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CULTURE BOUNDARIES,  
CULTURE MAINTENANCE-IN-CHANGE, AND  
TWO-WAY ABORIGINAL SCHOOLS#

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INTRODUCTION

Remote Aboriginal culture(s) and Western culture(s) are two of the most diverse culture groups on earth. In the context of these two fundamentally different world views, Aboriginal formal schooling is facing a major dilemma. Simply put this dilemma is that while most Aboriginal parents have a deep desire for their children to 'grow up Aboriginal', they also want their children to succeed in Western schooling and to perform successfully in some aspects of white culture, thereby reducing dependency on white expertise in their communities.

To some extent the two parental desires are mutually exclusive. It is accepted that 'Aboriginal culture' means an adapting (or modernising) one, as any static, unchanging culture is a dead culture. It is also recognised that Aboriginal students need a sophisticated English schooling in those parts of the curriculum that are necessary for anyone wanting to deal with the white culture and its 'secrets'. (I think that's what Aboriginal parents, such as those at Strelley, mean when they say they want 'proper schooling'). But at what cost to Aboriginal identity and to long term Aboriginal culture maintenance?

SOURCES OF THE DILEMMA

Being Aboriginal involves retaining an Aboriginal world view: doing, thinking and believing in Aboriginal ways. But being successful in the higher levels of white culture roles involves some very un-Aboriginal ways of going about things. Even when Aboriginal teachers and Aboriginal languages are used extensively in school, attempting to adapt to the formal verbal learning requirements of Western schools will result in Aboriginal students learning some un-Aboriginal ways of thinking and using language. For example, transmitting knowledge through hypothetical problem

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posing, the question and answer teaching/learning technique, and seeing 'knowledge' as theoretically available to all rather than personal property, are all unusual ways to communicate and learn in remote aboriginal society. Can even orthodox bilingual schooling be anything other than 'Western' for much of the time in its teaching methodology and dependence on verbal learning? Not if its goal is to help students to pass *Western* exams.

I began work in the Northern Territory bilingual program in 1978 full of enthusiasm for the school applications of Aboriginal or informal learning styles, such as learning by doing and by observation. While I still see the value of these in school it has become clearer that to succeed, especially in Western high school, Aboriginal students must master Western school learning styles. These school learning styles, for example, context-reduced verbal learning, heavy use of comparing and contrasting, hypothetical problem posing etc., are not just linked to Western culture, but more fundamentally to industrial *technologies* and cash *economies*. In other words Japanese, Chinese, Russians, Peruvians, Africans and so on, (while probably having some unique aspects of formal school education in their cultures) adopt these formal learning strategies and related information processing strategies wherever they want to involve themselves in an industrial technology and cash economy. In the case of cultures such as these their size allows them to retain identity even after adopting formal education. Aboriginal cultures are extremely small and therefore more vulnerable. With this rather frightening fact in mind we need to ask the question: is it possible to achieve the expressed wishes of Aboriginal parents that their children grow up Aboriginal and also learn English and to read, write and count 'properly'?

Orthodox schools have been and still are, one of the most powerful forces toward assimilation in Aboriginal communities because they try (both accidentally and deliberately) to teach un-Aboriginal ways of thinking, believing and valuing. There are a number of ironies here: one is that the only reason schools have not been more destructive to Aboriginal culture is that they have been largely unsuccessful in achieving their aims. The proof of such a depressing statement is that one would not need many hands to count the number of qualified remote Aboriginal trades and professional people (or even high school graduates for that matter). This is after at least a quarter century of provision of fairly extensive schooling services in an orthodox Western sense.

