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ì...if the child is suitable...î:the racialisation and deracialisation of Aboriginal students.

by

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Introduction

This paper focuses on processes of racialisation and how they shape the educational experience of Aboriginal students. Ethnographic work, such as Malin (1990), demonstrated the way in which micro-political processes in the classroom mitigate against Aboriginal student success. These studies have shown that responses to cultural differences are important dynamics within classrooms. But they concentrate on the students themselves. Racialisation inherently involves teacher/student, as well as student/student, relations. How can an investigation into educational discourse clarify our understanding of these processes of racialisation and the unequal outcomes of Aboriginal students? How does shifting the gaze from the 'victims' to the teachers provide us with a better understanding of these micro-political processes? And what insights does the concept/theory of the racialisation of education (Troyna, 1993) add to our understanding of the educational processes faced by Aboriginal students in Australian classrooms? This paper will attempt to answer these questions by building on the work of Malin (1990), Keeffe(1992) and Troyna(1993) to provide a framework in which to discuss this research.

The realisation that discourse is central to relations of power has come from practice. That what we say simultaneously includes and excludes is learned in the classroom, the media and from important others. It is what we experience daily that gives us a sense of belonging or not belonging (Griffiths,1993). Ruby Langford talks of growing up on the margins and how language was a glass door we walked into BANG all the time and not many white people could see it

(1988:231). Diana Eades (1981) has of course illuminated this process very succinctly in her work on Aboriginal English. She shows that language is a vehicle for cultural maintenance and production and that different dialects of English, including Aboriginal English, carry with them implicit understanding about social relations..

The way in which discourse develops to give meaning to and express our lives is inextricably linked to our class, gender, ethnicity and éraceí. The structures that exist then, and the discourse which gives them meaning, are a consequence of history and form what Bourdieu calls habitus.

ìThe habitus, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices - more history - in accordance with the schemes generated by history. It ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the forms of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the écorrectnessí of practices, and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms.î (1990:54)

Teachers then, are shaped by and make their own histories. They bring to the act of teaching a range of pre-existing perceptions about what makes good teaching practice (Connell, 1985). This does not suggest that practice remains static. Indeed, Giroux argues that teachers are ìreal people articulating and rewriting their lived experiences within rather than outside of historyî (1994:284). What this paper will argue however, is that while practice has changed in terms of classroom organisation and interaction - and while overtly racist, sexist and discriminatory language is now unacceptable - education as cultural practice, continues to ìgenerate a privileged narrative space for some social groups and space of inequality and subordination for othersî (Giroux, 1994:279). This provides a theoretical framework in which to analyse educational outcomes of Aboriginal students. The term

ëracialisationí is used in this paper to describe a complex, often paradoxical process. Miles has defined racialisation as ìany circumstance in which the idea of éraceí is employed in discourseî (1993:74). We need to explore further the way in which the ideological process of racialisation impacts upon pedagogy. ëRacismí, is a socially constructed process which is relational. It involves more than one history because there are always two or more sides. Studies of racism in education require an understanding of where teachers are coming from, as well as the students.

This paper presents the preliminary results of research involving teachers of Aboriginal students in New South Wales primary and secondary schools. It will firstly outline the theoretical framework underlying the research. Following this, there is a description of the qualitative methodology which was employed and an analysis of the ways in which it provides possibilities for teasing out the complex nature

of the racialisation process in schools. As this is a work-in-progress paper, I will confine my discussion to three case studies exploring the theme of Aboriginality. Aboriginal English, curriculum and learning styles are also part of this study but time does not permit an adequate exploration of these themes. Finally, there will be a discussion of the implications for the classroom and future research.

