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DEVELOPING DIALOGUE BETWEEN TEACHING-TEAM MEMBERS IN BILINGUAL/BICULTURAL CLASSROOMS

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A Bilingual Early Childhood Conference held in the Northern Territory at Batchelor Education Village in August 1980, provided the content and emphasis of this paper. In attendance at the conference were Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members of teaching teams from bilingual schools of Central Australia and the Top End of the Northern Territory.

The conference aimed at providing an opportunity for dialogue to occur between team members, to assist them in further understanding the importance of two-way communication, and to raise their conscious level of thinking towards understanding the roles each should play within a bilingual classroom setting.

The team-teaching approach demands co-operation and a close working relationship between both team members. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers plan together for each day of teaching and share class materials and ideas. Each teacher must be willing to be a leader at times and a follower at other times, and there must be constant discussion about the aims of their programs and their subsequent implementation. Groups of children normally rotate between the members of the team for different lessons, which are presented in the mother tongue language of the teacher in 'face to face' contact with the children.

THE ABORIGINAL TEACHER (referred to as 'teacher'¹ rather than 'assistant') may or may not be fully teacher-trained, but his/her role is clearly no longer one of a clerical aide, but one of a

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¹ 'Aboriginal teacher' is the title of reference often used for assistant teachers, regardless of the years of training completed or commenced. The term '*teacher*' is considered preferable to 'assistant', as confusion in terminology between the old term of 'aide' and the later term of 'assistant' still occurs. The duties of the assistant teacher are no longer of a clerical nature, as were those of the teacher aides. Assistant teachers are involved in 'face to face' contact with children.

teacher involved in 'face to face' contact with the children in vernacular instruction. Vernacular instruction can cover a variety of subject areas, including Oral Vernacular, Reading, Writing, Environmental Science, Social and Cultural Studies, Local History, Art/Craft, Health, Music and Dance. It must be pointed out that instruction in the vernacular is often based on the Aboriginal world view and is delivered by means of Aboriginal teaching styles where this approach is efficient in achieving the purposes of each subject area.

Aboriginal teachers have for a long time been mimicking the performance of the non-Aboriginal teacher and playing the teacher's role of an urban school setting. As a result, requesting Aboriginal staff to use Aboriginal teaching styles has sometimes caused confusion in their minds. This confusion has arisen because it is not at first easy to see how Aboriginal styles of learning - by doing, by observation, by imitation and by trial and error - can effectively be used to achieve outcomes in school content.

To achieve educational goals by taking the approach that Aboriginal learning styles should be utilized whenever educationally sound in the classroom, constant communication and dialogue must occur between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal team members. They need constantly to review their roles and objectives, and to talk about the 'why' of learning, to raise the conscious level of learning. They need to examine not only the content of their programs for their relevance, but to examine learning processes that learners experience during activity times. This is important because all educational experiences involve both content and learning processes.

It has been pointed out by Harris, S. (1977) that traditional Aboriginal learning was achieved through personal trial and error (rather than verbal instruction), through real life performance, (rather than through practice in simulated settings), through mastery of context-specific skills (rather than through abstract, context-free principles). It further occurred through orientation to persons (rather than to information, with little time orientation to the future).

However, the demands of present-day Western European society require of children that by Years 3 or 4 they go beyond the basic learning process such as observation, imitation, identification, classification, and discrimination to higher order process skills of hypothesizing, analysing and evaluation. Our society also aims for the development of the child's independence in intellectual processing. The implication, therefore, is that while Aboriginal learning styles are a very good starting point for school learning, teachers must progressively add more Western-type school learning processes.

Members of a bilingual/bicultural teaching team need to take time to discuss the differences in learning processes that exist between the two cultures, and to assess each system for its value and importance in the implementation of their class program.

THE NON-ABORIGINAL TEACHER has a dual role to play within the classroom. On one hand he/she is an instructor in the English language subjects and in European world view. Depending on the grade level of the students, the English language instruction may be in the following subject areas: Oral English, Reading, Writing, Mathematics, Environmental Science, Social and Cultural Studies, Local History, Health, Home Economics, Technical Training, Art/Craft, Music, Drama and Sport.

More importantly, the non-Aboriginal teacher functions as a *facilitator*, that is, a person who assists the Aboriginal teacher achieve goals, and who helps in the organization and planning of effective content material and teaching approaches suitable to the realities of the particular community. The facilitator's role is more prominent (in contrast to the straight teaching role) in Early Childhood classes where the majority of instruction occurs in the vernacular.

