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#LEARNING TO READ THE ABORIGINAL WAY

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SUMMARY

This article briefly describes recent approaches to Aboriginal reading education, and assesses their possible usefulness on the basis of the extent to which they are consistent with present-day cognitive and cross-cultural psychological views on reading. Competence approaches are seen as having least likelihood of success, while other approaches based on indigenous learning styles, explicit metacomprehension skills, and functional literacy provide a suitable base for Aboriginal learning.

Researchers and practitioners interested in the education of culturally different students increasingly are emphasising the importance of adapting school learning to suit the cultural backgrounds and extra-school experiences of those children (Davidson, 1981). Such emphasis, until recently, has mainly been on the use of familiar materials and tasks in classroom learning activities and, to some extent, on making what is learned more relevant to the everyday needs of minority groups. There has also been some research designed to discover how children of other cultures learn to learn within their own culture, resulting in attempts to organise classrooms in such a way that students employ or adapt indigenous learning styles in school.

Ways of teaching literacy to Aboriginal children and adults have recently been suggested, based on the above assumptions that schools are better able to achieve their educational objectives by altering the education system to suit the prior learning behaviour and cognitive competencies of Aborigines. In one sense, the development of an indigenous reading education for Aborigines is a contradiction of terms since Aboriginal culture traditionally is an oral culture. Most of the methods discussed do *not* imply that literacy in English or in an Aboriginal language should be based on some sort of indigenous writing system. Rather, researchers have tried either to present literacy materials in such a way that other indigenous skills may be utilised in the process of learning to read and write, or to make the activity of reading more purposeful by making it more personally and socially meaningful in an Aboriginal sense.

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In this article, I briefly describe recent approaches to Aboriginal reading education, and assess their possible usefulness on the basis of the extent to which they are consistent with present-day cognitive and cross-cultural psychological views on reading. The approaches are based on one or more of the following Aboriginal qualities: competencies in intellectual functioning, indigenous learning styles, prior knowledge and language structures, and views about the usefulness of reading. Competence approaches are seen as having the least likelihood of success, while the other approaches are shown to comprise a reasonable base for the development of an Aboriginalised reading instruction. Normally, when we discuss an instructional procedure, we weigh the evidence for learning gains, as they are assessed during prior applications of the procedure. Many of these approaches, however, either have not been extensively tried with Aboriginal students, or are still at the formulative stage.

APPROACHES BASED ON ABORIGINAL COGNITIVE COMPETENCIES

The notion of transfer has always been an important concept in education and psychology. Generally speaking, if skills or rules which are acquired within the context of a given learning activity are successfully used at a later date, in a similar activity, or a more complex learning activity, then transfer is said to occur. In cross-cultural psychology, the notion of transfer is often used in relation to people's ability to apply the skills learned within the context of their own culture to learning or performance contexts within a second culture. Where schooling is concerned this means the application of children's perceived cognitive competencies in out-of-school activities, like games, food gathering, or learning to interact with others, to formal instructional activities like counting, measurement, spelling, or reading. This is achieved, firstly, by observing and analysing children's behaviour in those out-of-school activities. Then,

after isolating and analysing specific cognitive skills...
ways to transfer or translate these skills are sought so
that they may be tapped or elicited in the classroom setting.
(Ciborowski, 1980,p.292)

Davidson and Klich (in press) argue, however, that attempts aimed at transfer of indigenous skills to school learning tasks, generally have not been successful. Put simply, this is due to the often widely different knowledge bases on which different cultures operate, and to the cultural importance of these out-of-school activities compared with school learning.

