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VALUES DISSONANCE

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Within the North-west Aboriginal reserve of South Australia a traditional system of tribal Aboriginal culture is currently maintained and reproduced. The observable culture of the Aboriginal people of this region retains distinct traditional elements and a life-style very different from that of the dominant white Australian society. Within this socio-cultural setting, schools which have been operational in some form since the establishment of the settlements face a unique challenge. Unfortunately, the challenge has, in most cases, not been successfully met, since the lack of success of Aboriginal students in the school situation is a damning indictment of the introduced Western system of schooling. Success is measured by the achievement of the set goals of the school, but frequently these reflect a white Australian value system.

Indeed, one of the reasons why schools have not been successful is their inappropriate emphasis on middle class, white, urban Australian values and patterns of behaviour and the desire to change those existing Aboriginal values considered to inhibit school success. White teachers in these isolated Aboriginal communities have, in their genuine attempts to provide sound education to their students, relied upon the system which supposedly meets the needs of students in urban areas. If the system of education is to operate on the basis commonly stated by educationists and envisaged by Coombs (1978:130) of

working in parallel with the traditional pedagogy
of the Aborigines themselves and which will need
to some degree to interlock with it...

then an increased awareness of the conflicting value differences has implications for educational planning and the effectiveness of administrators in this field of education.

The viewpoint I have taken is that schooling must assist the Aboriginal people to develop appropriate attitudes and skills to be

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able to cope with the modern Western environment, without devaluing their heritage and losing the associated values and skills which are the essence of Aboriginality.

CULTURE, EDUCATION AND SCHOOLING

The inter-generational transfer of culture is achieved through the process of socialization and education. Both processes normally serve to reinforce one another in establishing the rules that govern how individuals interpret their behaviour and make sense of their world. The Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures have these two means by which the knowledge and belief systems are transmitted to children. Education, though, serves a different function in each culture.

The Western oriented culture of 'white' Australians is increasingly being transmitted by education through the institutionalised school system. The school system exists primarily to prepare children for economic survival. Teachers are employed having the task of educating the members of succeeding generations who are under compulsion to attend such a school. The education imparted reflects the values associated with a cash/profit Western style economy. Education or schooling seen in this perspective is characterized by change and is linear in progression, moving away from the socialization process of the family group.

The traditional Aboriginal culture had no single institution responsible for culture transmission. Socialisation of the child resulted from the informal and close social life of the extended family group. Today, during the formative years of childhood, this process is still the case. The socialisation process at this stage is in general free, unstructured and open. The formalised education only occurred at initiation, reinforcing a value system needed for a hunter-gatherer culture. Now formalised education begins as from the first day at school.

In the cross-cultural context of daily life in an Aboriginal community within the north-west reserve, schooling has been considered a legitimate major agent of change by both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups. From the institutionalised Education Department perspective, schooling has been considered essential if the minority Aboriginal group members are to have educational equality with members of the dominant white society. The aim has been to prepare Aboriginal children for a role in the Western-style economy. What seems to have been overlooked is that the number of highly skilled jobs required in these communities is relatively few.

Hence schooling cannot be as oriented as it is to the preparation of students for participation in the workforce through an academic emphasis. The assumption has also been made by 'white' decision makers that schooling is to ensure preparation for successful survival in a Western-type society.

If, however, change involves replacement of values in Aboriginal society which inhibit achievement in Western cultures with internalised white achievement values, a clear predicament is evident. Aboriginal students, if encouraged to adopt the values and life-style of urban industrial society, may devalue the image of their own identity as Aborigines and suffer identity conflict. Green, (1983:40) has commented that -

Many elders believe that every Western value that is adopted requires an Aboriginal value to be discarded.

The retention of Aboriginal identity is very important and the school system must respect the individual and his cultural heritage, in its intervention into the traditional Aboriginal education system. Not to do this means an open conflict with parents and community elders by threatening the integrity of their way of life.

VALUES

Although the Pitjantjatjara tribal Aboriginal society is often regarded as a static culture, the commonly held values of the members are not obsolete.

Values are fundamental in influencing and guiding a person's attitude and subsequent behaviour. They are organised into hierarchies of importance into a value system. The concept of a value system recognises that some values are more important to a person than are others. The values are subject to change in response to influences from within the culture and those from outside which impinge upon it from time to time.

