IDENTITY AND CULTURE SHOCK: ABORIGINAL CHILDREN AND SCHOOLING IN AUSTRALIA*

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ABSTRACT. This paper is based on funded research into socialization patterns of Aboriginal children and their transition from an all-Aboriginal preschool to a white primary school. Aboriginal children experience substantial difficulties in white schools and tend to drop out early. Research so far has shown that explanations of individual deficits, which are often alleged in the literature, are not the cause for dropping out. Rather, Aboriginal children suffer from severe culture shock when turned over to white schools, as a consequence of subtle but significant differences between Aboriginal and white socialization of children, even within the same town.

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article rend compte de recherches subventionnées portant sur les schémas de socialisation des enfants autochtones et sur leur passage d'un milieu préscolaire entièrement autochtone à l'école primaire blanche. Les enfants autochtones éprouvent de grandes difficultés dans les écoles blanches, d'où leur tendance au décrochage. Les recherches menées jusqu'à présent ont démontré que les déficits individuels auxquels ce phénomène est souvent attribué dans les publications ne sont pas la cause du décrochage scolaire. Cette tendance est plutôt due au choc culturel profond que les enfants autochtones subissent lorsqu'ils commencent à fréquenter l'école blanche, du fait des différences subtiles mais importantes qui distinguent les modes de socialisation des autochtones et des blancs au sein même d'une localité.

Australia has a persistent problem in living effectively with its indigenous populations of Aboriginal people. A high percentage of Aboriginal people are regarded as "problematic" within the context of the dominant white culture. In the interface of black and white Australian everyday life the assumptions made by white Australians about black Australians are based on deficiency models, either of a medical, scien-

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tific, or socio-psychological kind. This study is concerned with an examination of these deficiency models, not from the point of view of the white majority but from the point of view of the socialization of Aboriginal children and their experience once in contact with white school environments.

STAGES OF ABORIGINAL AND GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

To understand the nature of the relationship that exists between the Aboriginal people and white Australians, it is necessary to understand something of the history of indigenous people since colonization. Until the 1930s, Aboriginal people were segregated and "protected" on government reserves and missions under the Native Title Protection Acts enacted by each state government to "train", "civilize", "uplift", and "Christianize" the "Natives" (Reynolds, 1989; Rowley, 1971).

Assimilation became the unspoken policy (to be enacted in 1951) when in 1939 the then Minister of the Interior, T. McEwan, stated:

> . . . The final object of the Government in its concern for these native people should be the raising of their status so as to entitle them by right, and by qualification to the ordinary rights of citizenship, and enable them to share with us the opportunities that are available in their own native land. (quoted in Rogers, 1973, p. 11)

Despite the sentiments and a clear recognition of "native lands", the 1930s and beyond saw an increase in the levels of control and subjugation of Aboriginal people. This was the period when self-supporting, independent Aboriginal people, who had escaped the influence of reserves under the policy that "training", by segregation and in isolation, was necessary before Aboriginal people could be admitted to citizenship and "equal opportunity" (Rowley, 1971; Quinlan, 1983). It was also the time when Aboriginal children were excluded from mainstream schools and forced to attend segregated, poorly staffed, and ill-equipped "black" schools, a policy which continued well in to the 1940s and 1950s (Eckermann et al., 1994; Harris, 1976).

In 1951 the Assimilation Policy became very clearly defined. It stated

> . . . that all Aborigines shall attain the same manner of living as other Australians, enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities, observing the same customs and being influenced by the same beliefs, hopes and loyalties. (Lippmann, 1992, p. 38)

In reality, the policy continued the framework of protection and segregation because states continued to produce specific legislation to con-

trol, restrict, and dehumanize Aboriginal people. Thus the Northern Territory Welfare and Wards' Employment Ordinance (1953)

> . . . made Aborigines wards of government, on the basis that they were so declared by the administration because of: (1) their manner of living; (2) their inability without assistance to manage their affairs; (3) their standard of social habit and behaviour; [and] (4) their personal associations. (Lippmann, 1992, p. 39)

Similar control was built into Native Welfare and Aboriginal and Islander Advancement Acts in Queensland (McCorquodale, 1987) throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and up to 1975, despite quite major federal government policy changes.

