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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Aboriginal people's aspirations and the Australian Curriculum: a critical analysis

Chloe Parkinson[1] · Tiffany Jones[2]

Abstract A culturally inclusive curriculum has increasingly been considered beneficial to all students. The national Australian Curriculum set out to be inclusive, containing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority. Some education discourses can assume however that inclusion is an unproblematic good, and a true representation of the 'reality' of Aboriginal Peoples' lived experiences and aspirations. This article presents a study exploring how the aspirations of Aboriginal people are supported in dominant education discourses mobilised within the Australian Curriculum. The study firstly applied Critical Discourse Analysis to the Curriculum policy corpus, to explore the Indigenous education discourses privileged and marginalised within it. It then utilised informant interviews with members of an Aboriginal community, to explore their education aspirations for the community's children. The results revealed a critical gap between the Curriculum's positioning of Aboriginal knowledges, histories and cultures; and the Aboriginal community's aspirations for their children's education. They highlight the need for the Curriculum to offer critical-oriented learning opportunities whilst remaining flexible, to support localised aspirations and approaches.

Keywords Curriculum · Indigenous education · Discourse · Aspiration

✉ Chloe Parkinson
  cparkin4@myune.edu.au

  Tiffany Jones
  tiffany.jones@mq.edu.au

1 School of Education, University of New England, Armidale, NSW 2351, Australia

2 ARC DECRA Fellow, Department of Educational Studies, Macquarie University, North Ryde, NSW 2109, Australia

1 Introduction and background

The oppressive history of education for Australia's Aboriginal Peoples is well documented, as is the resultant legacy of intergenerational education alienation and underachievement (Bodkin-Andrews and Carlson 2016). A raft of contemporary policies, programs and initiatives have been deployed to address the significant disadvantages facing Aboriginal Peoples, though education sectors continue to fail many Aboriginal students (Garlett 2012). In seeking to improve Aboriginal students' educational outcomes, the majority of these policies and programs have been directed at Aboriginal students, parents and caregivers (Price 2012), rather than education systems. Critics however suggest an undeniable connection between 'culturally unresponsive curriculum and the largely uninterrupted trajectory of Indigenous student underachievement' (Lowe et al. 2014). Whilst no longer so overt or deliberate, contemporary education systems maintain vestiges of assimilation and institutionalised racism. Nevertheless, systems recognise the need to be culturally inclusive of Aboriginal students' cultures, languages and identity, for these students to achieve success (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs 2010).

The national Australian Curriculum (the Curriculum) claims to offer an education of excellence and equity, and takes measures to include Indigenous content across the curriculum. The *Melbourne Declaration*, from which the Curriculum developed, states that all students should 'understand and acknowledge the value of Indigenous cultures, and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, reconciliation' (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA] 2008). To this end, the Curriculum identifies Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures as a cross-curriculum priority. In creating a culturally inclusive Curriculum which considers this cross-curriculum priority in meaningful and respectful ways, challenges have arisen. Concerns include the design process of the Curriculum, associated perceived relevance and authentic inclusion of the cross-curriculum priority (Maxwell 2014; Casinader 2016); lack of accountability given the cross-curriculum priority's non-assessable nature (Salter and Maxwell 2015); the quantity and quality of cross-curriculum priority content (Lowe et al. 2014; Lowe and Yunkaporta 2013); and the subjective positioning of Indigenous Peoples (Peacock et al. 2015). It is thus necessary to critically analyse how the Curriculum positions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, histories and cultures.

The concept of 'cultural inclusiveness' has limitations however, as it retains 'a sense of the state allowing something from the margins to be included within the dominant mainstream' (Vass 2012). Brayboy and Castagno (2009) call for 'culturally responsive schooling', which 'builds a bridge' between schooling and a child's home culture by using localised language and culture to inform appropriate education practices. It is necessary to examine how cognisant education is of the connections between schooling and local community aspirations, in order to ensure the system responds to the wants, needs and values of Aboriginal Peoples (Fogarty 2010). In recognising learners' aspirations within a localised community context, an education system can develop which sees everyone belong, rather than insisting everyone belong to it (Bat and Guenther 2013). Therefore, the doctoral research (Parkinson 2017) reported here aimed to explore how the aspirations of Aboriginal people are supported in dominant Indigenous education discourses of the Curriculum.

2 Research questions

Three key research questions emerged from this aim:

1. Which different Indigenous education discourses are privileged or marginalised in the construction of Aboriginal knowledges, histories and cultures in the Curriculum?
2. Which Indigenous education discourses do Aboriginal community members draw upon in expressing their education aspirations for the community's children?
3. Do curriculum and community discourses align?

The first research question (Part A) explored the prevalence of Indigenous education discourses within the Curriculum, recognising the complexity of the policy as discursive (Jones 2013). It was just as significant to explore 'what is' as 'what is not,' to interrogate the Curriculum's hegemony. The second research question (Part B) explored the discourses drawn upon by members of an Aboriginal community in their articulations of education aspirations for the community's children. The third research question bridged Parts A and B; encouraging conversations of critique amongst all stakeholders.

3 Conceptual framework

The study was grounded in critical theory; concerned with addressing unequal relations of power and marginalisation, and questioning the truth positions of the dominant group in society. It considered the representation and positioning of Aboriginal Peoples, their knowledges, histories and cultures within the national Curriculum, and how such representation is reflective of the desires of Aboriginal people. In Part A, the study applied Fairclough's model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to the Curriculum. CDA highlights the discursive features of inequality and disparity in society by detecting the linguistic means used by those privileged in society to maintain such inequality (Wodak and Meyer 2009). This framing offered a means of examining how curriculum can contribute to the dominance of a particular social group and the marginalisation of others.

In Part B, the study drew upon advocacy ethnography and narrative portraits, in a community-based investigation exploring the education aspirations of Aboriginal people. The community-based investigation was designed to enhance the Curriculum policy corpus under investigation, by adding supplementary data as further discourse samples (Fairclough 1992). It attempted to engage Aboriginal people in the research, to avoid the danger of utilising a Western methodology to analyse Western data relating to Aboriginal Peoples without dialogue with those implicated in such a study. The interdisciplinary nature of CDA was also addressed by this addition, by drawing on a core CDA approach complemented by Indigenous research principles (de Melo Resende 2010). Critical sociological literature was used to conceptualise aspirations as cultural capacity, rather than simply an individual motivational trait connected to individual wants, choices and preferences (Appadurai 2004). This study took the position that a person's cultural capacity to imagine futures is framed by their social, economic and cultural context. That community members have aspirations for the education of their children was seen as a given, as was their cultural capital. Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth Framework highlights the multiple cultural capitals residing in communities. Drawing on this strengths-based model, aspiration was defined as 'the ability to hold onto hope in the face of structured inequality and often without the means to make such dreams a reality' (Yosso 2005) and framed as a positive force in the lives of young people. In Aboriginal communities, aspiration is a source of resilience and a collective process (Osborne

and Guenther 2013a), with collective aspirations tied to land, cultural rights, education and employment.

