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10. INDIGENOUS EDUCATION POLICY DISCOURSES IN AUSTRALIA

Rethinking the "Problem"

ABSTRACT

Despite small improvements in Year 12 attainment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students over the past 10 years, convergence with non-Indigenous achievement remains slow and narratives of deficiency continue to dominate public discourse and policy in this area. This chapter examines recommendations and goals across three policy periods, identifying prevailing and shifting discourses and their effects on achieving intended aims. Our analysis illustrates that little has changed in the discourses and the effects of Commonwealth policy in this area over the past 50 years. That is, while numerous attempts have been made in policy and practice to address participation and attainment levels, the effects of these initiatives have been limited in terms of outcomes. We argue that going forward into the 21st century, a major rethink of the representation of the "problem" is required. This historical analysis enables us to identify how policy might be enacted in the future, and to provide suggestions for how to move forward productively in order to enhance the learning and lives of indigenous people.

Keywords: education policy analysis; policy discourse; indigenous education; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous education is a highly contested space in Australia and globally. In colonised nations such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA, the rights of First Nations peoples have been a site of activism and policy reform since settlement, with a focus on addressing inequities for education, health and welfare of each nation's indigenous population. In recent years, it has become increasingly one of the most pressing equity concerns. This chapter examines Australian education policy in this area as a way of:

T. Barkatsas & A. Bertram (Eds.), Global Learning in the 21st Century, 165–184.

- explicating the embedded narratives or discursive moves in policy in Australia; and
- offering potential ways to think about policy and what is needed in order to change its effects in practice.

While the focus in this chapter is on Australia and the local specificities of this site, the debates and issues for indigenous education raised here have broader application for other colonised countries. In addition, the analysis and approach we provide here offers possibilities for similar studies within and across such nations.

Indigenous education[1] has been a policy priority for the Commonwealth of Australia since the 1940s. Prior to this, it was largely the responsibility of colonies, states and territories. In the past 50 years, policy moves have focused on strategies to address the persistently lower educational achievement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts. Although there have been small improvements in Year 12 attainment, convergence between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students remains slow, and narratives of failure dominate public discourse and policymaking in this area (Altman, Biddle, & Hunter, 2009).

This article examines three key policy periods since 1967 leading up to the current moment. We identify the shifting discourses in policy for Indigenous education in Australia, and examine the extent to which successive recommendations and goals from reviews and schooling policy have achieved the intended aims.

Following a brief background to policy since 1967, recommendations, actions and principles of three reviews of Indigenous education (Hughes, 1988; National Aboriginal Consultative Group [NACG], 1975; Yunupingu, 1995) are analysed to identify aims and underpinning discourses in Indigenous education from 1975–1995.

This is followed by an examination of three overarching Commonwealth policy statements (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 1989, 1999, 2008) on the education of young Australians in relation to their respective goals for Indigenous education. These Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Declarations set the goals for schooling, each driving Federal and State policy from 1995 until the 2010s.

A brief analysis is then provided of the goals, discourses and foci of two policies central to the implementation of Declaration goals for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in Australian schools—the Professional Standards for Teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2016) implemented in 2011, and the Australian Curriculum (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2016) implemented in stages since 2012. The standards and the curriculum articulate the role of schools and teachers in addressing education for and about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories, and cultures in Australia since 2008.

Our analysis illustrates how little education goals and strategies have changed over the past 50 years of Commonwealth policy in this area. We demonstrate

the persistent problematic nature of the ways in which Indigenous education and education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are framed in policy. In the final section, we argue for the urgent need to think differently about what the "problems" are and how policy might be enacted in this area.

POLICY ERAS OF INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS IN AUSTRALIA

An examination of the three policy moments we outline here reveals that vestiges of well-recognised historical eras of policy in Indigenous affairs are reflected by educational policy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. It is interesting to note and compare parallel policies in other colonised counties such as New Zealand and Canada. However, that is beyond the scope of this chapter. What is offered here is, however, useful for similar research in these nations and comparative studies across nations.

The *Review of Aboriginal Customary Laws* (Australian Law Reform Commission, 1986 (updated 2012)), identified four eras of policy that are recognised by researchers as representing the history of policy moves in Indigenous affairs in Australia. In addition, Sullivan (2011) argued that we are now in a fifth policy era, marked by the Northern Territory Emergency Response ("The Intervention") and the abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. The five eras are referred to as: "protection", "assimilation", "integration", "self-determination" and "normalisation".

