The Australian Educational Researcher
https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-022-00517-4

Inclusive, colour-blind, and deficit: Understanding teachers' contradictory views of Aboriginal students' participation in education

Sara Weuffen[1] · **Jacinta Maxwell**[2] · **Kevin Lowe**[1]

Received: 29 May 2021 / Accepted: 14 March 2022
© The Author(s) 2022

Abstract

This paper contributes evidence-based scholarship to how teachers understand the value of Aboriginal student-focussed programmes and how discourses of Indigeneity appear to influence those views. Interviews with $n=22$ teachers across $n=3$ secondary school sites in New South Wales highlighted teachers' understanding of Aboriginal programmes as primarily contributing to students' behavioural and academic improvement. The interviewed teachers spoke positively about Aboriginal students' current academic achievements and prospects for their bright futures as graduates, albeit from within deficit and colour-blind discourses. Utilising Moodie's Decolonising Race Theory framework, teachers' juxtaposing beliefs resonate with existing decolonising education research which indicates a performativity of cultural inclusion through adherence to settler-colonial practices, while at the same time, an intellectual desire to move away from the legacy of Australia's contentious colonial past.

Keywords Aboriginal education · Indigeneity · Aboriginal programmes · Decolonising race theory · Indigenous methodologies · Australian schooling

✉ Sara Weuffen
s.weuffen@unsw.edu.au

Jacinta Maxwell
Jacinta.maxwell@usq.edu.au

Kevin Lowe
kevin.lowe@unsw.edu.au

[1] University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia

[2] University of Southern Queensland, Darling Heights, Australia

Published online: 07 April 2022

Current lay of the land

Over the past several decades, policy makers, curriculum developers, and school staff in Australia have been working towards developing inclusive and culturally responsive curricula and pedagogies where Australia's sovereign First Nations[1] peoples are concerned. In the 1970s and early 1980s, recommendations were made to facilitate self-determination in education (Aboriginal Consultative Group, 1975), with a shift to achieving broad equity and giving "full consideration" to Aboriginal people's views on education (Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force, 1988, p. 4). Directives in the first state *Aboriginal Education Policy* (New South Wales, Department of Education, Directorate of Special Programs, 1982) required linguistically and culturally responsive, strength-based curricula, and were followed by targets in the first *National Aboriginal Education Policy* (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1989). These targets were intended to increase involvement of First Nations people in educational decision making, equality of access to educational services, equity of educational participation, and appropriate educational outcomes (pp. 1–2). Decades later, the national *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan* (Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011) outlined broad equity goals around attendance, participation, retention, and achievement in early childhood education settings and schools; developing community partnership agreements at focus schools; increasing educators' intercultural and linguistic competence in First Nations education and increasing the number of First Nations staff. A consistent directive to close achievement gaps has been the focus of educational policy for four and a half decades (Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force, 1988; Council of Australian Governments, 2009; Education Council, 2019; MCEECDYA, 2011).

Since 1989, state education ministers across Australia have published statements of national educational goals for young Australians: The *Hobart Declaration on Schooling* (Australian Education Council (AEC), 1989), the *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century (*Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), 1999), *The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008), and the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (Education Council, 2019). Through these documents, Ministers have encouraged an understanding of the value, comprehension, and respect for First Nations cultures (AEC, 1989; Education Council, 2019; MCEETYA, 1999; 2008). Since 1999, some version of a reference to the need for all students to "possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to and benefit from, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians" (MCEETYA, 1999, Sec. 3.4; 2008, p. 10; Education Council, 2019, p. 6) has been included. The authors of the *Mparntwe Declaration* built on previous recognition of the importance of First Nations peoples and cultures

[1] We use the nomenclature First Nations to acknowledge 250+diverse Aboriginal communities across the Australian continent, the five distinct Islander communities of the Torres Strait, and the countless Indigenous peoples removed from community and Country as a result of white assimilation policies.

by asserting that "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, knowledge and experiences are fundamental to Australia's social, economic and cultural wellbeing" (Education Council, 2019, p. 16). The Education Council (2019, p. 16) expressed support for ideas outlined in the earliest Aboriginal education policies, that it is the responsibility of the education community to create culturally safe learning spaces that engage First Nations students and communities, to share decision making about schooling, and to develop regionally responsive education in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders.

The aims of these educational policies, declarations, and practices are threefold. First, as metrics they have come to be seen as key markers of success; policies aimed at improving the academic outcomes of First Nations students have been prioritised. Increased recognition of the detrimental effects of overtly discriminatory policies, curriculum and practices have resulted in a shift away from explicit racism and towards inclusive approaches, both genuine and performative (Hogarth, 2018; Moodie et al. 2019; Sharp, 2013). As social awareness for the continuity of First Nations cultures has grown, policies have also come to include instructions for cross-cultural education of non-Indigenous students and education professionals. Lowe et al. (2021) argue that educational policies aimed at increasing knowledge of First Nations cultures, and improving the academic outcomes of First Nations students, has operated as a reductive process of reconciliation and purposeful strategy to deflect attention away from the systematic racist structures of Australian schooling. Despite the increasing focus on educating non-Indigenous students and teachers through and about First Nations cultures and histories, a number of persistent and significant challenges continue to limit positive impacts to First Nation students' learning. These challenges include a lack of sustainable and culturally safe education and curriculum, limited cross-cultural development in initial teacher education courses, and lack of professional development opportunities offered to in-service teachers (Brown, 2019; Hogarth, 2016; Lowe & Yunkaporta, 2013).

Comparative statistics in education indicate that there is a persistent gap between the academic achievement levels of First Nations students as a cohort and their non-Indigenous peers (Australian Government, 2020). While there is an increasing acknowledgement that settler-colonial systems of educational governance in Australia were never designed for First Nations students, Australian policies, curricula, teacher education programmes, and professional development programmes continue to be developed in the same mould, albeit with some recognition of past wrongs and statements indicating a desire to improve (Education Council, 2019; Patrick & Moodie, 2016; Moodie et al., 2019). Additionally, little research has been undertaken to understand how teachers in Australian school systems develop the requisite sophisticated knowledge of factors impacting student achievement within biased systems, and what resources are available to enable a suite of critical and culturally responsive pedagogical skills to be developed (Vass et al., 2019).

