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Social Justice Directions in the Aboriginal Independent Schools (WA)

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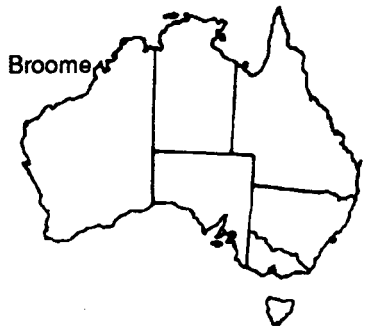

Earlier this year I was approached to speak to a gathering of Principals and other senior education officers from the WA Department of Education attending a Kimberley School Management Team Conference held at Derby during August, 1994. The topic is one of major concern to education providers in the north west and is certainly central to the legitimisation of the Aboriginal Independent Schools as well as their day-to-day operations. Assuming a wider audience I have therefore prepared the following paper in an attempt to consolidate as well as expand upon the points I made while addressing this meeting. In an attempt to maintain a sense of immediacy I have also retained the first person approach to its delivery.

Preamble

I have been asked to speak to you about the Aboriginal Independent Schools and the directions they have taken in implementing Social Justice Directions. By this I have presumed we are specifically considering the items listed in the WA Education Department's *Social Justice in Education: Policy and Guidelines for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students* which has as its genesis the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP).

Let me say from the outset that I find this to be a daunting if not impossible task given a combination of time restraints, the complexity of the subject and the nature of this particular forum.

Allow me to explain. When I was first approached to speak on the topic it seemed a simple enough task, so I agreed and put it to one side in anticipation that I would comfortably deal with it closer to the time. However, subsequently I have had little option but give the matter considerable thought due to an involvement in the Independent Schools' response to a Review of the National Policy as well as responding to the recent findings of the Court Government's Social Justice Task Force.

It was during the process of the AEP Review, that it became increasingly clear to me that we are talking about the introduction of what is mostly an externally initiated, and some would say, guilt-driven policy into a diverse, complex and politically sensitive cross-cultural situation. That this area has a known and well documented history of good intentions foundering on mutual misunderstandings adds to, rather than diminishes, our difficulties. You may gather from what I am saying that there are a number of people both

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal who are increasingly concerned with a policy which raises questions such as: Whose policy for whom? Whose outcomes for whom? Who ultimately benefits? For example, writers such as Ralph Folds, to whom I will refer later, claims that the chief beneficiary, particularly in the short-term marketing of Social Justice initiatives, is the national government who can claim to be delivering equity even if much of what it provides may in the long-term prove to be inappropriate for numerous Aboriginal communities. Much the same might be said of the recommendations of the WA Social Justice Task Force.

Whichever way we look at it we are dealing with vital issues centred on relationships of power sited within our schools and community. Incidentally the use of 'our' associated with schools and the singular for community is, within the context of today's discussion, deliberate. Again, whose policy for whom? And to this I will add a further question: Are the terms for its delivery genuinely negotiable?

Perhaps I can give you an example of what I am driving at. Currently I am researching and writing a paper titled, 'Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Government Policy and the Aboriginal Independent Schools in WA'. If I attempt to condense the 20,000 or so words of the initial draft into a couple of sentences I would say that it basically examines the history and processes by which reliance on a nationally-driven Aboriginal Education Policy, the parent of the Social Justice Policy we are considering today, creates a situation that simultaneously **enables** yet **constrains** education decision-making by **nominally** self-determining communities. On the one hand funding is specifically provided to allow for community decision-making while on the other hand various strings attached, particularly in terms of specified desirable outcomes, negate the original intention.

Before specifically discussing the Independent Schools in this context I should also make it clear that while I think all three school-based sectors operating in the Kimberley share similar theoretical and practical difficulties with the implementation of these policies their approaches differ considerably at a number of important points. However the fact that the Independents are doing it differently from both Catholic Education and the Department as well as from each other does not necessarily mean they are doing it better. As an aside I would like to add that in my view anyone claiming the higher moral ground in Aboriginal Education should be regarded with suspicion and hopefully I haven't fallen into this particular trap. I'm sure that if we had the luxury of sufficient time and opportunity we could together with Martu, Marrngu, Piyirn, Yolngu, Nyoonga, Wongi, Yamatji and others negotiate a better, on-going, dynamic meaning of what Social Justice means in our schools than I am going to achieve with you today.

