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ABORIGINAL TEACHERS AND BICULTURAL SCHOOLING

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'Aboriginal teacher training', 'Aboriginalisation of staffing in Aboriginal schools', 'Aboriginal self-determination in schooling', 'bicultural education', 'Aboriginal control of schools', 'Aboriginal excellence in the 3Rs' are all phrases used by people with some commitment to seeing Aboriginal interests achieved through schooling. These statements in relation to traditionally oriented Aboriginal schools are often used as if they all contained mutually supporting ideals. The reality is not, however, without dilemmas and it is the purpose of this paper to point out some of those dilemmas and to demonstrate that quite often the choice is not a simple one but between the lesser and the greater good, or between individual Aboriginal teacher preferences and recognition of the better good of the language group as a whole.

The main dilemma for Aboriginal parents is that, on the one hand they say they want their children to do well in the 3Rs in English, and on the other hand they say they want their children to grow up Aboriginal. By this we believe that they want their children to be like themselves, but with additional skills. To some extent the two hopes are mutually exclusive unless we, and those parents, accept the idea of the 'modern Aboriginal'. It is a challenge to educators to work out ways of achieving both wishes as far as is possible at the same time, and to work out strategies that will allow Aboriginal teachers to play as full a role as possible in achieving these two hopes that Aboriginal parents have for their children.

Two real and related situations will help to bring this discussion down to practicalities. The first is at a school in NE Arnhem Land where, on current projections, all the Band 1 teaching positions in the school could be filled by Northern Territory Teaching Service Aboriginal teachers# at the beginning of 1987. In other words,

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After one year of training at Batchelor College an Assistant Teacher is classified as Assistant Teacher Grade 1; after two years of training an Assistant Teacher Grade 2, and after three years of training Northern Territory Teaching Service Band 1, with two year trained status and without access to substantive promotion positions.

most non-Aboriginal classroom teachers may be replaced by 1987. This would be a remarkable achievement on the one hand, but on the other hand is it likely to be something all these Aboriginal teachers or all the affected Aboriginal parents will want after they have tried that situation? Will the school be closer to being a bicultural school? Will the school have an increased chance of preparing children to understand, communicate with and cope with the dominant culture?

The second situation is at Batchelor College, through which an increasing number of three year trained Aboriginal staff will graduate (with two year trained status in the Northern Territory Teaching Service.) What role will these NTTS Aboriginal teachers play in schools? This is a matter for discussion in a number of circles, including Aboriginal teachers themselves and Aboriginal parents, and of course, at Batchelor College because the College needs to have its 'end product' clearly in mind when it designs courses. There are three questions which must be addressed:

- will these graduates be teachers of English?
- will they manage every aspect of classroom organisation and teaching on their own? and
- will they, on their own, provide a full model of a bicultural person and so be able to build bicultural classrooms?

Each of these questions will be examined in turn - not in a spirit of dogmatism, but in the hope of stimulating discussion.

One of the factors which makes this discussion difficult is that, to some extent, the career interests of individual Aboriginal teachers may not coincide closely with the interests of their language group as a whole - but that is not a new problem for individuals who are members of groups which are undergoing social change.

1. *Will these Aboriginal third year graduates from Batchelor College be teachers of English?* Regardless of which way observers would answer this question, all would probably agree that the majority of third year graduates from Batchelor College from traditionally oriented Aboriginal communities do not have native-like fluency in English. Some would argue that these teachers should be able to teach English on two grounds: firstly, if they are allowed any less of a task they are still second class citizens in the world of professional teachers; and secondly, it could be argued that if local Africans, Indians and Filipinos teach English in Africa, India and in the Philippines, why shouldn't Australian Aborigines?

This latter argument is supported by the view that there may no longer be a 'standard' English: do we mean British English, or American English or Australian English, or what? But *within* English speaking countries there are common perceptions of what is 'standard' English, and expectations will be different from those in countries such as India, Africa or the Philippines.

We would argue that unless the Batchelor College graduate has native-like English fluency it would be better for their language group (though not necessarily for them professionally as individuals) if they did not teach English *entirely on their own*. The arguments behind this politically unpopular stance are:

- a) Filipino and Indian English is growing further and further apart from English as it is spoken in the Western world. Whether or not we accept this type of drift for Aborigines in a theoretical sense, it is probably a sad fact of life that social acceptance of Aborigines in the wider Australian society is probably assisted by the fluency with which they can (when they need to) use a variety of English which is fairly close to that spoken by native speakers of Western-world English. The question then is, should Aboriginal children be penalised in terms of future racial prejudice because of pressures on Aboriginal teachers to 'perform equally' with white teachers? This is really a race-relations argument, and quite subjective. The following two other arguments are much less subjective.
- b) This is a second-language-methodology argument. English is a second language to most isolated Aboriginal children in the NT, and those children should be taught English by teachers trained in second language methodology. The fact that most non-Aboriginal teachers teaching English to Aboriginal children, while they should be, are not trained in second language methodology, does not weaken the strength of this argument. Nor does it detract from the fact that in informal contact with these children these white teachers are unconsciously being good English language models.

