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CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS ABORIGINES: AN INTERIM REPORT*

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The proliferation of Aboriginal Studies, as a formal component of teacher education programs, has been variously met with praise and criticism by educators. The financial, educative and ethical aspects of this proliferation have caused such bodies as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (AIAS) to look closely at the outcomes of such courses. The variability of stated objectives, coupled with a reluctance by individual institutions to evaluate their own courses, has prevented any overall evaluation from a cognitive stance. Implicit in each course, however, are affective aims (sometimes wishes) that students will become more tolerant, sympathetic or positive in their attitudes towards Aborigines and, that those attitudes will be maintained and conveyed to the pupils they teach. Whether or not these are actual outcomes of Aboriginal Studies courses is a question that was chosen for exploration by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, in a three-year project located at Armidale College of Advanced Education.

As the study is essentially a longitudinal one, the focus of this paper is on the attitudes towards Aborigines of 100 primary children aged from six to nine years. Where it is relevant, the relationship between the teachers' and pupils' attitudes is discussed but in general, only the methodology of testing teacher attitudes is reported, as it is too early to say whether or not there is a causal relationship and whether or not it can be demonstrated. However, it is already apparent that the use, misuse or neglect of affective strategies in an Aboriginal Studies course affects both teachers' and pupils' attitudes towards Aborigines. This factor similarly affects the teacher's predisposition, and competency, to teach about Aborigines in the classroom.

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There would be few issues related to social change as significant as multiculturalism, with its concomitant policies affecting education. The issue is not so much about whether we have a multi-cultural society (we obviously do in a population-statistic sense) but the quality and form of it to be promoted in the future. Definitionally and indeed philosophically, the debate focuses on cultural pluralism versus cultural diversity. The former implies a static and separatist notion of groups co-existing; the latter implies a fluid notion of groups interacting. Both viewpoints have serious implications for educational practice and for a secure personal identity. Falk argues that unless we plan for a multi-cultural society with shared core-values, as well as diversity, we risk an outcome of individuals with insecure personal identities (Falk, p.4). Further, that the distinction between personal and ethnic identity is in danger of being lost and the individual in danger of becoming a stereotype (Falk, p.5). Up until now, I would submit that we have focused on the encouragement of pluralism at the expense of an integrative set of values, or diversity within consensus. This is manifested by the existence within our education systems, of separate units of Aboriginal or Ethnic Studies rather than an integrated, multi-cultural emphasis within all subjects. Not only does this separatist structure influence student-teacher attitudes towards a particular ethnic group, it also affects their predisposition to teach about a particular group and the methodology they employ. Evidence for these, and other, effects will be given in this paper.

A.I.A.S. RESEARCH PROJECT

Originally, the Race Relations Project was ambitiously conceived as a national study into the *affective* aims, effects and outcomes of Aboriginal Studies courses for student-teachers. More realistically, the researcher and her four advisers (Professors Watts, Walker, Tatz and Dr Mulquiney) decided to limit the exploration to three representative *types* of Aboriginal Studies course: a compulsory one-semester unit (Rural C.A.E.); an elective two-semester unit (Urban CAE); and an elective six-semester major study (Metropolitan CAE). For a variety of reasons, the Metropolitan CAE withdrew from the project shortly after attitude testing had commenced. Despite this unforeseen occurrence, the two types of course are fairly representative of all others in organization, although they obviously differ in specific content and duration.

In order to evaluate attitude change and attitude maintenance, as well as the impact of the teachers' attitudes on those of

their pupils, a variety of techniques were employed.* Student-teachers were tested before and after their Aboriginal Studies course, as well as after being in their teaching placements for twelve months. Control groups were used for all formal testing. Supplementary information was gained through participant-observation, interviews and surveys. Ten student-teachers from Rural CAE, who indicated a positive attitude change, were randomly selected for in-depth study in 1978, twelve months after they had commenced teaching. Ten randomly selected pupils, aged from six to nine years, from each of their classes, were interviewed about their attitudes towards Aborigines, as well as being observed in the classroom and playground. A projective technique was used in the pupil interviews, where they had to react to a series of pictures depicting Aborigines and non-Aborigines in various situations. This proved to be the most useful method of eliciting pupil attitudes towards Aborigines. In summary, attitudes were tapped from three dimensions:

<u>Attitude</u>	<u>Teacher Technique</u>	<u>Pupil Technique</u>
Ideal View (Covert)	Attitude Test	Projection Test
Perceptive View (Covert)	Interviews Surveys	Interviews
Actual View (Overt)	Observations	Observations

The *ideal* and *perceptive* viewpoints may or may not be related to actual behaviour but fairly definitely represent the 'should' aspect of attitude; the *actual* viewpoint is the behaviour observed as it relates to Aborigines.