Having given you some idea of the direction I am taking I would now like to turn to a description of the Independent Schools and in doing so emphasise their role as mirroring the richness and diversity of Aboriginal society rather than engaging you in an oppositional discourse, i.e. these schools *vs* yours.

The Aboriginal Independent Schools

As already suggested the thirteen Independent Schools are widely separated both in a physical as well as in a philosophical sense. You are probably aware that there are four of these schools in the Kimberley, three in the Pilbara, one in the

Murchison, three associated schools in the Eastern Goldfields and Esperance and two in the Perth Metro area. Two of them also operate outstation schools as annexes to their main campus. The differences between the schools in terms of physical and human resourcing as well as stated aims and outcomes are considerable. What is desired and achievable in one place may not be relevant or work in another. They constantly reinforce the point that I will be attempting to make about diversity in Aboriginal society and education.

However, despite these differences all thirteen adhere in various and diverse ways to a basic founding premise and that is the idea that they need **to own the processes** if they are to **possess the outcomes**. The governing bodies, who are a vital but not the sole point at which Aboriginal activism occurs in the schools, consistently argue that they cannot afford to be shut out of the processes of reform, i.e. of determining for themselves the means by which Social Justice is achieved and in taking this action develop better understandings of the benefits to be gained and the **costs** involved.

To demonstrate how the schools address this goal I would like to draw your attention to how they respond to the four major strands of the AEP and, due to your interest and involvement in the Kimberley I will concentrate more on the situation and activities of the northern schools. Unlike the situation in the south all of them are located in remote communities.

I also need to point out for those of you who are unfamiliar with the chain of events that flow on from the AEP through its funding arm, the Aboriginal Educational Strategic Initiatives Program (AESIP) that there is a requirement for all education providers to establish Operational Plans that reflect their approach to implementing the Policy. As individual providers each of the thirteen Independent Schools are required to provide such a plan if they wish to access considerable amounts of 'supplementary' funding. This situation differs significantly from that of the Education Department and the Catholic Education Office who have a single plan encompassing all of their schools and associated activities. From this situation it is obvious that the individual Independent Schools' governing bodies have the responsibility for the construction, implementation, monitoring and acquittal of their plans which in turn brings the process, in terms of policy linked to outcomes, right down to the grass roots.

The four major policy areas contained in the AEP, and therefore in every providers' Operational Plan, cover Aboriginal Involvement, Access, Participation and Educational Outcomes, and it is each of these areas that I now intend to discuss.

Aboriginal Involvement

I, like many, assume the order in which the national policy presents its goals reflects a deliberate sense of priorities and if so it also reflects the pre-AEP priority given by the Independent Schools to Aboriginal Involvement. This situation however stands in contrast to the West Australian Department's Guidelines which, contrary to a statement on page six that 'they are in accordance with the national policy', orders its priorities quite differently.

The first objective of the WA policy is to do with Outcomes followed by Aboriginal Involvement, with Participation as the third and final objective.

It is clear from my earlier comments regarding ownership of processes and outcomes that the

Independent Schools regard the State's prioritisation as very much a case of putting the cart before the horse. For that matter they also take significant umbrage with the absence, in any of the major national and state documents, of the term 'Aboriginal control'. Unfortunately this is a situation that appears to stand in contrast to the broader long-term national policy of self-determination which has a bottom line requirement that Aborigines take control and responsibility for the institutions that effect their lives. For some Aboriginal groups the Independent Schools offer an opportunity to do this, i.e. take responsibility for an institution that exerts considerable influence over their lives. So for Involvement in the Independent Schools read **'Control'**. Also read a heavy emphasis on Aboriginal staffing accompanied by active steps to support and involve existing and potential Aboriginal staff in programs such as the Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (RATE: Batchelor College) and the Off Campus Teacher Education Program (OCTEP: Kimberley Centre/ Notre Dame; Cairns TAFE/James Cook University). The issue of professional development centred on management/ administrative skills for members of the schools' governing bodies is also high on the agenda for a number of communities.