4 Indigenous research principles and positioning

Research, linked to imperialism and colonialism, has traditionally been exploitative of Indigenous Peoples, their knowledges and cultures (Smith 2012). More recently, a growing number of Indigenous Peoples have actively sought methods to disrupt this history by becoming researchers themselves, to question Western research and tell more liberating stories (Kaomea 2016). Indigenous research methodologies have developed, which are connected to a particular Indigenous group, their knowledges and cultures and use techniques drawn from their traditions (Wilson 2008). Non-Indigenous researchers in this field may embrace the critical theory tradition as many Indigenous researchers do (Nakata 2012), but should resist the colonising potential of developing outsiders' Indigenous research methodologies.

The lead researcher approached this study from an Anglo middle-class background. As a beginning teacher and later curriculum leader in an Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory, I became closely acquainted with the Curriculum as I worked with staff to implement the policy alongside the school's existing cultural programs. My Whiteness impacted upon my beliefs and assumptions, my day-to-day practices and ultimately the students in front of me. I became aware that the role I undertook made me complicit in the continued colonisation of Indigenous Peoples through education. This experience impacted how I positioned myself within the research. Atkinson (2002) notes that research within Aboriginal communities by non-indigenous researchers, if not informed by Aboriginal Peoples, can be problematic. Others are more definitive—that Indigenous research must be undertaken by Indigenous Peoples (Jones 2012). Some see the involvement of non-Indigenous people in educational research as necessary for creative educational change, given the current power imbalance in favour of non-Indigenous people (Hotere-Barnes 2015). Rigney (1999) affirms that critical research by non-Indigenous Australians may still be carried out, if that research genuinely contributes to Indigenous Australians' self-determination. Accepting this standpoint, the study attempted to give voice to Aboriginal people whilst assessing their representation within the Curriculum, through a relationship with one particular community. It contributed an ethical approach for non-Indigenous researchers, through methodological choices that named researchers' positions and privileged informants' voices. It also utilised ethical procedures such as the use of humanising pseudonyms, following local community protocols, and ensuring a Community Reference Group guided the research.

5 Indigenous education discourse taxonomy

In order to respond to each research question, and bridge a conversation between the analysis of the Australian Curriculum policy corpus and the education aspirations of a community, an Indigenous education discourse taxonomy was developed. In education discourse analysis, it is useful to have a succinct conceptual framework which allows the exploration of multiple views of education (Jones 2013). Absent from the literature on Indigenous education however were attempts to critically conceptualise the field's numerous approaches, and draw them together into a cohesive framework (Beresford and Gray 2006). This necessitated the need for the development of a new Indigenous education discourse taxonomy, to

be used as a discourse identification tool. An extensive literature review and mapping work saw the following discourses identified and a taxonomy created specifically for this study: Intercultural/Both-ways, Critical Multicultural, Multilingual Multicultural, Human Rights, Empowerment, Liberal Multicultural, Inclusive, Neoliberal Assimilationist and Assimilative Monolingual. The taxonomy is framed by Jones' (2013) 'Four Education Orientations' framework, with the identified discourses falling within postmodern, critical, liberal or conservative education orientations (see Table 1). The organisation and cohesiveness of the taxonomy supported the analyses of both the Australian Curriculum policy corpus and the education aspirations of community members, and allowed for the findings of Parts A and B to be considered jointly in a much broader discussion of Indigenous justice within curriculum.

5.1 Postmodern

The postmodern orientation emerged in the 1980s. Postmodernist education seeks to address particular issues left unresolved by modernism's straightforward approach to power, authority, patriarchy, identity, ethics, and the (re)production of cultural patterns within the 'consecrated' dominant discourse (Boboc 2012). Centred on critiquing notions of reality, social values and practices are deconstructed to reveal their underpinning discursive assumptions (Jones 2013). The very notions of power, authority and identity are called into question, and grand narratives (which reproduce relations of domination, subordination and inequality) are rejected (Boboc 2012; Giroux 1992). It embraces a democratic dialogic pedagogy, hoping to provoke a meeting of consciousness whereby the teacher and student can create new ontological possibilities (Matusov 2014). Numerous realities and perspectives are taught. Culture and identity are explored and opened up, providing opportunities for creative change and re-organisation (Jones 2013). This orientation allows the student to deconstruct and recreate norms, and co-construct knowledge. Postmodern Indigenous education discourses include the Intercultural/Both-ways Discourse.

5.2 Critical

The critical orientation to education has its roots in the foundational theoretical work of the Frankfurt School (Foley et al. 2015). It took hold in the 1970s, within and alongside social reform movements of the 'post-civil-rights' era, class system reforms, feminism and gay liberation (Jones 2013). The critical orientation to education broadly seeks to reveal relations of power and inequality as manifested in education (Apple et al. 2009). It redresses the marginalisation of particular social groups through necessary whole-school reform approaches. These are based on the premise that students be educated to be active citizens and agents for social change (Foley et al. 2015). Students are asked to critically evaluate the structures, social orders and values of society and undertake activism to bring about equality, thus developing their critical social awareness and engagement in action for social improvement (Kemmis et al. 1983). In this way the critical orientation to education challenges inequitable social structures and can be used to empower and emancipate traditionally marginalised groups in society (Kemmis and Fitzclarence 1986; Jones 2013). Increasingly rights-based, critical Indigenous education discourses include Critical Multicultural, Multilingual Multicultural, Human Rights and Empowerment.

