CHAPTER ONE
BACKGROUND, RATONALE, RESEARCH QUESTIONS, STRUCTURE AND DESIGN

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overall scaffold for the portfolio. Initially, the personal background of the author is discussed to give the reader an understanding of the perspective from which the writing emerges. This encompasses personal history and professional experience. The rationale for the research project presents the statistics which support my personal observations of disadvantage. It also outlines the focus of my work and some of my perspectives on interpreting the causes of Aboriginal[1] marginalisation in Australian society. The structure of the portfolio and the relationship of the chapters are outlined. Research questions formulated to guide the research process are provided and the research paradigm and methods adopted are discussed.

Background To Research

This section provides an outline of my personal history and professional experience in education which led to the research interests incorporated into this portfolio. It is included so the readers can identify the factors which may influence the way in which I approach the formulation of research questions and the task of locating and presenting information which addresses these questions.

Personal background

I am a Palawa woman. Growing up in Tasmania I was faced with the paradox of being taught in Social Studies that the Tasmanian Aborigines became extinct with the death of Trugannini. What we were taught conflicted with family oral history. My maternal lineage traces back to a woman named Dolly Dalrymple Briggs who was the

[1] I have used the term Aboriginal in the majority of instances throughout this portfolio. This represents the fact that I am largely writing from an Australian Aboriginal perspective. The history, cultures and policies in the Torres Strait Islands are unique. I only use the term Indigenous when it is a direct quote or part of an official title of a committee or publication.

daughter of a Tasmanian woman and a British sealer. Knowledge of this lineage was a simple fact of life for my extended family.

During my undergraduate studies at the University of Tasmania in the mid 1970s one of my lecturers was engaged in research involving the genealogies of Tasmanian Palawa people. Through conversations with him I became aware of more aspects of Tasmanian history than had been part of family tradition. These combined factors led me to personal research into the history of my home state and resulted in a wider understanding of issues faced by Aboriginal people.

Nothing was in the schoolbooks; 'the imperial chronicles' as Pilger refers to them in the documentary based on his book *A Secret Country* (1989) – nothing related to the history of the Palawa people since the death of Trugannini that is. This information and much more was available in primary sources but ignored by the authors of school texts. It was not until the 1970s that Aboriginal activism resulted in the recognition that there were many people in Tasmania and on the Bass Strait Islands who identified as Tasmanian Aboriginal (Ryan 1996:253-255).

Teaching in Tasmania 1979 – 1981

Acknowledgement of the Palawa community however had little immediate impact on social justice issues in education. I still learnt nothing in my 1978 Diploma of Education studies about appropriate pedagogy for Aboriginal students. In three years of teaching before leaving Tasmania I was not made aware of any developments in policy related to Social Justice. The landmark 1973 Karmel Report and its implications in terms of the Disadvantaged Schools Program were not even brought to my attention through any form of in-service or dissemination of information to staff in the somewhat rarefied climate of the matriculation college in which I was teaching.

Teaching in Queensland 1983 - 1984

In 1983, after leaving Tasmania, I began teaching in an Ipswich high school in Queensland. I was at this school till late 1984. Ipswich is the traditional land of the Jaggera people, and long time home of Neville Bonner. I shared a staff room with Neville's stepdaughter. We had significant numbers of Aboriginal students from adjacent housing estates, and from further afield because of the school's rugby

program.[2] Despite the demographics of the school nothing specific was happening to improve the educational experience of Aboriginal students. In-service programs concentrated on Glasser's (1969) theories of behaviour management. I returned to this school for a term on contract in 1986, and again for first term of 1988. I was aware of only one change related to Aboriginal education issues - the appointment of an Aboriginal Community Education Counsellor whose role was seen largely as an extension of the behaviour management program.

In 1987, in an outer Brisbane school, I came into contact with English as a Second Language (ESL) issues and English Language Development Across the Curriculum (ELDAC) pedagogy methods through in-service provided by the Queensland Department of Education. The emphasis in my school was on support for students from immigrant Non English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB). The concept of Australia as a multicultural nation introduced in 1978 had officially replaced the view of Australia as a mono-cultural, monolingual outpost of Britain. However much of the emphasis was on the culture of migrant groups, with only passing mention of Australia's original cultures. The impact for the teacher at the 'coalface' in urban areas was at the language teaching level for NESB students, and at the superficial level of celebrating different cultures through food, music and dance. I still had not encountered any systemic initiatives addressing issues for Aboriginal students.

A transfer in second term of 1988 placed me for the next four and a half years in a school in a satellite suburb almost exclusively made up of public housing. The enrolments averaged approximately 20% Aboriginal students and about 20% NESB students. The school faced a range of issues created by the archaic public housing practice of building huge clusters of public housing which concentrated residents experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. A year 10 student informed me one day that there was no point in trying with her school work as nothing would change her future, no-one would ever give her a job. This reflected the high level of welfare dependency in the suburb, illustrated the attitude of many of the students and complicated the pedagogical issues raised by low levels of literacy and numeracy.

Having arrived in the school just after the death of my husband I was immune to becoming distraught by the behavioural issues which contributed to very high staff turnover, and became comfortable with the school as the numbness receded. That odd

[2] Queensland schools are not zoned for enrolment purposes, consequently parents and children are able to choose schools based on personal preferences and school specialisations.

start actually led me to become quite attached to the school and the students, which contributed to a desire to explore the issues contributing to their disadvantage.