Furthermore, if Aboriginal teachers teach English in their home community will they be able to stop Aboriginal children spontaneously replying to them in their Aboriginal language, or in a mixture of two languages, even if they are consciously aware that this is occurring (which is not always the case)? A case in point is Ngukurr (Roper River) School, where most of the classroom teachers are Aboriginal. The school language of instruction is officially English, and

the home language is Kriol. When an outside observer urged the Aboriginal teachers to become more consciously aware of what language they were using (because he had observed them communicating in Kriol in an English reading lesson) several of them were offended and assured the observer that they were speaking English. However, the teachers' consciousness of language use is only half the problem; the other half is to get the children to reply in English.*

- c) This is a culture-learning argument. Learning a second language should, or must, involve learning the cultural context in which that language is used. While many Aboriginal teachers have learned a considerable amount of English, and many of the complexities of the wider culture, there are still important aspects of that system, (e.g. economic, political, historical, sociolinguistic and value systems) which, to some extent, remain a mystery to them, as is the case in reverse in relation to non-Aborigines participating in Aboriginal culture. This is not an argument against sophisticated Aboriginal staff teaching an understanding of Western culture to Aboriginal children, but it is an argument in favour of keeping a *proportion* of (hopefully well trained, experienced and suitable) non-Aboriginal teachers on Aboriginal school staffs.

The irony is that the further the Aboriginalisation of jobs in Aboriginal communities progresses, the more important it is for schools in those communities not to be totally Aboriginalised, because in the absence of representatives of the wider culture in the store, hospital and post office, etc., the school has an increasing teaching responsibility in terms of English language and the cultural contexts surrounding its use.

2. *Will these Aboriginal third year graduates be able to manage every aspect of classroom organisation and teaching entirely on their own?* The teaching capacity of Aboriginal teachers, that is, their capacity to control and communicate with children, is not being disputed. But there are aspects of long term classroom organisation, foresight in programming and judging different student requirements at different grade levels, which third year graduates of Batchelor College may find very difficult without continuing access to

* Aboriginal assistant teachers teaching in homeland centre schools would probably need to be exceptions to these discussions because there is often no alternative than for them to try to teach in two languages.

experienced local resource teachers. Several anonymous case studies may illustrate the point (reported by sympathetic non-Aboriginal teachers working closely with the Aboriginal teachers concerned):

X was an excellent teacher in Year 1 and had worked closely and effectively with several white team partners at that level for a number of years. The principal was so impressed by her performance that he placed her in Grade 4 the next year, completely on her own - programming and teaching all areas of the curriculum. She used the same activities with Year 4 as she had with Year 1 and 2, and the students respected her and cooperated but the next year she applied for a non-teaching position in the school. She knew the Year 4 experiment somehow wasn't working.

and

Y probably has the best teacher-student relationships of any teacher in the school. He can keep students happy for two hours sitting at their desks virtually doing nothing. If you do all the planning and making of work-sheets etc. for him he can teach the lesson very effectively, but left completely on his own he reverts to child-minding routines. It's as if he's still not sure what's expected of him, or what's involved in the classroom teaching process.

It should be emphasised here that these people are very capable people and their talents are badly needed in schools, and below we will suggest some ways in which these teachers' talents can be better harnessed. However, the politically unpopular truth is that these teachers, even after three years of teacher training, still may not have the background necessary to allow them to understand the processes of formal classroom teaching and organisation. This should not surprise us, because the same evolution of school systems and school staff policies has been observed in other post colonial areas: at first the colonial power provided all the school teachers; then it trained some local teachers to share the teaching load with expatriate staff; then came self-government and the rapid departure of many expatriate teachers and localisation of the teaching service with a considerable drop in teaching standards; then finally, with local people in the *leadership* positions, a recognition came that local teachers could not satisfactorily fill all teaching roles and that expatriate teachers needed to be recruited again to work in these situations, but under different circumstances.