This latter period of assimilation saw Aboriginal children entering mainstream schools; it was also marked by the deficit model of education which squarely placed the "blame" for poor educational attainments of children from minorities on their socialization, family patterns, cultural traditions, and socio-economic situation (Eckermann & Kerr, 1979; Ryan, 1976). The influence of this educational model continues to plague Aboriginal education, teachers' philosophies, and teaching strategies (Eckermann, 1982, 1985, 1987).

In 1967 a national referendum gave the federal government power to legislate in Aboriginal affairs (1). In the same year (1967) government policy in relation to Aboriginal affairs changed to *integration*. In 1972 the prevailing view adopted by the Labour Government under Whitlam is best described as *self-determination*, only to be changed to *self-management* once the Liberal Party under Malcolm Fraser came to power in 1975. The dominant direction of self-management has not changed to this day under two consecutive Labour prime ministers, Bob Hawke and Paul Keating.

de Hoog and Sherwood (1979) distinguish these phases in Aboriginal affairs as follows:

> *Integration* puts an emphasis on positive relations between the Aboriginal and white community, while recognizing that Aboriginal people may have different needs and aspirations in some aspects of their lives.
>
> *Self Determination* takes these different needs and aspirations further, literally meaning that Aboriginal people should have the right to choose their own destiny, with Government help in an enabling role, providing finance, technical skills, and social and economic support.
>
> *Self Management*, which is the current Federal policy, has somewhat similar stated aims, but stresses that Aboriginal groups must be held accountable for their decisions and management of finance. (pp. 30-31)

In principle, then, self-determination and now self-management should enable Aboriginal people to decide their own fate, and to make their choice of lifestyle, economic pursuit, political allegiance, cultural patterns whether they be "mainstream" Australian, "traditional", or a blending of both. In practice this continues to be difficult, given that when self-determination and self-management became the driving force in Aboriginal affairs almost 25% of all Aboriginal adults (over 15 years of age) had never attended school, and 40% had attended only primary school, while less than 2% actually attended Year 10 (Commission of Inquiry into Poverty, 1976, p. 10).

EDUCATION AND ABORIGINALITY

Although some progress has been made, the pattern of under-education persists, as Hughes points out in the National Aboriginal Education Policy:

> . . . in the compulsory school years, 1 in 8 Aboriginal children aged 5 to 9 do not go to school or pre-school, and for those aged 10-15 years an appalling 1 in 6 do not have access to appropriate schooling. Moreover, access to and participation in education for Aborigines beyond the age of 15, whether in senior secondary school, technical and further education or higher education, remains at unacceptable low levels generally at rates some 3 to 5 times lower than for the community as a whole. (National Aboriginal Education Policy, 1989, p. 7)

Thus continuing assimilationist pressures tend to question and often abuse Aboriginal identity and cultural integrity (Eckermann, 1988). Together with a host of prejudices, they tug at the very value ascribed to their culture and in their "looking-glass self" (Cooley, 1956). These processes in turn lead to cultural insecurity and, at a personal level, often to severe stress and anxiety. Several writers (Eckermann et al., 1994; Kamien, 1975; Lickiss, 1971; Mitchell, 1978) have indicated that a substantial number of Aboriginal people, at least a third but often more, were and are affected by shyness, continual worry, xenophobia, and inadequacy as measured by the *Modified Cornell Medical Index Protocol* (Eckermann, 1988).

