manifested itself as well in the more physically overt form of 'Paki-bashing'.

Failure, or success, says Rowley, (1970, p.14) lies not so much in the "colour of the skin as the colour of the mind". Could then the different Indian parental attitudes lie in the Indian's feeling of "cultural security"? The Newcastle researchers concluded that the West Indians "unlike the Indians, are still looking for a culture and an identity".

One disagrees with the first part of the conclusion. The West Indian has an extremely vibrant culture. But there is a snag. Can he uphold his cultural achievements in a society which takes as its standards those of West European cultural development? The Indian can. He pre-empted the European in civilization by some 2,000 years. The achievements of that civilization, for example Buddhism and Hindu-Arabic numeration have had world-wide influence. He has model 'world figures' such as Gandhi. He may, in fact, feel culturally superior to the parvenu European.

Opposed to this, one regards the Negro, the American Indian, the Ainu of Japan, the Montagnard of Vietnam, the Bantu, the Maori, and of course, the Aboriginal. His culture is 'unacceptable' to all but himself. He is a 'prisoner of war' in what Paulo Freire (1972,p.123) calls "cultural invasion". Cultural invasion, he believes, is both an "*instrument*" and a "*result*" (Freire's italics) of domination. For it to succeed, "it is essential that those invaded become convinced of their inferiority".(p.122)

The "invaded" are posed with a dilemma. Not to rebel against a repressive situation, Freire warns, leads one "to drift into total indifference, alienated from reality". (p.124) Or, equally bad, one may be tempted "to engage in forms of destructive action". (p.125) Alienation is complete, adds Jacques Ellul,(1973, p.169) if it makes one live "an alien and artificial life" obeying "impulses foreign to (one)."

However, if the "invaded" rebel, that is, reject in part or total, the values enforced by the majority culture, they are still the losers. The "professionals" (Freire's term) "in order to justify their failure, say that the members of the invaded group are inferior because they are 'ingrates', 'shiftless', 'diseased', or of 'mixed blood'." (Freire, 1972,p.125)

One could attribute the quite patent failure of the Aboriginal child in the Australian school, not to the last-mentioned slanders, but to alienation, the loss of that "self respect and self concept" without which efforts at reform or solution "will only be marginal". (Duncan, 1969, p.34)

Bureaucratic thinking often sees the solution to the problems of the 'disadvantaged' as being achieved through the massive expenditure of 'welfare' money - "the crude shotgun approach" as Nurcombe (1975, p.5) calls it. It is true, as Freire (1972) says, that the "invasion" has been 'economic' as well as cultural. Undoubtedly the gaining of the outward manifestations of material prosperity will be of value in helping the Aboriginal escape what Himes (1971, p.54) calls the self-perpetuating "cycle of poverty". But creating a prosperous Aboriginal community is not in itself enough. "A Black with money is still only a rich nigger", criticizes Bobbi Sykes (1975, p.131), an Aboriginal "ingrate". Ivan Illich (1973) sees the inherent danger in purely "welfare" thinking. Such 'care' can be destructive as it tends to make people dependent on more treatment and "renders them increasingly incapable of organizing their own lives around their own experiences". (p.12)

In the past, and even today, the school has been regarded by many as yet another 'welfare' handout for such people as the Aborigines. Education, per se, has been seen as a cure for Aboriginal ills. But it is to be feared that the school did precious little to help the Aboriginal organize his own life around his own experience. This is a tragedy, for one agrees with McGeekin (1969) that the school "of all agencies of a developmental nature...has the highest potential of success". (p.19) One agrees the potential is there, but it quite palpably has failed because it has tended to consider only what it saw as its part of the "contract". The Aboriginal background, particularly the child's home, has been ignored.

Strangely, considering its historical context, Australia's first Aboriginal school, founded in 1815, nearly established an embryonic home-school contact. Its first director, William Shelley, postulated the 'radical' conviction that differences between Aborigines and Europeans were superficial, the result of differences of

"manner and custom and a variety of circumstances". (Cleverley, 1971, p.107) The Aboriginal child he found "remarkably teachable" and his dearest wish was that "the Lord spare (him) to learn their language". (p.106) Tragically, the Lord did not spare him. He died later in 1815. The way was left open for those who saw the coercive 'civilizing' of the natives as the answer. The paling fence which had been provided to enable the parents to peer in to see how well their children were being looked after was eventually replaced with an escape-proof wall. (I shall not underline the symbolism).

