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URBAN ABORIGINAL STUDENT UNDERACHIEVING, UNRECOGNISED POTENTIAL

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This paper attempts to explore current issues in Aboriginal education within the urban sector of Australian society. Identifying specifically both the current positive and negative trends within the urban Aboriginal education scene.

Today's urban Aboriginal student faces many situations which are entirely different from those of traditional Aboriginal counterparts. But it is these situations which influence the urban Aboriginal child's cultural values, personal identity, language, social security, self concept and learning. This study is intended to be a critical review of literature on this particular subject.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is generally agreed that the outcomes of schooling for Aboriginal children are different from the outcomes for non-Aboriginal children. Aboriginal children are at times disadvantaged in that a school's curriculum, organisation and staffing arrangements fail to meet the language and cultural needs of such children.

The considerable differences within Aboriginal Society preclude the assumption that Aboriginal students come from a homogeneous cultural background. It is wrong to refer to Australian Aborigines as one group. Forrest (1985 p. 36) illustrates this point when he states, "There are Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders who live in traditional communities

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and who observe a high level of traditional institution. They are usually geographically and socially disconnected from the rest of society although there may be some economic connection. Others live in rural, non-traditional communities and exhibit a low level of observance of traditional institution. Some are geographically and economically embedded in mainstreamed society although there is a degree of social separation as they dwell in rural-urban or metropolitan-urban communities of their own (eg. Redfern, N.S.W.). Lastly, some are dispersed in rural-urban or metropolitan-urban living areas and are fully embedded in mainstreamed society. Such a socio-geographic distribution of indigenous people makes it impossible to refer to the Aboriginal population as one group". Today's urban Aboriginal student faces many situations which are entirely different from those facing traditional Aboriginal counterpart within the school setting. But it is these situations which influence the urban Aboriginal child's cultural values, personal identity, language, social security, self concept and learning.

Schooling for Aborigines and Islanders in the urban situation has been closely linked to Government Policy and legislation. In the early part of this century, the policy was to relocate all Aborigines to reserves. While this remained policy, not all were treated in this way, and so provision was made for some Aborigines to attend specially created Aboriginal schools in some centres. These were eventually closed and urban Aboriginal students attended local schools. Such was the case in Western Australia in 1912 where according to Lippman (1976, p. 1), a sudden influx of Aboriginal children into white schools led to an uproar from white parents whose children had to share facilities with Aborigines. This ultimately led to the expulsion of the Aboriginal children in this case.

Through various Commonwealth Government initiatives (eg. Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme) aimed at encouraging Aboriginal children to remain at school, and the "urban drift" of Aboriginal people, we now find in some instances a significant number of Aboriginal children enrolled at a number of urban schools. These students come from a wide spectrum of the Aboriginal population: some are recently arrived from rural communities; others have come some years ago; some have been born in the urban situation of parents who previously lived in a rural setting; and others are second (or more) generation urban dwellers.

Today's Aboriginal child in an urban situation stands in the intersection of two circles - one comprising the culture of traditional Aborigines and the other dominated by European contact. Both cultures manifest themselves in a child's attitude to people and to society at large. Such a situation can greatly affect the urban Aboriginal student's attitude, behaviour and performance at school.

Our schools need to realise that Aborigines, even in an urban situation, have different points of view, priorities and attitudes from students in the mainstream school. Failure to take appropriate action in developing strategies to recognise that such a diversity does exist, will ultimately lead to the detriment of the children concerned: the demise of Aboriginal language, cultures, traditions as well as the loss of the opportunity for all Australians to benefit from a cultural and linguistic diversity .

It must be conceded that our schooling has not always included a positive view of Aborigines. There have been instances where they have been excluded, patronised, denigrated and even ridiculed as an inferior "pre-civilization" group. It is therefore little wonder that both urban and rural Aboriginal students receive the message that they are inferior and their ancestors and culture, "worthless". But such an effect has specific implications for the Aboriginal child in our urban setting where they not only encounter a cycle of prejudice and discrimination but also may suffer an identity crisis.