Among the many prejudices held, just one aspect is singled out here. This is concerned with the conceptualization and construction of aboriginality. There is a persistent assumption that there are "real" and "non-real" Aborigines. The "real" Aboriginal people are those who live their traditional-oriented lifestyle somewhere "out bush". The "non-real" ones are those who live in urban or rural situations. According to the 1991 census, by far the majority is in the latter category. White

perceptions of these groups tend to be that they have lost their indigenous culture and, often, that they are maladapted to white culture (Beckett, 1964; Inglis, 1964). A sense of loss of culture also permeates Aboriginal writing. Hence Colin Johnson argued in 1985:

> I believe that we should *recapture* our history and culture . . . and if we do not do this, what shall we have? Culture is built on the faith of a people and the history of a people. [authors' emphasis]

However, a sense of culture loss does not necessarily mean and cannot be equated with the concept of a cultural *vacuum* (Eckermann, 1988). Some traditional practices may be defunct, and white settlement has been an undeniably destructive force of Aboriginal culture (Bryant, 1982), but does this mean that rural or urban Aboriginal groups now have *no* culture?

Ironically, while asking this question, Australia has been "aboriginalified" in many ways. Even at a time when Aboriginal people in Australia were thoroughly disenfranchised and muted, their culture seeped through to the Australian consciousness and, in many ways, has attained symbolic stature for white Australian culture in general. The most distinctive Australian culture symbols overseas are Aboriginal. Many of these today are practised by contemporary Aboriginal groups. Skills and knowledge are transferred from generation to generation, not just via art and dance but through the transmission of folklore. There is a body of knowledge that Aboriginal people share – one facet of it is the knowledge of their suffering since white settlement, the other has to do with the transmission of positive values. As Kerry Giles, an Aboriginal painter, put it: "Paintings are not just pretty pictures on the wall they are identity" (Giles, 1994). Both of those elements have helped to strengthen identity, have led to a politicization of Aboriginal thinking and, amidst personal life tragedies, they have fostered a new sense of pride. Consequently, it is not a matter of concluding that rural or urban Aboriginal groups live in a cultural vacuum but to focus attention on an analysis of their cultural transmission process.

The premise of the authors before commencing this study, then, was that rural and urban Aboriginal culture(s) is/are complex and intricate. By focusing on processes which strengthen particular values and beliefs, it is the authors' hope to identify how and why Aboriginal adults encourage and discourage particular behaviour patterns; and, further, how these may clash with the cultural patterns characteristic of mainstream society and, particularly, schools.

THE ABORIGINAL PRESCHOOL IN AUSTRALIA

From the turn of the century onwards the segregationist policies *ab ovo* implied that Aboriginal children would be educated separately from the Australian mainstream. It is doubtful, however, whether the schooling received in reserves and missions can be classified as "education". While attendance was in theory compulsory, these rules were never strictly enforced and many Aboriginal children (well into the 1970s) never received any education at all. Many only attended classes for four years. The standard and circumstances of educational delivery in those "schools" are by and large best described as appalling: overcrowded classes, containing children of all age groups; teachers who would stay for brief periods only; and a lack of adequate educational materials and of even rudimentary educational tools. In the 1970s, the Save the Children Fund intervened and began to open and run educational facilities for Aboriginal communities. The Save the Children Fund is a nonindigenous organization, and it retained control of these preschools until 1989 when it gradually handed over control to Aboriginal management committees. This pattern has also characterized the preschool at which this study has been conducted.

THE PROJECT: CULTURE AND EDUCATION

Perhaps in no other area are social and cultural values displayed so openly and so meticulously reinforced as they are in the education and care of children. This study, still in progress, concerns parental attitudes toward the behaviour of children in two clearly identifiable sets of behaviours, judged either as "acceptable" or as "unacceptable". Disciplines relevant to the study of socialization, by and large, have taken their models for assessment of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours from the dominant culture. Unwittingly or knowingly, these models may have prejudged indigenous culture in ways that may have led to an acceptance of standards of child psychopathology not relevant to Aboriginal people, even though those standards are applied uniformly.

Recognition of the need for a cross-cultural approach has motivated some investigators (e.g., Weisz et al., 1988) to study child behaviour across ethnic and national boundaries. So far, studies by several teams have investigated socialization patterns in the Netherlands and in West Germany (Achenbach, Verhulst, Baron, & Avenhuis, 1987; Achenbach, Verhulst, Baron, & Althaus, 1987), in Thailand (Weisz et al., 1988), and in Jamaica and the United States (Lambert et al., 1989, 1990).