Policies that are now viewed as "protection policies" came into place from 1837, including the appointment of "Aboriginal protectors" and policies aimed at protecting Aboriginal people from abuse and providing rations, blankets and medicine (Australian Law Reform Commission, 1986 (updated 2012)). Such policies were based on the assumption that Indigenous people were to be treated as British citizens and act within British laws. At this time, missions and reservations were set up to promote Christian ideals and train Aboriginal people as domestic workers and labourers. It was "much later in the century that more formal and extensive policies of protection were formulated, aimed at isolating and segregating "full-blood" Aborigines on reserves and at restricting contact (and interbreeding) between them and outsiders" (Australian Law Reform Commission, 1986 (updated 2012), p. 19). Rather than "protection", the Acts and policies in this era were characterised by extraordinary controls being placed on all aspects of Aboriginal people's lives.

Approximately a century later, policies began to take on different underpinning assumptions and are usually referred to as "assimilation policies" (Australian Law Reform Commission, 1986 (updated 2012)). The policy of removing Aboriginal children from their families (the "Stolen Generations") was the ultimate reflection of this policy era. Policies were based on beliefs that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders should adopt White Australian social, cultural and economic practices, thus removing any trace of Indigeneity from the cultural, biographical, social and political landscape.

For a short period of time in the 1960s, integrationist policies were developed based on the principles of "recognition" and "rights". Integration policies challenged assimilationist assumptions and arrogance on the basis that they took no account of the value or resilience of Aboriginal peoples. Such policies "recognised the value of Aboriginal culture and the right of Aboriginals to retain their languages and customs and maintain their own distinctive communities" (Australian Law Reform Commission, 1986 (updated 2012), p. 20) within Australian society.

In 1968, the first Minister for Aboriginal Affairs was appointed. This followed immediately after the 1967 Referendum (*Constitution Alteration [Aboriginals]*, 1967) that brought about a constitutional alteration to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in State and Commonwealth census counts. In 1972, a Federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs and a Royal Commission were also established to investigate land rights.

Policies in this era of "self-determination" recognised "the fundamental right of Aboriginals to retain their racial identity and traditional lifestyle or, where desired, to adopt wholly or partially a European lifestyle" (Viner, 24 November, 1978). This era was based on the understanding that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people manage their own lives in culturally relevant ways. It aligns with other de-colonising work of the late 20th Century in countries such as Australia, Canada, South Africa, and New Zealand.

More recently, Sullivan (2011) has argued that we are now in a fifth policy era that he refers to as "normalisation". This phase effectively overturns self-determination and aims to recalibrate the relationship between Indigenous Australians, the market, and the state (Altman, 2010; Sullivan, 2011). This era of statistical equality and accountability to the state signifies a total and complete subsumption of Indigenous autonomy by neoliberal market forces (Altman & Fogarty, 2010), by redefining citizens as clients to be managed rather than citizens with rights. As Connell (2013) pointed out, the impact of neoliberalism on schooling has resulted in increased state control through measures such as a "system of tests and examinations [that measure] a set of skills and performances defined within the dominant Anglo upper-middle-class practices of living … [Thus] the school system's capacity for cultural and class diversity is quietly but powerfully constricted" (p. 107).

Current policies are referred to by the Government under the broad umbrella of "Closing the Gap" which is aimed at reducing Indigenous disadvantage. Policies within this framework are aimed at achieving convergence in education, health, housing, and employment levels of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, which the Commonwealth will monitor through measurable targets. Sullivan (2011), however, argued that such policies should be termed "normalisation" policies because they "[encapsulate] the development dilemma for Aboriginal people" (p. 112). That is, while a positive possible outcome of such policy intervention would be that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people could expect the same living conditions as those viewed as achievable by all Australians, a significant challenge is a possible loss of identity as a result of an expectation of social and

cultural conformity with the "mainstream". Thus, in the early part the 21st century, any vestiges of the Australian Government's commitment during the 1970s and 1980s to self-determination have been eroded by these neoliberal policy discourses, with the neoliberal shift to individual as opposed to collective responsibility.

This chapter will explore educational policy moves with reference to these eras, with a view to identifying alternative ways in which schooling policy might be envisaged.

ANALYTICAL APPROACH

Over the past decade, there have been a number of policy analyses focused on schooling for Indigenous Australians. Burridge, Whalan, and Vaughan's (2012) analysis, for example, provided a detailed history of schooling policy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from the pre-Federation colony of New South Wales until the early 21st century. They provide a historical listing with commentary on the effects of the policies from settlement until the 1930s.