There have been two recent attempts to employ the notion of skills transfer to devise suitable reading instruction for Aboriginal students. The first of these approaches is based on research findings

that some Aboriginal groups are naturally skilled in visual memory, especially spatial memory for things and places in their environment or in experimental tasks. Moreover, this superiority over non-Aboriginals appears to be quite robust, encompassing memory for the identity and spatial location of natural and artificial objects under a variety of viewing conditions. The original research here was undertaken by Kearins (1976, 1981), who also claimed that Aboriginal children in many instances prefer learning through the visual modality and that they devised associated memory strategies that helped them learn, such as making picture images of objects. The memory strategies that aid performance on these kinds of experimental tests and the resultant difficulties in replicating these initial research findings have been reassessed by Klich and Davidson.

Kearins' approach to the teaching of reading is based on this supposed visual spatial superiority of Aboriginal children.

The method involves the use of a visually presented letter of the alphabet together with several pictures each having names with that initial letter...(and) always displayed in the same order...at the end of this first stage children should be able to draw the letters of the alphabet and know several words beginning with each letter.

(Kearins, 1977, p.2)

There are problems with Kearins' sight word approach. In the first place, as Hung and Tzeng (1981) have pointed out, the process of reading should not be confused with that of single word recognition. The former is much more complex, involving lexical and grammatical knowledge and integrative thinking at the level of production, and is more knowledge-directed than print-directed (Anderson, 1978). Aboriginal students, in fact, are quite capable of recognising by sight a large number of words. Harris (1982b) suggests that this is a result of their visual memory strengths. However, they are less likely to be able to read in a meaningful fashion or for comprehension.

Secondly, Knapp and Seagrim (1981) and Davidson and Klich (in press) point out that, quite apart from tribal group and geographical differences in visual memory performance, there are noticeable individual differences in such performance within the communities that have been tested and, furthermore, that there may also be individual differences in the degree to which Aboriginals are able to use these skills in new contexts, like learning to read. Thus it is that many Aboriginal children have no greater visual spatial memory capacity than

their non-Aboriginal counterparts and may be unsuited to this "visual" approach to reading.

A second transfer approach has been suggested by Seagrim and Lendon (1980). This approach is based on a study by Wallace (1968) of Pitjantjatjara children's skills at recognising, reproducing and following tracks. Wallace also discussed how such skills were learned and how Aboriginal adults eventually become as skilled at recognising human's movements by their tracks as they are at animal tracking. Seagrim and Lendon (1980) have proposed therefore,

that the more consistent the child's upbringing in the Aboriginal mode, the more thoroughly expert in teaching he or she will become and the parallel nature of those skills to the ones required for reading written language should facilitate their transfer. (p.209)

In addition, Seagrim and Lendon suggest that certain features of learning to track should be employed in learning to read. For example, part of learning to track is being able to make the animal track with one's hands. Writing, they suggest, should therefore be an important part of reading education. Children learn first to identify clear, unambiguous tracks and then progressively are able to read degenerated patterns. Finally, all tracks in a given area will be surveyed, as a means of assessing the condition of the animal, when it passed, where it was going, and so on. No track is viewed in isolation from the whole scene.

The notion of Aborigines learning to read in the same way that they learn to track is intuitively appealing. However, psychological research on text processing suggests that the two tasks, at least at the level of word and track identification, might be quite incompatible, and hence unlikely to lead to skills transfer. Research on the information processing of Chinese logographic and English alphabetic systems of writing (Hung and Tzeng, 1981) has found, for instance, that with lower levels of text processing, like letter, syllable and word identification, different orthographic symbols "are processed differently in terms of visual scanning, perceptual demands, involvement of different pathways between print and meaning, and cerebral lateralization functions" (p.406). The elementary processing of an alphabetic system of reading and of a sign system learned as part of tracking, could conceivably also rely on different cognitive and neurological functions. Thus beginning readers and beginning trackers may -

face different learning tasks when they are taught how to decipher printed symbols. The match between the task demands imposed by various writing systems and the developing cognitive structure of the beginner reader is an essential factor for success in such learning.