While significant cultural, curriculum, and pedagogical change has been acknowledged throughout state and federal school policy, curriculum and metrics-driven priorities have received precedence (Gallant & Riley, 2017; Heffernan, 2018). The perpetually-increasing responsibilities placed upon teacher workloads has resulted in frustration about not having enough time, being financially limited

to undertake professional development, feeling as though schools do not prioritise cultural matters, and/or the absence of relationships with First Nations communities, as barriers to understanding and incorporating First Nations studies (Maxwell, 2013; Sarra et al., 2020). While incorporation of Indigenous perspectives and other content related curriculum solutions have received institutional support (e.g. *The University of Melbourne Indigenous Knowledge Resources for Australian school curriculum project* (Langton & Barry, 2021)), responses to integration of First Nations onto-epistemologies, entanglements of perceiving, knowing, doing and of perceiver, knower and doer (Higgins, 2021), have been less favourable. The aforementioned political and economic barriers have been interpreted as subtle pedagogical resistance to First Nations onto-epistemologies in ways that reflect settler-colonial educational supremacist ideologies (Higgins et al., 2015). This has led to a hyper-focus on the need for more resources to develop more culturally responsive education.

The divergence of teachers' responsibility to understand and work with First Nations onto-epistemologies in curriculum has flow on effects to their wider professional pedagogical practice. Operating alongside mainstream curricula, programmes[2] targeting Aboriginal students have been a feature of secondary school education since the 1980s. These programmes focus on developing students' positive connections with culture, building wellbeing strategies, improving academic outcomes, and engaging identity work through education (Thorn & Flodin, 2015; Williams et al., 2020). When Aboriginal programmes are delivered transparently, and when teachers are trained adequately and participate actively in community relationship building, they are empowered to build culturally-differentiated and nuanced quality learning programmes from a social justice perspective and within a strong community relationship model (Munns et al., 2013). But, when knowledge of their operation is separated from the whole school community, the non-Indigenous contingent views the programmes as distracting and negatively impacting Aboriginal students perceived academic capacity, which in turn reinforces notions of difference and deficit (Williams et al., 2020). It is this unseen space around the operation of Aboriginal programmes in Australian schools, and how teachers work with Aboriginal students, targeted educational programmes, teaching resources, curriculum development, and responsive pedagogies, that is explored in the data presented in this paper.

Contextualising the study

This chapter examines $n = 22$ interviews via focus groups with teachers employed across three high schools in New South Wales, Australia as part of phase 1 of the *Aboriginal Voices* project (Lowe & Burgess, 2021). The three schools were selected to be representative of the diversity in which Aboriginal students are enrolled. They were classified as metropolitan, regional, or rural, and had 25% or greater of the

[2] Programs such as Clontarf girls program, are not inherently cultural. Rather, each program has its own academic and/or cultural intent.

total student population identify as Aboriginal. Detailed descriptions of each of the school sites have been provided in the editorial overview of this special issue (see Weuffen et al. 2022). Invitations to participate were disseminated by leaders within each school and/or via an Aboriginal Education officer. After being supplied with a plain language information statement and completing an informed consent form, as approved by the Ethics application (Macquarie University: 5201600672), a mutually agreeable time and location for the focus groups was confirmed. Each focus group was conducted by a researcher on the original project, guided by semi-structured questions, audio-recorded, and transcribed by a third-party transcription service.

Data collection

Focus groups were chosen over one-to-one interviews as the preferred data collection tool to replicate group interaction consistent with normative school-based meetings and to gather rich in-depth insights from teachers (Allen, 2017). The diversity of teaching roles and expertise, combined with individual teacher backgrounds, sexual orientation, and experiences captured by the focus groups enabled deeper conversational exploration of the questions. The focus groups gathered on-the-ground experiences of teaching practices and the conditions by which teachers understand Aboriginal students, associated cultural programmes, and notions of race/ism in the respective schools. The key questions underpinning these focus groups were:

- What are your key experiences, lessons, and successes in working with Aboriginal students?
- What do you think are the key impediments and issues affecting Aboriginal students' participation in education?
- How do Aboriginal students demonstrate their educational aspirations and values?
- What are some of the experiences (school-based or teaching activities) that you consider have made an impact on Aboriginal students' interests and engagement?

Data analysis

Focus groups data were coded in NVivo thematically against a coding tree aligned to Moodie's (2018) Decolonising Race Theory (DRT) to enable a "disrup[ution of] the knowledge-power dialectic which perpetuates deficit discourses" (Moodie, 2018, p. 43) by "moving beyond critique to change [and undertake] reparative activism [that] centres prerogatives – spiritual, political, economic, and academic – other than Whiteness" (p. 42). The coding tree designed by Moodie (see paper two in this special issue, 2022) provided a structural framework for examining focus group transcripts and identifying statements aligning to one of the seven tenets of DRT, identified within NVivo as head nodes. As noted in Fig. 1, direct and aggregated coding of head nodes in NVivo indicated that teachers' pedagogical understanding

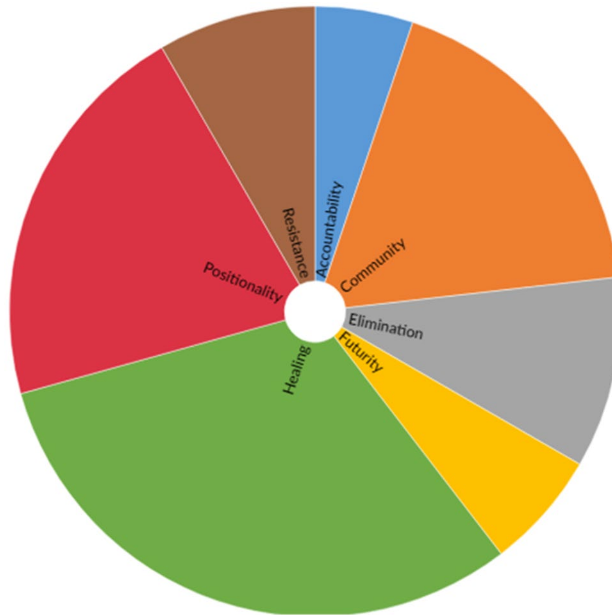

Fig. 1 Head Node coding of teacher focus groups against DRT

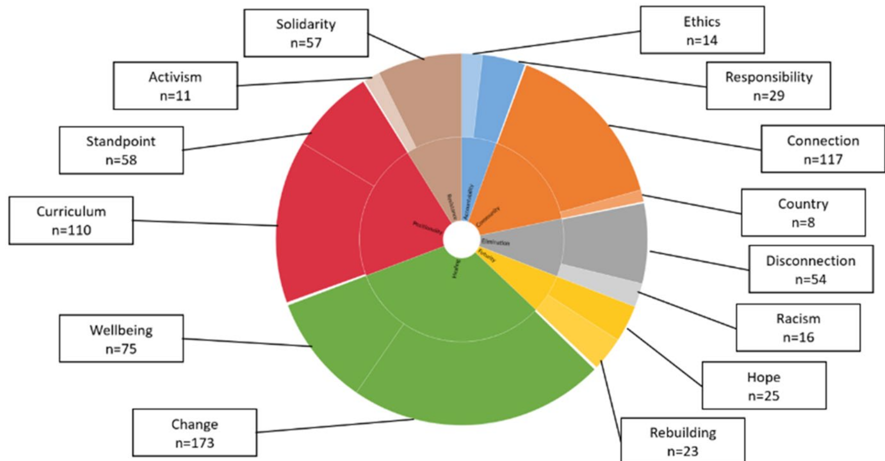

Fig. 2 Sub-node coding of teacher focus groups against DRT

of Aboriginal students' participation in schooling was centred around notions of Healing ($n=276$), Positionality ($n=190$), and Communities ($n=163$) primarily.