Beresford and Gray (2006) also examined models of policy development in Aboriginal education. They argued in support of a new governance model for "Indigenous education involving both horizontal and vertical policy-making structures" (Gray & Beresford, 2008, p. 197) to address the lack of progress in Indigenous educational achievement and the under acknowledgement of the complexity of multiple contributing factors. Vass (2014, 2015) also pointed to the failure of successive policies and reviews of the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to bring about greater improvements in achievement and experience and argued that this is due in part to the problematic deficit discourse of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples embedded in these policies. Through a Critical Race Theory lens, he argues for reframing the "problem" as the racialised nature of Indigenous education and affairs in Australia, rather than "Indigenous education" as such.

In this article, we continue in this tradition of policy analysis by problematising the discourses embedded in policies, reviews, and strategies aimed at addressing inequitable educational outcomes. We take the position that policy is text, and as such analyse it in order to uncover discourses—overt and hidden—and their effects. Discourse is understood here in the poststructuralist tradition—rather than the linguistic tradition (Bacchi, 2005; MacLure, 2003). Thus, this chapter is an "analysis of discourse"—that is, an analysis of social and political narratives—rather than a "discourse analysis" or language analysis (Bacchi, 2005). We focus on analysing ways in which issues of Indigenous education are given particular meaning through policy, in particular in Australia in the 21st century. Our aim is to understand broader socio-cultural representations of the "policy problem"—what Gee (1999, p. 26) referred to as "Discourse with a capital 'D'". This understanding and our approach draws on Foucauldian understandings of discourse as a set of ways to think and represent a particular topic (Foucault, 2002).

Our approach is also informed by Blackmore and Lauder's (2011) case for viewing policy as text, and analysing the text to uncover discourses in political decisions, programmes, or outcomes. It is also influenced by Bacchi's (2009) Foucauldian approach in that we aim to uncover the "problems" represented in policy. Thus, we analyse policy discourses to understand what is said, what is not said, and what cannot be said; the particular social conditions under which discourses arise; and their effects.

Bacchi's (2009) "What's the problem represented to be?" approach is useful to guide such an analysis. It requires six interrelated steps, which she posed as questions (summarised below) to ask of a particular policy (or in our study, a set of policies):

- What's the problem represented to be?
- What presuppositions and assumptions underlie this representation of the "problem"?
- How has this representation come about?
- What is left unproblematic? What are the silences? Can the "problem" be thought about differently?
- What are the effects produced by this representation?
- How has this representation been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?

We apply these questions through an integrated discussion throughout the chapter, finishing with a discussion in the concluding section of the chapter about possible productive ways forward when writing and implementing policy in this area.

The purpose of our policy analysis, then, is to explicate the problematic, dominant, enduring representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners and education in policy over the past 50 plus years; identify the effects of these policy discourses; and present a case for a shift in thinking.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: FROM THE 1967 REFERENDUM TILL 1995

Since the 1967 Referendum, the Commonwealth Government has increasingly taken leadership for policy and legislation related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. In the 20 years between 1975 and 1995, there were three major reviews of Indigenous education, each reflecting their particular historical and political context (Schwab, 1995). The purpose of this section is to: summarise the key foci in Indigenous education policies at this time; identify the recommendations arising from the reviews; and discuss the impact of the policies.

The Education for Aborigines review (National Aboriginal Consultative Group (NACG), 1975) recommended an increase in the number of Aboriginal decision-makers and administrators in educational policy environments. There was also a focus on increasing participation of Indigenous Australians in education professions,

and addressing "educational needs" and "opportunities". This was common language in the field of education at this time, and the beginning of international moves to recognize indigenous people's rights and government responsibility. The "rights" framing in education, drawing on critical pedagogy, commonly focused on fixing the deficits in access and opportunity, shifting in the 1980s to a "self-determination" focus on autonomy and cultural recognition.

This was the start of the development of a national Indigenous education policy (Schwab, 1995) and represented a critical shift in policy focus from assimilation to integration (Australian Law Reform Commission, 1986 (updated 2012)).

Applying Bacchi's (2009) analytical approach, we can say that the "needs" and "opportunities" discourses that underpin the recommendations in this review represent the "problem" in deficit terms. Following Bacchi's six analytical steps, we present an analysis of policy that illustrates our argument that: the problem is represented as sitting with individual learners (Step 1). This presupposes (Step 2) a deficiency of achievement that has come about (Step 3) through lack of participation (at best). What remains unproblematic (Step 4) are the wider historical, social, and political conditions that have contributed to this underachievement. The effects of such a representation (Step 5) are that policy measures required educators to "fix" individual deficiencies situated with Indigenous people. The kind of policy discourse summarised here has been ineffective over decades in achieving its aims, because such discourses fail to problematise the particular social, historical, and political conditions in which the policy discourses are located (Bacchi, 2009)—that is, the differential economic, geographic, and social position of Indigenous people and systemic barriers to participation and success. A more productive rethinking or questioning of such representations of the problem (Step 6) therefore would consider the education system and Australian politics more broadly (rather than individuals). This will be discussed further later in the chapter.