Shelley's faith in the teachability of the Aboriginal child was justified, incidentally, when in the Anniversary School Examination at Parramatta in 1819, an Aboriginal girl of fourteen bore away the chief prize over the heads of 100 European and 20 Aboriginal pupils. This girl, of course, had not learnt one important lesson, that Aborigines, because of their 'deprived' status, cannot succeed at school. However, as the low social status of the Aboriginal was eventually defined, the schools at least learnt that the Aboriginal simply lacked the intelligence to cope with the white man's world.

Nurcombe (1975) dispassionately examines variables which could affect the cognitive development of the Aboriginal child. There is, for instance, evidence to show that a number of Aboriginal children suffer from severe protein and calorie subnutrition from conception into early childhood. Moodie, (1973) has noted common maternal malnutrition of Aboriginal mothers during pregnancy - of deficient body stores of iron, calcium, Vitamin A and other minerals and nutrients. Research (Mussen, Conger and Kagan, 1969) seems to indicate that severe malnutrition of a pregnant mother interferes with the production of myelin (fatty nerve fibre cover) in the fetus and this in turn may lead to retarded mental development. In some children, the postnatal nutritional problem may be aggravated if another infant arrives too soon, denying the child access to breast milk.

The problem of diet and its effect on physical and mental well-being is the subject of unresolved dispute between the megavitamin 'school', Pauling, Davis, Kalokerinos et al., and the medical fraternity. However, all disputants do agree that a "balanced diet" is essential. Stacy, (1975) has shown that many rural Aborigines, through their integration of relatively inexpensive items such as flour, sugar and tea into their diet, are not achieving that balance.

The urban picture is less clear, because metropolitan Aborigines being distributed over a number of widely scattered suburbs, are not communities in the same sense as rural communities. Hence the urban child is less in the spotlight of the health services. However,

the greater availability of urban health services does not necessarily mean their use by Aboriginal parents. Further, the urban health situation can be aggravated by frequent "house-hopping" indulged in by some Aboriginal families within a locality, a city or a suburb. (Moodie, 1973, p.40). This is not a genetically acquired tendency to "walkabout", for it would appear to be quite rare for an Aboriginal to leave a locality without a definite reason. Thus, in the city, there can be a discontinuity in health care and, of course, a corresponding discontinuity in educational experience.

The problem seems to be out of the school's sphere of influence. Family health and housing are part of the family's "contract". However, the school can be involved, at least with the health of its "clients" both actual and prospective. The pre-school is, of course, an excellent setting for the medical assessment of physical status. However, diagnostic and curative programs can be expanded into preventative fields. According to Aboriginals' needs and requests, an extremely important condition, the school can become a community centre where people, not necessarily only Aboriginals of course, can talk about mothercraft, housekeeping, budgeting, cooking etc.

The clinic orientation of Australian public health services in the past has been unfavourable to the improvement of Aboriginal health at the family or domestic level, notes Moodie (1973). However, there is a recent trend towards more home visiting, a trend which brings the benefits of a health service to the people, rather than the other way round. The problem and its solution have a direct parallel in educational services which, in the past, have been too "clinical". Later, we shall look at how the school can set up the liaison necessary for home visiting.

But the parent has also an important contract to prepare the child cognitively for school entrance. Many parents, however, seem to fail in this contract. The Aboriginal child enters the school, it is said, "culturally deprived". Nurcombe (1975) disagrees. The theory is untenable, he writes, because 'Aboriginal children are exposed to a rich and stimulating experience, but the environment differs from that of the European'. (p.4). Nevertheless, the stimulation is not geared to Western classificatory concepts. The school, however, is geared to Western classificatory concepts and this will necessarily leave many Aboriginal children at a disadvantage.

One aspect of this deficit is 'language retardation'. We are on safer ground with this generalization of 'language retardation'. because it is demonstrable that certain children have not developed

linguistic excellence in what is the official language of the school-"standard English". This problem may be less significant in the city. The Van Leer (1972) project discovered that Brisbane five-year-olds have generally acquired competence with the regular features of standard English. There is, of course, a gap between spoken 'home' English and 'school' English. However, in some rural areas English is a foreign language, and in others the Aboriginal community may speak a language incorrectly and loosely called 'pidgin'.

