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CURRICULUM, CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND DISCIPLINE FOR THE ABORIGINAL STUDENT

* Jeff Guider

The Director-General of Education in 1982, Mr. D. Swan, stated that Aboriginal education had two purposes: to enhance the development and learning of Aboriginal students and to enable all students to have some knowledge, understanding and appreciation of Aborigines and their cultural heritage (Aboriginal Education Unit, 1982, p.5). Unfortunately, today Aboriginal students still do not enjoy compatible success and participation rates to those of non-Aboriginal students. They are predominantly taught irrelevant curriculums and faced with inappropriate teacher classroom management and discipline styles. Subsequently, many Aboriginal students view schools as alien and hostile places. Schools do not meet Aboriginal students' needs and problems of low self-esteem, motivation, academic achievement and a sense of safety and belonging often occur. Aboriginal students often do not behave in the same manner as non-Aboriginal students and teachers should be aware of the purposes of Aboriginal students' behaviour and of the family and cultural influences which shape Aboriginals' feelings, attitudes and values. There is a need in our schools for the inclusion of more Aboriginal perspectives in curriculums and for teachers to become aware of the need to change the way they teach and interact with Aboriginal students.

The aims of education in Australia have been closely aligned to Australia's political ideology since compulsory education began. For much of this time schools have been assimilation agencies for relatively pro-British monoculture reflecting the complete control people of Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Celtic origins have had on Australian politics. The culture and education of the indigenous Aboriginals was virtually ignored or treated in a typical British Imperialistic manner. The history of Aboriginal education in N.S.W. is characterised by cultural imperialism, assimilation and exclusion (Hill, 1989, p.12). Since the early 1970's multiculturalism has been Australian society's ideological principle reflecting the changes in ethnic diversity and political thinking in our country.

*Jeff Guider wrote this paper whilst a student at the University of Western Sydney.

To assist in equality of opportunity for Aboriginal people initiatives have been made to improve the access and quality of education for Aboriginals. Yet, despite improvements in educational facilities, most Aboriginals find themselves in mainstream classrooms where methodology and organisation follow a white Australian tradition (Bamblett, 1985, p.34). Aboriginal students' needs are still not being met in our schools (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1988, p.1), and low levels of achievement and low retention rates is a cause of great concern (House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education, 1985, p.21).

Many Australian Aboriginals have the same aspirations for their children at school as do most other non-Aboriginal parents. They share concern for their children to acquire basic skills and want their children's education to provide access to jobs and the skills for living in the modern world (Muir, 1983, p.19). Aboriginal parents, like many other of Australia's ethnic diverse parents, want recognition and valuing of their unique culture so that their children will feel confident about themselves and their Aboriginal heritage. Herein lies the main reason why Australian education is failing Aboriginal people. Schools generally do not have programs which enhance self-esteem and cultural identity for Aboriginal children. There is a lack of Aboriginal perspectives in curriculum design and a lack of understanding of Aboriginal behaviour. This can lead to a conflict of values between Aboriginals and schools and adversely affect Aboriginal students' motivation, self-concept, achievement and general participation at school.

Motivation is a key determinant of school success. Research into the educational attainment of Aboriginal students, particularly in secondary schools, suggests high attrition and low academic attainment is caused by low levels of motivation (Hill, 1989, p.13 quoting McConnchie, 1982, Lovegrove, 1986). Aboriginal children are often not motivated towards school because their basic psychological needs are not being met at school. Children's basic needs include a sense of belonging, affection, independence, social recognition, self-esteem and achievement. G. Lefrancois (1988), when describing Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of basic and meta-needs, states that, "...higher level needs will be attended to only after lower level needs are satisfied...." (p.269). Watts (1974), in a detailed paper on personality factors in school achievement, writes, "If youngsters are miserable, unloved and

insecure it is nonsensical to expect them to be interested in things intellectual in the classroom" (p.102). He adds, "It does not matter how bright we are: if we are not interested in succeeding in something, we will not succeed because we just will not put any effort into it" (p.105). We cannot expect Aboriginal children to have the energy or drive towards higher level needs such as school taught knowledge if their basic needs aren't being met. If we showed our Aboriginal children more often that they and their culture is valued, then many of our motivation problems should disappear.