These studies have indicated that the prevailing values of society may lead adults to discourage certain kinds of child behaviour while condoning or facilitating other behaviour. For instance, Jamaican culture, predominately Afro-British in its traditions, is strongly committed to nonagression in child behaviour. Jamaican adults are quite intolerant of "rude", i.e., aggressive, abusive, or disrespectful behaviour in their children (Clarke, 1957; Cohen, 1956; Lambert et al., 1989; Winkle, 1961). Children are admonished against being "rude" and risking punishment (Kerr, 1963). If Jamaican culture discourages aggression and other similar externalized forms of behaviour in children, Jamaican youngsters may develop internalized problems instead. The studies by Lambert et al. (1989, 1990) confirm this hypothesis. Thus cultures may differ with respect to behaviour type, with certain types of child problem behaviour arousing greater concern in some cultures than in others (Weisz et al., 1988).

METHODOLOGY

Minimbah, an Aboriginal preschool in a university town in New South Wales, was chosen as the site for conducting the present study. The town has a population of about 20,000 swelled in number by university students during the academic year. The Aboriginal population is about 1200. From 1963 to 1989 Minimbah Preschool was funded and run by the Save the Children Fund with its stated purpose being that of improving the educational opportunities for Aboriginal children who lived in the adjacent Aboriginal reserve. The preschool was at first directed by a non-Aboriginal teacher and Aboriginal "assistants". In 1989, however, the school was handed over to an Aboriginal Management Committee, which appointed an Aboriginal specialist in early childhood education as the school's first director. The staff employed at Minimbah consists of one Aboriginal teacher and five Aboriginal education workers, and additional support staff, such as administrative assistant, handyman, and nutritional worker. Part-time non-Aboriginal staff is occasionally employed for specific purposes. Hence, when this study began in early 1992, the school had been operating as a self-managed, Aboriginal educational facility for three years. Currently, the school serves seventy Aboriginal children. Parents are integral to the school's operations and they serve on committees, participate in school activities, and take part in community oriented in-services and workshops.

This study focuses on the Aboriginal children, of both sexes, aged 3 to 5 years, attending Minimbah Aboriginal Preschool. The purpose of this

study is to facilitate the understanding of culturally acceptable and nonacceptable behaviour in this age group. Previous research (Eckermann, 1977, 1980) indicates that Aboriginal parents clearly distinguish phases in child development and attach quite different expectations of child behaviour to each phase, which they support with varying levels of suppression of facilitation and varying levels of adult distress thresholds.

Minimbah provides a unique opportunity to explore with teachers and parents Aboriginal cultural transmission because the school caters to Aboriginal children, many of whom are growing up in the all-Aboriginal environment of the local reserve; because staff at the preschool are predominantly Aboriginal; and because the school is under the control of an Aboriginal Management Committee. Consequently children attending this school are at an age and in an environment which does not include substantial exposure to non-Aboriginal expectations of behaviour and socialization.

Indeed, Minimbah can be described as an Aboriginal "culturally safe" environment. Thus this environment was chosen because it is culturally safe and it was done with the full collaboration of its director and parents. "Cultural safety" is achieved when the reality of the child is acknowledged and teachers reflect back to the children. Eckermann et al. (1994) adapted the concept of cultural safety from Ramsden (1994) and have argued that:

> Cultural safety . . . is the need to be recognized within the [education] system and to be assured that the system reflects something of you, your culture, your language, your customs, attitudes, belief and preferred ways of doing things. (Eckermann et al., 1994, p. 215)

Progressively, over the past 10-15 years, educators have come to realize that a cultural difference model of education must also meet the cognitive differences which children bring to the classroom (Christie et al., 1987; Harris & Malin, 1994). Such cognitive differences are based in culture and formed, in the first instance, by primary socialization (Eckermann, 1994). Consequently, if we are to understand the preferred ways in which children learn, interact, are motivated and communicate, then we, as teachers, must understand much more about the socialization practices which predispose children towards such preferences.

