

ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK: THE HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT OF INDIGENOUS EDUCATION POLICY

The gap between the educational outcomes of Indigenous students and their non-Indigenous counterparts remains a significant issue for Federal and State Government since their introduction into the Eurocentric classroom setting. Indigenous policy has sought to address the disparity since the late 1960s (Beresford 2012; Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist 2003; Vass 2012). Present policy developed from the review and recommendations of previous policy are encouraged to break the 'deficit view', that is, the devaluation of Indigenous students' educational potential (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA] 2006). However, there is little alignment between the historical and social context of policy, Indigenous education and the maintenance of the dominant ideology. Within this paper, an overview of current policy that addresses the gap is provided. This is juxtaposed against the recommendations of the Schools Commission Report provided in 1975 ("Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group - June 1975" 1975). In turn, the paper encourages critical dialogue around policy decision making and potential policy revision.

Introduction

In the *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report 2014* (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2014: 4) states that "we [...] need to more honestly assess the impact of policies and programmes and, where success is not being achieved, be prepared to change tack and try new things". This statement highlights a potential shift in policy. This paper argues for the necessity of such a shift in decision making and policy when addressing the disparity of Indigenous students and their non-Indigenous counterparts. The historical and social context of Australia is presented to foreground the development of Indigenous education policy and provide reason for the need for a new perspective.

Too primitive to be actual owners

In 1788, when the continent of Australia was colonised by the British Empire, it was settled under the doctrine of terra nullius (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 2015). In doing so, Australia was considered a land without owners. The British justified this doctrine "by saying the Aboriginals were too primitive to be actual owners" (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 2015: para. 2). Such dominance was maintained by European countries since the 1500s as they invaded countries around the world with no to little regard for Indigenous populations (Ferreira 2013). Indigenous Australians were seen as having no real culture when compared to the 'civilised' practices of the British which acted

as the foundation for early policy to dispossess and alienate the Indigenous population (Partington 1998). This practice and shared ideology continued until the early 1900s (Harris 2003).

This belief was nurtured within the ideals of social Darwinism. It was generally accepted that the Indigenous Australian population would eventually die out (Bretherton & Mellor 2006; Partington 1998). As relationships continued to break down and traditional lands became pastoralist grazing grounds, the Aboriginal population moved to the fringes of settlements, which caused further animosity.

Extension of powers

By the early 1900s, “the Indigenous populations [had] become a despised underclass that was regarded as a blot on society” (Partington 1998: 36). The governmental solution was to extend their powers (State Library of Queensland 2012). As the result of the policies, families were forcibly removed from Country and separated.

Powers extended to the forced removal of children (Beresford 2012; Bretherton & Mellor 2006). A.O. Neville, Chief Protector of Aboriginals in Western Australia, was a prominent figure in the removal of children (McGregor 2002). To validate the removal, Neville

writes of “flea-ridden” humpies; camp conditions characterised by “fleas, germs and disease”; of unwashed clothing and bodies because of lack of running water and inadequate diets due to lack of cooking facilities (Beresford 2012: 98).

These historical accounts of forcible removal, social Darwinism and alienation supported by the policy merely highlight why Indigenous people are wary of and resistant to non-Indigenous expectations and, furthermore, explain why intergenerational trauma is still experienced today. That is, these observations and justifications were a mere 60 years ago.

The process of desegregation

Changes of policy in Australia towards Indigenous people slowly began in the late 1960s (Beresford 2012; Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist 2003; Vass 2012).

Australian governments up until the 1960s held that Aboriginal children should be offered minimal schooling consistent with the perceptions about the limitations inherent in their race and their expected station in life at the lowest rungs of white society (Beresford 2012: 87).

However, the policy of assimilation and forcible removal of children did not cease until the 1970s. Indigenous education in Australia did not begin to see change in policy until the 1960s when the United States called an end to desegregation (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist 2003). The integration into State schooling of Indigenous students was not without its own challenges that governmental policy has been attempting to address ever since.

