NOTICE OF ORDINARY MEETING

The next meeting will be held in the Museum Education Building, North Terrace, Adelaide at
8.00 P.M. ON MONDAY, 23 OCTOBER, 1972

AGENDA

1. Apologies
3. Tabling of Papers and Journals.
4. Announcement of new member.
5. Mr. G. Killington, Consultant in Community Development and Senior Social Worker, Port Adelaide Central Mission - A.U.A., L.Th. will give an address entitled:-
   "IMPLICATIONS OF THE BELIEF SYSTEMS OF URBAN ABORIGINAL PEOPLE"
6. Date of next meeting: Annual General Meeting - MONDAY, 27 NOVEMBER, 1972.

R.D.J. Weathersbee
Honorary Secretary,
C/- S.A. Museum,
North Terrace,
ADELAIDE, S.A. 5000.
The following is the paper prepared by Rev. R.J. Jepsen for the Society Meeting on Monday, 28th August, 1972:

"THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL FACTORS AFFECTING ABORIGINAL SCHOOL PERFORMANCE IN WALGETT, N.S.W."

by Rev. R.J. Jepsen

INTRODUCTION

This research project was conducted during 1970 and specifically examined the social and cultural factors affecting Aboriginal school performance in Walgett.

Walgett is a hot, dusty town situated on the Great North Western Plains of N.S.W. Built on the banks of the Namoi River some three miles from its junction from the Barwon River, it is approximately 460 miles N.W. of Sydney and 90 miles South of the Queensland border.

Its population of 2,600 includes 800 people of Aboriginal descent all of whom are of mixed blood and who descended from the Kamilaroi people.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Rev. Jepsen submitted his paper in the form of notes that he prepared for his address. It is felt that these notes are so lucid that it is unnecessary to alter their form.)

1. THE ABORIGINAL POPULATION

a) Live in a number of distinct groups.

b) Mission Station 8 miles West - 16 houses of pre-war vintage occupied by 165 persons.

c) The Namoi Reserve - 2 miles North - There were 26 humpies housing 136 people - area had one public tap and a public telephone.

d) Montkeila Reserve - on Northern side of town just outside the Levy Bank - 8 shacks

e) Camping Area - within the Levy Bank on South Western side of town - 20 humpies - toilet blocks erected by the Council.
1. THE ABORIGINAL POPULATION (Cont.)

f) Town Houses - a further 37 families live in houses scattered throughout the town with a concentration in the southwestern corner near the camping area.

Until 1969 houses were built by the Aboriginal Welfare Board under a standard design, which was substandard by European models. Since then Aborigines have been allotted Housing Commission Cottages which are a considerable improvement on A.W.B. Houses.

g) Social class within Aboriginal Community:

i) Town people who owned house were on top of social ladder.

ii) Town People renting house

iii) Montkeila and Namoi Reserve

iv) Mission Station

v) Camping area.

h) Walgett's awareness of its Aboriginal population and limits to mobility.

2. THE SCHOOL

a) 1971 - of 527 enrolments in infants and primary 226 were of Aboriginal descent i.e. 42.9%.

b) European children were predominantly in the "A" classes - 75%.

Aboriginal children were predominantly in the "B" classes - 73%.

c) Aboriginal school achievement is generally below that of European children, in fact, school authorities state that their school performance deteriorates as they advance in school years. Many attend high school simply to fulfil requirements of law and leave school on the day they turn 15.

d) I.Q. scores add to the picture.

i) Aboriginal children in 4th and 6th grade tested in 1970 obtained a mean I.Q. score of 75.4.

ii) European mean was 97.5.
2. **THE SCHOOL** (Cont.)

Highest European score was 125
Highest Aboriginal score was 105.

e) Within the Aboriginal group there were considerable
differences in school performance.

So two groups were chosen for study on the basis of
their performance - differences were quite startling.

3. **THE TWO GROUPS**

i) Basis of selection: During 1968 and 1969, the Walgett
Central School and the Mission School conducted tests
known as "The W.S.W. Basic Skills Testing Programme."
Two groups were chosen for study on the basis of their
scores in these tests and their grading in the school.

ii) They were called:

The Town Group, and
The Mission Group.

iii) The Town Group was made up of all these Aboriginal
children who were in 5A and 6A during 1970. These
children were regarded by school authorities as
being the most successful Aborigines in the school.

All lived in town houses with relatively stable
families.

iv) The Mission Group. The other group consisted of all
Aboriginal children from the Aboriginal Mission
Station who were in fifth and sixth class during 1970.
All were in 6B or 5B. These children were regarded
by school authorities as being poor school
performers.