An *intensive* study rather than an *extensive* study was chosen at this juncture because of time, personnel and methodological constraints. As the study is essentially a longitudinal one, data from the formal testing of teacher attitudes are still being analyzed. The final report will be available from the A.I.A.S early next year and should highlight intended and unintended outcomes of Aboriginal Studies courses; the main contributing effects of a course in Aboriginal Studies, on negative, neutral and positive attitudes; whether or not these attitudes are maintained or changed;

* A full description of the research design, methodology and techniques employed will be available in a report to the AIAS early next year.

the impact the teacher has had on his/her pupils' attitudes, and suggestions for modification of Aboriginal Studies courses.

TEACHER ATTITUDES

Although detailed results of teacher attitudes will not be available until early 1980, it is already apparent that the use, misuse, or neglect of affective strategies affects both teacher and pupil attitudes towards Aborigines. This factor similarly affects the teacher's predisposition, and competency, to teach about Aborigines in the classroom.

Evidence for this may be seen in the following representative comments made by student-teachers from Rural CAE, after their course in Aboriginal Studies in 1977:

I would have preferred more methods on the teaching of Aboriginal Studies.

The attitude of the opening lecturers was appalling - they assumed we were racists.

I would have preferred a multi-cultural unit - most of us will be teaching in metropolitan areas next year.

In the last semester of our course we desperately need practical experiences and techniques.

I resent being called a racist for two hours per week over the semester.

How can we be expected to be tolerant to Aborigines when no tolerance, understanding or individualisation was applied to us?

The course was too intellectual. We never got down to discussing, in any real depth, the real problems of prejudice. People who I know are prejudiced seemed unable to air their views - probably scared of failing.

I resent Aboriginal Studies being compulsory under its present organisation and conduction - what about other ethnic groups?

I gained more from Aboriginal guest lecturers in a tutorial situation than a lecture.

We need more Aboriginal tutors, not just one.

Comments:

These fairly hostile comments were judged, from participant-observations by the researcher, to be legitimate grievances. Twelve months later, their surveyed evaluation of the same course had modified in intensity although not in content. The course was largely information-based and, as Lippmann (1973) states, information alone will not change attitudes although it may create an awareness upon which attitude-change strategies may be built. People will tend to accept information which fits in with their existing attitude structure and reject that which doesn't. Similarly, to try and alter an individual's attitude by direct instruction is to imply that he/she is wrong (or the significant others from whom the information was originally learnt are wrong) and thus is interpreted, unconsciously or consciously, as an attack (Brown, 1975). Not only were these students attacked, they were stereotyped as white racists, which they not unnaturally resented. The course suffered from a conflict between overt aims and covert practices. In other words, the 'hidden curriculum' was not so hidden to the students and the course, and many of its lecturers, lost credibility. Guilt, I would maintain, is not a healthy motivator for positive action or change. Apart from any ethical debate it is dysfunctional in the long-term: people grow tired and resentful of being labelled guilty and will often backlash onto the very group they felt guilty about.

The positive aspects of this course, and there were many, included a favourable evaluation of Aboriginal participation and an appreciation of several individual tutors who attempted to defuse the 'we/them' confrontation experienced in lectures.

In contrast, Urban CAE focused, in its equivalent unit, on causal/historical factors in race-relations; had a credible coordinator who was an Aborigine; and the lecturers were facilitators and resource-persons rather than instructors. These factors are thought to lead to positive attitude change, and indeed student-teacher comments from Urban CAE reflected this. However, even students from this CAE were critical of the lack of practical strategies relating to positive inter-group issues.