Over the past three years the approach used in this study has been that of filming groups of children at the school for a minimum of one week at various points of their activities. These "uncut" videos are then

reviewed to pin-point particular segments of interactions which could well be considered "unacceptable" within the mainstream system. These segments are then edited out and reviewed in workshop sessions to determine whether actions are really "unacceptable" in terms of the Aboriginal parents' and teachers' perceptions. If they are, we explore how they would go about modifying such behaviours. If they are not considered problematic, we discuss why we believe they might be considered to be so within a non-Aboriginal setting.

In 1994 we had the opportunity to follow some of the children into mainstream schools and to observe all interactions over at least one week to cover various aspects of their activities. These data await analysis. Discussions with teachers will highlight how children "fit" into mainstream activities and to what extent they may be subject to culture shock and its implications (e.g., withdrawal, aggression, avoidance).

It has been argued elsewhere (Eckermann et al., 1993) that film is an extremely useful tool in studying children's behaviour. At the moment we are focusing on "non-acceptable" behaviours because these will cause the children problems in mainstream schools. The majority of behaviours which have been recorded so far are, however, extraordinarily supportive. We will review the original videos again and again and discuss with Aboriginal parents and teachers the values, traditions, and beliefs which underlie such behaviours, how they are reinforced in the home, and how they may be built upon with the mainstream education system. Further, the videos provide a rich source of comparison between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teaching styles. We believe that non-Aboriginal teachers can learn much from the culturally safe practices observed at Minimbah.

DISCUSSION: THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE SHOCK

Our work so far has convinced us that one of the major stumbling blocks in many Aboriginal children's successful participation and achievement in education is intensive and prolonged culture shock engendered by conflict between the values, traditions, language, customs, and routines of their homes and those of mainstream schools (Eckermann, 1994).

In our observations within the Aboriginal environment we have seen none of that "excessive shyness" and poor attendance that appears to characterize Aboriginal student behaviour in white classrooms (McInerny, 1991). Our work to date indicates that within a culturally

safe environment, Aboriginal children's behaviour is characterized by (1) boisterous physical activity, (2) boisterous, noisy use of Aboriginal rather than standard English, (3) physical touching, sharing, and cuddling, (4) teasing and mild physical aggression between same sex peers and relatives, (5) expectations of touching and cuddling from adults, (6) withdrawal from an interaction which has become boring or stressful by simply walking away, and (7) noncompliance with adult instructions unless the child wishes to comply.

These behaviours are not considered rude or dangerous or distracting – they are simply judged by parents and teachers to be appropriate within the framework of children's rights for that particular age group. Such rights are, however, culturally defined and concomitant behaviour may be quite unacceptable within mainstream education. When children experience censure for behaviour which is acceptable within their own community they are exposed to culture shock.

Culture shock occurs when "well established habits no longer have expected consequences" (Bochner, 1982, p. 17). It is that feeling of uneasiness, anxiety, and stress which arises when suddenly all our familiar cues, language, interpersonal relationships, tastes, and actions appear to be out of place, suspect, or even inappropriate and we must reassess our behaviours in the light of foreign expectations.

It could perhaps be argued that all children experience a measure of culture shock when they enter school. Eckermann (1994) has argued that those who share most, in terms of language, values, and experience, with the established school environment are likely to adjust most quickly and find learning in such an environment most rewarding. However, those children who share least with the environment of the school are likely to experience acute and prolonged culture shock which will inevitably influence the development and expression of their abilities and their enjoyment of the learning process.

Teachers are quite aware of the emotional trauma and economic plight of refugee children and their parents and the need to support them emotionally during this period of rapid adjustment that is complicated by a traumatic history of war and disruption (Eckermann, 1994). However, children belonging to less recent arrivals, second generation immigrant children who have grown up predominantly within their own cultural group, or those who belong to minorities which are not highly valued in Australian society, e.g., Aboriginal children, suffer significant, and frequently prolonged, culture shock. These children are also

transformed from being valued, knowledgeable, and acceptable members of their communities to "novices" within the new environment.