The Referendum – a shift in policy

The Referendum in 1967 began challenging the colonialists' ideals about Aboriginal Australians and with the election of a Labor Government, assimilation and integration was replaced with autonomy (Partington 1998). After the Referendum, "the continued expectation by the government that they should assimilate met with little support among Indigenous people" (Partington 1998: 48). The changing ideals led to the formation of the review process to monitor progress and increased accountability for government.

By 1972 and the election of Whitlam's Labor Government, Aboriginal Affairs was now of key concern. Within the term of Whitlam's Government, the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs was created and the policy of self-determination introduced. Both of these as well as the introduction of the Aboriginal Study Grant Scheme (now known as ABSTUDY) were seen as critical factors to improve the participation and retention of Indigenous people in the decision making process including education (Zubrick et al. 2004).

An Australian Schools Commission was established to advise government on educational disadvantage. "The Commonwealth Government also created the Aboriginal Consultative Group as a specialist advisory body. The Group had as its mission the development of aspirations for education to complement moves towards self-determination for Aboriginals" (Beresford 2012: 112). The Schools Commission reported to government two years later in consultation with the Aboriginal Consultative Group (Partington 1998).

Despite being almost 40 years ago, it is interesting and disheartening to note the report's findings and its similarities to current policy findings. What follows is a discussion comparing the *Schools Commission report* ("Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group - June 1975" 1975) with the most recent Indigenous education policy, the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan* (Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA] 2011). This, in turn, demonstrates the need for a new approach when addressing the educational attainment of Indigenous students as suggested in the *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report in 2014* (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2014).

Discussion and Conclusions

It was not until the 1970s that development of specific Indigenous education policy occurred (Western Australia Child Health Survey 2004). The Schools Commission report published in November of 1975 ("Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group - June 1975" 1975) gave several recommendations to address the disparity of Indigenous students' educational attainment (Western Australia Child Health Survey 2004). Written in consultation with the Aboriginal Consultative Group, Indigenous voice and support for self-determination by all is evident within the discourse. In 1971, the Indigenous population was less than 150,000 making up about one per cent of the Australian population ("Schools Commission

Report for the Triennium 1976-78: Chapter 9 - Education for Aborigines” 1975). In comparison, when the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan was released in 2010, the Indigenous student population was over 160,000 (MCEECDYA 2011).

The Plan (MCEECDYA 2011) is the most recent national policy to address the ‘gap’. Although released in 2010, it was not endorsed until 2011 by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). Its’ purpose “is to assist education providers to accelerate improvements in the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people” (MCEECDYA 2011: 4). Its final evaluation by Acil Allen Consulting Ltd (2014) provides several means to build on the Plan.

Schools Commission report

The Schools Commission report (“Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group - June 1975” 1975) identified four areas that informed the recommendations. They were *Administrators and Decision Makers; Professionals; Children; and the Excluded*. Written and presented to Government, the reports echoed the historical and social context of Australia. Indigenous voice within the discourse demonstrates an era where self-determination was encouraged through policy. Table 1.1 provides an explanation of each area and the key recommendations suggested by the Schools Commission report.

Table 1.1 Schools Commission Report areas of concern: Explanations and Recommendations

Note: Adapted from *Education for Aborigines: Report to the schools commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group - June 1975* 1975: 3-26.

SCHOOLS COMMISSION REPORT	
ADMINISTRATORS AND DECISION MAKERS	
Explanation	Recommendations
Involvement, appointment and training of Aborigines to high level administrative and decision-making positions which affect the education of Aboriginal children	Establishment of National Aboriginal Education Commission <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Government policy should support a system which involve the use of Aboriginal people supported by non-Indigenous rather than the reverse - Concern at the absence of Aboriginal people in decision making - The appointment of Aborigines to school councils
PROFESSIONALS	
Explanation	Recommendations
Strategies to meet some of the needs at the professional and trade levels	Training of Aboriginal teachers Aboriginal Liaison officers Training of Aboriginal teacher-aides Professional upgrading of Torres Strait Island schools Technology education and Aboriginal students
CHILDREN	