Peter Farb (1974, P.160), writing of "Linguistic Chauvinism", defends the "substandard" Pidgin. Its utterances, he claims, are as grammatically consistent as those of the standard language. Oddly, features of Aboriginal speech analysed by the Van Leer Project - for example, the use of the word "he" for nominative, possessive and objective cases of both genders, are remarkably similar to Farb's observations on features of Negro speech.

Still, despite the validity of sub-culture language, competence in standard English is of increasing importance in our society. Perhaps one day 'white' Australians will be able to speak it too. The importance of a knowledge of the 'majority' language was underlined recently by the case of the Darwin Aborigines who were forced to go without unemployment benefits for up to two months because they could not read the required application form. (Telegraph, Brisbane, 30.9.76).

The school then should ask the question, "I can and do accept the differences but where do I draw the line?" (Poole, 1975, p.17). Language usage, as Poole points out, has been used as a scapegoat "...to explain failures in systems and policies" (p.17). The school must no longer perceive the child as deficient and lacking in language. Rather, the teacher's job becomes "one of opening up other options rather than topping up deficits". (p.16).

Matthews (1975) sees Australia as a multi-cultural society in which English is the dominant language. However, as he points out, there has been a tendency to think of immigrants and their children as the multi-cultural group together with "an unwillingness to see Anglo-Australians as part of it". (p.17). Significantly, Matthews' concern with migrants has led him to ignore the Aborigines who complete the multi-cultural picture. However, he sees as an important part of the school's contract, its task of developing in the child a sense of security and personal worth in being a member of a culturally plural society.

A child will almost certainly bring to school with him a good deal of his parents' attitudes and values. (Naturally some parents are more effective than others at transmitting those values). And if, for example, these attitudes towards the school or to other groups are negative, and in the case of Aboriginal children it is possible that this will often be the case, it is to be feared that the best efforts of the school will be near impotent. There is an urgent need to work "at getting the adults to support and indeed identify completely with the school" (Brennan, 1975, p.28). At present, as Brennan says, many Aboriginal parents, with memories of un-rewarding school experience, regard the school as "white man's business".

Involvement in the school, says Matthews (1973), is of greatest importance in re-establishment of Aboriginal identity. Adult and child invariably feel a need to belong to and be wanted by family and community, and for Aboriginals the school could provide the first opportunity to be involved as equals in the wider community, and their first opportunity of being on any management committee making decisions affecting the community. The past impotence of Aboriginals in making decisions concerning their children's education has surely been the root of any 'apathy' displayed towards the school.

Success stories of home/school relationships have largely come from rural and settlement areas. There, perhaps, the Aboriginal community is more easily defined. The urban picture is less clear. In city schools it is not uncommon to see non-Aboriginal parents being overwhelmed at P & C meetings by other parents who are secure in their knowledge of the mechanics of public meetings. The situation of the Aboriginal, brave enough to face the white, "middle-class orientation" of such a meeting, is doubly daunting. Often those who do attend feel they "do not have the words" to participate. (Nugent, 1975.)

Unfortunately home/school contact is too often left to the usual means of a report form or a circular. (Binnion, 1976). Parental feedback, understandably is almost non-existent under such circumstances. To establish contact then, suggests McClay (1973), the school may have to agree to a certain amount of 'deschooling', that is, a breaking down of the traditional school 'role' which tends to set up a barrier between institution and community.

There are no hard and fast guidelines for the establishment of home/school contact. Joan Binnion (1976) has summarized South Australian findings and offers a number of valuable suggestions. However, there are no universals. Communities differ and it is the job of the school to discover what makes its community 'tick'. The

ingenious teacher must work upon various methods to secure, first parental interest, then involvement. A particularly typical example of a new approach comes from Millchester, where the school, after the granting of an "operator's licence", allowed children to take audio-visual equipment home. The aim, of course, was to encourage home study but, just as important, "to involve parents". (Litzow, 1976, p.33).

Most research, however, does seem to indicate firstly, the need for the school to make the first advances and secondly, the importance of face-to-face meeting between parent and teacher.