However, the extent to which Aboriginal control actually occurs on the ground is far more problematic than the impression I may have given. For a start there are considerable structural barriers firmly embedded in the institution of education, as we and our clients currently understand it, that hinder significant shifts in the locus of power. As already suggested this is reflected in the extent to which mainstream society as the funders are prepared to accept significantly different outcomes resulting from Aboriginal decision-making of a different kind. Conversely the current situation also reflects on the willingness, ability and opportunity for Aboriginal decision-makers to develop existing opportunities to suit their own purposes.

For example there are the difficulties associated with forms of governance and decision-making processes, which are basically derivative of Westminster-based systems, to fit in with and/or give way to Aboriginal forms of control over the dissemination of knowledge, tradition, administration and reporting that is never fully amenable to another system of checks and balances. While the election of Office Bearers and the formal requirements of an Annual General Meeting may adapt to local circumstance, a Chairperson's signature on an Offer and Acceptance document has specific legal implications that lie outside the Law as it is understood and practised by the signatory.

There are also considerable problems associated with negotiating Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal understandings of these processes, particularly if there is a perception that one side hasn't got anything that the other one wants. Keep in mind that this last comment reflects an essential condition for negotiation which distinguishes it from the process of consultation.

For the moment it can be said that the goal of Involvement/Control as a top priority is firmly established in the Independent Schools and procedures are set in place to continually encourage and further develop a process of genuine ownership. As Stephen Harris (1992: 38) said in a UNESCO sponsored address to the Institute of Pacific Studies '... control of the school organisation (a political matter) influences the ways people do things hence ultimately [it] will be the biggest influence over curriculum processes (an educational matter)' which brings me to a consideration of the three remaining strands of the National Policy.

Access and Participation

I wish to consider these policy items together, as in the Independent Schools' context they are largely synonymous with the interdependent issues of **opportunity** and **relevancy**. Looking at them together as well as separately also allows me an opportunity to discuss potential as well as actual examples of policy implementation.

Following on from my comments regarding control it is not difficult to appreciate the strong expectation that exists within a number of communities, particularly in the north, that access is basically guaranteed by virtue of ownership. Recent moves by a relatively new outstation community in the Kimberley confirms this observation in that the Chairman, previously an Education Department employee, suggested to me that given the current political climate it is the only way they would get an on-site school. It was also clear from the observations made by a number of Piyirn (the name for Aborigines attending this meeting) that an Independent School offers significant employment opportunities as well as providing additional stability to the overall resource base and the day-to-day operations of the community.

While there is a general understanding, based on previous experience with Kartiya (non-Aboriginals), that financial difficulties, time delays, the intransigence of white teachers and other obstacles will occur, there is an expectation that opportunities can and will be created by Independent Schools to meet particular Aboriginal demands. Numerous examples spring to mind, many of them involving the repeated growth and retraction of outcamps. Given the circumstances surrounding the staffing of the Independent Schools by 'volunteer' teachers who are usually well informed as to what to expect, there is, generally speaking, an 'industrial' climate which encourages greater flexibility of human resource management. This in turn encourages lateral thinking and innovation when it comes to dealing with these situations. For example, there have been a number of occasions where non-Aboriginal teachers have accompanied Aboriginal co-workers and students to other communities in order to attend ceremonies. For the non-Aboriginal teacher, living and teaching in the river bed while the majority of the Aboriginal adults are heavily involved 'down the road' is no doubt a challenging experience. It is also, I suspect, an experience accompanied by relatively little in the way of increased academic outcomes as measured by mainstream indicators but it demonstrates a commitment by parents/ community to the idea of extended, flexible schooling.

One of the strengths of the Independent Schools has been their ability to provide for the needs of relatively ephemeral outcamps. For example, over a period of fifteen or so years one school has located teachers and basic equipment in four separate locations that are currently unoccupied by families with children. During this period they also provided a localised bilingual school of the air program utilising a discrete HF frequency coupled to the services of an itinerant teacher. Although this and other examples of the flexible utilisation of resources have been achieved in the face of considerable logistical and financial difficulties it indicates a commitment to providing access on the communities' terms rather than those of schools or funding bodies. Unfortunately recent developments, some of them arising out of the application of the AEP, have exacerbated these difficulties.

