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Teacher Socialisation and Teacher Attitudes Towards Indigenous Children

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In this paper I offer an explanation for teacher-held beliefs that contribute to perceptions of school failure by indigenous children and discuss the ends served by these perceptions. Although the validity of using retention rates as an indicator of actual educational outcomes is questioned (Luke, A. et al, 1993:144), there are few other indicators presently available. The figures on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student participation rates-indicate that few children of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent complete secondary school. The following figures, based on data collected in the 1991 Australian Census, show the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school children of a particular sex and age expressed as a proportion of the population of children of the same sex and age, in Queensland.

Children aged	15 years	79.6%	Last year of compulsory schooling
	16 years	59 %	
	17 years	31.1%	
	15 years	8.8%	
	19 years	1.5%	

While the figures are an indicator only, as families designate themselves as being of Aboriginal and Torres Islander descent, they do direct attention to a drop off rate for children after 16 years of age.

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However, blaming the child or the school for what is seen as the failure of indigenous children to achieve educational outcomes equal to those of 'normal' non-indigenous children oversimplifies the matter. Aboriginal children's failure in schools is worked out and achieved at the interactional level between teachers and students in the classroom, by both teachers and students. (See McDermott 1974:95. African-American children's failure to read is a learned behaviour.)

The appropriate question to ask is 'How do teachers, (whose explicit objective is to teach children to succeed in the education system) and how do the children (whose attendance often indicates their own, their parents' or their community's desire for them to succeed in the education system), become involved in a process which results in failure?'

The answer may be found by investigating the nature and manner of teacher socialisation. and the influence of significant others in the process, at the level of classroom strategy development. The current practices used by the Department of Education for the employment and placement of teachers in Queensland primary schools are of some importance to this discussion.

As part of this study, I conducted ethnographic research at an Aboriginal community primary school, Pepper Tree, with a population of 245 children in rural southern Queensland. The purpose of the research was to observe the process of socialisation of non-indigenous teachers in classrooms populated by children of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. I interviewed six volunteer teachers asking them questions about their understandings of Aboriginal culture and their own role in the school. I also observed them teaching in their own classrooms.

Teacher Socialisation

The dominant features of the process of teacher socialisation are the minimal of appropriate modes of behaviour by the neophyte (Moore 1969:868) and the development of the neophyte's self-image as he/she 'constructs a social reality on the basis of shared meanings and expectations' (Edgar 1974:5). These develop throughout the anticipatory socialisation stage, formal schooling and practice teaching and through the development of survival strategies when teaching.

Anticipatory Socialisation. Western and Anderson (1968:96) say the neophyte acquires both societal values and the visible professional values of teachers during anticipatory socialisation. and Lortie (1975:61) emphasises the importance of these values. Compared with other occupations, teachers undertake a relatively long period of general schooling and a relatively short period (sometimes counted in weeks) of specialised schooling. Lortie (19 5:6) says 'the average student has spent l3,000 hours in direct contact with classroom teachers by the time she/he graduates from high school..'. This period of 'participant observation' is not a passive one, he says,

> *the student learns to "take the role" of the classroom teacher, to engage in at least enough empathy to anticipate the teacher's probable reaction to his behaviour. This requires that the student project himself into the teacher's position and imagine how he feels about various student actions. Lortie (1975:62).*

In this way students develop not only expectations about appropriate behaviours for both teachers and students, but about how to teach. Children learn the hidden curriculum which incorporates teaching methods along with the acknowledged prescribed curriculum. The hidden curriculum refers to information attitudes, and values which are either an inherent but unstated part of the overt curriculum, and to the information, attitudes, and values which teachers subconsciously convey to students about themselves, the students, the school and society in general. The hidden curriculum is particularly powerful, as it is one way by which the dominant hegemony is reproduced, with children learning their 'appropriate' place in society.

Formal schooling. The impact of teacher training has been a predominant research theme in education and has generated much debate (see Smith, R. and A. Zantiotis, 1988) for a discussion of current issues). The gist of the debate is that teacher training institutions fail to give neophytes the conceptual tools they need in order to view knowledge as problematic, and as a historically conditioned, socially constructed phenomenon (Giroux, 1980:19). In effect, teacher training has little impact in altering the effects of the overall period of anticipatory socialisation, and, as Lortie says, they fail to correct or remodel the preconceived notions of teaching developed during the stage of anticipatory socialisation.