The *Report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Task* (Hughes, 1988) made recommendations aimed at achieving "broad equity in Aboriginal participation and retention rates and educational outcomes by the year 2000" (p. 2). The Task Force recommendations focused largely on equity and community involvement, as well as moving towards involvement of the community, policy implementation, and strategies and resourcing for schools and tertiary institutions. With the implementation of policies specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, there were now the beginnings of a shift of focus to achieving equity of educational outcomes, in addition to equal education access and opportunity, and an associated commitment to resourcing these changes.

This approach also reflects moves of that time towards recognition of cultural diversity in the Australian population. While there is an increased focus on equity of outcomes and community involvement, the emphasis on multiculturalism signals an erosion of sovereignty by equating Indigenous and new migrant experiences. The policy discourses here continue to position the "problem" as one of "fixing"

deficiencies with little consideration of the effects of social context—in this case, on access and outcomes. We suggest that this era foreshadows the "closing the gap" policy agenda of the early 2000's.

The National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (Yunupingu, 1995) is more specific in its recommendations than previous reviews, and draws on language of self-determination, outcomes, and evaluation. This aligns with contemporary political debates about sovereignty. These recommendations continued to promote Aboriginal involvement in policy development and decision-making, with specific reference to "self-determination" and a stronger emphasis on equity of both access and outcomes. From the late 1980s, we also start to see Indigenous education policy focus on accountability and reporting, alongside the increasing adoption of neo-liberal policies, deregulation, and privatisation in public policy.

The timing of this review occurred immediately before the change of government in Australia, from Paul Keating's Labor Government to John Howard's conservative Liberal-National Coalition Government. The Howard Government's approach to Indigenous affairs, characterised by the abolition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Commission (ATSIC), the Native Title Amendment Act 1998, and later the Northern Territory Emergency Response ("The Intervention"), represented a dramatic reshaping of Indigenous affairs and the adoption of "crisis rhetoric" (Maddison, 2012) used to justify extraordinary interventions into the daily lives of Indigenous Australians. Against this reshaping of the relationship between Indigenous Australians and the state, the move to self-determination in education recommended by the Yunupingu Review did not proceed. Instead, it was arguably replaced with a return to protectionism and the heralding of Sullivan's (2011) normalisation era.

Summary: Effects of the Policy Recommendations from 1967 Until 1995

The foci of recommendations from reviews during this period included: increased input from Indigenous people in decision-making, the development of curriculum for Indigenous students and to enhance cultural awareness, involvement of Indigenous communities in education support systems, the development of responsive pedagogies, and increased employment of Indigenous teachers and educational support staff (Schwab, 1995). Despite these commendable aspirations, there have been only small shifts in educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and recommendations did not change substantially in content or direction over that time. We would argue that the recommendations outlined above are critical for supporting the achievement and participation of Indigenous learners. However, they cannot be effective unless the broader social, political, and historical legacies for Indigenous people are acknowledged and considered in the implementation of policy. Foucault's (2002) understanding of how discourse works and Bacchi's framework of questions, therefore, offer us potential to rethink

and reframe the "problem". This will be discussed in more detail in the discussion section of this chapter.

Given the limited effects of policy and the recommendations of the three reviews, it was clear at the time that significant change was needed, not only in the focus of the policies, but also in the way policymakers and educators represented the "problem" of Indigenous achievement (Bacchi, 2009). Thus, policy in this area was in need of major reform, not only in terms of its approach but also in terms of the underpinning discourses driving it. As Schwab (1995) argued in his review of policies during this period, it is essential for policymakers to take account of historical exclusion and marginalisation, the demographic of Indigenous Australians, the locational disadvantage for many, and the lack of recognition, inclusion, and respect evident in many Australian schooling contexts.

Now—a further 20 years on—the educational achievement of Indigenous learners continues to be presented as a policy problem, for example, in the "Close the Gap" strategy (Council of Australian Governments, 2012), which represents the "problem" as one of individual responsibility and follows a neoliberal accountability agenda. It is, therefore, timely to review the effectiveness of key policies and initiatives that have targeted change and to consider what further reforms would bring about the desired shifts. The analysis that follows examines both persistent discourses about the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and also the focus of policy through an examination of three overarching educational policy statements that guided schooling over the following 20 years.