Explanation	Recommendations
Children who are either still in school or of pre-school age	Children of pre-school age Achievement of Aboriginal children enrolled in Australian schools Aboriginal studies for teachers Aboriginal studies for Australian schools Curriculum initiatives Retention of suitable teachers in schools Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme evaluation
THE EXCLUDED	
Explanation	Recommendations
People who do not have the opportunity to take advantage of education, or who have withdrawn because of deficiencies in some education systems	Special seminars for members of Aboriginal communities Part-time studies for Aboriginal people Aboriginal visitors to school schemes Local initiative in education to be encouraged amongst Aboriginal and Island organisation Aboriginal Education studies film unit Public relations and communications

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan

The Plan (MCEECDYA 2011), in contrast, has six domains to address the educational attainment of Indigenous students. They are *Readiness for School; Engagement and Connections; Attendance; Literacy and Numeracy; Leadership, Quality Teaching and Workforce Development; and Pathways to Post-school Options*. These domains align with the National Indigenous Reform Agreement's [NIRA] (COAG 2008) targets and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy [AEP] (DEET 1989). Table 1.2 provides an explanation of the purpose of each of the domains and the targets set.

Table 1.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014 domains: Explanations and Targets

Note: Adapted from *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014*, by Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs 2011: 9-26.

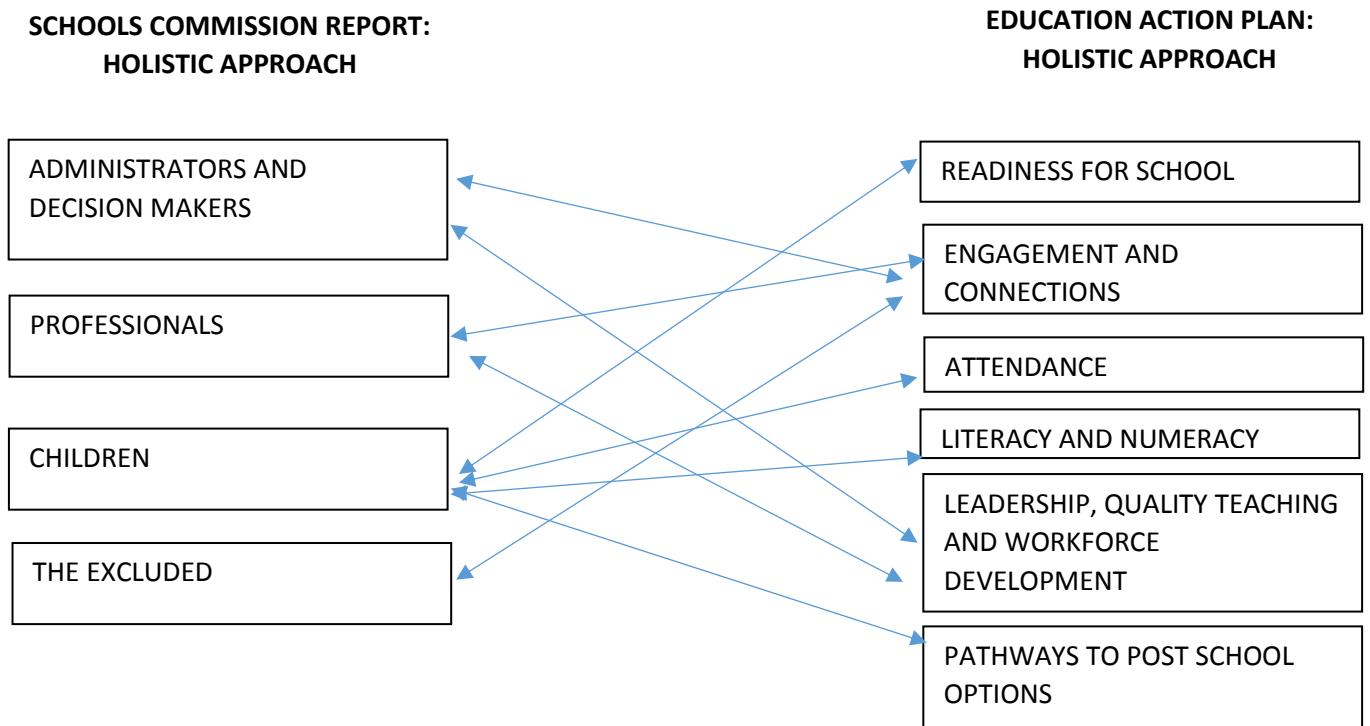
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER EDUCATION ACTION PLAN	
READINESS FOR SCHOOL	
Explanation	Targets
Participation in culturally inclusive, high quality early childhood education programs and care can assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to get the best start in life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children participating in quality early childhood education and development and child care services. • Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students perform at equivalent or better rates to other students in school on-entry assessment.
ENGAGEMENT AND CONNECTIONS	