(Hung and Tzeng, 1981, p.407)

It might also be argued, when it comes to test performance that relies on holistic analysis or synthesis, that Aboriginal children do as well as their non-Aboriginal counterparts whereas they do less well on successive, or serial, and analytical tasks. For instance, we have identified and administered to tribal Aboriginal school children a number of psychological tests, said to measure skill at mentally processing information as a spatially related, whole entity, and have found no difference between those children's and non-Aborigines' performance (Davidson, 1979: Klich and Davidson, in press). Might Aborigines, therefore, be disadvantaged by having to learn to read using an alphabetic script which relies on serial skills, and might they not learn more efficiently if they were to use a pictographic script? Rosin, Poritsky and Sotsky (1971), in a now famous study, taught a group of non-reading, second-grade American children to read in English when words were written in the form of Chinese characters. However, for those children, as for Aboriginal children, there is no guarantee that reading skills involving a logographic or pictographic system will transfer in the long run to an alphabetic system. Aboriginal children would also be disadvantaged later in not being able to read English material.

Finally, Hung and Tzeng (1981) further point out that research has found no differences with regard to the complex or higher level processes, like working memory strategies, inferential processes and comprehension, between reading in different scripts. Although Aboriginal cognitive competencies suit indigenous activities and occupations such competencies may not be directly relevant to reading education.

APPROACHES BASED ON INDIGENOUS LEARNING SKILLS

An alternative approach to that of skills transfer is the introduction into classrooms of culturally appropriate learning related values, such as group achievement or self and peer management schemes, and indigenous learning styles, like observational and other non-verbally based learning systems. Overseas, some success has been achieved in schools where classroom contexts have been re-oriented to reflect characteristic learning patterns of culturally different children (e.g. see Gallimore, Boggs and Jordan, 1974: Ramirez and Casteneda, 1974).

The information that is available on teaching-learning styles in tribally oriented Aboriginal communities confirms that those learning styles are similar in many respects to informal learning systems operating in other traditional societies (see Scribner and Cole, 1973). Moreover, there is general consensus between my own research (Davidson, 1977) and that of Stephen Harris (1980, 1982b) that Aboriginal learning styles in Arnhem Land communities rely on, amongst other things, the following values and practices:

1. Observation, imitation, and repetitious revision of material to be learned.
2. Group performance and systems of shared reward.
3. Task-specific learning, where the task most often is a real-life event, rather than a practice session.
4. An observational learning procedure, that allows for successive improvements each time observation is followed by rehearsal.
5. Learning as a personalised event, involving a specific relationship between learner and teacher.

Thus instruction in indigenous skills, like bark painting, dancing, and ceremony took place within the context of those actual activities, and was carried out by knowledgeable elders, with whom trainees were kin folk. Trainees learned by repeating or performing what they were told or shown. Questions relating to skills to be learned were seldom asked by the instructor or trainee, as learning was by observation and imitation (Davidson, 1977).

A number of articles have appeared quite recently attempting to select or devise literacy approaches that suit these characteristic learning patterns of Aboriginal children. Some of these approaches also contain suggestions for improving Aborigines' appreciation of the reading act and of the range of reading materials that are available.

Harris (1982a) has suggested a number of strategies based on the above Aboriginal learning styles. In these strategies reading demonstrations by adults or peers who are competent readers serve the purposes of teaching by imitation and of promoting reading-related behaviours not seen in homes of non-reading Aboriginal parents. However, Harris emphasises that revision must follow demonstration and, as much as possible, should involve actual reading practice rather than pre-reading activities such as individual word identification, letter/syllable-sound association and so on. The various approaches he discussed are:

1. *The Lap Method* One or two children sit close to or on the lap of an older person and the latter reads along with the student with their finger moving along closely under the words being read. Here the non-reading child is constantly reading for meaning in their favourite book... and inductively learning sound/symbol correspondence over a fairly lengthy period of time. (Harris, 1982a, p.145-146). This method utilises the story-reading ritual that is found in reading homes.
2. *Sustained Silent Reading*. Students and teachers together in the classroom engage in uninterrupted silent reading of familiar reading materials.
3. *Shared Book Experience* (Holdaway, 1976). This is similar to the Lap method, except that popular books are transcribed onto large sheets of paper or onto video tapes and teachers and students read the story together. Sound/symbol association again is derived by observation of the teacher pointing to the words as they are read.
4. *Reading Games*. Students participate in various games based on familiar activities which are designed to incorporate the various functions of written language (Halliday, 1975).