Theoretical perspective

The social conditions that constitute habitus are central to understanding practice in classrooms as in broader society. The interrelationship of past and present social conditions is the focus of this study through the analysis of interviews of teachers. Educational workers perceptions of their work, their students and the relationship of both to wider social contexts such as geography (space), current policies and understandings in the area (ideology) and personal history are constantly shifting. Each of the workers I interviewed reflected on these dimensions by calling on the past to help explain the present, comparing the present place with that of another and situating their understandings in terms of relationships. Such is the task of an educator - to make sense of the real world and reflect that in the unreal world of the classroom. It is essentially an evaluative process (Johnston, 1990) which carries with it perspectives. However, as cultural practice, teaching is not merely a matter of choice. It is constantly constrained through institutional imperatives, policy guidelines and community input. The filtering of disparate influences inform and help shape pedagogy.

Giroux (1994) and Keefe (1992) both draw upon the work of Raymond Williams in attempting to understand the way in which culture is reproduced and produced within the classroom. Giroux argues that we need to understand how teaching is negotiated by human beings within specific settings and circumstances (1994:284). In this way, we are provided with a window onto the local negotiation over cultural production in the classroom. As such, we are more likely to see the differences within and across groups of people and gain a more powerful understanding of the complexities inherent in teaching.

Keefe, at another level, is concerned with ideology and the way in which state apparatuses and Aboriginal organisations, through policy and programs, define Aboriginality (1992). Keefe found Aboriginality was constructed in such a way that two oppositional ideologies emerged, that of Aboriginality-as-persistence and Aboriginality-as-resistance. These provided useful analytical tools in understanding the production of culture and social relationships within the classroom as well as the broader society, such as the media. My earlier honours work looked at the ways in which these ideologies worked to disenfranchise urban

Aboriginal adolescent girls. I found that their daily lives included highly politicised expressions of Aboriginality-as-resistance of which

the media created myths of disorganisation and breakdown. The school was an accomplice, in that it incorporated representations of Aboriginality-as-persistence rather than the lived experiences of the girls' lives (Reid, 1991).

The construction of Aboriginality as Aboriginality-as-persistence, which was associated with the continuities rather than changes, simultaneously provided space for the reclaiming of culture by Aboriginal people while restricting the range of Aboriginal identities, was appealing. So too, was the ideology of Aboriginality-as-resistance, for it provided a framework for understanding the more strident, political expressions of contemporary Aboriginal life and the way this ideology was manifested in the classroom. Malin's visible students for example, were visible in transgression and were thus constructed in terms of their difference and inability to conform. Keffe argues that Aboriginality-as-resistance, when used by teachers in the construction of Aboriginal student identity, is seen in the same light as the visible students in Malin's work. Malin's work then, clearly demonstrates the way in which the micro-political processes of the classroom exclude and include at the same time, while Keffe provides a theoretical tool for understanding the ideology that underlies teacher perception and practices.

My earlier work on urban Aboriginal adolescent girls explored Keffe's ideologies but left me with a vague feeling of dissatisfaction. I had come to see that using *ëraceí* as a basis for providing educational programs was entrenched in discourse and policy and contradictory. Furthermore, I was also interested in the silences, the times that *ëraceí* was not overtly part of the picture. At about this time I came across Barry Troyna's (1992) work on racism and black students in Britain. Troyna was concerned that multicultural education policies had failed to deliver the outcomes for black students that it claimed to pursue. Important differences exist between Australia and Britain in regard to multiculturalism, which has never been a national policy in Britain. Rather, multiculturalism was something that educationalists took up in random and diverse ways. The left in Britain saw multiculturalism as a conservative ploy to distract attention away from racism in schools and society. However, this paper is too short to take up all the issues inherent in this debate. As a consequence, Troyna preferred an anti-racist approach to educational policy-making and discourse.

Using Reeves (1983) analysis of the racialisation process in political discourse Troyna was able to move beyond the either/or dichotomy (1993:28) which both Malin and Keffe employ in relation to Aboriginal education. Visible or invisible, persistent or resistant, are categories with firm boundaries that do little to explore the complexities of the racialisation process. As mentioned previously, educational programs based on *ëraceí* are overtly *ëracistí* but can be aimed at decreasing the impact of negative discrimination and as such

have benign goals. They attempt to make obvious the way in which racism creates inequality through a benign discursive racialisation: 'Discursive racialisation denotes the explicit use of racial categorisation and evaluation' (Troyna, 1993:29).