With the introduction of the National Aboriginal Education Policy[3] (NAEP) in 1989 increased funding became available to schools for specific Aboriginal programs. The principal was aware of my personal background and asked me to represent him on the Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) committee. An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support centre known as Jaragill linked to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Unit of Education Queensland was opened in the area. The staff of Jaragill ran in-service programs with an emphasis on development of curriculum which included Aboriginal perspectives. Funds were available for relief teachers to cover the classes of teachers who attended the in-service. In the first year of the program two teachers were released for a total of five days each. The expectation was that in our own time we would disseminate the information to the rest of the staff to absorb in their own time. In a school where each lesson could signify the beginning of a new battle to retain sanity, few teachers had the time to pursue new trends in their own time. Most staff remained unaware that the NAEP existed. The emphasis during in-service remained literacy, language and behaviour management.

Funding was available for other initiatives which were meant to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. One Jaragill staff member was assigned to implement the Aboriginal and Islander Tertiary Aspirations Program (AITAP). However we were not able to set it up at the school. The principal viewed the situation from the philosophy that all the students were disadvantaged and no programs should be set up solely for any target groups. The compromise, the only one available, was to set up a broad-based Tertiary Interest Program (TIP) proportionally funded by NAEP and Special Program School (SPS) funds. The same approach was adopted in relation to the creation of a homework centre.

The school had a Community Education Counsellor, a lovely and very approachable person who had no tenure of employment and comparatively poor pay. Eventually the employment uncertainty led her to accept a position with the ministerial educational advisory body. Another equally approachable (and untenured) counsellor replaced her. Many of the staff would not avail themselves of the support available

[3] The NAEP later became known as the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP).

through these two and would always refer all students through the mainstream options: year co-ordinators, heads of departments, guidance officer or the time-out room.

For three years I was year co-ordinator with the same group of students as they progressed from Year 8 through to Year 10. I was also the time-out room co-ordinator for 15 months of those three years. In these roles I developed a sound knowledge base in relation to the students and the issues they faced. I would often ring through on the intercom to ask one of the Aboriginal counsellors to visit with me and whichever of our students had been sent to me.

It was blatantly obvious that the system was failing many of these students. Reading and maths tests were administered to all students on enrolment in Year 8. The results were entered on my computer. I used some long ignored knowledge of statistics for social science purposes to extract information related to reading ages of students being referred to the time out room, along with subjects in which they were (dis)engaged in when referred. There was a strong correlation between misbehaviour in class and difficulty with the subject due to reading difficulties. This type of data had been published by researchers, and I was able to present to the staff, through the principal, concrete examples of how theory was illustrated in our local context.

Many of our Aboriginal students were well behind the benchmarks for literacy and numeracy skills on enrolment, but nothing specific was being done. A half-hearted effort was made in the senior years. Those who stayed that long were usually placed in an English class with ESL support.

As is so often the case, exclusions and suspensions of Aboriginal students were disproportionately high. Another role I filled for a while was typing up suspension and exclusion reports to regional office. The variety of roles I filled allowed me to see that the principal often bent over backwards to give our students more leeway. He would take an interest in each case individually. Community concerns were partially addressed by meetings with community members, appropriate and interested staff, members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Education Unit (A&TSIEU) in central office, members of the ministerial advisory body and counsellors from community organisations. It was through these meetings and the Jaragill in-service that I became aware of wider policy making bodies and the new Aboriginal education policies which were being developed.

However despite emerging systemic changes, racist comments were still common in staff rooms. My identity was questioned or denied by other staff on the common ground of skin colour, and for spurious reasons such as not having skinny ankles.

Discussions of individual students often contained equally ignorant or uninformed comments.

Policy Office in Queensland 1992 - 1994

During the Easter of 1992 I returned from a pleasant visit to the botanic gardens with my then 8 year old daughter. A voice on the answering machine asked me to ring the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit (A&TSIEU) in central office. Thinking I must have overlooked an overdue book from the resource centre I made an unsuspecting phone call. The result was that I became Senior Policy Officer (Studies) in the unit. Negotiations had secured funding from the state coffers for two extra policy officers in the unit. At this stage the only commitment from the state government was funding for the wages of the eight permanent central office unit staff. All initiatives at regional and school level were funded by the Commonwealth through the NAEP.

In the early 1990s the unit was part of the umbrella Social Justice Unit within the Studies Directorate. Some people argued for the separation of the A&TSIEU to a branch in its own right which eventually happened. An ex-director expressed reservations about this, believing as I long have, that issues intersect and that therefore it can be more useful for Aboriginal education policy officers to work in co-ordination with those whose specialities are gender remoteness and socio-economic issues and Non English Speaking Background (NESB) concerns.

One of the projects for which I was responsible during two years in the unit was the development of a policy on teaching Aboriginal languages in Queensland schools. In 1992 a seminar was held with Education Queensland personnel and community representatives from all over the State and from the Torres Strait Islands. Three linguists also attended and provided key note speeches. Co-ordination of this colloquium was my responsibility and I am therefore aware that over $80,000 was expended on travel, accommodation and other costs. Subsequent to the state wide meeting, which involved approximately one hundred people, a smaller reference group was established to advise on ongoing issues related to policy development. While working on my masters in 2001 I wanted to find out what final format the policy had taken – it had not been finished. The work from 1992-1994 had achieved nothing.