Of particular concern to the Independent Schools and the Catholic Education Office are the current notification rules and funding restrictions

regarding the numbers and conditions required to register Pre Primary and Secondary programs, the setting up of additional annexes and access to Post Compulsory education (including funding support for on-site Teacher Education). In some respects it is a case of one hand of DEET giving (AESIP) while the other takes away (Schools' Division). As mentioned earlier the emphasis given to accessing professional development for Aboriginal Teachers within a family supportive context is of vital concern to schools/communities who see little logic in the policy, funding and administrative differentiation between the schooling, post-compulsory training and tertiary sectors even though this vitally affects them. An example of this situation is seen in the difficulty the administrative arm of the AEP has in accepting the provision of tutors for aspiring Aboriginal teachers as a legitimate application of school-based AESIP funding as opposed to acquiring the service through the tertiary or post-compulsory sector. I think many of you would have some sympathy with my claim that in the Kimberley the schools are doing it better in terms of employing appropriate support staff and negotiating entry for their students into relevant tertiary/training institutions than the higher education sector. However, of greater concern than the way in which Kartiya organise things is the realisation that non-Aboriginal teachers come and go while community-based Aboriginal teachers are far more likely to stay. An example of this latter point can be seen in the following anecdote.

In 1992 I was asked to conduct a one day workshop for the Kimberley District Office staff. At one stage during the proceedings I referred to an incident that occurred in the Fitzroy Valley in '89 in terms of 'You will remember...' Realising that there were a number of negatives being expressed I asked who of the twenty-four people present were working for the District Office or in the area at that time. There were two positive responses, and they were from the Aboriginal Liaison Officers, one of whom is still in the Office while the other is still in the area making what I consider to be an effective on-going contribution to Aboriginal Education.

In the context of these remarks it is also clear to the Independent Schools that the importance of the access/participation link is clearly demonstrated in terms of the reality and further potential for Aboriginal teachers to bring relevancy and increased student participation to the learning process. Before exploring these links any further, however, I would like to return to the issue of access for small, often mobile groups of students as well as to discuss the participation of secondary, post compulsory students located in the small the medium sized remote communities.

In many respects this is, for all of us in the Kimberley, one of the hardest nuts to crack. For a start there is a possibility that we, in company with WAWA, SECWA, ATSIC and other agencies of Social Justice, are vigorously pursuing small and scattered groups of people across the countryside who are equally as vigorously fleeing the attentions of the bodies sent to help them. There is however another possibility that, despite this seemingly aimless mobility, there is in fact a logical pattern to this behaviour desiring and amenable to relevant forms of education, as opposed to the extension of social control inherent in many of our current practices. I would suggest that there is an urgent requirement, for educators such as ourselves, that we tackle this issue from

the bottom up rather than the top down if we are genuinely concerned with providing lasting and meaningful access to education. Hopefully some of the things I am about to say will illustrate this point.

By bringing some lateral thinking to bear on the issue we need to think in terms of the new technologies such as telematics, cross sector co-operation and what might be called action research out there in the field. From the latter initiative we might derive some useful general principles to guide the provision of future capital expenditure, the preparation of relevant curriculum frameworks and appropriate forms of staffing. If we are concerned with diseconomies of scale then we need to turn the situation around through innovative, cost-effective, community-based approaches because, as many of you are aware, there are far more non- and irregular attenders out there than we generally admit to. However in the final analysis it is only through Aboriginal involvement and appropriation of the process that we are going to succeed. This is illustrated by the way in which the widely spread Warlpiri community through the Tanami network has appropriated high tech interactive technology for their own social purposes, i.e. for the organisation of ceremonies, funerals, football matches and the sale of art. For these communities the use of the same technologies to access further education opportunities makes additional social sense as well as retaining community control over the process. If we hope to couple financial reality to worthwhile access to education, as is happening to a limited extent in the Independent School sector, we could do worse than use this broad-based community example as a starting point. In advancing this argument it is important, however, to consistently stress the links between the potential for community-based appropriation of technology as opposed to the kinds of cost-saving advantages so beloved of the newly corporatised education administration of this State. As stated in a recent paper dealing with this issue '...we need to be aware of, and sensitive to, the question of whose needs are being actively served by the introduction of such measures' (Bucknall, 1955: 1).