### IS THE PAST SCHOOLING EFFORT WASTED?

This negative statement is not meant to imply that Aboriginal schools have not enjoyed the services, for at least some of the

time, of very caring, creative and capable teachers, or that there hasn't been some very innovative and positive curriculum development within Aboriginal education. (Examples of the latter are the bilingual program, the gradual increase in the number of Aboriginal controlled schools, and a greater commitment in some parts of the country to Aboriginal teacher training). Nor is this negative statement meant to imply that remote Aborigines are not coping with white culture institutions better than they once did. It should also be said in fairness that Aboriginal schooling is still very new (and that student attendance in remote schools has been very poor). Not only have most remote Aboriginal schools been established as recently as the mid 1950s, but virtually no usable research on Aboriginal learning differences was available until about a decade ago. To answer the question posed above: No, past effort is not entirely wasted, but the cost-benefit ratio in terms of financial and human resources is extremely poor, and the major dilemma remains largely unresolved.

## A POWERFUL EDUCATIONAL THEORY NEEDED TO RESOLVE THE MAJOR DILEMMA

All of these factors and many more are relevant to making judgment about Aboriginal education, but we should not lose sight of what I have called the major dilemma: how can Aboriginal students be successful in schooling without losing their Aboriginal ways of believing and thinking? A small group among the more 'pro-Aboriginal' white teachers in the Northern Territory says that schools should leave the passing on of Aboriginal culture and language to the parents. School, they say, is a Western institution and its function is to empower Aboriginal children to deal with the Western world in English. Surely they are not right? But are they half right?

Yes, they are half right, and some Aboriginal groups such as Hermannsburg think the same way. They are right to the extent that establishing boundaries between very dominant and very small cultures is essential to the *long term* survival of the small culture. This is discussed further below. But where they are wrong, in my view, is that such an approach ignores the potential power of the school (or more specifically the Aboriginal sector or domain of a school that allowed such a thing) to help in culture reproduction under changing circumstances. An example is the transmitting of Aboriginal history. In past times we can probably assume that during many evenings there was no family activity available other than telling stories, many of which would have been of an historical nature. Nowadays with videos, television,

movies and card playing such stories may not be as frequently told and some stories are dying forever with the death of their major tellers. Capturing these stories on video or audio tape or through a written Aboriginal literature would mean that the school could play a significant role in the passing on of those stories. This is an example of the school enabling 'changing to remain the same' (a phrase I think borrowed from David McClay).

Another group of white teachers, concerned about the role of schools in Aboriginal culture loss, deliberately 'go slow' in teaching English (or at least allow the students to condition them into having very non-cognitively-demanding classroom activities) thereby hoping school will be less culture-destructive. These are the teachers who evidence insufficient clarity of guidance about bicultural schooling.

They are unsure of their teaching role because they have no powerful theory of bicultural schooling to follow.

Of course no 'answer' can be 'right' all of the time for all Aboriginal people, but the most hopeful solution to the dilemma is the *Aboriginal invention* of two-way or 'both-ways' schooling, in particular Aboriginal controlled two-way schooling. Two-way schooling seems to me to be the most positive model of schooling possible in the midst of the major dilemma.

**TWO-WAYS:** Is it possible to live in two worlds?

It seems to me that conventional wisdom assumes that it isn't possible. For example, recently in a meeting of teaching staff in an Aboriginal training institution a staff member was overheard to say 'You can't have a buck each way in relation to culture', and he was not refuted. One problem is that bicultural schooling has been so poorly defined in Western educational circles. The main point of confusion is that the term 'bicultural' can imply two very different and virtually opposite processes. On one hand 'bi' implies combining the two: amalgamation, or bridge building. This produces the international person, the 'citizen of the world', which seems to be a desirable identity for a few of the financial and academic elite but would, I suspect, be a sterile identity for remote Aboriginal people. On the other hand 'bi' implies a retention of different identities through separation, boundary maintenance, compartmentalisation, disengagement, and parallel development. Is it possible to live in two worlds - in two cultures? It is relatively rare (as Joshua Fishman, points out) but it is possible, and it is necessary if a minority culture is to survive over the *long term*. The more common tendency is for

minority groups to adopt the majority group's language and most aspects of its culture. (The last aspects to change are often the more superficial aspects of culture such as festival activities - dancing, costumes, and tastes in food). So separation is *rare, possible and necessary for culture survival.*