To gain further insight into how DRT tenets influence teachers' epistemic beliefs and associated pedagogical practices, sub-nodes were coded across the transcripts. As noted in Fig. 2, direct coding indicated an interesting interplay of disrupting the

functioning of privilege and power while maintaining their primacy. Focus groups revealed attitudes towards change ($n=173$) were considered the primary means by which one demonstrates reparative activism and addresses healing, that connection ($n=117$) is essential to relational practices that foster connections with community, and that presenting curriculum ($n=110$) at the cultural interface is the way forward for integrating Indigenous knowledge into education.

Both the theoretical conceptualisation of DRT (see Moodie, 2022) and the accompanying coding tree enabled identification of both meta—across participant groups—and micro—within focus groups and individual statements—accounts of how race/ism happens in these schooling contexts, how teachers buy into constructions of race, and how they interact with counter/narratives. Systematic coding was used in conjunction with thorough in-depth reading of transcripts to triangulate findings and reduce the influence of individual researcher interpretations; even though this may be an unavoidable condition of social science research practice (Crotty, 1998). To name the visible and hidden functions of race in settler-colonial contexts, once focus groups discussions were transcribed and uploaded to NVivo, the researchers read through each transcript systematically, extracted statements relating to Aboriginal students, programmes, and/or teaching pedagogies, and sorted according to nodes (see Fig. 3).

Thematic analysis was then conducted of all statements to identify commonalities of concepts emerging to determine how Aboriginal programmes are understood by teachers and function within these NSW schools. To maintain the anonymity of participants and mitigate the positioning influences of pseudonyms, a generic numeric referencing system for presenting teachers' direct quotes has been used: i.e. Teacher 1, Teacher 2, etc.

Key findings

Coding of teacher interviews against a DRT framework revealed that notions of change ($n=181$), connection ($n=143$), and curriculum ($n=116$) were mobilised more frequently than notions of Country ($n=9$), activism ($n=12$), and ethics ($n=14$). The overall tone of focus groups indicated teachers' desire to heal the historical wrongdoings of past Australian government policies while providing equality of educational outcomes through reparative activism and social change ($n=262$). However, there was limited discussion about the value of Indigenous methodologies ($n=44$) as integral to driving such change. Our analysis illuminated that teachers—as a collective—tended to speak positively about Aboriginal programmes and expressed a faith that Aboriginal students can succeed in school. Yet, these views were held alongside a deficit perspective of Aboriginal students' educational participation and achievement aligned with settler-colonial constructs of success, influenced by notions of race. This conflict was evident in how teachers spoke about the value of Aboriginal programmes for improving relationships between school staff and Aboriginal families, increasing rates of students identifying as Aboriginal, and the perceived improvements in students' engagement with school, while implicating Aboriginal parents as causes of poor engagement and low self-confidence.

ELIMINATION n=64 (Head Node)

DRT	Head node	Definition	Definition, expanded keywords (examples of definition, key ideas, synonyms)	Sub-note, definition
1. The logic of elimination	Elimination	Settler colonial processes of erasure	Dispossession, race, racism, colonialism, imperialism, genocide, assimilation, disconnection, Stolen Generations, religious conversion, land loss, missions (children's homes, reserves etc), Anglo renaming (places and people), Indigenous appropriation, cultural appropriation, White supremacy, deficit, damage, narratives of Indigenous inability, repression, backwards, historicization, stereotypes.	

<Files\\#10 Plumpton Teacher #1> - § 2 references coded [4.51% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.91% Coverage

Learn to Learn Skills. So, whilst that was developed by the PACE team it's relevant to the entire school community. So those strategies – we didn't have those before. It was a bit piecemeal, a bit tokenistic, but we seem to be making – we' re very lucky here to have XXXX who is outstanding support for staff and students.

Reference 2 - 2.60% Coverage

Not necessarily as the 'naughty kids' but certainly perhaps kids that are more disengaged with their learning. I mean, they did in my early times probably make up a greater proportion of the kids that were in trouble, like maybe truanting, or high absenteeism. But I don't see that now. In fact, I'd probably even suggest they might be under represented compared to the rest of the school now. I don't have any data on me to back that up,

<Files\\#11 Plumpton Teachers #5> - § 8 references coded [11.38% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.96% Coverage

Yep. 'Read this Policy. It's got this, and this. Let's me nice to Aboriginal, blah, blah, blah' so it's very tokenistic. And then when we looked at our data, so she started with data in terms of Aboriginal students reading levels, their Naplan results, and then we set up – if this data that's telling us that we have some students in our class are already disadvantaged, having to fix that. We agreed. We need time to do that. So that's how professional learning came about. *[another person came into the room]* So once we looked at the deficits in our learning, then she provided all this professional learning about what we need to look into.

Fig. 3 Extracted teacher statements according to DRT node

Two key themes emerged from our analysis. First, that teachers' understanding of Indigeneity reflected discourses that are simultaneously inclusive, colour-blind, and deficit. Second, that the perceived purpose of Aboriginal programmes is to improve academic and behavioural outcomes. Perhaps demonstrating the pervasiveness of settler-colonial ideologies of students—as solo neo-liberal agents of their own success—teachers' connections between students, families, and communities as critical to Indigeneity were absent. Overarchingly, teachers expressed theoretical support for Aboriginal programmes but cited workload pressures, lack of knowledge, and the disconnection from communities as barriers to deeper and more connected engagement within their own curriculum and pedagogical practices. This resulted in a limiting, reductive, and eliminatory understanding of the value of Aboriginal programmes in mainstream NSW schools.

Discourses of Indigeneity

Overall, focus groups suggested that teachers understand Indigeneity via deficit and colour-blind discourses, despite speaking positively about the potential and current successes of Aboriginal students. Colour-blind discourses of Indigeneity construct frames for creating and interpreting realities in which collective characteristics (e.g. ethnicity, culture, perceived racial characteristics), specifically those associated with Indigeneity (e.g. sovereignty, Country, survival) are not considered influential factors in people's lives (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Moodie, 2018). Since the late 1600s, European discourses of Indigeneity served to undermine the humanity of First Nations peoples, constructing them as inherently deficient, pitiful, and/or dangerous (Fforde et al., 2013). While discourses of Indigeneity are increasingly informed by self-determination, strengths-based approaches, anti-racist and whiteness scholarship, and decolonisation, the legacy of earlier discourses remains (Fogarty et al., 2018). Contemporary deficit discourses suggest a logic of elimination, involving overt racism and discrimination; assumptions about characteristics, skills, knowledge, or dispositions that First Nations peoples lack; and the policies and practices that are borne from these beliefs (Fforde et al., 2013; Moodie, 2018). When teachers spoke about the impacts of Indigeneity on Aboriginal student identity, and school/family and teacher/student relationships, they shared a complicated narrative that simultaneously employed oppositional DRT concepts.