What is happening in our schools is that Aboriginal children are often being presented with a set of values and practices which are in direct opposition to their intrinsic values, feelings and attitudes. Aboriginal homes and communities strongly reflect Aboriginal cultures, values and lifestyles. When a school doesn't consider these differences in curriculum design, or when children cannot find much at school which relates to their cultural background, learning is impeded (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1988, p.19). Skills and characteristics that are highly valued in Aboriginal homes often become irrelevant at school because of the way classrooms are organised (Malin, 1990, p.9). This rejection of Aboriginal children's sense of being can leave them alienated or hostile and threatens their psychological safety, sense of belonging, self-esteem and cognitive development in the classroom.

The child functions in the classroom as a total person, bringing with him all the results of his learnings and experiences which have shaped his emotional, physical and intellectual being: his self-identification and his influential friends, his concept of himself and his level of adjustment, his motives, values and aspirations, his attitudes to and perceptions of school, learning and the world about him, his health and nutritional status and his sensory functioning, his level of cognitive functioning, his preferred ways of knowing and learning and his competence in language usage (Watts, 1974, p.20).

An Aboriginal child growing up under the influence of attitudes, values and beliefs in Aboriginal society will have quite different life experiences to those of a non-Aboriginal child. It is these life experiences

that shape the Aboriginal child's social and cognitive behaviour at school and help them to decide whether or not school appears meaningful, relevant or attractive. In short, there are a number of innate characteristics that many Aboriginal students possess due to encouragement they receive during childhood.

Researcher, M. Malin (1990), in a study of why schooling is difficult for urban Aboriginals, reports that Aboriginal families encourage their children to develop qualities of autonomy and affiliation. Aboriginal children's autonomy is encouraged through the child's:

- self reliance
- ability to regulate his or her own behaviour
- seeking help and attention from peers as much as from adults
- approaching new tasks cautiously to avoid making mistakes
- being emotionally and physically resilient

The intimate, interpersonal childhood that many Aboriginal children have develops in them a strong need of family and belonging. This affiliation with others is encouraged through:

- keeping an eye on those around them and knowing where everyone is
- helping others
- trusting that peers can be relied upon to help if need be

(Malin, 1990, p.12).

In teaching Aboriginal children, teachers must be aware of the nature and purpose of the Aboriginal child's classroom behaviour. Watts (1974) writes, "The Aboriginal youngsters in New South Wales' country schools are affiliation-orientated rather than achievement orientated" (p.107). If this were true of the majority of Aboriginal children in all classrooms in Australia then it would indicate that the Aboriginal student's needs are more social and emotional than cognitive. Aboriginal children may see little future in a classroom that force compliance to a code of behaviour that they neither understand or cannot follow. It is important that teachers possess a knowledge of characteristic Aboriginal student behaviour

so as not to mistake behaviour, the purpose of which is to meet the children's needs, for disruptive and disobedient behaviour.

Malin (1990) also details some characteristic Aboriginal students' behaviours which teachers should be aware of. Malin groups, what he sees as autonomous Aboriginal student behaviours, under the heading of self-regulation and self-reliance. A few of the behaviours he lists could be viewed by some teachers as threats to their authority in the classroom. What is essential for teachers to learn is that, "...Aboriginal families' constraints on and tolerance levels of behaviour differ from those of the school" (Bamblett, 1985, p.35). Too often teachers ignore the fact that children have individual differences in intelligence, ability, behaviour and preferred ways of learning. Malin's list of Aboriginal student autonomy components is:

SELF-REGULATION

- Doing things in one's own time.
- Not always obeying directives first time round.
- Sometimes delaying compliance indefinitely.
- Wanting to size up a situation before plunging in.
- Not having to demonstrate contrition at being disobedient.
- Using questioning in an indirect, unobtrusive manner.

SELF-RELIANCE

- Being assertive verbally:
 - *Expressing one's needs, wants as declaratives and directives.
 - Being physically assertive:
 - *In obtaining what one desires, or is entitled to.
 - Possessing particular competencies including:
 - *Acute observation skills.
 - *The ability and tendency to orient within a wide geographic area.
 - *Practical dexterity and experience.
 - *Ingenuity, astuteness and initiative.
- (1990, p.18).