2. UNDERACHIEVING ?

(i) INTRODUCTION

The failure of Aboriginal children to achieve at school has been widely interpreted as an individual failure on the part of Aboriginal children. Poor attainment has been attributed to lower I.Q. and ability, inadequate home environments, and poor parenting and not to the inadequacies of the education provided, to prejudices Aboriginal children face or to the active resistance by Aboriginal people to the cultural destruction implicit in many educational programmes. An examination of the determinants of school success shows that Aboriginal children's cultural values, beliefs and practices and Australian

schools are often in conflict. To improve the outcomes for Aboriginal children, schools are required to assess whether or not they are catering for the inherent needs and talents of individual Aboriginal children.

Many of today's Aborigines when placed in a Western urban educational environment, develop a range of psychological problems. This is partly because the education system is based on Western traditions and culture which, knowingly or unknowingly, tends to ignore almost completely Aboriginal culture and traditions. Honeyman (1986 p.17) makes this point when she states "Most Aborigines living in a Western urban manner are expected to become members of the Western society although this society has ignored the fact that Aborigines have their own reference group which demands loyalty to it. Thus, many Aborigines have the pressures of two societies influencing their lives."

(ii) INFERIOR INTELLIGENCE THEORY

For many years it was believed that Aborigines had less innate ability or intelligence than non-Aborigines. A belief in the inferiority of Aborigines as a race of people had long been supported by imperialistic rhetoric about white racial supremacy, the failure of Aborigines to adopt European work ethics, and the numerous failed attempts to educate Aborigines (Kociumbas, 1988, p. 147; McConnochie, 1982, pp.19-22). As late as 1961 the annual report of the N.S.W. Aboriginal Welfare Board stated, "...Aboriginal children, as a whole, do not possess an intelligence quotient (I.Q.) comparable to that of their white counterparts..." (Duncan, 1969, p.194) This claim was supported by the poor results Aboriginal students achieved in school administered intelligence tests. I.Q. was then regarded as a major indicator of intelligence. It cannot be denied that Aborigines tend to score below average in these tests but there is abundant evidence from psychologists and sociologists that these test are influenced by social and cultural factors to a very marked extent. Duncan (p.194) dispels the inferiority intelligence theory when he states that such tests measure the current mental working level and performance of pupils rather than actual innate ability. Innate ability or potential is sometimes referred to as 'Intelligence A' whilst the working level is referred to as 'Intelligence B'. If steps are taken to meet the effects of social and cultural deprivation, the working level and thus the measured quotient can be raised quite significantly.

The suggestion that the intellectual inferiority of Aborigines is due to the fact that they do not do well at school can only be seen as a gross generalisation. Jenkins (1987 p. 49) agrees that such a theory is particularly fragile and makes three particularly appropriate points in this regard. She states "Firstly, no reference is made to specific genetic disorders that might account for the inability to learn. Secondly, use of such terms as inferiority is racially prejudiced, particularly without qualification. Lastly, the context of the learning process in question which shows up this possible inferiority might be at fault, as it does not take into account the special circumstances of cultural background. This sort of insinuation may be likened to giving intelligence tests to Aborigines who are unlikely to score well due to a different cultural background.

Certainly it is erroneous to believe that Aborigines have less innate ability or intelligence than non-Aborigines. Indeed, Duncan (p.195) on this particular subject. This group felt that where allowances for differences in environment opportunities could be made, then intelligence tests showed an essential similarity in mental characteristics amongst all human groups.

(iii) SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL REASONS

Today it is inaccurate and misleading to talk about Aboriginal students as a homogenous group who all share common and readily identifiable characteristics and who share a strong affinity to traditional beliefs and practices. The degree to which they are influenced by traditional and contemporary culture and the degree to which this will affect the students' school performances, will depend on the type of communities the students have lived in and how they identify with the values and customs of those communities.