In addition to providing opportunity (access) and relevancy (participation) into the scattered homelands/mobile students' situation there are also related issues to be tackled in a number of our larger, more cohesive, albeit still relatively small community schools.

Within this context a number of the Independent Schools have over the past fifteen years spent considerable time and effort, without a great deal of accompanying success, trying to develop programs directed towards self-sufficiency in terms of community management and the provision of basic services. Providing training programs in the areas of teacher and health education, office and store management and trade skills relating particularly to motor mechanics, building and plumbing, etc., has occupied a large amount of time in terms of submission writing and community negotiation aimed at creating a viable role for the schools. In some instances the schools sought a pro-active role as the administrative and delivery focus for such programs. In others they sought a co-ordinated approach with other providers from both within and outside the community.

The Independent Schools have also had to deal with the issue of developing relevant programs for both junior secondary as well as post-compulsory students that lead to effective entry into the type of training programs being sought by their communities.

This then raises the issue of what schools and communities mean when they talk about future

employment for their pre and post trainees. Are they talking to each other about the same thing? In my experience community recognition of the value and importance of health education, housing and various service industries is always forthcoming as desirable goals for student activities. However, in listing such things as welding, sewing, gardening, stock work, poultry projects, etc. are they linking it to how the students want to spend their time in the future? For that matter, are they linking it to the circumstances under which the community is most likely to utilise these skills? For example, it is highly unlikely that the graduate student from one of the desert schools will spend his/her future as a 9-5, 5 days a week, 42 weeks of the year welder. However, it is highly likely that his/her skills will be utilised to put a truck on the road in time for people to leave for a funeral. The picture of an economically and socially self-sustaining community is an idealised one which has to be set against the realities of a contemporary life-style that contains elements of boredom, restlessness and social disintegration.

In looking at alternatives that build on rather than work against the grain, some of the Independent Schools are actively exploring the issue of enterprise training for a range of future life-style and employment possibilities that lie outside Kartiya constructions of meaningful employment. However, the obvious difficulty lies in locating the desirable activities before they can talk about effective links to appropriate training.

An example of an approach being considered by one of the Independent School communities is the marketing of an Outback Adventure. The basic idea is to marry the development of enterprise skills to a one-off exercise involving elements of reconciliation, self-esteem for the hosts and seizing the political upper ground in terms of non-Aboriginal ambitions for the tourist industry in certain areas of this State. To date dangers to be recognised and avoided principally reside in the potential for stereotyping as well as cheapening the essence of Aboriginal life during the process of reinforcing values by older Aboriginal participants within an enterprise marketing context. The attraction, apart from the acquisition of transferable skills, lies in the appeal this type of employment has; linked as it is to short-term, immediate and easily identifiable goals.

As a final comment on access and participation I would like to offer a brief comment on the inclusive curriculum approach advocated in the Department's Social Justice Policy and in doing so I continue to utilise the context of the relatively homogenous, community-based Independent Schools located in the north where the presence of non-Aboriginal students is at an absolute minimum.

Under these circumstances the **adding on** or **linking** approach advocated as the third objective in the Department's Policy seems to me to be very limited in terms of achieving social justice objectives compared to the opportunities available for negotiating what is becoming known as **common ground education**. It is therefore not my intention to go through all the arguments for and against the validity of ideas centred on domain separation, two-way education, both-way education and bi-cultural education in order to throw light on the usefulness or otherwise of the inclusive curriculum approach which owes much to these theories. One thing I would say however is that, in building on Aboriginal experiences, learning styles and knowledge in order to achieve improved Kartiya defined learning outcomes, we run the risk of developing approaches that destroy rather than retain what we recognise as important in the lives of Aboriginal students, i.e. we more effectively move the students on to 'bigger and better things', as has happened world-wide where

initial literacy in the vernacular has offered an effective bridge to other values and knowledge and in the process very likely contributed to the destruction of the vernacular.