In a small teaching service like our own in the NT where quickly responsive management should be more likely, we see no reason why the wasteful third stage of almost total localisation of school staffs cannot be avoided by moving directly from the second to the last stage. It is our concern that in response to pressures of various kinds, and under the banner of 'Aboriginalisation', many Aboriginal staff will be placed in embarrassing positions in schools which they cannot handle, that student academic standards (already none too high) will drop, and these teachers will be badly 'burnt' in their teaching career. (Of course, it may be that the third stage of total localisation of staff is a necessity because this kind of trial and error may be the only way in which a social group can independently sort out what they really need in a schooling system and be willing to take responsibility for it).

3. *Will these third year graduates on their own provide a full model of the bicultural person, and be able to build bicultural classrooms?* This is a broader issue than the 3Rs. It is in the realm of social change and culture and language maintenance; it is in the area of trying to meet the dual priorities of Aboriginal parents about their children's excellence in the 3Rs in English and yet growing up Aboriginal. Certainly Aboriginal students do need success models of Aboriginal adults who are successful bicultural people, who are at home in both languages and cultures but still with a clear primary identity as Aborigines. On the other hand, perhaps some mechanism is needed to aid the survival of Aboriginal language and culture. These cultural minorities are so small that they are in danger of being swamped by the dominant society. Should not the school, therefore, be organised as much as possible to promote home language maintenance as well as excellence in the 3Rs?

One possible solution in bilingual schools is to attempt to have domain separation within the classrooms; i.e., that English and Aboriginal languages have separate functions on the basis of *person*, *topic*, and *place*. The Aboriginal language would be used by particular people, in particular places, for particular topics: all of which would have to be negotiated locally. Incidentally, the 'topic' dimension is the hardest to sort out and decisions reached for Year 1 children can be quite invalid for Year 7 children.

Under a language separation policy such as this the school would have Aboriginal teachers as far as possible teaching in their Aboriginal language, with English first language teachers teaching in English. This would involve various team teaching arrangements across several classes. Another way to handle this would be to follow the Rock Point (Arizona) Navajo-English language separation

model where about 70% of the school staff are Navajo people and 30% Anglo. In this school there are Navajo language teachers and English language teachers (who may be Navajo people). The English language teachers use only English in the classroom, and teach in particular rooms on particular topics, and if they are Navajo people they do not switch into Navajo while in their formal teaching role. (It might be relevant to note that apparently the more traditionally oriented Navajo teachers teach in Navajo and the less traditional Navajos in English.)

SOME POSSIBLE NEW DIRECTIONS

This paper is basically meant to be a discussion paper to highlight some of the dilemmas which face Aboriginal teachers and educational planners as they seek to plan for optimum opportunities for career development for Aboriginal teachers, and for optimum staffing arrangements for schools in the light of both academic and cultural priorities. Below are some tentative solutions to some of the dilemmas:

1. Develop a second model of team teaching in Aboriginal schools which would both promote language separation and use the *strengths* of each teacher. Recently a staff member at Batchelor College made the point that positions on school staffs should be organised as a coach places members on a cricket team. In some Aboriginal schools if the Aboriginal teacher is not, as it were, a batsman, bowler and wicket keeper all rolled into one, the non-Aboriginal staff are critical. All members should be placed according to their *strengths* and within the guidelines that will achieve the educational goals of that community. (The model of bilingual education in the NT is an example of an expression of educational goals which seem to aim at what both many Aboriginal parents and educators think is desirable.)

At the present time the NT has one model of team-teaching, where trained non-Aboriginal teachers team-teach the same class with partially trained Aboriginal assistant teachers, and on the whole this works reasonably well. There could be a different model, however, where trained non-Aboriginal teachers and trained Aboriginal teachers team-teach two or three classes together, with or without any assistant teacher to help. Class sizes, however, would need to be down to 15-20 children or so to make this newer kind of team teaching possible if assistant teachers were not made available to allow for smaller grouping of children. In this way the idea of having English-language teachers would be managed, and language separation on the criteria of person, topic and place would be possible. (The reason there would be no absolute need for Aboriginal

assistant teachers is that one of the advantages of these assistant teachers is that they enable a school to have a bicultural/bilingual approach to teaching. The presence of Band 1 Aboriginal teachers would achieve the same bicultural ends, so the Aboriginal assistant teachers would, in this sense, be redundant, except for their important role in allowing for smaller groups of children to be taught. Also, there is no reason why a trained Aboriginal teacher should not be supported by untrained non-Aboriginal teaching aides who brought an English as a first language model into the classroom.)

All members of the teaching teams would plan together and organise the two or three class unit together, teach separately, have equal status.