What overseas precedents are there for the claimed necessary linkage, in the case of small ethnic minorities, between culture domain separation and culture survival? One could say that the death of many small cultures around the world is profound proof that a small cultural group cannot mix with a large dominant society for a long time without losing itself. The operative words are small and long time. (In relative terms contact with still surviving remote Aborigines has been fairly recent - mostly during the first half of this century.) While overseas there are not a lot of small groups which have survived after hundreds of years of contact, there are some. The best examples are the Gypsies of Europe and Western Asia, the Amish Mennonites of North-eastern USA, and the Pueblo Indians and Hassidic Jews.

What strategies have these four groups used? All share a grim determination to remain different. All make determined efforts to have economic independence. All strongly retain unique religious beliefs and practices. All maintain a special language for at least home and religious purposes. All have very strong views about schooling: Gypsies and Amish keep their children out of Government schools; Jews allow their children to attend Government schools but retain a strong Hebrew school experience as well; The Pueblos have opted for bilingual education under their control. All see it as their right and responsibility to control their children's schooling and all are aware of the threat to their own world view of both the defined and hidden curricula of Western schools. In other words, culture compartmentalisation, boundary formation and living in two culture domains has been their survival strategy.

Aboriginal survival history and current insight generally support the view that at least partial separation is crucial to survival. Historically, remote Aboriginal society has survived by living in two social worlds, with Aboriginal people retaining a primary loyalty and identity to their Aboriginal world view. These two social worlds were in general maintained by such strategies as the use of two different languages for different purposes (the Aboriginal language and English), the maintenance of different geographical locations for various activities (the Aboriginal 'camp' and the mission, government or station compounds) and family teaching of different value, religious and kinship systems.

In general remote Aboriginal society survived through isolation: by living on land white people didn't want.

Culture survival by living in two separate 'worlds' or domains has been a powerful contemporary Aboriginal idea. Those remote Aboriginal groups which have achieved a greater degree of self determination in schooling than most, for example, Strelley, Yipirinya, Hermannsburg and more recently Yirrkala, have recognised separation of white and Aboriginal culture domains as crucial. (By listing these four better known examples I am not implying that they all have identical approaches.) Furthermore, the whole out-station movement in remote Australia - involving several hundred small groups - is partly based on a belief in the value of culture domain separation. In these situations while white clothes, vehicles, radios and so on are used, the value system which is associated with those items is, as far as possible, excluded.

It is interesting to note that while the approach to survival varies both between self-determining Aboriginal groups in Australia, but among the four overseas examples, the common themes are strong, with the biggest differences occurring in the areas of economic independence and the role of the home language in school.

Are there precedents for culture domain separation within sub-groups of mainstream society in Australia? I believe so. One example is in the area of religious belief. Many Christians have different priorities and sets of behaviours at home and at work: in a sense they believe in the Adam and Eve story at home and 'accept' evolutionary theory at work. Another example comes from the area of science teaching. There is a considerable body of evidence to show that science students who successfully learn 'scientific' problem solving techniques at school will tend to revert to home grown problem solving techniques outside school.

I do not want to claim too much from all these examples. But I do want to say that culture domain separation sometimes happens successfully, and that it falls very much within the range of normal human behaviour.

## WHAT WOULD BE THE MAIN CULTURE SURVIVAL STRATEGIES WHICH WOULD INFLUENCE TWO-WAY CURRICULUM DESIGN?

*Parent Control.* The main strategy must be parent control of schools. For schools not to be undermining (either wittingly or unwittingly) the world view of the group from which the children come, both the overt curriculum and the hidden curriculum need

to support the parents' world view. This can hardly happen if a parent body is not in the position to strongly influence staff recruitment, decisions about the range and type of learning experiences offered, school year and timetabling etc. It is possible for the most fundamental purposes of schooling to be achieved (for example, the 3Rs in English to useful levels of excellence) under parent controlled schools. The achievements of the Rock Point Navajo Community School in Arizona prove that. It is also important that children of small cultural minorities see their parents as models of people who can influence and take control of the major social institutions in their lives. If children observe their parents as powerless, their parents' language and culture will appear as low in status and therefore not worth emulating.

