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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses Aboriginal English speakers in Australia, noting the importance of recognizing prior learning and of recognizing Aboriginal English within the context of programs that understand the particular areas where Aboriginal English speakers need support to achieve outcomes in standard English. It defines recognition of prior learning (learning from experience that children bring to their schooling, particularly when the experience has been in a speech community different from that of the school), then discusses: prior learning and language/literacy acquisition, recognition of prior minority language knowledge and second language acquisition, Aboriginal English prior learning and education, and the relationship of dominant and alternative discourses. The paper goes on to discuss linguistic processes present in Aboriginal English, examining some of the phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and discoursal processes, schemas, and genres that underlie it. Finally, it examines community (vernacular) literacy practices of aboriginal youth, presenting information from a study of the vernacular literacy practices of Aboriginal high school students. Analyses were conducted at the sociolinguistic, linguistic, and semiotic levels. The paper concludes by presenting outcomes where Aboriginal English speakers' prior knowledge can be utilized and where speakers may need help in literacy education. (Contains 16 references.) (SM)

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# Aboriginal English:
# A Case for the Recognition of Prior Learning

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## Recognition of Prior Learning

The term 'Recognition of Prior Learning', or RPL, has been around for a long time, in Australia and overseas, but it hasn't, as far as I know, been applied before to the situation I want to refer to here. It is commonly used in the fields of adult education and training to refer to giving credit for what people already know, whether on the basis of prior study, work, or life experiences. The principle behind RPL is a recognition that learning can occur in many ways, and what some people acquire formally others may acquire informally and through experience. The actual outcomes of one's experience and study are what count, and paper credentials may be a poor indicator of this. What I want use RPL to refer to is the learning from experience which children may bring to their schooling, particularly where their experience has been in a speech community which is different from that of the school.

## Prior Learning and Language/Literacy Acquisition

It is not new to consider the relevance of language background to language learning, particular second language learning. There is a significant body of research into second language acquisition reviewed by Baker (1988, 2001) which provides convincing evidence that prior learning of one language is relevant to learning another language, that by learning a second language one increases one's metalinguistic awareness (Baker 1988, 2001, citing Cummins 1978), becomes more field independent and becomes a more divergent thinker, though such good consequences are only likely to occur if the first learned language is maintained and respected while the second is being learned (Baker 1988, 2001, citing Cummins 1977).

## Recognition Prior Minority Language Knowledge and Second Language Acquisition

The key point of the maintenance of respect for the first learned language applies especially to minority learners, since learning a new language in the absence of home language support is likely to further increase their sense of vulnerability.
"Cummins' (1986) theory argues that minority language pupils are 'empowered' or 'disabled' by four major characteristics of schools.

1. *The extent to which minority language pupils' home language and culture are incorporated into the school curriculum...*
2. *The extent to which minority communities are encouraged to participate in their children's education...*
3. *The extent to which education promotes the inner desire for children to become active seekers of knowledge and not just passive receptacles...*
4. *The extent to which assessment of minority language pupils avoids locating problems in the pupil and seeks to find the root of the problem in the social and educational system or curriculum wherever possible."* (Baker 1988:192-194).

## Aboriginal English Prior Learning and Education

All of this bears on the situation of Aboriginal learners in schools. For the most part, their first learned language is Aboriginal English, yet often such a variety is not even acknowledged by the school to exist, far less to have any role in the curriculum. Aboriginal English speakers are given no encouragement to respect or use the

literacy-relevant skills which they have brought to school from their communities. They are taught and assessed as if they are monodialectal Standard English speakers.

The Relationship of Dominant and Alternative Discourses

The fact is, however, that Aboriginal English does exist and that it is the first learned variety of most Aboriginal children. It co-exists in Australia as an alternative discourse, but non-Aboriginal Australians have always been reluctant to acknowledge it as other than a grossly inadequate attempt to use the English of other Australians. The Japanese American linguist Paul Kei Matsuda wrote recently:

> "Somewhat paradoxically, we... need to better understand dominant discourse practices and their boundaries as perceived by the audience in various contexts of writing because alternative discourses are always defined in relation to dominant discourses in a particular context."
> (Matsuda 2001).