This team teaching model should be workable in both bilingual and non-bilingual schools. In bilingual schools the teaching load within the teaching teams would be split up both according to particular teacher strengths and on the criteria of person, topic and place to promote language separation and, hopefully, language maintenance. In non-bilingual schools the teaching load would be split more according to teacher strengths and interests. Also, even in non-bilingual schools Aboriginal teachers could be encouraged to work *orally* with children of their own language groups on a regular basis on some aspects of the Social and Cultural Education curriculum and in other areas, particularly in the early years.

2. The current entry standards to the First Year course at Batchelor College, and the entry and exit standards of the Third Year course at Batchelor College should be seen as temporary, and should be increased as rapidly as possible without turning all applicants away. The exit standard of the Third Year students must allow them to move comfortably into a Fourth Year of training at a regular CAE third year Diploma of Teaching level.

Batchelor College is to be applauded for imposing academic entry standards to the College and for providing a half-semester Access (or bridging) Course to assist entry to the college. However, perhaps this access course needs to be extended to allow for higher entry levels to first year, and perhaps there needs to be a fairly lengthy access or bridging course with academic content (advanced 3Rs/high school substitute) between second and third year to make the necessary exit standard of third year achievable.

Writers such as Beeby (1966) have emphasised that there are three prerequisites for the production of fully competent teachers

who understand the *processes* of good school learning. These are: the trainees' general educational level; the quality of teacher training, and confidence. At the present time the Aboriginal trainee's personal educational level deserves much of our attention, and in practical terms means more bridging courses at different levels. (And we should not be surprised that achieving better standards will cost more - it will)

3. A 'fully qualified' NTTS teacher should not be thought of as the only respectable end point of teacher training for Aboriginal people. Many two year trained Aboriginal assistant teachers do an excellent job in the team teaching setting; they fulfil a necessary role in schools and they do not want to 'progress' to the full responsibility of teaching a whole class for all subject areas on their own. (They also often have more than enough responsibility to live with outside school.) Therefore, two years of teacher training should perhaps be thought of as a respectable exit point (with later on-going inservice training as with qualified teachers) for those who wish a career as assistant teachers. There is quite a bit of pressure imposed on assistant teachers to get further training, which implies that Teaching Assistant Grade 2 is not a respectable exit point or career opportunity; which, of course, many believe it is not.

4. Perhaps Aboriginal *influence* in schools or *control* of schools in terms of Aboriginal principals, majority of Aboriginal staff, school councils and influence on recruitment of non-Aboriginal staff, is more important to aim for than total Aboriginalisation of Aboriginal school staffs in the short term. Under this arrangement Aboriginal people could greatly influence what happened in schools, including the hidden curriculum of classrooms. But the necessary support system could be provided by perhaps a non-Aboriginal assistant principal and the 30% of the school staff who are non-Aboriginal teachers prepared and trained to work in team-teaching situations and to participate in ongoing staff development programs. These non-Aboriginal teachers preferably should have specialist training in teaching Aboriginal children, which would include second language teaching methodology.

5. Qualified Aboriginal teachers (3 year trained graduates) who wish to teach only in English - which would be their right by qualification - should be made conscious of the option of working outside their own Aboriginal language group. This would make their own teaching easier and allow for easier language separation in schools in their home communities.

In any case, we need to hold on to the important principle of separation of languages: if an Aboriginal teacher wants to teach in English s/he should be able and prepared to do so in virtually standard English without resorting to code mixing (or language mixing), and the children whom they teach should be required to respond to them in English. If these two sub-principles cannot be adhered to (remembering that few people are objectively aware of their own language behaviour) these teachers must be made aware that they are forceful agents of pidginisation in their community, which would horrify some of them. In short, the issue is not only should Aborigines teach in English in Aboriginal schools, but how can schools be agents of Aboriginal language maintenance, as well as agents for learning English. Nearly all Aboriginal teachers agree at one level of argument: they should teach English when they are well enough trained to do so. So English cannot be a white teacher's preserve, but we urge Aboriginal teachers to apply the principles of language separation in a determined way.

It should perhaps be emphasised here that we see Batchelor College as having a clear responsibility to teach *both* Aboriginal language and English teaching skills. This should not add greatly to the lecturing load as, in terms of methodology, second language learning and first language enrichment should be seen as largely the same.

Of course, Aboriginal graduates from a fourth year of training, such as is available at Darwin Institute of Technology, would have three year trained status and would have wider career opportunities including the opportunity to teach in two languages.

CONCLUSION

It is quite likely that some of the issues discussed above are too politically sensitive for us to expect firm political decisions to be made about them. However, they are not against current policy, so perhaps school principals and especially school councils should begin to discuss the issues and reorganise schools locally. Perhaps these issues are really in the realm of school councils because they are central to school policy and certainly too big for any principal to handle alone.

REFERENCE

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