This is probably best witnessed when one considers the differing attitudes towards individual success as displayed by our schools and by some Aboriginal communities. Human values and personal relationships are constantly stressed rather than the importance of material possessions by Aboriginal communities at large. Aborigines are taught to share their possessions with others who are unwilling or unable to find employment. There is no disapproval of members of the community who make no attempt to 'pull their weight'.

Kinship obligations and the need for mutual co-operation are continually stressed. The individual who strives for his personal advancement becomes a threat to the group as a whole and is actively discouraged from becoming too ambitious. Some pupils who have the capacity for academic success at school find that their parents, their siblings and particularly their peer group give them little or no encouragement.

The urban Aboriginal child, as a member of a depressed cultural group, quickly realises that social acceptance will be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. As long as they remain unconvinced, they are unlikely to be ambitious and to strive to higher social status on an individual level. For the urban Aboriginal student to attain social mobility might well mean that they must forget their kinship obligations and their practice of sharing with other members of the community. Duncan (p.201) then poses a very pertinent question: What happens to the Aborigines who do turn their back on their own community and fail to succeed in European society?

Since very few Aboriginal houses (urban/rural) have much in the way of books and writing material, the child often suffers because of an environment that may not be conducive to academic learning. Honeyman (p.25) illustrates this point particularly well in her study of learning difficulties of Aborigines in the Western urban educational environment. Because a significant number of parents of Aboriginal children did not receive substantial education, concerns arise. It may mean that if a student is having problems comprehending work in class, the teacher cannot rely on the parents to help with remediation work at home. This may also mean that the parents will find it difficult to motivate the child to succeed at school. Honeyman feels that the education system must be consciously aware of these parents' attitudes towards educating their children.

Valadian (1985, p.37) in her article about Aboriginal children and giftedness provides a very succinct summary of the social and psychological factors effecting the urban Aboriginal child. She feels that Aboriginal children in the urban setting tend to assume the characteristics of monocultural Australians with a veneer of Aboriginality based mainly on clan sharing and gathering for funerals. They grow up in an

adult-centred society and undergo a politically-based socialisation process rather than one which is culturally-based. They develop a street-smart culture and are often pauperised by a handout mission mentality which affects their intellectual, social and emotional development.

(iv) NON ACHIEVEMENT OR NON RECOGNITION ?

Aboriginal children possess many skills and knowledge which are devalued in our education system. Valadian claims that recent school programmes have not been based on utilising the talents and giftedness of Aborigines. She suggests that the range of knowledge and skills that children had to acquire in a traditional community by the age of four or five alludes to giftedness and talent constituting the norm amongst the children. Valadian supports her claim by comparing the multitude of skills the children had acquired at an early age compared with the skills of non-Aborigines of the same age. The abilities the children acquired are quite extensive and certainly refute suggestions that Aboriginal children are less intelligent and capable as non-Aborigines.

We expect of minorities such as Aborigines the attitudes and values held by the average Euro-Australian groups in our society even though many of these are not part of the Aboriginal culture. These attitudes and values include an emphasis on individual success above group welfare and on the values and benefits of competition rather than cooperation. We are aware of Euro-Australian moral standards, codes of behaviour and etiquette and belief in the puritan work ethic but these are not so evident to all members of Australian society. We expect a value to be placed on the acquisition of material possessions and their individual ownership.

McEvoy (1985, p.40) in her article entitled 'Special Needs of Aborigines in the Teaching of Reading' makes the point that if the teaching of reading (or of anything else) is against the background of these expectations then we will fail to meet the needs of a group who do not hold these expectations. McEvoy suggests that the thinking of their culture. The written word has an effect on the habits of thinking and categorising knowledge in a way in which the spoken word does not. We must therefore recognise that Aboriginal ways of knowing are inevitably different and that the urban Aboriginal student is likely to exhibit skills and knowledge which need to be encouraged, not devalued by our education system.