In 2002 another state-wide meeting was held in relation to Aboriginal languages. One of the community representatives from the 1992 seminar was invited and expressed a sense of déjà vu and disappointment – nothing had changed in the intervening 10

years. Hopes had been raised in 1992, but there had been no progress and no institutional commitment had been made.

Teaching in Queensland 1994 - 1996

During my time in the unit the education department had named the social justice strategy as a system priority. This strategy included inclusive curriculum and supportive school environment initiatives. I was involved in the development of documents related to system priorities. I left the unit in 1994 for personal reasons and undertook some contract teaching in schools on the Sunshine Coast. Most of these positions were in special needs units. As a result I would interact with many staff as students needed support across a range of subjects. Most of the staff I talked with in these schools had not heard anything of the departmental Social Justice Policies and related documents developed in central office. The exception always was the principal and in some cases the deputies. Unfortunately the information was not being disseminated. Although systemic priorities of Supportive School Environments, Inclusive Curriculum and Effective Learning and Teaching, had been identified, implementation seemed to be subject to the interest and commitment of individual school administration teams.

In one school I shared a staff room with a teacher well informed about these developments. Her husband worked in regional office and had been in Rockhampton for the 1992 meeting, and her information came from him rather than members of the school administration team. More typical was a discussion with another teacher in the same school who had worked with me in the early 1980s, and had transferred to this school as Head of Department for Social Science. Systemic social justice priorities came up in conversation related to what we had both been doing in the previous decade. The information seemed largely unfamiliar to him and his resistance bordered on outright hostility. Policy makers in central office were described as being out of touch with the realities of the classroom, and teachers were described as too overworked to have time to read the documents which emanated from head office.

This resistance was also encountered when I did some work for the TAFE system where I was employed to set up a literacy and numeracy program for Aboriginal people. The concepts of Social Justice, Inclusive Curriculum and Supportive School Environments were unfamiliar to many and actively resisted by some senior staff who controlled funding and course organisation. I had established a reference group to guide the development and implementation of the course. It consisted of local Aboriginal

educators and members of community organisations. Despite the strongly expressed support from this group, the whole project of establishing an Aboriginal literacy and numeracy program stumbled from the beginning. No compromise could be reached on a suitable venue or even for that matter a consistent one. Flexible entry and exit provisions would not be considered. Members of the reference group expressed concerns that despite all my efforts their views and wishes would not be taken into account by senior staff and that the program would be set up to fail leaving the institution with funds that could then be used for other purposes. The frustration of these people was obvious. The tutor resigned stating that he could not be party to what the TAFE was insisting on. After a long discussion with the regional TAFE social justice advisor, with whom I had worked elsewhere, I also resigned and the reference group subsequently withdrew all support for the project. They stated that without me to intervene they felt the program had no chance of success and they were not going to facilitate what they saw as a money grab.

General observations

There appears to be a tendency by some to view urban Aborigines as not real Aborigines, and that specific Aboriginal policy only needs to be developed for and implemented in remote and rural areas. In light of this I can't help remembering a long ago conversation with a co-worker. We were discussing the situation of urban people, especially students. She made the comment that one of the least considered groups are those who are not physically recognisable as Aboriginal, and are in schools with very few Aboriginal students. These students do not receive recognition of specific needs related to their Indigineity, and indeed are often derided by fellow students and staff when they identify. Lack of recognition of the needs of this group of students illustrates a lack of understanding of the history of Aboriginal people and is a reflection of a lack of inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives in general education and in teacher training.

One thing that I have found reassuring is the development of units in teacher preparation courses which explore Aboriginal education. In the early 1990s when I was in the A&TSIEU, staff members were often called on to present seminars, mainly at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT). We were also called on to present in-service sessions for teachers. These pre-service and in-service programs were at that stage all voluntary. Ten years later teacher education is moving towards compulsory inclusion of Aboriginal studies and perspectives. My daughter recently finished her

Bachelor of Education and Aboriginal perspectives were woven into compulsory units, and often presented by Aboriginal staff of the support centre.

This personal and work related background has significantly influenced my research interests since returning to university study. A course work Masters Degree afforded me the opportunity to explore in some depth theories and issues of social justice, and a desire to delve more deeply into social justice issues for Aboriginal people generally and in the field of education specifically led me to this current doctoral project.

Rationale

Concrete and undeniable statistics are readily available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics to support my personal observations of Aboriginal marginalisation. These provide a stark description of the disadvantage faced by many Aboriginal Australians in their everyday lives and support the assertion that the descendants of Australia's original inhabitants occupy the position of an underclass in this prosperous country. Selected statistics related to a number of key areas are presented to provide support for my subsequent discussions. These areas are age distribution, health, education, employment, income, housing and involvement with the criminal justice system.

Disadvantage contributes to poverty that is intergenerational and the intersection of the issues creates a matrix that is difficult to unravel. Lack of education leads to poorer employment opportunities and lower incomes, which in turn exacerbate problems of overcrowded and inadequate housing and poor health. Health problems, poor housing conditions and poverty in turn make pursuit of educational qualifications a challenge that is difficult to overcome. This perpetuates the cycle of poverty. The intersection of issues is discussed in a number of the Social Justice Reports available on the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) website. If the premise that education is the way out of the cycle is accepted then the factors which detract from equitable educational outcomes must be addressed.