The way in which benign racialisation has become operationalised within Australia is through groups such as the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (A.E.C.G.) who argue for and support programs based on the specificities of racial categories. The content of the categories change but the aim remains the same - to overcome

inequality. One of the difficulties that this approach has had to confront - within Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations working toward improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students - is the recent backlash against what has been termed the 'new racism' (Castles, 1994; Troyna, 1993). Malin alludes to this problem:

In recent times there has been a movement away from emphasising cultural difference. I feel, however, that it is irresponsible to deny that cultural differences exist. They have been empirically detected time and time again as leading to difficulties in the teaching-learning process (Malin, 1994:84).

Malin would of course see the use of racialisation in her research context as having benign goals. Essentially, the 'new racism' is seen in the deployment of terms such as ethnicity and culture, language and 'ways of life' to explain how things are in the classroom. It is argued that these terms have the same epistemological roots as biological racism which is now out of favour. Miles (1993:63) has suggested that the 'new racism' naturalises community, or, rather, that human nature is dependent upon closure and the exclusion of those who do not share the same beliefs. The problem, it seems to me, is that the direction is always towards the 'other' and focussed on the victims of racism rather than the perpetrators. This is what has interested me in looking at what may be called 'whiteness' (Solomos and Back, 1994). There is no denying that cultural differences exist, but why do we highlight the way in which the 'other' is culturally different rather than exploring how the social relations of the classroom - including teacher/student and student/student relations - are constituted?

This is where Reeve's (1983) other analytical tool discursive deracialisation is useful. Here, we can move beyond overt racialisation, which is unfashionable, to discover how it has been reconstituted into the 'new racism'. Covert racialisation is thus hidden under terms such as culture, language and ethnicity. Deracialisation refers to this covert process whereby seemingly non-racist criteria are used to actively discriminate against another group (cited in Troyna, 1993:29). This is reflected for example in the continuation of Eurocentric conceptions of the curriculum and the

non-acceptance of non-standard language forms.

By understanding the continuities and discontinuities in the discourse of racialisation we are provided with a more sensitive lens through which to identify and interpret the muddled and contradictory ways in which key concepts such as race, ethnicity, culture, identity and deprivation have been presented and related (Troyna, 1993:29-30).

Methodology

The research reported in this paper is situated within my general thesis which is a comparative study of Aboriginal education in Australia and Canada. The research involves interviewing 20 educators in both countries regarding practices for indigenous students, constructions of aboriginality, learning styles and language issues. The Australian interviews were semi-structured to allow for a narration which includes a component of life history as well as discussions around the themes already stated. A semi-structured format allows for the elucidation of key issues and the exploration of informant's perspectives. As Dowsett succinctly puts it, it lets me take risks, follow my nose, and get closer to the social relations I want to investigate, and produce a much richer and therefore more useful account of life (1986:56).

The project began with the aim of wanting to know what other teachers

were doing in relation to Aboriginal education. My personal history in Aboriginal education provided me with my focus. I taught for ten years in Redfern teaching at primary level where I worked with a dedicated staff and community members to bring about change. Since then I have been involved with the Aboriginal Rural Education Program (AREP) at the University of Western Sydney. When AREP students are on practicum experiences, teachers and principals invariably raise concern at the student's Aboriginal English. The same issues recur - Aboriginality, learning styles and Aboriginal English. I wanted to know how teachers negotiated community involvement as well as broad pedagogical responses. As previously mentioned, Malin (1994:84) has recently highlighted the concerns about focussing on the cultural characteristics of students as a way of dealing with difference. I want, then, to add to our understanding of this process by looking at the cultural baggage of educators. In this way, we might know more about the process of racialisation of Aboriginal students. Therefore, I thought it important to focus on the educators - on whiteness in some instances - although that could also run the risk of reification of what is in fact a political not racial entity. The focus is more on shifting the gaze and redefining the definition of normal (Solomos and Back, 1994:154).