Brink and Saunders (1976) identify five major stressors that create culture shock when minority group members experience hospitalization. We would argue that the same stressors operate when Aboriginal children and their parents come into contact with the white school system. Figure 1 illustrates the stressors and their interrelationships. We have summarized Brink and Saunders' (1976) analysis of factors characteristic of the five cross-cultural stressors within institutions, such as schools, and have supplemented these by indicating the concerns and reactions of Aboriginal children and parents.

Figure 1 shows that the five major stressors of culture shock are: mechanical differences, patterns of communication, attitudes and beliefs, customs, and isolation. Let us consider each of these briefly in turn.

MECHANICAL DIFFERENCES

The physical environment of the school as well as the routines, technology, and patterns of movement are developed to ensure smooth organization and appropriate facilities for children as well as teachers. These routines and the associated constraints of movement, expression, and behaviour are culturally determined. While most Anglo-Australian children and parents are socialized to expect such routines, Aboriginal children may find them to be intolerably constraining. This is particularly so when, in an Aboriginal environment, children are thought to have particular rights, e.g., the right not to listen to directives or the right to withdraw from activities. Mechanical differences become particularly confusing when prevailing patterns and kinds of communication are foreign.

COMMUNICATION

All schools endeavour to enhance communication between teachers and students, as well as between students and students, by helping children to acquire the necessary language skills as quickly as possible. This need is as important for Aboriginal children, who speak English as a second dialect, as it is for any immigrant children. Further, research generally acknowledges that such skills are best acquired by building on the strengths of the children's first language. Communication, however, includes more than spoken or written language. It encompasses