Of course, a major factor, quite apart from any organisational deficiencies, influencing the differential responses of students from Rural and Urban CAE's, was that the former was a compulsory unit and the latter an elective. Both groups of students, however, were in consensus that priority should be given to a multi-cultural emphasis in *all* their teacher education units and, failing

this, a multi-cultural major, including Aboriginal Studies, in lieu of the present elective offerings.

CHILDREN'S ATTITUDE DEVELOPMENT

Children are often romantically ascribed with being prejudice-free and blinkered about colour. Yet children are socialized from birth to view their worlds in certain ways and, depending on personality factors and their exposure to a variety of situations, may tend towards xenophobia when very young.

To call this process a matter of "transmission" is to imply a misleading simplicity, directness and mechanical handing-over (or teaching). The process is perhaps less a matter of *transmission* than *regeneration*. This is to say that there begins early and proceeds gradually, in each individual, a process much more complex than the sheer *learning* of someone else's attitudes. It is rather that each individual *generates* his own attitudes, out of the personal, social and cultural materials which happen to be his. In view of the fact that the variety of such materials is finite...our individuals tend to get hold of rather similar materials and hence eventually generate rather similar attitudes. (Goodman, p.246)

This regeneration, rather than transmission, was demonstrated time and time again during fieldwork on children's attitudes. The 100 children studied varied in many attitudinal respects, but were consistent in their idiosyncratic versions of the same information on Aborigines, given by the same teacher. Goodman (p.252) cites three stages of attitude development: *awareness*, where skin colour predominates as a focus; *orientation*, or incipient attitude, "the learning and synthesizing of race-related words, concepts and values"; and *true attitudes*. In other words, there is a developmental sequence associated with the formation of attitudes that roughly corresponds with ages $2\frac{1}{2}$ to $3\frac{1}{2}$; 4 to 7; 7 plus. The vast majority of children studied in my project were at the orientation or incipient attitude stage. One high school has been included in the project at this stage, where thirteen and fourteen year old pupils are being studied before and after a unit on Aboriginal Studies. Pre-test results indicate that they hold true attitudes and, as Trager and Radke-Yarrow (1952, p.346) found with seven year olds:

Their concepts and feelings about race frequently include adult distinctions of status, ability, character, occupation and economic circumstances... Among the older children stereo-typing and expressions of hostility are more frequent and attitudes are more crystallized than among the younger children.

Similarly, evidence was found for Allport's conclusion that:

By about age twelve...verbal rejection (accompanied by behavioral acceptance), gives way to behavioral rejection (accompanied by verbal acceptance).

(Allport, 1973, p.309)

This was not the case for high school pupils, although the reverse was certainly true for younger children. Of twenty high school pupils, at least a quarter engaged in verbal and behavioural rejection.

CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES (Preliminary results of 100 children aged from 6-9 years)

Detailed analysis of children's attitude-responses is not yet finalised, but several broad categories have emerged which are worth reporting. To recapitulate, children were given structured interviews about their knowledge of, contact with, and attitudes towards Aborigines. It is important to note that all teachers had either taught an Aboriginal Studies unit, taught a Multi-cultural unit which included Aborigines, or were in the process of teaching about Aborigines.

Category 1: Knowledge

- Q. Who were the first people to live in Australia?
- A. The majority of pupils, including the secondary ones, responded - "Captain Cook", "the convicts", or "white people". When I probed and asked if there were any people here when Captain Cook arrived, most said "No"; then "Oh yes, Aborigines", and the remainder affirmed my question when I asked if Aborigines were here when Captain Cook arrived.
- Q. What do you know about Aborigines?
- A. Most children displayed a superficial knowledge in terms of tradition-directed societies, almost no stated knowledge

of de-tribalised societies, and many misconceptions:

"Aborigines killed Captain Cook."

"Aborigines were vicious because they hunted their own food and didn't want anyone on their land."

"They drink blood."

There was knowledge of the usual paraphernalia - spears, witchetty grubs, boomerangs, nakedness, humpies, etc.