A FURTHER 20 YEARS OF COMMONWEALTH EDUCATIONAL POLICY: 1995 TO THE PRESENT

Since the period discussed in the previous section—1967–1995—many more reviews and strategies have been published in relation to Indigenous education (such as, Buckskin, Hughes, & Rigney, 2009; Department of Education Science and Training, 2003; Hughes, 1996; Ministerial Council on Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs & Education Services Australia, 2010; Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2000). Recommendations variously focus on outcomes, educational action plans, directions and strategies, literacy and numeracy targets, and education and training opportunities for staff.

Framed by the "Closing the Gap" strategy (Council of Australian Governments, 2009), under the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA), education and other social policies have been developed almost exclusively within the discourse of statistical equality—that is, equal educational achievement. During this period, schooling policies more broadly have been driven by three Commonwealth Declarations (Council of Australian Governments, 2012). These Declarations incorporate recommendations for Indigenous education from broader national

policies and reviews, including "Closing the Gap", and are the focus of the following section of this article.

The Declarations (1989, 1999, and 2008)

Having shown in the earlier section that the policies from 1967–1995 had little significant effect on the achievement levels of Indigenous students, we now examine what, if anything, has changed in policy discourses and effects in the past 20 years.

Building on previous policy work by Beresford and Gray (2006) and Vass (2014), we articulate discourses and themes in Commonwealth Indigenous education policy in this period. What follows is, first, a summary of the goals from Declarations (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 1989, 1999, 2008) and how they position Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures in relation to education. We see these as sitting within three broad discourses—multiculturalism, equal access, and equity of outcomes. The summaries are followed by a discussion of the extent to which the goals reflect or extend on the recommendations in the reviews of the previous period. We finish with a mapping on to the historical policy eras outlined in the introduction, and the themes in the recommendations from the 1975, 1988, and 1995 reviews (Hughes, 1988; National Aboriginal Consultative Group (NACG), 1975; Yunupingu, 1995).

The Declarations, like many other policy statements, look both to the past and to the future of education in Australia. That is, past discourses embedded in policy, practice, and the social and economic context of the previous 9–10 years, inform and influence current policies through a recursive process. At the same time, each Declaration sets out the vision, aspirations and goals for the decade ahead.

Hobart declaration – discourses of multiculturalism. The Hobart Declaration (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 1989) included the following statement (Agreed National Goal #8 of 10) about education for and about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students:

> To provide students with an understanding and respect for our cultural heritage including the particular cultural background of Aboriginal and ethnic groups. (p. 2)

Given the successive migrations of refugees from South East Asia in the 1970s and 1980s, and the increasing political activism by and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, this statement addressed an important need in Australia—the education of young people to understand and respect peoples with non-White heritage. While recognition of the cultural heritage of Indigenous students was evident in this statement, the conflation of all recent migrant ethnic groups reflects the educational narrative of the time and represents a discourse of multiculturalism. This was an important narrative at the time, given the historical positioning of non-White migrant Australians in such legislation as the "White Australia" policy (*Immigration*

Restriction Act, 1901). However, the effect of such policies in colonised nations is that they can position the experience of First Nations people alongside those of migrants and refugees. This is problematic, as multiculturalism does not recognise First Nations status. That is, whilst all people of colour are subject to racialised representations of a White majority population, the primary issue with including Indigenous peoples, histories, and perspectives in the "cultural diversity" approach is that this is silent on matters of sovereignty and dispossession from the political, economic, cultural, social, and physical landscape (Vass, 2014).

The inclusion of "cultural awareness programmes" in the Hobart Declaration responded, to some degree, to one of the key recommendations emerging from the previous reviews (Hughes, 1988; National Aboriginal Consultative Group (NACG), 1975; Yunupingu, 1995). The Declaration also reflected the historical policy eras of assimilation (by denying Indigenous difference) and integration (by recognising and representing Indigenous peoples in schooling curricula and community involvement). However, it failed to recognise sovereignty and self-determination, thus, taking little account of historical injustices, the impact of the younger demographic and locational disadvantage in the Indigenous population (Schwab, 1995), and the distinct and unique (hi)stories of First Australians.

Thus, while acknowledgement through policy of "cultural appropriateness" in schools can occur through respect and recognition, little can change in terms of educational outcome statistics until fundamental changes are made in the way policymakers frame the "problem" (Bacchi, 2009; Vass, 2014).