Table 1 Indigenous education discourse taxonomy

Education orientation	Indigenous education discourse	Description
Postmodern: deconstructs and recreates norms	Intercultural/Both-ways	This approach sees Indigenous and settler cultures taught in equal partnership in which neither presumes dominance. It promotes an equal exchange of ideas in a neutral, negotiated space, where multiple perspectives are interrogated. It aims to strengthen Indigenous students' identity while allowing them freedom to pursue their own aspirations. Intercultural/Both-ways education allows students to deconstruct and recreate realities. Pedagogy is centered on referring to and the interrogation of multiple perspectives, comparing and contrasting, and direct cultural discussion. In this approach, schooling is directed by Indigenous peoples. They are involved in developing schooling structures, learning frameworks, curriculum etc. There is a strong community involvement in all aspects of schooling
Critical: redresses marginalisation	Critical Multicultural	This approach questions unequal power structures within society and how these construct identity, difference and otherness. It is emancipatory in nature, pushing back against institutionalised forms of domination. It aims to deconstruct power dynamics, privilege and oppression both within schooling and wider society, and provide students with strategies of resistance against and transformation of oppressive social arrangements. Pedagogy is centered on equity-oriented, investigative activities. Indigenous peoples participate in mainstream schooling contexts, and are grouped with all students considered ethnically or racially diverse. They may be involved in interrogating power structures. By interrogating Eurocentric bias, the differentiated cultural knowledge of Indigenous peoples is acknowledged
	Multilingual Multicultural	This approach uses two or more languages as the languages of instruction (both settler language and mother-tongue/s) to not only teach the languages themselves but also content. It aims to allow students to be multi-literate. It is a vehicle to prepare Indigenous children for mainstream success while being active participants in the maintenance of their minority culture and language/s. Pedagogy is centred on authentic and reciprocal interactions, and dual/multi language use. There is strong Indigenous involvement in all aspects of schooling. Indigenous peoples may be literacy workers, literature production supervisors, linguists, teacher-linguists etc. Multilingual education values and respects Indigenous peoples and their cultures. It ensures support for Indigenous language maintenance. Literacy in a student's first language/s is valued, with multilingual education not simply a means of bridging or transitioning to English

Table 1 continued

Education orientation	Indigenous education discourse	Description
	Human Rights	This approach is based on Indigenous peoples having the right to all levels of education, and rights in education. Rights in education challenge dominant norms and involve protecting, respecting and responding to students' needs, cultures, languages and beliefs. It aims to allow Indigenous peoples to participate in all levels of schooling without discrimination, to receive a quality education which benefits not only the individual student but assists in achieving self-determination and community development. Pedagogy is centered on rights-based education in a rights-respecting environment, cooperative learning, inquiry, debate, and evaluation. Indigenous people are free to participate in all levels of education without prejudice or discrimination—leadership, policy, curriculum, teaching, government, support workers etc. They have strong involvement in systems that seek to redress marginalisation and respond to students' needs and backgrounds. Indigenous peoples are equal to all other peoples and individuals, enjoying the same rights as all others, without discrimination
	Empowerment	This approach develops students' self-belief and positive identity formation to build their capacity to overcome barriers to success. It targets individual, social and systemic change. It aims to not only improve upon Indigenous students' self-esteem, but to also effect social change at organizational and community levels. Pedagogy is centered on a critical-democratic pedagogy, cooperative learning, hands-on activities with a practical real-world orientation, and reciprocal interactions. Indigenous peoples have strong participation within non-Indigenous education constructs, with community participation the key to an empowering education. Educators, parents/carers and community members work as partners in the education process. Students are educated in an environment in which difference is actively sought, where they can be proud of their Indigenous cultural and linguistic heritage. They have the potential to be change agents and social critics
Liberal: personal development	Liberal Multicultural	This approach promotes educational equality for all students regardless of ethnic, racial or cultural characteristics. Embedded in cultural pluralism, it aims to recognise and celebrate cultural, ethnic and racial diversity. It creates equitable opportunities for all students regardless of difference, and reduces prejudice and discrimination. Pedagogy is centered on safe and supportive practices, special events and days celebrating diversity. Indigenous peoples participate in mainstream schooling contexts, though there is minimal involvement in this approach—Indigenous peoples are grouped with all considered ethnically or racially diverse. Studies suggest Indigenous peoples seen as being outside of multicultural education. Approaches to and views of liberal multicultural education differ—it promotes the celebration of difference but Indigenous peoples can at times be included in a 'trivial' manner

Table 1 continued

Education orientation	Indigenous education discourse	Description
	Inclusive	This approach promotes educational equality for all students. Diversity in an inclusive approach can mean any student who is vulnerable to marginalization because of their race, gender, sexuality, social or economic status, special needs or other characteristic. It aims to challenge social justice and attempts to provide safe, supportive learning environments in which there is an understanding of and appreciation for diversity. Pedagogy is centred on safe and supportive practices, and open-ended tasks. Indigenous people are included within inclusive education along with all others deemed vulnerable to marginalisation—they participate in and are supported within mainstream schooling constructs. The possibility of the marginalisation of Indigenous peoples within education and society is recognised, and the cultural/linguistic diversity of Indigenous peoples is acknowledged and respected
Conservative: transmits dominant ideas	Neoliberal Assimilationist	In this approach the Indigenous student is seen as any other, needing to be instilled with the knowledge, skills, values and disposition considered important by those dominant in society. This preparation enables the student to function effectively as a citizen and as part of the workforce. The status quo is maintained. Pedagogy is centered on 'traditional' teaching methods, the teacher as authoritarian approach, and standardised assessment. Indigenous students are present in mainstream schooling contexts. There is little room for community/parent involvement. Indigenous peoples are like any other citizen, needing to be up-skilled to be active participants in society and contribute to the economy. Students are removed from historical and geographical influences and the context in which Indigenous peoples are situated
	Assimilative Monolingual	This approach involves the privileging of the dominant (settler) culture's language over Indigenous languages. By imposing normative language practices and English-only policies, Indigenous languages are marginalised within schooling. It aims to improve English literacy, to allow students to participate effectively in education and wider society. The status quo is maintained. Pedagogy is centered on the teacher as authoritarian approach, standardised assessment and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. Indigenous students are present in mainstream monolingual schooling. There is little room for community/parent involvement. Indigenous peoples are 'lacking', with their language backgrounds seen as an impediment to success in mainstream society

5.3 Liberal

Popularised in education policy in the 1960s, liberalism is closely tied to the development of the modern world (Browning 2000). The liberal orientation to education sees the goal of education as a holistic endeavour preparing the 'whole' student for life as an autonomous being, as opposed to more traditional and conservative views of education as preparation for work (Kemmis and Fitzclarence 1986). The liberal dream is to create 'daring, self-asserting, self-confident and self-reliant humans' (Bauman 2005). Jones (2013) characterises the liberal education orientation as one which focuses on nurturing students' intellectual, emotional, social and living skills, as well as their ability to choose their own values and beliefs. The individual excellence of each student is promoted. Teachers facilitate the development of students' knowledge and skills, and their ability to participate effectively in society's improvement. Whilst the liberal orientation to education sees society as in need of improvement, students are engaged in less radical methods than those of the critical orientation, identifying social structures in need of reform without addressing questions of radical change (Jones 2013). Liberal Indigenous education discourses include Liberal Multicultural and Inclusive.