Christie (1982a, 1982b), has also explored a number of teaching strategies that might suit Aboriginal beginning readers. Christie's is a two-part philosophy. Keeping in mind Aboriginal learning styles, he suggests that it is important that

- a) Aboriginal students understand what they do when they read, and
- b) they learn to read for meaning rather than for the sake of simply being able to read.

1) *Reading to Others*. Based on Carol Chomsky's (1976) reading research, Christie (1982a) had "poor to very poor" Aboriginal readers practice reading a book of their choice over a number of days. Silent reading activities were accompanied by the making of personal tape recordings, flash card sessions with the teacher, and reading aloud to the teacher or to other members of the group. Students were set the goal of learning to read a book in a meaningful fashion, so that they would be able to read it to an infant class. Christie and the classroom teacher involved reported a subsequent noticeable change in students' attitudes to reading and in their expression and comprehension when reading. Chomsky (1976) reported resultant significant gains on standardised reading tests.

2. *Self-questioning procedures.* Using Holdaway's notion of self-regulation, Christie (1982b) explores the need for Aboriginal children to develop a variety of monitoring strategies aimed at assisting them to self-test their comprehension of written material while they are reading. These procedures will be discussed in a later section.

The above approaches based on Aboriginal learning styles in general involve instructional procedures that are known to work well with non-Aborigines. Some work, despite the fact that a cognitive explanation is not immediately apparent. For example, there is overseas research also which advocates learning to read by reading. Elley (1981) in Fiji reported significant reading gains by Fijian and Fiji Indian children who participated in a Book-Flood programme. These gains occurred when large numbers of books were placed in classrooms for children to read, and increased where teachers in some of those classrooms read daily to children. The program did not aim to teach children specific strategies for reading comprehension.

Students who can read are known to improve if they are allowed to read aloud for meaning and pleasure, but they do not always improve if reading practice is restricted and is continually disrupted by corrections and questioning by the instructor. Gumperz and Hernandez-Chavez (1972) have suggested that the gap between good and poor readers is often the result of a teacher adopting restrictive teaching strategies in poor reading groups. In addition, poor reading groups, often consist mostly of culturally different students. The division between majority and minority group children therefore is also maintained in this fashion.

Gumperz and Hernandez-Chavez found that the quality of teacher-child interactions in these groups also differed dramatically. For example, the teacher was warm and relaxed with good readers, and allowed them a good deal of spontaneous involvement with the story. With slow readers she was "deliberate and slow", and restricted participation to turns and specific questions. McDermott and Aron (1978) describe a similar situation with top and bottom reading groups they studied. Activities in the top group, generally, were reading-oriented, and in the bottom group were management-oriented.

Approaches like the Lap Method, Shared Book Experience and Reading to Others which have been mentioned, all assume that Aboriginal students can immediately become competent readers of suitable materials. They give students the opportunity to do so, and provide models of competent readers. However, these approaches should be seen as adopting a primarily informal instructional style, and as emphasising production rather than reading for comprehension (see

Tharp, 1982). Other approaches, where extensive periods of direct questioning precede and follow silent reading, might also be considered in terms of their suitability for Aboriginal classrooms. For example, Au and Mason (1981) describe a variety of effective teacher and student participation structures in Hawaiian classrooms which recreate a commonly occurring Hawaiian speech tradition known as "talk story". Although questioning is explicit, the teacher questions in such a way that "a child could reply independently of other children, receive help from others, and comment on, contradict, or complement the answers of others (p.124), as in "talk story". A second approach known as the ETR method will be described later. Collaborative discussion and analysis of reading materials by Aboriginal students, during and after the beginning reading phase, may be a suitable additional, or perhaps alternative approach to the repetitious reading schemes proposed by Harris and Christie.