Adelaide declaration – discourses of equality of access and opportunity. Ten years later, the Adelaide Declaration (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 1999) moved to include a discourse of equal opportunity and access, as described in the following extracts from Goal 3:

> Goal 3: Schooling should be socially just, so that:
>
> 3.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have equitable access to, and opportunities in, schooling so that their learning outcomes improve and, over time, match those of other students
>
> 3.4 all students understand and acknowledge the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures to Australian society and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to and benefit from, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. (p. 3)

By this stage, the policy goals became two-pronged, focusing on (1) addressing access and opportunities for the schooling of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and (2) educating all Australians to understand and respect Indigenous histories, peoples, and cultures. These goals continued to reflect the discourses of earlier reviews (Hughes, 1988; National Aboriginal Consultative Group (NACG), 1975) and did not significantly diverge from the goals established by the 1989 Hobart

Declaration. That is, while well-intended and necessary for addressing statistical inequality—the "achievement gap"—the goals continued to be underpinned by assumptions that addressing differences represented in Indigenous learners will affect equitable achievement.

A focus on consultation and Indigenous representation did become increasingly evident with the Adelaide Declaration, along with moves to increase numbers of Indigenous educators and strengthen research in the field (Department of Education Science and Training, 2003; Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2000). However, the Declaration did not engage with recommendations to consider culture, or the impact of historical inequities and dispossession (Hughes, 1988; National Aboriginal Consultative Group (NACG), 1975; Yunupingu, 1995). Given that there was little change in the intent or goals of this Declaration, the limited improvement in educational outcomes over this period is unsurprising. "Recognition", "representation" and "access", while critical steps towards equity, are insufficient to bring about equity of educational achievement because they do not take account of the specific social conditions under which the policy discourses arise (Foucault, 2002).

Melbourne declaration – discourses of equitable outcomes. The Melbourne Declaration (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2008), by contrast, more comprehensively addressed the complexity of achieving the goals of equitable educational outcomes, and the mechanisms needed to achieve this. This is reflected in three sections of the Declaration—the Preamble, the Goals, and the Commitment to Action.

The Preamble summarised the two goals as: valuing Australia's Indigenous cultures and addressing the failure "to improve educational outcomes for many Indigenous Australians" (p. 4).

The language used focuses on equity of educational outcomes. This was an important shift, as it implied a recognition that access and opportunity were inadequate in and of themselves to bring about changes in outcomes. The Melbourne Declaration extended this by also including: local cultural knowledge, partnerships, early childhood educational opportunities, and pedagogies informed by local Indigenous knowledges.

What is notable here is that the two Adelaide Declaration (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 1999) goals for Indigenous education still drove the 2008 Declaration. However, the more recent Declaration also included more specific detail of what this looks like:

Goal 1 relates to improving the educational achievement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners by: building on local cultural knowledge and experience of Indigenous students, promoting high expectations for Indigenous students' learning outcomes, and ensuring these improve to match those of other students.

Goal 2 concerns educating the wider Australian community so that they "understand and acknowledge the value of Indigenous cultures and possess the

knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians" (p. 9).

The Commitment for Action in this Declaration included eight actions to achieve the goals. While these related to all students, three included specific reference to young Indigenous Australians. These involved: developing stronger partnerships—between schools and Indigenous communities, strengthening early childhood education, and improving educational outcomes, participation, community engagement, and support.

This provides us with insights into underpinning principles for the goals. That is, while there was now acknowledgement of the younger demographic and the importance of cultural awareness, the Declaration continued to imply that educational outcomes will be improved by "fixing" the educational experiences of Indigenous Australians by increasing understanding and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories, and cultures. Without detracting from an overdue focus on recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, histories, and cultures in curriculum and pedagogy, we also note that teacher quality is the most important within-school factor for improving student outcomes (Hattie, 2002). However, placing the responsibility on to teachers and schools in this way risks locating the "problem" within educational settings rather than the wider social context of Australia.

At the same time as articulating more clearly how educational outcomes for Indigenous learners might be improved, the policy environment had moved by this time well into neo-liberalism with extraordinary levels of State intervention in Indigenous affairs. That is, neo-liberalism's focus on individual responsibility and accountability expectations is evident in the detail of this Declaration with requirements by State and Commonwealth education authorities to provide evidence of achieving objectives associated with its goals. Thus, there is a somewhat paradoxical juxtaposition of a powerful equity agenda with a compliance agenda (Patrick, 2010). As such, we have now clearly entered the fifth policy era of normalisation (Sullivan, 2011).