Practice teaching. During practice teaching, the neophytes are most concerned with the practical skills of teaching (Denscombe 1982:252). In addition, Hanson and Herrington (1976:17) say that the major function of practice teaching is to confront students with 'the realities of schooling and the conservative nature of school', and that the pressure to pass and to achieve the approval of the co-operating teacher is constant (Pruitt and Lee 1978:71). Practice teaching is a time when the need to learn the skills of teaching is closely aligned with the neophyte's need for self-survival.

Teaching. During the initial stage of teaching the neophyte develops competency and resolves conflicts. Given the cellular organization of schools, the neophyte does not work under the supervision of an experienced teacher and he/she is responsible for all aspects of his/her students' development from the first day of employment (Lortie 1975:72). Denscombe (1982:258), Eddy (1969:26), Mardle and Walker (1979:121), and Lortie (1975:75), Clandinin (1985:369), and Shulman (1987:17) identify a number of teaching constraints, eg., social pressure to conform, adverse staff - pupil numbers, the need for control, isolation, which influence how the neophyte develops competency and resolves conflicts. The manner in which the neophyte's competency is gauged is yet another constraint. Denscombe (1982:258) says it is gauged by significant others, e.g., principal and peers, in terms of the teacher's willingness and ability to adhere to the 'informal aims and methods of teaching which are intrinsic to the classroom context and which respond to the practical demands of survival in class.' Mardle and Walker (1979:118) propose that through a combination of classroom and school conditions, the recipes for teaching and the assumptions the neophytes derived from college and other teachers, and from the latent culture developed during the anticipatory socialisation stage, teachers develop a personal approach to teaching. Teachers hold strong beliefs in their right to autonomy in their classrooms (Lortie 1975:75). The ways in which teachers develop competency and resolve conflicts are called 'survival strategies' Lacey (1977:84).

Survival strategies. The term survival strategies describes behaviours which consciously or subconsciously allow the teacher to survive as the teacher responsible for children achieving stated educational goals and as a person with private agendas, concerns, interests, morals and world view. Woods (1977:272) and Nias (1986:25) say that survival strategies

are the teacher's way of protecting their substantial self from situation influences. Survival strategies are either strategies of control, of negotiation, or strategies for the survival of the teacher within the bureaucratic system. Survival strategies developed by children, in the form of counter-strategies, similarly describe behaviours that allow the child as self to survive the socialisation agenda of school. To understand why strategies develop, one must be aware of the conditions in which teachers work, the intense nature of the interpersonal interactions taking place in the classrooms, and the hidden curriculum.

Significant Others-Principal and Peer. Pupils, the principal, teachers, and, under the policy of devolution in Queensland, the parents are all influential as significant others in the socialisation process for teachers. Significant others are people to whom the neophyte attributes importance. The neophyte may then moderate his/her behaviour to accommodate the significant others; use them as role models; or evaluate themselves according to their perceptions of what behaviours the significant others find acceptable. At Pepper Tree School the parents were not considered 'significant others'. Teachers (with the exception of the pre-school teacher) stated that they could 'get away' with more than in a non-indigenous school, meaning that the parents were less concerned with trivial things. The teachers discussed this in terms of less stress and less parent surveillance.

During the initial stages of teaching, the role of the principal and to a lesser degree, other staff, as significant others is paramount for the neophyte and the power invested in the principal as the neophyte's sole evaluator is the direct result of Department of Education policy.

Employment. In Queensland teachers seek employment in specific educational regions across the state. They are assessed by members of a regional board; the members of the board are not necessarily trained teachers. The teachers' association does not control the recruiting, registration, or promotion of teachers (Carpenter 1978:6). Neophytes are offered positions on the basis of their availability to fill a vacant position. The neophyte's suitability for a particular position is of little importance. Of the six teachers interviewed, four were appointed or transferred to Pepper Tree School, the other two teachers had indicated the school as a possible transfer option.