Age Distribution

The age distribution of the Aboriginal Australian population differs from that of the non-Aboriginal population. Statistics from the ABS (2003:3) compare Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations in different age brackets. Two important factors are worth noting. Lower life expectancies related to health issues are illustrated in these statistics which indicate that the number of Aboriginal people over the age of 50 is disproportionately low. Associated is the relative youth of the Aboriginal population which has important implications for educators.

Health

Lower life expectancy, as illustrated in the population age pyramid, is not the only area in which health disadvantage can be identified for Aboriginal Australians. Quality of life is influenced by the health challenges which are faced by people. Data discussed below only provide a snapshot of the health status of Aboriginal Australians.

Figure 1.1 illustrates that Aboriginal people are more likely to assess their own health as poor and that this increases significantly with age. Although self-assessment of poor health increases for all people with age it is more so for Aboriginal Australians.

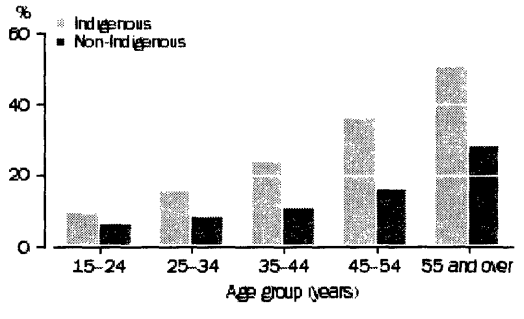


Figure 1.1: Fair or poor self assessed health, Persons aged 15 years or over
National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey, 2004-05,
ABS Catalogue 4715.0

Such self-assessment of health status reflects identified and recorded health issues. The *2004-2005 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey* (ABS

Catalogue 4715.0) reveals the prevalence of health conditions such as diabetes, hypertensive diseases and kidney disease amongst the Aboriginal population and that these significantly increase as people age. The same source also shows a notable age related increase in the disproportionate number of people suffering from asthma.

These conditions are only a small number of those which affect Aboriginal Australians, but represent considerable curtailment of people's quality of life. Health problems can be related to lifestyle issues such as nutrition. Inadequate nutrition is often linked to poverty. It can also be linked to place of residence. Remote locations do not have the same access to a wide range of quality fresh produce, and what is available is more expensive. Poor general health influences other aspects of a person's life including education. Juvenile hearing loss and diseases of the ear are also more prevalent in the Aboriginal population. This is an important factor to be considered by the providers of education services.

Education

Education is another dimension of social inequality (Western et al 2005, 127). Retention and the highest level of education completed are two aspects which reveal educational disadvantage. Table 1.1 clearly shows that progression through and completion of secondary education is far lower for Aboriginal students than for non-Aboriginal students. By Year 12 the retention rate for Aboriginal students is close to half that for non-Aboriginal students

Table 1:1 National Apparent Retention Rates - Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, 2000-2004

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Year 9 Indigenous	95.5	96.5	97.8	96.8	97.2
Non-Indigenous	99.8	99.9	99.8	99.9	99.9
Year 10 Indigenous	83.0	85.7	86.4	87.2	85.8
Non-Indigenous	98.0	98.4	98.5	98.9	98.5
Year 11 Indigenous	53.6	56.1	58.9	61.4	61.0
Non-Indigenous	86.2	87.6	88.7	89.5	88.9
Year 12 Indigenous	36.4	35.7	38.0	39.1	39.5
Non-Indigenous	73.3	74.5	76.3	76.5	76.8

Source: HREOC 2006:18

Figure 1.2 presents a graphic image of the disparity in educational attainment and illustrates that a significant number of Aboriginal people have not completed high school. Over 30% have not gone beyond Year 9, and close to another 30% have left school by the end of Year 11. Numbers of non-Aboriginal people who have not completed high school are much lower. Further a significantly lower percentage of Aboriginal Australians have completed Year 12 and post Year 12 studies than in the general population.

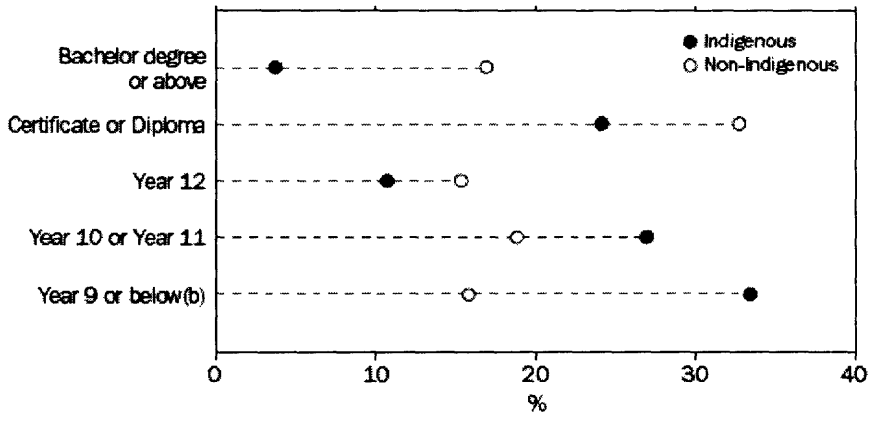


Figure 1.2: Highest educational attainment persons over 18

Source: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey, (2002:17).