Summary. While the five recommendations from the reviews of the 1967–1995 period (Hughes, 1988; National Aboriginal Consultative Group (NACG), 1975; Yunupingu, 1995) are embedded across the three Declarations, the language has shifted, in line with an increasingly neo-liberal discourse (Connell, 2013) to a focus on compliance and the idea that consultation, representation, support structures, research, and specific curriculum will bring about these changes (that is, "closing the gap"). However, the discourses continued to reflect those of the earlier recommendations—and the historical discourses outlined in the introduction to this article.

Apart from increased Year 12 attainment rates and scattered increases in educational achievement, there is little evidence that these policies and goals have had an impact to the extent intended: out of the six "Closing the Gap" targets established in 2008, only two are on track to be met (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2015) (see Table 1). Out of the four education targets, only one is

on track to be met—that is, the aim for a halving of the gap in Year 12 attainment rates. It is pertinent to note that the reportage of this target as "on track" does not specify Year 12 attainment rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, which, in the most recently published Social Trends report, sat at 31% and 76% respectively (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011).

It is also interesting to note the addition in 2014 of a new target relating to the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance. In their analysis of attendance and achievement data from the MySchool website, Ladwig and Luke (2014, p. 193) demonstrate, the unlikeliness of current policies around attendance alone to improve achievement.

Table 1. Progress on closing the gap targets

Target	*Target year*	*On track*
Close the gap in life expectancy within a generation	2031	No
Halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade	2018	Yes
Ensure access for all Indigenous four-year-olds in remote communities to early childhood education	2013	No (Expired unmet, new target 2016)
Close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance within five years	2018	No (New target 2014)
Halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for Indigenous students	2018	No
Halve the gap for Indigenous Australians aged 20–24 in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates	2020	Yes
Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians	2018	No

Source: The Prime Minister's Closing the Gap reports (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2015, 2016)

The recommendations of earlier reviews discussed in the previous section, and the goals of the Declarations identified critically important measures for changing educational outcomes for Indigenous learners. However, alone they are insufficient, as evidenced by the progress on "Closing the Gap" targets and previous policy analyses. There is also little evidence in the Declarations that policymakers have shifted thinking from models that position Indigenous learners and underachievement as the problem. As such, deficit framing of Indigenous peoples in Australia continues in education policy.

Our analysis of successive goals for schooling and their historical tracings foregrounds current policies that emerged out of the most recent Declaration. The findings of our analysis also support Sanders and Hunt's (2010) analysis of

generational revolutions in Indigenous affairs. Thus, we suggest that Indigenous education policies, which emerged at the end of the self-determination era, have now been reimagined wholly within a discourse defined by narratives of failure, the pursuit of statistical equality, the dominance of ideology over evidence, and the incorporation of Indigenous people into the market economy (Maddison, 2012; Partridge, 2013; Sullivan, 2011; Watson, 2009).

We now turn briefly to the recently endorsed National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2016) and the Australian Curriculum (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2016). This provides an illustration of how tracings of past policy discourses manifest themselves in practice.

CURRENT POLICY MOMENT: AITSL STANDARDS AND THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

While each State and Territory had their own sets of professional standards for teachers, these were replaced in 2011 by national teacher education standards, created following the Melbourne Declaration (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2008). As discussed earlier, the Declarations were both reflective of past policy discourses and aspirational in terms of the implementation of future policy. Thus, current educational policy for schooling, in particular the National Professional Standards for Teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011, 2016) and the Australian Curriculum (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2016) are a manifestation of the 2008 Melbourne Declaration intent, through implementation in practice.

The professional standards and the Australian Curriculum were implemented to replace previous State and Territory standards and curricula (although States and Territories have developed their own interpretations of the national curriculum document). Two of the National Standards directly refer to Indigenous education with the same two foci as the Melbourne Declaration—that is, teachers are expected to demonstrate competence in using: (NPST 1.4) Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and to (NPST 2.4) Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2016). How teachers demonstrate this varies at each of four career stages, and ranges from developing knowledge in each area to leading initiatives and teaching programmes that address the Standards.

It is too early to judge the impact of these Professional Standards on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' educational achievement and teacher knowledge and attitudes towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories, and cultures. However, what is of interest to us is the extent to which the policy discourses, recommendations, and goals from the previous 50 years are similar with regards to educational outcomes.