Of course Aboriginal control of schooling includes the right to reject the notion of two-way schooling as it is being advocated here, which is based on the belief that the school itself can contribute to learning in both domains. Hermannsburg is an example of such a 'rejection'. There the parents have said 'white teachers can teach the 3Rs in English in the school; we will look after all the Aboriginal things at home.' (In my view that is just another model of two-way schooling, but that's another story.)

#### *A Policy of Culture Domain Separation in Schools*

Aboriginal children need to learn to consciously step between two worlds. Of course there are many areas of culture overlap, but this does not diminish the general utility of the principle.

### THE ABORIGINAL CULTURE DOMAIN

In the Aboriginal domain of a two-way school I would expect that activities would be planned, conducted and timed in an Aboriginal manner and context for an Aboriginal purpose. I realise this would not always be easy, but it must be emphasised that parts of Aboriginal culture could easily be trivialised or artificialised by being taken into the school to be 'taught'. *Styles* of doing things, ways of organising activities and the *purposes* for doing things are central to a culture. So, while some aspects of culture, such as the modern adaptation of a written literature, or some aspects of history or art or music or cooking and crafts might be functionally expressed in the school (especially if the parents truly felt they 'owned' the school) many other important aspects of Aboriginal culture cannot

be. Such things as the special values to be had from learning history actually on the land where the events took place, with the land acting as a mnemonic device; and the special training in kinship, land ownership, first causes and world view which can best be learned at a mortuary ceremony, cannot be taught appropriately in a school, because the functions which underline them are not inherent in the school situation.

A reader could be forgiven at this stage for asking 'Then why have an Aboriginal domain part of the school at all? Can't it be better done at home?' Because schools historically are adaptive mechanisms in social change and also play a role in cultural reproduction there is no reason why, carefully managed, Aboriginal schools could not have an important role in Aboriginal culture reproduction. The Western school system evolved to help people adapt to the industrial revolution. It is evolving further today to help Western society adapt to the 'high tech revolution'. Furthermore, in Western schools, subjects like history, geography, economics, art, music, politics, and home economics all have a strong culture reproduction function; they tell the students, 'This is how we do things, or view things or evaluate things in Western culture'. Two-way schooling is attempting to look a long way ahead. *As Aboriginal life style changes so will the culture reproduction mechanism need to change.* One small example would be that of Aboriginal storytelling. This is an important reproductive mechanism of Aboriginal culture, and if changes in life-style have reduced exposure to storytelling, why can't schools find the time to fill the gap? (Provided, of course, they do it under Aboriginal control in an Aboriginal way, in a context perceived by Aborigines as being Aboriginal.)

All this new school management of the two domains would require great flexibility in timetabling, and good record keeping in the Anglo domain, but it would be possible. As Beth Graham often said -

*The way to timetable when circumstances change is not to try to keep all the old activities and try to squeeze in the new ones somewhere. It's better to wipe the timetable clear and start putting in what is most important and ignoring what doesn't fit into the remaining time available.*

(Frequent personal communications  
1978 - 1985.)

Of course, most of the above is a white person's view, built from observation of some Aboriginal feelings about these matters,

and influenced by a number of educational and sociological principles. After all, some theoretical principles (for example, the notion that a dance performed away from its social context and without carrying its normal social function is something quite different than it normally is) have universal application. Aborigines can benefit from these universal principles. However, it is likely that Aborigines in control of their own schools will, in the long run, invent an organisation and establish priorities very different from anything we can now observe or make guesses about.

