

CONCENTRATED LANGUAGE ENCOUNTERS: THE TRAEGER PARK LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

PART 1: THE CONTEXT

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THE CONTEXT AND THE SCHOOL'S INTERPRETATION OF STUDENT NEEDS

The Traeger Park Primary School Language Development Project began because the school principal and staff were concerned about the extremely poor language and literacy outcomes they were achieving at the school. The majority of students identified as Aboriginal with home environments ranging from remote community families living in fringe camps to families living mainly in the lower socio-economic sectors of the urban Alice Springs township. Consequently, this discussion will use the term Aboriginal to identify the students at the school. However, the discussion here has relevance for many educational contexts that involve Indigenous students in general. Additionally, there is also considerable relevance for other educationally marginalised and low performing students.

The school staff detailed the low outcomes and their interpretation of the problems they faced in a submission to the Australian Government's Neal/Hird Committee (1976) on Indigenous education. The submission identified the problems underlying poor outcomes in terms of language difference and deficit as well as poverty and home experiences. It specifically identified the following concerns,

- Low attendance levels (ranging from an average of 1.5 days per month for fringe camp children to an average of 3.5 days per week for those living in the town).
- Language difficulties due to differences between Aboriginal English and Standard Australian English.
- Poor student motivation reflecting low aspirations in the home.
- Developmental delays in Piagetian concept development for students.
- Low literacy levels of parents.
- 'Dearth' of books in the homes.
- Overcrowding and lack of facilities in homes.
- Health problems in students and their families.
- Low parent engagement with the school.

The school had, for some time, been attempting initiatives to redress some of these perceived problems using the following means,

- Teacher orientation activities conducted by Aboriginal community members and other non Aboriginal 'experts'.
- Purchase of a 'school bus' to facilitate flexibility in programming.
- Development of a 'whole school' emphasis on building personal relationships with the students. e.g. conscious spending of time talking to students before and after

school, informal day outings for classes, extended class camps, involvement of parents in outings and camps, organised class sleepovers at the school, teachers including one or two students on family trips etc.

- A policy of employing Aboriginal teaching assistants and Aboriginal teachers when available.
- Developing a 'whole school' emphasis on including parents. e.g. functions (barbeques) for parents and teachers, inviting parents to camps and sleepovers etc., provision for child-care when parents visited the school, encouraging parents to use the school staffroom, provision of transport when parents needed to access the school etc.
- An Aboriginal studies elective in the upper grades that involved camps at local communities with Aboriginal community members.
- An arts engagement program that involved Aboriginal craft lessons and visits from Indigenous performers and artists.
- Use of teaching materials that reflected Indigenous content.

The school's response to the perceived language needs of the students was to set up a language unit within the school that offered small group language drills in Standard Australian English syntax. This program followed the guidelines and methodology set out in the Northern Territory Oral English Syllabus. The language drills in this syllabus were loosely based on the model provided by Bereiter and Englemann (1966) in their Direct Instruction approach. Whole classes rotated through the language unit for one hour each per day with the classroom teacher combining with the unit teacher and teaching assistant to allow for group teaching.

Despite the attempts to provide learning and other support of the kind listed above, outcomes remained low. Moreover, issues around attendance and parent engagement remained unchanged. In response to the school's request for assistance through the Neal/Hird Committee, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies funded a study of the syntax of Traeger Park School students by Margaret Sharp 1976. Sharp compiled a list of Aboriginal English and Standard Australian English (Sharpe 1976, 1977a, 1977b). However, Sharp was unable to provide any substantive guidelines for developing the school's language program. As a result, the principal and the senior language teacher were funded to visit a number of centres across Australia to identify a candidate to initiate a language teaching project at the school to commence in 1980. The project was to be funded jointly by the then Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies and the Commonwealth Department of Education which was responsible at the time for education in the Northern Territory.

MY OBSERVATIONS OF THE CONTEXT AND STUDENT NEEDS

I was invited to take the position at the school primarily because I had experience in the child language analysis methodology used by Sharpe in her work at the school. The school representatives also judged that I possessed a sufficiently broad knowledge of the various approaches to literacy teaching and psychological learning theory. In addition, I had some experience in literacy teaching with Aboriginal children as well as with grant application processes.

My limited prior experience with Aboriginal primary students had taught me that there was no simple ready-made answer to successful teaching with these children so my approach to the opportunity I had been offered was a cautious one. Consequently, I did not commence the project with a pre-conceived methodology to implement at the school. Before commencing the project, I made extended visits to the school to talk with teachers and to observe the educational progress of children in lessons (both in the Language Unit and in classrooms). Observation continued as

the program was developed and gradually extended across the first four grades of primary school over the next four years.

Very quickly it became apparent that contemporary teaching methodology had little to offer to resolve the educational breakdown that I was observing at the school. Over time, the school had moved to and fro between various methodologies from progressive child centred to explicit teacher directed approaches. The teachers had tried highly prescriptive Direct Instruction following Bereiter & Engelmann (1966), the structured syntax teaching of the Northern Territory Oral English Syllabus, a number of approaches to language experience including Breakthrough to Literacy, various 'culture appropriate' content reading programs using 'whole word' and different variations of phonics teaching from analytic to strict interpretations of synthetic approaches. Finally, the school had settled on an eclectic 'whatever works' approach and various elements of most of the above approaches could be seen at play to various degrees across the school. The latest orientation that was emerging in the school was the then Australia wide trend to Whole Language methodology (Goodman 1973, 1976, 1986; Smith 1975; Graves 1983; Cambourne 1988) that, in Australia, was building on the Shared Book work (Holdaway 1979) that had originated in New Zealand a little earlier. A number of teachers had begun to experiment with this pedagogy and we continued exploring its potential for a period but eventually realised it contained no panacea for the issues facing the school.

Disjuncture between learning negotiation strategies and student needs

The problem with all of the methodologies discussed above was that they lacked the capacity to bridge the gap between what the children expected to do in the learning negotiation process and what the teacher expected them to do. What I observed from the outset, however, was that 'seeing the purpose' of an activity or task was critical to the successful performance of the Aboriginal children in school. By 'purpose', I meant an understanding of where the task or activity fitted into the context that was being addressed as a focus for teaching. If students did not see this they were unable to meet the teacher's expectations for participation and engagement in the associated learning negotiation.

To take some simple examples:

- In a direct instruction lesson:
The teacher models a statement eg. This is a pen (while holding up a pen). She then gives the pen to the child and says "now you say it."
The question that arises here for the child is what is the purpose of this? (e.g. What does she mean? What am I supposed to learn here?) It is presumed that the children will realise they are learning an element of language that they can incorporate into their everyday speech.

However, when the gap between the child and the teacher's perception of the task relevance is large (as frequently it is for Aboriginal children) the child will not realise this or see the overall point of the activity. In fact, it is almost inevitable that the confused child will see it as an attack on his/her usual way of responding. This kind of interaction was what I observed at Traeger Park. The activity if it is engaged with at all (by the children) becomes at best a ritualised and meaningless process (performance).