Participants addressed aspects of sovereignty and Indigenous futurity when speaking about individual student potential; an awareness of the importance of relationality but implicit rejection of collectivism; an acceptance of individual people's positionality within the cultural interface but apparent indifference to the institution's positionality regarding knowledge production; and a logic of elimination, particularly when speaking about parents' roles in education. Teachers explicitly avoided speaking about Aboriginal students in collective terms, preferring instead to speak about the behaviour or academic potential of individuals. Such avoidance reflects colour-blind discourses that simultaneously demonstrate awareness of historical racism while also denying commonalities that may lead to contemporary disadvantage. Relationships with Aboriginal students and settler-colonialist understandings of Indigeneity and racism resulted in oscillating acceptance and rejection of the existence of hierarchical and social constructions of race influencing Aboriginal students' educational success. Western colonialist-settler views of success (as a product of an individual's academic achievement and appropriate behaviours) permeated teachers' understandings of Indigeneity, difference, and equity potential in contemporary schooling.

> I think they're proud of their Aboriginality. (Teacher 4)

Teachers from two schools spoke about Aboriginal identity as something that increasingly generates pride in most students, citing higher rates of Aboriginal identification than in previous years. This was largely attributed to the schools' programmes, family members identifying, and a culture that is more positively inclined towards Aboriginality than in the past.

> Putting Indigenous perspectives in your curriculum, that encourages and entices those kids to learn about themselves and there's that sense of identity and get rid of that shame factor. I'm just as good as everybody else here and I can achieve. And that's something that has been a big battle for Indigenous people Australia wide. Not just [this town]. (Teacher 21)

Teachers discussed increasing rates of students' self-identification as Aboriginal in a manner that suggested it as a very positive development that is encouraged and supported by the whole school community. Coupled with these discussions, parts of the focus groups that explicitly focussed on student identity were overwhelmingly positive. Teacher narratives tended to reflect the DRT notion of Indigeneity as a political tool for justice, Sovereignty, and futurity (Moodie, 2018). The former was expressed in terms of social and academic benefits of Aboriginal students acknowledging and understanding their cultural identities, with the latter represented in terms of the positive futures teachers predicted for students who have pride in that identity and acceptance of the support offered throughout their schooling. Teachers' affirmations of identity and identification as a positive aspect of Aboriginal students' schooling experiences indicate a shift from negative attitudes identified in earlier research (e.g. Foley, 2000). Such attitudes, particularly when considered in light of findings in the following sections, only address the complexity of Indigeneity in DRT in the most superficial manner. Recognition of individual identity, or even group identity, coupled with a refusal to recognise the political nature of Indigeneity as centred within the collective, and the refusal of whiteness and colonisation, suggests inclusive but colour-blind discourses have been influential in raising consciousness around affirmative stances to student identity, without recognitions of wider-reaching implications that are found in decolonial and anti-racist discourses (Moodie, 2018).

> Doesn't matter whether [they're] Aboriginal or not. (Teacher 4)

A colour-blind discourse of Indigeneity reads as an oxymoron, particularly when it comes after the previous section which relates recognition of the benefits of students identifying as Aboriginal. However, resistance to, and movement away, from explicit racism were responded to in part by an insistence that race no longer matters (Walter & Butler, 2013). Consequently, suggestions that school achievement might be correlated positively with cultural background are often dismissed in favour of neo-liberal, individualist explanations. Throughout the focus groups with teachers, statements favouring individualism were present when asked about how Indigeneity might impact students' potential or achievements at school:

> It's very hard for me to say this particular kid could be unengaged because he's Aboriginal or something. I don't do that, that perspective. When I'm in a classroom I just treat everyone equal. (Teacher 8)

The steadfast adherence to individualism in this response suggests a beneficent approach to teaching diverse students but is illustrative of a colour-blind discourse (Bonilla-Silva, 2013). Such a belief system involves refusal to consider the interface of student backgrounds, school or classroom culture, and the effect it has on student learning (Nakata, 2007). Similarities between Aboriginal students

was the theory mobilised to assert that Aboriginal students learn differently from non-Indigenous students and that teachers must be responsive to this. A range of discourses appear to influence these conceptions and the resultant impacts on planning and teaching. When asked by a researcher "We might start with in terms of the kids, their Aboriginality and their identity, how do you think that impacts on their schooling?" Teacher 2 responded:

> A great deal. In terms of their ability to grasp concepts. I found that I need to be really more visual, and I need to use a lot of tools where I had to either get them to visualise it or I need to be able to then, to get them at a level where I'm using emotional or emotive languages; and also having the ability to make it really, not dumbing it down, but simple for them to understand and then leading it to a context that I know would resonate with them. The ones that have had—are varied, so I have some students that in terms of the literacy it's quite low, Aboriginal students especially—on paper it's better than the average student. So, I've seen the breadth of some learning deficits and some wonderful learning taking place in the classroom ... There are some [Aboriginal students] that are obviously coming in with low literacy levels and it's the same as the normal other students in the mainstream class.

Part of the narrative around Teacher 2's statement about teaching Aboriginal students demonstrates awareness that *dumbing down* or lowering expectations is an unacceptable pedagogical practice. In the same breath they assert that content needs to be simplified "for them to understand". The teacher goes on to explain how they appropriate aspects of pan-Aboriginal culture in an effort to engage students and improve behaviour.

> I'm a Science teacher so every time I talk about say systems, it could be the weather, it could be the eco system, I would tend to relate it to the land or to the environment. I'll use some animals that they would be familiar with, that's pretty easy because it's Australian animals within that context. But I also then talk about I guess in engaging them about classroom behaviour, I relate it to—I don't think I use the word 'Elders' - but I use respect for people of authority, people with wisdom and knowledge. (Teacher 2)

Another teacher at this school refers to 'Aboriginal learning concepts' and connects these, in part, to Yunkaporta's (2009) *8 Ways Aboriginal Pedagogy*, developed in Western NSW:

> Every single teacher understands how an Aboriginal learns and how it might differ or look different for other kids in comparison to Aboriginal kids. So, we're kind of looking at—we just did a big, huge professional learning night purely based on Aboriginal learning concepts and a lot of that was based around 8 Ways. And so, I've just taken part in it. (Teacher 5)

Colour-blind discourses stem from "ideas associated with political liberalism (e.g. 'equal opportunity', the idea that force should not be used to achieve social policy) and economic liberalism (e.g. choice, individualism) in an abstract

manner to explain racial matters" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 28). Consequently, the teachers indicated a simultaneous belief that students' backgrounds do not inherently negatively impact their chances of success, while also holding the belief that Aboriginal students benefit from distinct pedagogies. The reluctance to acknowledge Aboriginality as a significant influential factor on students' likelihood of success in schooling was generally coupled with a recognition of Aboriginal students' potential to succeed, examples of other Aboriginal students already demonstrating strong academic results, and *good* behaviour (e.g. Teacher 17, Teacher 4, Teacher 5). There was frequent denial of the uniqueness of Aboriginality influencing aspects of schooling that could be perceived as negatively stereotyping (such as a lack of engagement). This suggested an aversion to being labelled racist by speaking about Indigeneity in the context of schooling success. Despite this, teachers' expressions about their beliefs relating to Aboriginal students' learning preferences or styles were accepted as normative culturally responsive practice.