If we use the category Aboriginal/Aboriginal are we collaborating in the continuing process of recreating racial difference? Certainly this

is a danger, but éraceí is such a commonsense organising principle that we need to understand more about the way it is operationalised. We need to bear in mind that other discourses of éraceí impinge upon education and are included and reproduced in the classroom. The interviews were analysed ìto decipher the meanings of racialised identities without attempting to prioritise one classification as more legitimate than anotherî (Solomos & Back, 1994:157). The dominant discourse surrounding Aboriginal education has focussed on ëcultureí which referred by Solomos and Back as metonymic elaboration or the coding of éraceí as culture (1994:156). However, this discourse is filtered in specific, local contexts and articulated to the social relations. Therefore, interviews took place in rural and urban areas, across primary and secondary areas. This particular type of qualitative research used was grounded theory procedures and techniques (Strauss & Corbin; 1990).

Each interview or narrative was treated as a ëcase studyí. A case study ìinvolves the investigation of a relatively small number of naturally occurring (rather than researcher-created) casesî (Hammersley, 1992:185). Due to the amount of detail collected through this method, it is more likely to be accurate than say a survey which would give a greater number of cases but less accuracy. When analysing the teacherís narratives it was important to understand the conditions of both time and space which shaped their understandings. To that end I have used not only the context of the school to understand these narratives, but also the town, region and personal histories of each. The contexts tell us of wider relationships in the community which impact upon school dynamics. The level of unemployment and the spatial relations of different groups of people help shape the conditions in which teachers work and in doing so, frame the possibilities for action. There is space both for change and resistance to change.

This required a description of the social dynamics of the town/region using Aboriginal community profiles from the 1991 Census, mass media profiles, anecdotal references from various informants in shops, pubs and general acquaintances. What might be called a situational analysis was undertaken with an eye to the dynamics of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interaction and representation through symbols such as street signs, suburb names, flags and spatial relationships of

communities.

Importantly, each case study included a potted personal history because each interviewee called on events, processes and situations that attempted to show the specific ways in which their racial understandings were constituted. This was no doubt a response to the heightened awareness of racism in the general community and the need to be distanced from such potential claims or as justification for a particular stance. This ëpositionalityí, or understanding of oneís place in the social structure, incorporates the objective social

structures or those things over which we have no control and which are seen as *énormalí*(Bourdieu, 1994:234). The personal histories were partly reflections drawn directly from the teacherís narratives about their own professional and personal lives that they clearly thought were relevant or useful in explaining their position, and partly from an exploration of government policy in relation to Aboriginal people in general and education in particular.

The analysis does not attempt to claim that what teachers say is what teachers do, rather it explores the relationship between discourse, social structures and policy. Strauss and Corbinís conditional matrix places as much emphasis on the phenomena being studied as it does the social conditions which have brought it about (1990:162). This type of analysis is useful because it can account for processes and change. For example, in this research, it is useful in determining that racial categories are not fixed but evolve and respond to particular moments in history. It allows us to see the conditions - the why and how - that brought about the changes and how they may be changed.

The study

For the purposes of this paper, I will demonstrate the ways in which the discourse of racialisation is both overt and covert. I want mainly to concentrate on the overt racialisations which have benign goals, since these are proactive and require theoretical bases for continued support. I then want to turn to the covert racialisation processes which do not have benign goals. These are the hidden factors which continue to discriminate against Aboriginal students.