Initiation into the professional body. Initiation into the profession is extremely stressful and is based on resolving a series of conflicts and contradictions (White 1989:190), revolving around the demands of the bureaucratic system, the needs of the individual pupils, the expectations of significant others, the ever-widening agenda determined for schools without any, or with limited consultation with teachers, and the teachers' own moral and ethical codes of behaviour, both as a teacher and as self. An example of this is the first three days at a Queensland primary school (pupil free days), where the neophyte, now a probationary teacher, needs to make sense of the school procedures, timetables, traditions, the expectations, both stated and unstated, of the professional and ancillary staff, the principal and the parents (Nias 1986:14, Hanson and Herrington 1976:40). As well, they encounter, for the first time the hidden power structure of the school (Hanson and Herrington 1976:77). This experience is stressful as the neophyte has yet to prove him/herself (Eddy 1969:19).

Assessment for a permanent position. The formal evaluation of the probationary teacher's competence is constant. During the two years of probation, the principal, using departmental procedures such as observation and reviews of work, evaluates the neophyte's performance. The power of the principal in evaluating the probationary teachers is immense. Research by Edgar and Warren (1974:237) has shown that beginning teachers tend to move towards the values of the evaluating supervisor, and this may explain the beginning teacher's move towards traditional values. The socialising pressure is intense and protracted, with the agenda for the probationary teacher essentially one of conformity. This period of teacher socialisation is described by Lacey (1977:84) as the honeymoon. The neophyte's willingness to please and his/her apparent compliance in accepting existing school cultures and the power structure shared by existing staff is explained by van Maanen (1977:24). He says :

> *persons often allow bizarre or incredulous behaviour to pass without notice because they are uncertain as to what the behaviour in question means. Since they do not have a ready explanation at hand and do not want to appear ignorant, individuals many times prefer to 'not make a fuss' over such occurrences and continue on as if nothing had happened.*

Despite the power of the principal and the influence of both the principal and peer teachers as significant others during the beginning years of teaching, the students are the predominant significant others for teachers.

Students

The students' influence as significant others is generated by their capacity to develop counter-strategies, thereby influencing the agendas set by the teacher.

Strategies and counter-strategies. At the interactional level of the classroom Woods (1977:275) says 'teachers [and students] accommodate by developing and using survival strategies.' Survival or coping strategies are constructive, creative, and adaptive activities of the teacher which enable him/her to more or less achieve long term teaching goals within the experienced constraints (Woods 1980:18, Pollard 1982:20, Doyle and Ponder 1977-78:5). Researchers have emphasised the teacher's part in strategy development, but a truer picture of how strategies develop is obtained by noting the strategies and counter-strategies developed by both teachers and students. A successful strategy is implicit, and is based on assumptions about education. In this way, they reflect the dominant hegemony. Woods (1977:275) says that the persistence of, and subsequent institutionalisation of a strategy depends on the students' response and he (1977:274) warns that, 'where the problems are numerous and intense, accommodation will prevail over teaching', and that accommodation can masquerade as education. Pollard (1982:33) identifies the business of the classroom as on-going negotiations between the teacher and the students. The success of the teaching transaction is determined by what each person as an individual brings to the interaction.

The act of maintaining the optimal balance between negotiation and control to ensure learning, is the real work of teaching. The dominant constraint for students in these interactions is the inequality of power. As a result of the imbalance of power, student strategies can be seen as reactions to teacher strategies. Students rarely develop strategies but they do construct counter-strategies. By using counter-strategies students attempt and sometimes successfully gain control of classroom situations. In this way students become reality definers for teachers and exert influence as significant others. It is through the process of the teacher developing strategies and students reacting with counter strategies that success or failure in classrooms is generated.

Summary of Teacher Socialisation

The teacher is informed by his/her own experience as a student in school. The influence of the extended anticipatory socialisation period is profound. During this stage of socialisation teachers develop expectations about appropriate behaviours for both teachers and students. Teacher training institutions are extensions of this period of socialisation, and fail to remould the neophyte's views. Almost invariably their experiences are informed by non-indigenous, western, capitalist hegemony. The influence of the principal as evaluator, and the role of peer teachers as significant others, moderate the neophyte's behaviour in a way that leads the neophyte to accept, or at least accommodate, the existing school culture. The development of teacher strategies and student counter strategies is a part of the school culture.