- Similarly, in a whole language teaching lesson: The teacher invites the children to read along with her in 'shared reading'. However, the result at Traeger Park was a ritualised chant with no attention paid to processing any meaning that was involved in the wording although the teacher presumed that the children were attending to meaning. Consequently, when she eventually pointed out a word she was surprised to see that the children were not following her attempts to focus their attention. Likewise, I observed that not only was it important for the children to see the purpose of the activity or content that was presented it was perhaps even more critical for them to see the purpose of the engagement processes they were expected to negotiate.

Thus, when the whole language teacher pointed to a picture and asked the class "What is happening here?", the children needed to be aware that she wanted them to engage with the motivations of a character, to evaluate those motivations and to speculate on the likely consequences of an action for the characters affected by a particular action.

This kind of disjuncture and associated breakdown in learning negotiation was common in the writing of observers of classroom interaction with Aboriginal students. Later Harkins (1994) would describe the kind of interaction that was common at the time in schools with significant numbers of Aboriginal students. In describing a lesson at another Aboriginal school in Alice Springs where the teacher was attempting to conduct a picture discussion with Aboriginal students, she concluded,

The teacher and the children obviously have different ideas of what the 'classroom game' involves. The children know that it is a question-and-answer game, and are eager to shout out their one-word answers, displaying their knowledge of English vocabulary items.....

They do not realise that the teacher also has an elaboration game in mind, and wants sentences as well as vocabulary items. The teacher encourages them in their responses, but does not find a way of making clear to them what she really hopes from them.(Harkins 1994:135)

Harkin's comments, above, underlined the kind of communication breakdown between teachers and children that was occurring constantly at Traeger Park School. Her comments were made ten years after the early developmental phase of the program at Traeger Park School came to an end. However, they also refer to a level of communication breakdown that was pervasive in the literature on Aboriginal schooling around the time of the Project (eg. Malcolm 1982; Harris 1980; Christie 1984; Folds 1987). What was being observed at Traeger Park clearly held and still holds significance for Indigenous education generally.

The technical dimensions of negotiation failure

In trying to understand the communication breakdown that was occurring at Traeger Park, I turned to the literature on classroom discourse and found arguments for the superiority of different types of questions. However, what I was observing was the breakdown of all types of questions.

As earlier discussion has indicated, this generalised breakdown of classroom interaction could be found in the literature on Aboriginal education, and, incidentally, it could also be observed by visiting any other school in the Northern Territory with a majority enrolment of Aboriginal students.

What was also observable was the fact that interaction breakdowns increased dramatically whenever teachers attempted to pursue learning task goals that could be described as academic. Children would participate in talk provided the teacher did not try to focus that talk on, for example, explaining, elaborating on or justifying statements. Any questions that attempted to probe for these kinds of responses generally failed no matter how the question was posed.

In Gray (1998), I discussed two interaction transcripts analysed by Malcolm (1982). In the first transcript, Malcolm showed how direct questioning resulted in breakdown and confusion as a teacher tried to focus on a specific type of discussion outcome. The teacher's strategy of using direct questioning simply caused the lesson to dissolve into chaos. In the second transcript, the teacher was able to generate more engagement and talk. Malcolm concluded that the lesson was successful when the teacher simply encouraged the children to talk and followed and supported the discussion that the children initiated. In doing so she used non-directing strategies that avoided asking questions designed to focus the children's learning and rather allowed the children to control the direction of the discussion. What happened was that the ensuing 'talk' was of little educational value or purpose and consisted of low level personal observation statements.

The question that arose for me was, "How was such talk to develop into a more directed and analytic academic discourse that was appropriate for negotiating learning?" Malcolm's transcripts mirrored the situation at Traeger Park. It was possible to achieve positive classroom interaction if teachers abandoned any focus on worthwhile educational discussion. However, teachers in general are not comfortable doing this. It defeats the purpose for which schools exist. The need to confront this dilemma confused and deeply affected teachers at the school. It also fed much of the stereotyping and the tendency to lower the standards of teaching activities that occurred as teachers presumed lower student cognitive capacity and sought causes in the home background of the children.

My observations of the failure of teacher-student interactions at this point had identified two 'needs' appropriate to the successful mainstream education of Aboriginal students. The first had to do with how the teachers and students could realistically focus on suitable, grade appropriate outcome goals in their learning negotiation. The second had to do with how the students could be engaged productively with the ways of talking and thinking that were appropriate for exploring those kinds of academic goals. Teacher negotiation strategies had to be found that could support this kind of engagement.

At the same time these 'needs' were emerging from my observations of teaching interaction, a further issue arose that not only was interaction breaking down, teacher attempts at repair were also ineffective. French and McLure (1981) had produced an interesting paper in which they outlined in detail the various strategies that teachers use to repair breakdowns in classroom communication. Teachers at Traeger Park were using these same repair strategies but they were rarely successful with the students.

In fact, I observed that not only were initial repair attempts failing, any further attempts to recover from the breakdown of the repair attempt invariably failed also. This resulted in chains of repair attempts that compounded and intensified the effect of the initial breakdown.

Further consideration of the fact that both initial communication attempts as well as

subsequent attempts at repair on the part of the teacher were breaking down led to an important understanding. Essentially, most of the instances of breakdown that were occurring **could not actually** be repaired at the point of occurrence no matter what repair strategies the teacher attempted to use.

When there is a large disjuncture between the understandings and expectations that various participants bring to an interaction it is virtually impossible to achieve satisfactory repair at the point of the interaction at which the breakdown has occurred. To achieve productive interaction around a learning task, a teacher needs to go back and to reconfigure the developmental process that prepared the learner of the task in the first place (e.g. Lundgren 1981).

Repair strategies that could be applied in many mainstream classrooms with relative success did not work with the children at Traeger Park because the understanding and expectation gap that existed between teachers and the Aboriginal children was simply too great. Consequently, the 'repair' process had to begin well before the lessons in which the communication breakdowns were occurring. To put the point directly, the gap between teacher and student communicative intent was too large. A process had to be put in place that 'closed the gap' as part of the teaching process.

What I needed was a **developmental sequence of lessons** that could gradually bridge the gap between understandings about what was relevant in the educational task and what constituted effective engagement with those relevant aspects. This need for a lesson framework that was capable of 'synthesising' the expectations and focus of teachers and students was a third crucial 'need' to be addressed in any proposed literacy program. This lesson framework had to be capable of embedding the previously mentioned 'needs' for appropriate teaching/learning negotiation strategies and grade appropriate goals.

The synthesising lesson framework I was seeking clearly had to embrace far more than a conventional 'theme' approach to teaching in which students study within topic fields such as 'dinosaurs' or 'health' or 'weather' and so on for one or two weeks. In conventional theme teaching, often the only concept or process that links individual lessons is the topical content that is being considered. That is, one lesson would concentrate on a particular type of dinosaur (e.g plant eating) another might cover 'meat eating or predatory', another lesson might cover 'time lines' and 'changes to the Earth's atmosphere'. The emphasis in this kind of programming is on breadth of understanding. There is little emphasis on the systematic development of the students' ability to engage over the range of lessons.

