



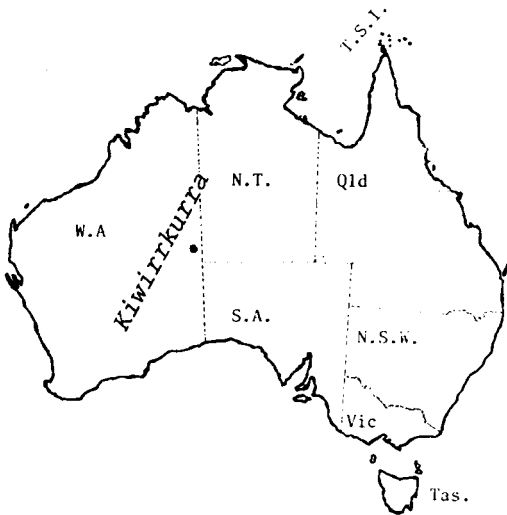
The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

This article was originally published in printed form. The journal began in 1973 and was titled *The Aboriginal Child at School*. In 1996 the journal was transformed to an internationally peer-reviewed publication and renamed *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*.

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....ACROSS AUSTRALIA....

FROM TEACHER...

TO TEACHER

EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

*E.A. (Tim) O'Keefe

This article is essentially a review of an article by J.P. Fanshawe which appeared some 12 years ago in *The Aboriginal Child at School* [Vol.4 No.3, 1976]. The comments are still valid today and will probably be valid ten years hence.

In the article Fanshawe puts forward a particularly sound argument on what personal and professional characteristics are necessary for a teacher to become effective in teaching non-traditionally oriented adolescent Aborigines. I believe that many of the attributes Fanshawe advocates are equally applicable to teachers involved in teaching Aborigines in the Primary school and indeed, to teachers in general. Fanshawe considers the characteristics under five headings:

1. Personal characteristics
2. Attitudes and values
3. Essential knowledge and experiences
4. Strategies
5. Roles

(Fanshawe 1976, p.3)

In my discussion I propose to review Fanshawe's argument under the above headings, as I feel they provide a conclusive framework for desirable attributes of primary school teachers of Aboriginal children.

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PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Under this heading Fanshawe reviews the works of Ryan, Goldberg and Kleinfeld, and has derived a composite description that he feels would be applicable to the teaching of adolescent Aborigines. This is:-

- The effective teacher of minority children is warm and friendly.
- He actively demands a high standard of performance from his pupils, though his demands are realistic.
- He is stimulating, imaginative and original.
- He is responsible, businesslike and systematic.

(Fanshawe 1976, p.7)

This model is equally applicable to the primary school Aboriginal class. Teachers should make every effort to gain the trust and co-operation of their pupils in any form of teaching. This is, however, especially applicable to Aboriginal classrooms.

The Aboriginal child may come to the classroom shy and reticent about school. If this is reinforced by a harsh authoritarian teacher the child may withdraw from the class altogether. The teacher then faces an uphill battle to educate the child.

Teachers of Aboriginal children should make an effort to gain the trust and respect of their students before they actually begin to teach them.

Aboriginal children are shy, especially with people they don't know or who are new. They stay like this for two or three weeks or maybe a month before you get them to say anything and look you in the eye.

(Ungunmerr, 1976, p.24)

The effort to establish rapport with the children should be made in a slow and positive way. If the teacher tries to push this rapport, the child may revert and the inevitable behaviour problems will arise.

The rapport should be achieved not only with the pupils in the classroom. An effort should also be made to establish some rapport with the local Aboriginal Community. If the teacher has the trust and co-operation of the Community's adults and leaders then the job will become much easier. Hart quotes an example of

a teacher in an Aboriginal school who, in two years, had not visited the Aboriginal housing area only two hundred yards from the classroom. He says:

This very impersonal and unsociable attitude may be part of city suburban life, but Aboriginal people have very highly developed social abilities and distrust a person who seems unwilling to communicate with them.

(Hart 1974, p.37)

In any school the teacher should try to mould the class into a co-operative and cohesive unit working towards a common goal, not working against each other. To do this the teacher should involve parents and the Community. Schools should be seen as part of the Community not a distant ivory tower.

ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Perhaps the most important attitude and value the teacher of Aboriginal children requires is confidence in the child's ability to achieve.

A teacher needs a positive attitude to his Aboriginal students, perceiving them as worthy in their own right and believing that they are individuals who are capable of achieving once they feel trusted, respected and valued.

(Fanshawe 1976, p.10)

This is an extension of the self-fulfilling prophecy. Teachers have always to extend their students. This is to be done with careful guidance and a firm yet understanding hand. Teachers must firmly believe in both their own ability to teach Aborigines and the children's ability to learn from them. Whilst recognising that the Aboriginal child may come from a vastly different cultural and traditional background from themselves, teachers cannot abrogate their responsibilities as regards the child's educational well-being.