5.4 Conservative

Prior to the 1960s, the conservative orientation to education was dominant. Conservatism is largely based on a romantic evaluation of the past and calls for a return to a common culture and traditional values (as conceptualised by the Western tradition) (Apple 2005). This conservative position is threatened by the move towards cultural pluralism, as it 'rests on the assumption that there is a clearly defined set of values or norms that can be transmitted' (Miller 1983). Within the conservative orientation, education is seen as a reflection of the principles of society, or at least those of the dominant group in society. Education maintains the status quo by instilling in students dominant ways of being (Jones 2013). Schools and teachers take on authoritative roles. Students are passive recipients of this dominant knowledge. Conservative education discourses focus on the shaping of students to fit current social, civic, religious and vocational conventions (Jones 2013). Education is seen as the training of students into appropriate social roles (Connell 2013) and as preparation for work, whether it be skilled or semi-skilled with varying educations systems catering for both (Kemmis et al. 1983). Within and alongside this, students are seen to be needing to develop normative skills and behaviours necessary to compete effectively in society and in the economy (Apple 2005). Conservative Indigenous education discourses include Neoliberal Assimilationist and Assimilative Monolingual.

6 Part A: CDA of the Curriculum

6.1 Methodology

Norman Fairclough's approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was considered suitable to foreground issues of ideology and power concealed in curricular discourses as they relate to Aboriginal representation within the Curriculum. It allowed an investigation of the (re)production of socio-cultural biases in content valued within the Curriculum (Lim 2012). In combining social theory and discourse analysis, CDA provides a framework for systematic analysis and allows for detailed investigation into the workings of language in unequal power relations in society, and its relationship to broader institutional and societal practices

(Lim 2012). With discourse simultaneously seen as text, interaction (discourse practice) and context (sociocultural practice), the three analytical stages comprised of:

- Description: which concerns the formal properties of the text (vocabulary, grammatical and textual structures);
- Interpretation: which concerns the relationship between text and interaction (discourse practice), in which the text is a product of the processes of production and a resource in the process of interpretation; and
- Explanation: which concerns the relationship between interaction and context (sociocultural practice) (Fairclough 2001).

Seven documents were analysed: *The Curriculum: English*, *v7.4*; *The Curriculum: Mathematics*, *v7.4*; *The Curriculum: Science*, *v7.4*; *The Curriculum: History*, *v7.4*; *The Curriculum: Geography*, *v7.4*; *Student Diversity*, *v7.4*; *Cross-Curriculum Priorities*, *v7.0*. These documents were downloaded in PDF format from the Australian Curriculum website for analysis. CDA is particularly suited to detailed analysis of smaller samples of discourse, or text segments which Fairclough terms 'cruces' (1992). As such, smaller segments from each of the policy documents were sampled for closer analysis, including each learning area's Rationale and introductory paragraphs in the supplementary documents.

Data analysis involved the use of Leximancer (text analysis software designed for automatic thematic analysis), application of Fairclough's 10 CDA questions to the cruces, and application of Fairclough's interpretive and explanatory procedures to the policy documents. The description stage required an exploration of the linguistic features of the text, to demonstrate how language features (vocabulary, grammar, and textual structures) provided ideological structures for participants' knowledge/beliefs, social identities and social relations in discourse (Lim 2012). The first two analytical tools (Leximancer and Fairclough's 10 CDA questions) largely related to this description stage. The interpretation and explanation stages then went beyond the description to focus on how these ideologies are embedded within broader societal and institutional practices, and the nature of discursive processes and power relations (Lim 2012).

In tabulating and interpreting each policy document's data against the Indigenous education discourse taxonomy, instances of discourse were tallied as they occurred within each cruce's textual features (vocabulary, grammar and textual structures). This allowed 'occurrence statuses' to be allocated to each identified discourse within a cruce:

- Dominant status: evidenced in all three features
- Operant status: evidenced in one or two features
- Dormant status: evidenced only through intertextual references
- Absent status: not present in any features of the text

The Curriculum documents were then read in totality, tabulating tagging to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cross-curriculum priority within each year level. The tagged content was read and re-read for experiential, relational and expressive features of vocabulary and grammar, as per Fairclough's 10 CDA questions. Instances of discourse were noted and cross-checked with that evidenced in corresponding learning area cruces. Wider contextual literature was also reviewed, placing the content analysis of learning areas within broader debates on the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, histories and cultures within each learning area, as part of the interpretation and explanation stages of analysis.

7 Results

The first research question asked, which different Indigenous education discourses are privileged or marginalised in the construction of Aboriginal knowledges, histories and cultures in the Curriculum? There was no singular answer to this question (see Table 2). Instead, the findings revealed similarities and differences across the policy corpus, pointing to a lack of cohesiveness and consistency in the Curriculum's rationale for and approach to the inclusion of Aboriginal knowledges, histories and cultures. The Curriculum privileged and marginalised the full range of Indigenous education discourses to varying degrees across the *English*, *Mathematics*, *Science*, *History* and *Geography* learning area documents, and *Cross-Curriculum Priorities* and *Student Diversity* supplementary policy documents.

Broadly, a liberal orientation to education was most privileged in the Curriculum policy corpus, with Inclusive and/or Liberal Multicultural Discourses dominant in six of the seven policy documents analysed (with both discourses operant in the seventh document, *Mathematics*). These discourses were evidenced in quite distinct ways. Whilst both speak to notions of valuing diversity, Inclusive Discourse manifested in views around safe and supportive learning environments in which all individuals (regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, ability or other personal characteristic) were equally valued and supported within schooling. Liberal Multicultural Discourse manifested in explicit references to cultural diversity, and the recognition and valuing of cultural pluralism within schooling. Inclusive Discourse was often evidenced in regards to the inclusion of all individual students within the broader school climate or practices and policies aimed at reducing exclusionary structures, whilst Liberal Multicultural Discourse was more often evidenced in connection with curriculum and content integration. Within these liberal discourses, Aboriginal students were framed as being vulnerable to marginalisation and in need of support to ensure equality in education. There remains the question however of whether Aboriginal Peoples are or wish to be included in such discourses (St. Denis 2011).