What I needed was a series of lessons, that over time, would do more than increase the range of coverage of the topic under investigation. I needed to arrange the sequence so that cumulatively, the lessons built up and enhanced the ability of the children to engage with the topic in a manner that was appropriate for the kind of learning process that was necessary for educational success.

A further problem was that I was starting to realise that the children had to arrive at the communication point with **two** sets of parallel (and interrelated) understandings in order to engage productively with the teacher around learning and that both of these were problematic for Aboriginal children and their teachers. These understandings could be characterised roughly as understandings, first, about *what was relevant* and, in the second instance, about *how to learn in school*.

Failure to negotiate 'what' was relevant

The first of these understandings was concerned with the content of what was to be learned and how it was to be constructed conceptually, especially through language. That is, what elements in a particular task or attention focus were appropriate in the learning context and what kinds of relationships existed between those elements. For example, when the teacher set up a maths activity that involved sorting beads the focus of attention had to be on the concepts being taught and not the social act of playing with the beads. In Gray (1998) I discussed a transcript of a discussion at Traeger Park between a teacher and two children participating in a Piagetian (conservation) water play activity. In it, the teacher was focusing on developing the preliminary concepts of 'full' and 'empty'. However, the children saw the focus as deciding who was the 'boss' of the game and spent their time and effort in attempts to gain teacher approval for their respective claims to the title of 'boss'. Teacher attempts to reframe around the concepts of empty and full simply received no attention.

Another example can be taken from books and reading. Teachers had a lot of trouble engaging the children in discussion about illustrations in the books they were reading and when the children did attend they could not engage with the concepts the teachers were seeking. Thus, the children were happy to point out things that were illustrated on the page. They could even identify actions although often not the things the teacher considered relevant to the storyline. However, when the teacher tried to shift the focus to predicting or speculating on the possible progression of the narrative or the feeling and consequences experienced the interaction process quickly began to lose its way.

Teachers at Traeger Park tended to avoid sessions where they engaged in reading stories to the class and their ensuing discussions because the children simply 'played up'. In the early primary grades, teachers interpreted this as an indication that the children were 'not ready' and the emphasis shifted to 'pre-reading' and 'perceptual motor development'. In fact, when I started my observations, teachers had reached the point of avoiding reading to the class because the children had no interest and continually misbehaved. In the upper school, the interpretation was that the students were 'visually oriented' so much TV was watched instead. To anyone familiar with Indigenous schooling practice these are familiar observations although today computers and surfing the internet tend to have supplanted TV watching. Michael Christie (1984), writing at the time about Aboriginal children in Eastern Arnhem Land (NT) makes the following observations,

Because Yolngu children become refractory and frustrated when encouraged to learn purposefully, discipline problems arise. When discipline problems arise teachers choose activities which will maintain peace in the classroom. Through a process of survival of the fittest, the teacher subculture has become dependent on a range of activities which, while ostensibly academic, require little purposeful behaviour. These.....

....., keep the children happy and maintain teachers in the hope that their pupils are occasionally learning something. (Michael Christie 1984:374)

Michael Christie then goes on to point out how pedagogic discourse in Aboriginal classrooms eventually comes to focus upon markedly lower goals which constitute a parody of the kinds of goals that are important for achieving control over academic discourse. Thus, not only does the behaviour of the children become ritualised, the behaviour of the teachers themselves also becomes ritualised. Eventually, even the theoretical rationale upon which teaching activity rests becomes distorted in order to

accommodate and legitimise this ritualised pedagogical discourse. Along with Christie, a number of other contemporary researchers were reporting similar observations from different Aboriginal community contexts (e.g. Malcolm 1979, 1987; Harris 1985; Folds 1987; Malin 1989).

This kind of process seemed to extend across almost all of the curriculum task and activity spectrum and led to a general sense of confusion and disruption whenever the teachers became serious about engaging the children in what could be viewed as academic learning. Teachers viewed this disruption as evidence that the children had difficulty 'tuning in' because of short 'attention spans' and poor listening skills. My observational perception on the contrary was that the children had difficulty 'tuning in' primarily because they did not understand what it was that they had to tune in to.

The question that arose from this first set of understandings, therefore, was how to teach the children to 'tune in' to the features of the task or activity that were appropriate educationally. I interpreted this need at the time through the operation of the 'w' interrogative elements;

- What - particular aspects in a learning context were important and relevant?
- When - at what point in time within a task were they relevant?
- Where - in what circumstances did they assume their relevance?
- Why - were certain aspects relevant in the first place?

Somehow we needed to create a teaching/learning context in the classroom that not only pointed out these things to the children but also ensured the children developed the orientations to tasks which predisposed them to select appropriately.

Failure to negotiate 'how' to learn in school

The second set of understandings the children required concerned the expectations that the teacher held when she attempted to negotiate academic learning with the children in the classroom. These expectations had to do with the manner in which (or 'how') the child would think when they were attempting to learn. Thus, we can complete our interrogative cycle of learning needs (i.e. what, when, where, why & 'how').

When teachers explain things to children, they expect that the nature of their explanation will be attended to by the children. They also expect that children will respond in certain ways when they are questioned and asked to explain in class. All of these activities are focused on modelling and teaching specific ways of using language that are critical for academic success. Children who are not initiated into the ways of thinking and interrogating reality that are expected in schooling will struggle to engage productively.

It is tempting to interpret the communication processes and their associated ways of thinking that teachers are trying to establish and maintain in schooling as the imposition of a different style of using language that is merely a different way of saying the same thing (e.g. Labov 1969 and discussion in Gray 1998 (a); Sharpe 1976, 1977(a), 1977(b)). This interpretation of difference in language use as simply stylistic also carries through much of the early discussion on teacher questioning in school (e.g. Sinclair and Coulthard 1975 etc.; Barnes 1976; Britton 1970 etc.).

However, at the time of the Traeger Park project support for a contrary position was also emerging from my classroom observations. This perspective was also beginning to appear consistently within the research literature. This position was that the language competency (ways of thinking and talking) that were being sought in

classrooms was critical to the development of academic success in general. Children who entered school already initiated into these 'ways with words' (Bryce-Heath 1982, 1983) were significantly advantaged when it came to their educational progress. From this perspective, many of the learning difficulties Aboriginal children experienced in schools occurred primarily because schools were deeply embedded within a literacy oriented culture of a particular type (e.g. Scollon & Scollon 1981, Goody & Watt 1963). The literacy oriented discourse representative of that 'academic' culture pervaded both *what was taught* in schools and *how* it was taught.