In 1993 I sent out surveys to all schools with Aboriginal Education Assistants in the metropolitan south-west of Sydney and the north-west of New South Wales. The surveys were largely focussed on receiving demographic data related to age, experience, training and special programs in the area of Aboriginal education. Any teacher interested in a follow-up interview signed and left a contact number at the end of the survey. In a sense then, teachers self-selected and as such, tended to constitute a group that were either particularly interested in the project or had a history of advocacy in relation to Aboriginal students. There were Aboriginal, as well as non-Aboriginal teachers interviewed as well as Aboriginal support staff. All Aboriginal Education Assistants in each region were contacted and meetings were held in Sydney with the metropolitan south-west group.

I interviewed 14 educators in the north-west of N.S.W. and 8 in metropolitan south-west Sydney with an additional focus group discussion with 8 highschool teachers. The latter methodological difference occurred because the school was the focus of another research project I was working on and I did not want to inconvenience the school any more than necessary. The process of interviewing was fraught with difficulties due to unforeseen calamities like no electricity at one school with a taperecorder that did not have

batteries! For the purpose of this paper, I have chosen three teachers - two from the north-west and one from metropolitan south-west Sydney -

mainly because they represent a range of experience. Allen is male and a highschool teacher in the north-west of the state; Nancy is a female principal of a primary school in the same region, and Kerry is an infants teacher in metropolitan Sydney. All three were interviewed individually in private offices. Each interview became a case study so that wider issues could be incorporated and to ensure during final analysis that there were themes rather than identities arising from the data. I will however, create composite identities of the teachers so that the cosmology of their lives is illuminated while their identities are concealed.

Findings

My analysis of the three case studies will make occasional references, where relevant, to other interviewees. This is an exploration of my thesis that Aboriginal students are racialised in overt and covert ways which have benign or racist goals. For the purposes of this paper, I mainly want to demonstrate the differences between overt and covert racialisation processes.

Difference

In general, Allen, Nancy and Kerry demonstrated some ambivalence around the notion of difference. This was particularly evident when students broke traditional patterns of what was considered an educationally supportive lifestyle. That is, periods of leave - central to Aboriginal lifestyles in response to death, illness or socio-economic problems or just family business - were seen as disruptive to overall learning and as examples of familial breakdown. These were in turn used as explanations for the child's failure at school. Kerry, an infants teacher at Tharawal comments on her experience of Aboriginal students:

A few that I have had learning problems with literacy. A lot of that is due to absenteeism too and moving schools. So it's hard to judge whether it's actually to do with how they learn, or just the problems they have in education as a whole. Like just attending, and a lot of them change schools. Or they go out west to visit relatives for two or three weeks, and don't attend school and then come back. They just miss a lot of things. (Kerry; 2)

These comments are echoed by Allen, an English teacher at Kamilaroi High:

One of the things is that we do have kids coming here from other towns, Aboriginal kids from other towns, who do only spend relatively short periods here, and that becomes very very difficult...and I would say [they are] the ones that tend to drop out more quickly, than the ones who do perform. (Allen;5;309-313)

Why is school failure a necessary corollary of practices that are related to cultural maintenance? There seems no questioning of school culture, yet if you were to inform teachers that their practices were essentially assimilationist or racist they would be aghast. This is how deracialisation works. It is the covert use of racial signifiers that discriminate against one group while affirming another.

Nancy, a primary school principal in Wonarua, echoes Allenís and Kerryís position regarding stability:

But having the paid tutors [for Aboriginal students] is really great, and she is here every day, and they are getting the continuity. And they're mostly working on a one-to-one basis. And the improvement in their self-esteem and their ability to work in class, has been quite tremendous really. (Nancy, 4)

Nancy clearly supports the additional funding provided for Aboriginal students and uses it to provide support and increase literacy levels. The process of racialisation is reflected in the linking of Aboriginality with the need to improve self-esteem and ability. This is an example of covert racialisation where Aboriginality is associated with a deficit model. There are clearly normalising behavioural processes in operation also, but the Aboriginal workers in the school are most supportive of the Principal arguing that she never lets things get out of hand and responds to the kids early. While the successful literacy results - which Nancy determines via Basic Skills results - are one indication of success, Aboriginal workers in other places see that the process involved in attaining literacy is often at the expense of the child's Aboriginality. That is, to succeed in literacy requirements is to reject Aboriginal cultural traits relating to language, accent and social patterns of the community. Clearly, different communities have different expectations and different goals.