All lived in poor housing with unstable families.

v) **I.Q.** Mean I.Q. score for Town Group was 93.3.
Mean I.Q. score for Mission Group was 71.8.
3. **THE TWO GROUPS** (Cont.)

vi) Scores on the basic skills battery of scores was:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literal Meaning</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implied Meaning</td>
<td>56.8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Test Total</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map Reading</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference Materials</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receptive Listening</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective Listening</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening Total</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These scores were obtained in 1960 whilst children were attending school at Walgett Central School and The Mission School respectively.

4. **WHY THE DIFFERENCE**

Three sociological theories of help:

i) HSU: Kinship and ways of life

ii) Lewis: Culture of Poverty

iii) Kemper: Reference Groups

i) **HSU: Kinship and Ways of Life**

a) In past, he feels, we have concentrated too much on kinship structure and have neglected content. Content is more clearly related to patterns of thought and action than is structure.

b) By studying kinship content, HSU feels that definite correlations can be found between kinship and ways of life.

c) There are eight kin relationships which are basic to every kinship system:

- Husband / Wife
- Father / Son
- Mother / Daughter
- Father / Daughter
- Mother / Son
- Brother / Brother
- Sister / Sister
- Brother / Sister
4. WHY THE DIFFERENCE (Cont.)

i) HSU: Kinship and Ways of Life (Cont.)

c) The eight primary relationships are not given the same emphasis by all societies. When a society gives importance to one of these relationships, it does so by altering the content and importance of the other relationships. Resulting kinship systems differ in their structure and content and in their influence upon individuals reared in them.

d) Kinship content predisposes a society towards a particular type of religion, government, impetus to change and to certain types of general characteristics. It furthermore predisposes the individual towards certain attitudes to life and success in life.

e) Four basic kin types:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Axis Emphasised</th>
<th>Resulting Content</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type A</td>
<td>Father / Son</td>
<td>Mutual dependence among members of kin and Community</td>
<td>Chinese Koreans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Japanese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Siamese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type B</td>
<td>Husband / Wife</td>
<td>Self reliance on the part of the individual</td>
<td>Majority of Western peoples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type C</td>
<td>Mother / Son</td>
<td>Dependence on the Supernatural</td>
<td>Hindus in India and possibly Moslems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type D</td>
<td>Brother/Brother</td>
<td>A degree of mutual dependence. No Ancestor worship</td>
<td>Africans of The Sahara</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

f) Application to Walgett: Western society is classified as being of type B kinship emphasis. Fringe dwelling Aborigines at Walgett do not wholly fit into this type. In many families, the Mother/Son axis has become the most emphasised because many Aboriginal males are involved in rural work which takes them away from home for weeks at a time. Furthermore, in a number of cases children have come as a result of casual sexual unions which have not resulted in any enduring Husband-Wife type relationship.

The strong link which exists between the mother and her children as a result is similar to that which Firth calls "Maternal Focus".
4. **WHY THE DIFFERENCE** (Cont.)

i) **HSU: Kinship and Ways of Life** (Cont.)

   g) Walgett's Aboriginal kinship system may be described as encompassing both HSU's type B and his type C. Individual families can be arranged on a continuum.

   h) HSU's type B and type C further defined:

      i) **Type B** - usually Patrilineal, Patrilocal or Neolocal, and in many instances nominally Patriarchal.

      Husband/Wife axis is most elevated relationship - the only one which is expressly and elaborately sanctioned.

      Children find themselves in units which include mother, father and unmarried siblings.

      Content most commensurate with the emphasis on Husband/Wife is individualism or self reliance. The individual has to seek his own mate and his own means of support. He has to set up his own house and accumulate his own wealth.

      Emphasis is placed on the uniqueness of the individual rather than upon relationships between individuals.

      ii) **Type C** - the central kinship structure is the joint family. The axis most elevated is the mother/son relationship. Children are initiated into the adult world early but are, in their early years, almost totally dependent upon their mothers. The mother is the answer to all the infants' troubles and needs.

      Characteristic kinship content is what may be described as supernatural dependence. Instead of solving life's problems by self-reliance or by mutual dependence, the individual seeks, by various means, to influence the gods in order to gain their assistance.

i) HSU's types applied to Walgett - HSU's typologies are models. In reality cases will only approximate the model. However, predictions can be made on the basis of the models.
4. WHY THE DIFFERENCE (Cont.)

i) HSU: Kinship and Ways of Life (Cont.)

i) Families which most approximate type B should be individualistic and self reliant. They should place emphasis upon the uniqueness of the individual rather than upon the relationship between individuals. They should, within the understanding of Western Society, be the Achievers.

Little difficulty was found locating type B families in Walgett.

ii) Families of type C emphasis should be dependent on the supernatural. There should be little desire on the part of children to leave their parents and become independent. They should expect problems to be solved by simple boon. These people will be the "failers".

In Walgett, families approximating type C in structural emphasis do not exactly correspond with the type when content is considered. The closest approximation among these families to supernatural dependence is dominant group dependence.