Most importantly, the research strongly supported the conclusion that literacy-oriented discourse and its associated mode of thinking was highly significant for educational success at all levels. This research supported the notion that, while one particular discourse (ways of thinking and talking) could not be said to be better in any generalised sense, it was also true that performance in different social contexts did require and was advantaged by having control over discourses appropriate for constructing meaning within the particular social context in question. It was proposed that the mode of thinking appropriate to academic (or 'literate') learning differed from that employed by those who are 'non-literate' (eg. Luria 1976; Olson 1977; Scribner 1977; Tough 1977; Donaldson 1978; Vygotsky 1978; Rometveit 1979; Goodnow 1981; Scollon and Scollon 1981; Scribner and Cole 1981; Heath 1982, 1983; Olson & Torrance 1983; Snow 1983; Romaine 1984; Wertsch 1985, 1990; Light 1986; Wood 1988). This position was also strongly supported by the linguistic insights being developed by Michael Halliday (1975, 1985, 1985a, 1985b) along with Jim Martin and Joan Rothery (Martin & Rothery 1980, 1981, Martin 1984, 1985). At the time of the project I had access to the developing work of Halliday & his colleagues.

The question that arose from the second set of understandings, therefore, was how to tune students into the learning negotiation processes that were important to effective learning. Fortunately, research in early childhood development was also beginning to underline the fact that the nature of the interaction in literacy oriented events that occurred in the home (bed-time story reading, for example) was a critical force in the development of facility with academic literacy-oriented discourse (e.g. Goodnow 1981; Scollon and Scollon 1981; Bryce-Heath 1982, 1983; Olson & Torrance 1983; Ninio & Bruner 1978; Goldfield & Snow 1984; Bruner 1983; Painter 1985; Snow 1983; Wells 1983, Wood, Bruner & Ross 1976). These studies were already beginning to outline ways of engaging with learners that suggested a potential for extending the principles involved to develop the kinds of classroom interaction awareness that I was seeking in classrooms.

The affective dimensions of negotiation failure

In discussions of teaching practice, the affective impact of communicative breakdown generally receives scant attention. Typically most emphasis is on the technical aspects of the teacher's role in negotiating learning (How to question and so on). However, in schools like Traeger Park the affective impact is perhaps the most significant aspect of the whole learning negotiation equation. This is because marginalised learners are the most vulnerable to the potential for psychological damage that accompanies the affective dimensions of negotiation failure.

Failure to negotiate a sense of 'belonging' in the classroom

The failure to achieve a sense of belonging in the classroom is a major cause of affective dysfunction. If we search for a definition of 'belonging' we meet a range of attempts from the simple, such as the following;

Belonging is the idea of being part of something where you are accepted

To others that attempt to incorporate the psychological effects on people;

Belonging is the term used when the individual becomes involved in something; it is the feeling of security when members may feel included, accepted, related, fit in, conformed and subscribed which enhance their well-being with a feeling of home.

In its everyday meaning belonging is a nice concept. One that is often embraced as a sentiment, a 'motherhood' statement that everyone accepts. Although, it is often not examined too deeply in practice.

At the time of the Traeger Park project, psychological attachment theory was beginning to register the deep significance of the role 'belonging' plays in the development of a person's self concept and identity as an effective participant in various aspects of his/her social and cultural life (e.g. Bowlby 1958; Schaffer & Emerson 1964; Ainsworth & Bell 1970; Ainsworth 1973). Since that time much of the early work in this area has been synthesised in broader analyses of the development of 'self' and its relation to cognition (e.g. Stern 1985; Lee & Martin 1991; Siegel 1999).

A sense of belonging, especially when it is projected toward the child by parents and other significant persons such as teachers, engenders a sense of safety and security within the contexts in which it occurs and leads to the development of a 'secure self' who can respond in a balanced and constructive way to challenges within his/her environment. Such a person can, for example, take considered risks in response to the challenges they face. The inability to take risks in school learning tasks, as we have seen, was a major concern for students at Traeger Park. Overall, the actions of teachers play an important role in the development of a child's sense of self as a learner. The teacher's role was especially critical in the case of vulnerable children such as those at Traeger Park who entered school with little awareness of their role as academic learners even though their home experiences may have developed a strong sense of self and belonging in other aspects of their experience.

Consideration of the school's submission to the Neall/Hird (1976) enquiry shows an awareness of the need to develop the children's sense of self. This awareness could be found in the expression of teacher aspirations to build personal relationships; talking to the children out of class, informal outings, extended class camps, class sleepovers, including parents, Aboriginal studies electives, Indigenous content in teaching materials and so on.

However, while such things were positive initiatives in many critical ways they missed the point of the problem that was confronting the children and the school. A sense of belonging is projected perhaps most strongly through the **reaction** of the significant adult to the behaviour and utterances of the child. In the sense that teacher **reaction** is critical, one could observe that a sense of belonging is predominantly 'reflected' rather than 'projected'.

The importance of teacher reaction lies in the fact that it is when a child commits to an utterance or action that the child is most vulnerable to shame and humiliation. Psychologists distinguish between these two terms that are often used interchangeably in everyday speech. Shame occurs when the child's ego (or childish grandiosity) is checked by the adult, for example, "Big boys shouldn't hit little kids!"

to a child who is pushing toddlers over. However, if shame is induced, it is important for the child's stable development that shame is induced within a relational context in which the child feels secure and accepted on an emotional level, that he/she 'belongs'. Effective parents act this way when they act to regulate the behaviour of their children.

For Aboriginal children, the classroom does not present itself as the type of emotionally secure and safe environment within which adult 'shaming' (i.e. correcting of impulses and utterances) can have a positive effect on development. Aboriginal children arrive at school usually with very different norms and orientations towards acceptable behaviour and learning than those that are assumed and expected. Consequently, the checking and correction around both behavioural control and learning that happens in school occurs in different ways and circumstances to those they can relate to. These differences make the children super vulnerable to humiliation which psychologists define as a destructive and potentially traumatising process.

To create humiliation with vulnerable children, the teacher does not have to utter an explicit condemnation of the child. The process works far more subtly and it works when failure takes place in both the realms of learning attempts and behavioural control. The humiliation process grows from a failure on the teacher's part to achieve what has been called 'alignment' and 'attunement' with the offering of the child. Alignment means that the teacher should be able to confirm for the child that her/his initiation or response is acceptable. Attunement means connecting directly and positively with the child on an emotional level. The teacher must be able to accept and praise the initiation of the child.

Understandings concerning alignment and its role in determining the nature of development in children have formed a prominent area of research and treatment in psychology for a considerable time. Essentially, in this process, the adult needs to 'reflect' back to the child both cognitively and emotionally. The adult must reflect back to the child on two dimensions. They must reflect back on an emotional level as well as a cognitive. Distorting this reflection process can have catastrophic effects on the children's development of a healthy sense of self. The reflection needs to confirm that '**we**' are joined (aligned and attuned) towards the same end. In order to succeed in the classroom the child must join with the teacher around these two dimensions. Continual negation of the children's attempts to join inevitably produces confusion and humiliation because the children are exposing their sense of self as a learner to rejection. This was why, as communication began to breakdown, the children often retreated into silence.