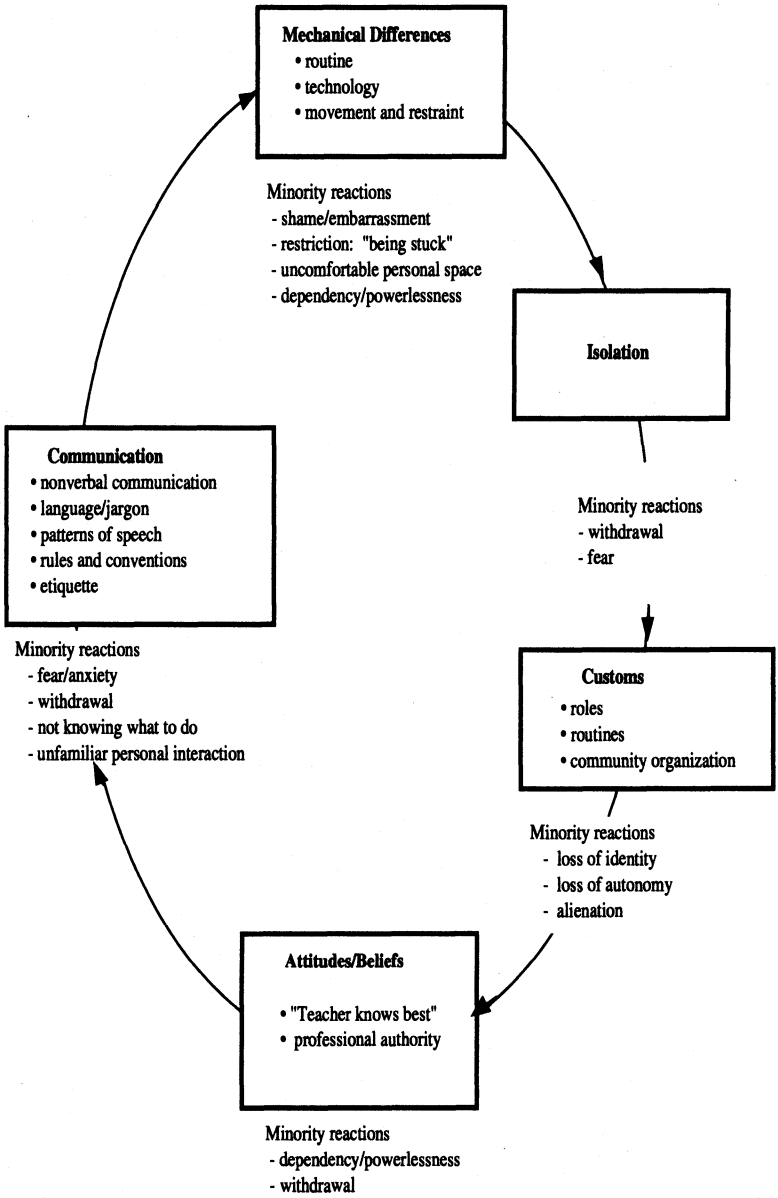

FIGURE 1. The five major stressors of culture shock and their possible implications for nurses in remote Aboriginal communities (Eckermann, 1994; adapted from Eckermann et al., 1994)

nonverbal communication, the rules and conventions of how we interact and with whom, as well as etiquette.

Clearly these unspoken aspects of communication vary significantly between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures (Eades, 1991). They are extremely subtle. Consequently transgression is easy, and because these unspoken aspects of communication are so closely tied to values about what is acceptable behaviour and what is not, transgression, even unintentional transgression, can cause serious offense. Our data indicate that Aboriginal English is frequently difficult to understand, and consequently often interpreted as "broken" English, which gives this language low status. Further, nonverbal communications are frequently "missed" and when cues are misinterpreted, children are often confused.

ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS

In order to function, schools, like any other institutions, must establish and pursue strong lines of professional authority. Inherent in any school system are also prevailing attitudes and beliefs about how children learn, what they should learn, and in what way learning experiences should be structured. Such attitudes and beliefs are translated into school policies and classroom organization, as well as philosophies of teaching and learning, which are definitely grounded in Anglo-Australian traditions. The persistence with which school attitudes and beliefs are maintained and the extent to which schools fail to take note of the varying attitudes and beliefs of parents and children will create conflict. Within such conflict, participants operate from different power positions (Eckermann, 1994). Parents and children, particularly those with communication difficulties and from a nonvalued Aboriginal background, are dependent on schools. Their only option of registering protest is to withdraw.

CUSTOMS

Based on evolved patterns of communication, attitudes, and beliefs, schools operate within a framework of established customs. As Brink and Saunders (1976) point out:

> Customary, expected and/or anticipated patterns of behaviour differ between . . . [school] and home and must be learned. Although this stressor is directly related to the system of communication, the entire concept of reciprocal role relationships enters in. In particular, sex-linked roles and relationships must be established in the new setting.

> New roles and systems of etiquette are often implicit rules of behaviour rather than explicit. Class and status, . . . kinship networks, and indeed the entire social structure, need to be understood to determine where one fits within the framework. (p. 129)

Thus customary peer behaviour among Aboriginal children may be interpreted as aggression by non-Aboriginal children and teachers.

The stressors discussed above combine to create the enormously frightening barrier of isolation.

ISOLATION

Parents and children who find it difficult to communicate, who feel alienated from a system whose rules and conventions they do not understand, and who are unfamiliar with the routines, expectations, and language of the institution, will be affected by a feeling of isolation, a feeling that little or nothing in the environment is a reflection of self, or of the familiar and known. Brink and Saunders (1976) state that:

> In addition to the isolation experienced in relation to the communication barrier, there remains the sense of isolation inherent in any situation totally populated by strangers. When an individual enters the field alone, or even with such significant others as spouse or nuclear family, the friendlessness and non-relatedness to the immediate population is apparent. The distance between self and significant others is magnified and/or distorted. . . . Making friends, becoming important or relevant to someone in the new situation is a time-consuming, often lonely task. (p. 128)

This becomes a particularly important stressor for Minimbah children when they move from a predominantly Aboriginal environment to mainstream schools where they become part of a minority.