> Parents not putting an importance on education. (Teacher 12)

Aboriginal parents were spoken about as people with whom teachers appreciated developing strong relationships with, in part because of the positive impacts on students' commitment to their academic and behavioural goals.

> I think sometimes the parents learn things that they didn't even know, or they realise—I think [Teacher 11] said before they realise things about their own children or child that they didn't know and in doing that we're building relationships and not just with us per se, maybe them going home and building that relationship so their home life then influences what they're doing when they come to school as well. (Teacher 10)

But then instances emerged where teachers drew upon deficit discourses to discuss their perceptions about the value of Aboriginal parenting on education. Below are examples of descriptions of parents that suggest that they are not invested in their child's school education. There appears to be a belief that without teachers, children would have no support or guidance.

> We need more parents turning up. You saw how many parents were there. So, there isn't that connection ... If the parent knows what's going on at school and actually holds this to a higher importance and they're on board, then if a kid's sitting at home doing nothing, they'll be like, oh, hold on, but you had this to do, because they know about it. Even if you don't have anything on let's go and study because your education's important. We can't do it all here. You need whoever's at home to be supporting what's happening here to continue to remind the kids what they should be doing. (Teacher 14)
> I feel that they've seen, in some cases not all of our parents are this way, but they've seen mum, dad, sister, aunty, all go through the cycle of life being what it might be, or bleak, and they just feel that that's their path. I think that's part of our job as teachers is to work with them to make them realise they can create their own. I think that's one of the most rewarding parts of our job is that these kids can be anything they want to be, they've just got

> to have someone believe in them and that someone has to be them. (Teacher 11)

Clarifying statements such as "not all of our parents" (Teacher 11) and "all kids" (Teacher 13) suggests a degree of equality in thinking about students and parents. However, they are suggestive of colour-blind and deficit discourses where the assumption that Aboriginal parents do not consider schooling to be of "higher importance" and, rather, rely on teachers to undertake the heavy lifting of education. The suggestion here is that teachers know what the parent/child relationship is like at home, parents do not talk to children about education, parents do not believe that their children will succeed—ultimately, that parents undervalue education. These assumptions are common but not supported by research (Lea et al., 2011).

A recurrent theme representing the apparently conflicting dispositions towards Aboriginal parents is illustrated below. The teacher seeks to defend parents of Aboriginal students by emphasising that only a (guesstimated) minority are having a negative impact on their child's capacity / ability to achieve to their full potential, while at the same time, blames them for modelling negative characteristics presumed to exist in Aboriginal students.

> It's not all of the kids. It would be a minority of the Aboriginal student parents. If I was going to pull out a number it would be like 20% of parents might be that way, it's not all of them. I don't want to make a statement that's not, but I think those that don't have the self-belief sometimes it does come from home and it does come from their upbringing and what they see and what they're told. (Teacher 11)

The perception of Aboriginal parents as being different from other parents results in deficit narratives around disconnection and absence from their child's education. As this happens, a logic of elimination creates the conditions for maintaining stereotypes about Aboriginal parents as negligent and impacts the possibility of building stronger school/parent connections. The latter, however, stops well short of a decolonial approach to relationality as it reflects a preference for adherence to relationship building without collectivism.

Understanding Aboriginal programmes

When teachers spoke about the Aboriginal programmes operating within their respective schools, a general recognition of the positive impact on student's academic outputs, teaching pedagogy, and the culture of the school and broader community was observed. Interestingly, while statements made about Aboriginal programmes aligned to notions of Change, Healing, Locality, Curriculum, Community, and Connection in Moodie's coding tree, when explored deeper, particularly where teachers' positionality is concerned, eliminatory practices of colonisation emerged subtly under the guise of recognition, change, and healing.

Self-determining programmes for Australia's First Nations students have been an educational directive since the early 1980s, with subsequent policies focussing on reconciling school-wide recognition and respect for First Nations cultures

(MCEETYA, 1999). While the teachers in this study were able to articulate some knowledge of various Aboriginal programmes operating in their schools:

> Heaps of programs. AIM. Deadly dreaming. A lot of university programs. (Teacher 5)
> We've got the AFL Indigenous academy [and] the Pathways to Dreaming. (Teacher 11)
> I know that there are some instances where we have Aboriginal programs running in our school. (Teacher 2)

The impact of these appeared to be tied to academic outcomes, such as increased engagement with school activities, enhanced academic results, and improved behaviour.

> We look at the data of our students when they start Year 7 and where they go towards finishing high school … a lot of them have actually gone onto higher education study as well. So, that's really good statistics for us. (Teacher 11)

While teachers' statements are reflections of a moment in time, contextualised by their individual knowledge and experience, the eliminatory tone about academic outputs indicates a superficial understanding of the purpose of Aboriginal programmes within schools. The lack of discussion about relational connectedness to Country and community indicates that teachers continue to be caught up in educational discourses that tout deficit expectations of Aboriginal students' academic achievement compared to their non-Indigenous peers (Australian Government, 2020). In the neo-liberal settler-colonial Australian schooling space, this results in concepts such as *aspirations* linking First Nations' sovereignty and futurity within cultural programmes being interpreted as avenues for conditioning *good behaviour* and higher academic outcomes. This is exemplified by Teacher 2 who said:

> The sole focus of that [program] is to enhance and really give kids that advantage they need to be able to perform equally among the other students.

Given the intent of Aboriginal programmes, as discussed by teachers in these focus group snippets, tended to focus on academic output, it is unsurprising that many features of sovereignty and futurity were not discussed.