The repeated failure, frustration and humiliation that occurred in interactions around learning set up a disjuncture with teacher attempts to sustain warm interpersonal relationships on a social level. Additionally, negative experiences in learning interaction often 'carried over' and impinged on the social relationships the teachers were trying to sustain. Likewise, even attempts to make children feel secure emotionally (like those strategies proposed in the school's Neal/Hird submission) fall foul when at the same time classroom behavioural control attempts induce humiliation within the child.

In the previous section, mention was made of the confusion caused when the children could not see the purpose of the questions they were asked in language development activities. In fact, as later discussion will illustrate, the children were often rendered mute by their helplessness, confusion and shame created in these activities. The teachers, however, did not interpret the children's responses in this

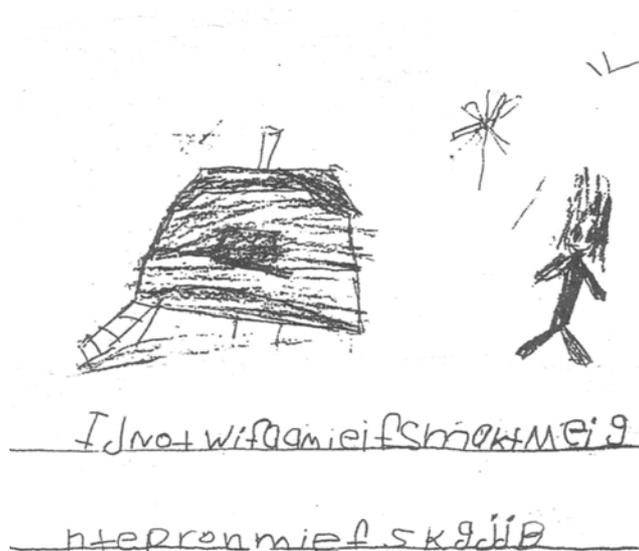
way consequently the children were deemed 'shy' and 'lacking in language competence'.

From the perspective of the teachers, the tasks that the children were 'failing' were extremely elementary and undemanding. However, from a psychological point of view, it was clear that breakdowns at this level were having a detrimental effect on the children's secure sense of self as learners as well as their overall capacity to engage, take risks and learn in school.

Furthermore, the kind of breakdown that was observed within the language unit was also occurring in the classroom interactions around learning. In a Grade 2 class, for example, many of the children refused to risk an attempt at spelling a word. Their writing, therefore, was constricted to reproducing simple patterned texts that were only varied by including one or two words available for copying from wall displays. They wrote texts like, 'Last night I saw the TV'. 'Last night I saw a dog'. 'Last night I went to the shop.' All of these were copied from words the teacher had posted on cards on the wall as she tried to dialogue with the students to encourage them to begin writing. The children would simply not write if she did not support them in this way.

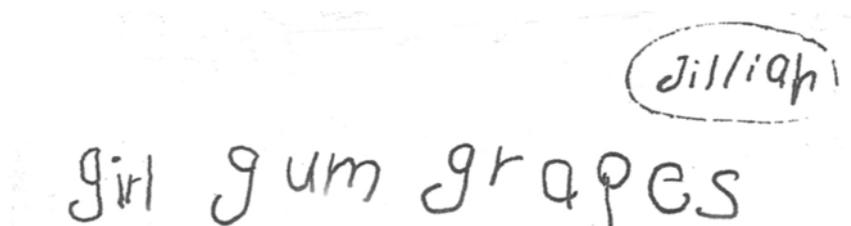
No matter how teachers attempted to encourage these children to take risks in learning tasks, the children remained unresponsive. Of course, as previous discussion has indicated, the technical problems faced by the children were such that they could not be repaired by intervention at the point of the breakdown. A program was needed that brought about an alignment in understanding and intentions prior to the students being confronted with the task. However, what teachers were encountering in these instances of refusal to engage was a manifestation of the enormity of the negative effect that continual and unresolvable failure was having on the children.

The negative effect was so severe that teachers saw the behaviour of the children as mystifying and even bizarre. The girl who produced the following piece of 'writing' was eight years of age and should have been in grade 4. Although, on two occasions she had been relegated to a lower grade because the teachers felt that she was not making progress. The task for this writing exercise was to draw a picture and to write a sentence to say what it was about.



At first glance the writing below the illustration seemed to be an instance of what Gentry (1978) had identified as an early stage in the development of invented spelling. However, a number of factors give pause to such an interpretation. First, children usually pass through this stage in the first year of schooling. This child had been at school for four years and was clearly not progressing. Second, when the teacher asked the child to read back what she had written she refused to talk. When that request was reframed to ask questions about the drawing itself the child retreated further into complete silence and avoided eye contact. Third, inspection of the letters showed that there were no invented symbols and that all of the letters were correctly formed. 'Inventing' spellers are usually starting to form prototypical words by this stage. There was little indication that any of the letters formed such proto-words although I did notice a recurrence of sorts with 'miei', 'mei' and 'mie' which could possibly represent 'me'. She did not respond to any probes regarding these. Later, I asked the student to tell me the sounds that were represented by each letter in the sequence. She could give me an appropriate sound for each letter. All of this indicated that her development as a speller and writer had frozen at a basic stage. She had learned her letters and sounds but could do nothing with them. In the face of the seeming enormity of the task that confronted her she had become paralysed and completely risk averse.

This interpretation was reinforced further a little later when the teacher tested some spelling that the class had been learning. The words tested were 'girl', 'gum', 'grapes'. The test results of the girl we have been discussing are shown below



Jillian
girl gum grapes

Jillian was able to write her name and to complete the spelling test correctly. However, her approach to these problems appeared to have been achieved by rote memorisation of letter strings. I could not get any indication that she was prepared to 'blend' any of the sounds (e.g. Which letters say /gr/ in this word (*grapes*), or, to identify the sound for the the vowel pattern 'ir'). When asked to identify the sound for 'a' in 'grape' she gave the short sound as in *cat*. Her confusion in this area of spelling and writing development was mirrored by other children in the class. Although few tried as hard as she did to learn her spelling, her apparent success in her daily spelling tests showed no transfer to her writing ability. Whatever strategies she was using, her retreat into avoidance and rote learning was a powerful testament to her complete loss of any sense of self as a learner in the classroom. It was hard to imagine the confusion and uncertainty that this child was attempting to deal with. It was easy to understand, though, why the children discussed earlier refused to write any words unless the teacher provided a template to copy.

This kind of response, whereby, children went mute or refused to take even the slightest risk in the face of seemingly simple tasks were taken by the teachers, and indeed by much of the contemporary literature available to teachers (e.g. Christie 1984; Harris (1985) ; de Lemos 1972) to be evidence for a characteristic conservative, low risk taking behaviour of Aboriginal children. However, it has long been recognised in psychology that the perception persons take from a situation is

dependent to a significant extent on their prior experiences in that context. Ongoing failure leads to future fear of failure and the fear of failure leads to low and irrational risk taking behaviour.