There was very little knowledge revealed of more abstract cultural identifiers such as kinship systems, myths and legends, or religion, although most of the children had been exposed to some of this knowledge by their classroom teacher. In other words, their knowledge responses were focused either on the exotic or popularised/commercialised aspects of Aboriginal life-styles. In many cases, there seemed to be a confusion in the children's minds between historical and contemporary information. A fairly dramatic television program on contemporary tradition-directed Aborigines was seen by many children at the time of fieldwork. This accounted for many lurid responses about Aborigines.

Category 2: Similarities and Differences

- Q. Are there people living in Australia who are different to you? In what ways are they different?
- A. Children were able, for the most part, to identify many ethnic groups and elaborated on differences in terms of language, dress, food, customs, etc., but without making any value-judgments as to whether these people were better or worse than self. The overall attitude was one of equal but different. The exception to this, with older children - particularly high school pupils - were Vietnamese refugees. These people were constantly criticized for being "dole bludgers", "causing unemployment" and being responsible for most social welfare costs.
- Q. Would it be better if we were all the same as each other?
- A. Most children responded "No" to this question, but the majority of their reasons - particularly in younger children - were bizarre:

"If we were all the same, we wouldn't be able to tell bad people from good ones", "...bank robbers from nice people".

Further probing revealed that this was not always a question of simple criminal identification after the crime had been committed, but of important facial identifiers before the crime was committed. Criminal-types looked "mean", "nasty", "ugly", or "rough". A few older pupils stated that "it would be boring if we all looked the same", "we wouldn't be able to learn from each other" and so forth.

Q. Are Aborigines the same or different to you?

A. The majority of children said "they're the same as us, but they've got a different skin colour." Most of the children added hastily that "skin colour doesn't matter, it doesn't make any difference." Secondary pupils' responses were fairly elaborate and revealed many generalisations about differences: "Aborigines are dole bludgers...lazy...rough...violent..." Slightly younger children also identified behavioural differences, but in a more sympathetic light: "Aborigines aren't very well-off...live in poorer houses...don't get good jobs." Whereas younger children again, only identified skin colour as a difference or occasionally added contrasts in terms of tradition-directed lifestyles. It was in this area that I found the most discrepancies between *ideal*, *perceptive* and *actual* views.

Category 3: Skin Colour

Q. Would it be better if we all had the same skin colour?

A. The majority of children said "yes".

Q. Would it be better if we all had dark-brown skin?

A. The responses were sometimes amusing, mostly contradictory to previous statements, sometimes bewildering and mostly negative:

"No, because you wouldn't be able to get a suntan - if you have long hairs you can't go brown."

"Colour doesn't matter but...I'd rather be white."

"No, it's better to be white because you can earn your tan." (Many children said this.)

The last response is very curious and further probing revealed no clarification whatsoever. A number of explanations spring to mind, but they are only suppositions. Is it an example of the Protestant work ethic? Aborigines don't earn their tan so therefore it's not worth having? Is it the difference between ascribed and achieved status - the depth of summer tan does elicit comments of approval and admiration. The more likely explanation was provided by an example in Goodman (1973), where a teacher, in response to a question, "Why are some people dark-skinned?" said:

Melanin can grow in your skin, and make it look brown, because the sun has been shining on you. You have only a little of it in your skin without the help of the sun. But some people...don't need the help of the sun. Their melanin just grows in their skin naturally. (Goodman, p.220)

It is not inconceivable that the pupils in this study were told, in response to a similar question, that "you have to earn your suntan, Aborigines don't."

Children were aware that others (not themselves!) were nasty to children because of skin colour and, after probing, explained why:

"because they're dirty"

"because they're different"

"because they bite" (they rise to the bait)

"because they're jealous of their tan"

"they're jealous because Aborigines are brighter than them" (in terms of hunting, survival and so on).

Category 4: Friendship

Most children wouldn't mind Aborigines as friends, to stay at their house but not to stay in an Aborigine's home:

"they'd teach me how to hunt"

"He'd show me how to...throw a spear...cook snakes...
dance a corroboree...live in the desert."