Conservative discourses then followed those privileged, with Neoliberal Assimilationist and/or Assimilative Monolingual Discourses dominant in three of the seven policy documents analysed (*English*, *Mathematics* and *Cross-Curriculum Priorities*), and operant in the other four. Neoliberal Assimilationist Discourse was most evidenced of the two, mobilised through the construction of Aboriginal students as those removed from the historical and social context in which they are situated. Aboriginal students were framed as any other, needing to be instilled with the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions deemed necessary by those dominant in society, to enable them to function effectively as a citizen and future worker for individual and national benefit. Whilst Assimilative Monolingual Discourse was only operant in the *English* and *Student Diversity* documents, it was found to be an underlying discourse across the policy corpus. This was due to the required delivery of the curriculum in Standard Australian English (SAE), mentions of first languages largely in reference to the improvement of English literacy, and the absence of bilingualism or multilingualism. These conservative discourses removed Aboriginal students from their cultural and linguistic resources.

Critical discourses were less privileged within the policy corpus, with Critical Multicultural, Human Rights and/or Empowerment Discourses dominant in one of the seven policy documents analysed (*Geography*), and operant in another three (*Science*, *Cross-Curriculum Priorities* and *Student Diversity*). These critical discourses seek to critically evaluate the structures, social orders and values of society and undertake activism to bring about equality. Within the policy documents, this manifested in examinations of the rights and continued struggles of Aboriginal Peoples, activism and advocacy for socially-just change, giving voice

Table 2 Discourses evident in Curriculum documents

Document	Status allocated to discourses			
	Dominant	Operant	Dormant	Absent
Curriculum: English	Neoliberal Assimilationist Inclusive Liberal Multicultural	Assimilative Monolingual	Empowerment Human Rights	Critical Multicultural Multilingual Multicultural Intercultural/Both-ways
Curriculum: Mathematics	Neoliberal Assimilationist	Inclusive Liberal Multicultural	Assimilative Monolingual Empowerment Human Rights	Critical Multicultural Multilingual Multicultural Intercultural/Both-ways
Curriculum: Science	Inclusive	Neoliberal Assimilationist Liberal Multicultural Empowerment	Assimilative Monolingual Human Rights	Critical Multicultural Multilingual Multicultural Intercultural/Both-ways
Curriculum: History	Liberal Multicultural	Neoliberal Assimilationist Inclusive	Human Rights Assimilative Monolingual Empowerment	Critical Multicultural Multilingual Multicultural Intercultural/Both-ways
Curriculum: Geography	Empowerment Liberal Multicultural	Neoliberal Assimilationist Critical Multicultural	Assimilative Monolingual Inclusive Human Rights	Multilingual Multicultural Intercultural/Both-ways
Cross-Curriculum Priorities	Neoliberal Assimilationist Inclusive Liberal Multicultural	Empowerment Human Rights	Assimilative Monolingual Critical Multicultural	Multilingual Multicultural Intercultural/Both-ways
Student Diversity	Inclusive	Assimilative Monolingual Neoliberal Assimilationist Liberal Multicultural Human Rights	Empowerment	Critical Multicultural Multilingual Multicultural Intercultural/Both-ways

to Aboriginal Peoples and disrupting the status quo, and self-improvement for individual and collective benefits. Multilingual Multicultural Discourse was absent across the policy corpus, contributing to the underlying presence of the competing Assimilative Monolingual Discourse.

The postmodern orientation and Intercultural/Both-ways Discourse were absent within all seven policy documents analysed. This is perhaps unsurprising, given the way in which conservatives favoured the development of the Curriculum in response to concerns around education standards, and the teaching of common values and knowledge (Bessant 2011). Conservative critiques of education have gained political and policy traction in Australia and elsewhere, and this orientation opposes postmodernism and 'progressive' causes (Bessant 2011). There does not exist a single discourse of power however, with another running counter to it. As per Foucault's 'tactical polyvalence' of discourses, policy is a 'multiplicity of discursive elements' and there can be different and contradictory discourses operating within the same approach (Foucault 1981). Conversely, unchanged discourses can circulate in opposing approaches. Those discourses evidenced within the Curriculum policy corpus were often different and contradictory, with each document mobilising numerous discourses from three orientations to education (critical, liberal and conservative). The analysis revealed the complexity of policy and a deeper understanding of the processes of ideological struggle as they occur within discourse (Fairclough 1992).

8 Part B: Community-based investigation

8.1 Methodology

Interviews with Aboriginal community members (named informants, rather than participants, to signal their privileged status in relation to Aboriginal knowledges and perspectives) were used to explore education aspirations for the community's children. CDA was not considered wholly appropriate to use in the analysis of interview responses, given that it generally utilises analytical frameworks based on 'standard' colonising linguistic models such as SAE (Kettle 2005). Instead, narrative methods offered ways in which space could be created for informants' voices. These methods are prominent in research that strives to foreground marginalised voices (Waterhouse 2007). Although at times imperfect, the telling of the stories of marginalised people is necessary through research to document non-White experiences (Barone 2009). Critical advocacy ethnography and narrative portraits, as articulated by Smyth and McInerney (2013), were applied. They require creating authentic spaces in the research product that 'give voice' to those rarely given the opportunity to engage in public conversations (Smyth and McInerney 2013). To draw distinctions and find balance between researcher and informant voices as much as possible, the narrative portrait is an extended thematic statement, crafted from the interview transcript with minimal editing (Smyth and Robinson 2015). Admittedly, compromises are made in this process and elements of co-construction exist where what is said and not said are mediated and negotiated (Pedroni 2007). Souto-Manning (2014) comments however that 'a discourse is only powerful when it is recycled in stories everyday people tell', and as such narratives can be joined with CDA to create a more robust means of analysis to assess the discursive field and relations of institutional power.