Non-indigenous teachers, having participated in the socialisation process described, develop beliefs about what teachers do and what students do. These teachers enter into cross-cultural teaching situations that do not conform with their pre-conceived notions. In classrooms characterised by a non-indigenous teacher and indigenous children shared notions of appropriate behaviours, expectations, and outcomes do not necessarily exist. In these situations teacher strategies elicit student counter strategies that are viewed by the teachers as aberrant or at least inexplicable. The power imbalance that generates student counter strategies is exacerbated by the teacher being perceived by the students as a representative of the dominant culture. The students, without shared notions of power and role expectations, are caught in social transactions they do not fully understand and the resultant sense of powerlessness may contribute to the preferred options of truancy as the prevailing counter strategy in these schools (Folds 1987:40). Teachers are caught up in social transactions they also do not fully understand. They seek to understand the students' reactions, rationalising them in terms of their own experiences. In turn, the teachers develop more strategies to correct the perceived student behaviours, and teaching can inadvertently become a facade of teaching, with strategy and counter-strategy development dominating the classroom. This results in little learning taking place. It is in this way that schools fail indigenous children and the teacher and the students unconsciously and inadvertently contribute to that failure.

Ethnographic Data

My research on the process of teacher socialisation at Pepper Tree School supports this explanation for 'school failure by indigenous children?', as does the research of McDermott (1987), Wolcott (1974), and Folds (1987). McDermott found that minority children fail in schools partly because of being 'tagged', specifically being tagged by colour, and partly by the teachers' use of minute differences in speech, dress and behaviour in the tagging process. At Pepper Tree School, the strategy of labelling or tagging was invasive. However, labelling extended beyond the individual level where, in this case, pre-school children effectively failed pre-school and were perceived as needing remediation, and a small number of year seven children were identified as 'not fitting into a classroom'. Labelling was found at the structural and policy level of the school. At the policy level, labelling, in the form of stereotypes, e.g. 'Many of our children are extremely sensitive to failure and no-risk takers in academic terms.' were written into school policy documents. This specific stereotype informed the teaching philosophy of two teachers who formulated their teaching practice on that basis. The arrangement of classes, including single age, composite, and multi-age classes with children grouped by academic or social abilities, indicated labelling at the structural level of the school. Likewise, the Friday afternoon sports program reflected the teachers' beliefs about Aboriginal children. One third of the teaching staff were rostered with free time, during which they pursued their own school related business. This program represented a staff strategy developed to accommodate high rates of truancy on Friday afternoons.

Both the staff and the students are influential in the formation of teacher strategies. The teachers' understanding of student counter strategies influenced the subsequent development of teachers' attitudes about how Aboriginal children learn best, and how Aboriginal children play. In this way the students were influential as significant others.

At the class level, teachers explained student behaviours in terms of their own experiences, school-based procedures and methodologies written in policy documents, and the myths and traditions of the particular school. The myths and traditions are perpetuated and disseminated by the longer serving teachers to the new recruits.

Pepper Tree School's teaching staff has approximately half of its membership filled by newly graduated teachers; a phenomenon not usually observed in non-indigenous schools. The new recruits, who have not asked specifically for these placements, believe two to three years' service in an Aboriginal school entitles them to a transfer. This notion is supported by the actual transfer rate of new teachers.

As well, each teacher developed beliefs about how best to teach Aboriginal children, and developed expectations about Aboriginal children's scholastic success in terms of their own experiences in the classroom and their own need for survival of self.

Analysis of my observations at Pepper Tree School reveals that the teachers had generally favourable attitudes towards Aboriginal children (see Diefenback 1979 for student teachers' attitudes towards indigenous people), and in seeking explanations of observed student-counter strategies, they acknowledged the existence of the kind of racial barrier and job ceiling identified by Ogbu (1978:49) as possible contributing factors to what they saw as student failure. Only in two instances did teachers explain student problems in terms of cultural deprivation and language deficit (Eckermann 1987:57, Labov 1973:21, McDermott 1987:362). Two teachers stated that the school could be seen as a white school by the community, but did not connect this view with the difficulties experienced, in particular the high truancy rate and the intransigent behaviour noted in some children in the upper levels. All the teachers except one held the belief that success in school ensured success and access to the benefits available generally to Australians. In their view academic success removed racial barriers.

The teachers were energetic and dedicated, but were ignorant of Aboriginal culture and history and were ill-prepared to deal with problems inherent in communities that were previously under Government control (Koepping 1975, Whalley 1992). Nor were they prepared to fulfil the role of go-between for the Aboriginal community and the local non-Aboriginal community in which they lived. More over they were not prepared for the stress associated with the initial stages of teaching. The teachers were required to learn the trade of teaching in a cross-cultural classroom unaware of the nature of the conflict situations in which they were involved.