Teachers must be aware of the cultural differences that are experienced by Aboriginal children. They must be prepared to extend the children but offer a warm and supportive side as well. Kleinfeld sees her "Supportive gadfly" type of teacher as fulfilling this role:

Whilst demanding a high level of intellectual participation, these teachers were highly supportive of any attempt the student did make. They very consciously avoided even the most minor forms of direct criticism.

(Kleinfeld 1972, p.37)

Although Kleinfeld was applying this theory to Indian and Eskimo high school students, I feel it is equally applicable to Aboriginal children. There would be difficulty in achieving this ideal in a classroom where the children are of different races. The teacher has the task of extending both the European children and the Aboriginal children who may be achieving at different levels. It is, however, the teachers' professional duty to devise a method by which they can extend both groups. After all, the same thing is bound to occur in any classroom where standards of intellectual achievement differ.

ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCES

Under this heading Fanshawe subdivides the knowledge required into a further three sub-sections:

- a. Knowledge of content
- b. Knowledge of students
- c. Knowledge of effective means of facilitating the acquisition of content.

(Fanshawe 1976, p.11)

Knowledge of Content -

Under this sub-section Fanshawe looks at the sort of content that would be needed to pass on to adolescent Aborigines. This is not always the same as that which would be taught in the Primary school.

When teachers move into a Community with a high proportion of Aborigines they must decide on what they are going to teach them (what they will need to further themselves within that Community and beyond it) and how they are going to teach it. To me this is a most perplexing question. In some Communities the teacher teaches only basic literacy and numeracy (this is usually decided for them by Community leaders). The teacher, before coming to any major decisions, must first consult with as many interested groups as possible (these must include local community leaders, parents, and Education Department supervisors). In making any

decision the children's needs should be the major consideration. The teacher may find a school based curriculum is the best way of achieving the desired outcomes. If this is so, it must be implemented in a way in which the child is always extended and always sees the relevance of what he/she is being taught.

Knowledge of Students

In this sub-section Fanshawe advocates that teachers should have a detailed knowledge of the culture of the Aborigines they will teach. This, to me, is a sound practice in the education of any children. Teachers can only teach effectively if they know the cultural norms and differences of their clientele. Teachers should go out to teach with an open mind, willing to educate themselves in the culture and ways of their pupils. They should then find a way to accommodate these in their teaching strategies. They must not make moral judgments on the children's lifestyle, but accept them and teach within the confines of it.

One teacher explained how he had encouraged the children to rebel against their community's marriage laws. Another said he had persuaded the older boys to resist initiation. But neither of them realised the long term effects if the children decided to follow their teacher's advice. The teacher stays a year or two and moves on; the child usually spends his whole life in that environment.

(Hart 1974, p.39)

I will also note Fanshawe's third sub-section in the section titled -

STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE TEACHERS OF ADOLESCENT ABORIGINALS

Basically, what Fanshawe advocates is applicable to Primary schools. Fanshawe advises that, before proceeding with an education program, the students should be tested to find out their level of intellectual achievement.

For effective teaching at any level, the teaching should be logical and sequential. This is obvious. The children must be tested to find out what they know and then this should be used as a base to teach them what they don't know.

Teachers should have at hand a variety of techniques which they can use to make learning meaningful to their students.

Aboriginal people are, by tradition, very closely aligned with their environment. Therefore, it follows that Aboriginal children will have a basically intimate relationship with the environment in which they live. Their environment is the known; the skills in numeracy and literacy are the unknown. To wed these two aspects within a school learning situation can only result in a relevant, exciting and rewarding program of learning experience for Aboriginal children.

(D. & N. Moeckel 1979, p.43)

Teachers must use the things that the Aboriginal child knows, to help keep lessons interesting and motivation high. Teachers, as previously said, must teach within the confines of the students' cultural norms and lifestyles. In a European school we are encouraged to build up a child's self-esteem by praise and overt encouragement. This is not always successful when teaching Aboriginal children.

If you have a child in the classroom who is better at his work than others in the class, and it isn't because he's brighter than the others that he doesn't want to do it, it's because everybody in the village is equal to everyone else...Singling out an Aboriginal child for praise above a group is an embarrassment. The praised child may feel he has let the others down and so lower his performance. Group praise fits their feeling of group identity much better.

(Ungunmerr 1976 pp.23-24)

The teacher must be seen to be fair to the whole class, not just to individuals. I feel that some praise of individual's work is necessary but this should always be given in an indirect and discrete manner.

Teachers in the Aboriginal classrooms should be flexible and approachable. This can be achieved only if they have the respect and trust of the children and the community. This is applicable in most school situations. Below is a list of the commandments which should be followed to help teachers achieve all the roles they have to in the Aboriginal school.

"THE TEN COMMANDMENTS....