Data collection consisted of one semi-structured interview with each informant. Snowball sampling was used to recruit informants. All interviews (13 in total) were transcribed

and returned to informants as requested. The data analysis of interview responses involved the thematic analysis of interview transcripts, using the Indigenous education discourse taxonomy as a discourse identification tool. The descriptive stage of data analysis progressed systematically, alongside Fairclough's (1992) interpretive and explanatory procedures. Identifying details were removed along with researcher questions, replaced where necessary with two to three words to lead in the informant's responses. All narratives were read and re-read, and coded within three broad thematic questions: Why should language and culture be taught at school; what is your vision of schooling for children in this community; and what is the purpose of education here for children? These thematic questions came out of the interview questions asked and were those that were most taken up by informants in their responses.

8.2 Results: narratives from community

The second research question asked: 'Which Indigenous education discourses do Aboriginal community members draw upon in expressing their education aspirations for the community's children'? The Elliott community in the Northern Territory was at the centre of the research. It lies halfway between Darwin and Alice Springs on the Stuart Highway. The area surrounding Elliott is Jingili country, and where the Dreaming Trails of Jingili and Mudburra people intersect. *Kulimindini* is the traditional name for Elliott, named because of the Dreaming Trail of the Emu. Elliott is now made up of two town camps and town centre between them, and is home to a relatively small population. In 2011, 287 of Elliott's 348 residents identified as Aboriginal (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2013). The community is linguistically diverse, with 29.6% of households speaking more than two languages (ABS 2013). The most dominant Aboriginal languages in the community are Mudburra and Jingili.

Employment is recognised as a key issue for residents. Of the 84 residents who reported being in the workforce in 2011, 46 reported being a full-time employee (13.2% of the population) (ABS 2013). Census statistics do not show what percentage of those employed full-time were non-Aboriginal service providers, such as the lead researcher (then teacher). Housing is also recognised as a key issue within Elliott. The past three years have seen numerous media reports highlighting the poor condition of housing and overcrowding, with no new housing built since 2000 (Sharkey and Weekley 2016). These issues featured strongly in informants' responses, as they articulated their education aspirations for their children. Also evident in informants' responses were concerns around the maintenance of traditional language and culture:

> I find that the younger generation are not learning their own culture, their own language, not the real language as they should be taught by the elders. We haven't got many elders now, but this is what they should be learning… Aunty HS, 70+ years.

In discussing their education aspirations for the community's children, the first thematic question, 'why should language and culture be taught at school?' elicited a range of responses from informants, with postmodern (Intercultural/Both-ways) and critical (Multicultural Multilingual; Empowerment) discourses mobilised most often. All informants advocated the teaching of language and culture in schooling. Rationales for inclusion were related to both individual and communal strength. For the individual student, a strong sense of identity and self-esteem were communicated as being important by some informants. Individual gains were tied to collective benefit in many responses. Other informants focussed more explicitly on community strength and the maintenance or revitalisation of its language and culture traditions, which they saw as in decline. Aunty MW drew on numerous ideals, speaking of the revitalisation of language needed to counteract the loss evident amongst the younger

generation (Multilingual Multicultural); involving non-Aboriginal children in culture learning and the equal mixing of Aboriginal and Western learning (Intercultural/Both-ways); and children needing to know their linguistic heritage, which is connected to their identity, therefore having the capacity to engage in activities like land claims (Empowerment and Human Rights):

> They should be teaching everything about language and culture at school… When they do the cultural stuff, they can teach the other students that are non-Indigenous. Yeah mix them together. We used to know our language very well. But these ones, they don't even know, they don't even understand… Community members should have a lot of involvement really, they should have an input in it and putting efforts into it and making sure these kids are getting a proper education through White and through Aboriginal side as well, they can teach both sides. It's better for the kids, yeah, because if they go somewhere and they'll ask them 'what's your language?' They won't even know… Language is very important, especially if it's coming to land claim… Aunty MW, 30–49 years.

Instances of Liberal Multicultural (the learning of multiple cultures, including Indigenous cultures) and Neoliberal Assimilationist (the competing need for English and Western knowledge) Discourses were also evident in responses to this broad question of language and culture inclusion. Informants, rather than mobilising one discourse, drew upon different and at times ideologically conflicting discourses within their responses.

Responses to the second thematic question, 'what is your vision of schooling for children in this community?' mobilised numerous discourses across postmodern (Intercultural/Both-ways), critical (Multicultural Multilingual; Empowerment) and liberal (Liberal Multicultural) orientations to education. Multicultural Multilingual Discourse was evidenced in the majority of responses. This discourse sees the home culture/s and language/s of students as assets to be built upon in meaningful ways within the classroom environment (Banda 2010; Nieto 2000). Its strong presence was indicative of Elliot's multilinguistic context, and concerns of language and culture maintenance:

> Well my vision of school is like, if we've got a school and Aboriginal teachers with them, just teaching culture… cause our culture is dropping and we need try to make it like, go up. But we don't have that knowledge like, to reach the top. So we just like start step to step and reach that high level. With all the subjects at school, culture is more important and probably English same time. When they want to get a job well there's English in there and when they go back home well there's language in there. … Aunty EC, 30–49 years.

A key theme around informants' visions of schooling was the expansion of the Aboriginal teacher workforce, leading to increased community involvement and control of education:

> My vision of schooling? Well there's a school up the top end like in Arnhem Land that has co-principals, so like a White and an Aboriginal principal and they work the school together. I'd have co-principals in Elliott… The goal is to be principal of this community. Like, this is where I'm from, this is what I call home, you know, being able to run the school is the goal… Uncle WH, 18–29 years.

In other responses, Uncle WH spoke of the need to explore culture, 'why Aboriginal people have culture', and how as a fluid entity 'it's changing with time' and with 'white input' in Elliott. He connected with ideas of cultural revitalisation, and young people being strong in

both culture and Western academia in order to pursue their aspirations. These ideals, reflecting opportunities for creative change and re-organisation of culture and identity, as well as control of schooling, tied strongly to Intercultural/Both-ways Discourse. Others considered a stronger Aboriginal teacher workforce or Aboriginal Assistant Teachers as an appropriate level of involvement. Four informants recognised that local Aboriginal staff should be 'properly trained', enabled to not only teach traditional language and culture, but across all learning areas. For those that were explicit in their desire for registered Aboriginal teachers, relationships, respect and role models were key drivers, evidencing critical (Multicultural Multilingual; Empowerment) and liberal (Liberal Multicultural) discourses.