Settlement life, increased contact with the dominant white society, and schooling have had a considerable influence on traditional values, but Aboriginal identity continues to have a strong cultural base. The Aboriginal people in this area of the North-west reserve want some of the advantages of Western culture and its associated knowledge and technology base (particularly those associated with health and food supply). The recognition that this may necessitate accepting some basic changes in social structure, life-style and adjustments in values has, though, gained only limited acceptance. This is due largely to the fact that, realistically,

no one can be expected to know what these changes are likely to be and what effects they will have. Introduced mainstream Australian schooling and non-Aboriginal teachers have been viewed by the people as being necessary in providing this knowledge. It is more than likely, however, that this too results from the dominant white culture insisting that the acquisition of this knowledge can only be achieved by these means. It is expected by Aboriginal adults that schooling should still assist their children to grow up to be Aborigines, not black 'white fellahs'.

The child may spend a considerable amount of the day exposed to white behaviour, norms, attitudes and values at school. The reference group and significant models for Aboriginal children continue, however, to be peers, parents and kinsmen of the home and camp situation.

An Aboriginal child at one of the North-West communities may internalise some of the values of Western society by using individuals, such as school teachers, as his reference group or, alternatively, other Aborigines whose behaviour indicates adoption of some of these values. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961:45) report that:

anthropological studies have amply documented the fact that it is a common tendency of peoples to borrow actively or accept passively the ideas, the techniques, the art forms and many another aspect of other cultures and then remould them in accord with their own basic value system.

It is unlikely, however, that the individual will adopt new norms of behaviour which replace the traditional ones in all situations. Sommerlad (1976:57) has commented that, in reference to Kormilda College feeder communities in the Northern Territory -

there appears to be a negative sanction on the internalization of Western values or behavioural norms and on close relationships with whites in the community.

A similar outlook is to some extent evident in the North West reserve. More likely it is a synthesis of the two groups as sources of attitudes, values and norms.

Successful melding of the two value systems depends on the student's self confidence and sense of security in his or her identity. Those values which are most crucial to his/her identity

as an Aboriginal will be retained. At school, then, the child must learn to lead a double life with each set of values impinging on the interrelationship of the other set. Should highly important values of two differing cultures conflict then it is manifested in behavioural outcomes. In relation to schooling, this behaviour may take various forms reflecting educational adjustment to the particular environment in which social change is taking place. It should be pointed out that the social changes which have taken place (such as the emancipation of women, greater leadership responsibility being assumed by the younger males, and so on) are not of the kind that makes Western schooling more attractive or necessary to the people.

VALUES AND SCHOOLING

All permanently established settlements have a school staffed mostly by non-Aboriginal teachers. There is a tendency to cling tenaciously to their own value system in order to emotionally survive as a cultural minority in such a community. There is the dilemma that the values inadvertently or consciously taught in these schools are, in many instances, contradictory to the traditional values held by the Aboriginal community. This conflict of values permeates the total school situation.

Where a formal European-type school has been introduced into such communities, ignorance within both groups may exist. Parents, many of whom have attended some type of formal schooling, frequently are still unable to perceive the possible outcomes of schooling in anything but the haziest fashion. Their limited scope (caused by the restrictions of the school) in observing current school behaviour and also their limited knowledge of the English language, prohibit much in-depth communication with teachers. European teachers, in spite of their own expectation to learn the vernacular and acquire a knowledge of Aboriginal culture, are likely to be ignorant of much of the traditional way of life and its associated values. Once past the school gate, the classroom environment is a 'white' culture dominated situation. In this sanctuary white teachers inadvertently tend to forget that education or schooling should both reflect and reinforce the culture from which students come.

In such a white culture dominated situation, Williams (1977: 209) has pointed out that

it appears that the power field effect of Europeans is recognised by all Aborigines, who have developed patterns of behaviour appropriate for European dominated situations. On the basis of this knowledge, parents form their norms

and expectations for children's behaviour at school. As a result parents and children show a reasonably high level of agreement on norms and expectations for behaviour at school.

This, however, does not mean that the values held by the Aboriginal parents and children have changed. They have merely adapted to a situation. It does mean, though, that the contrasts between formal school learning and informal traditional learning, which are fundamentally different, appear less so from the teachers' perspective since there is little student rebellion. Hence, the discontinuity between what is learned in the classroom and what is learned in everyday life is perpetuated. Many educationists have argued that this is a failing of the school system in any situation. It is more apparent in these tribal Aboriginal schools since ignorance of the difference in values between home and school continues not to be fully recognised and acted upon by the school. It is the school which has the responsibility to change, not the culture which it is supposed to serve.

The object of these bilingual programs has been to reinforce rather than clash with the values of the local community. In many instances, however, the non-Aboriginal, by suggesting which are the positive values of Aboriginal society to be reinforced and which are the negative aspects to be discarded, has imposed his own cultural viewpoint on to the Aboriginal. The ideal for the school is for the Aboriginal to decide which values are to be retained. There is, though, a clear problem of which value system is to be used to develop the educational program of a school.