When speaking about the impact of Aboriginal programmes on individual practices, teachers spoke confidently about the meta and individual process of integrating culturally responsive aspects of learning into curriculum, and for the benefit of all First Nations students. Conversations about how individual teachers, and in some cases faculties, were integrating Aboriginal material was readily explained, for example:

> I went on the 8 Ways training and then had to present that to the whole staff. [There's been a flow on effect] of how [other staff have] implemented Aboriginal perspectives in their classrooms or in their programs and that'll just be an ongoing thing. (Teacher 6)

Given that integration of Aboriginal onto-epistemological content beyond that already prescribed within the larger National Curriculum structure (i.e.: cross-cultural priority areas and elaborations), and as mandated Standards 1.4 and 2.4 within the *Australian Professional Standards for Teacher*s (Australian Institute for Teaching & School Leadership Limited, 2011), the manner by which teachers wove content relating to Aboriginal programmes within curriculum was variable. Some teachers wove content where they personally identified links, while others undertook a more comprehensive departmental-based approach.

> We've spoken about what we do to minimise that gap here and any chance I have to make a link to something that we're doing to reduce the gap, I try and make that link. (Teacher 6)
> All of [the] frameworks [i.e.: literacy] has [sic] the Aboriginal 8 Ways embedded within it and we then implement in terms of programming and scope and sequences and things like that, we're mindful of those 8 Ways as well. I think a lot of staff when they're teaching here, without even really being mindful of the Aboriginal pedagogies and things like that, it's just a natural thing that's been embedded into our lessons, our programs, our resources and I think that that's part of the reason why our Aboriginal kids are above the standard. (Teacher 12)

Variable approaches to building curriculum inclusive of Aboriginal content, as Brown (2019) argues, fail to account for the deep onto-epistemological foundations of First Nations knowledges. In doing so, the logic of elimination at the core of settler-colonial practices segments knowledges as normative or other and limits the possibilities of thought about First Nations' hybrid, liminal, or (re)emergent perspectives and standpoints. This results most often in piecemeal implementation of, or failure to work with, culturally relevant content and is justified on the basis of workload demands.

Workload pressures, and perhaps also the settler-colonial system in which teachers themselves have been educated and are now employed (Weuffen, 2018), appear to influence how individualised learning outcomes of Aboriginal programmes are mobilised to create a culture of success within the school and wider community**.** Several teachers raised the point that linking classroom learning to individual Aboriginal student's *Personal Learning Plans* (PLPs) was a general expectation within the schools.

> [We] support our Aboriginal kids through their PLPs; so, we get them to find their strengths and their smarts and we get them to work out what they're good at and how other things can help them with their smarts because if they don't recognise those achievements and if they don't start to believe in themselves then their beliefs will become reality. (Teacher 11)

There was broad agreement that when student's PLP goals were drawn upon to inform individualised learning, or in the case below modify behaviour, teachers perceived students to be both surprised and delighted that time was taken to acknowledge their identity and learning goals.

> So if a student in the classroom made a decision to throw the paperclip off the table, the teacher might tap the desk and say ‘are you managing your impulsivity?’ and that would connect—the student knows that you know [that] their goal is to manage impulsivity [and] they think ‘oh my gosh this teacher’s actually taking the time to get to know my goals and to get to know me’, and the student says ‘oh I’m sorry sir, how did you know that?’. If the teacher uses those things, the student feels proud that they’ve taken the time to get to know them. (Teacher 10)

But, in some cases, teachers’ lack of intricate knowledge about learning happening within programmes was a barrier to their pedagogical capacity for integration:

> I know last year when I had this class, about six Aboriginal students had been doing different programs and then when they come back to my class [they’d be really far behind]. That’s true too, but I said I really would like to know what they’ve done so then I can support it in my classroom. (Teacher 2)

While references to Aboriginal knowledge/s and generalised learning styles were discussed by teachers, rarely was this encapsulated in a manner consistent with decolonial practices. Teachers’ acknowledgement, references, and integration of student goals tied to Aboriginal programmes for example, may be considered a moment of resistance to settler-colonial agendas of assimilation, or as acts of change and solidarity to the rights of First Nations peoples. Yet, the disciplinary and structural manner in which Aboriginal programmes are spoken about, and employed, reflects the very same settler-colonial ideologies of education, namely the logic of erasure and negation of self-determination. Perhaps this is a result of the coding conditions of non-Indigenous teachers’ own personal and professional positionality. As Vass et al. (2019) and Weuffen (2018) have argued, non-Indigenous teachers’ capacity to critique their own positionality is a significant aspect to developing the requisite sophisticated knowledge of factors impacting Aboriginal student achievements within mainstream schooling.

When considering the meta positive impacts of Aboriginal programmes on the school community, references to enrolment numbers and declarations of identity were strongly cited.

> I think we’ve got 13% plus who identify as Aboriginal. We’ve got about 26 in Year 7 alone [which], I think, is the biggest intake of students who have identified as Aboriginal for a while. I suppose, a large amount of those kids are proud to identify. (Teacher 6)

Citing school culture and support programmes as the main reasons for an increase in Aboriginal student enrolments, teachers commented:

> I think the reason why [numbers are] increasing now is because of the amount of programs and support that has been publicised about [the school] and students are now wanting to come here … they’re extremely supported through a few different learners [support teams]. (Teacher 6)

> Obviously, parents want their students to go here especially those with an Aboriginal background because parents want their kids to be a part of the programs that we do run. (Teacher 11)

The increase in student numbers was attributed to a cultural liaison officer as integral to building an inclusive community culture:

> In two years, there has been an ASLO, Aboriginal School Liaison Officer intervention. Because [they're] so close with the Aboriginal families in the local community, [they] generally will just go "oh speak to Aunty such and such about this" and [they'll] go off in [their] own time and then seeing them after school and know exactly what's going on. (Teacher 7)

But another teacher articulated that parental investment was a missing link to building an inclusive community within the school further. They said:

> When we have a celebration of students' achievements, [parents] should be probably be invited … like in assemblies and things like that, rather than just the student. (Teacher 11)

In speaking favourably about the increasing enrolment numbers of Aboriginal students, teachers acknowledged that identity work happening as part of the programmes was the major contributing factor. Yet, the influence of ASLOs and parents—aka the community—while mentioned, was considered supplementary to the larger educational opportunities offered up by these same programmes. Rather than seeing the multiple relationality factors of community practices in developing a sense of connection and identity within schools, teachers' statements reflected a reductive settler-colonial ideology of segmented disconnection consistent with the logic of elimination.

Speaking back to deficit discourses?

Analysis of teacher focus groups within the larger *Aboriginal Voices* project revealed the colonising prevalence of erasure through a logic of elimination. Notions of collective identity and collectivism broadly were absent. There was little recognition that the overarching aims of cultural programmes could involve building capital and knowledge production, with the focus remaining on behavioural and academic improvement. Teacher discussions oscillated between accepting, rejecting, or being unaware of the hierarchal social discourses surrounding the delivery of programmes and Aboriginal students' participation in Australian schooling. In this manner, Aboriginal programmes function as racially driven programmes designed to address specifically the perception of academic difference and close the gap on Aboriginal students' educational success. As this happens, empowering notions of activism, sovereignty, futurity, connection, and wellbeing are squashed under western colonialist-settler ideologies of educational success.

