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REFLECTIONS ON EDUCATION IN TORRES STRAIT: ZUNI INSIGHTS

*B. Osborne

Education in Torres Strait is at a crossroad. On the one hand changes are about to occur to its organisation. On the other hand crucial inroads are being made into community life by that process of education.

I have lived in Torres Strait. I know some of the fears, hopes and disillusionment of many Torres Strait Islanders. I want to share some of my insights into your situation. When I left Thursday Island in 1972, it was with sadness and with a determination to find out how to better teach the young people of the Torres Strait. I would like to share one set of my findings with you. In particular, I would like to share the experiences of a small American Indian community with you. In many ways their story is like yours. Some of their lessons may help you in these days of rapid changes.

ZUNI

Zuni is the name of a tribe of American Indians who live in a village (called Zuni) with a population of about 5,000 in the state of New Mexico. Their village was first invaded by the Spanish in 1540. They fought frequently with the neighbouring Apache Indians. The Catholic Mission, established in 1629, was abandoned from 1821-1921 because of the raids between Zuni and Apache warriors. Other churches came in. The Zunis learned silver jewellery making from the Spanish. In 1873 the first American school teacher arrived at Zuni. Electricity came to Zuni in 1950. In 1980 the people of Zuni took control of their own schools (two primary schools, one middle school and one high school). There are still two church schools in the village. When I was there in 1982 and 1983, they had a Zuni assistant teacher in every primary school classroom; most of the kindergarten, grade one and two teachers were Zunis. One primary school principal was Zuni and two or three other teachers were also Zuni. All were fully qualified and some had master's degrees. They were doing a fine job in the classrooms. I watched in five classrooms, I talked a lot with the five teachers and all their assistant teachers. I did this over 16 weeks of school term.

(Osborne, 1983)

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* *Dr Barry Osborne, James Cook University of North Queensland.*

SOME OF THE COMMUNITY DILEMMAS AT ZUNI

a) UNCERTAINTY ABOUT ROLE OF ANGLO EDUCATION

Some of the community were unsure about the role of white man's (Anglo) education for their children. They saw Anglo education as spoiling their children, making them disrespectful and different from themselves. At the same time, I must stress that Zuni still has a very strong Indian religious and political life. They still speak their language widely and with pride. The ceremonial dances are still practised and some of the old dances which had not been performed for many years are being performed again. While I was there, 120 boys were initiated into the tribe. Some adults who have lived and been raised out of Zuni are coming back there to live and are being initiated into the tribe.

While some were wary of Anglo education, others saw it as essential to employment for the young people and indeed essential to the life of the tribe itself. They said that they need their own lawyers, accountants, economists, doctors, nurses, politicians and businessmen to protect the colourful heritage and very existence of the village reservation.

Some of the community were critical of the teachers, the Zuni teachers, who taught their children. Their criticism of the Zuni teachers was that they had changed. They were no longer 'true' Zunis. The Zuni teachers were hurt by this criticism - they were proud to be Zuni - they practised the religion, used the language, engaged in the customs. But they were different - they had learned to see things from the Anglo way, too. Highwater (1982) refers to this as having "dual vision". They can see the world from the Zuni perspective and from the Anglo perspective. In this way they are no longer 'true' Zunis, because a true Zuni can see things only the Zuni way. A Zuni with dual vision can see things both the Zuni way as well as the Anglo way.

A Zuni teacher with dual vision can help students to understand and live in the Anglo world. That teacher can explain the strange new world in Zuni terms and in a way that the Zuni student can understand. Nevertheless, the Zuni teachers were seen as not true Zunis by other members of the Zuni community.

b) COMMUNITY ACCEPTANCE OF THE ZUNI SCHOOL BOARD

The Zuni School Board had to make many decisions about the schools at Zuni. They had to work closely with administrators and the principals to make sure the schools were teaching the right

things. They made decisions about languages to be taught, holidays to be kept, programs to reduce alcoholism, ways of getting students to go to school, which aspects of culture should be taught in schools and which principals to appoint.

Some members of the community said that the Zuni School Board would not be able to make these decisions, that they did not know enough about education to make good decisions. And the Zuni School Board members said that they made mistakes - nevertheless they had made many changes to their schools in three years - buildings were being improved, programs were being changed to include more Zuni things and Zuni language, new language programs were being started to help the students with English,and school holidays were fitted in with important religious festivals. As they made some mistakes, the Zuni School Board learned - it learned to make better decisions. It also learned how to enforce its decisions.