Whether we like it or not, Standard English is a dominant discourse in Australian society and Aboriginal English is an alternative discourse, and the speakers of the non-dominant discourse perceive English from that standpoint. It is highly relevant to school literacy how Aboriginal English speakers perceive the dominant discourse that the school is required to impart and how they see it impacting on their alternative discourse. That is why I would argue that we need to know more about the alternative discourse of Aboriginal students as a prior condition of offering them Standard English literacy.

What Prior Language/Literacy Learning do Aboriginal English Speakers Bring to School?

This question entails two further questions with which I would like to preoccupy myself in the rest of this presentation:

a) What metalinguistic knowledge might be entailed in speaking Aboriginal English in an Australian English speaking context?
b) What community literacy practices comprise the repertoire of Aboriginal English speakers?

## Linguistic Processes Present in Aboriginal English

It's impossible to sum up a whole dialect in a few minutes, but I would like to select from the data on Aboriginal English to show some of the phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic and discoursal processes that underlie it.

a) Phonological Processes

i. Reduced phoneme inventory

| | |
|---|---|
| *There was bushes up to dere* | Note the variable occurrence of /Δ/ and /d/. |
| *fibe* | five |

ii. Different phoneme distribution

| | |
|---|---|
| *she hate it* | she ate it |
| *oliday* | holiday |

iii. Different word stress pattern (forwarding of stress)

| | |
|---|---|
| *KANGgroo* | kangaroo |
| *GIDar* | guitar |

b) Morpho-phonemic Processes

i. Reduction of first syllables

| | |
|---|---|
| *nother, leven, long, round, bout, way* | another, eleven, along, around, about away |
| *The boys went cross the swamp* | The boys went across/crossed the swamp. |

ii. Lack of liaison between vowels

| | |
|---|---|
| *a egg* | an egg |
| *the egg /Δ↔ Eg/* | the egg /Δij Eg/ |

iii. Different patterns of elision

| | |
|---|---|
| *we 'as* | we was (we were) |
| *we 'ent* | we went |
| *we gonna* | we'll |

Morphological Processes

a) Noun compounds

| Compound Form | Australian English Equivalent (if any) | Process Involved |
|---|---|---|
| *firesmoke* | smoke | may be creole-influenced (Crowley and Rigsby 1979) |
| *cattle snake* | snake (with markings like cattle) | |
| *cattle cow* | cow | Recorded in Woorabinda by Alexander 1968 |
| *foot track* | track | May be blend: 'footprint'+ 'track'. Note: *track* may also mean 'road' |
| *eye glasses* | glasses | Needed to distinguish from *glasses* = bits of glass |
| *finger ring* | ring | |
| *paper wrapping* | wrapping | |
| *dinner out* | a meal in the open air | May be blend: 'dinner' + 'outside' |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *ownlation* | (one's) own relation | blend |
| *claimin cousin* | someone who claims to be one's cousin either as a blood relation or as an Aboriginal | |
| *woman head* | a precocious little girl | |
| *bigfella, blackfella, whitefella, tall fella, mad fella, young fella* | big person, etc. | Specifying suffix 'fella'. The compound may also sometimes function adjectivally. |

b) Adverb compounds

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *north way* | towards the north | 'way' marking manner or place adverbial |
| *quick way* | quickly | 'way' marking manner or place adverbial |
| *long way* | far | 'way' marking manner or place adverbial |
| *wobbly way* | wobbly | 'way' marking manner or place adverbial |
| *full way* | terrific, well done | 'way' marking manner or place adverbial |
| *dark time* | night | 'time' marking time adverbial |
| *alltime* | all the time | 'time' marking time adverbial |
| *late time* | at a late hour | 'time' marking time adverbial |