Aboriginal teachers need to be encouraged to become more consciously aware of the purpose of communication and the processes of such communication in a classroom situation. Likewise non-Aboriginal teachers need to more fully understand Aboriginal communication processes and work with the Aboriginal teachers to make the communication more meaningful.

This communication link can only occur if members of the team are conscious of the differences between Aboriginal knowledge and Western European knowledge and work towards the integration of these traditions of knowledge and the consequent transferral of these to the classroom situation. The ideal times for two-way communication to occur between teachers are during teacher training and lesson preparation times. Lessons need to be carefully prepared, recorded in a suitable form for Aboriginal teachers to comprehend, and evaluated for success or problem areas. Opportunities for after-school and weekend trips involving gathering, collecting, hunting, digging, fishing and eating with Aboriginal teachers and their families should be encouraged and fostered. At these times non-Aboriginal teachers can observe and experience Aboriginal teaching/learning styles, and gain further knowledge of Aboriginal culture. These opportunities assist in developing close rapport between teachers outside the school situation.

The non-Aboriginal teacher, during discussion and dialogue situations, must act as a facilitator. The facilitator needs to have the following abilities:

1. The ability to guide the Aboriginal teacher to share knowledge of the Aboriginal world view and teaching styles which are applicable to the classroom situation and to lesson programming. (In most cases restricted or unrestricted status of Aboriginal knowledge is a matter for the Aboriginal teachers to investigate, but it has been found that there is ample scope in the vast body of relatively unrestricted [Aboriginal] knowledge to provide sufficient basis for the intellectual development of Aboriginal children. (Harris, J., 1979)
2. Ability to assist the Aboriginal teacher in more fully understanding the European world view and teaching styles, emphasizing the importance of the language of instruction in mirroring the source of the cultural knowledge.
3. Ability to guide the Aboriginal teacher to become less dependent on the qualified team member and more capable of making her own decisions, to avoid threat of collapse when the non-Aboriginal person withdraws from the community. "To this end Aboriginal teachers must be actively involved in inservice activities, and [in] the documentation of local knowledge and the development teaching materials." (Davis, S., 1980)

At the Bilingual Early Childhood Conference referred to in the paper, Goodluck¹ led participants in activities which helped them see what organized team-teaching is trying to achieve. Team members were involved in activities which sought to raise their consciousness about their role within the bilingual program. It further sought to examine the conceptual development of Aboriginal children who enter school with a conceptual view of the world based on that of their parents and of their local physical and social environment.

The most stimulating conference sessions involved participants in activities that stressed the importance of two-way communication between members of the bilingual team. Participants experienced failure in simulated one-way communication activities and experienced success in two-way communication activities. Frustration and exasperation felt during one-way communication activities gave way to

¹ The Rev. Jack Goodluck, Coordinator of Development Studies, Nungalinga College, Darwin, N.T. - Conference leader at the Bilingual Early Childhood Conference.

confidence and achievement when communication on a two-way level was prominent. The following is a description of these simulated one-way and two-way communication activities.

ACTIVITY 1

One-Way Communicative Process

Participants were requested to choose their school team member as a partner and select a place in either Group 1 or Group 2.

Group 1 were seated at desks, given a piece of paper and pencil and asked to wait until their partners emerged from behind a hidden screen. They were directed to make no verbal or body language contact with their partner when he/she came to direct them in an activity, but were permitted to follow verbal directions.

Group 2 were taken behind the screen where Goodluck began drawing a picture. The drawing developed in stages, and as each stage was completed Group 2 members emerged from behind the screen to direct their partner in constructing the drawing they described.

Without the aid of dialogue between partners the activity proved extremely difficult. The exercise took approximately half an hour; the results of the drawings when finally compared with Goodluck's original drawing, were poor to average. During discussion after the activity, participants stated that they felt frustrated and exasperated by the lack of communication.

ACTIVITY 2

Two-Way Communication Process

Team members changed groups, so that each member had the opportunity to experience both the roles of Group 1 and Group 2.

Group 1 participants seated themselves with paper and pencil awaiting direction from their partners (who were briefed behind the hidden screen). They were permitted in this exercise to communicate with their partner, using dialogue and body language where required, but were not permitted to see the blackboard illustration.

Group 2 participants watched as the second picture was completed. Participants were permitted to describe the scene as a whole to their partner before drawing commenced.