With this in mind I would rather continue to emphasise the vital importance of recognising the wide variety of circumstances that exist in Aboriginal schools that encourages the development of local curriculum initiatives with Aboriginal teachers (AEWs) assuming a central role. In this process the key elements, whatever the particulars of the situation, remain **negotiation** that recognises the **equal status and legitimacy** of knowledge by both sides.

It is of course unfair as well as unrealistic to expect individual teachers and schools to achieve an effective negotiated common ground curriculum overnight without the existence of meaningful frameworks and the presence and/or availability of experienced educators in this field. For this reason the Independent Aboriginal Schools generally accept that there are positive elements contained in the curriculum approaches currently under consideration by the Commonwealth and the WA Departments. While I personally have considerable problems with the emphasis on 'individual student needs' as a significant non-Aboriginal emphasis within the Student Outcomes Statements, the potential that exists for the construction of community-based frameworks reflect the sorts of negotiated position that the Independent Schools are actively working towards.

In a number of instances the Independent Schools are also seeking to draw on the experiences and expertise of other schools and communities from across the north of Australia. This includes evaluating developments in some Territory schools where there is a greater emphasis now being placed on outcomes as the point at which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal forms of knowledge and experience are most clearly articulated. An example of this is seen in the *galtha* curriculum being developed by the schools at Yirrkala which encourages the recording of shared group experiences. Unfortunately today is not the occasion to explore this concept as fully as I would like so I can only recommend your reading of *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* where I discuss these ideas more fully.

Education Outcomes

When we turn to the last of the four major strands we come to the Independent Schools' greatest difficulty with the AEP, and in particular the statement that achievements of Aboriginal students will match those of the student population at large while at the same recognising that education must accommodate Aboriginal community values strongly identified in Aboriginal Law, religion and learning. Please bear with me as I try to explain their concern.

As Ralph Folds (1993) points out in a recent article, it is an unfortunate fact of life that we feel constrained to measure disadvantage through indicators such as home ownership, unemployment levels, child care facilities, school retention rates, etc. Unfortunate in that the resultant policy aimed at alleviating the situation brings considerable pressure to bear on communities and individuals to make a shift towards the mainstream values that these gauges reflect.

I have a vivid memory of an occasion when in November '89 representative members of the Independent Schools' governing bodies met with a number of Canberra-based DEET officials to discuss the funding implications of the forthcoming AEP. During the course of the meeting one of these officials, a senior Aboriginal

Public Servant, put forward the position that the Government could not stand aside and allow a situation where, for example, the number of Aboriginal pilots did not match that of the pilot population at large. This was too much for a well known Perth Aboriginal activitist who leapt to his feet to claim that he didn't give a damn (or an expletive to this effect) about Aboriginal pilots, lawyers and doctors; he just wanted the kids from his school to stay out of jail. It was for him and the others who rose to support his point of view an issue of priorities and real social justice being negotiated at the community level.

According to Folds, the problems we face with the AEP, as a model of social equity, seem to revolve around the ethnocentric way in which we attempt to graft on measurably beneficial aspects of the majority society without any destructive leaching of mainstream values into the fabric of Aboriginal society. I would like to touch briefly on one of a number of examples he provides to illustrate this claim. It is also one that will be familiar to most of you in the Kimberley.

There is no doubt people want houses and it is equitable and just, apart from the anticipated health benefits, that Aborigines should have houses. However, as Folds claims, we are constantly confused and often resentful when this and other measures taken to alleviate disadvantage produce so little in the way of results. Many of you who have worked in communities will, on reflection, realise that there are Aboriginal values that are, as Folds claims, of far more immediate, personal and social consequence than our long-term goal of improved health, desirable as that might be to Aborigines as well. As many of you are aware children of all ages have the freedom, along with an ever-changing multitude of relatives, to use the house as is their right, which results in a relatively shortened life span for what Kartiya regard as a significant material object. Overcrowded houses will often stand next to an empty one due to a death despite earlier assurances that no old people will live here, or that something will be worked out before the event.