APPROACHES BASED ON PRIOR KNOWLEDGE STRUCTURES

Research on reading comprehension suggests that readers are heavily dependent on their own personal knowledge of the world when they have to make meaning of written text (Pearson and Johnson, 1978). Such knowledge is dictated by a person's cultural affiliation, as well as by group divisions within a culture. Consequently, when the cultural origin of the content of reading materials is different from those of readers the latter will either have difficulty in making sense of the material, or will adjust its meaning so that it becomes congruent with their own knowledge system. For example, when reading a culturally unfamiliar passage rather than a familiar one, a reader is likely to read slower and remember less, and misinterpret more of the passage. On the other hand, when the passage is culturally familiar, readers often spontaneously contribute significantly more meaningful background than the passage contains. If the passage is linguistically ambiguous, the culturally appropriate rather than the culturally unfamiliar meaning will be proffered. Steffensen demonstrated these schematic effects by presenting Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal adults with an Aboriginal and a westernised story relating the etiology, symptoms and treatment of illness, and asking them to recall the stories verbatim (Steffensen, 1980; also see Steffensen, Jogdeo and Anderson, 1978; Reynolds, Taylor, Steffensen, Shirey and Anderson, 1982)

Thus, if reading materials are culturally unfamiliar comprehension may be distorted, and a reader may have actual difficulty when asked to read the passage silently or aloud to others. Christie (1982b) mentions this as a problem for Aboriginal readers: "If the children are having a terrible time with comprehension, then the story may be too hard for them to read purposefully." (p.24)

A number of approaches that seek to make reading materials culturally relevant for Aboriginal children may be subsumed under the general rubric of experiential reading schemes. In turn, that category may be divided into two broad types. Both types attempt not only to present written content that is culturally familiar but to present it in a form that is consistent with the linguistic skills and usages of students.

The first approach is that of "write your own reader" (see Clay, 1975). Here students write sentences or stories which they themselves read with the teacher and then share with other students. Stories can be collated into a book. Each child initially should be able to read his or her own book. The degree of help from the teacher which is required to write and then read each sentence should decrease with time in the literacy programme. This type of scheme is a familiar one in Aboriginal classrooms (see, e.g., Reading Development Unit, 1982) but it is unusual to find any formal evaluation of its effects on pupils' reading ability.

In a second approach, children's natural language is used as a grounding for the development of oral language and reading activities. This approach is the basis of the van Leer Language programme which operated in some Aboriginal schools in Queensland (see Hart, 1973; Teasdale and Whitelaw, 1981) and later the experimental reading programme at the Mt Gravatt College of Advanced Education. Such a programme has been operating already for two years at Traeger Park Primary School in Alice Springs (Walker, undated, 1981). These programmes appear to have positive results, if other factors like children's health and hearing ability are taken into account (see Lewis, 1976).

The production of indigenous language readers in communities where Aboriginal languages are still used should also be considered as an attempt to match reading materials with students' prior knowledge backgrounds. These materials have been proliferated by the introduction of bilingual programmes into tribal schools, and are too numerous to review here.

Some limitations to these experiential approaches exist. In the first place, the language concordance of Mt Gravatt approach is said to require extensive analysis of children's natural language before reading materials can be devised. Thus, reading materials developed at Traeger Park, for example, should not be assumed to be suitable for other bilingual communities until extensive language analysis has been undertaken in those communities.

There is, therefore, considerable expense and effort involved before a new program can be established in a community.

