# *Culturally Responsive Classrooms:*

## *A Way to Assist Aboriginal Students with Hearing Loss in Urban Schools*

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The educational difficulties that many Aboriginal student's experience has been thought to derive, in large part, from the cultural mismatch between Aboriginal students and Western schools. Malcolm (1982) and Christie (1984) have described the difficulties that Aboriginal students encounter learning within the unfamiliar social and linguistic context of Western schools. Aboriginal children arrive at school having experienced learning contexts that emphasise visual skills (Kearins 1986), informal real-life contexts (Harris 1980) as well as independence from adults and affiliation with peers (Malin 1990). They have had little experience in learning from de-contextualized language (Jacobs 1988) which is the predominant medium of school learning (Harris 1980, Malcolm 1982). Moreover, the many Aboriginal students who are affected by hearing loss are particularly disadvantaged within Western schooling.

Between twenty five to fifty percent of Aboriginal students are affected by mild to moderate conductive hearing loss at any time (Quinn 1988, Kelly & Weeks 1991). This hearing loss is a consequence of chronic middle ear disease, otitis media. While this conductive hearing loss can fluctuate, especially among younger children among whom it is most prevalent, a significant proportion of Aboriginal students experience chronic middle ear disease throughout their school years ( McCafferty et al 1985, Hatfield et al 1990). This can result in damage to the ear drum or auditory canal, resulting in some degree of permanent hearing loss.

What little is known about the educational impact of conductive hearing loss on Aboriginal education gives cause for serious concern. Howard (1991) reported that in one all-Aboriginal class, it was students with hearing loss who had the most difficulties in learning from the teacher-centred talk that characterises Western schooling. While some students with hearing loss appeared to use peer oriented learning strategies to cope, others were heavily reliant on individual help from their teachers. Even then they experienced constant frustration and were often disruptive in class. Further, the demands on the teacher and assistant teachers' time to provide individual assistance and manage the disruptive behaviour of some students with hearing loss meant that other students were often left educationally under challenged. These findings in one class was supported by results from two remote area Aboriginal schools (Howard 1991/b).

These results suggest that hearing loss interacts with and magnify cultural and linguistic differences inherent in cross cultural education. Therefore , in order to understand what are the adverse effects of hearing loss and how they can be minimized, it is necessary to consider some of the features of cross cultural education.

**Cultures and Schooling**

A restricted view of culture leads many white Australians to think that Aboriginal people who live in Western housing, drive cars and whom may not speak an old Aboriginal language are not culturally different to White Australians. What this view ignores is that culture is expressed through the social relationships of everyday life. Judith Kearins (1986) and more recently Merridy Malin (1990) have provided evidence that urban Aboriginal people, who are several generations removed from a traditional lifestyles still continue to maintain a pattern of social relationships that is similar to that of those Aboriginal people living in remote areas (Harris 1980). This means that Aboriginal children's expectations of Western teachers initially are derived from their social experiences with Aboriginal adults. The responses of Western teachers to the culturally patterned behaviour of urban Aboriginal children is also shaped by their Western culture. Malin (1990) described some of the cultural differences in adult/child relationships in Western and Aboriginal cultures that shape the expectations that Western teachers and Aboriginal students have of each other in the classroom. These are outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1.**

**Differences in Adult/Child Relations between Western and Aboriginal Cultures- ( Malin 1990)**

| ***Western*** | ***Aboriginal*** |
|---|---|
| adults give many directions and reprimands to children | adults give fewer directions and reprimands to children |
| compliance with directions is mandatory | compliance with directions not mandatory |
| children encouraged to be dependant on adults | children encouraged to be self reliant and independent |
| children not encouraged to help and nurture other children[1] | children encouraged to help and nurture other children |
| children required to express wants from a deferential position | children express wants directly in the same manner as adults |
| children are clearly subordinate to adults | children more equal to adults |

These patterns of social relationships provide the framework of expectations that Western teachers and Aboriginal children have of each other. Thus, Aboriginal students' independence and sense of equality with adults is likely to viewed by teachers as purposeful misbehaviour. Conversely, teachers constantly giving and enforcing directions is liable to be

[1] While it may be said that Western parents do encourage this, Malin's work indicates that Aboriginal parents encourage it more and it is more in evidence in the behaviour of Aboriginal children.

seen by Aboriginal students as teachers being 'too bossy' and may prompt angry outbursts or sullen resentment.