At Traeger Park School, low risk taking was tied mostly to situations where the learners were experiencing ongoing confusion, shame and humiliation in their learning interactions. This context dependence was able to be demonstrated at Traeger Park by simply changing the context to one in which the students were confident that they could participate meaningfully in the activity (eg. Gray 1980). In the classroom, whenever children felt in control of the outcome in learning they were prepared to take constructive risks. Additionally, in any other area where children felt they could succeed (e.g. in sport) they were generally confident in their risk taking and highly creative in their responses. Unfortunately, observations revealed that the children were rarely in a position in the classroom in which they felt confident in their ability to control learning outcomes.

Just as the children's low risk taking response to failure had led the teachers to conclude that 'concrete' thinking and 'low risk taking' were the product of a characteristic thinking style or delayed conceptual development that could be ascribed to Aboriginal children, similar pressures for the over generalisation of stereotypical 'styles' in other areas were also present. There was a general view across the school (sometimes implied but quite often overt) that Aboriginal children in general were not 'success oriented'. Moreover, this stereotype resonated with a similar stereotypical view of Aboriginal people in general that was, and still is, frequently carried in some sectors of the Australian non-Indigenous population.

This second stereotype did not hold up under observation either. Outside the classrooms, for example, the children continually demonstrated purposeful behaviour. In play activities, the children at Traeger Park valued their personal skills highly and worked hard and persistently to build those skills. They engaged in highly organised practice games/tasks that set high performance demands. Moreover, children with higher skills were well respected by their peers precisely for that reason.

It was often volunteered that the children's perspective on success was 'non-mainstream' in the sense that it appeared to lack some of the intense competitive drive to dominate and beat others that is often promoted in school team sports. Teams of Aboriginal children at Traeger Park frequently included a wide range of age levels and the older children appeared unconcerned and were supportive even when younger children made serious errors (e.g. scoring 'own' goals). They were also quite happy to let the opposing team take, for example, an extra turn at batting in baseball when they felt the Traeger Park team had been dominating too long.

However, when these same children decided to win they pursued their goal in a focused way. This seemingly relaxed approach to sport was no disadvantage for the Traeger Park children as their far superior (self developed) skill levels allowed them to win easily across all sports competitions. It could also be argued that a drive for success that was measured in terms of individual excellence and acceptance of others was, perhaps, more conducive for successful classroom participation than one that was based on the dominance of others. When these kinds of observations were added to the observations concerning the extent to which the children were being marginalised in classroom learning interaction, they underlined further the need to shift the school teaching practice onto a more supportive and collaborative footing.

In classroom and language unit observations also, I had encountered numerous examples of behaviour that showed the children wanted (at times desperately) to succeed in school learning activities. A case in point was the amount of effort Jillian, the girl discussed earlier, had invested in the laborious process of learning by rote her class spelling words. I also noted instances that showed a growing sense of alienation and resistance was developing as a result of the frustration being experienced by the children, even in the first year of their schooling experience.

What the children were demonstrating so insistently at Traeger Park was the powerful nature of the interrelationship that exists between emotions and thinking (and more specifically learning). When the children were confident, and emotionally balanced their thinking and risk taking was focused and considered. This last comment would have seemed like a truism. However, two critical aspects of the interrelationship that were escaping the attention of the teachers were that, first, the depth and intensity of that interrelationship was being massively underestimated. Second, the nature of the interrelationship between emotions and thinking was such that one could not proceed without the other. Thought and emotion are part and parcel of the same process. They are not separate things that can be developed in isolation from one another. Therefore, it is not possible to compensate for the damaging of emotions in one situation by trying to instil confidence in another. The children at Traeger Park could for example be confident and self assured on the sports field and simultaneously insecure and vulnerable in the classroom.

The misinterpretation of the nature of the relationship between emotions and thinking, along with the fact that the children did not seem to possess the same level of focus and socialisation into the learning and behaviour patterns expected of 'good' students, led teachers to overlook the positive instances. The teachers at the school were confused because they seemed to be working so hard on the inclusion strategies they had developed with very little return in terms of student engagement in learning. However, while all of the strategies used by the teachers were possibly helpful in making the children identify on a broader level with the school, it was the 'reflection' process breaking down in classroom interaction that was destroying the development of the children's secure self as learners.

The dysfunction in the development of the children's secure self as learners was also making a major contribution to a tendency across much of the school to construct the children as 'other' through the use of stereotyping of the kind that was evident in the submission to the Neal/Hird Committee (1976).

The failure of the teaching/learning negotiation at Traeger Park school to support the positive development of the children's secure sense of self as learners pointed to a fundamental need for the development of any program that aimed to support the academic learning of Aboriginal students. The development of a secure self as learner had to be pervasively embodied within the tasks, strategies and teacher negotiation processes of the new program. And, just as importantly, the development of a secure sense of self as a learner had to pervade the teaching goals that were set as the outcome for the new program. In the next section, I will explore why this latter perspective on goals was so important.

Disjuncture between educational goals and student needs

The program prior to intervention could only be described as 'dumbed down'. What I also observed was that when more challenging educational activities failed, teachers

would revert to non-academic and highly social tasks (such as copying, colouring, watching TV or relatively unstructured play and talking) because teachers had concluded that children were only capable of simple, short-term activities. These factors combined to generate a curriculum that, in practice, set very low educational goals. This set of circumstances ensured students would fall behind acceptable standards and would continue to fall further behind as their schooling progressed. Proof of this progressive increase in outcomes over time was readily demonstrable from reading test results as the children progressed through the school (Gray 1980).

Language teaching in the original program also revolved around simple syntactic structures isolated from any meaningful involvement in the production of any of the necessary content, language features or extended staging necessary for the production of any educationally useful interaction. In the language program activities, teacher attempts to construct meaningful situations in compliance with the stipulations of the Northern Territory Oral English Syllabus were failing.

In this program 'meaning' was satisfied by having the students practice language structures (i.e. syntax) by talking about real objects such as toys etc. This kind of 'functional' meaning was inadequate and meant nothing to the children. In order to connect with such meaning, children had to be privy to the communication purpose that the language was expected to achieve. This, however, was never made clear in the activities which, for example, included teaching requests for students to pick up particular objects or asking other children to pick up those objects from a set and then say: "I have an Indian (toy object)". These kinds of 'language development' activities served no recognisable or valid communication purpose and simply added to the confusion the students were experiencing.

The irrelevance of goals around language development and the confusion they generated in the children were embedded at all levels of the curriculum. There was no substantive link between what the students were expected to learn in the language unit and their ability to succeed in schooling or, for that matter, in the community outside the school. I could, for example, find no substantial rationale or evidence to support the proposition that teaching the limited range of syntactic structures found in oral language programs such as the Northern Territory Oral English Syllabus would provide Indigenous students with the kind of language and literacy resources necessary for success in mainstream schooling.