The third thematic question asked 'what is the purpose of schooling for children in this community?' Overwhelmingly, the majority of informants responded with what appeared to be conservative viewpoints, connecting the purpose of education for Elliott's children to employment and economic participation. Informants largely drew on notions of students needing the language, knowledge, skills and dispositions valued by those dominant in society, in order to participate in the broader economy. These notions were often connected with the current socio-economic context of Elliott and the challenges informants saw in employment, financial security and particularly housing:

> The purpose of schooling here is learning… And we want them to learn as much as they can, whatever the teacher has to offer. Never really thought about the main subject but yeah, we send our kids cause we want our kids to learn. Cause they our future, we don't want to get to one day where someone says 'oh they're bludgers', do you know what I mean? I want in the future that it gets to that we all contributing. And so what I want for my kids, is I educate my kids as much as I can in the White society and I don't know if that's bad, but I want them to grow up and have a house, and have an understanding to have a house you need to have an education, you've got to get a job… Aunty PP, 30–49 years.

Aunty PP doesn't want her children to be welfare-reliant and seen by wider society as 'bludgers'. Elements of Neoliberal Assimilationist Discourse were evidenced in her desire to teach her children about White society, to enable their participation in areas like employment and housing, but at the same time she wants them to have the capacity to contribute. Aunty didn't mechanically implement this discourse and accept it in totality. In other responses, this contribution her children will have the capacity to make is linked directly to the future of Elliott as a community, signalling a broader Empowerment Discourse.

The second of the conservative discourses, Assimilative Monolingual Discourse, was actively resisted by informants through their mobilisation of Multilingual Multicultural Discourse. Multilingual education can be seen as an act of resistance, highlighting (explicitly or implicitly) the need to struggle against submission and domination (Giroux 2006). Informants, in their resistance to monolingualism, advocated for the maintenance of the local language/s and community, the continued ability to communicate with others in local language/s and thus maintain social and familial connections, and the strengthening of identity. Such views are echoed in Australian (McKay 2011; Nicholls 2005) and international (Usborne et al. 2009) literature. Whilst ideals of maintaining a connection to culture are considered by some to be in competition with notions of successful participation in mainstream society (Dockery 2010), informants pieced together these contradictory discourses.

In aspiring for the maintenance of language/s and culture within the community, the struggle to balance this with Western knowledge learning was evident. As informants' responses progressed through the thematic questions, they veered further away from postmodern or critical discourses, towards a focus on English, Western learning and the importance of

employment and economic participation. Two informants, after explicitly advocating for language and culture inclusion along Multicultural Multilingual lines, retracted their expressed ideals, concluding with the importance of learning English and White society. Their internal struggle with such issues was made visible:

> So I sort of forgot about culture and language because not being mean or anything, but culture and language not going to put my kids in a house. It's going to leave them homeless… For an example, my sister came back to try and bring her son back for ceremony. She had to leave him with me because she has to go back and work to pay her rent. She doesn't pay her rent, she's out… You can't tell your landlord, you're going home for ceremony. He doesn't care, he wants his rent. Do you know what I mean? That's why sometimes I think language and culture is getting lost, because we struggle to… We want to work just like everybody else. Own our own house and have a car as well. And yeah, it is hard, isn't it, the balance. You want the best for your kids in the culture and the White society… Aunty PP, 30–49 years.

The issue of economic justice, employment and housing security being prominent in informants' articulations of their aspirations was perhaps not surprising given Elliott's current socio-economic climate. Again, within this discussion of the community-based investigation, Foucault's 'tactical polyvalence' (1981) of discourses is useful here as it reveals how multiple and often competing discourses can function alongside one another. In discussing their education aspirations, informants quite often referenced the social and economic context in which those aspirations were formed. They selectively and eclectically drew on a range of competing discourses to make sense of their aspirations. The dominant discourses mobilised were Neoliberal Assimilationist, Empowerment and Multicultural Multilingual. Instances of Intercultural/Both-ways, Critical Multicultural (in an alternate reading), Human Rights and Liberal Multicultural Discourses were also evidenced in informant responses. Inclusive and Assimilative Monolingual Discourse were not evidenced in any responses across the thematic questions, with Assimilative Monolingual Discourse actively resisted. Informants engaged in an act of bricolage to creatively stitch the dominant discourses together, to develop and mobilise a broader empowering Community Revitalisation Discourse. This unique discourse of Aboriginal education reflected the specificities of the local context.

9 Discussion

The study found disconnections between those education discourses evident in the Curriculum and in the goals of Aboriginal people. Whilst both data sets evidenced a wide range of discourses, the Curriculum privileged liberal discourses, followed by conservative. The policy corpus was not consistent however, and particular documents supported informants' aspirations more than others. In contrast, the informants' responses in the community-based investigation represented a complex act of bricolage in which an overall Community Revitalisation Discourse was mobilised by many informants, which rearticulated critical and seemingly conservative ideas (drawing most often on elements of Empowerment, Multicultural Multilingual and Neoliberal Assimilationist Discourses). What was revealed was a complex discursive field circulating within the policy corpus and community articulations of their ideal education. Cognisant of this complexity, an assessment can be made that in general, the Curriculum does not wholly support the critical, empowering aspirations of the community informants.

There are challenges in the provision of an intercultural, multilinguistic education, particularly in relation to Indigenous education. No singular 'Indigenous knowledge' exists, as knowledge is 'a product of context' and each First Nations community will have distinct knowledges, values, beliefs, and understandings of the world (Perso 2012). The Curriculum however can allow for the inclusion of local Aboriginal knowledges, histories and cultures, to be then put into practice within the localised enacted curriculum. It is imperative that the intended curriculum provides opportunities for teachers to connect the curriculum to the cultures and backgrounds of students, and that teachers have the resources to enact them. Many saw these opportunities as lacking or ambiguous within the Curriculum (Maxwell 2014; Exley and Chan 2014; Lowe et al. 2014). This study took the position that inclusion in itself is not an unquestionable good. Power relations are inherent in discussions of 'culturally inclusive' education, as the dominant mainstream 'allows' something from the margins to be included (Vass 2012). It is the embedded values, beliefs and biases possibly transmitted through such inclusion that is also problematic. Some inclusions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures within the Curriculum were considered in the literature to be tokenistic or requiring a low level of critical engagement (Lowe and Yunkaporta 2013). This assessment was supported by the findings of this study, which highlighted the lack of inclusion based in more critical or postmodern orientations.