Harris (1982a) also expresses some concern about the extent to which these programs, in the long run, restrict children's development of new cultural schemata, which allow them to increase the range of written materials which they can read and comprehend. He suggests some ways that teachers can gradually build on children's existing schemata so that they can be read more widely.

The suggested approach is somewhat similar to the ETR (experience-text-relationship) method of direct instruction in reading comprehension described by Tharp (1981, 1982) and Au (1981). ETR involves, firstly, a discussion of the story theme by the teacher and students in relation to students' prior personal experiences and background knowledge (E), then directed silent reading utilising a thematic question, or questions, set by the teacher on the text (T) and, finally, comparison of information in the text with students' own previous knowledge, and discussion of anticipated and actual outcomes of the directed reading (R). Au (1981) argues that the method provides a set of specific reading strategies that students adopt later on when reading. In addition, it assists them to incorporate new information into existing personal schemata.

APPROACHES EMPHASISING FUNCTIONAL ASPECTS OF READING

The written word in western society performs a number of functions. Apart from allowing us to record and communicate personal and socially relevant information, it also is a means, amongst other things, of official communication, of instruction, and of creative composition. This is not necessarily the case in other societies with a literacy tradition. Scribner and Cole (1978), for example, undertook an extensive study of members of the Vai culture, who were literate in one of three languages; the indigenous script, Arabic, which is the language of Qur'anic scholarship, and English which is used for administrative purposes. Their study included an investigation of the social and personal functions of these written languages, and of the cognitive, language, and communication skills demonstrated by those literate in each of the scripts. Specific language-processing and cognitive skills were found to be associated with being literate in Vai *vs* English and Arabic. Except for some English literates only, "literacy does not lead to learning of new knowledge nor involve individuals in new methods of inquiry. Basic processes of production, trade and education are little affected by the written word". (Scribner and Cole, 1978, p.31). Thus, what a writer will commit to paper and who reads his or her writing is very much dependent on the culturally acceptable functions of literacy in a society.

Furthermore, actions or behaviour like those of writing and reading, if they occur in a social context or for a different purpose other than that for which they were meant, may lose their social meaning and their value for people. They have value only if considered important by persons or by society at large (Davidson and Klich, in press).

Australian Aboriginal societies traditionally were oral cultures. Even now, tribal and non-tribal communities still rely mainly on oral communication as a means of interpersonal and inter-community communication. A recent study by Fesl (1982) of three Aboriginal communities in south-eastern Victoria concludes those Aborigines "show little or no interest in literacy tuition", that "literacy ability...has little value as a skill in Aboriginal society", and that in Aboriginal communities which are based on reciprocity and extended family contribution only few Aborigines need to be literate for the community to be able to cope with non-Aboriginal written materials. Furthermore, Aborigines are often inherently suspicious of written materials as being racist (Fesl, 1982) or as containing religious information usually not available to uninitiated members of communities (see Davidson, 1980).

It is probably a bit naive, therefore, to expect, as Christie (1982b) does, that we can inspire Aboriginal children to internalise non-Aboriginal literacy-related values, including those associated with writing as well as reading, unless being literate has at least some purpose or real value for a goodly majority of Aboriginal children and adults. Furthermore, we should be very careful not to confuse familiarity with function or, in other words, to imbue locally written stories or experiential readers with functional value. Although such materials may be matched with existing local schemata, the actual business of writing or reading the material may not be culturally valued.

Apart from waiting for Aboriginal literacy-related values to become more like those of westerners in the long term, possibly the only way of making literacy instruction a purposeful activity is to incorporate it into educational, vocational and leisure programs that Aborigines themselves consider important. The most effective way of identifying these training areas, as Fesl (1982) points out, is to ask Aborigines themselves. Literacy instruction then becomes functional to the extent that it assists Aborigines to engage in those activities they value. Where this involves, for example, vocational training of health workers, councillors or mechanics, literacy training should have a demonstrated connection to on-the-job performance. In some adult education programs based on leisure

interests the need for functional literacy training may be minimal. Only a complete re-definition of the aims and purposes of education in Aboriginal communities, especially tribal ones, would assist classroom teachers in associating literacy instruction with activities and other learning which Aboriginal students see as functional or purposeful.

