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RATIONALE AND DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY BASED CURRICULUM UNIT - WRECK BAY, A.C.T.

A. Nugent

This is an account of a project undertaken with the assistance of a grant from the Schools Commission's Innovation Scheme to develop a social studies unit in a cross-cultural situation. The minority community involved is the Aboriginal community at Wreck Bay; the school is the Jervis Bay Primary School which the children of Wreck Bay attend.

The Wreck Bay community is a strongly integrated group, exclusively Aboriginal in membership, small in size, (current 1975 population being 148) stable, enduring and geographically isolated from other groups black or white. ¹

The closest neighbours of Wreck Bay Village live five kilometres to the north at Jervis Bay. Jervis Bay comprises the closed community of the Royal Australian Naval College and a satellite village occupied mainly by Department of the Capital Territory and other government employees and their families. The local primary school is located at Jervis Bay Village. Since 1966 the children of Wreck Bay Village have attended the Jervis Bay school. The communities and their educational experiences have been described by Patrick Brady in his evaluation of an Innovations Project at Jervis Bay Primary School.² Both Wreck Bay Village and the communities of Jervis Bay lie within the Australian Territory of Jervis Bay and thus are under direct Commonwealth control.

THE SCHOOL AS AN AGENT OF CULTURAL TRANSMISSION

In Australian society the school acts as an agent of cultural transmission - from the Aboriginal point of view one could say as an agent of cultural omission. Arguments have been presented for some time now that systems of education reproduce and defend the culture of the dominant cultural group. Transmission of what is learned in schools occurs in both the overt and the hidden curriculum. The overt curriculum refers to the actual content, the 'what is taught', while the hidden curriculum comprises the attitudes, values and

taken-for-granted beliefs which characterize society in general and which are transmitted often in non-explicit ways in the school. From the child's point of view both the hidden and the overt curriculum are important in forming his view of his world and of his self.

From the Aboriginal perspective, attitudes (stated or implied) which deny the existence of an Aboriginal identity and culture diminish the Aboriginal person. The denial of the right to his Aboriginal identity in the school situation is particularly damaging for the Aboriginal child. In the practice of the dominant culture school, often the Aboriginal child is accepted to the extent that he conforms to the modes and ways of the dominant culture and he is rejected to the extent that he does not conform. Thus failure and rejection at school become associated in the mind of the Aboriginal child with his Aboriginality. This can lead to feelings of conflict and self-hate.

In the area of content, the overt curriculum, Aboriginal history and culture has been bowdlerized to suit the palate of the non-Aboriginal majority. Research by Parish, Doobov, Hill and Barlow, and Gray indicates that the literature which is available for school use is inadequate, uninteresting and in many cases presents a prejudiced view of the Aboriginal people and their life styles.³ It is interesting to note that this tendency is being reversed by Aboriginal writers and by the criteria set by the National Aboriginal Education Committee. In the schools all children, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, have a right to correct knowledge of Aboriginal prehistory in precontact times, and to an Aboriginal perspective of history in post contact times.

Although Aboriginal Studies are included in most school curricula, the inclusion is an appendage. School studies which treat Aboriginal occupation of this continent as a prelude to the coming of the whiteman, and after that, Aborigines as either helpers or hindrances in the saga of white settlement, are unacceptable and insulting to the Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people know that there is no way in which Captain Cook discovered Australia for them; in their historical perspective and jargon they say, "Captain Cook didn't discover Australia - he stole it!" Kevin Gilbert makes the same point in his poem 'Advance Australia Fair' -

And look what the whiteman did
Their Captain Cook alias Captain Kidd
Took all of Australia off us,
No bother about stealin' no fuss...⁴

The resentment expressed in the poem is justified and must be acknowledged if the history in the schools is to have any validity in Aboriginal eyes.

The Aboriginal parents of Wreck Bay want authentic statements about Aboriginal culture and experience to be included in the school Social Studies curriculum. It is for this reason that the community at Wreck Bay is working to develop an Aboriginal Studies Unit which is based on local culture and history. The school is co-operating in this enterprise.

BLACK STUDIES - THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE.