## THE WHITE CULTURE DOMAIN

Culture domain separation in school would mean that Aboriginal School Council approved aspects of Anglo culture (language, manners, content, teaching methodology, assessment systems and so on) would be learned in a classroom microcosm of white culture. The important matter is that the normally hidden curriculum be brought out into the open by teacher attitudes and by such teacher statements as 'You are not learning these skills, or in this way, because they are better, but because they are necessary to succeed in the white world.' It is impossible to learn to survive the white high school system, or the white world generally, without learning a good deal of white culture. Any effective white domain section of a two-way school should be seen as a white culture learning centre, more than merely a place where the 3Rs are learned. If the 3Rs in English are learned without their cultural connections and cultural contexts of application, then students will not be gaining usable knowledge. The crucial issue in relation to being protected against absorbing the hidden values curriculum of all this knowledge is for these children to be *conscious* of what is being learned. (See the discussion below about the need for a giant role-play approach to the white culture domain.) But it remains true that to hope that Aboriginal children can learn English or Maths in *useful* forms without knowing *when* and *how* and *why* (all aspects of white culture) to apply that knowledge, is unsound in terms of learning theory.

## ARE THERE ANY LINKS BETWEEN THE TWO CULTURE DOMAINS OF A TWO-WAY SCHOOL?

My own preference would be, in curriculum areas such as Western Social Studies (if the parents wanted it taught at all) not to compare and contrast various Aboriginal and Anglo social institutions such as the family, economic system, political system and so on, but simply to teach about each in its own right, in its own domain. The very teaching technique of

comparing and contrasting and its accompanying procedures of question-answer and hypothetical problem posing are in themselves un-Aboriginal and would inevitably train children to look at their fundamentally religious culture through Western positivistic eyes.

The value of keeping each culture domain separated can be illustrated further. Some Social Science curricula seek to demonstrate that Aboriginal culture is something of value because the presence of Western equivalents can be established. For example, it is shown that Aborigines have art too; Aborigines have religion too; Aborigines have history too; Aborigines have dancing too; and so on. The implication is that Aborigines become more real because they have the same range of social institutions as the dominant society. But this is very dangerous in terms of reproducing Aboriginal world view because art in Aboriginal society is not the same thing as in Western society at all, except perhaps when works of art are made for commercial purposes. In Aboriginal culture 'art' is more often something like 'ikons-which-participate-in-creation-recurring', or is to do with social status or membership. For example, when a boy is circumcised in North East Arnhem Land his whole body is painted with the same clan designs that are on the sacred boards hidden away, and he becomes something like a living sacred object. So simply using the term 'art' when talking in the Aboriginal context reduces it to being filtered through a Western world view.

The white culture notion of 'fairness' applied in an Aboriginal domain activity is another example of links across culture domains which can undermine Aboriginal world view. During a trip into the bush at Elcho Island on one of the school's Aboriginal Culture Program days a mixed group of primary aged boys and girls under the control of one white teacher and a number of Yolngu female assistant teachers was required to look for and dig yams. After a while the white teacher noticed that the Yolngu staff and girls were digging yams and the boys were just fooling about, yet clearly expected to eat some of the cooked yams. The white teacher thought this unjust so he said to the boys, 'If you want to eat yams go and dig your own and cook them yourself', which they duly did. The female Yolngu staff, while they may not have enjoyed having to dig yams for able-bodied boys, had been willing to do so. (*Personal communication, Michael Cooke, 1988*). Was the white teacher's act a matter of justice or cultural interference? I am not implying that the answer is an easy one, especially at much deeper levels of what could amount to 'human rights' issues, but I am saying that

Aborigines should be left to do the adapting in their own culture domain.

A final example of the possible danger of having links across culture domains which could undermine Aboriginal world view, is the teaching of Western maths in Aboriginal languages. Aboriginal people are more interested in qualitative relationships than in quantitative ones; more interested in fitting in with what's happening in their physical environment than in controlling it and harnessing its resources. Western maths is part of the Western world view and is directly connected to economic and technological pursuits and to interfering with the environment. To foster language engineering in Aboriginal languages so that Western mathematical purposes might be achieved in those languages looks to me like interference in Aboriginal world view. (It is this kind of concern which has caused the Northern Territory bilingual program not to advocate teaching school maths in Aboriginal languages beyond about year two level.)