c) Adjective compounds

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *big mob trailers* | lots of trailers | The determiner 'a big mob of' is adjectivalized to become 'big mob' |
| *five sheeps fat one* | five fat sheep | The adjective is marked with 'one' and positioned after the noun |

d) Verbalization

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *She blackeye(d) Amy* | She gave Amy a black eye | a verb is derived from a noun |
| *They cheek em* | They give them cheek | a verb is derived from a |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | noun |
| *Growl im* | Scold him/her | a verb is derived from a noun |
| *I schooled in Derby* | I went to school in Derby | a verb is derived from a noun |

e) Pronoun modification

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Youfella(s), yous* | you (plural) | A plural discrimination is added to Standard English 'you' |
| *thisfella, this otherfella* | this one, this other one | Indefinite pronoun 'fella' as an alternative to 'one' |
| *e* | he or she | gender discrimination on 3rd person is not obligatory |
| *minyu* | me and you | Dual form (Creole areas) |
| *mela* | we (including the listener) | Inclusive form (Creole areas) |

f) Clipping

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *pinnies* | pin-ball machines | clipped noun form with diminutive suffix |
| *glueies* | glue-sniffers | clipped noun form with diminutive suffix |
| *rellies* | relations | clipped noun form with diminutive suffix |
| *bro* | brother | clipped form |
| *cuz* | cousin | clipped form |

g) Regularized verb paradigms

| | |
|---|---|
| *I was, you was, he/she was, we was, they was* | I was, you were, he/she was, we were, they were |
| *I talk, you talk, he/she talk, we talk, they talk* | I talk, you talk, he/she talks, we talk, they talk |

h) Regularized possessive pronoun paradigms

| | |
|---|---|
| *he's* | his (does not follow the 's pattern on the noun) |
| *hisself* | himself (reflexive does not imply possessive) |
| *theirself* | themselves (reflexive does not imply |

| | |
|---|---|
| | possessive) |

Syntactic Processes

a) Deemphasis of auxiliaries and copulas

| | |
|---|---|
| *You got dog?* | Have you got a dog? |
| *Where you live?* | Where do you live? |
| *They too small.* | They are too small. |
| *We got a big air conditioner and all* | We've even got a big air conditioner. |

b) Double subjects

| | |
|---|---|
| *My mother she was a white woman* | My mother was a white woman. |
| *Me an my uncle an dat we went up to visit my dad* | I went up with my uncle and other relatives to visit my dad. |

c) Avoidance of impersonal subjects

| | |
|---|---|
| *E got some sand there* | There is some sand there. |
| *Some sand there* | There is some sand there. |

d) Avoidance of passive

| | |
|---|---|
| *I been hitting around* | They were beating me up. |
| *Do as you told* | Do as you're told. |

e) Embedded observation

| | |
|---|---|
| *I saw him was running behind me.* | I saw him and I saw that he was running behind me. |
| *We saw Murphy's camp had a big hoe* | We observed Murphy's camp and that it had a big hoe |

f) Post-clausal extension

| | |
|---|---|
| *We seen a big snake. Big green one.* | We saw a big green snake. |
| *She ad little bike- this when they little kids- little bike. Little yellow one.* | She had a little yellow bike, when they were little kids. |

Semantic Processes

a) Blending

| Aboriginal English form | Australian English Equivalent (if any) | Process/Comment |
|---|---|---|