Teachers' explanations about the purpose and functions of the programmes seemed to be at odds with the aims of building community networks, undertaking identity work, and providing Aboriginal students with a safer educational space in

which they may experience success. While these programmes present opportunities to speak back to deficit discourses through the building of Aboriginal students' collective cultural identity and knowledges, these outcomes are undermined by an absence of relationships beyond teacher-student. An interesting example of the rejection of collectivism is illustrated by teachers' reluctance to identify students as Aboriginal, First Nations, or Indigenous, but rather integrate them into the larger student body. Yet, teachers attempted to understand Indigeneity as a collective concept by building relationships with students while critiquing parental involvement and undervaluing the importance of the collective Aboriginal community.

Much of teachers' discussions about Aboriginal programmes were linked explicitly to feelings, personal observations, and/or professional perceptions. Although some teachers had access to data (e.g. attendance), others spoke about a lack of data to support their beliefs about the impacts of the programmes. Some teachers spoke of the improvements that they believed had resulted from the programmes, however, their comments about insufficient time to align practice with programme goals appeared to imply recognition that they were not fulfilling their professional responsibilities, and by extension, letting Aboriginal students down as a result. There was an indication of commitment to supporting Aboriginal students by recognising the value of cultural programmes within their school, this occurred by teachers using products of the programmes (i.e.: PLPs) as tools for improving academic and/or behavioural outcomes. As this happens, settler-colonial ideologies of educational success centred within individualism works against First Nations ideologies of togetherness and negates the possibilities of speaking back to educational deficit discourses.

Culture was absent from any teacher explanations of the purpose of Aboriginal programmes except where the 8 Ways pedagogical framework was mentioned. This absence of cultural grounding suggests that Aboriginal programmes within these schools currently function as performative acts of cultural inclusion. Operating from within the cultural interface, teachers seemed to be bound by their own personal and professional positionality as privileged subjects, with the cultural programmes enacted as piecemeal and tokenistic approaches to facilitate the building of cultural capital within Australian schooling systems. In the settler-colonial architecture of the school, the intention and outcomes of Aboriginal programmes are not valued as a core educational endeavour. Given this, the inclusion of them has a limited functionality for speaking back to social deficit discourses about the educational aspirations, capacity, and success of Aboriginal students. As this happens, the systematic necessity of orientating Australian education towards Aboriginal onto-epistemologies ways of doing to mobilise academic sovereignty and futurity remains a pipe dream.

A possible way forward

The variable and fluctuating acceptance and resistance to including and accepting Aboriginal students, communities, cultures, and pedagogies into teachers' daily practice examined in this study provides some possible ways forward to elevating

the operation of Aboriginal programmes in Australian schools. From our analysis, the bulk of these enhancements would seem to be situated with building greater understandings for student potential and teacher:student:community relationships centred in Aboriginal sovereignty, identity, and culture. This would require both pre- and in-service teacher professional development orientated towards flipping the lens and critiquing western settler-colonialist ideologies in order to accept that identity for Aboriginal students is central to their increased participation and success in schooling. One way in which this may occur is through an awareness of, and willingness to, implement curriculum and pedagogy that promotes diversity and anti-racist messaging. Yet, further empirical research exploring how a largely non-Indigenous teaching workforce might contribute a more culturally safer education system is required to determine how Aboriginal students' participation and success in Australian schooling can be enhanced and sustained.

Acknowledgements We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the unceded lands upon which this research has taken place.

Funding Open Access funding enabled and organized by CAUL and its Member Institutions.

Declarations

Author Positioning Statement This paper is a collaborative case study inquiry by a diverse team of ex-school teachers and current university teacher-researchers. Sara is a non-Indigenous scholar of German, Scottish, and Welsh descent, born on Gundijtmara Country. She currently lives and works on Wadawurrung Country and focusses on challenging binary discourses of race and educating non-Indigenous peoples about crosscultural work. Jacinta is Pākehā and non-Indigenous Australian, born on Mununjali Country, and raised in Aotearoa/New Zealand on the lands and waters of Ngāi Te Rangi. Jacinta works and lives on Giabal and Jarowair Country, with her teaching and research focussed on whiteness and education practice and policy. Kevin is a proud Gubbi Gubbi man from southeast Queensland. He is a Scientia Indigenous Fellow at UNSW, working on a community and school focussed research project on developing a model of sustainable improvement in Aboriginal education.

Ethical approval Macquarie University: 5201600672.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/.

References

Aboriginal Consultative Group. (1975). *Education for Aborigines: Report to the schools commission*. Doi:https://doi.org/10.3316/informit.016131448533487

Allen, M. (2017). *The SAGE encyclopedia of communication research methods*. SAGE.