We already know from the literature that in culturally safe environments children are healthier, more adventurous, and productive because, to use a jargon term, their identity has been validated. At Minimbah, Aboriginal children are taught largely by Aboriginal teachers, and their parents also come in and assist in the running of the preschool. Although strategies exist to cushion some of the effects of culture shock by creating a warm, safe, supportive environment, by making use of specialist teachers, and by encouraging community participation, the whole process of culture shock and the level of not just intellectual but also emotional adaptation, which this requires from even very young children, needs to be addressed much more rigorously and systematically. Most of all, its impact on urban and rural Aboriginal

children needs to be carefully analyzed. Culture shock and its related stress and anxiety may well be one of the major factors inhibiting Aboriginal children's ability to achieve in the school situation. It may also be the catalyst for "unacceptable" behaviours within mainstream schools.

Tatz (1979) suggested fifteen years ago that "voluntary separatism" may be a precondition for acceptance by non-Aboriginal Australia. We like to turn his argument around and say that "voluntary separatism" in the educational field is perhaps the most promising road to take to enable the future generations of Aboriginal Australians to gain and maintain a positive identity. Positive identity of Aboriginality may be held by a large number of Aboriginal people but it is often sorely tested in everyday life.

Although our study is still in progress, it is clear that whatever problems occur later in the students' school careers are not comfortably attributable to individuals. This is not an issue of individuals or of a whole group of people being unable to achieve. We know that Aboriginal students are not nearly represented well enough in the educational system, but we also know that up to now little effort has been made across the continent to create culturally safe environments for Aboriginal children. Conforming to white school also means conforming to its prejudices, and no one can seriously doubt that conformity based on such a premise does not augur well for individual development and identity formation.

NOTE

1. For the first time (1967) legislation enabled Aboriginal people to be counted in a national census. In a sense, this was a hallmark year. It is still at times falsely claimed in Australian popular discourse that Aboriginal people became Australian citizens at that time. This is a misconception. Aboriginal people were British subjects since Lord Glenelg decreed so in 1836. However, this fact tended to be conveniently forgotten and the decree was ineffectual. Many restrictions were placed on Aboriginal people which effectively denied citizenship rights. To name just a few examples, Aboriginal people could not give evidence in court; their customs, language, and values were not recognized; and they were unable to vote. In practice, they were treated and regarded as part of the flora and fauna. For a select few, it was always possible to gain so-called "exemption papers" from the 1930s onward. In New South Wales this practice stopped around 1961-2 but continued operating in Queensland, for instance, right up to the early 1970s. Exemption papers, jokingly called "dog's licenses" by Aboriginal activists, officially bestowed citizenship rights to individuals, be this for specific services (such as serving in the army during the world wars) or by recommendation from "reputable" white Australians, but these citizenship rights were not transferable to members of the family and offspring. The population of Aborigines continued to decline largely through diseases, stress, and also through white homicides. From the estimated one million Aboriginal people living in Australia at the time of the first white settlement in 1788, the Aboriginal population had plummeted to about 70,000 by the late 1800s and these conditions gave the justification for rounding up Aborigines

in reserves. These "protection laws", while varying from state to state, operated well into the 1950s. As said before, in 1951 the first concerted effort was made to regard Aborigines not as fragmented splinter groups but as one people. Policy decisions, reflecting this change, were initiated by the various State Ministers of Aboriginal Affairs in joint meetings in Darwin. Hence, these policies were borne out of discussions of the states and were not a matter for the federal government to decide. The National Referendum of 1967 was sought by the government in order to effect constitutional changes. Eleven questions were asked, two of them referring to the Aboriginal people. According to the constitution, Aboriginal groups were not permitted to be counted in the national census and the federal government was not allowed to legislate on Aboriginal affairs. The two questions relating to Aborigines were therefore concerned with seeking permission from the non-indigenous people of Australia to take over legislative functions for Aborigines from the states. Both were granted. Especially in the 1960s, but even before that, Aboriginal people began to mobilize politically. In a combined effort, Aboriginal organization and non-Aboriginal organization sympathetic to the plight of Aborigines achieved this victory in 1967.

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