An informant said that the people expect the Government, the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs, the University Students and other institutions of the dominant European society, to solve all their problems for them. There is a marked tendency for some Aboriginals to sit back and wait for the "Big White Father" to solve all.

Dominant group dependence is so similar to supernatural dependence that it is quite legitimate to regard families exhibiting this trait as being of type C, so long as the Mother/Son axis is emphasised.

j) Criteria for typing families - A set of Criteria was drawn up in order to place families of children in the Town Group and the Mission Group within the context of HSU's models.
4. WHY THE DIFFERENCE (Cont.)

i) HSU: Kinship and Ways of Life (Cont.)

| THE CRITERIA |
|--------------|----------------|
| IF Type B Husband/Wife Axis | THEN |
| 1. Nuclea Family |
| 2. Kin Recognition Limited |
| 3. Children exclusively in care of parents |
| 4. Parental control ceases at maturity |
| 5. Individualism - self reliance |
| 6. High individual achievement |

| Type C Mother/Son Axis | THEN |
| 1. Joint or extended family |
| 2. Kin recognition extensive |
| 3. Children in care of females |
| 4. Independence from parents not sought |
| 5. Dependence - reliance on dominant group |
| 6. Low individual achievement |

Families in the two groups can be arranged on a continuum according to the number of Criteria conformed with.

Numbers with circles represent Mission Group:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE B</th>
<th>TYPE C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 4 5 6</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Town Group - Type B
Mission Group - Type C
4. WHY THE DIFFERENCE (Cont.)

i) HSU:  Kinship and Ways of Life (Cont.)

The school performance figures of the two groups do not refute HSU's theory. It seems that if a child's family is of HSU's type B kin emphasis, then his school performance (in a European type school) will be at a level higher than that of a child whose family approximates type C.

However, reliance on Hsu's hypothesis alone would oversimplify the issue.

ii) LEWIS:  Culture of Poverty

The Aboriginal sub-culture in Walgett bears many of the marks of Lewis' "Culture of Poverty". He has set up an ideal type to represent this culture which is useful in describing the wider cultural aspects of the people. Not all Aboriginals in Walgett conform to the type. In fact those which least approximate it are those who are most successful and who, in turn, produce children who are most successful at school.

On this basis, it can be expected that children in the Town Group will come from families which least approximate Lewis' ideal type whilst those children in the Mission Group will come from families which most approximate the typology.

Lewis maintains that:

"The Culture of Poverty is not just a matter of deprivation or disorganisation...It is a culture in the traditional anthropological sense in that it provides human beings with a design for living, with a ready-made set of solutions for human problems, and so serves a significant adaptive function. Social mobility is extremely limited for it involves breaking into new reference groups".

Lewis states that there are certain pre-conditions which must be met if the "Culture of Poverty" as a way of life is to flourish.

(i) The Setting
(ii) Organisation not provided
(iii) Bilateral as opposed to unilateral kin system
(iv) Dominant class assertions.
4. WHY THE DIFFERENCE (Cont.)

ii) LEWIS: Culture of Poverty (Cont.)

(i) The Setting

"The setting is a cash economy with a continuing rate of "unemployment and underemployment"."

Walgett Town is based on a cash economy and among its Aboriginal people there is a high rate of unemployment and underemployment, especially at the Mission Station.

In October, 1970, 38 males and 33 females of Aboriginal descent were unemployed. A further 40 males were employed under drought relief grants. This work was of temporary nature. These figures represent 80% of Walgett's Aboriginal workforce.

During normal seasons, those people who are able to obtain work are only employed as seasonal or casual labourers.

(ii) Organisation not provided

"The society fails to provide social, political and economic organisation, on either a voluntary basis or by Government imposition, for the low income population".

Walgett's Aboriginal community is disintegrated and disorganised. The only organisation functioning is the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs but this group is not representative.

The general attitude of the dominant society to the Aboriginal sub-group is one of apathy and disinterest. There is a marked failure to provide social, political or economic organisation.

(iii) Bilateral as opposed to Unilateral Kinship System

"There is a Bilateral Kinship System centered on the nuclear progenitive family, as distinguished from the Unilateral extended Kinship System of lineage and clan".

In Walgett all vestiges of lineage or clan have been lost. Tribal kinship structures have vanished. Bilateral nuclear type emphasis is prominent though in many cases emphasis is upon the Mother/Son axis rather than Husband/Wife axis.
4. WHY THE DIFFERENCE (Cont.)

ii) LEWIS: Culture of Poverty (Cont.)

Relatives on both mother's side and father's side are of equal importance.

(iv) Dominant Class Assertions

"The Dominant Class Asserts a set of values that prizes thrift and the accumulation of wealth and property, stresses the possibility of upward mobility and explains low economic status as the result of individual personal inadequacy and inferiority."