While those investigating the effects of cultural differences in the classroom have focussed mainly on Aboriginal children, the response of Western teachers to these cultural differences is equally important in determining Aboriginal students' educational outcomes. The following is a brief description of two common teacher responses to Aboriginal students who demonstrate cultural differences in urban classrooms.

**Western Teachers Responses to Aboriginal Students in Urban Classrooms**

<u>1) Classroom Confrontation</u>

There are long standing traditions among teachers in managing and coping with students who defy teacher expectations. These traditions are based on the assumption that some students choose not to co-operate with their teacher's legitimate attempts to control student behaviour. Probably the most common teacher response to student non-compliance is overt domination ( Woods 1979). The attitude is *'I will, and have to, show who's boss otherwise I am not being a competent teacher'*. This attitude often results in much teacher effort being expended in demanding Aboriginal students comply with Western social expectations ( to answer questions, be attentive to the teacher etc). While this type of teacher domination is consistent with the the pattern of adult/child relationships in Western culture, it is not consistent with the pattern of adult/child relationships in Aboriginal society. Aboriginal students often cope with "bossy" teachers by resistance (active or passive) or by removing themselves from the proximity of teacher demands through non attendance.

<u>2) Mutual Disengagement</u>

Another common teacher coping strategy when faced with students who are "recalcitrant material" (Woods 1979) is the withdrawal of their services as a teacher. This often occurs after classroom confrontation has failed to gain student's compliance. The attitude is that *" If they do not want to co-operate in class then I am not going to bend over backwards to teach them"* .

This withdrawal of teaching services is justified by an unstated ' teaching contract' that goes *" I, the teacher, will teach to the best of my ability when students come to school on time, comply with my directions, answer my questions etc. Students who 'break' their side of this contract lose, to varying degrees, their rights to my teaching services"*. Because of cultural differences Aboriginal students often fail to conform to Western teachers expectations of appropriate student behaviour. Malin's (1990) work indicates that this teacher response particularly disadvantages Aboriginal students in urban schools. Teacher disengagement

from Aboriginal students is often matched by Aboriginal students avoidance of teachers and their unfamiliar demands. The result is that Aboriginal students and their Western teachers often co-exist in the classroom through mutual disengagement. Aboriginal students are allowed to spend time in whatever way they wish, as long as they do not disturb others "who want to learn", or they may be encouraged to do 'busy work' with little educational substance.

Since mis-perceptions derived from cultural differences are compounded by the effect of hearing loss, students with hearing loss appear  those most 'non-cooperative' in class. They even more than other Aboriginal students, are the liable to prompt the above teacher responses. Improving Aboriginal educational outcomes requires consideration of the interaction between hearing loss and the culturally derived expectations of Aboriginal students and their Western teachers. It is important that Aboriginal hearing loss is viewed within the larger context of cross-cultural issues in Aboriginal education. Otherwise, consideration of hearing loss in isolation can easily perpetuate 'deficit thinking' about Aboriginal children. If hearing loss is thought of simply as a problem residing in the student which inhibits their access to teacher instruction, programs to address this problem will provide more of the same type of education that Aboriginal students are already having difficulty in learning from. Alternatively, viewing hearing loss within the wider context of Aboriginal education allows for programs to be developed which can tap the potential of Aboriginal students' cultural differences as a valuable educational resource. However, this approach requires moving away from the 'deficit thinking' about Aboriginal children that is so common among Western educators.

'Learning Deficits' or 'Alternative Learning Competencies'

Conforming to Western social expectations is not the only way school knowledge can be gained- any more than to learning about bush tucker can only take place through conforming to Aboriginal social expectations. However, the culturally derived learning skills of Aboriginal children ( see West in this volume) can be valuable learning assets only if the learning context allows them to be used effectively. The key for this potential to be realized is that patterns of culturally derived learning skills are seen as 'alternative learning competencies' and not as 'learning deficits' (Schultz et al 1982). Once Aboriginal students' difference is seen as involving 'alternative learning competencies' the possibility emerges of these being utilized in school learning.

### ***Towards a Solution: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy***

Erickson (1987) uses the term 'culturally responsive pedagogy' to refer to teaching practises that are congruent with the culture that students come from. American research (Au and

Jordon 1980) indicates the potential for indigenous students to make great educational gains when teaching is centred around social relationships that they are familiar with.