For European teachers of Aborigines

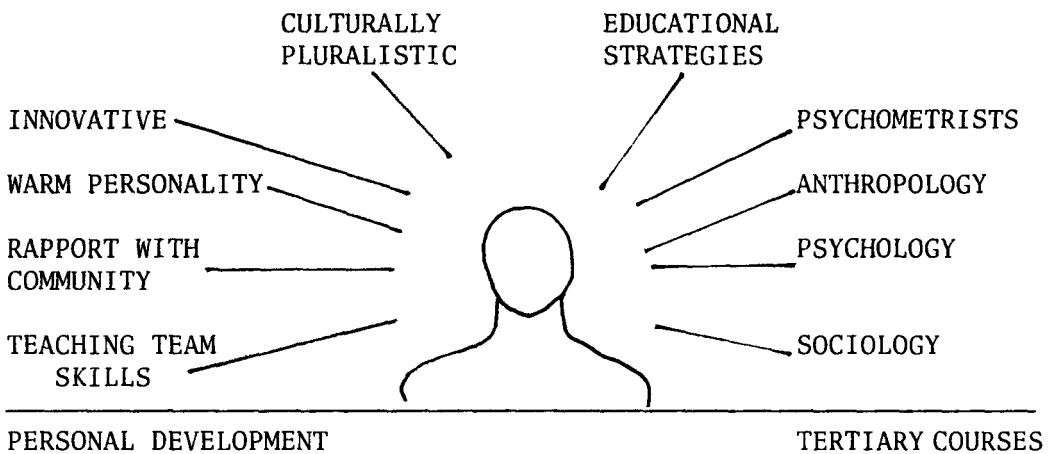
- I. Thou shalt establish a liaison between thyself and the general Community.
- II. Thou shalt study and try to understand the culture and the children who are born and reared in it.
- III. Thou shalt continue gradually in the initial stages of any developmental program.
- IV. Thou shalt endeavour to teach material that has relevance to the child's frame of reference.
- V. Thou shalt establish Community activities and rapport with the local Council (where applicable).
- VI. Thou shalt not covet thy children's kin relations.
- VII. Thou shalt respect the ethnic cultural values and maintain a continuous interchange between the school and the home.
- VIII. Thou shalt reinforce those ethnic values of generosity and reciprocity within the framework of the school program.
- IX. Thou shalt treat the children as rational human beings who require continual methodical guidance.
- IX. Thou shalt seek the Community's support in the implementation of those cultural and traditional elements desired in the school, and at the same time give the Community a SAY in the school's affairs."

The above are not necessarily in order of importance, but each is worth contemplating for the children's sake, if not our own. Perhaps, with the above "Bible" in our thoughts we, as responsible teachers, can make some significant claim to Aboriginal progress.

(Fisher 1975, pp.39-40)

In their role as teachers of Aboriginal children, teachers should be prepared to seek the advice and co-operation of any teacher aide who may be in the school. If this is not possible, teachers should elicit the co-operation of a respected Community member to help them understand and assist the Community. At all times teachers must maintain their role as professionals, and be businesslike, responsible and systematic in their dealings within both the school and the Community.

Hart (1974) sees the ideal teacher of Aborigines as shown diagrammatically below:



Suggested combination of personal and scholarly qualities in the ideal teacher.

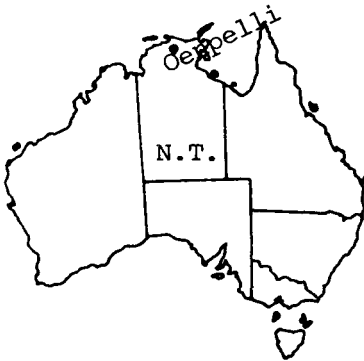
(Hart 1974, p.44)

The number and variety of characteristics outlined by Fanshawe and others treated by this paper give the impression that the "efficient teacher" of Aboriginal children has to be somewhat super-human. Many of these characteristics can only be developed through experience. New teachers going into Aboriginal schools must not use this as an excuse. They must be prepared to learn from their experiences. They must go with an understanding of the problems they may encounter and have developed strategies to counter any problems. Above all, they must go with warmth and a willingness to learn.

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SOME LINGUISTIC DIFFERENCES BETWEEN KUNWINJKU AND ENGLISH

Strategies the teacher can use to help
Kunwinjku speaking children to learn
English

*Michael Calwell

Kunwinjku is the main Aboriginal language spoken in Oenpelli, Northern Territory. It is estimated that Kunwinjku is spoken by over 1,000 people; it is the *lingua franca* of Western Arnhem Land.

The purpose of this paper is to outline the linguistic difficulties that Kunwinjku speakers face in learning English as a second language, and to suggest some teaching strategies that a teacher can adopt to help children overcome these.

Most of the ideas in this paper are from my experiences in trying to learn Kunwinjku as a second language. I have applied the difficulties that I have had to the opposite situation - Kunwinjku speakers learning English. This exercise has shown me

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