Members of the dominant group in Walgett feel that Aborigines have all the opportunities for mobility that Europeans have, but that they will not take them. They are regarded as inadequate and inferior. They are unreliable and dirty, and have no desire for work or to improve themselves. They would be better off if they stopped breathing. One person said that he found them to be disgusting, revolting, drunkards and bludgers. They spend their money recklessly and they brawl.

THE CULTURE OF POVERTY IN WALGETT

Where these four conditions prevail, Lewis maintains that "The way of life that develops among some of the poor is the culture of poverty. It comes about as both an adaptation and a reaction to the marginal position of the poor in relation to the dominant society."

By the time children have reached the age of seven they have taken upon themselves the norms and values of the culture and are psychologically unable to take full advantage of the opportunities which may present themselves for self-improvement.

STATUS & ETHNIC STRATIFICATION

As a sub-culture, within Walgett's social system the Aboriginal community may be regarded, in Weber's terms, as a status group which is distinguished from other status groups by a distinctive life-style, and upon the basis of ethnic identity. An impermeable caste-like barrier determines the upper limit of Aboriginal mobility. This means that for Aborigines, location in society is fixed
4. WHY THE DIFFERENCE (Cont.)

ii) LEWIS: Culture of Poverty (Cont.)

permanently and irreversibly. In life-style there is a range from the Culture of Poverty type, through to a style identical with the European style. Families with European life-styles confront the ultimate barrier in mobility. They cannot enter white society.

School performance is not only affected by one's kinship content but also by one's position in the status dimension which exists within the Aboriginal sub-culture.

The child whose family is towards the culture of poverty extreme is disadvantaged in an educational system that is staffed almost entirely by middle-class teachers.

My research showed that children coming from the Mission Station came from families who in life-style most closely approximated the Culture of Poverty. They had little motivation to succeed at school, nor did they have the motivation to improve their status position within the A.B. sub-culture. They were happy and contented as they were.

Achievement differentials within the Aboriginal school population can be explained. Not only in terms of their position on HSU's continuum between type B and type C kinship content, but also in terms of their position on a continuum relating them to the culture of poverty.

iii) KEMPER: Reference Group Theory

Kemper's Reference Group theory will help make sense out of all I have said.

A Reference Group is an important determinant of an individual's action or attitude.

It comprises "A Group, Collectivity or Person", and an individual takes this group into account when he is confronted with the selection of a course of behaviour.
iii) KEMPER: Reference Group (Cont.)

Kemper maintains that there are three types of Reference Group.

He calls them:

1. Normative Groups
2. Comparison Groups
3. Audience Groups

1. Normative Groups set down the norms and values which provide the individual with a guide to action. The individual is expected to comply with these norms or else incur the sanctions of the group.

In Walgett, those A.B. families who have reached the higher status positions are regarded as having gone "flash" by other Aborigines. In other words they incur the sanctions of the majority. These sanctions cause individuals to have little motivation towards success, and consequently give little impetus to school performance.

2. Comparison Groups provide the individual with role models or frames of reference which enable him to make judgements concerning:

   a) The equity of his fate
   b) The legitimacy of his actions and attitudes
   c) The adequacy of his performance
   d) The accommodation of his acts to acts of others

In Walgett the 'Culture of Poverty' comparison groups are totally at variance with the European values of the school. In fact poor school performance becomes a norm rather than an exception.

3. Audience Groups are those before whom the actor performs. The audience may reward or negatively sanction the actor.

According to Kemper's theory, therefore, one's behaviour and level of achievement will depend upon one's reference groups.
4. WHY THE DIFFERENCE (Cont.)

iii) KEMPER: Reference Group (Cont.)

The Aboriginal child whose family most approximates HSU's Type C in kinship content and Lewis's culture of poverty in life style will have reference groups which are totally different from those influencing the child whose family has adopted a European type life style.

The effect of this cultural background is clearly seen in results obtained at school.

Town group children of European life style perform well.

Mission group children of culture of poverty life style perform badly.

CONCLUSION:

Any educational programme for Aborigines which fails to take into account the social and cultural background of the children will simply be a waste of time both for teachers and for Aborigines.

Aboriginal Australians are in various stages of assimilation throughout the Continent. Hardly an Aborigine remains who is untouched by the culture of the "White" man. In many parts of the Continent, he is faced with a dilemma. Should he remain "Where he is" in his own group, or should he launch out and join the society of the European? Only the Aboriginal can make that choice. Europeans cannot and should not try to make it for him.

Education policies throughout the Continent seem to be based on the assumption that the choice is already made - The Aborigine must assimilate - He must be educated in accordance with European Standards. My research revealed the fact that in Walgett this assumption is not correct, that the Aborigine on the Mission Station was not assimilating, and that he was a dismal failure in the European education system. It is my guess that a similar situation exists in many other parts of the Continent.