Explanation	Targets
<p>Schools and early childhood education providers that work in partnership with families and communities can better support the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, establishing a collective commitment to hold high expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and foster learning environments that are culturally safe and supportive.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students involved in personalised learning. • Active school – community partnership agreements in place within focus schools.
ATTENDANCE	
Explanation	Targets
<p>Attending school and engaging with learning is fundamentally important in helping young Australians to acquire the skills they need for life.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are equivalent to non-Indigenous student attendance rates. • All compulsory school-aged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are enrolled in school. • Increased retention rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. • Increased grade progression ratios for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
LITERACY AND NUMERACY	
Explanation	Targets
<p>Mastering the basics of English literacy and numeracy is essential to participation in contemporary Australian society.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievement between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-Indigenous students by 2018. • Increased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student participation rates in the National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN).
LEADERSHIP, QUALITY TEACHING AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT	
Explanation	Targets
<p>It is important that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are taught by high quality teachers in schools led by effective and supportive principals who are assisted by a world-class curriculum that incorporates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in professional development hours in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and cultural and linguistic competence training undertaken by principals and teachers. • Increase in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers, principals and education workers (Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers (AIEWs) and equivalents). • Increase retention of principals and teachers in hard-to-staff schools with high enrolments

	of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
PATHWAYS TO REAL-POST SCHOOL OPTIONS	
Explanation	Targets
Successful education can lead to employment and economic independence and form the basis for intergenerational change by providing individuals with the skills to participate fully in society and work and determine their own futures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Halve the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020.

The explicit interrelationship of the areas identified within the Schools Commission report (“Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group - June 1975” 1975) and the Plan (MCEECDYA, 2011) when juxtaposed against each other are evident. Figure 1.1 provides a visual representation of the areas identified in 1975 and how they are replicated in the Plan, albeit with different terminology. In 1996, the abolishment of the policy of self-determination occurred with the election of the then Prime Minister, John Howard (Australians Together n.d.). As a result, a shift in policy discourse occurred.

Figure 1.1 A visual conceptual overview of the areas of concern within the Schools Commission report (“Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group - June 1975” 1975) and the domains of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (MCEECDYA 2011).



Self-determination is fundamental to the United Nations International Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Australian Government elected to support this policy. However, this did not occur until two years after its adoption by the General Assembly in 2007 (Australian Human Rights Commission 2015). Today the struggle for self-determination continues in Australia. Within the literature, there is argument that Australian Aboriginals never had 'true' self-determination as there was constant governmental interference (Australians Together n.d.).

Administrators and Decision Makers vs Leadership, Quality Teaching and Workforce Development

The first area of concern in the Schools Commission report ("Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group - June 1975" 1975) was *Administrators and Decision Makers*, which aligns with the Plan's (MCEECDYA 2011) *Engagement and Connections* domain. The Schools Commission report recommended the increased involvement of parents in the education of their children through the appointment of Aboriginal parents to the School councils. In fact, the onus of involving Indigenous people within such councils was placed on school leaders and staff where it was seen that they had "a serious responsibility to encourage, support and assist Aborigines to become members of school councils and to carry out their responsibilities effectively" ("Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group - June 1975" 1975: 8).