Again, the responses indicate a stereotypic notion of Aborigines, based on historical more than contemporary lifestyles. Only one girl, an eight-year-old Indian girl, gave a positive response, but one indicating that she was a victim of prejudice:

"Yes. Aborigines would like me because I've got a dark skin too and we wouldn't make fun of each other's skin."

This girl elaborated on the name-calling in her school. "Chocolate drop" was a favourite but she is by no means cowed and retaliates with "Snowflake". Further probing indicated that names were hurtful because of what people were really trying to say. In other words, she knew the difference between words and meaning. She was one of the few that said other children were jealous of people with tanned skin.

Some children did say that name-calling didn't mean anything, "all kids get teased about something". Yet, other children - particularly the victims of skin colour teasing - feel that there is a difference: "even if you're fat they still play with you". At certain schools, with younger children, observation revealed no behavioural discrimination in terms of segregated friendships although, those children who were most predisposed to teasing others about skin colour did not play or sit together. With older children, and most markedly in the high school, behavioural discrimination and segregation was very obvious in classrooms and playgrounds, although not in sport.

Category 5: Being Aborigines

Q. Would you like to be an Aborigine?

A. Responses were generally negative, although often realistic in terms of the status of colour in their own society:

"I want to get a good job."

"I like being me."

"I like being white...because I'm used to it...because I don't like being teased...my friends wouldn't like me..."

"I wouldn't mind, but I wouldn't like to live like them." (naked, hunting food, have no toys, being poor, living in a humpie).

"Black is dirty. I like being clean."

"I like to earn my suntan."

Again, the contrast between their responses on questions to do with differences and similarities differed markedly from their responses on this question. The previous questions related to ideals, with a comfortable social distance between 'us' and 'them', marked by a magnanimous ideology of the equality of differences. The latter questions related to actual behaviour, with close social proximity between 'us' and 'them', and was marked by an awareness of what it is like being an Aborigine in today's society.

Projective Technique

Finally, children were shown a variety of pictures, black and white and coloured, depicting Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in a variety of situations. I asked them to tell me about the picture first, and then posed specific questions. Responses were as follows:

- . All white children could identify Aborigines.
- . Most children ascribed positive values to the non-Aboriginal children. They were brighter, more popular, lived in better houses, were preferred by their teachers. Most children said they would like to be friends with the Aborigines in the picture, again for stereotypic reasons, and yet said that the non-Aborigines would be more popular at school because "there are more whites than blacks at school."
- . There were a few extreme reactions like "Yuk, they're black", "he looks scary, wierd" (about an Aboriginal boy participating in a tribal dance).
- . The high school was the only one with Aboriginal pupils in the classes studied. Of these, five were included in the study but not one identified Aborigines as such in the pictures. Whereas white children would say "There are two

Aborigines and one white in the picture", the Aborigines would say, "There are three children in the picture."

Goodman (p.260) observed that Negro children failed to identify correctly with Negro pictures and dolls, "not because they *are* unaware of their own racial identity, but precisely because they *are* aware and are rejecting that identity." This appears to be an assumption which may or may not be partly or fully correct. In the case of Aborigines at least, it may also be partly true that their cultural identity is viewed as quite separate from their personal identity.

While it is apparent that minority-group children are 'out-group' oriented compared with the 'in-group' orientation of white children (Goodman, p.256), and while it is demonstrably true that this has a negative effect on self-concept (Falk, 1978), the 'solution' is often crass and may lead to further alienation from cultural identity and inter-group harmony. This was vividly demonstrated in interviews with, and observations of, Aboriginal children. The secondary school, attended by the five Aboriginal pupils, had mounted an Aboriginal Studies course as a solution to the poor inter-group relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children. Observation of one lesson on Aboriginal language revealed that the non-Aboriginal children participated eagerly compared with the Aboriginal children, who were sitting at the back of the room reading travel brochures on Asia.

Whatever the explanation, educators have to be particularly sensitive about 'publicly' ascribing cultural identity and even more cautious about labelling the personal identity of the child in terms of their ethnic group. This eagerness, to redress the former grievance of 'we' denying 'them' their ethnicity by 'we' insisting that 'they' are their ethnic identity, could result in a crisis of personal identity for children. Both attempts are invidious because persons other than self are doing the defining. The effect, on other children, of the teacher thus categorizing individuals is likely to be an implicit encouragement to develop stereotypic responses to those same individuals.