Writers on Black Consciousness in the United States describe situations and forces which have an apparent similarity with the experiences of Aboriginal minority groups in this country. Alvin Poussaint, a black psychologist, argues that Black Studies in the Arts and History in the schools will not, in themselves, alleviate the lot of the black student because, he claims, such courses do not strike at the forces which oppress minority groups in the wider society and which the school replicates.⁵ It is possible that Black Studies courses can have the effect of locking the child of the minority group into the existing, inequitable status quo. Valentine, a white anthropologist working in the Black ghettos, concurs with Poussaint and states the need for radical change in the existing social order because, in his view, it is "the political and economic pressures which push thousands of black children out of America's schools..."⁶ Valentine accuses the schools of the mainstream culture of cheating the minority child by inculcating "mainstream goals and ideals without imparting the skills or providing the opportunities needed to make these goals realizable". He goes on to condemn those ghetto schools "which practise rigid insistence on mindless conformity, while completely denying meaningful, quality education". He calls for changes which will allow members of minority groups to perceive and appreciate their patterns of life from within, not only from an external viewpoint.

In answering the question 'What is to be done?' Valentine keeps to his original argument that it is the political and economic pressures in the wider society and which are reflected in the schools, which should be of concern, and *NOT* the personality configurations of the school drop-outs. White researchers, in Valentine's resume', are condemned for denying that Afro-Americans possess any valid or cultural identity and for their tendency to define Black identity in terms of pathological failure or socio-economic disadvantage.

For the Black writer or activist this has meant that he has had to grapple with the problems of identity whilst doing battle with the forces of oppression. Valentine's arguments have implications for the Australian education scene.

IMPLICATIONS FOR AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION

As educators charged with the education of all children in a democratic society which professes equality of opportunity, we must ask ourselves what is the reality of education within the schools for Aboriginal children of minority communities? In Valentine's terms do these children receive 'meaningful, quality education?' Figures of achievement for Aboriginal children would indicate that this is not the case. As well there is some evidence that Aboriginal children emerge from their schooling and childhood with inadequate self-concepts which foster manifestations of psychological stress, marginality and self-hate.⁷ In the Australian context we must ask, "What is to be done?"

I fear that by adopting approaches which concentrate too heavily on the 'personality configurations' of the Aboriginal child, we will become so involved with a deficit approach which stresses 'pathological failure' and 'socio-economic disadvantage', that we will overlook the strengths which exist in the child's home community. The capacities for self-awareness and decision-making inherent in Aboriginal communities will remain untapped to the disadvantage of the Aboriginal child at school.

What is needed is an outlook in which the school accommodates the cross-cultural situation in its curriculum and pedagogy so that there is a positive appreciation of the cultural reality of the child's life. If this approach were adopted, the minority's culture would be valued in the school and efforts would be made to match the reality of the child and the educational experiences provided at the school.

In the project at Wreck Bay Village an attempt is being made to develop an Aboriginal Studies Unit in a way that draws upon the capacity for self-awareness and decision-making within the community to the advantage of the Aboriginal children in the school situation. Part of the project is directed to increasing communication between the community and the school, so that the Wreck Bay children who attend Jervis Bay School, will experience some continuity between their home and school life. One of the aims of the Aboriginal Studies Unit is to ensure that what is taught about Aboriginal history and

culture in the school situation is relevant in terms of the Aboriginality of its pupils. Emphasis is on 'cultural synthesis' and continuity, and not 'cultural invasion and manipulation', to use Friere's terms.⁸

The project started with the understanding and consent of the community and it has continued with their full co-operation. There is no other way in which the project could proceed, because its basic premise is community understanding and participation. The principal of the Jervis Bay School, Mr G. Donnelly, understands and supports the development of the Aboriginal Studies Unit.

By hinging the Aboriginal Studies Unit on the Aboriginal community's consent, consensus and co-operation, the Unit escapes Poussaint's criticisms of those Black Studies courses which replicate the pressures of the wider society. By directly involving the Aboriginal community, the project provides the minority group with access to the school in a way which could alter the school so that its educational activities become relevant in terms of the life experience of the Aboriginal child. Because it is the Aboriginal community which is articulating its own values and beliefs, the Unit might replace 'the external viewpoints' of Aboriginality with 'patterns from within', to use Valentine's terminology.