Educators need to consider national debates and systemic priorities as well as Aboriginal voices and priorities, all whilst engaging in critical reflection of their own complicity with colonialism (Osborne and Guenther 2013b). A reframing of the notion of 'cultural inclusion' is required alongside considerations of the power relations operant within such a notion. Only then can educators begin the very real and complex task of engaging with intricate knowledges and structures residing within communities, in order to deliver localised, responsive education (Osborne and Guenther 2013b). Successful education for Aboriginal students, particularly those in remote locations such as Elliott, must provide a space for Aboriginal knowledge and connect learning to local community aspirations (Fogarty 2010).

For Elliott's informants, these were largely related to the overcoming of social and economic challenges facing the community, with issues of employment, financial security and housing, and the maintenance or revival of local Aboriginal language/s and culture. Informants at times prioritised education for employability over language and culture inclusion. It is the community's particular context that renders such a prioritising understandable. In facing two analytically distinct forms of injustice, recognitive and redistribute remedies (Fraser 1997) may not be equally weighted by community members. Certainly, the tension between cultural recognition and social equality was evident in informants' responses.

This tension between the ultimate purposes of schooling, with education for employability preferred, will perhaps continue until such a time as the economic participation and survival of Elliott's residents is more assured. It has been commented that in remote communities, the purpose of curriculum remains unclear, with some suggesting participation in employment (Perso 2012). The realities of many communities however impose limitations on the availability of jobs so employment-based knowledge and skills obtained through education need to enable students to enter professional roles and opportunities present within the community. A locally relevant curriculum is required that focuses on the specificities of context, to enable students to support community development and cultivate local entrepreneurial opportunities (Perso 2012). Such a curriculum would respond to community members' aspirations in Elliott. Fogarty (2010) comments that current policy fails in this regard, despite much research promoting the importance of schooling being connected with community and with locally valued, meaningful work or production roles.

A complex question is raised here of whether employability needs to be more of a focus in new critical approaches that speak to and respond to community wants, needs and values. It may seem conservative to privilege a view of education as preparation for work and future participation in the nation's economy, when post-schooling employment is more assured (in White middle-class settings), but in Elliott it cannot be characterised as such. Elements of this conservative neoliberal discourse were mobilised by informants, but not to achieve its conservative ideals. Instead, the discourse was mobilised within an overall narrative of an empowering Community Revitalisation. Not being concerned with employability is not possible when a person's economic future is insecure. In contexts such as Elliott, where employment participation is not more assured, promoting employment preparation could be a critical, localised and central goal for community and educators.

The comparison of informants' aspirations to those discourses mobilised within the Curriculum revealed further work needs to be undertaken at multiple systemic levels, to ensure curriculum policy is responsive to local context and supports the aspirations of Aboriginal people. The reality of Aboriginal Peoples' lived experiences, which influence their aspirations, must be reflected in a culturally inclusive national curriculum. In order to respond appropriately to informants in Elliott, educators need to enable the continued growth of collective aspiration for long-term change and community development (Osborne and Guenther 2013a). Only then, in their implementation, will national policies such as the Curriculum be best placed to support the aspirations of Aboriginal people and achieve the *Melbourne Declaration* goals (MCEETYA 2008).

10 Conclusions

The Curriculum does not fully respond to Goal 1 of the *Melbourne Declaration* in which 'Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence' (MCEETYA 2008). A consistent, dominant discourse of authentic and respectful inclusion of Aboriginal knowledges, histories and cultures in the Curriculum has not been achieved, and as such, the needs of all students within the Australian education system are not being met. Particular learning areas (such as Geography) include more responsive and critical exemplars, and their approach needs to be extended to ensure this national goal is promoted across all learning areas. Those learning areas in which inclusion has to date been somewhat tokenistic should be revised, with revisions made explicit and promoted to ensure awareness and take-up at state, school and classroom levels. State and school-level policies then need to be developed that encourage culturally inclusive curricula, in which Aboriginal students can see themselves reflected in affirming and empowering ways.

Communities should be encouraged and supported to engage in consultative activities with schools and government so that their desires may be heard and responded to. For school staff working within communities, work must be undertaken to bridge the gap between the Curriculum policy and community aspirations, based on a deep understanding of the community the school serves. School leadership must ensure that schooling responds to the needs of the community, and that there is a whole-school approach to a culturally inclusive curriculum. The benefits of authentic and respectful inclusion of Aboriginal knowledges, histories and cultures within schooling should be communicated to staff, students, parents/carers and the wider community. School leadership can encourage accountability amongst their staff, to ensure that the cross-curriculum priority is not overlooked as a non-assessable element. Teachers have a great deal of agency when it comes to embedding (or not) Aboriginal knowl-

edges, histories and cultures within their classroom. They can create a culturally inclusive classroom climate, and build relationships with students, parents/carers and community in order to learn about and respond to their needs and aspirations.

Aspiring and current teachers should be given the opportunity to engage in critical analysis of the Curriculum, so that the way in which Aboriginal knowledges, histories and cultures are framed within it is not assumed to be an unquestionable good. They should also have opportunity to learn about the range of approaches to Indigenous education as described in the Indigenous education taxonomy, and particularly the importance of Intercultural/Bothways, Critical Multicultural, Multilingual Multicultural, Human Rights and Empowerment Discourses. Research must continue as the Curriculum is developed, revised and deployed across the nation. This study only analysed the first five endorsed learning areas, so provides direction for future research as similar work is needed for more recently-developed learning areas. The different approaches to Indigenous education must be made explicit in this work, in order to allow critical comparisons and debates around such approaches to take place. The Indigenous education discourse taxonomy developed for this study provides a conceptual tool that could be used to frame future work in research, policy and curriculum development in Australia or elsewhere. Researchers of other nations may build on the taxonomy to further develop this field.

The above recommendations may seem straightforward, but the real work involved is multifaceted and must be undertaken by all those with a stake in education. If the Curriculum is to be in a position to respond to the desires and aspirations of Aboriginal people, conservative undertones have to be re-evaluated and replaced by more progressive ideals that take into account the different ontologies and epistemologies of Aboriginal students, and their education needs and values. The complexity of each community must be communicated and recognised, as well as the competing and complimentary discourses parents and carers draw upon to form their aspirations for their children. New generations of teachers, teacher educators and researchers must therefore become more flexible and upskilled in understanding these education discourses, in order to support localised approaches at multiple systemic levels. Only then may curriculum policy be responsive to local context, the needs, wants and values of each community.

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