As argued in the previous section, the three Declarations continued to, first, position Indigenous learners as differently deficit and amenable to a "one size fits all" approach to teaching "them". As Vass (2012) has pointed out, the use of the term "Indigenous education" in this context is highly problematic because of the ways in which it is used to racialise and, we would argue, theorise Indigenous students in deficit and essentialist ways. Further, responsibility for addressing inequities in educational opportunity, access, and performance continues to be located with teachers and schools. This is also dangerous within the current neo-liberal climate and successive Governments' criticism of teacher and teacher education quality—that is, an environment of high compliance and low trust.

As demonstrated in this policy analysis and by Schwab (1995), Vass (2014) and others, despite continued attempts, little has changed in terms of educational achievement for many Indigenous learners. This suggests to us that rather than persisting with policy agendas that have proven ineffective over the past 50 or more years, a reframing and rethinking is needed.

WHERE TO FROM HERE? IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY REPRESENTATIONS

Applying a Bacchian approach to policy analysis (Bacchi, 2009), we have explored the representation of the issue that underlies a range of Australian education policies in this area since 1967, explicating the embedded presuppositions, how the representations of policy problem have come about, what is left unproblematised, and the effects (or lack of effect) of such policies. This analysis of the specificities for one country offers lessons for both local and global learning the 21st century.

In this section we discuss how this policy problem might be disrupted, rethought and reframed, and what this might mean in and for future policy writing. It should be noted that our task in this chapter has been to explicate how policy represents issues, not to address how to "do" Indigenous education in Australia. As such, our offerings in this section relate to three key policy representations and some observations about how we might bring about the desired changes in learning for indigenous learners—both locally and globally—as the 21st century progresses.

We argue that the lack of significant progress in the participation and achievement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners is due first to the policy "problem" being represented as one in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are deficient when compared to other sections of the Australian population. Secondly, we argue that to address the policy "problem", the place of Indigenous knowledge and sovereignty need to be considered and placed firmly to the fore in schooling. Thirdly, we point out that taking account of a history of exclusion is a critical addition to developing awareness and respect, and strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

As Vass (2012) pointed out, use of the term "Indigenous education" alone perpetuates a deficit "regime of truth" that contributes to "sustaining deficit assumptions regarding the engagement and outcomes of Indigenous students within

Australian schools" (p. 85). We similarly contest that successive policies—over at least the past 50 years—contribute to such deficit framing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners and learning in Australia. Thus, it is critical to find different ways of framing learners—through policy and in practice.

What is needed, then, is a rethinking and re-representation of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian knowledges, histories, and peoples, for example in curriculum. It also requires a genuine recognition of Indigenous sovereignty through equal partnerships—that is, policies framed by self-determination and sovereignty rather than those that position Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as "deficiently other".

In our analysis, we have argued that the discourses underpinning policy continue to reflect the historical eras of assimilation and its recent manifestation as normalisation (Australian Law Reform Commission, 1986 (updated 2012); Sullivan, 2011). Such discourses have proven to be inadequate for achieving the intended task. We claim that these discourses are problematic because they do not take account of the impact of generational dispossession or Indigenous sovereignty. Further, these discourses function to silence the voices in Australian history that incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

It needs to be noted that as long ago as 1995, Schwab (and others) recommended that policymakers take account of historical, demographic, and locational disadvantages for Indigenous Australians, as well as addressing the lack of recognition, inclusion, and respect in Australian schooling contexts. While most of these recommendations are evident in policy, what is missing is a change in the discourses that underpins policy statements. We argue that this is largely because policy continues to position Indigenous learners as differently deficient and places responsibility on individual teachers, schools, and communities to effect change. This, therefore, does not address the broader, complex societal context that is silently racialised.

We have argued, influenced by Bacchi's (2009) Foucauldian approach, that the policy "problem" should be constructed differently in order to enable us to think more clearly about what is needed in practice. What we have demonstrated, through this analysis of historical policy discourses, supports and builds on similar cases presented by Schwab (1995), Beresford and Gray (2012) and Vass (2012), for instance. It was not our intent to provide practice solutions in the chapter—although we recognise that research-informed changes are needed going forward. What is needed, in order for practice solutions to be found, is the rethinking and re-representation of discourses of indigenous learning, learners, and education within policy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all those who provided feedback on the project, in particular Dr Emily Gray and Dr Deana Leahy, whose critical feedback on this chapter were invaluable. We would also like to thank the reviewers for insightful and thoughtful advice.

NOTE

[1] The authors recognize that the terms "Indigenous education", "Indigenous Australians" and "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people" do not respect the diversity of experiences and histories of Australia's First Nations people. We also recognise the contested and contingent nature of these phrases. The terms "Indigenous" and "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people" are used interchangeably to assist readability.

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