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *raw* | 'unripe', 'uncooked' | semantic mapping from natural to human process |
| *stop* | 'cease movement', 'dwell' | permanence is less salient to the idea of residence (term may be common to South Seas Jargon: Baker 1993) |
| *bony* | 'showing bones', 'thin' | bones are not essential to the concept of 'bony' |
| *break* | 'break', 'injure' | with respect to the human body, not only limbs can be broken |
| *daddy* | 'father' and 'son (*little daddy*)' | cross-generational continuity (male) emphasised |
| *mum* | 'mother' and 'daughter (*little mum*)' | Cross-generational continuity (female) emphasised |
| *unc* | 'uncle', 'nephew' | cross-generational continuity (male) emphasised |
| *granny* | 'grandmother', 'grandfather', 'grandchild' | cross-generational, cross-gender continuity emphasised |
| *ownlation* | (one's) own relation | Blend of 'own' and 'relation' |

b) Semantic extension

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *head* | 'head and/or neck' | different image schema |
| *hand* | 'hand and/or arm' | different image schema |
| *cheeky* | 'dangerous' | intensification |
| *kill* | 'hit and/or kill' | identification of intent with effect (pervasive in Aboriginal languages) |
| *fire* | 'fire or match' | (Harkins 1994) |
| *bamboo* | 'bamboo or didgeridoo' | The phenomenon and what it is made out of are conceptualized together (Arthur 1996) |
| *clever* | 'clever or spiritually powerful' | blending of physical and spiritual domains (Arthur 1996) |

c) Semantic inversion

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *deadly* | 'handsome, very good' | reversal of meaning, possibly associated with Aboriginal reverse languages or with youth culture (in Australia and overseas) |
| *cruel* | 'good' | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *hungry* | 'good looking, sexy' | |
| *wicked* | 'terrific' | |
| *savage* | 'good' | |

Discourse Processes

Discourse involves the use of language in social events.
It involves finding language which will

- express concepts which are, or can be, shared
- be recognized as an acceptable part of social behaviour.

Schemas
In order to express concepts which are, or can be, shared people use pre-packaged ways of understanding the world, otherwise known as schemas.
e.g. If I say "He gave me a prescription," you know that I have probably been sick and been examined by the doctor and that I am going to go to the pharmacist to get some kind of medicine. This has not all been said, but it is a part of the schema which is activated by the way I used the word "prescription."
People who share the same life experience share the same schemas.
In Australia, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people often do not share the same life experience and assume different schemas.

Studies of over 200 oral texts produced by Aboriginal people, mainly of school age, in the South West of Western Australia, showed that they organized their discourse most commonly (over 70% of the time) according to five schemas:

| | |
|---|---|
| Scary Things (27%) | The representation of experience, either first-hand or vicarious, of strange powers or persons affecting normal life within the community and manifest in the expression of appearance and disappearance or seeing or not seeing/finding evidence of the phenomenon in question. |
| Hunting (15.5%) | The representation of experience of known participants, organized with respect to the observation, pursuit and capture of prey, usually entailing killing and sometimes eating it. Success is usually associated with persistence, expressed with repeated and/or unsuccessful actions (e.g. shoot and miss, look and never find). |
| Observing (12.5%) | The representation of experience, usually shared experience, in terms of observed details whether of natural or social phenomena. |
| Family (8%) | The representation of experience in relation to an extended family network. |
| Travel (8%) | The representation of experience of known participants, organized in terms of alternating travelling (or moving) and non-travelling (or stopping) segments, usually referenced to a time of departure and optionally including a return to the starting point. |

The Aboriginal people in our study repeatedly used Aboriginal frameworks of activity and relationship in order to make sense of the world and what they were doing in it. They situated themselves in an Aboriginal life-space, despite the fact that they were nearly all monolingual English speakers and living in the South-West of Western Australia.

Example of a story using the Scary Things Schema:

Y20 Little Man Story:

Um.. when I 'as asleep at 'ome (...)
When I 'as asleep at 'ome ..
One.. one little man was dere.
I was.. I was I went under the rug
An.. it it come right up to me..
An' pricked me.
E fight me all over the place (...)
Oh... and he went then.