(v) STANDARDISED TESTING PROBLEMS

Studies show that when Aborigines assimilate into the European culture their performances in standard intelligence tests improve. Guider (1991 p.44) in his article quotes McElwain who found that ..." the relative average inferiority of performance on tests of the Aborigines is (roughly at least) proportional to the degree of lack of contact with European culture (ie. Language, skills, methods of thinking, and so on)". Because their life experiences are different most Aborigines are at a disadvantage when they attempt standardised intelligence tests, even the urban Aboriginal student.

Teachers should be cautious in assessing the potential of Aborigines on the basis of one-off intelligence tests. Conventional intelligence tests only measure the present level of a student's academic achievement and not their potential or innate cognitive capacity (LeFrancois, p. 214). An individual's I.Q. is not fixed or unchanging and is highly amendable to modification by environmental interventions (Vander Zanden et al, 1984, p. 109).

It should also be argued that tests which are specified for one cultural group are inadequate for another. Jenkins (p.50) makes this point when she discusses study habits. She notes that there is no cultural tradition in Aboriginal society to foster such habits at the expense of performing co-operative duties or kinship within the group.

With regards to the urban Aboriginal child any veritable assessment of intelligence of academic potential must give consideration from how Aboriginal culture and life experiences influence cognitive development and how these influences can be different to the norm. It is inexcusable to assume simply that because an Aboriginal child is from a westernised urban setting that Aboriginal culture and life experiences will not influence that child's performance in a "test situation" .

3. UNRECOGNISED ?

(i) INTRODUCTION

Much of the literature on Aboriginal education tends, and rightfully so, to emphasise the disadvantages Aboriginal children face when they enter into Western schooling. Research certainly supports the view that

Aboriginal students differ from their Western counterparts in terms of world view, learning style and in sociolinguistics. Hudsmith (1992, p. 3) reports that in some urban schools, it appears that the inability of teachers to understand and cater for the cultural differences of their Aboriginal students is compounded by an active resistance to the school culture by those students. It may be seen that the education of Aboriginal children in urban schools is often problematic and may lead to on-going, long term misunderstanding and frustration for students and their teachers. However, I do have to ask, in such classrooms are pupil/teacher interactions characterized by sensitivity, respect and allegiance to common goals? Are teaching processes and strategies informed by Aboriginal student learning styles, experience, sociolinguistic etiquette's, values and social identity? I fear I know the answer to both questions and it is proposed that this paper looks at why many urban Aboriginal students are not involved in a learning process that is enriching for the teacher and the student alike.

(ii) ABSENTEEISM

Teachers have often complained that Aboriginal pupils are frequently absent from school. Writers including Dunn et al (1969, p. 19) provide many reasons for such frequent absences including illness, domestic financial difficulties, parents' work habits, lateness and lack of interest. Whilst it is agreed that absenteeism hinders educational progress, these absences must be considered as a symptom, rather than a cause, of the general situation.

Folds (1987) in his book '*Whitefella School*' sees non-attendance as the most effective and pervasive form of resistance exhibited by Aboriginal children to schools. Whilst his book centres on the Pitjantjatjara settlements of central Australia, Fold's work does have some relevance for the urban Aboriginal setting. Often a reason for absenteeism for urban Aboriginal students is that there are many 'other' activities in their environment apart from school. However, Folds (p. 40) points out that the high rates of absenteeism are all the more remarkable considering that there is extremely little for children to do in Pitjantjatjara communities apart from attending school. Fold's also raises another interesting point on this matter albeit rather cynically when he states 'School resources and reputation are geared to attendance and it is not unheard of for absenteeism

to show a remarkable decrease in a school where added resources, human or material are being sought." One would think that such a suggestion, if accurate, would therefore apply to traditional as well as urban Aboriginal schools.

With regards to an urban Aboriginal education setting, this fear of failure or being judged is indeed very real. O'Shane et al (p. 33) point out that 22.5% of students in urban settings in their study gave the reason for their absenteeism as "not coping with school-work".