Low level goals such as those pursued at the school provided no support for the development of the children's sense of 'self' as learners. When students work day after day on tasks that they see as infantile or disconnected from any real world purpose, they soon come to realise that both they and the activities they encounter in school have very little worth from an educational perspective. For example, the children knew much about the kinds of frogs that inhabited the Central Desert region of Australia. In fact, some of these frogs (e.g. The water holding frog - *cyclorama platycephala*) were important for survival at certain times of the year. For these children, opening a book to see an illustration of an Aboriginal child pointing at a 'generic' frog with the text 'This is a frog' held little relevance, even though the author's considered they had produced culturally and experientially relevant texts. The 'trivial' text on the page held little relation to the 'potential' text that was located in the experience of the children. This factor was exacerbated by the fact that the majority of the children were working on such limited texts well into their upper primary years.

The same problem of relevance and text quality existed when teachers attempted a more child focused approach and ceded control of the discussion to the children.

Writing teaching in the original program was constructed mostly around individual writing and the kind of 'class story' so ubiquitous in primary classrooms. 'Class stories' were elicited generally with the class gathered around the teacher after an excursion of some kind. However, although group 'concept maps' were often constructed prior to writing, no preparation concerning the language to be produced was involved either on the excursion or prior to the writing in class, nor was any teaching involved during the writing activity which simply consisted of the teacher writing down what individual children contributed in the moment.

The process involved in joint writing of class stories was essentially the process of 'piloting' (Lundgren 1981). In piloting, the teacher leads a child or children through a task by asking questions as the task progresses, but because the children share little common knowledge about the 'definition of the task situation' (Wertsch 1979) with the teacher they learn little from the activity. The inevitable outcome to this process at Traeger Park was a limited and formulaic 'oral' text (a simple recount of the experience) for which little common knowledge was held between teachers and students. These texts were of no use for teaching about reading because the students had little commitment to ownership and the texts were poorly constructed.

The individual writing produced in class was likewise unanimously limited and formulaic in its scope. The implications for the new program were that children should not be thrown solely onto their own very limited writing strategies and language knowledge to construct a text. The resources they needed had to be provided to them beforehand in a manner that enabled them to identify and utilise the language and strategies they needed for a particular writing task.

This was necessary if the teacher wanted to engage the students in the production, reading and understanding of high level literate texts. Instead, Many children were incapable of producing beyond basic writing attempts and others simply refused to engage in the task. The outcome, whether in writing or through the production of a 'class story', was still at an extremely low level text. For individual writing attempts the writing was formulaic and limited largely to an 'observation comment' structure.

The lack of connection between the curriculum content within the school and the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve success in education and the community generally highlighted the importance, of not only setting and achieving high goal levels, but also of ensuring the knowledge and skills taught were appropriate for academic and wider community success.

In many ways the situation that existed for Jillian (the 'potential' grade 4 student discussed earlier) formed a metaphor for the disembodied and irrelevant goals that were in place more broadly across the school. Someone had clearly taught Jillian about basic sound/symbol correspondence. And, Jillian had learned exactly what she had been taught. Likewise, she was being taught spelling words and was trying her best with the limited strategies she had to hand to learn those words.

What was not being taught, and what Jillian could not achieve by relying on her own resources, was how to marshal and focus those understandings in pursuit of the goal of learning to read and write.

Across the rest of the curriculum the situation was similar. The goals set for each area such as maths, science and literacy sat in complete isolation from each other and from real life use. As was the case with the oral language program, this disembodiment of individual goals was exacerbated by the pathetically low level of the tasks with which the students and teachers were seemingly forced to engage in

their attempts to learn and promote learning.

The problem was that the children lacked access to the cognitive and experiential resources that were required to connect these disparate elements of the curriculum together. This problem was compounded by the failure of the school program to show the children how to achieve such a synthesis. Children entered school with varying levels of understanding about the thinking and language resources that are required to do the 'job' of constructing the academic learning that is promoted through schooling. They also come with varying levels of understanding of the resources required to do the jobs needed for negotiating their way within advantaged and privileged settings in the wider community. Research shows it is Indigenous and low socio-economic children who are most marginalised in terms of their access to these resources.

When the Traeger Park project commenced it was beginning to be understood that Written text and experiences with Written text played a crucial role in preparing children to succeed in academic learning. Some of the insight available at the time came particularly from Olsen 1977,1980; Olsen & Nickerson 1978; Olsen & Torrance 1983; Halliday 1973, 1975; Bryce-Heath 1982, 1983; Vygotsky 1978; Greenfield 1972; Scollon & Scollon 1981; Green 1982; Snow & Goldfield 1982; Wertsch 1979; Scribner 1977; Scribner & Cole 1981.

As Bryce-Heath (1982) explained it, children who entered school with certain kinds of experience with literacy had already begun their journey to successful participation and success in schooling.

Close analyses of how mainstream school-oriented children come to learn to take from books at home suggest that such children learn not only how to take meaning from books, but also how to talk about it. In doing the latter, they repeatedly practice routines which parallel those of classroom interaction. By the time they enter school, they have had continuous experience as information-givers; they have learned how to perform in those interactions which surround literate sources throughout school. They have had years of practice in interaction situations that are the heart of reading - both learning to read and reading to learn in school. They have developed habits of performing which enable them to run through the hierarchy of preferred knowledge about a literate source and the appropriate sequence of skills to be displayed in showing knowledge of a subject. They have developed ways of decontextualizing and surrounding with explanatory prose the knowledge gained from selective attention to objects.
(Bryce-Heath 1982:56)

Children who come with these perceptions at the highest levels possess the ability to marshal the often disembodied learnings they encounter in their schooling and focus those resources productively within the challenges they face in school and in the wider community. If we were going to produce students who had a future as learners in academic settings and in the community, this cycle of disembodied and low quality goals had to be broken. I needed to find a goal formulation that provided relevance in a manner that could be seen and identified with by the children. I also needed goals that promoted the important understandings about using and making decisions with language that educationally advantaged students possessed. These goals had to make it possible for the children to bridge the gaps that the disembodied program structure at Traeger Park was placing in their way. To put it more crudely as a metaphor, I needed to be able to teach the 'glue' that would allow the children to pull the disparate elements the curriculum together into something that was transparently meaningful to their present and future lives.

This 'glue' was the underlying and largely invisible mental subtext that allowed the students to 'make sense' of and assign relevance to the activities and information they were encountering in school. If we go back to our earlier discussions on the breakdown of learning negotiation in the classroom, it becomes possible to begin to explore the nature of this invisible mental subtext (or orientation).

For example, if we consider the earlier example of the two young children in the Piagetian water play activity in which the teacher wanted them to explore the concepts of 'full' and 'empty' we can make a start. The interaction broke down because the children saw the relevance of the activity only as a game. However, the water play was 'play' in name only. What was missing was a generalised orientation on the part of the children to explore the propositions being made by the teacher as something that existed separately from the purely inter-personal context of their normal everyday experience. In effect, the activity was intended as a vehicle through which the teacher would engage them in a hypothetical and objective experience that sat as something to be dealt with separately from the concrete real life experiences of their everyday world. This hypothetical world was constructed through attention to the principles that were embodied in classical syllogistic reasoning e.g. "This is A, now is this the same as A?" Such a discussion requires the children to enter into an imaginary world that is defined by premises that are jointly accepted by both parties as the basis for interaction. It also requires the children, as part of process to 'display' their understandings in order to allow for challenge and reflection.