Of course it is impossible that there be no links and continuities across the two culture domains of a two-way Aboriginal school. After all, the same children are in both. What I am saying is that those who organise learning activities in each domain of a two-way school should become more aware of the world view implications of what they are doing. I think some topics should be taught only in one domain (for example, Western mathematics in the white culture domain). There is no escaping that this is crucial for Aboriginal wellbeing, but when it happens I am advocating that it be conducted in a context and manner consistent with the world view of each domain. Aboriginal people themselves can decide the practical implications. For example, Yolngu people in N.E. Arnhem Land see no 'inconsistency' in visiting the clinic as well as the traditional healer for the same illness. And of course there will be times when one world view may need to predominate, as in the case of dangerous modern viruses. But Aboriginal people themselves need to sort out these matters, because when they are in control less damage is likely to be done to cultural continuity. This, I think, is the positive difference between 'adaptation' and 'social engineering'.

In saying all this I am in no way limiting individual Aboriginal choices or the possibility of their achieving at high levels in the white domain. I also wish to imply that any white teachers who might be invited by the Aboriginal School Council to teach in the white culture domain do need to be specially prepared to teach Aboriginal children. Such teachers would need to have an understanding of such matters as Aboriginal learning

styles, Aboriginal rules of interpersonal communication, and the place of competition and individual performance in Aboriginal life. Otherwise likely student reactions to the promotion of academic purposefulness and cognitively demanding activities would produce a very unproductive learning environment. Keeping these necessities in teacher background in mind it should be emphasised that the white culture domain of a two-way school is a white culture learning setting. This, in my view, would need to be the case whether Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal teachers were working in it.

## STAFFING IMPLICATION

Recently a colleague at Batchelor College said to me:

*I'm not comfortable with this domain separation business and I wouldn't express it this way. While there are some areas of learning which could be labelled 'Aboriginal' or 'Western' I don't think the whole curriculum should be cleaved in this way. Many areas are best studied both ways. To set up Aboriginal versus Western domain is to invite one to rise up over the other; it will allow Aboriginal teachers to be sniped at for their 'deficiencies' in one side of the pair. I would back a D-BATE (a fourth year of teacher training provided at Bachelor College by Deakin University) graduate any day against a typical non-Aboriginal teacher in the ability to get kids to learn what you'd call 'Western domain' material. But the non-Aboriginal teacher would probably be able to satisfy most other non-Aborigines that the Aboriginal teacher was naive, ignorant and 'not qualified'. I suppose what I am saying is that Aboriginal Dip.Teach. graduates are far more bi-cultural than non-Aborigines could ever aspire to be and I don't want to see them made vulnerable by setting up a 'Western domain'.*

There are two related matters here. The first is about the nature of both-ways schooling, and I've expressed some views of that above. It is of course very early days in relation to two-way schooling and the issue raised here will require a lot of future thought, particularly on the part of Aboriginal teachers and School Boards.

The second matter is about maintaining the dignity and leadership role of Aboriginal staff in an Aboriginal school. In my view, the way to protect the roles of Aboriginal staff at all

levels of training is true Aboriginal control of the school. (Often having a clear Aboriginal majority on the school staff would be part of that control.)

I have seen a Navajo controlled school and an Aboriginal controlled school where the white staff would not have dared to question the appropriateness of the local staff, both because their jobs depended on their keeping their opinions to themselves, and because they recognised that the School Boards had their own priorities. It seems to me that the Rock Point Navajo School has a sensible staffing system. About 80 per cent of the staff are (or were when I last heard) Navajo people, some of whom are Navajo language teachers and some of whom are English language teachers. This strategy was designed as much to foster language separation, for long term Navajo language maintenance reasons, as for other curriculum reasons.

Again I think we are in very early days in two-way schooling. All I wish to emphasise is that the curriculum (including the staffing) design of a two-way school should be as much influenced by long term culture maintenance as by any of the other purposes which vie for supremacy in a school.