The Zuni School Board members were scared of their role - they said that they felt like they were in a "fish bowl" with everyone watching them and waiting for them to make mistakes. However, they had kept the schools going for three years and were getting better at their job each year. One of the key ways that the Zuni School Board showed that it was afraid to make a mistake in front of its own community, had to do with its policy statement on education. In order to get the State Department of Education to set up the Zuni School District and the Zuni School Board, the community had to put forward a policy statement, including goals for education, which was acceptable to both the community and the Department of Education. They did this in 1979 - the statement had support from the community and was approved by the Department. However, in 1983 it still had not been presented to the schools - teachers were working from the old Anglo policy statement three years after the Zuni School Board had formed. They had not introduced the new policy statement because only a bare majority of the community accepted it in 1979 - the Board was scared that they would lose support if they presented the policy statement before the community had become used to the Board influencing the schools.

c) COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS

The community is strongly involved in the schools - many parents now attend monthly meetings and help with book covering, aid-making, reading and telling stories to the children.

Many parents had been disappointed with what was happening in schools when they were run by Anglos. They were disappointed when a teacher treated their child unfairly, but did not check with

teachers about what happened at school. Parents are now going to schools to check with teachers about their child's progress and behaviour.

One of the many reasons for the formation of the Zuni School Board was parental dissatisfaction with teachers and the way the schools failed to give their children an education which gave them a job as good as anyone else's. That dissatisfaction gave birth to the Zuni School Board - some fourteen years after the parents voted on whether they were satisfied with the quality of education their children were getting. It took a lot of time to walk around to all the houses to find out what all the people wanted. In general terms they wanted better education for their children. Once that was decided it took fourteen years to get the Zuni School Board to control the schools. Even now, three years after it started, the Zuni School Board is still learning how to do this.

Some Zuni people see the subtle changes, the gradual improvements, the subjects which now include local content, the better students and the better grades. Parents are now more comfortable going to school to see how their children are progressing and teachers are now more comfortable going to children's homes to talk about school with parents. But the changes have taken years and will take many more years.

d) COMMUNITY CONCERN ABOUT PROTECTING ZUNI WAYS

Members of the community at Zuni were concerned about the effects that Anglo ways were having on traditional Zuni ways. They wanted no part of Zuni religion taught in the schools. Through the tribal council they made sure that it is not. They did not mind Zuni language being taught in schools. It is being used in the lower grades. They did not mind that some traditional crafts are taught at school, or that art classes contain Zuni themes. The walls of the school are covered with delightful Zuni paintings.

Educators like to see Zuni ways included in schools - it helps students to be proud of their heritage - it helps them to learn Anglo skills with the ideas, knowledge and skills they already have - it helps to bridge the gap between school and community. However, the community controls which content can be included in the school curriculum.

One interesting way in which the high school has fostered the Zuni culture was a music project the students conducted. The students went to older members of the tribe to find out about the "Buffalo Dance", which had not been performed for many years. They

learned the dance from the elders and performed it at school. Interest in the dance spread through the community and the dance has now been reintroduced to the schedule of religious dances performed during each year. In other words, the school has encouraged the rebirth of a traditional dance which had died out.

It is not just about the content of their culture that the Zuni people are concerned. They are also concerned about the effects of Anglo ways on the behaviour of their children. One example of this is that Anglo teachers ask many questions and expect very rapid answers. In the Zuni way, the children are not asked a lot of questions and they are given a lot of time, days and sometimes weeks, to carefully think out their answers. Zuni children may become quick, unthinking answerers (and askers) of questions by going to an Anglo school. Their parents and the community may see them as frivolous or impatient or too inquisitive or even dumb because of this Anglo training.

This and many other Anglo ways which are very different from Zuni ways create a major dilemma for the Zuni community. They want their children to be able to compete with Anglo children - they also want their children to be the same way that Zuni children have been for generations. The only solution to the dilemma is for some adjustments to be made both ways - the schools can make some adjustments, and maybe the community can too.

In this section we have looked at some of the main dilemmas facing the community at Zuni. These are: community concerns about whether Zuni teachers are still really Zunis, community scepticism of the Zuni School Board, community involvement in schools and community concern about protecting Zuni ways. Discussion now turns to the dilemmas faced by the teachers at Zuni.

SOME OF THE TEACHERS' DILEMMAS AT ZUNI

a) ZUNI TEACHERS' BICULTURAL ROLES

As people who were both Zuni- and Anglo-educated, the Zuni teachers face interesting challenges. On the one hand, they have to fulfil their roles as teachers. Sometimes the two sets of roles conflict. For example, teachers sometimes have to take work home from school to prepare for the next day and this may make it difficult to be a good host to a respected relative. For another, a family bereavement and its attendant social responsibilities may cut across teaching duties. There are many other examples of how social and school responsibilities might conflict. Sometimes, by

working very late at night, or by working very hard, the missed school work can be caught up. Sometimes schools may have to make adjustments. Sometimes communities may have to understand the special demands that teaching places on teachers.

Another aspect of teachers' bicultural roles is that they can assist the community to understand what European education is and should be. So, teachers probably spend a lot of time in the community explaining to parents and elders what the school is trying to do and asking parents/elders to assist them to educate the children. They also spend some considerable time explaining community hopes and practices to new Anglo members of staff. They link the community to the school and they link the school to the community in special ways.