It can be argued that there are many benefits of education at a personal level and in terms of encouraging life long learning. Many reports including the recent *2004 National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training* (2006) emphasise that, at a very practical level education influences a person's employment opportunities, both in relation to gaining employment and the type of employment that may be accessible.

Employment

Aboriginal people are over represented in unemployment statistics. They are also disproportionately represented in unskilled employment. This is particularly marked in cities and regional areas where the majority of Aboriginal people live as illustrated in Figure 1.3. In all skilled areas of employment Figure 1.4 clearly shows the under representation of Aboriginal people. Further, of those who are employed, a higher percentage of Aboriginal people are employed in the semi-skilled and unskilled areas.

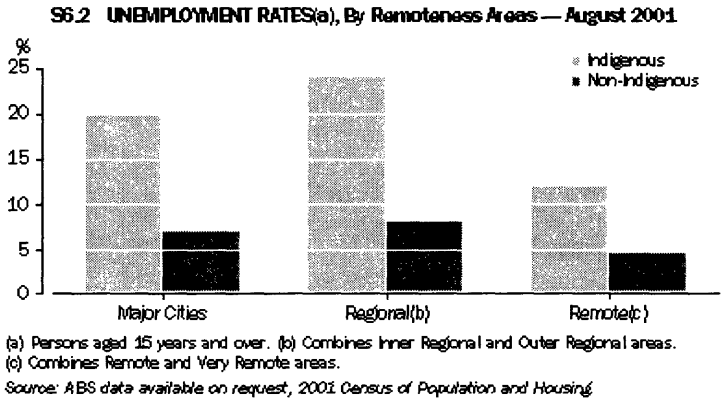
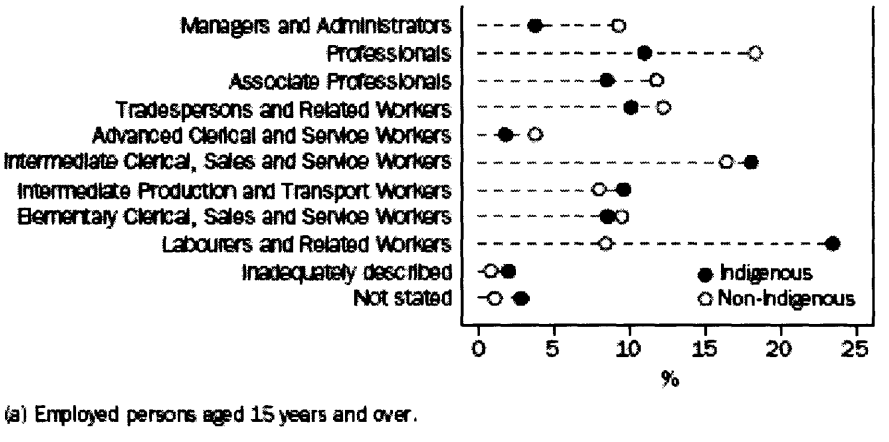


Figure 1.3: Regional unemployment rates



Source: Population Characteristics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2001

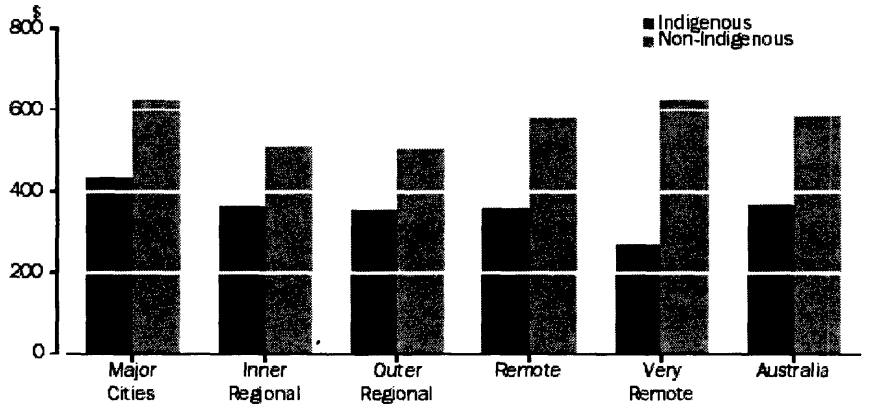
Figure 1.4: Employed persons by occupation – August 2001

Age related patterns of unemployment outlined in Figure 1.4 raise some additional issues. High unemployment amongst people with young families contributes to the problem of intergenerational dependence on welfare in which children are growing up with role models dependent on welfare (Pearson 2001). There is also the obvious link to household income.

Income

Individual and household incomes for Aboriginal people reflect employment statistics. For all people, income is an important influence on health status, educational opportunities and standards of housing. Figure 1.5 illustrates the disparity in incomes

between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal households, as well as regional differences. On average Aboriginal income is at least half that of non-Aboriginal workers.



Source: ABS 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

Figure 1.5: Average equalized gross household income per week by remoteness area

Housing

Conditions in which Aboriginal people live vary considerably. Housing available to those on limited incomes varies between cities, regional centres and remote areas. Two indices of quality of housing identified and reported on by the ABS are overcrowding and the need for repairs.