The Plan (MCEECDYA 2011) encourages parental involvement through School Community Partnership Agreement's and the development of Personalised Learning Plans. In 1975, the involvement of Indigenous people was encouraged at an administrative and decision-making level whereas today, the role, according to the Plan's targets, is to liaise and increase involvement at a local/school level ("Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group - June 1975" 1975). However, in current policy, parental and community involvement does not include a role in decision making.

Further to this, the Schools Commission report ("Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group - June 1975" 1975) recommended the establishment of a National Aboriginal Education Commission. At this time, they noted how Aboriginal representation in educational administration was minimal. In response, they encouraged the development of and inclusion of Indigenous people in these positions to ensure that Indigenous voice was privileged but moreover, because "only Aborigines can accurately communicate the needs and aspirations of their people to government and other authorities" ("Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group - June 1975" 1975: 4). The language is positive in nature and furthermore, positions Indigenous people in control of and responsible for their own lived experiences.

The election of Prime Minister Tony Abbott in 2013 saw the Department of Indigenous Affairs integrated into the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. In fact, all Indigenous programmes and Commonwealth-funded services for Indigenous people became part of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet “to overhaul the system, to make it simpler and less burdensome, and to ensure that the right resources supported by the right capabilities go those who need them most” (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2014: 2). The language used within this statement differs dramatically to the Schools Commission report (“Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group - June 1975” 1975) with its negative undertones.

The term *burdensome* exemplifies the negative undertones suggesting that the provision of services for Indigenous people specifically for government is taxing and difficult to carry out. In doing so, it positions Indigenous affairs and therefore, Indigenous people as a ‘problem’ needing a ‘solution’. Such positioning further emphasizes and maintains the deficit view.

Professionals vs Leadership, Quality Teaching and Workforce Development

The second area *Professionals* sought to address the lack of and in some areas, absence of Indigenous people at a professional and/or trade level (“Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group - June 1975” 1975). With a clear alignment to the Plan’s domains (MCEECDYA 2011) *Leadership, Quality Teaching and Workforce Development*, the area of Professionals also focused on the training of Indigenous teachers and liaison officers as well as teacher aides. Approximately 40 years since the Schools Commission report, it is interesting to note that the teaching profession is still dominated by White teachers with Indigenous teachers only making up about 0.3 per cent of the teaching workforce (Behrendt 2009).

The need to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators is still necessary today and the benefits of doing so is identified within the Plan (MCEECDYA 2011). This is exemplified when it states that the “building [of] a well qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educator workforce is an important way of potentially reducing the impact of high teacher turnover in school communities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students” (MCEECDYA 2011: 22). However, within this declarative statement there is once again implicit negative undertones where assumptions are made that high teacher turnover is the result of schools having Indigenous students and not due to extenuating factors such as geographical location and so forth. Further to this, with no use of a quantifier, it implies that schools with any amount of Indigenous students, albeit a high or low population, are at risk of high teacher turnover.

The ‘cultural gap’ between schools and Indigenous communities is also recognised within both the Schools Commission’s (“Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group - June 1975” 1975) Professionals area of concern and the Plan’s

(MCEECDYA 2011) Leadership, Quality Teaching and Workforce Development domain. This cultural gap is the manifestation of many factors ensuring the maintenance of the dominant ideology, where White privilege implicitly maintains the binary construct of 'us' and 'them' allowing the rise of prejudice and discrimination.

The earlier Schools Commission report in June 1975 ("Schools Commission Report for the Triennium 1976-78: Chapter 9 - Education for Aborigines" 1975: 47) best articulates the alienation felt by Indigenous people from mainstream Australian society within a school context when it states

The Commission's Aboriginal Consultative Group argues that the Aborigine is not culturally deprived, merely 'culturally different'; but that the tension between the Aboriginal community, with its values of kinship, sharing, mutual interdependence and emphasis on non-verbal communication, and the white, middle-class school with its emphasis on verbal skills, competition and individual success, is one contributing factor which leads to an erosion of self-respect and increasing frustration amongst many young Aborigines.