Australian Education Council. (1989). *Hobart declaration on national goals for schooling in Australia*. Canberra.
Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force. (1988). *Report of the Aboriginal education policy task force*. Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force.
Australian Government. (2020). *Closing the gap: Report 2020*. https://ctgreport.niaa.gov.au/sites/default/files/pdf/closing-the-gap-report-2020.pdf
Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Limited. (2011). *Australian professional standards for teachers*. https://www.aitsl.edu.au/teach/standards
Bonilla-Silva, E. (2006). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
Brown, L. (2019). Indigenous young people, disadvantage and the violence of settler colonial education policy and curriculum. *Journal of Sociology, 55*(1), 54–71. https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783318794295
Council of Australian Governments. (2009). *National integrated strategy for closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage*. Council of Australian Governments.
Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research*. Allen & Unwin.
Department of Employment Education and Training. (1989). *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education policy: Joint policy statement*. Commonwealth Government.
Education Council. (2019). *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) education declaration*. http://www.educationcouncil.edu.au/site/DefaultSite/filesystem/documents/Reports%20and%20publications/Alice%20Springs%20(Mparntwe)%20Education%20Declaration.pdf
Fforde, C., Bamblett, L., Lovett, R., Gorringe, S., & Fogarty, B. (2013). Discourse, deficit and identity: Aboriginality, the race paradigm and the language of representation in contemporary Australia. *Media International Australia, 149*(1), 162–173. https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X1314900117
Fogarty, W., Lovell, M., Langenberg, J., & Heron, M. J. (2018). *Deficit discourse and strengths-based approaches: Changing the narrative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing*. The Lowitja Institute & National Centre for Indigenous Studies.
Foley, D. (2000). Aboriginality? The plight of the fair-skinned Indigenous Australian student in the secondary school system. In R. Craven, R. (Ed.) *Aboriginal Studies: Self concept for a nation* 10th Annual ASA Conference (pp. 51–55.). Aboriginal Studies Association.
Gallant, A., & Riley, P. (2017). Early career teacher attrition in Australia: Inconvenient truths about new public management. *Teachers and Teaching, 23*(8), 896–913. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2017.1358707
Heffernan, A. (2018). *The principal and school improvement: Theorising discourse, policy, and practice*. Springer.
Higgins, M. (2021). Positing Cartesianism as an ontology within science education: Towards a more response-able inheritance with Dr Frédérique Apffel-Marglin. In M. Higgins (Ed.), *Unsettling responsibility in science education* (pp. 211–268). Palgrave Macmillan.
Hogarth, M. (2016). One step forward, two steps back: The historical and social context of Indigenous education policy. *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues, 19*(1–2), 147–160.
Hogarth, M. (2018). Talkin' bout a revolution: The call for transformation and reform in Indigenous education. *The Australian Educational Researcher, 45*(5), 663–674.
Higgins, M., Madden, B., & Korteweg, L. (2015). Witnessing (halted) deconstruction: White teachers' 'perfect stranger' position within urban Indigenous education. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 18*(2), 251–276. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2012.759932
Langton, M. & Barry, R. (2021). *Indigenous knowledge resources for Australian school curricula project*. https://indigenousknowledge.unimelb.edu.au/curriculum#home
Lea, T., Thompson, H., McRae-Williams, E., & Wegner, A. (2011). Policy fuzz and fuzzy logic: Researching contemporary Indigenous education and parent–school engagement in north Australia. *Journal of Education Policy, 26*(3), 321–339. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2010.509813
Lowe, K., & Yunkaporta, T. (2013). The inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content in the Australian National Curriculum: A cultural, cognitive and socio-political evaluation. *Curriculum Perspectives, 33*(1), 1–14.
Lowe, K., Moodie, N., & Weuffen, S. (2021). Refusing reconciliation in Indigenous curriculum. In B. Green, P. Roberts, & M. Brennan (Eds.), *Curriculum challenges and opportunities in a changing world: Transnational perspectives in curriculum inquiry.* Palgrave Macmillan.
Maxwell, J. (2013). Teachers, time, staff and money: Committing to community consultation in high schools. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education, 41*(2), 120–130. https://doi.org/10.1017/jie.2012.31

Moodie, N. (2018). Decolonising race theory: Place, survivance and sovereignty. In K. Gulson, J. Maxwell, S. Rudolph, & G. Vass (Eds.), *The relationality of race in education research* (pp. 33–46). Routledge.

Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA]. (1999). *The Hobart declaration on schooling (1989)*. Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs.

Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA]. (2008). *Melbourne declaration on educational goals for young Australians*. Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs.

Ministerial Council on Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA]. (2011). *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education action plan 2010–2014*. http://www.educationcouncil.edu.au/site/DefaultSite/filesystem/documents/ATSI%20documents/ATSIEAP_web_version_final.pdf

Munns, G., O'Rourke, V., & Bodkin-Andrews, G. (2013). Seeding success: Schools that work for Aboriginal students. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education, 42*(1), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1017/jie.2013.6

Nakata, M. N. (2007). *Disciplining the savages, savaging the disciplines*. Aboriginal Studies Press.

New South Wales, Department of Education, Directorate of Special Programs. (1982). *Aboriginal Education Policy*. NSW Government.

Patrick, R., & Moodie, N. (2016). Indigenous education policy discourses in Australia: Rethinking the "problem." In T. Barkatsas & A. Bertram (Eds.), *Global learning in the 21st century* (pp. 163–184). Brill Sense.

Sarra, C., Spillman, D., Jackson, C., Davis, J., & Bray, J. (2020). High-expectations relationships: A foundation for enacting high expectations in all Australian schools. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education, 49*(1), 32–45. https://doi.org/10.1017/jie.2018.10

Sharp, H. L. (2013). What we teach our children: A comparative analysis of Indigenous Australians in Social Studies curriculum, from the 1960s to the 1980s. *Social and Education History, 2*(2), 176–204.

Thorn, C., & Flodin, C. (2015). Clontarf to curtin: Row AHEAD and tertiary affinity. *International Journal of Learning in Social Contexts, 17*(1), 64–83. https://doi.org/10.18793/LCJ2015.17.06

Vass, G., Lowe, K., Burgess, C., Harrison, N., & Moodie, N. (2019). The possibilities and practicalities of professional learning in support of Indigenous student experiences in schooling: A systematic review. *The Australian Educational Researcher, 46*(2), 341–361. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-019-00313-7

Walter, M., & Butler, K. (2013). Teaching race to teach Indigeneity. *Journal of Sociology, 49*(4), 397–410. https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783313504051

Weuffen, S. (2018). Surveying the landscape five years on: An examination of how teachers, and the teaching of Australia's shared history is constructed within Australian academic literature. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 78*(1), 117–124. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2018.11.010

Williams, J., Pill, S., Evans, J., & Davies, M. (2020). '… if my family didn't play football… we would literally have pretty much nothing': How high school Aboriginal students continue culture through rugby league and Australian football. *Sport, Education and Society*,, https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2020.1814716

Yunkaporta, T. (2009). *Aboriginal pedagogies at the cultural interface.* [doctoral thesis], James Cook University

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Sara Weuffen is a non-Indigenous woman of German, Scottish, and Welsch descent. She is a Research Fellow at the University of New South Wales with extensive experience in teaching diverse cohorts across multiple platforms at the Secondary and Tertiary levels. Dr. Weuffen's research is situated in the field of Education and History, with a specific focus on working with others for cross-cultural/racial education that is productive, respectful, forward-thinking, and ethical. Her research draws upon a grey methodological approach—where both Poststructural theory and Indigenous methodologies are bought together—to critique dominant structures and ideologies, interrogate binary discourses, and push educational boundaries for emancipatory and success-orientated shared-learning outcomes and positive social progress.

Jacinta Maxwell is Pākehā and non-Indigenous Australian, born on Mununjali Country, and raised in Aotearoa/New Zealand on the lands and waters of Ngāi Te Rangi. Jacinta works and lives on Giabal and Jarowair Country, with her teaching and research focussed on whiteness and education practice and policy. She produces critical research into education policy, curriculum and practice—primarily in relation to race and culture in Australian contexts, and transnational school contexts, and academics undertaking location-independent or remote work.

Kevin Lowe is a Gubbi Gubbi man from southeast Queensland. He is a Scientia Indigenous Fellow at UNSW, working on a community and school focused research project on developing a model of sustainable improvement in Aboriginal education. Kevin has had experience in education as a teacher, administrator and lecturer. He has expertise in working with Aboriginal community organisations on establishing Aboriginal language policy and school curriculum implementation. Recently Kevin has worked with colleagues to review research across key areas of schooling and established the Aboriginal Voices a broad-base, holistic project which is developing a new pedagogic framework for teachers.