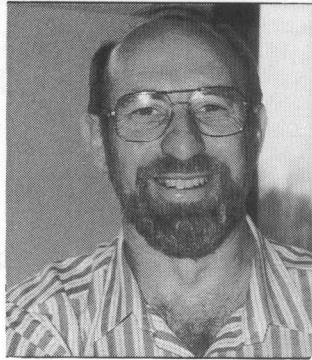

Editorial

One of the benefits likely to be encountered in the International Year of Indigenous People is a renewed appreciation of the concept of culture, a recognition of our dependence on it for our sense of identity, our sense of positive self worth and the processes of socialisation which go in to making us members of it. The nurture which builds on nature to create what we subjectively see of ourselves and our world. Nurture undertaken, in the main, in the context of family and extended networks of kin, peers and significant others. Our place, our social address rolling like a marble among the institutions and influences which are part of the daily round. To extend the analogy, the unevenness of the ground or the thumb behind the alley are the markets, the political factions, the warring parties, the legal and other bodies with power to enforce compliance, the power of public opinion.

These schools for life provide us with practical and social skills as well as much of the strength and direction of our motivation. They are also the source of many of the value positions we ultimately adopt and many of the prejudices which we are likely to begin expressing and practising from a very early age. This year will acquaint many of us with issues related to membership in dominant and minority cultures, with differential advantage and disadvantage accruing from accidents of birth, as well as fiendish politics, well intentioned policies founded on ignorance with disastrous consequences and the use and abuse of power to favour one group at the expense of another.

One would hope that the policies, programs and real opportunities bearing on the interests of children and their families will be grounded in good social and psychological research, humanitarian values and practical concern for the development and maintenance of safe social and physical environments. We know that this has not been and is not now the case for many Aboriginal children, it is not the case for many non-Aboriginal Australian children and we know that for very large numbers of children overseas, the situation is deplorable. War, poverty and sweat shops are all too often part of the contemporary scene.

The mythology of the present era appears to have placed the arts and sciences of economics in centre stage and the arts and sciences of generic organisational management close by. There appears to be considerable risk in concluding that the institutions of these movements and the academic disciplines which support them, contain more science than art. Just as the physical, biological, psychological and social sciences have given increasing recognition to the inevitable presence of cultural and the personal values in human thought and behaviour, to the transience and uncertainty which can attach to seemingly solid models, so too should economics and management attend to the ethics and morality of the behaviour of practitioners. Priority must be given to the well being of future generations, protection must be afforded to the world's



children of today, parents must be enabled to parent. If business is prepared to trade the goods of sweat shops, if governments devalue any of their citizens, ignore the need to act on international covenants and fail in long term vision, notions of growth run the risk of accelerating misery. The adoption of lean organisations and macho management practices as the only way to go seems to this observer to be lacking in morality; likely to create massive amounts of down time and confusion; likely to set in motion 'peck order processes' where the less powerful at

the end of the line receive the kick; and possibly be just plain wrong. At least one economist lends credence to such a view. (Kenneth Davidson, 'Social Conscience, not micro reform, can create jobs.' *The Age* 3 June 1993:15). Instead of devaluing anyone, we need to find ways of mobilising the talent of all Australians to tackle the array of tough social and environmental problems facing the present and future generations. Our children need this.

The articles in this issue take us into some interesting territory. Notes of caution from two states are sounded in respect to family preservation programs and another on the drive for skill based competency. Neither Dorothy Scott nor Frank Ainsworth denigrate the efforts of those engaged in developing these programs but clearly cultural awareness is needed when Australia borrows ideas from the United States. Their experienced and thoughtful observations about services in Australia, like Lesley Cooper's about industry and education policy, provide food for thought for managers engaged in the massive resource and structural shifts of public welfare today. It is a hard and complex industry dealing with tough human problems, many not amenable to quick fixes, but which if denied or ignored become much more costly to the community in the long term. Cas O'Neill at last shares with us some of her rich experience in the field and the perspectives of parents involved in placement disruption – important research into an area involving extreme emotional pain for children and families, which others, we hope, will build on. Another research report from an impressive collaborative team (Bruce, Schultz, Smyrnios and Schultz) picks up family suffering and intellectual disability. The comparative approach introduces useful normative considerations which in turn should improve the perceptions and capacity of the community to respond appropriately to the losses and gains in this sensitive, intimate area. These contributions reflect the difficulty and importance of work in major areas of social welfare and community service practice, areas in which service systems have been slowly, painfully and thoughtfully built over a long period of time. No one working in those systems would see them as complete or sufficient. It is crucial, in the present difficult economic climate that we do not abandon the need to progress in these domains, or 'spoil the ship for a ha'porth of tar'.

Chris Goddard has returned to this issue and pursues this economic notion in his inimitable style. 'Danger, Economists at Work: The Joke that can damage your Child's Welfare...' ♦