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS UNDERLYING THE CURRICULUM PROJECT

The basic assumptions which underlie the present project are:

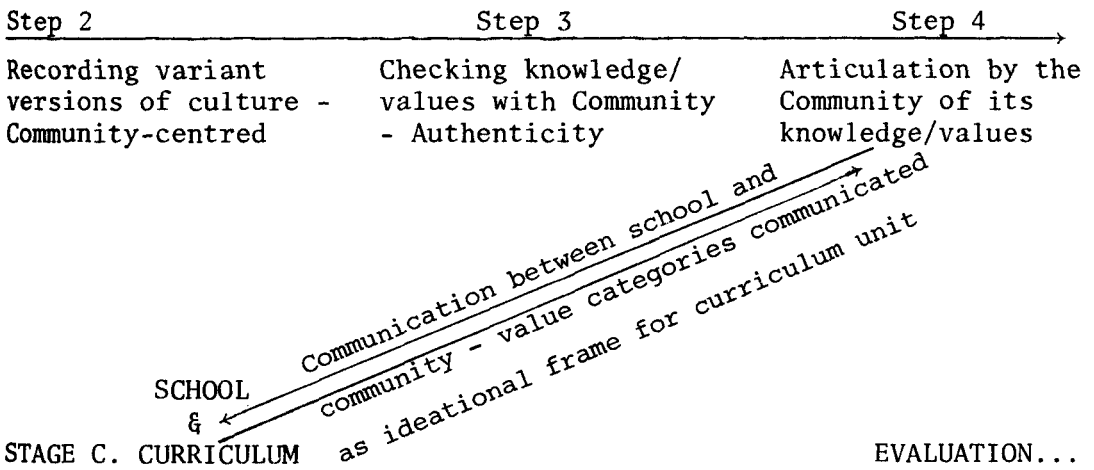
- cultural sub-groups are distinguishable in that they possess and value cultural configurations which differ from those of the dominant culture;
- the schools transmit the cultural patterns of the dominant culture;
- culturally distinctive sub-groups are capable of reflecting upon their socio-cultural history and determining what values they wish to transmit to the younger generation;
- in the transmission of this knowledge and these values, the cultural sub-group has the right to enlist the co-operation of the school;
- in order for the school to educate effectively children of cultural sub-groups, it should realize that the children are in a cross-cultural situation, and that this has educational implications.

THE PROCESS OF CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN CROSS-CULTURAL SITUATIONS

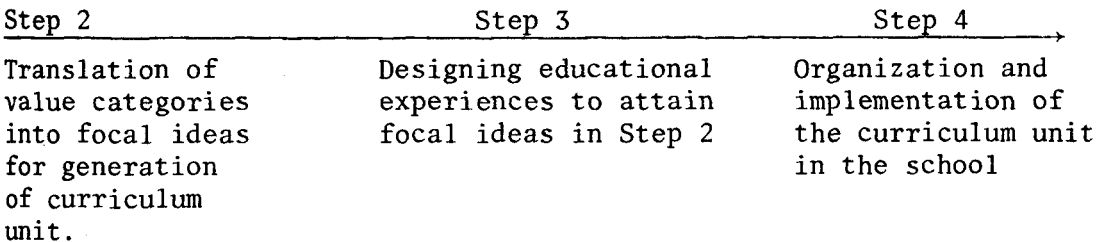
The Aboriginal Studies Unit is being developed in a way which involves both the community and professional educators in the design of high quality curriculum materials. In the project the decisions about what is to be taught rest with the community, while the design of the materials is the responsibility of the Curriculum developer in consultation with the community and teachers. The process can be shown diagrammatically as follows:

STAGE A. Step 1. SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS → The School → Curriculum
→ and Cultural Sub-Group

STAGE B. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION



STAGE C. CURRICULUM EVALUATION...



STAGE A - ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION

In Stage A of the project, an attempt was made to assess the position of Aboriginal minority groups in relation to the structure of the dominant cultural group.

Aboriginal minority groups, when compared with Euro-ethnic sub-groups within the wider Australian society, stand in a particular relationship to the dominant culture. In a sociological perspective, they are sub-groups of a minority culture, while the Euro-ethnic groups are sub-groups of the majority culture. This makes the position of the Aboriginal minority groups more complex *vis-à-vis* the institutions of the dominant majority society. It is for these reasons that new ways need to be found for the view of the Aboriginal minority groups to gain legitimate and constructive expression in the institutions of the dominant culture. In this situation, one must ask, how a sub-group of a minority culture might contribute in a meaningful way to the educational processes which take place largely within the school. My responses to this question centre on considerations of curriculum and pedagogy.

CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY

By adopting Bernstein's definition⁹ that curriculum is what counts as valid knowledge, and that pedagogy is what counts as valid transmission of knowledge, one has a starting point.

Curriculum as knowledge has been discussed in reference to the Social Studies curriculum earlier in this article, but cultural relevance is needed in other areas of the curriculum besides Social Studies. For example, what the child reads in reading texts should be culturally comprehensible to him. This does not mean that the child is never presented with materials outside his immediate experience but it does mean that the child's reality cannot be ignored in the programming of the school. There must be some continuity between the home and school life of the child.

In the area of pedagogy we know that one cannot hold the interest of the child or teach to his potential without reference to his culture.¹⁰ For the Aboriginal child at school this requires that some attempt should be made to

- match the teaching style employed in the school with the learning styles of the child;
- find areas of experience in the minority culture and in the school which are compatible/comparable;
- make learning experiences and the learner's reality coincide;
- develop educational experiences which deal with the affective concerns of the learner.

In the cross-cultural situation teaching should make sense in terms of the child's socio-cultural environment, take note of psychological factors, and contribute to the child's well-being.

Problems immediately emerge for the teacher in a cross-cultural situation - how is he/she to know the psychological and socio-cultural aspects of the minority group culture? It would seem that specialist research skills will be needed and the school should be able to call on these, but even more important than specialized research is the need for a common human understanding to exist between the school and its personnel and the parents of the minority community. For such understanding to be achieved there must be access to the school by the community and contact and communication between the school and the community. The problems concerning curriculum, pedagogy and the institutional school in a cross-cultural situation have to be critically examined if educational responses are to have constructive meaning.

STAGE B - COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

In Step 2, Stage B of the figure on page 37 it is the community that has the responsibility of collecting and recording its own culture, and there are good reasons why this should be so. If culture is defined as "the system of knowledge which underlies the socio-cultural system and which is variously distributed among members of the cultural group"¹¹, then the community is in a unique position to know, and if it so wishes, communicate its culture. Outsiders cannot know in the sense that the community knows. Observation and research techniques will provide only the 'external viewpoint' criticized by Valentine, and the children of the community will be denied their 'patterns of life from within', which are essential, if they (the children) are to develop secure self-concepts and an image of their own identities.

Further, if the decisions about what is significant and valuable rest with the curriculum designer, then it is likely that the categories of knowledge incorporated in the curriculum materials will be those of the curriculum designer, with the biases of his/her own culture. The culture will be told in an 'outsider's' way. For example, in primary school we often discuss communities under the headings - transport, communication, industry ... and these could be completely inappropriate to a different cultural setting. If the definition of the culture is to be authentic, then the community must, in its reflections, define its own values and categories of knowledge.

At present, the people of Wreck Bay are gathering and recalling their history and culture; history is a part of the wider culture concept, and different themes are emerging. There is an emphasis on prehistory, language, kinship, what is called 'the Aboriginal way', and most importantly, the land. As well, the people stress bush and survival skills, the value of tolerant attitudes to others, and sharing within the group. There appears to be an adaptive process at work by which the community accommodates their own experience and knowledge of the wider society.

DISCUSSION OF SOME THEMES EMERGING IN STAGE B OF THE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT - PREHISTORY AND ADAPTATION:

The people of Wreck Bay are aware that in precontact patterns of migration Wreck Bay was a popular site. The people know the situation of, and purpose of, some of the earlier sites in the area. The community states that the pattern of using Wreck Bay as a camp site continued in post contact times, especially when food was scarce, or in 'off' work seasons. There are stories of older residents who sailed from Botany Bay to Wreck Bay in the 1920's because the fishing was reputed to be good and the site was known to the Aboriginal people of La Perouse. Earlier than that, at the turn of the century, Aboriginal families had used the Summercloud site at Wreck Bay as a seasonal camp site, having travelled there from Bateman's Bay in open boats with homemade sails. The pattern of seasonal movement was a precontact pattern and the use of boats can be seen as a post contact adaptation. This knowledge is available from one source only, that is the community, and in one form only, that is an oral tradition. The people have pointed out material relics of the earlier campsites and some prehistoric sites. The sites are known to the community and valued by them as part of their past. Outsiders are unaware of the significance that these sites and stories have for the Aboriginal people of Wreck Bay. That is possibly why a public picnic ground has been built in the area originally cleared by the Aboriginal settlers at the turn of the century.