MG2 Side 2: boy, aged 11 talking to T W 17th May 1994

Example of a story using the Hunting Schema:

Y25 Hunting the Gwirra 2

Um we was goin
an my older sis-
I went with my cousin Cindy family..
we went out the bush
and we was goin for gwirra
and.. and we took the axe wid us..
and.. me and Cindy was at the fence with the ute
and .. we seen this gwirra
we seen this big fat one..
e was e was old
an e jus come through the fence..
Cindy.. she picked up the axe axe
and and .. she chucked it down the wrong way..
and.. she missed it.
She jumps down again
and the gwirra was..
it nearly chased her
and she she.. she took off over the fence
and she nearly cut her face
and.. and.. this other one
he climbed up the tree
and.. and my- and.. and.. my uncle e e got the gun
and e shot it down into- into the ute at the back.

(MUM1 Girl 12).

Story using the Family Schema

P36 When They Eat

('Aileen', 'Patricia' and 'Lena', aged about 15, taking with teacher)

A: I hate when xxx
when they eat
they go (*clicking noises*)
P: Oh yeah I know
Michael- Michael he goes
I said 'God you know
Close your mouth.
Don't chew like a cow.'
A: My cousin's do that
my cousin's do that
ohh always make up excuses
I say like
I say 'Ohh what you- you live in a farm?'
or somethink you know
all the time you know
an' I say um
L: [In the bush there]
P: I jus' say
'Don't you know
how to close your mouth?
Are you a cow?'
A: An' I always say that to my dad
'cause 'e got no teeth
but it- 'e use- used to say
'I need more flavour.'
an' I said
an I tried to do it
but use to taste the same.
an like 'cause they-
they like get on my nerves
an' they do it
so when they finish
I get something
an I start doin' it
but they eat like a Bussa bird

(Tape 096 Girrawheen, p. 12; Lines 359-370).

Genres

In order to have one's contribution accepted as a normal part of social behaviour, one has to use a discourse form which is recognized in the speech community. Such discourse forms we call genres.
Aboriginal English speakers, as we have observed them, use basically similar genres to their non-Aboriginal peers, though they use them in distinctive ways.

The preferred genres represented in the 200 oral texts we collected are:

| | |
|---|---|
| Recount | 73% |
| Report | 10.5% |
| Narrative | 5% |
| Procedure | 3% |
| Expository | 2% |
| Other | 6.5% |

The first person recount is particularly suited to Aboriginal oral narrative because

- Aboriginal people prefer to talk about what they know
- Aboriginal people prefer not to talk on behalf of others
- The Recount is a flexible form which may be used to perform such socially relevant functions as warning of dangers, exemplifying desirable behaviour and shaming inappropriate behaviour.

So, what Prior Knowledge do Aboriginal English speakers, as such, bring to school?

a) knowledge of an alternative phonological system for English;
b) knowledge of various morphological processes which are more extensively exploited by Aboriginal English than by standard English, in particular:
   - compounding
   - various forms of derivation of word classes
   - increased differentiation within the pronoun system
   - increased regularization within verb and pronoun paradigms;
c) knowledge of alternative ways of exploiting the English syntactic system, e.g.
   - forming questions without subject-verb reversal
   - expressing the passive without the verb to be
   - embedding without the use of relative pronouns
   - post-clausal extension;
d) knowledge of multiple levels of meaning in English words, through processes of semantic blending and extension;
e) knowledge of culture-based schemas for the organization of knowledge about the world;
f) knowledge of culturally-appropriate genres for the expression of knowledge in social contexts.

This is the language knowledge Aboriginal English speakers bring to school. But there is more than this. There is community-based literacy knowledge.

## Community (Vernacular) Literacy Practices of Aboriginal Young People

Literacy is more than the linguistic skills of reading and writing. As Brian Street and others have show, it is practices embedded in socio-cultural contexts (Street, 1984, 1993). The work of Gee, among non-mainstream Americans, has strengthened the view that literacies are social and multiple (Gee, 1996). Shirley Brice Heath, in ground breaking research on the basis of residence in two different communities, showed that communities have their own distinctive literacy practices (Heath 1986).