The teachers' aims were to help and teach these children, and unintentionally through the development of strategies and the students' responses in the form of counter-strategies, together the teachers and the students contributed to their own failures. However, to break the cycle of failure the teacher must become aware of the centrality of his/her contribution to it.

What are the ends served by this failure?

Despite the efforts of the teachers and the desire of the community for its children to be successful in the education system the status quo is maintained. Teachers justify their teaching methods through the development of stereotypes about how indigenous children learn and about indigenous people in general. Racial perceptions of Aborigines based on school success are maintained through comparisons of indigenous and non indigenous children.

The indigenous community, while acknowledging the school as a possible avenue for advancement and social mobility continue to identify the school as a site of cultural conflict. The teacher's perceptions that the school was viewed as a 'white' school, (see Smith, R. 1992:38 and Hornberger 1987:216 for discussions of schools being perceived as representative of a society that has consistently oppressed and marginalised them) and the social distance kept by both the staff and the community (despite the aides being indigenous) ensures both parties have limited access to and limited information about each other (see Osborne 1989:197 who explains this as the insider-outsider game as played by the Zuni of New Mexico). This distance is maintained by both parties in the interests of self survival. One teacher understood this in terms of community control saying, ' If they [Aborigines] want to achieve, ah it's much harder, sort of everybody pulls them down...'].

At the time of this investigation communication between the school and parents took the form of class visits to children's homes so teachers could introduce themselves, and later to deliver reports, pre-school special days, e.g., park day, and a newsletter home. One teacher believed that lack of parent participation resulted from the parent's inability to read and write hence the parents were uncomfortable in the school environment. Despite this belief, newsletters were distributed. However most

communications were negative and included the truancy officer seeking children at home, and parents being called to the school over violent incidents involving their children. Informal liaison was maintained through the aides, but no formal body such as a Parent and Citizens' Committee existed. The children, aware of the contradictions inherent in the situation are pulled between two discrete sets of expectations, and through the development of counter-strategies, play out the conflict. The communities' perceptions of the school are based on the school's continuing failure to contribute to the alleviation of the social, political, and economic conditions experienced. In this way the community could discount their own contribution to that failure, and the distance created maintained (see Smith, R. 1992:39).

Conclusions

Of the six volunteer teachers I interviewed, two had studied aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, but only as a part of another subject. The in-service about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and teaching provided for the teachers at Pepper Tree School ranged from five days to one hour. The present system of in-service is operated by six centres across the state. Staff, principals, Parent and Friend Committees, and Aboriginal Student Support Parent Awareness Committees, in consultation with the principal, may invite personnel from the centres into the school to conduct in-service courses. Given the area to be covered, the capacity of these centre to provide in-service is stretched.

I propose that a number of measures be taken which will eliminate much of the rationale governing teachers' strategy development. These measures can be implemented within the existing system for training and employing teachers. All teachers as part of their initial training, should undertake compulsory courses about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history, particularly that part of Australian history concerned with Aboriginal and European conflict, and the institutionalisation of Aboriginal people. Another compulsory component of the course should be 'Teaching English as a Second Language', as many indigenous children are bi-lingual, speaking Aboriginal Languages, Aboriginal English, and standard English. Teachers are often unaware of indigenous children's linguistic capacities.

Teachers with four or more years experience in classrooms and who have completed or are completing a course about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and /or teaching, should be appointed to schools where there are large populations of indigenous children. Every school should have the services of at least one full-time permanent teacher who is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. In schools with predominantly indigenous students these teachers will function as a student support teacher, as resource teacher for other staff and as a liaison officer between the school and the community. In schools with large populations of indigenous children these teachers should be given key roles in the implementation of school based in-service if their understanding of the community culture is appropriate and they are accepted by the community, and in developing school/community relations, inviting wider community involvement. Finally, teachers who persue a career in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education should be given incentives to stay for extended periods as many of these schools are in remote areas.

In these ways, newly appointed teachers in these schools will have an understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, and will enter schools which have a support network aimed at minimising teacher strategy development and the resultant student counter-strategies with their attendant poor educational outcomes.

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