The classroom management techniques of many teachers must change if the teaching of aboriginal children is to become more effective, than the levels of Aboriginal student success currently indicate it is. As Watts (1974) states:

With each child one must ask, "What makes this person tick, what are his basic needs?" When this has been ascertained, teaching strategies can be decided and teaching methods devised that will rouse that motive and that will help the youngster to learn in the classroom" (1974, p.106).

In summation, many Aboriginal children at school today should be viewed as children who are self-reliant, self-regulating and affiliation orientated, who have a sense of worth and belonging towards Aboriginal culture, who possess many qualities which are not fully utilised and encouraged, and most importantly, children whose basic needs of affection, belonging, recognition and self-esteem are not being fully met in our schools.

The effective teachers of Aboriginal children are those that understand the individual child's needs and appreciate and acknowledge that which makes the child, the child's family and culture. There are teachers that have high expectations of the child and those who don't make judgements about Aboriginal children's performance and ability based on the present success rates for Aboriginal children in schools. The effective teacher acknowledges that schools are failing Aboriginals, not visa versa, and have decided to do something to improve the Aboriginal child's chances of success at school. The effective teacher ensures that the Aboriginal child gets to enjoy strong social, emotional, physical and cognitive growth.

Teachers need to adopt more appropriate strategies so that teaching and learning is effective and enjoyable in classrooms with Aboriginal children. To bring about desirable outcomes for students, teachers need to consider the type of classroom management they use and their style of discipline. Just as there are differences in individual students, there are also a variety of classroom approaches to management and discipline that teachers use. The important point becomes marrying up the teacher's methods

of teaching and discipline and the students' styles of learning and behaviour. What type of teaching approach is the most effective in meeting the needs of Aboriginal students?

Judith Kleinfeld (1972), in her investigations of effective teachers of Indian and Eskimo students, proposed that teachers could be labelled under four distinct titles which described their approaches to teaching (Honeyman, 1986, p.34; Fanshawe, 1989, p.38; Fanshawe, 1976, pp.3-23). Teachers were placed into each group on the basis of two main criteria. They are, the degree of demandingness a teacher insists upon and secondly, the personal warmth or professional distance a teacher adopts in interacting with the students. The four types are: traditionalists, sophisticates, sentimentalist and warm demanders. Warm demanders are also known as supportive gadflies. A summary of the characteristics of the types and the significance to Aboriginal students, taken from K. Honeyman's (1986) paper 'Learning Difficulties of Aborigines in Education', is as follows:

TRADITIONALISTS

- concentrate exclusively on academic subject matter
- consider interpersonal dimension of classroom as an illegitimate concern
- prefer highly structured lecture type lessons maintaining professional distance
- tend to ignore non-academic students
- often seen as hostile by students

SOPHISTICATES

- highly educated, well travelled
- employ humour often tending towards irony
- intellectually fascinated by culturally different students
- often confuse unsophisticated students by fast-paced repartees and use of irony
- tend to focus on cultural differences from a professional distance and thus reinforce minority students' sense of being different and estranged
- act according to stereotypic description of ethnic minorities

- exempt minority students from standards of behaviour and academic performance applicable to everyone else
- view deviant behaviour as an expression of culture

SENTIMENTALISTS

- warm kindly people
- find it difficult to make demands of any students
- react with aggrieved anger at defiance
- show apparent favouritism to minority group children resulting in anger and resentment from mainstream students
- require little learning.

WARM DEMANDERS

- tend to be successful with all students
- spend time to establish positive interpersonal relationships between teacher and student, and student and student
- become demanding only after rapport established
- concerned with what students learn
- avoid minor forms of direct criticism
- structure classes largely to cater for students' personal needs
- strive to increase minority students' status in class

(1986, pp.34-36).