The *vernacularlization* of literacy is the way in which it is used by a community to serve its own purposes (Carrington 1997)

Camitta (1993) studied varieties of literacy among Philadelphia high school students, by analysing student diaries, letters, journals, lists and poems and the oral practices that accompanied them, and observing how these activities served to negotiate meaning, identity and truth within the adolescent social realm.

Flinders (1996) in a study of girls in junior high school, showed how the girls expressed their emerging identities through literacy of two kinds: "school-sanctioned literacy" and "underlife".

Jon Yasin, teaching English in a New York community school setting, observed how their most mature and creative literacy was expressed in response to the international hip hop youth culture. Quoting from Willis (1990), he noted: "Most young people's lives are not involved with the arts and yet are actually full of expressions, signs and symbols through which individuals and groups seek creatively to establish their presence, identity and meaning." Yasin and others (e.g. Rodriguez and Clair 1999) have also studied graffiti, which has been described as "a communicative opportunity for marginalization". There are many forms of graffiti which make significant demands on their readers and writers, many of whom are dropouts from formal education. Rodriguez and Clair describe it as, an art which is "both personal and public at the same time."

Inspired by studies such as these, we began last year a study of the vernacular literacy practices of Aboriginal people of high school age in some areas of Perth. We were particularly interested in the ways in which literacy was being vernacularized in their own cultural milieu by the kinds of students who might see little or no point in going to school. Our Aboriginal research assistants and colleagues spent time in parks, shopping centres, on street corners and in Aboriginal students' homes, gaining the trust of the Aboriginal youth, observing their behaviours, making field notes and sometimes asking them to explain the vernacular literacy practices in which they were engaged.

We found a wealth of literacy practices, many of which showed as subtle an understanding of language as any school syllabus might expect. We carried out analyses at the sociolinguistic, linguistic and semiotic levels. I shall give here just a sample of what we found at the sociolinguistic and linguistic levels.

Sociolinguistic Dimension

Among the naturally occurring literacy events we recorded we shall note two here:

a) Art Stories
   This typically takes place at home. It combines the media of art and writing. The person concerned begins by doing art work, based on imagined or actual experience. Then, in response to the interest of observers, the artist puts a story to what has been depicted.
b) Ritual Insults

This is a practice found among the youth of many cultures. It involves the collaborative creation of a text by two writers each of whom provides a response to a personal insult initiated by the other.
An actual example from a 13 year old girl's notebook reads:
*Emma sucks.*
*No I think it really goes Jillian sucks and emma Rules!*
*Bullshit you wish. More like emily sucks & jillian rules ok bitch.*
*Whatever you dumb DOG!!!*
*you're a dumb SLUT, who ♥z the 2 year 11 twins.*
The text makes an interesting use of oral style combined with certain graphic conventions which show a desire to go beyond the conventions of purely alphabetic writing.

The community-based reading activities the people we studied were engaged in included news-related reading from both Indigenous and general newspapers, reading the lyrics of CDs, downloaded, if necessary, from the internet, reading special interest magazines, such as those dealing with racing cars, reading books on Indigenous culture, in the homes where they were available, reading personal letters and SMS messages. Writing was done to communicate with remote friends, to provide a memory aid (e.g. telephone numbers written on the wall inside the house), to record one's group's presence at a particular environmental location and for self-expression. Aboriginal radio was popular. Certain programmes enabled messages to be communicated via the request segment, obviating the need for writing. Viewing also formed an important part of the lives of some of those we studied. Television was left on all night, with high priority being given to certain human interest programmes.

Linguistic Dimension

We found that the discourse of the students we studied abounded in intertextual influences, whether from African American English, or from Aboriginal languages, or from popular music, or from international teenage culture. There were also distinctive borrowings or coinages, like *orse,* meaning 'good' and *tuck tuck*, meaning 'fight'.

The Aboriginal people we studied had a highly developed metalinguistic awareness, expressed in many distinctive phonological, morphological and grapho-phonic processes.