Overcrowded housing can have negative results for health. It also reduces the chances for people to engage in study. At a more subjective level lack of privacy can reduce the general quality of life. The extent of overcrowding shown in Table 1.2. I would suggest that the figures may under-represent the actual situation. People who are homeless often 'camp out' with relatives and friends but are not necessarily counted in census figures related to population of individual houses.

Table 1.2:Aboriginal households and Aboriginal persons in overcrowded conditions: 2001

	Persons(a)		Households(a)	
	No.	%	No.	%
Home owner/purchaser	8 110	8.3	2 160	4.7
Renter state/territory housing a	14 500	17.5	2 660	9.1
Renter Aboriginal/ma community housing	44 040	57.3	5 320	34.0
Private and other renter	11 330	11.6	2 840	6.1
Total(b)	80 370	22.2	13 380	9.5

(a) Excludes dwellings where the number of bedrooms was not stated.
(b) Includes other tenure types and not stated tenure type.
ABS, 2001 Census of Population and Housing

The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, 2005, ABS catalogue 4704.0.

The state of housing, as indicated by level of needed repairs, is illustrated in Table 1.3. Over 30% of dwellings are identified as in need of major repair replacement nationally, although there is a deal of variation between states. No indication is given of what is classified as minor repair so the picture could be worse than these statistics portray.

Table 1.3 Condition of permanent dwellings in discrete Aboriginal communities: 2001

	Minor or no repair		Major repair		Replacement		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
New South Wal	865	69.9	336	27.2	36	2.9	1 237	100.0
Queensland	2 239	59.9	1 068	28.6	432	11.6	3 740	100.0
South Australia	680	70.2	180	18.6	109	11.2	969	100.0
Western Australi	1 790	65.7	552	20.3	383	14.1	2 725	100.0
Northern Territo	4 829	74.3	1 024	15.8	631	9.7	6 498	100.0
Australia	**10 433**	**68.5**	**3 179**	**20.9**	**1 601**	**10.5**	**15 228**	**100.0**

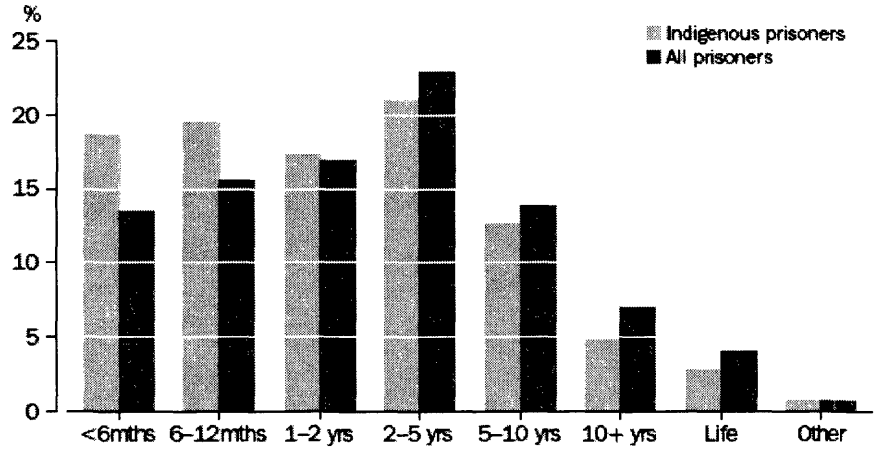
Data only includes permanent dwellings managed by Aboriginal Housing Organisations. Victoria and Tasmania included in Australia for confidentiality reasons.
The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, 2005, ABS catalogue 4704.0.

The nature of repairs needed is not specified but could include issues of health and general security. Health issues can be involved if the repairs needed are in the area of bathroom or kitchen facilities. Security issues and protection from the weather can arise when structural repairs are needed. Inadequate fencing presents safety issues for young children with increased opportunity for them to wander onto roads or further from home.

Criminal Justice

The numbers of Aboriginal people involved with the criminal justice system and imprisonment is disproportionately high. The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991) stated unequivocally and repeatedly that the incarceration rate of Aboriginal people is linked to the social, economic and cultural disadvantage experienced as a direct result of dispossession and racism (Johnston 1991). Two sets of figures are presented are of interest. The two chosen relate to the length of sentence imposed on people and the age composition of the prison population. The selection does not in any way suggest that there are not many other ways to analyse Aboriginal involvement with the criminal justice system.

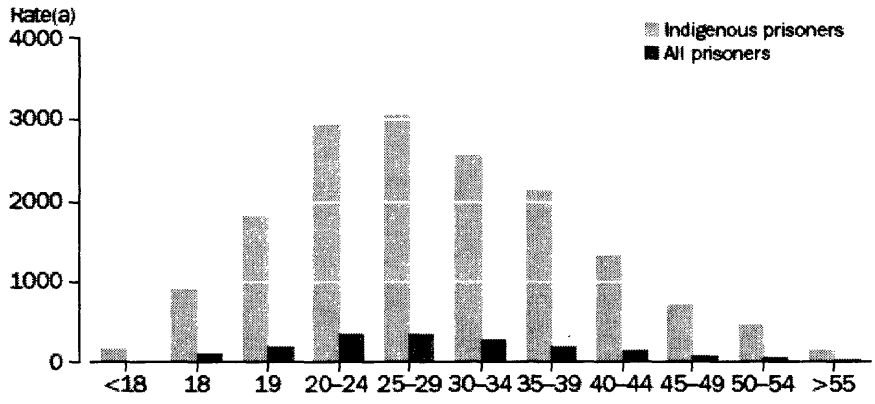
Figure 1.6 suggests that Aboriginal people are over-represented in the short to medium term sentencing. This could suggest either that Aboriginal people engage more frequently in less serious crime than non-Aboriginal people, or that they are more likely to be identified, apprehended and sentenced.