Most notably, this account is recounting the sentiments and position of the Aboriginal Consultative Group in regards to the disengagement of students within schools due to the differing value systems. Such an opportunity is not found within the Plan (MCEECDYA 2011) itself, but moreover, in the reviews and evaluations (see Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC) 2013). Here the Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies (IECBs) report the position of community by providing feedback. However, within the reviews, the IECBs feedback is countered by governmental response which in turn, silences their voice and further establishes government's position of power. The differences in the position of Indigenous people within the policy/report further exemplifies the influence of the historical and social context. That is, in 1975 the policy of self-determination encourages Indigenous people to take responsibility and to voice their concerns and so forth regarding Aboriginal affairs ("Schools Commission Report for the Triennium 1976-78: Chapter 9 - Education for Aborigines" 1975). However, today as Rigney (2002: 79) exerts Indigenous education policies "tell the new wave of Indigenous children and their parents that Aboriginal self-determination can only occur within the already constitutional arrangements".

Children vs Readiness for School; Attendance; Numeracy and Literacy; Pathways to Post-School Options

The third area of concern in the Schools Commission report ("Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group - June 1975" 1975) being *Children* has been further elaborated in the Plan (MCEECDYA 2011) into four domains including *Readiness for School; Attendance; Literacy and Numeracy; and Pathways to Post-School Options*. Within the Schools Commission report and the Plan, recognition of the importance of education for potential futures occurs. In the report, this is exemplified when it states "we recognize that under-achievement of Aborigines

in all areas of education is serious and debilitating to their success in later life. We attribute this to a wide range of social, environmental and educational factors” (“Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group - June 1975” 1975: 16).

The use of the collective *we* makes the statement all inclusive, being the position of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people at the time. Further to this, the use of the euphemistic expression *under-achievement* eludes to students not attaining their potential rather than the predominant view as recognised in the 2006 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) Review where Indigenous students were seen as being the “characteristics of individual children, their families and communities” (MCEETYA 2006: 16). In other words, although being challenged today, the dominant ideology found in 2006 was the educational attainment of Indigenous students was the result of student disengagement. In 1975, recognition of various extenuating factors of the historical and social context provides reason for under-achievement, sharing responsibility for the shortcomings.

The importance of education was further exemplified with the Schools Commission report (“Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group - June 1975” 1975) when, despite not being within the Schools Commission terms of reference, the need for the inclusion of Indigenous students, parents and community in pre-school. In the Plan (MCEECDYA 2011: 9), “participation in culturally inclusive, high quality early childhood programs and care can assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to get the best start in life”. Once again, the Plan mirrors the recommendations of the Schools Commission report encouraging facility staff and families to work collaboratively to address student needs and to prepare for the classroom and its routines.

Further to this, the Schools Commission report (“Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group - June 1975” 1975) recommended the inclusion for Aboriginal Studies for students and Australian schools. As with the recent inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures into the National Curriculum (ACARA 2015), the reasons for inclusion in 1975 were based on closing the ‘cultural gap’ as eluded to previously and working towards reconciliation. In fact, the Schools Commission expressed concern about the lack of understanding and appreciation of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in the wider Australian society. In comparison, with the development of the National Curriculum, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cross-curriculum priority was included to provide opportunity “for all learners to deepen their knowledge of Australia by engaging with the world’s oldest continuous living cultures” (ACARA 2015: para. 3). This exemplifies that the ‘cultural gap’ and reconciliation are still objectives that Australian society are working towards and further demonstrates the need for a new perspective.

Interestingly, the Schools Commission report (“Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group - June 1975” 1975) emphasizes how Indigenous people are authorities in Indigenous affairs. They state that Indigenous people should be considered authority “for

all matters relating to the preparation and implementation of such study programs and the development of curricula” (“Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group - June 1975” 1975: 19). Today, while ACARA has consulted with Indigenous people within Advisory groups and so forth, the recommendations made in 1975 are yet to be implemented. At the time, the number of Indigenous people qualified to do so was limited however, today, the pool while minimal in comparison to the non-Indigenous teacher population, allows for such opportunities to be fulfilled.