This approach has relevance for the education of Aboriginal students, and it holds particular promise for Aboriginal students with a hearing loss. Students with hearing loss are advantaged because Aboriginal learning competencies are less reliant on verbal interaction as the predominant medium of learning. Further, they encourage the use of peers as supplementary sources of individualized auditory input, avoiding the 'bottle-neck' effect where the teacher is the main source of auditory input in class. Howard (1991) noted that some Aboriginal students attempted to compensate for their hearing loss by using peer observation in class. This is to be expected since Aboriginal students' have culturally enhanced skills in learning from each other using observation and peer teaching (Harris 1980, Malin 1990). This competency is contrasted with Western students acculturation towards learning from adults. However, since school processes assume teacher-centred learning, efforts to learn from peers are liable to be seen only in terms of students having 'deficit skills' in learning from the teacher. One teacher described the school difficulties of a group of Aboriginal students as resulting from *"them being just too interested in each other"*. This teacher, as do many others, constantly battled to get students' attention away from each other and on to her as the teacher; in order that they could learn in the way she expected them to. This process effectively transformed the students potential 'peer learning assets' into a 'teacher centred learning deficit'. However, in some classrooms Western teachers have made conscious attempts to adapt their teaching to suit the learning styles of Aboriginal students.

Some observations in Darwin schools

In the following I will describe examples of what I see as features of culturally responsive pedagogy already occurring in some Darwin classrooms. These examples are not a formulae to achieve culturally responsive pedagogy, they are descriptions of practises that appear to foster greater participation of Aboriginal students (especially those with hearing loss) in school learning. Two aspects of culturally responsive pedagogy are described. Firstly, teaching that utilizes Aboriginal students culturally derived learning skills by teaching in ways Aboriginal students can best learn. Secondly, consciously teaching how to learn from Western schooling so as to enhance students access to the educational opportunities available in Western schooling.

### ***A) Teaching in Ways Aboriginal Students can Best Learn***

*1) Establishing positive relationships with students*

A warm and positive relationship with teachers is crucial for Aboriginal students learning (Harris 1982, Harris et al 1992 in press). While non-Aboriginal students are often able to

constructively engage in classroom tasks without this type of relationship with their teacher, social comfort is generally essential for Aboriginal students' to be successful learners. However, there are some obstacles to these type of relationships inherent in notions of 'teacher professionalism'; for example, the perceived need for teachers to maintain a certain degree of formality with students and to relate to them primarily through the the 'role' of teacher. This kind of teacher most often fails to motivate Aboriginal students. Conversely, teachers who respond warmly and personally towards Aboriginal students motivate them to want to learn. The willingness and ability of teachers to step outside their role and respond as 'people' is an essential element of culturally responsive pedagogy for Aboriginal students. Teachers were observed to establish this type of relationship in many ways; sharing a joke with students, putting a hand on a students shoulder when talking together and spending time together outside the usual classroom contexts, for example on camps, in sporting activities or in homework groups.

*2) Supporting leaning from peers*

Aboriginal students come to school without the degree of dependence on adults that characterizes Western children. They are used to learning by observing peers and being helped by peers. However, as discussed earlier, many teachers see this focus on peers only negatively- as a problem inhibiting learning. They urge students to seek help from them as 'the teacher ' and to work independently. These teachers are constantly involved in 'policing' Aboriginal students attempts to seek help from, or offer help to, each other.

In contrast, there are some classrooms where this culturally derived learning asset is actively fostered, Aboriginal students' focusing on peers is accepted. Students requesting help or offering help to each others is encouraged.Teachers are not 'offended' by students monitoring each others work as a means of evaluating the quality of their own. In fact, students are encouraged to show each other what they have done as a means of developing higher expectations for their own work. A teacher in one such classroom described how he had come to view himself as a facilitator of learning rather than as the 'teacher' from whom all learning emanates and by whom all learning must be evaluated. This teacher's multi-grade class group was able to provide most students with easy access to peers to monitor and learn from, as would often occur outside school. In contrast, streaming into relatively homogeneous class groups can make peer learning more difficult. As mentioned earlier, students with hearing loss are particularly advantaged by being able to observe peers and by having access to more than one source of auditory information in class.