In a study of teacher effectiveness with adolescent Aboriginals in Brisbane, J. Fanshawe (1989), using Kleinfeld's system of classification, had this to say: There was"....strong evidence that....the warm and friendly supportive gadfly and sentimentalist approaches are considerably more effective than the cold, distant and aloof traditionalist and sophisticate approaches" (p.47). Support of the need for teachers to establish a warm and understanding rapport with Aboriginal students also comes from K. Honeyman (1986) when he states, "Teachers concerned with helping Aboriginal students can appraise their approaches according to this typology (Kleinfeld's) and seek to modify their professional behaviour to approximate as closely as possible the warm demander" (p.36). A. Eckerman (1988) in proposing a set of strategies for

teaching Aboriginal students also follows a warm demanding approach. She sees effective teachers of Aboriginal students as being demanding, warm and supportive, stimulating and responsible and organised (1988, pp.13-17).

A warm demanding classroom management style is effective with Aboriginal students because it suits their cultural and personal needs. There is an emphasis on the building of positive relationships between teachers and students and students and students which enhance an Aboriginal child's chances of affiliation at school. Warm demanders are also better motivators of Aboriginal students because the students are more likely to be motivated by affection for a teacher than by respect for authority or interest in classroom tasks (Bambllett, 1985, p.35). Warm demanders include aspects of Aboriginal culture in curriculum design and classroom instruction because they are concerned that what the students learn is meeting their needs. The student's self-esteem is maintained and encouraged through the teachers valuing of Aboriginal culture and increasing Aboriginal status in the classroom. Aboriginal students who are taught by warm demanders should enjoy greater success and participation at school as warm demanders tend to be successful with all students.

The style of discipline teachers use for Aboriginal students should also be compatible with Aboriginal feelings, attitudes and values. Discipline approaches can be expressed along a continuum that sees teachers in control of student behaviour at one end and students responsible for their own behaviour at the other end. Between these two extremes lies a variety of discipline styles which use a balance of teacher control and student self-control. Teachers who tend to maintain complete control are called interventionists, whilst teachers who allow students responsibility for their own behaviour are called non-interventionists. Interactionists are those teachers in the middle ground (Sutton, 1983, p.9). It would appear that Aboriginal children would respond best in classrooms with a code of discipline that was based on the interaction and non-intervention styles. As mentioned earlier, Aboriginal students are autonomous and independent and therefore do not enjoy a strict, demanding style of interventionist discipline. V. Hoopgood (1986) writes that a majority of Aboriginal students "...are often visibly upset by strong demands and insistence. Frequently this leads to....their refusing to then follow

the direction, and ultimately swearing at the teacher and/or threatening physical abuse" (1986, p.34).

Aboriginal students are taught to be self-regulators at home and schools should further encourage Aboriginal students to develop self-discipline. This may best be achieved in classrooms that use mainly non-intervention discipline codes. Non-intervention by teachers allows students to have the most control of their behaviour. It is a method of maximising the chances of students 'working through' their own misbehaviour in an atmosphere of teacher support and valuing of the students' decision making (Sutton, 1983, pp.13-14). There are times, however, that all children need guidance as to the validity and consequence of the decisions they make, especially when they are younger. The success of non-intervention lies in students being able to make rational and logical decisions. It is important that in any decisions students make that they consider not just their own, but others' needs. K. Darvall (1990), in a study of Adelaide Aboriginal students who were considered troublesome and having low academic ability, writes, "...the major restriction on the child's individual autonomy was the adult's expectation that children modify their independent drive with a nurturing and socially considerate orientation" (1990, p.10). Teachers may need to use an interactionist method of discipline so as to show Aboriginal students the need to consider the effects of their behaviour on others. When students are unable or not prepared to make fair and proper decisions about behaviour, interactionist teachers are able to guide and assist the students to develop more socially appropriate responses. Still, whether a teacher uses non-intervention or interactionist discipline, it is important that, like classroom management, a teacher chooses a style that is going to best meet the students' needs.

Once teachers have been educated in the optimum methods and content to instruct Aboriginal students, education will become more relevant and attractive for Aboriginals. School is often a difficult time for Aboriginal students today and there is much that needs to change. Curriculums based on an understanding of Aboriginal culture have to be written and Aboriginal students' values, skills and characteristics must be utilised and promoted at school. As Aboriginal students

begin to see that schools value them and their culture and that their basic needs are being met they will become more motivated to attend and participate at school. By changing the process of education for Aboriginal students we should be able to make a far better product. Students whose school experiences were enjoyable and richly rewarding.

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