This response was greater than any other answer which included such responses as not coping with school system, bored, bad feelings with teachers and sickness. Incidentally, I feel in reading *O'Shane et al* report that whilst the incidence of absenteeism was closely tied to both personal and cultural traits, that personal relationships may also have played a significant role.

In conclusion, I would think it is fair to say that non-attendance must be seen as a real likelihood for urban Aboriginal students when circumstances (school or home) interact to create a situation where the odds are against motivating their attendances.

(iii) SELF-ESTEEM

In today's society many urban Aborigines have a very low opinion of themselves. This may be because most of them are living their lives in a Western manner and being expected to become members of the Western society although that society has ignored the fact that Aborigines have their own reference group which demands loyalty to it. Thus, many Aborigines have the pressures of two societies influencing their lives.

Self-esteem is necessary to any individual and this is particularly important when there appears to be some doubt about being accepted as an equal in the general community. Failure at school damages Aboriginal pupil's concept about themselves as well as their self-confidence. *Dunn et al* (p. 200) feels that this lack of confidence in themselves and in their chances of success leads to further deterioration in school attainments.

But do urban Aboriginal pupils have negative self-concepts? Chadbourne (1983 p. 38) in his article quotes Fanshawe (1976) who observes that there is insufficient experimental data to enable this issue to

be resolved conclusively on empirical grounds. Briefly, the case for urban Aboriginal children having negative self esteem is argued by Chadbourne as follows, "The self is a social product formed from our perceptions of what others think of us; that is, from the image we see when we look into the mirror of us that others hold up (the 'looking glass self'). Compared with their white counterparts, Aboriginal pupils are confronted with a more negative mirror image because they get more negative feedback from 'significant' and 'generalised others', (as a result of the low achievement at school and damaging ethnic stereotypes in our society). Therefore, logically other things being equal, they must develop lower self-esteem than do white students." Chadbourne then suggests that instead of focussing only on the 'victim' and devising ways to build up the self-esteem of Aboriginal children, the spotlight should be turned also on the 'system' to see that changes can be made to inspire the children's confidence in their teachers, school and society.

Certainly Hoopgood (1986) in an article focussing on delinquent behaviour of Aboriginal pupils in a Queensland Secondary School tends to agree with Chadbourne. Hoopgood observed a number of types of behaviour that he believed were simply examples of adolescents trying to gain some feeling of identity. He concluded his article with the belief that Aboriginal pupils do have negative self-concepts and by changes within the system as much as anything else, positive feeling and a higher level of self-esteem within the Aboriginal students will reduce their chances of engaging in delinquent behaviour.

The connection between self-concept and school success seems plausible enough. Students with low self-esteem may tend to adopt low occupational horizons which in turn can undermine one type of motivation for academic achievement. It is possible that urban Aboriginal students are insecure and defensive and do find many learning situations very threatening and must also acknowledge the influence of low self-esteem in contributing to the relatively low academic achievement of urban Aboriginal students.

(iv) DISCIPLINE

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 lie 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. Inter-actionists 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. By referring to Hudsmith (p. 6) one is able to get an example of such a discipline style by explaining 'Group talk'. During such a session, teachers sat with a group discussing the settlement procedures for a dispute between group members. This session normally took place with the group on a mat or around a student desk with the teacher participating in but rarely appearing to direct the discussion overtly.

Urban 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 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. Darvall (1990 p. 10), 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". Teachers may need to use an inter-actionist method of discipline so as to show urban 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, inter-actionist teachers are able to guide and assist students to develop more socially appropriate responses. Still, whether a teacher uses non-intervention or inter actionist discipline, it is important that, like classroom management, a teacher chooses a style that is going to best meet the students' needs.

(v) RESISTANCE

It could be argued that Aboriginal school behaviour is best characterised as resistance which indeed bears very strong resemblance to well known forms of resistance predominantly seen in working class schools as described by Willis (1977).

