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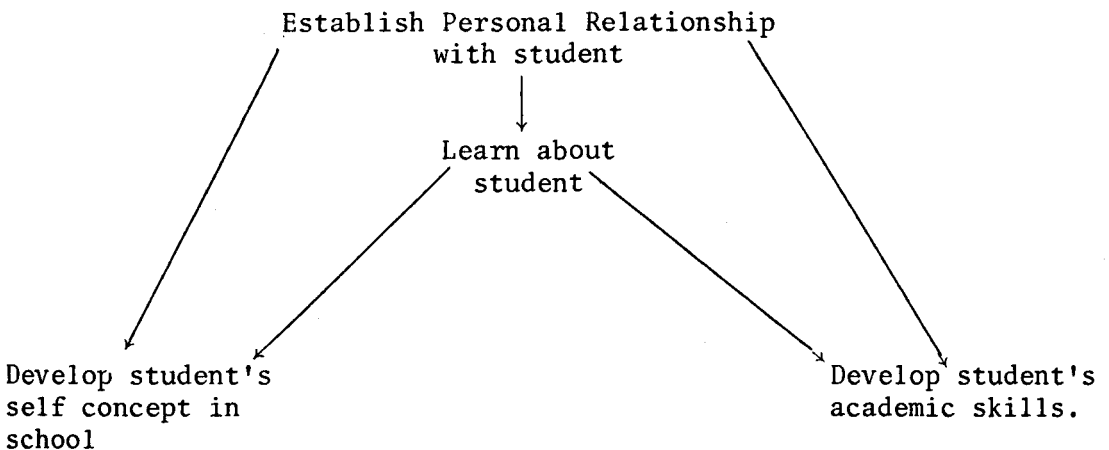
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THE ROLE OF TUTORS IN THE ABORIGINAL SECONDARY GRANTS SCHEME

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In considering the role of tutors of Aboriginal and Islander students at secondary school, the fundamental question is, "What can tutors do to help students that isn't being done by teachers in schools?" Of course, working with students on a one-to-one basis or in small groups will be seen as an obvious advantage of the tutoring system. However, it alone is not enough, and tutors need to develop specific skills and expertise if they are to help Aboriginal and Islander students to negotiate, and achieve in, an imperfect system that is, I believe, inappropriate and even alien to many Aborigines and Islanders.

The role of tutor can be represented diagrammatically as follows:



ESTABLISH A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE STUDENT

There is considerable evidence to suggest that the establishment of a warm, personal relationship between student and teacher is a vital factor in Aboriginal education (Elphick, 1980; Fanshawe, 1976; Harris, 1980). For many teachers in secondary schools, this is difficult because of the conservative attitudes to the teacher/student relationship that exist in most schools. Hence, it is one area where tutors have a definite advantage and can feel free to develop the necessary relationship. However, I do not believe this is possible in three or four hours of tutoring each week. Hence, tutors need to

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spend extra time with their students in situations out of the school context. In particular, the students need time to learn about the tutor. This may mean students visiting in the tutor's home and meeting their family. It can also mean spending some time at the same places as students, and extending the personal relationship to the students' families. However, once such a relationship is developed, the tutor must not be afraid to make demands on students and to insist on active participation by the students in tutorial sessions.

LEARNING ABOUT THE STUDENT

From the development of a warm, personal relationship with students, tutors can then learn about the student so that they can most effectively select appropriate experiences that will enhance the students' self concept and increase their academic competence.

DEVELOP THE STUDENT'S SELF CONCEPT AT SCHOOL

Most Aboriginal and Islander teenagers that I know have positive self concepts within their own environments, but this often does not carry through into educational settings. As a representative of the education system, the tutor's attitude towards the student can help promote the student's identity and confidence in the school system.

Tutors need to demonstrate clearly that they respect the student as an Aborigine or Islander, that they respect the student's family and that they respect Aboriginal and Islander cultures. I think that it is particularly important that tutors use their knowledge of the student and show their respect for the particular culture that is lived by the student, in addition to traditional cultures. On the teaching level, tutors need to be aware of, and use, the growing body of materials relating to contemporary Aboriginal and Islander life, so that students can see themselves and their cultures represented in educational resources.