In Namoi, with a larger Aboriginal community, programs designed to increase literacy among Aboriginal students by separating Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students are achieving some success. However, Helen, an Aboriginal teacher in Namoi, commented:

Why do they separate our kids? They're the ones that can tie their shoelaces up before they get to school. They can always find the toilet. They don't cry on the first day - you should see all the other kids - they help them! I reckon it's just a new word for the same old thing - assimilation. They want 'em to behave like white kids. Why can't they teach them the same way, altogether? (Helen, 1)

What we have here is a range of differences surfacing related to differing identities across Aboriginal communities. These identities are constituted by broader socio-economic factors. Nancy and Helen's towns differ greatly. For a start, the Aboriginal population in Helen's

town is around 13% (Ethnic Affairs Commission, 1994) while in Nancyís it is 4%. Greater visibility seems to go hand-in-hand with greater tension. The towns are also spatially very different. Wonaruáis Aboriginal population is integrated and not found in isolated pockets unlike the community in Namoi who live on mission sites and marginalised sections of town. Housing and employment are significantly better in Wonarua than Namoi and Aboriginal organisations have a higher profile in Wonarua. Structural racialisation then in Namoi is significantly more noticeable than in Wonarua. Clearly, education is more a site of struggle where Aboriginal populations are greater and where there is multi-institutional racism (Rizvi, 1993). We can explore more deeply these understandings of difference if we look at the three teachers understandings of Aboriginality.

Aboriginality

The way in which Aboriginality is understood is complex and contradictory. There is often a criss-crossing of other forms of identity with Aboriginality, in the following case, ability:

...for one reason or another, the Aboriginal kids tend to be in the lower groups, so they can become recognisable, and recognise themselves in ways that aren't really fair, and you sort of get that self-defeating situation where in the lower class they are going to keep behaving and performing at that lower level, and they are expected to do that. I think mixed-ability has made the difference (Allen;2;98-103).

Here, Allen is using ability as a relevant criteria, not race. It just happens that the low ability groups are disproportionately

Aboriginal. The common sense corollary is that it is to be expected that many Aboriginal students have low ability. This is an example of covert racialisation since the constructions of ability are clearly racialised - in favour of the dominant group. Therefore, Allen is making racial statements about the ability of Aboriginal students. Kerryís understanding of Aboriginality reflects a number of other interviewees living in urban areas:

[Do the Aboriginal kids identify openly as Aboriginal?]

Yes, fairly well. And some of the parents are a bit reluctant, I don't know why. There's a couple that have got Aboriginal children, like not all of their children are Aboriginal. May be one child has an Aboriginal father or part-Aboriginal father or something, and they don't want to be identified. There's a couple like that, who don't want their child identified as Aboriginal, and they state that.

[Right. How does the Aboriginal Education Assistant deal with that?]

Oh she just says that's OK. Because I had one last year, the parent stated that she didn't want her child identified as Aboriginal.

[And teachers don't worry about the issue of degree of colour...]

Yeah sometimes that crops up. Just in discussions and that. Like you

wouldn't know unless you were told. And sometimes that can be a problem, because sometimes you go half the year, and unless you know. A few things happened last year, where actually they were new kids that were coming in didn't sort of say anything. And then it wasn't found out till later, when some Aboriginal event came up or something, and they [say] oh I'm Aboriginal. And then you had to go and find back in the record card, [to see if] their parents are actually [Aboriginal] or not. (Kerry, 4-5)

Lurking in the background here is a distinction between *érealí* Aborigines and *ënot realí* Aborigines. We are dealing here with a sub-discourse about difference, one that revolves around official definitions of difference as a basis for claiming entitlements and *ëcommon senseí* definitions based on colour. The implication is that claims to be Aboriginal are a benefit. The good old record card is the final arbiter. But record cards can lie - they record ethnicity and other aspects of students performance, behaviour and ability - based on teacher's judgements.