*3) Considering Timing*

Aboriginal sense of time differs from that of Western people in a number of ways. These include the following; differences in the appropriate pause time before a response to a

question, the sense of urgency to complete work by a certain time and the importance of ceasing to work on something at a set time, but before its completion. Further, Aboriginal students preference to observe others at a task before trying it themselves means students may wish to attempt a task that, in the teacher's mind, the time for which has passed. Daily programs are often treated, especially by new teachers, as a prescriptive document which over-rides student interest. Aboriginal students are often frustrated by classroom activities that are driven by timetables which ignore their interest; interest which may take longer than anticipated to develop only to be cut short by time restrictions. This is often demonstrated in the reluctance of Aboriginal students to 'pack up' before they have completed the task they are working on. In discussions with Aboriginal parents about school, they often mentioned this as something about school that frustrates their children.

Teachers can avoid this frustration by trying to be flexible in their programming and responsive to student interests. For example, allowing students enough time to develop interest as well as to master a task. One teacher reported how she only realised the frustration her programming was causing to some Aboriginal students when they consistently asked to be able to use free time to undertake work that other students had completed the week before. The expectation behind conventional school timetable is that all students can and will master a task in the same time block. This expectation ignores many Aboriginal students' (especially of those with hearing loss) preference to observe others efforts before they make a serious attempt at the task. One way of catering for this preference is to return to an activity a number of times, so that less confident students are provided with the opportunity to observe others before going on to master the task themselves.

*4) Enabling Aboriginal Students Real Life Skills to be Demonstrated at School*

During a lesson on 'making toast' in a grade one Darwin class with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, the Aboriginal students were much more successful than Western students at actually making toast. Aboriginal students needed no teacher instruction to put the bread in the toaster, to butter and put a spread on the toast, as they had often done the same at home. In contrast, the non-Aboriginal students, whose parents always made their breakfast for them, needed to be told what to do at each step. Later, when it came to writing about making toast, it was the Western students who had no hesitation, whereas the Aboriginal students had to be constantly encouraged and helped to write. This illustrates the cultural differences in child rearing which means Aboriginal students arrive at school with "enormous practical competencies" (Malin 1990), while Western children are comparatively incompetent and dependant on adults in real life skills. However, Western students are more adept at using language as a medium of learning. This constitutes 'culture capital' which pays dividends in Western schools where talking or writing about activities is valued more highly than actual competency in the activities themselves.

Again, some schools and teachers are exceptions. Instead of ignoring students practical competencies they attempt to program activities around them so as to build academic work on real life skills. These activities often included traditional bush skills but also other practical living skills. One example was a program called 'meals on legs' which involved Aboriginal girls running a lunch program- buying ingredients, preparing and selling lunches to the school staff one day a week. The program involved the recognition of these students competency in cooking as well as providing a 'real life' maths and literacy context.

Even when academic work is not directly involved, giving recognition to success in non-academic areas can contribute to improved academic performance. This helps to 'anchor' students' academic endeavour to confidence that has been built up elsewhere. An example of this was one teacher who discussed with students how their work effort in class would produce improved academic results in the same way that their perseverance in training had resulted in greater prowess in sport.

In particular, Aboriginal students with hearing loss are better able to cope with learning activities based around 'real life skills'. Since the context is familiar, they are less reliant on verbal information to know what is going on. Further, giving recognition to real life skills can relieve the unrelenting, confidence destroying failure that is otherwise so often the school experience of many Aboriginal students with hearing loss.

*5) Respecting Aboriginal Students' Autonomy*

At home Aboriginal children are given a great deal more autonomy than Western children (Harris 1980, Malin 1990). However, Western teachers role is based on the expectation that they structure, direct and pace students' learning. This means Aboriginal children's autonomy is likely to be viewed as *"them being willful and naughty, due to coming from a deprived background that has not instilled adequate discipline"*. Aboriginal students with hearing loss are often reluctant to participate in activities where, due to their hearing loss, they don't understand what is expected of them. This means they appear to have an extreme independence in class and often become the focus of teacher 'confrontation' or 'disengagement'.

However, Aboriginal children, including those with hearing loss, are often very socially mature as a consequence of their earlier experience of independence and autonomy. They have culturally enhanced capabilities to undertake self directed, self paced learning towards goals that are clearly understood and have been accepted by them. However, for these capabilities to flourish, it requires Western teachers to share 'educational power' more equitably with Aboriginal learners. This means, firstly, the end product aimed at being clearly

delineated at the beginning of a task, as well as, secondly, students having some measure of control over how the goal is to be achieved. One teacher described how while she planned classroom tasks, she would negotiate with her Aboriginal students about how and when they wanted to do these. Another teacher described how, when getting to know a group of Aboriginal students, she refrained from intrusive questioning and waited until they asked for her help. Allowing her students to exercise this initial control resulted, eventually, in far more verbal interaction with her.