A boy named Willie Wallam was nicknamed *Willie Wonka*, and one named Wesley Walley was nicknamed *Where's Wally,* showing the speakers' delight in phonic mapping across forms from family and media domains. The suffix /ib I/ served the purpose of marking the name of a boy in relation to his eponymous father or uncle. Thus *Marky boy* was the son or nephew of Mark. Aboriginal words might be borrowed into English and modified according to English morphology. Thus, the Nyungar word *winyarn* 'pathetic', might occur in the expression *It was really the winyarnest thing I ever went to.*

The graphological processes employed were particularly interesting. It was expected that an Aboriginal young person would have their own logo, which might be created by modifying an advertising logo or some other source. Group fonts were developed,

not only for graffiti but also for use in personal letter writing, which tended to be in modified capital letters in more than one colour. Spelling was modified, as in:

HOWZ RONA
OK SISTA
WELL C- YOU LATER
DEYA EMMA

The grapho-phonic awareness of the writers shows readily in their various code usages. Teenage Aboriginal girls may communicate with one another in backwards spelling, as in:

*Ekul dessik em no eht pil* (Luke kissed me on the lip).

A young mother (DH) communicated with her partner who was in prison (MM), telling him she was pregnant with their second child in the message:

*MM DH 4 ever + 2.*

Aboriginal girls will readily recognize the meaning of messages like *OBC* (only best cousins), *ABF* (always best friends) and *OTL* (only true love) marked alongside initials in public places.

Much environmental writing employs modification of the alphabetic writing system, whether by mapping word pronunciations on modified graphic symbols, as in *WOZ ERE*, or by mapping word pronunciations onto alphabet and number symbols, as in *B4* 'before' or *9T9* '99', or by mapping words onto iconic symbols, as in *I ♥ DC.* This, interestingly, represents a move in the direction of rebus writing, which Kennedy (1984) has suggested was possibly an intermediate step between ancient pictographic writing systems and our alphabetic system.

So, what prior knowledge do those who are familiar with these practices bring to school?

a) grapho-phonic awareness, extending both to the ability to represent phonemes and syllables with conventional or innovative graphic symbols;
b) recognition of the close integration of graphic expression with verbal expression;
c) ability to manipulate the morphology of English to create bound morphemes to express original meanings, and to add bound morphemes to non-English stems;
d) experience in the experimental use of highly charged language in interpersonal abuse;
e) familiarity with creating and interpreting systems of coding.

The Relevance of Aboriginal English Speakers' Prior Learning to School Literacy

We now turn to the application of all this: where is the prior learning of Aboriginal English speakers relevant to the acquisition of literacy in schools? Schools are seeking to impart literacy in both the senses we have been considering: both as a linguistic skill and as a socio-cultural practice. Aboriginal English speakers in school are concurrently operating in two speech communities: one where the linguistic features and socio-cultural practices associated with Aboriginal English apply and one where those of Standard English apply. What can the school build on as relevant prior knowledge, both linguistic and socio-cultural, and what must the school assist students with in making the transition to Standard English literacy?

The linguistic skills of reading and writing depend heavily on language awareness – something which we might expect, on the basis of the bilingual research we cited earlier, would be enhanced by the fact that they are operating with two language varieties rather than one. Skills of particular relevance are phonological awareness (Stuart and Coltheart 1988) and Grapho-phonic awareness (Harley 1995). Phonological awareness involves the skills of phoneme recognition and phoneme segmentation, as well as the ability to attend consciously to the sound structure of language (Wagner and Torgesen 1987). Aboriginal English speakers can be expected to have developed these skills with respect to their own variety- indeed, the inventiveness of their oral art suggests they are highly phonologically aware. However, since the phoneme inventory and the principles of distribution of phonemes in their own variety differ from those of Standard English, their prior knowledge will not always serve them well and will need to be supplemented by teacher support. For this, teachers need to have enhanced phonological awareness to encompass Aboriginal English as well as their own dialect.