Nancy has many years experience working at mission schools and many other rural areas. Nancy reflects on the changes that have occurred among Aboriginal people and situates that within wider policy changes: ...it was interesting to see because I was there, during the period...I guess...when the Aboriginal people started to find their feet, and became more vocal and started to voice opinions about things, far more than they had previously. It was a fairly interesting time, because...and in those days of the Non-Sexist Policy and so forth. (Nancy, 2)

Nancy has a clear understanding of Aboriginality in terms of *ëcolourí* but not of culture. There are references to *ëlost cultureí* and a romanticisation of traditional Aboriginal cultures. When talking about family networks she replied:

Oh no I don't think it's strong. It is broken down. I don't see the same...Well I guess it was almost like ancestor worship, because I think the Aboriginal people had so much to teach us in the way that they treated the older people, because what do we do, as soon as they are a bit of a problem, we stick them in a home. But Aboriginal people didn't.. that's not their way, and in fact that was the way they learned everything from the elders of their tribes etc. But um, sometimes lately there seems to have been, I have personally witnessed this at some places where family relationships have not been what they ought to have been. Or they haven't been as they would have been, to

put it that way is probably better. (Nancy, 3)

Here is an example of Keeffe's Aboriginality-as-persistence again, a construction of Aboriginality which is safe because it is somehow non-existent. That different family structures which have emerged and

are associated with breakdown is typical of the myth of disorganisation which surrounds the emergent culture (Williams, 1976) and is associated with Keeffeís Aboriginality-as-resistance. This latter ideology is more of a threat to the knowledge base because it asks questions about language, it rejects dominant symbols of power while creating itís own new symbols.

Racialisation and deracialisation

So far, I have demonstrated the way in which constructions of Aboriginality reflect official discourses of Aboriginality as well as experiential influences. I now want to turn to some of the paradoxes which highlight the racialisation and deracialisation processes. Firstly, Kerry responds to a question regarding programs for Aboriginal students:

No [there arenít any] but the A.E.A. does. She does things like excursions, and the dance group. I mean we have got a lot of things, where they just do their own activities. But within the class, no, I would say no.

[So, you donít really need to have then, a separate programme for Aboriginal students. You not actually looking at them in any way that is different to the other students.]

I would say not really. I mean we do cater for all different learning styles. With the different activities that we do. But nothing is specifically designed for the Aboriginal kids.

[So you are concentrating on teaching in a range of ways, as opposed to looking at individual children.]

Yeah. I mean we have individual programmes to do with them too. But I mean thatís not only Aboriginal children, thatís for all of them who have learning problems.

Kerry is able to justify special treatment in relationship to excursions/dance to account for Aboriginal studentsí special needs and special cultural attributes just as we have special language classes and gifted and talented classes. This racialisation has benign goals.

What Kerry is saying is unjustified is special treatment within the normal classroom. There is nothing specially designed but we cater for all learning styles, we respect individual differences. Here is covert racialisation. Aboriginal students are 'problem' learners: it is they who are the problem, not the curriculum. Aboriginality is acceptable as long as it remains at the periphery or is presented in Aboriginality-as-persistence guise.

Finally, Nancy gives us further insight into the way in which covert racialisation takes on such common sense language:

Could I just add something to what I said about the children themselves. I think the other thing that I really like about the atmosphere here, and the relationship between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children, is the fact that many of the Aboriginal

children have also been voted in as school leaders, which has been tremendous. We have had house captains and vice-captains and so on who have been Aboriginal. We don't have any this particular year, but every other year we have. And I think it is just a measure of that if the child is suitable, and the children think the child is suitable, then they vote for the person, I think that is really good.