If we refer to another instance discussed earlier, for example, the breakdown of the teacher/student discussion of photographs of themselves on an excursion, we can see another dimension of the mental subtext we have just explored. What the teacher wanted here was not just one word answers in which the children mostly shouted out each other's names. As Harkins (1994) put it; she wanted an 'elaboration game', one that involved 'sentences as well as vocabulary items'.

Judging by the thesis developed by Harkins in the rest of her text, it is doubtful that the relevance of the teacher seeking elaboration in the children's responses was appreciated as any more than a request for a ritualised classroom reply in 'Standard English' syntax. Possibly, the teacher also saw the picture discussion as a 'language activity' that was aimed at developing the children's syntax. However, what the teacher was doing in asking for elaboration was repeating a request that is fundamental to the operation of academic interaction. In asking the children to expand on their utterances the teacher was, albeit very clumsily, asking the children to enter into a different relationship with the pictures than the one they normally would. She was asking the children to reflect on the pictures as objects in their own right as objects that needed to form a point of departure for speculation, analysis and observation. Moreover, this analysis and observation was premised on the explicit display of the detail of those observations. In this sense the activity was not merely an 'elaboration game' and academically oriented students in a mainstream classroom would have readily recognised and responded to the objective nature of the task.

The invisibility of purpose for the teacher and observer simply highlights the invisibility of much of the underlying mental subtext in classroom teaching interaction and, incidentally, for interaction in social contexts generally (see Garfinkel 1967). In seeking to encourage students to explain and justify, teachers ask students to enter into a new academically oriented world of experience that takes as its point of departure the creation of experience as a hypothetical rather than as situated

tangible entity. Fundamental to the development of that hypothetical world of experience, is that any experiences encountered via the lens of academic thinking are treated as 'objective' - as something that **can** be referenced and discussed apart from the subjective everyday experience of the participants. The topic of that discussion is often the information response that is, in turn, taken as a point of departure for further reflection and analysis.

As previous discussion about the breakdown of learning negotiation has indicated, this orientation or predisposition to enter into objective and hypothetical thinking is particularly promoted through engagement with certain kinds of 'literate' experience within the socialisation of children prior to entering school. I recorded the following discussion at the time of the Traeger Park program in the home of an educationally successful and highly literate family. In it, a mother (M) and a 3 year old child (C) discuss the illustrations in a book. The ensuing interaction illustrates a typical stage in the progress of the development of the literate ways of thinking that we have been discussing in this section.

M: What's that?
C: Horsie.
M: That's not a horsie, what is it?
C: That's a pony.
M: Nearly, what is it? (laughs) It's a....
C: Ha-haw.
M: What goes he-haw?
C: A pony.
M: A donkey (emphasis).
C: A donkey, haw...he-haw, he-haw.

This conversation is similar to others this mother and child have had about the difference between horses, donkeys and ponies during previous readings of this book. It is the previously shared and commonly held knowledge that has been built up that allows the mother to ask such a well targeted question when she refuses to accept the child's first label of "horsie". The mother knows the child knows the answer because it has been shared across previous readings and by the same token, the child knows that the mother knows that the child knows. The child just needs some help attaching the right label. The mother expects this also because she has already discussed this with the child previously. The appropriateness of the question for the child's development as a learner in academic contexts is brought out a few turns later when the child is consequently enabled to take the initiative and starts asking questions on the same topic.

C: What's that thing there?
What's that thing there?
M: Aw, you know that's a horse
C: Yessss (laughs).

In this interaction the child is demonstrating a growing acquisition of a particular 'mental set' - a way of viewing and interrogating that treats knowledge as an object available for display and reflection. One that is prepared to treat information within a propositional and hypothetical frame.

The mental set that this child was in the process of acquiring is part and parcel of the **role** of being a 'learner' in literate/academic contexts. For example, to take the role of reader, one has to learn to think like a reader (to have the appropriate mental set). The successful negotiation of that role (e.g. within narrative) requires the reader to step into the thinking of the writer, to understand what the writer is trying to

achieve. In a similar way the reader has to step into the thinking of the characters. Finally, the reader has to take a position in relation to the text that includes making a judgement on the success or failure of these (author's and characters') thinking processes. It is the ability to do these things that makes learning to read relevant. It is also the factor that provides the 'glue' that allows the reader to bring all of the reading sub skills together in pursuit of their logical end. Likewise, engagement with science and other academic fields of endeavour depend upon the ability to understand and position oneself in relation to the thinking of the participants in any particular scientific endeavour.

Additionally, the thinking resource being acquired by this child is also an important thinking tool for survival and control in contemporary society. Many social practices, modern technology, science and other academic fields are entered on the kind of thinking that the child above was beginning to develop through the comfortable and highly supportive interactions that occurred around her early literacy and in other similarly focused language experiences in the home.

Unfortunately at Traeger Park, communication processes to do with teaching and learning were breaking down essentially because the goals, expectations and strategies presumed by teachers in learning activities were generally not those held by the students. The key to conveying an understanding of these 'ways of thinking' was located in the ability to provide access to the underlying role perceptions that were necessary to engage with as a learner in academic/literate discourse.

Acquiring the appropriate role perceptions required to become a learner in academic/literate interaction is a special case (although a pivotal one) of the development of a general awareness and orientation to adopt the role perceptions required to negotiate within social roles across a society. As participants take part in negotiation with others to perform tasks within social roles, each projects themselves into the mind of the other and assigns to them certain presumptions concerning their understandings and intentions about the task at hand. Interaction proceeds on the basis that intersubjectivity has been achieved. Communication breaks down when at least one party is incorrect in the assumptions they project onto the other and a mismatch occurs.

As children increase the sophistication of their ability to project the intentions and focus of other participants by learning to function in an increasing number and variety of social roles (especially those that cross cultural boundaries), so also do they develop a more sophisticated awareness of 'self'. And, provided our role experiences are ones that allow us to participate constructively, and especially, if they accord us a level of control and success, we build positive and constructive 'self' images that greatly increase our capacity to take control of our life experiences generally. We come to extend what Duval and Wicklund (1972) referred to as our 'objective self awareness', our ability to reflect on our actions and intentions objectively and to see ourselves as a being that exists in the context of the perceptions of others.

Control of understandings of this kind allowed the children to actively control language in use. Developing such control clearly entailed more than the 'superficial' emphasis on syntax that formed the staple of contemporary language programming. Nor could the intra-psychological understandings that were subsumed under the notion of role perceptions be adequately addressed through an appeal to notions of functions in terms of explaining, elaborating etc. such as those set out in Tough (1977).

Achieving development for the children at Traeger Park on this 'rich' and 'deep' level of language resource clearly required a different conceptualisation of what was required in language teaching.