LANGUAGE

The Wreck Bay people carry in their consciousness knowledge of their original Aboriginal language. That vestiges of the original languages have remained after 150 years of contact and the terrible decimation of the Aboriginal people that took place on the South Coast, points to a cultural survival of some significance and one that is largely unsuspected by the non-Aboriginal population. In 1972 a linguist, Diana Kelloway Eades, worked from existing lexicons,

and with informants from Wreck Bay and other communities, to compile a grammar of the Dhurga and Dharawal languages.¹² In the present project the words recalled by the people contain words unlisted in the grammar. It would appear that the community has a wider knowledge of the original language and that it is being recalled and recorded by their own efforts.

KINSHIP

In traditional Aboriginal society kinship is the essential key. Today, in non-Aboriginal society, kinship has been reduced to the bare essentials of the nuclear family or mother-child relationship. This is not the case in the Wreck Bay community. At Wreck Bay, persons are valued as part of a wider kinship/community group and there is group bonding. Wreck Bay families know their genealogies which go back by word of mouth stories, in some cases, to contact times. Although the people have moved around, they know their origins and family connections and can trace these with a fine accuracy.

THE ABORIGINAL WAY

The Aboriginal way seems to be a description of a consciousness or awareness which differentiates between being Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. The Aboriginal way has something to do with the way one thinks, identifies and acts, and these modes can be discerned by other members of the group. People who are not Aboriginal in their physical features, are nonetheless identified as Aboriginal by the group, because they think and behave in what the group sees as distinctly Aboriginal ways. Identification as Aboriginal is highly valued by the community, and it is probably this identification which has made the community so cohesive in relation to the outside groups with which the community has dealings.

THE LAND

That the land is valued, is evident from the detailed knowledge which the people possess of the area, and the significance that they attach to particular sites. The people look to the land and the sea for spiritual and material support. Many say that they could never leave Wreck Bay, that there is no other place like it, that it is a heaven. The people are deeply aware of the physical beauty of their environment and express their anxieties that others would like to possess this stretch of coastline and so it might be lost to them. The people tell of their struggle to gain rights over the land which they see as being peculiarly theirs.

Linked with their appreciation of the land is a valuing of the materials and products which the land and sea have provided in good and bad times. Survival skills, such as the building of bush shelters from bush timbers and driftwood and flotsam from the sea, the use of bush foods, animal and vegetable, as supplementary elements in their diets, are recalled. The sea is a pervasive element in all conversations. The seasons, the varieties of fish and their habits, the numerous kinds of shells and the beaches on which they are found, the depredations of the spear fishermen on what were ample stocks of fish, are repeatedly mentioned by the people. The ability to survive in an independent way is highly valued in the community and the land and the sea are seen as the people's allies in this survival.

This is a brief outline of a few of the themes that are emerging but these few serve to illustrate the point that the culture at Wreck Bay is, in some respects, contiguous with the Aboriginal past and that it is not static but adaptive. The culture of Wreck Bay has responded in imaginative and inventive ways to the pressures which resulted from white settlement and which in diverse ways exert themselves on the community today. I refer in particular to the pressures which are being placed on the community in relation to land rights and land use. The institutional school could also be seen as a pressure upon the community if it were insensitive to the cultural perspective and heritage of the community.

The knowledge and values which I have outlined above could be overlooked, if the community did not define themes and values, or if other classificatory systems were imposed. The children of the community, as well as the children of the wider community, have a right to an understanding of the historic and cultural perspective of the Wreck Bay community.