*The white culture domain of a two-way school as a giant role play.* The question of how much from the white domain will rub off into the value system and world view of the students is a very real problem arising out of the above discussion. Some of the evidence offered under the heading 'Is it possible to live in two worlds?' is relevant here, especially that of the science students because they have had a very concentrated exposure to the Western, positivistic way of thinking. However, there is another way of guarding against how much the Western world view will rub off (although inevitably some 'rubbing off' will occur). That possibility is *presenting the white curriculum as a giant role play*. The role play could be put in place by teachers having the attitude and saying many times in many different ways 'You are not learning this because it is better, but because this is the way you can learn to handle white culture.' After all, all of us participate successfully in different activities with varying degrees of belief or commitment.

*The importance of a group or societal strategy for culture maintenance.* Aboriginal society does not promote individualism although there is much scope within it for individual expression. Long term culture maintenance is a structural matter; the threatened society needs to have social structures in place to support it. A policy or strategy cannot be built on individual

behaviour. A two-way school can only work in a culture maintenance sense if it is a reflection of a two-way community because its purpose would be to help prepare students for a two-way life and to support the retention of a primary Aboriginal identity. Of course group strategies always limit individual freedom somewhat, but it is probably that notions such as identity, security and continuity are more important (and in some ways more liberating) than the often illusory notion of 'freedom' where individual independence is the main goal. In any case commitment to a group strategy would be a voluntary matter. That's why culture domain separation is not apartheid. Apartheid has two features quite foreign to culture domain separation: one is that it is not voluntary, and the second is that it is a social structure initiated by the more powerful and imposed on the politically weaker. Two-way schooling has been initiated by the less powerful group as a means of self-preservation.

*Will there be time to do all this?* Some of the above may sound impractical until we remember that no normal child, if motivated, needs six or seven years in a primary school to learn what is needed. It could be done in a few years by an older child, well motivated and reasonably well taught. So, while some time might be 'lost' to Aboriginal culture pursuits (such as 3 or 4 times a year) under a truly Aboriginal controlled and directed school the gains in child motivation would more than make up for the reduced time in the Anglo domain. (In the Northern Territory bilingual program where 50 per cent of primary time overall is spent in Aboriginal languages, research indicates that in general the students know more English by the end of primary school than those in the English - only programs. Of course these are not directly comparable cases, but the example is offered here to make the point that time is a qualitative thing more than it is quantitative.)

The other aspect of time is the amount needed to evolve an innovative curriculum and organisational design. Aboriginal people have not had much experience in organising formal school programs. The first independent school in remote Aboriginal Australia was Strelly, which started in 1976. The most recent school to achieve independence or at least semi independence was Yirrkala in 1987. It will take at least 10-15 years for these schools to really put their own design on programs, and they should be allowed that time with much room for 'mistakes'. After all, previous approaches made numerous mistakes and were allowed to keep trying. Control and responsibility go together. We can hardly expect people to take responsibility when they don't have a significant amount of influence.

*What about standards?* Yes, there do have to be standards in the Anglo domain because achieving certain academic standards at different stages is both an integral part of Western culture and a prerequisite to most participation in tertiary education. To hope for remote Aboriginal lawyers, tradesmen and pilots while opposing academic standards is unrealistic. Ultimately the issue of standards needs to be directly related to parental and community aspirations. If parents do not want their children going to tertiary institutions they need to tell the school their concerns, or even perhaps keep their children at home for those parts of school which are not in tune with their aspirations. But if parents want tertiary training for their children, they should not be deceived into thinking this can be accomplished without 'standards'. They need to become sufficiently informed and concerned about academic standards before these can improve, and they are more likely to become concerned, or sort out their own independent feelings about the matter, if the school is their responsibility. Time must be allowed for all this *community* learning to take place.