The Excluded vs Pathways to Post-School Options

At the time that the Schools Commission report (“Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group - June 1975” 1975) was presented, secondary schooling was minimal and therefore, the area of concern regarding *The Excluded* is more relevant to the Plan’s (MCEECDYA 2011) *Pathways to Post-School Options* domain. However, it also addresses the prevalent rise of students at risk who disengage from school and become early school-leavers (Stehlik 2013). To demonstrate the interconnection, the Excluded includes “people who do not have the opportunity to take advantage of education, or who have withdrawn because of deficiencies in some education systems” (“Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group - June 1975” 1975: 23). Given today’s context, where schooling is more readily available and accessible, there are still students who elect to withdraw or disengage as a result of some of the very same deficiencies of the past including “recognizing that disengagement can begin in the early years of schooling and is even inter-generational; and that alternative learning programs are often better when based outside of schools involving the wider community, other agencies, and other professionals including social and youth workers working in collaboration with teachers” (Stehlik 2013: 15).

In 1975, there was the recommendation of providing special seminars for Aboriginal communities to inform community members of the initiatives and trends in education (“Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group - June 1975” 1975). These seminars would be held over a week and take on a workshop format that mirrored the “in-service seminars of teachers of Aboriginal children” (“Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group - June 1975” 1975: 24). In doing so, the communication between schools and community would be open ensuring that community is informed of the innovations being implemented in schools to improve participation, engagement and retention.

In today’s context, community forums are conducted by the Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies (IECBs) but are moreover, a means to gain feedback and provide voice from community on policy (Victorian Aboriginal Consultative Association Inc. 2015). These very Consultative Bodies were formed as a response to the Schools Commission report (“Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group - June 1975” 1975) and are still functioning today. However, more recently, representation of Indigenous people is also provided by the Indigenous Advisory Council (Prime Minister’s Indigenous Advisory Council

2015). It is important to note that none of the current Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander representatives are educators as such but are representative of all the other key areas including health and law.

Furthermore to address the Excluded, the Commission recommended the development of study courses and film groups that are informed by local needs (“Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group - June 1975” 1975). The initiative of the film groups was to provide on the job training of Indigenous youth in the making of documentaries and filming techniques. The Commission also encouraged the development of Aboriginal Visitors to Schools schemes whereby Indigenous people would be financed to form panels to visit schools to share their lived experiences. This in turn would be expected to build awareness and encourage positive relationships and ideology towards Indigenous people.

The Plan’s domain Pathways to Post-School Options’ (MCEECDYA 2011) primary objective is ensure that Indigenous students transition from school to employment or further study. To do this, focus is placed on retention and the gaining of a Year 12 (or equivalent) attainment. However, the IECBs highlight “there are not any real post-school pathway strategies currently available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and many government initiatives that have worked really well in the past have been withdrawn” (SCSEEC 2013: 70). They also suggested that the pathways available be introduced earlier in junior secondary schooling rather than the current situation where they are introduced in the senior years which they believe is too late.

There is definite need to “change tack” and seek a new perspective on addressing the disparity between Indigenous students and their non-Indigenous counterparts as there has been little to no change in policy ‘solutions’ and approaches. The discourse has shifted from a more inclusive voice to the top-down properties of current policy that silence and remove Indigenous from being actively involved in the decision making process. While there are similarities within each of the areas of concern and the domains, the differences in approaches and expectations are the result of the differing historical and social context and their relevant policies. Despite being written 40 years ago, the concerns of the Schools Commission in 1975 are still evident in today’s policy. If no change occurs, if policy makers continue down the same very formed track, the risk is 40 years from now, the very same questions on how to address the ‘gap’ between Indigenous students and their non-Indigenous counterparts will be being asked. The goals set are high but the need to succeed is even higher. Australia cannot afford to let another generation of Indigenous students be ‘lost’.

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