What is suitable? How can students see it so easily in other students? How is Nancy so certain that I will know what it means? This deracialised discourse can fool us into believing that there is one world view or set of attributes that makes a person acceptable. Nancy could have been more explicit about the values or attributes required for these positions but she wasn't. They were assumed and thus were covert forms of racialisation, ones that are known to the dominant group. Aboriginal students who decode these racial categories and respond accordingly are more easily assimilated and can attain positions of power.

Implications

One of the difficulties for this type of research is to see the possibilities for action. Importantly, these need to be specific and local but there are a number of recurring themes that need to be addressed urgently. Firstly, the vicious circle of exclusion (Bridges, 1994:42). Aboriginal students are excluded from schools intentionally and unintentionally. Bridges argues that this occurs when children are disproportionately identified as educationally backward or as presenting special behavioural problems (1994:43). This continues because children are tested and measured through the same simplistic methods where they always appear deficient. The sorts of internal exclusions (Bridges, 1994:44) we use such as casting through to short-term exclusion from school also create discontinuities. This is particularly evident in areas where social dislocation in the community is more fiercely evident and the school's discipline codes are repressive.

One of my Aboriginal Rural Education Program (AREP) students who is training to become a teacher asked why was it that teachers are so obsessed with behaviour. Bringing her own experiences and perspectives she was able to see these discontinuities and the subsequent isolation that Aboriginal students felt. Taken to its logical conclusion, Keefe's work suggests that having Aboriginal people in the education system does not automatically mean that the racialisation process would be abandoned. This is true, but I would argue that we need to have Aboriginal people in the system to change it and while the system may also change them, it is an important site of struggle and ultimately involves mutually transformative relations (Stasiulis, 1990:278). Aboriginal graduates in New South Wales are currently not guaranteed jobs. This flies in the face of affirmative action processes that have

provided the training and organisational support such as the A.E.C.G. So then, Aboriginal employment in teaching should be a priority. Secondly, there needs to be a rethink about teacher training in relation to dealing with difference in the classroom. We need to move beyond a model which sees the problems resting within the students. In this way, we may be able to move beyond focussing on the culture of the 'other'. Diversity requires diverse responses. We haven't adjusted to this yet and it is at the core of so-called 'catering for individual differences' which, as rhetoric, tells us nothing about practice. Overwhelmingly, this research has shown that teachers do not treat children as individuals. Processes of racialisation are constantly called upon to elucidate and excuse the continuing inequitable outcome for Aboriginal students.

To overcome this, we need to resist the current direction in education which is overly-dependent upon normative criteria and look at how the curriculum continues to privilege some groups over others. We have managed to do this with girls education, albeit not unproblematically, whereby the texts, subject structures, organisational practices and the nature of 'gendered' knowledge were brought into question. If we can do

this without attempting to come up with a recipe for all Aboriginal students we will begin to tease out the real bases of inequality. This will require understanding the relationship between knowledge and power rather than a concern with norms and behaviour.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to disclose the hidden injuries of common sense related to understandings of Aboriginality. This common sense is partly shaped by the discourse of racialisation and until there is some insight and awareness of the selective constructions of Aboriginality, and the limits to these constructions, we cannot expect equitable outcomes. This paper has argued that some aspects of Aboriginality are being responded to, particularly those that are associated with Aboriginality-as-persistence but other patterns of Aboriginality, such as mobility, are not. The processes of deracialisation are significant in shaping the outcomes for Aboriginal students because they obscure the ways in which knowledge and power are constituted.

Footnotes

Race is used here as a social construct. Miles (1993) argues that 'race' is not a biological fact and that the use of phenotypes is not supported. There are in fact more differences within groups than between groups of people.

Cosmology here refers to a study of the origins, structures and workings of the teachers' world and how it shapes their understandings.

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