Respecting Aboriginal students autonomy is also important in achieving good classroom 'discipline'. Requests made of Aboriginal students, in the manner of speaking to an equal, are more likely to be complied with than demands made from a position of dominance. In fact, treating Aboriginal students the same as Western children is likely to prompt an adverse reaction from Aboriginal students used to a greater measure of respect and equality with adults.

Respecting the autonomy of Aboriginal students can help to avoid students with hearing loss becoming the target for teacher confrontation since students are more able to structure their class participation to constructively engage in learning, often with the assistance of peers. Thus, students with hearing loss have more opportunities to participate in learning that does not centre on verbal interaction with the teacher.

***B) Teaching How to Learn from Western Schooling***

The aspects of what I have described above involve the adaptation of Western school processes to match how Aboriginal students can best learn. However, it is equally important that Aboriginal students learn how to make effective use of educational opportunities provided by Western teaching. This is imperitve if they are to have good access to the opportunities provided by Western education. School processes assume students have been acculturated, before they come to school, to the types of Western social relationships around which teaching at school takes place. However, Aboriginal students arrive at school without an understanding of these socio-linguistic expectations. Further, they are usually not taught them but have to pick it up as best they can. Teaching the Western social expectations of school, not as the 'right' way to behave generally but as the convention in that particular context, can give students greater access to what schooling can provide. For example one teacher formally taught Western social conventions ( e.g. maintaining eye contact with non-Aboriginal people) and there were regular discussions about school processes in class. Things such as the pet dislikes of teachers on yard duty or a letter written about student behaviour by a relief teacher were openly talked about in class. Students commented how they liked the way this helped them know what was going on at school. The implicit school

expectations were being made more explicit by this process. Again, Aboriginal student's with hearing loss are particularly advantaged, since among Aboriginal students they have the most difficulty with western school expectations (Howard 1991).

***Establishing Culturally Responsive Pedagogy***

Western schooling cannot replicate the informal learning contexts of traditional Aboriginal education (Harris 1984) but by adapting classroom processes, teachers can foster environments where Aboriginal learning skills become more functional. In culturally responsive pedagogy Aboriginal social relationships and learning styles are used to facilitate the learning of Western knowledge within Western school settings.

Culturally responsive pedagogy has benefits not only for Aboriginal students, though. In the classes which have established culturally responsive pedagogy, non-Aboriginal students have also gained. The teaching styles by which Aboriginal students can best learn also seem to suit many non-Aboriginal students; in particular, those non-Aboriginal students who also have had difficulty learning from teacher-centred talk or who have difficulties with the status differential in teacher/student relationships . Further, it is apparent from what happens in other classes, that culturally non-responsive pedagogy usually entails significant educational disadvantages for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.The difficulties of Aboriginal students (especially those with hearing loss) in learning from 'teacher centred talk', often results in much teacher time being occupied in individual instruction or in the 'management' of some Aboriginal students. This reduces the instructional time available time for other students. So eiminating the negative educational consequences, which are so often a by-product of culturally non-responsive pedagogy, is of benefit to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

However, establishing and maintaining the type of classroom environments described above is not easy, especially in schools where Aboriginal students are in a minority. Peer learning skills can be used most effectively if Aboriginal students have access to Aboriginal students with complementary peer teaching skills. I have observed that non-Aboriginal students will often refuse to engage in peer teaching, as well as having less developed peer teaching skills than Aboriginal students. The educational interests of Aboriginal students to be together with other Aboriginal students needs to be considered by schools in the organisation of class groups. Vertical or 'family' class groupings can enable Aboriginal students to be grouped together, thus providing students with peers who they can learn from. This does not mean segregated classrooms, but some class groups where Aboriginal students form at least a large minority.