Whilst certainly not in an "urban setting", Folds (1985) found that there were three main aspects of resistance from Aboriginal classrooms. These were the passive form 'the wall of silence' and two which actively challenge the teacher's position, 'ridicule and disruption'. The 'wall of silence' technique is where resistance is largely linguistic (students understand but choose not to respond), whilst 'ridicule' capitalises on the non-Aboriginal teacher's inability to understand the vernacular and 'disruption' involves challenging the teacher's domination over the class. Is such resistance yet another symptom of the conflict of culture between school administration and generally these lower-class students? If so, then it is quite clear how such students could be seen as behavioural problems or delinquents.

Are the adolescent students in Hoopgood's (1986) study who involve themselves in violence, drinking and drug taking actually trying to establish their own identity? Are they resisting the school system because they are confused, frightened or anxious? Are their feelings related to Swatta's (1988) fear of being judged and the fear of failure?

Folds (1985) would suggest that such incidents should be seen in the context of community resistance to school. Such pupil resistance can be understood when one considers the contradictions that exist in many urban Aboriginal community/school relationships. So do such incidents in actual fact reflect cultural differences in the teacher/student relationship rather than student resistance?

(vi) MOTIVATION

The arousal of motivation for school learning is a crucial problem. The goals of the school must be perceived by children as relevant and important to them. This is not likely to happen if the school ignores the

Research into the educational attainment of Aboriginal students suggests low academic attainment is caused by low levels of motivation. (Guider 1991 p. 22 quotes Hill 1989, McConnachie, 1982, & Lovegrove 1986).

McInerney's 1991 study entitled '-Key Determinants of Motivation of Non-Traditional Aboriginal students in School Settings', found that the variables not found to be major determining factors in the non-traditional Aboriginal child's decision to continue with school beyond year 10 were affiliation, social concern, competition, self-esteem, extrinsic motivation and recognition. He suggests that the cluster of influential variables determining the Aboriginal child's motivation at school and ultimately his or her decision to continue with school beyond the minimum school leaving age, are influenced by three facilitating conditions - parental support and help, school support through teachers and peers and finally, their general affect (like or dislike towards schooling).

McInerney sees the other variables (eg. affiliation) as only 'peripheral to the major determinants'. If he is correct then have we been guilty of basing Aboriginal education programmes on the 'peripherals' and not the major determinants. If so, is this why many programmes have had relatively little effect with urban Aboriginal students?

4. CONCLUSION

From my reading the most blatant point to come forth is the fact that the urban Aboriginal child is facing a complex range of problems in today's classroom. Our schools do acknowledge the disadvantages Aboriginal children face when they enter Western schooling. But often they don't acknowledge the many qualities urban Aboriginal children possess, which in turn are not fully utilized and encouraged. Our education systems need to devise interactions which are sensitive, respectful and sympathetic to the plight and culture of urban Aboriginal children. If we are unable to construct such environments, then we will continue to venture down the path of ongoing, long-term misunderstanding and frustration for both schools and students alike. We see it very clearly in many schools today with urban Aboriginal children having low levels of motivation, actively resisting and confronting teachers and administrators, having negative self-concepts and constantly absenting themselves. We need schools that have a positive orientation to such cultural pluralism, that affirms these students in their Aboriginality as well as providing appropriate strategies for the effective application in wider society.

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In Malin's study (1990), the three Aboriginal students in Mrs. Evers class came to be globally marginalised; their relative status within the student hierarchy diminished throughout the year until, at the end, it reflected that of the status of their parents within the major society.