Grapho-phonic awareness involves two complementary skills: the ability to make grapheme-phoneme correspondences, enabling words to be sounded out, and the ability to associate visual representations of whole words with their corresponding phonological representations, enabling whole words to be recognized. On the basis of the community literacy practices we have observed, these skills should not be entirely foreign to the students, though, because of other dialect differences, they may need particular support.

With respect to writing skill, one of the prerequisites is the sense of a need to write. Arnold (1991:3) has put it, "students have a powerful need to symbolize themselves and their world through writing, drawing or other expressive forms." There is abundant evidence that this need exists, and is driving vernacular literacy practices in Aboriginal communities, even among students who have dropped out of schooling. It is important for the school to give opportunity for this need to be satisfied within, rather than beyond, the school walls by expanding the writing options for students.

The expectations of the school systems in Western Australia with respect to all learning areas have been spelled out in an Outcomes and Standards Framework which specifies expected outcomes in all eight curriculum areas from levels 1-8. The English Learning Area Outcome Statements include over 20 anticipated outcomes for reading and over 30 for writing. Reviewing these, in the light of what I have said in this paper, I would suggest that one can fairly clearly distinguish areas where the prior learning of Aboriginal students can be drawn on and other areas where Aboriginal students may need particular help. I have summarized these below:

Outcomes Where Aboriginal English Speakers' Prior Knowledge Can be Drawn On:

a) Reading

R1 Demonstrating understanding that written symbols and illustrations convey information

R3 Identifying and using language structures
Recognising and discussing use of symbols and stereotypes to shape meaning

R4 Understanding how language structures work to shape meaning

b) Writing

W1 Recognising that writing conveys information
Producing written symbols to convey a message
W2 Producing brief written texts to communicate experience, information, feelings
W3 Demonstrating control over many language conventions
Experimenting with other language conventions
W4 Developing familiar ideas and information
Experimenting with a variety of text types

Outcomes Where Aboriginal English Speakers May Need Particular Help:

a) Reading

R2 Using basic strategies to locate, select and read texts
Recalling and discussing ideas from texts
Understanding people write about real and imagined experience
R3 Integrating strategies to interpret & discuss ideas/information/events in texts
R4 Giving possible reasons for varying interpretations
Justifying own interpretation of ideas, information & events in texts
R5 Discussing and comparing texts to examine issues, ideas & effects
Synthesising information from different sources to construct reasoned responses
R6 Drawing on strategies, incl. sociocultural context, for understanding of reading.
R7 Critical reading & discussion of a wide range of complex texts
Identifying ways text structure can influence reader reactions
R8 Conveying ideas about texts in a compelling way
Relating specific issues & ideas in texts to wider social experience.

b) Writing

W2 Knowing writing can be planned, reviewed, changed
Producing readable texts that follow some writing conventions
W3 Combining ideas in logical sequence to write some text types
Recognising needs of particular audiences and purposes
Using strategies for planning, reviewing, proofreading
W4 Adjusting writing for audience and purpose
W5 Using a variety of text types to explore challenging ideas & issues
W6 Conveying detailed information
Writing for general audiences
W7 Writing sustained, complex texts to meet or challenge audience expectations
W8 Analysing others' writing to inform one's own processes and strategies

## Conclusion

Writing recently about the work of a Nigerian novelist, Ato Quayson (2000) used the expression "harvesting the folkloric intuition." Quayson was referring to the ways in which, as culturally dominated people living in ghettos on the fringes of Western-influenced cities in their own country, certain writers were drawing on their cultural roots in order to develop works of literary art in English. I think the term also has application to Aboriginal English speakers in Australia. Aboriginal English is usually treated as an educational liability, yet it is a store of folkloric intuition which awaits harvesting. Its non-recognition leads to the impoverishment of the education system as a whole as well as to the suppression of a wealth of literacy relevant knowledge which comes from community sources. It is time for it to be recognized within the context of programmes which recognize at the same time the particular areas where Aboriginal English speakers need support to achieve outcomes in Standard English.

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