Due to the dialogue and body language that occurred between partners, the results of the second exercise were good to excellent when compared with the original drawing. The activity was completed in approximately ten minutes and participants expressed their feeling of satisfaction and success on completion of the exercise.

A further activity in two-way communication was performed through simulated role-play dialogues where two people played the roles of the non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal teachers involved in lesson preparation for the following school day. These contrived role-play scenarios were set up to demonstrate the right and wrong way of communicating in such situations. Goodluck gave each communication approach a title and described it briefly.

a) *Jugs and Mugs Approach* - This approach presented a lesson preparation session where the non-Aboriginal teacher felt his knowledge superior to that of the Aboriginal teacher, and consequently disallowed the Aboriginal teacher any say at all about the preparation of the lesson. The non-Aboriginal person gave direct instruction and left the scene. The Aboriginal teacher felt hurt and 'useless'.

b) *The Listless Learner Approach* - During this interaction the non-Aboriginal teacher asked one question about lesson preparation of the Aboriginal teacher. When receiving no immediate reply, the non-Aboriginal teacher lit a cigarette and slumped on the floor for the remainder of the planning session. After delayed silence the non-Aboriginal teacher left the scene disgusted. The Aboriginal teacher was left feeling bewildered and wondering what went wrong with the planning session.

c) *The Eyeball to Eyeball Approach* - In this scenario it was clear that the non-Aboriginal teacher had no knowledge of proxemics. He sat so close to the Aboriginal teacher using direct close eye contact and body contact that the Aboriginal teacher felt overwhelmed and so uncomfortable that she was unable to attempt to communicate. Both teachers felt frustrated by the planning session, but the non-Aboriginal teacher remained blissfully ignorant about the reason for communication breakdown.

d) *The 'Do It My Way' Approach* - The approach of the non-Aboriginal teacher commenced with suitable two-way communication, but abruptly ceased as the non-Aboriginal teacher found the whole exercise

to be too time consuming and difficult to handle, so promptly proceeded to offer direct instruction and leave the scene.

e) *The Side by Side Approach* - The last scenario proved to be an ideal approach for two-way communication to occur. The non-Aboriginal teacher guided the Aboriginal teacher to discuss the following day's lessons confidently and willingly. In other words, the non-Aboriginal teacher played the role of facilitator and adviser.

While searching for greater means of two-way communication between team members in bilingual schools, conference leaders emphasized that teachers needed to have common mutual ground for conversation on a level other than a school-based level. For this purpose an activity was designed by which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers could explore areas of common and mutual interest within the communities where they were teaching.

Participants sought to discover conversational topics which they felt highlighted mutual experiences for cross-cultural people in seeking to communicate. Some suggested ideas were - family relationships, photos, food in season, bush trips in local environment, plant and animal life, dancing, music, artefacts, etiquette, recreation, movies, sharing human feelings of pain, happiness, anger and so on.

Goodluck emphasised the importance in searching for common ground between cultures in contrast to seeking to isolate the differences. As a result of the Conference participants, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, returned to their respective schools more consciously aware of the value of two-way communication and of their role and responsibility within the bicultural team. Non-Aboriginal teachers were more aware that Aboriginal children entering school have already started to develop cognitively along the same lines and with the same world view as the adult community, and that they do not come to school knowing nothing. They realized that, as the child develops, it is inevitable that his cognitive development will be strongly influenced by an Aboriginal system of knowledge, and that we should capitalise on this in schools and not ignore it. Non-Aboriginal teachers recognised the importance -

of understanding Aboriginal knowledge sufficiently to reduce significantly the occurrence of semantic interference between their knowledge system and that of their pupils. (Harris, J., 1979)

They further recognised the validity of Aboriginal knowledge and the value of its incorporation into the school program.

Teachers, both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal, recognised that the sharing of knowledge between the two cultures could only occur if two-way communication through dialogue became an integral part of their daily team work.

The Conference expressed a very real message, important to all teachers in Australia involved in cross-cultural team-teaching situations. It emphasized that teachers concerned must continually strive for greater two-way communication through dialogue and continually be aware of the specific role each has to play in the bilingual/bicultural classroom.

The closing words of an Aboriginal teacher from Yirrkala, Djerrkngu Marika, highlighted the fact that the Conference objectives were achieved. She said -

I feel, deep in my heart, that all the people at the Conference have, for the first time, burned together like the flames of a fire, reaching upward to the same goal.

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