The differences in values (illuminated from the Aboriginal viewpoint) have been generally indicated by various writers in the past. The analysis of these values which influence achievement behaviour in the school indicates that they not only constitute the core component of Aboriginal identity but are also, in many instances, diametrically opposed to that behavioural orientation.

Where there is an inherent conflict situation as a result of difference in values, success at school may require the rejection of cultural identity. Aboriginal children can not only be faced with a change in their own value systems but also a change to a series of complex and contradictory sets of European/Australian values.

It is significant that, when considering change, theorists advocate acceptance of the status quo as a vital and worthwhile state. The existing state is capitalised upon and used as the

basis for any further developments. Schools have generally failed to fully utilise and integrate the learning process and skills acquired in the community with that which takes place in the school. The school and the teacher are not in these communities to change people and their lifestyles. Rather, the role is one of perceiving that value differences exist and developing appropriate strategies to capitalise on these differences. The differences should be regarded as strengths not weaknesses. The school program must build on the existing cultural values.

CONCLUSION

There is difficulty in discussing general educational issues in relation to these isolated communities because other factors such as the economic situation, the amount of contact with whites, the role of the community council, general morale of people, decision-making structures, health, etc., all impinge on the community, the child and the school and are all inextricably interwoven. What we do know, however, is that there is a considerable gap between what it is expected that a school will achieve and what actually happens to a child in terms of his/her academic, physical, emotional and social development. If the education system of these schools ceases to exist meaningfully, then when this happens it may well be a lack of recognition of the different value systems which is at fault. Makin, (1977:228) commenting on the hinderance to the progress of Aboriginal children, stated that-

the socio-cultural values of Aboriginal descent are
(or are seen as) a more inhibiting factor for example
than language.

A relevant framework within which the children can operate is required, taking into account this clash of values.

Some form of schooling is here to stay in the Aboriginal communities of the North West reserve. Even the newly established outstation communities which to some extent can be considered as displaying an open concern for the upbringing of children are, in the majority of cases, requesting assistance with the establishment of schools. It is obvious that schooling is and will remain the primary agent of assisting the Aboriginal people to cope with their involvement with the wider Australian culture. There must be involvement since it is the white society which currently has the power and control of the resources of the country. Not to be involved implies a state of continued dependency and subordinate status. Hence, given this prevailing situation, it becomes a question of what can be improved, particularly in reference to the values clash?

Change, to be of a beneficial nature, should be considered to be so from the Aboriginal perspective. Hence, it must also be based upon the values system of the Aborigine as it exists now in these communities. The white school administrator must be continuously questioning whether the educational program respects and reinforces the fundamental values of the parents. Furthermore, the hidden curriculum of those affective properties of human personality portrayed by the white teacher must be examined to ensure that a sense of belonging and not alienation is being promoted in the children.

The means of achieving this also appears quite clear cut. Aboriginal schools and the programs presented must be under the complete control of the local Aboriginal community. The token gestures of consultation undertaken in the past, requiring in many instances on the spot decisions, have offered a fixed and limited range of options. Little involvement in decision making is recognised by numerous writers to mean minimal impact in the implementation of change. Certainly the decisions made on the basis of a lack of a wider world view and a restricted formal academic knowledge base means that there is an inherent danger in limiting the perspective of what is the best option for a school system. To deny this right to make decisions infers that Aboriginal people are not competent to do so. Yet, as is pointed out by Coombs, Brandl and Snowden (1983:190)

Competence is highly valued by Aborigines and yet, most non-Aborigines regard Aborigines as incompetent in some way or other.

The schools need to be staffed by Aboriginal teachers who will have minimal cultural and cognitive discontinuity and a more realistic social reality of the school institution within the Aboriginal culture. If 'white' teachers are to be involved in these particular schools their role and tasks need to be of a consultative nature and decided by the local community and not by the bureaucracy. The role of the white educationists should be to assist the community in considering the likely consequences of different courses of action and not to make the decisions.

Finally, it must be recognised and simply accepted that the tribal Pitjantjatjara Aboriginal concept of what is educationally right for their children may be very different from what the dominant white society considers to be right.

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'THE ABORIGINAL CHILD AT SCHOOL' WELCOMES ARTICLES, PARTICULARLY BY TEACHERS, TO FULFIL ITS AIM OF BEING A FORUM FOR TEACHERS OF ABORIGINAL STUDENTS TO EXCHANGE INSIGHTS, IDEAS AND TEACHING STRATEGIES ACROSS AUSTRALIA. INTERSTATE DIFFERENCES IN EDUCATION TEND TO BE CONSIDERABLE, AND A SPECIAL FUNCTION OF THE JOURNAL IS TO BRIDGE THESE DIFFERENCES - BUT, TEACHER CONTRIBUTION IS ESSENTIAL.