AUTHENTICATION AND ARTICULATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND VALUES BY THE COMMUNITY

In Step 3, Stage B of the design, the themes and values which have emerged will be checked with the community, and measured against their perceptions, to ensure consensus and authenticity. In this step, the community decides what values and knowledge are to be passed on to the younger generation in the school situation, and what are to be shared with the wider population. This step has not been reached in the present project but it is envisaged that it will be a point at which discussion will take place at community level until consensus is reached. In this process the community becomes aware

of the role of the school as an agent of cultural transmission, and the community acts to ensure some cultural continuity for its children in the school environment.

In Step 4, the community articulates the values and knowledge which it has decided are valuable. In traditional terminology one could say that the community states its objectives in this area of the curriculum. I dislike the term 'objective' in relation to the transmission of a living culture, and so for this project I have substituted the term 'value category',¹³ which is meant to emphasize the present, as opposed to future quality implied in 'objective', and also to emphasize the organic growing quality which the child should experience in the process of cultural transmission.

Step 4 is a very delicate area of the design because it is the beginning of a period of communication and co-operation between school and community. There is an interflow as the culture expressed by the community becomes the focal points for the generation of curriculum materials for use in school. This process is indicated by the two diagonal arrows on the figure on page 37.

STAGE C - THE DEVELOPMENT, PRODUCTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CURRICULUM MATERIALS

The development, production and implementation of the curriculum materials are outlined in Stage C of the above mentioned figure.

In Step 2, Stage C, it can be seen that once the value categories are agreed upon and enunciated by the community, it becomes the task of the curriculum developer, in consultation with the school and the community, to design appropriate educational experiences. The community gives the value categories but the translation of the value categories into educational materials is the task of the developer and school. The first task of the curriculum developer is to work out focal points of the curriculum unit which are generated by the 'value categories' of the community. This is where I see the strength of the design, whereby one is able both to root the curriculum materials in the culture of the minority group and to go some way towards satisfying the standards of good pedagogy.

In Step 3, Stage C, the curriculum developer is concerned with developing educational experiences around the focal points reached in Step 2. Here the curriculum developer will have to consider many factors - the age group of the children, cognitive, affective and cultural factors which influence learning, designing

materials of a shape which is appropriate to the knowledge/values enunciated by the community, social interaction in the classroom, appropriate teaching strategies and so on. The materials must interest and motivate pupils, be attractive and functional, and be acceptable to the teachers. For example, if the ability to survive in a bush environment were a value expressed by the community, the curriculum developer would need to design an educational experience which transmitted this value in a way which matched the level of development of the children, and was acceptable to teachers and the communities, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. Such a learning activity might be the design of a bush trek or camp in the geographic location of Wreck Bay, and with the co-operation of the community.

In Step 4, Stage C, the curriculum unit is implemented in the school situation. Implementation of the materials is largely the role of the teachers, although it is envisaged that with this unit, the teachers will call upon resource persons within the community.

Implementation involves trialling and modification of the materials. At this step it is essential to have the support of the teachers and the school. Consultation with teachers would have been commenced earlier in Stage C and should be continuous. The role of the developer should diminish in Step 4, as the school learns and comes to an understanding of the materials and their meaning. This period provides an opportunity for some members of the community to gain a greater understanding of the functioning of the school as an institution, and the school to refine its understanding of the Aboriginal community and its ways.

Stage C is not a cut-off point for the community's contribution, although at this stage, some responsibility must pass from the community to the designer and school. The designer has a responsibility to ensure that communication between the school, the developer and the community, is maintained throughout the design and production of the materials. The materials can be implemented only with the knowledge and the consent of the community and with the co-operation of the teachers.

In our project we are completing Stage B and should pass to Stage C in Term 1, 1979, thus comments on Stage C are tentative.

CONCLUSION

This project provides a means by which the school can learn more about the community, its ways and values. At the same time,

the community can, by their interaction with the school, gain a greater understanding of the school as an institution, and of its educational processes. The process is one of mutual learnings, not one of being told or telling.

The content of the curriculum unit as it is being developed, will be relevant to the Wreck Bay community, and of use in Jervis Bay school. It could also be used in other local schools if the Wreck Bay community thought this were a good idea. Although the content is limited to a local area, the model of curriculum design could be used in other cross-cultural situations, either at the instigation of the school, or of the community. The only prerequisites for use of this model are the understanding that community consent and participation are an essential factor, and the awareness by teachers that they are practising in a cross-cultural situation, and that this requires a willingness by them to reach out to the minority community involved.

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