## CONCLUSION : IS THERE REALLY ANY OTHER CHOICE?

The survival over the long term of very small ethnic minorities is rare but possible. The Pueblos of the Rio Grande valley in New Mexico were conquered and settled by the Spanish in 1598, nearly 400 years ago, yet today they mostly still speak traditional languages and retain their first religion. Those cultures which have survived have done it by the fairly 'extreme' or strict strategies of establishing boundaries, of disengaging for some aspects of life, and following a policy of culture domain separation.

Some kind of *group* activity in terms of geographical separation, religious separation, and economic independence, are characteristics of those small culture groups in contact with large societies which have managed to survive for hundreds of years. And, what is central to us here, minority *group* control over and restructuring of schooling has been an essential aspect of those few examples of surviving small cultures that we have. Examples of how *individuals* can handle being bicultural in less 'extreme' ways are of little use to us here because such individuals will not have the contextual support to reproduce their bi-cultural identity in their children.

I neither deny that change will and must occur, nor say that Aborigines don't want to change in some ways. I also do not deny that enormous amounts of determination on the part of Aboriginal groups to remain different will be necessary for

their long term survival as a unique culture group. But what I am saying is that if they want to retain Aboriginal identity for hundreds of years these are some of the strategies that will be necessary.

In relation to Aboriginal schooling I do not deny that interesting and academically effective learning activities can result from combining aspects of the two cultures. But that is not the only path to academic effectiveness, and may in the long run be culturally expensive.

What is being advocated in this paper may appear to have overtones of desperation, but desperate measures suit desperate situations. Cultural identity can be seriously damaged within two generations after contact with a large and powerful society. Curriculum designers in the remote Aboriginal context need a perspective that spans 400 years rather than 400 days. Aborigines must disengage in general from the dominant society and re-engage selectively on their own terms if they are to retain a strong and unique identity.

Culture domain separation is not a formula for confrontation or hostility, but a formula of live-and-let-live, of cooperative action across cultures for some aspects of life, with retention of privacy and difference for others. A two-way school curriculum design is a way of implementing and practising selective engagement. The two-way design and the establishment of culture boundaries will not always be tidy, and they will certainly never be easy, but there may be no other way.

#### NOTES

\* Some of these statements in this paper might seem to be both extreme and unsupported by evidence. This is deliberately a fairly brief paper raising some ideas that are seen to be fundamental to future constructive Aboriginal curriculum development. The ideas are explored in detail in a book by Stephen Harris tentatively called *Two-Way Aboriginal Schooling*, which should be published later in 1988.

\* It should be stated that by 'Aboriginal' in this paper reference is being made to remote Aborigines. However, the principles expressed are valid for all groups of Aborigines who wish to retain a special identity over the long term.

\* Stephen Harris is a member of the Batchelor College staff. The views expressed in this paper represent his own views and do not imply College principles.

\* The author wishes to acknowledge the helpful criticism of Chris Schwarz and Maggie Hendriksen of an earlier draft of this paper, and Chris Schwarz' editing of the final version. The colleague whose statement was reported later in the paper is not named because, due to overseas travel at the time of writing, permission could not be obtained.

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House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs  
PRESS RELEASE

The Chairman of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, Mr Allen Blanchard MP, criticised the delivery of support services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities in presenting to the House of Representatives the Committee's interim report on an inquiry into support services. Mr Blanchard said that while the report was only preliminary, it highlighted a number of problem areas in the provision of support services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities.

Mr Blanchard said that the process of service delivery had become very complex with the involvement of a large number of players at all levels of government. "Poor coordination and co-operation between the agencies involved is a problem that has been identified in a number of recent reports and it is one that the Committee has found to be very apparent," he said.

Mr Blanchard also referred to a failure to give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities the control over services provided to them that was in accord with policies of self-determination and self-management. He said, "Far from communities being in control of services provided, the services are often imposed, and are not meeting the urgent needs of the communities."

Mr Blanchard also pointed to problems in the quality of staff employed in management and administrative positions in communities. He said that urgent attention must be given to training and recruiting Aboriginal people to the management and administrative positions in their communities. He said that the Committee will pursue these issues in its future inquiry on the support services reference.

For any further information please contact:

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