A more fundamental problem to implementing culturally responsive pedagogy is is that the paradigms of schooling do not foster the kinds of adaptations described in this paper. Indeed, many pressures are brought to bear on teachers who attempt them. For example, respecting students autonomy is difficult due to the emphasis given in schools to 'good teacher control of students'. Respecting students autonomy is liable to be viewed as as a teacher having 'poor classroom control'. This is illustrated by an incident related by a teacher who was endeavouring to establish a classroom that was culturally responsive to Aboriginal students. She had been given permission to trial a class made up of a group of mainly Aboriginal students who were the school 'trouble makers'. It was initially hard going as the students continued to wage the classroom guerilla warfare that they had honed to a fine art during their years at school. One Friday afternoon when this teacher had reached the end of her tether she directed students to take out their library books and and start copying from them into their writing books. They, somewhat surprised, did so in apprehensive silence. At that moment the principal came into the classroom and was amazed, not to say impressed, to see these students- each notorious in the school- quietly at 'work'. The sight of it dispelled the doubts he had about what the teacher wanted to do and helped to ensure the class continued and eventually it was successful. The teacher was perturbed that what she saw as her 'failure' at that time being seen as evidence of her 'success'. This illustrates the enormous pressures on teachers to value 'control' above learning. In fact, success in engaging Aboriginal students in learning that is not tightly directed by the teacher is likely to be viewed as 'poor teacher control'. This means Western teachers who attempt culturally responsive pedagogy can run the risk of having their professional competence questioned. Aboriginal people working in schools are even more exposed to this risk.

Aboriginal adults obviously have a 'natural' competence to provide culturally responsive education to Aboriginal students. However, they are often inhibited in doing so by Western educational expectations. Howard (1991) described the non-verbal teaching strategies of an Aboriginal assistant teacher which were very successful with Aboriginal students' with a hearing loss. However, the Aboriginal teaching assistant commented that she was reluctant to teach this way openly or too often, as when she had been observed doing so by some teachers had been criticised for not 'teaching properly'. Further, when this material on culturally responsive pedagogy was presented to Aboriginal education workers in workshops, it prompted lengthy discussion of their long standing concerns about the difficulties they experienced in attempting to provide culturally responsive education.

One Aboriginal Education Worker told of an incident when Aboriginal students were refusing to do any work in class because, as he saw it, the teacher was being too bossy. This teacher asked him to take the Aboriginal students to another room and come back when they had finished the work. He went with them knowing the teacher expected him to be stern and

'push' them along. He knew, though, that if he did this they would do as little work for him as they had for her. Instead he talked and joked with them for a time before asking "are we going to do this work ?" and then at intervals asking "have we finished yet", until the work was completed. His teaching exemplified respecting the students autonomy and independence within the context of a warm personal relationship with students. He said nothing about what he had done to the teacher as he felt (other AEW's also confirmed this from their experiences) that had he told her or had he 'taught' in that way in in front of many Western teachers, he would have been thought unprofessional or even incompetent.

It is evident that the kind of 'deficit hypothesizing' that is so often directed at Aboriginal students' 'alternative learning competancies' is also applied to Western and Aboriginal teachers who attempt to establish culturally responsive pedagogy. It could be said that this process results in the construction of a 'learning disability' in relation to Aboriginal education. Schools and teachers have to consider how ethnocentrism can create these 'teacher learning disabilites' that are serious obstacles to the provision of effective education to Aboriginal students.

**Conclusion**

In order to have access to educational opportunities provided by schools it is usually demanded that Aboriginal students conform to the Western social expectations that are embeded within conventional teaching practise. This has meant schools have, intentionally or not, acted as agents of assimilation. Aboriginal students' difficulties in participating or reluctance to meet the 'cultural cost' that appropriate classroom participation can entail, has contributed to the generally low educational attainments of Aboriginal students. Culturally responsive pedagogy has the potential to provide Aboriginal students with access to educational opportunities through which they can most effectively learn. In particular, the large number of Aboriginal students who experience chronic hearing loss during their school years are likely to be educationally benefited by culturally responsive pedagogy. Students with hearing loss are likely to be advantaged, firstly, by being explicitly taught the Western school expectations which hearing loss makes it difficult to learn and, secondly, by students being able to utilize culturally derived learning skills which are less dependant on access to a single source of auditory input (teacher-talk) as the predominant medium of learning

Providing these opportunities will require changes in the existing educational paradigms. These changes involve questioning ethnocentric educational assumptions about what is good teaching and learning. It is not only Aboriginal students who may benefit from these changes, however. Societal change has meant that authoritarian teaching practises are failing with many non- Aboriginal students as well. Many students claim greater independence and are less willing than their predecessors to accept a subordinate status in

the classroom. Western schooling in general can perhaps gain from an infusion of teaching practises that are more responsive to children who have a greater sense of independance and equality with adults.

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