AFTER THE ABORIGINAL WAY, WHAT THEN?

Attempts at Aboriginalising literacy instruction and relevant research findings might be summarised as follows. There seems to be no immediate case for transferring indigenous cognitive skills like tracking and visual spatial memory to literacy training. Lower order literacy skills, like sight word learning, which improve with a better than average visual memory may not be central to the process of becoming a competent and "purposeful" reader. Higher order literacy skills may be identical for those literate in different orthographies, despite differences in the perceptual and lower order cognitive processing of different writing systems.

There are successful literacy approaches available that are congruent with indigenous Aboriginal learning styles. However, these approaches tend to take a single line on how reading education is best accomplished and, in addition, provide little understanding of strategies that are, or could be, used by competent Aboriginal readers. They mainly demonstrate to students how a competent reader reads. There also seems to be some benefit, at least for beginning readers, in learning to read using texts that are linguistically and culturally familiar. Finally, literacy training for both Aboriginal adults and children may be more successfully implemented as part of other training programs desired by Aborigines.

Despite these guidelines for teachers, much of the success of Aboriginally oriented literacy instruction seems to depend on students comprehending the act of reading itself. This involves, not just knowing what good reading sounds like, but what to do if decoding or meaning difficulties are encountered and the flow of reading is interrupted or distorted. Of the other writers I have mentioned, both Harris (1982a) and Christie (1982b) are aware of the need for students to develop strategies to cope with such difficulties. Both writers rely heavily on Holdaway's discussion of the role of self-monitoring skills in learning to read. We may identify some of those needs as being:

1. The acquisition of appropriate self-checking techniques and knowledge of when and how to apply these with different types of checks.

2. Understanding how different communication functions are translated into text and reading for meaning in light of the purpose of the communication. For example, written information to be remembered might be approached in quite a different fashion from a written directive, a distinction which experienced readers take for granted (Brown, 1980).

3. Selection of written texts that they are competent to read.

4. Selection of written material that reflect their interests.

5. Identification of the criteria associated with being a good reader and judgement of the extent to which they meet, or can meet, those criteria.

Brown (1980) further discusses strategies aimed at assisting students to judge which aspects of the text they are comprehending, and which additional information needs to be mastered. This has led to the identification of some additional requirements of self-checking. They are:

1. Working out what is not known and how to know it. This includes

2. Extracting the main ideas from the text, and then devising ways of dealing with main and peripheral ideas that have not been mastered.

3. Setting aside time for studying and comprehending the main and peripheral aspects of the text.

4. Understanding the criterion task (e.g. reading to answer a question *vs* reading to remember and recall the content of the passage), and establishing guidelines for assessing the success of a reading activity in relation to the criterion.

5. Finally, developing strategies that activate the self-checking operation, or what to do immediately when comprehension failures are detected.

As Brown (1980) points out, the process of self-checking for comprehension failure operates more effectively if it utilises a set of conscious, deliberate and explicit reading strategies than if it relies on "automatic" understanding of the text. As a result, specific strategies associated with each of the above self-judgements need to be identified and incorporated as part of indigenised or experiential reading instruction. Furthermore, these strategies for educational purposes are best treated as metacognitive strategies (see

Brown, 1978, 1980; Brown, Campione and Barclay, 1979) rather than as personality-related behaviours, as Christie (1982b) implies.

A literacy tradition is one of those western traditions which individual Aborigines may decide, at some stage, to consciously accept or reject. Learning to read the Aboriginal way and being able to assess one's own literacy skills and interests are important steps towards a reading education for Aborigines who want to become literate.

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