These crucial roles again demand a lot of energy and time of teachers. However, the main problem the Zuni teachers felt was that at times other Zuni people did not respect them and treat them like real Zunis. They were and are real Zunis, but they are Zunis with dual roles and dual vision.

b) CONFLICTS FOR ZUNI TEACHERS

Zuni teachers were very aware of the ways in which Anglo ways contradicted the traditional Zuni ways. They helped the children to understand that what was sometimes appropriate behaviour in school may not be appropriate at home, and sometimes home behaviour may not be appropriate at school. In other words, these teachers helped children to know when to behave one way and when to behave a different way. The Zuni teachers were excellent. Their students worked hard and learned a lot. Some Anglo teachers were also doing an excellent job of teaching. Good Anglo and good Zuni teachers were very warm towards the students and held high expectations of them. In other words, the good teachers were both warm and demanding (Kleinfeld, 1975; Osborne, 1982). They were also sensitive to avoid interfering with Zuni customs, although one Anglo teacher was so respected by the community and loved by the children that although she repeatedly broke one of the traditions, the community still accepted her.

One of the key ways the Zuni teachers helped to foster Zuni ways in school was encouraging the children to be independent. Where Anglo teachers frequently sorted out squabbles between children, the Zuni teachers encouraged even grade one students to sort out their own squabbles without seeking adult help. In other ways too, the Zuni teachers encouraged the children to be independent, as is the Zuni way.

Another conflict for Zuni teachers was that of their special roles within the school. They sometimes suggested to Anglo teachers, as fellow professionals, that particular types of teaching would be most helpful for the children. Sometimes the Anglo teachers not only rejected their advice but also made the Zuni teachers feel very uncomfortable in staff rooms and powerless in school decision making.

Sometimes kinship systems also affected the way Zuni teachers would teach. For instance, principals had to make sure that particular teachers did not have particular children in their classes when kinship feuds prevented them from interacting effectively with each other.

c) CONCERNS OF ANGLO TEACHERS

Anglo teachers expressed three main concerns. One was whether they were doing what the people in the community wanted them to do. They heard many people say many things and they were unsure of which advice to take. They accepted that in all communities there is a range of opinions and advice, but many of them were looking for a tighter statement of what the community wanted them to do. As the Zuni School Board grows in strength and leadership, so this clearer guidance is being given.

The second concern was whether they were doing a good job with the children. They knew their job as Anglo teachers - they were unsure as to whether they were doing things which were not acceptable to the community. One of the Anglo teachers was still there after twelve years, another (who was married to a Zuni man) was still there after seven years. Those teachers that the community did not accept rarely stayed more than two or three years. So those two Anglo teachers were doing a job which the community appreciated.

The third concern was of acceptance within the community. Zuni people are happy for Anglo people to see much of their dancing, but they do not encourage Anglos to take part or even invite them to the dances. They will not allow Anglos to go to much of their religious activity. Anglo teachers have to live with the knowledge that they can never be Zunis - that they can never know all about Zuni ways. For some Anglo teachers that is a disappointment, but one which is accepted as they respect Zuni ways.

In this section we have seen that there are special demands placed on teachers (both Anglo and Zuni) as they seek to educate Zuni children. The next section discusses the insights from Zuni which are relevant to the Torres Strait.

REFLECTIONS ON EDUCATION IN TORRES STRAIT

Against this background of the Zuni situation, it is now important to see what insights are available for education in Torres Strait. Here are twelve.

- It takes a long time for a community to become clear about what it wants from the European education of its children.
- Within any community there will always be divisions about what education should be doing for its children.
- Torres Strait Islanders, like the Zunis, can learn how to influence their children's education in European schools.
- Torres Strait Islander teachers are bicultural and have 'dual vision'.
- Torres Strait Islander teachers can help children to become bicultural.
- Torres Strait Islander teachers can do a fine job, like the Zuni teachers, not just in producing school achievement but also in fostering special qualities in children.
- European teachers can do a fine job teaching Torres Strait Islander children.
- Torres Strait Islander teachers, like Zuni teachers, may feel criticism from the community because of their 'dual vision'.
- A community can become more involved with its school(s) and work with teachers for the benefit of the children.
- A community can help to protect its own ways by becoming involved in the school(s).
- Teachers' bicultural roles are very demanding of their time and energy.
- European teachers need to accept that they can never become Torres Strait Islanders but that they can do a fine, respected job if they are both warm and demanding of their students. Good Zuni teachers are also warm and demanding.

This paper has raised issues of considerable importance to the people of Torres Strait. The people of Zuni are working at resolving some of the issues. Their culture, like that of the Torres Strait, is long and strong. Hence, I believe that Torres Strait Islanders (like the Zunis) can make sure that they gain maximum benefit from education.

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