Abandoning the basic tenets of the kinship system and related aspects of a life-style linked to an often oppositional world view could turn this situation around but this would be achieved at what for some people would be an enormous cost. As I have suggested, it is this factor of **social cost** that has to be addressed by both sides and incorporated into the process of change. To achieve a solution, which I doubt will ever be entirely satisfactory to both sides, requires a negotiable flexibility of the type ideally offered by the Independent School system. This is not to say that this approach is confined to this sector but I am suggesting that this is the way to go and the results could well be different from what we anticipate. And this brings me to my last example which hopefully demonstrates what I mean by the unexpected.

When visiting a Northern Territory School in 1991, we were interested to note that of the eight classroom teachers which excludes the Principal, Teacher Linguist and Librarian, five were Batchelor College graduates with either a three year Associate Diploma (community teaching only) or four year Diploma of Education. It seems from what we were told and observed that the Aboriginalisation of the school was proceeding successfully and that the classroom climate, especially in the classrooms run by Aboriginal teachers, had never been better in terms of student participation and overall harmony.

Keeping in mind that a number of these teachers are qualified to teach in any NT school, it was interesting to note that some of them were responsible for the students' transfer from vernacular literacy to English as well as the

maintenance of the English literacy and numeracy programs. However, as we observed in one lesson where the subject was English, the language of instruction was Warlpiri, i.e. the students were being taught English literacy and numeracy skills from a predominantly Warlpiri-speaking teacher.

Of additional interest was the presence of a class taken by a non-Aboriginal teacher which was basically set up to accommodate the nine or so non-Aboriginal children of staff working in various positions within the community. Added to these students, in order to build up the numbers to an economically justifiable level, were a small number of high achieving Aboriginal students who were therefore involved in the 'mainstream' curriculum process. For the Aboriginal teachers who were obviously pleased with the Aboriginalisation of the school and who were also committed to the Warlpiri bilingual program, the existence of the mainstream class was an added bonus in that they vied with each other to include their own children within its ranks. Or so we were told!

In terms of Social Justice indicators this school was obviously achieving a great deal. An increase in Aboriginal employment, an increase in Aboriginal tertiary graduates, an increase in Aboriginal involvement and decision making, etc. However, I'm not so sure that the situation necessarily leads to increased achievement as measured by Year 12 graduation rates and other externally-derived performance indicators. There is a possibility, as has happened in some Arnhem Land schools, that the Aboriginal teachers and community may turn the process inside out, leading to approaches and results that sit uneasily with the National and State policies particularly in regard to measurable outcomes.

Conclusion

If we are serious about achieving Social Justice objectives in Aboriginal Education, then all those involved need to understand the nature and the extent of the costs involved.

On the Kartiya side we need to appreciate that the process is not, as Folds says, cost-neutral. For our part we need to surrender certain notions regarding the superiority of one kind of knowledge over another, one way of learning over another and a different way of locating ourselves within a socially constructed reality over another. We need to deconstruct the essentially hegemonic nature of our hold over education.

Likewise on the Aboriginal side there is a need to understand that the price they pay for contemporary education is not inconsiderable. It is not so much that for every gain (improved English literacy and numeracy outcomes, increased retention rates, etc.) there is a loss, but rather that there are consequent changes. Harnessing these changes in order to maintain a dynamic contemporary Aboriginal society, underpinned by enduring values which reproduce meaningful forms of social organisation, can only be achieved through Aboriginal action. The application of the term Action Group to meetings of Aboriginal teachers working in the NT schools seems, under these circumstances, most appropriate.

In all this we need to avoid the trap of perpetuating an **ours** and **theirs** reality which emphasises the exotic and ephemeral. Our task is to negotiate the circumstances which encourage a legitimate and sustainable Aboriginal pedagogy that allows for the reproduction of a creative and fulfilling form of survival in a predominantly white man's world.

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Call for Submissions

The Editors invite readers and subscribers to contribute material for inclusion in forthcoming editions of *The Aboriginal Child at School.* We welcome submissions such as:

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- news items
- book reviews
- notices of forthcoming conferences, seminars, etc.
- reports on relevant conferences
- information about resource centres and how to access them
- resources and materials for teachers and students

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