But who will that teacher be? Initially it would be desirable if that teacher could be an Aboriginal. However, it is more than likely, at present, that the teacher will be non-Aboriginal. The question, then, of non-Aboriginal attitudes is of vital importance. "Why bother moving kids around", asked an American mother, "if they cannot escape teachers with segregating eyes?" (Time, April 1974, p.46). Segregating eyes are not necessarily hostile, but such eyes recognize only the differences. Oddly enough, teachers who resolutely refuse to see differences are also performing a disservice, as they are denying the pupils' ethnicity.

Our ideal teacher for a minority group still remains a hypothetical figure. Overseas findings are valuable but, as Fanshawe (1976) says, although there are "broad areas of similarity between Aborigines and some minorities", we must not consider the Aborigines "as if their ethnic membership were of little importance". (p.8). Taking this idea further, we cannot assume that the successful teacher at Bamaga will necessarily be successful at Pt. McLeay, South Australia.

However, in broad outline, Fanshawe suggests that the successful teacher for Aborigines would genuinely respect his pupils, see them realistically, be a student rather than a judge of their culture, be sensitive to the scars of understimulation and be realistically demanding. Demandingness is important as Nurcombe (1975, p.14) notes, "a sense of competence develops" when expectations are placed upon children to concentrate and perform. 'Sentimentalists', and those who see work with Aborigines as a "spiritual exercise" (Taft, et al., 1970), do not seem to be suitable. It is perhaps because their attitude is discernably patronising. Most importantly, the teacher must be vitally aware of the child's life outside the school. In areas such as Port McLeay, for example, some success was noted once the teachers, through visiting, no longer considered the settlement as unknown territory. (Nankivell, 1975).

The C.A.E.'s then, as schools, have a contract to provide teachers who at least have a realistic attitude. It is not to be expected that the C.A.E.'s can exorcise prejudice, but at least they can be expected to present a realistic picture of Aboriginal education. Above all, the C.A.E.'s must present Aboriginal education as an important aspect of Australian education.

Teachers are school products, and it is there that we must work to clear up misconceptions about minority groups. The Americans currently are coming to grips with the misconceptions, myths, inaccuracies and stereotypes about Indians in textbooks and reading materials used in schools. They have seen the failure of the school to respect the basic differences amongst the Indians as well as between Indians and whites. Equally relevant to the Australian situation, there is concern that little information is being provided about contemporary Indian life. The minority person is really a person of two cultures. Parents naturally would like their children instructed in traditional culture, but they would like the school to prepare the child to take a place in the dominant economic society.

Australian textbooks also have presented Aboriginals in a negative light. They no longer contain such 'gems' as "the black-fellows form one of the lowest races of mankind", but can still carry such 'white father' sentiments as, "we must always try to make them happy in this land which once belonged to them". (Spalding, 1974, p.23) Equally insulting, as Harris (1976) shows, such books as "Australian Art", "The First Century" and "The Real Australians" totally ignore the Aboriginals' existence.

But with many Aboriginals, especially in urban areas, "traces of traditional culture are slight and do not play a major part in their lives." (Lippman, 1973, p.187). They will find little to identify with in the current Australian classroom book. In rural areas, where the traditional cultural life is dying out, school can play a major role in sustaining it. But the cultural needs of urban Aboriginals also require attention. The need for a realistic treatment of contemporary Aboriginals is required just as urgently in 'lilywhite' areas where children, and teachers, "have no opportunity to react with children with attitudes of respect for differences." (Watts, 1971, p.40).

Failing face to face contact, the school must rely upon second-hand sources such as books and television. Britain and America have produced multi-ethnic readers but as yet there are none in Australia. In general children's literature, as Cotterel (1975, p.36) points out,

"an Aboriginal reader" (or 'white' child or teacher), "will not find blatant ethnocentrism, but will have to look hard to find characters who emerge as real people rather than stereotypes". This same situation will be similar in most mass-media treatment of Aboriginals. The Aboriginals appear solely as people with "problems", alcoholism etc. The problems, of course, are real but they are not the only side of contemporary Aboriginal life. No one likes to be thought of only as a person with a problem to be solved.

The school cannot take on all the problems of prejudice. However, its contract demands that it works with parents who "are leaders with their children too". (Watts, 1971, p.40).

The acceptance of Australia as a multi-cultural society will be a slow process. School and family, however, can play an important part in the transition. To do this they must work together for the mutual benefit of the children. In this way both parties can best fulfil their "contracts".

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