Source: Prisoners in Australia, 2002.

Figure 1.6: Sentenced prisoners by length of expected time to serve – 30 June 2002

Age related imprisonment rates, as illustrated in Figure 1.7, are disproportionate in all age brackets for Aboriginal people. In the 25-29 age group approximately 400 out of 100,000 in the whole adult population are in prison, while approximately 3,000 of 100,000 Aboriginal people in the age group are incarcerated. Thus the imprisonment rate in this age group is seven and a half times greater for Aboriginal people than non-Aboriginal. The discrepancy is not as high in all age groups, but it is always disproportionate.



Source: Prisoners in Australia, 2002.

Figure 1.7: Imprisonment rates by age group – 30 June 2002

Discussion of statistics

Statistics paint a grim picture of the life chances of Aboriginal Australians. It has been stated by many writers (e.g. Cornell 2005; Eversole 2005: Eversole & McNeish 2005; Eckermann, Dowd, Chong, Nixon, Grey & Johnson 2006) that simply considering the socio-economic indicators is too simplistic, and that the historical and socio-political factors underlying disadvantage must be identified and addressed. The research underlying this portfolio has been approached from a desire to unpack the causes of Aboriginal marginalisation.

Historical socio-political factors favoured the colonists and dispossessed the traditional custodians of this country (Bennett 1989; Crotty & Roberts 2006; Eckermann et al 2006). These historical factors formed the foundation from which the contemporary situation of socio-economic inequality developed. It has been said that history has been selectively presented and marginalising factors are ignored or at least downplayed (e.g. Reynolds 1999; Gundstone 2004; Attwood 2005; Eckermann et al 2006). The argument about the interpretation of history persists today with the debate over the version of history presented by writers such as Reynolds (1981) and Ryan (1996) who raise issues of Aboriginal dispossession. Pilger (1989:78) refers to the traditional – in the colonial sense – version of history as the 'imperial record', suggesting that what was emphasised and taught in Australian schools was a white-washed version of history; a version sanitised to downplay aspects which portrayed

brutality on the part of the imperial colonisers and ignored the marginalising impact of colonialism.

It is in the political arena that policies which influence the daily lives and the life chances of Australian citizens are made, yet Aboriginal participation in the political arena of this country has been limited and controlled by the descendants of the original invaders, the power brokers of colonial and post colonial society (Bennett 1989). The dispossession experienced by Aboriginal people has not been fully recognised or addressed in policy formulation, and Aboriginal people continue to have little, if any, power in relation to policy making.

It has been contended that policy development needs to consider the rights of Aboriginal people as the original custodians of the country; rights which have historically been ignored (Behrendt 2001; Short 2003). These rights include citizens' rights – the rights related to living conditions and the provision of services that all Australians are entitled to as citizens of this country (O'Donoghue 1997). Aboriginal rights must also be recognised and placed in the forefront. These rights include land rights and recognition of our histories and cultures (O'Donoghue 1997; Jonas 2003).

I would argue that the current emphasis on provision of citizens' rights through the policy of 'practical reconciliation' is a limited view that ignores the underlying causes of disadvantage and locates the 'Aboriginal problem' outside socio-political practices. The emphasis is on statistical change, not on identifying the underlying causes of the perpetuation of inequality. Practical reconciliation emphasises the undeniable need to address the disadvantage illustrated in the statistics while it ignores rights associated with being Aboriginal. The latter are classed as symbolic by government representatives.

Initial Literature Review

Research and discussion over the last few years increased my understanding of the ingrained structures in our society which have created and continue to perpetuate the marginalisation of my people. An initial literature review contributed to a conceptual framework for analysing marginalisation.

Within the parameters of this framework, factors identified as contributing to continuing marginalization include colonialism, structural and cultural violence, institutional racism, historical and continuing policies aimed at integration and assimilation, legal and electoral disenfranchisement and dispossession. An analysis of

the past and of the contemporary situation from a standpoint incorporating these marginalising factors is one way of progressing. An understanding of the processes can lead us away from practices which diminish, demean and disempower people (Nursing Council of New Zealand 2005:4). This portfolio presents an effort to explore Aboriginal marginalisation in Australia from the perspective of the role of understanding the societal processes which resulted in the disadvantage and ways to redress the situation.

Research questions

Available statistics, personal experience, observations, discussions and the initial literature review led to the framing of a number of specific research questions to guide the project. These include:

1. What are some of the continuing societal factors which historically have contributed to social injustice and marginalisation for Aboriginal Australians?
2. How are these factors perpetuated in government policy and practice in three specific contexts:
   - general policy through the eras of protection, segregation and assimilation to the present day,
   - government sponsored national organisations supposedly set up to ameliorate disadvantage, increase Aboriginal participation in policy making, program development, service delivery and administration,
   - in policy related to one specific area of social injustice, i.e. education?
3. What measures have been identified which can help counteract these marginalising factors?
4. How can Cultural Safety principles be adapted to Australian Aboriginal education?