Teachers' Effects on Pupils' Attitudes

Most children in the study indicated that their teachers liked Aborigines. Their reasons were mostly based on what their teachers had said about Aborigines:

"Ms.--- says we shouldn't say nasty things about people just because they're different."

"Mr. --- says we're all the same as each other underneath."

"Mrs. --- says we shouldn't tease people about their skin colour."

These explanations are related to negative aspects: a solution for a symptom of children's behaviour. In no case did a child explain their teacher's attitude in terms of a positive affirmation of Aboriginal cultural identity or values or life-style.

On the other hand, even though children said their teachers liked Aborigines, most children thought their teacher would prefer white children because "they'd do better at school work. they're cleaner...they're tidier..." There were exceptions to this generalized response, particularly from children who were exposed to a multi-cultural strand in social science.

IMPLICATIONS

Compared with teachers who had indicated a negative attitude change, as revealed from survey responses, those teachers who indicated a positive attitude change were far more likely to have taught something about Aborigines. Overwhelmingly, however, these teachers taught about tradition-directed societies, with no emphasis on causal relationships, and with minimal emphasis on affective strategies like fishbowling, socio-drama, simulation games and so on. In addition, teachers indicated a desire for in-service education on classroom methodology in particular, as it relates to the teaching of Aboriginal Studies, and multi-culturalism in general. Most teachers also stated that they felt more comfortable about teaching an historical, tradition-directed unit on Aborigines. They did not feel comfortable teaching about affective issues or contemporary Aboriginal societies. It was apparent that teachers are conveying information which is not only compartmentalized in children's minds but is relegated to the area labelled 'exotic', with little or no relevance to themselves as developing individuals. Partly because children, and indeed adults, selectively perceive the information that fits in with their existing cognitive and affective framework, and partly because the teacher is not evaluating this knowledge, children are losing some stereotypes but just as rapidly gaining others.

To return to Falk's argument, referred to at the beginning of this paper :

It is not only the personal identity of each member of minority groups that is in danger in a poly-ethnic society. Foreigners pose a threat to the self-image of a member of the dominant group...Re-socialization of the dominant group is demanded by multi-culturalism, and this demand may shake the very foundations of primary socialization. A new me, a new identity must grow, and it may not be consistent with my previous self. (Falk, 1978, p.13)

I see very little evidence of re-socialization through Aboriginal Studies, whether it be at the tertiary, secondary or primary level of education. On the contrary, what I do see is an unexpected, or unplanned, outcome whereby the child is encouraged to see his/her personal identity in terms of ethnic identity - specifically in terms of labelling the 'out-group' - and is unwittingly part of a social change process that will foster cultural diversity. Children are not being encouraged to equally appreciate "the values of diverse cultures and denigrate none, so that there could be continuity in synthesis and resynthesis of the identities of pupils" (Falk, p.14), nor is there any evidence in the education system of planning for "shared values expressed in a 'stable symbolic canopy' for the whole society" (Falk, p.14), except where the status quo is maintained through forced compliance.

Skin colour is extremely important to young children as an identifier of difference. There appears to be, in the collective responses of children, support for Goodman's developmental sequence as it applies to attitude development. Further to her argument, I would hypothesise that the initial reaction to skin colour difference, whether it be positive or negative, determines future attitudes and becomes the focus around which future information is added. Younger children with negative predispositions would say "I don't want to be an Aborigine because they're black", whereas older children would say "I don't want to be an Aborigine because they live in poor houses...are lazy...are dole-bludgers...are dumb" and so on. Older children mention skin-colour infrequently as an explanation of difference, they are almost embarrassed about it and yet I suspect an evaluative judgment about skin-colour is deeply embedded in their attitude. It is possible that children's initial reactions to colour difference becomes the central core around which attitudes are built. In fact, in older students, the initial colour prejudice may be lost in complex layers of rationalization about their feelings towards Aborigines. If this 'core' is not explored, and this means using affective strategies, then attitude-change, indeed social change, is hardly likely as an outcome of Aboriginal Studies.

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