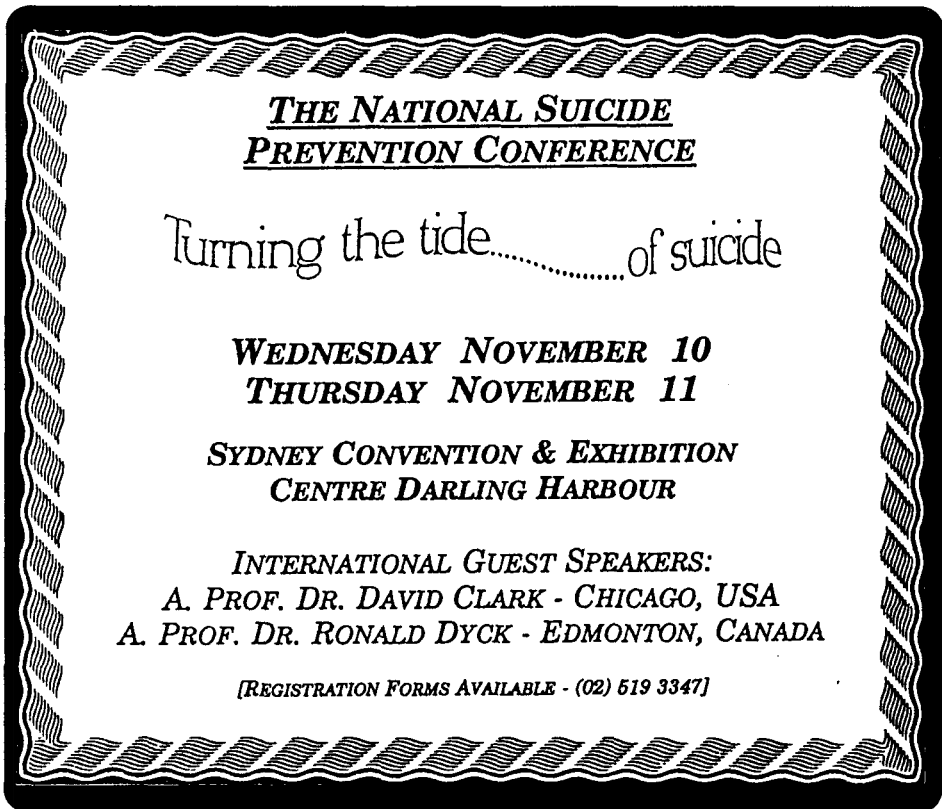
Therefore, what are the options available to schools to prevent such a situation taking place on what I suspect is an all too regular basis?

Firstly, I think we have to breakdown the mind-set of 'treating all students the same' which is often innocently held by many teachers. It is a dangerous creed because it is not appropriate nor easy to carry out. Even when students are from the same cultural group, their different personalities, skills and life experiences demand different responses. Teachers need to be sensitive to their students' respective personalities and propensities and respond accordingly. There will be some commonalities for children of the same cultural group but there will also be unpredictable differences; so it is not useful to classify students of any particular cultural group automatically into the same category of behaviour for all things. Today's schools face a real challenge in devising strategies and instruments which sense the differences in their students.

Secondly, there is a need for more Aboriginal teachers and ancillary staff and for improved training for non-Aboriginal teachers. Teachers cannot be blamed for a lack of specific cultural knowledge about all of their culturally different students. However, it is imperative that teacher education deals in substantive and tangible ways, with the issues of culture and its influence on people's ways of learning, relating, valuing and perceiving. Understanding the richness and quality in the values and processes of other cultural groups helps us to overcome our inevitable cultural chauvinism and arrogance.

Finally, if urban Aboriginal students are to become understood, are to achieve and are to recognise their potential then we, as educators, need to empower the Aboriginal people and treat them as equal partners in a common effort aimed at building a community development framework which starts in communities with community aspirations, not institutional or individual ones. Within such a framework the training of Aboriginal teachers would be an obvious major initiative.

Is the urban Aboriginal Student - Misunderstood, Underachieving and Not Recognising his/her potential? Certainly my review of literature would suggest two things, firstly, yes this is the case and, secondly, that what we have to ensure is that in years to come there is not a reproduction of the present situation,- a one way process - where the education system teaches and the Aboriginal community learns, where the education system speaks and the Aboriginal community listens.



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