While identity is a vital factor in the development of the student's self concept, this needs to be accompanied by the development of the student's confidence in their ability to achieve at school.

DEVELOPING THE STUDENT'S ACADEMIC SKILLS

Students will not develop confidence in their abilities to achieve if they feel they will be constantly dependent on a tutor. Hence, tutors need to attend to the students' immediate needs and, at the same time, develop in them skills that will enable them to

achieve by themselves. Hence the focus needs to be on teaching processes rather than products.

Below are some ideas that may be of help:

1. Tutors need to find out from the teacher as much as possible about what happens in the classroom to help students understand exactly what the teacher wants. Often, in cross-cultural situations, students are unsure of the teacher's expectations and will misunderstand requirements. Hence, tutors need to help students interpret the teacher's messages.
2. Work from the students' own resources (textbooks, handouts, class notes), to help students understand the materials they have and be able to use them to find answers. An explanation from the tutor solves the immediate problem, but helping the student find the solution provides long term benefit.
3. Go through processes with the students. For example, when looking for information for a project consider with the students:
 - What would you look up in the catalogue in the library?
 - Where do you find the books on library shelves?
 - How do you check the contents and index?
4. Make use of dictionaries and thesaurus so that the students learn to handle unfamiliar words or find more appropriate words.
5. Encourage students to provide specific examples from their own experiences so that what they are learning fits into their own cognitive maps.
6. If students are having problems in maths, make use of concrete materials and "hands on" experiences to ensure that they understand concepts.

For many Aboriginal and Islander children, language is the biggest single problem that they face academically, and many of the other problems that they have at school stem directly from a lack of mastery of Standard Australian English, particularly in relation to reading and writing.

I believe that it is important to introduce students to the concepts of language appropriateness and register. In my experience, students can better deal with Standard Australian English if they are aware that the language that they might speak at home is a different dialect, equally valid and effective. Thus tutors need to help students learn school language. What is the difference between "definition" and "example"? What does "criticize" mean in literature? If you are asked to summarise a chapter in a book, you need to be able to understand what "summarize" means. Many teachers take school language so much for granted that they do not often teach it to students. Thus students can be wrong because they might not understand the language of the question. It is often difficult for students to realise where they are making mistakes, particularly for some Aborigines and Islanders who are so used to performing poorly at school that they do not bother to question why.

For many Aboriginal and Islander students, reading and writing are of little importance except in the school environment. Tutors need to demonstrate the importance of reading and writing to them as individuals and as members of society. Tutors can do this by, for example, sharing with students the excitement of letters from friends; be seen reading and writing by students; read written materials to develop new skills, such as mastering a new video machine.

When working with students' writing, it is important to respond first to the meaning the student is trying to convey, then think about how to help them say it better. If tutors want students to develop confidence in their ability to write, then they need always to find something good to comment on, and then to focus on one or two aspects to be improved. Grammar and word attack skills are much better taught in context of the student's actual work.

To promote language development in students, make use of shared experiences to increase competencies in reading and writing skills. Writing and reading about culture and careers camps, excursions, football matches, etc., can be stimulating for students, particularly if the tutors work towards having writings published in, for example, *Speaking Free*. For those students who find writing very difficult, tutors can act as scribes, providing both guidance and encouragement (see Boomer, 1980).

Tutors need to develop personal relationships with students but they must go beyond that relationship and provide students with the academic skills they need to develop a positive self concept at school, and to achieve their potential. This requires not only a caring personality, but also sound, educational expertise. In addition, it demands that the tutor accept some responsibility for the student's performance at school.

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AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES IN THE NEWS

Australian Aborigines in the News is a news service compiled in the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies Library. The news clippings in facsimile appear on microfiche in the order of their publication. The clipping sequence of the service contains some 6000 items, commentaries, editorials, letters to the editor, book reviews, pictures, maps and even some political cartoons.

The index sequence comprises a geographical guide to index headings and a detailed alphabetical listing of events, subjects, places, organisations, and people mentioned in the clippings.

Australian Aborigines in the News (\$34 per annum) is published twice a year (January to June and July to December), and a cumulative annual index accompanies each July to December issue. The first issue of the series with clippings and index covered January to June 1981. The January to June issues are scheduled to appear each October, and the July to December issues in the following April.

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