Portfolio Structure

While previous sections have suggested some directions the portfolio will take, this section will outline the specific aims and structure. This portfolio will introduce key concepts such as colonialism, racism, structural violence and cultural violence and examine the role they have played in the life chances of Aboriginal Australians, particularly in the areas of participation in policy making and in education. Specific policies have been, and continue to be developed to address the different areas of Aboriginal disadvantage: land rights, health, housing, education, employment and engagement with the justice system. The choice of education as the focus for this portfolio in no way suggests that is the most important, or denies the inter-relationship between all the areas of disadvantage. It simply reflects my experience, interest, previous studies and my belief that education is an important tool through which people can empower themselves. Consequently Chapter 2 focuses on outlining the key concepts which are interwoven throughout the remaining discussion. Concepts of Social Justice and Cultural Safety are also presented because of their potential role in addressing Aboriginal marginalisation and disadvantage.

Although the emphasis will be on post 1972 developments, a brief account of general government policies since invasion will be given in the beginning of Chapter 3 to situate the more recent developments in a broad historical framework. An important development since 1972 has been the introduction of the notion of self-determination into the discourse about Aboriginal affairs.

The need to listen to Aboriginal voices did not really become recognised until the 1970s and since 1972 a number of Aboriginal consultative bodies have been created. The history of the national Aboriginal consultative bodies since 1972 will be considered in Chapter 4. Political parties, whether in government or opposition, developed policies related to Aboriginal affairs. Prior to 1972 this occurred with little input from those whose daily lives would be influenced by such policies. In 1972 the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee (NACC) was established. This was superseded by the National Aboriginal Council (NAC) which was later replaced by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), which in turn was replaced by the National Indigenous Council (NIC). These national bodies were conceptualised in terms of offering broad based policy advice to the Federal government. The interactions of the different bodies

and the different governments will be considered, especially in relation to the impact of systemic frustration.

Education policy for Aboriginal Australians has reflected the more general historical policies. Chapter 5 will trace the history of Aboriginal education exclusion, through the provision of education for assimilation to the changing foci since 1972. Most emphasis will again be placed on the national policies, reviews and approaches since 1972 on the premise that it is in this era that the espoused, intention of the successive governments has been to provide some measure of redress for the impact of colonisation.

Chapter 6 will examine the history of Aboriginal participation in the higher education sector. Equal participation in education will only occur when Aboriginal people not only access education at the compulsory levels, but also progress into the higher education domain in proportionate numbers and are represented at all levels of awards and in all faculties of universities. Included in this chapter will be a history of the development of Aboriginal enclaves within higher education institutions and their evolution into contemporary Aboriginal support units.

Chapter 7 will consider the place of Cultural Safety in education for Aboriginal Australians. It will include discussion of indicators of why education is not culturally safe, the problems with the cultural awareness approach to Aboriginal education and suggestions concerning the role of adopting the principles of Cultural Safety. In conclusion the major threads will be drawn together and directions for future research will be suggested.

Research design utilised in this research will be presented next. This will include discussion of the manner in which this project has evolved.

Research design

Introduction

Relevant methodology will be presented in this section. The original conceptualisation of the research design and the reasons for change will be discussed. This will be followed by an outline of the final paradigm and methods adopted.

Changes in focus and research design

Qualitative research methodology was adopted for this research. This can be defined as an interpretive approach which attempts to make 'sense' of our world (Denzin & Lincoln 2000: xiii) and is based on the researcher's view of what constitutes knowledge. Qualitative researchers are concerned with understanding the actions and statements of other humans (Schwandt 2000:200).

Initially I focussed on social constructionism which emphasises that knowledge is socially constructed. This approach stresses that our interpretations of the world do not occur in value-free isolation, but are constructed in relation to models that are influenced by our cultural and historical backgrounds (Schwandt 2000:179). The viewpoint that research could serve to present Aboriginal people' constructions of their historical and contemporary realities fitted my research aims and questions which focussed on the role of colonialism and its legacy in the everyday experiences of Aboriginal people.

The original concept involved case studies of Aboriginal support units in three universities. A case study approach would allow staff and students in these units to participate and present their voices and experiences in relation to the difficulties faced by Aboriginal higher education students and staff, and the role of support units. Change resulted from the early stages of the literature review and from discussions with people. The focus widened to include an exploration of Aboriginal experiences of higher education placed within the context of broad historical and contemporary Aboriginal education policy as influenced by colonialism and related concepts.

The role of support units in the experience of higher education for Aboriginal students remained part of the overall research project and it was envisaged that case studies of two such units would remain as part of the portfolio, although no longer the sole focus. Permission was sought and gained from the directors of two Aboriginal

support units to approach students about participating in the study. As an external student, not regularly on campus, I was an outsider and found the response to my 'advertising' limited. I conducted face to face interviews with five people who did contact me.

As a result of this limited response I utilised some established personal and professional networks and was able to contact recent and current Aboriginal students willing to discuss their experiences via email. These contacts included three undergraduate students and five postgraduate students as well as eight postgraduates working in the higher education sector. I also maintained regular phone contact discussing this research with the Chair of the Queensland Indigenous Education Consultative Body. Experience in a range of universities and across a number of academic disciplines was reflected in this group of contacts.

It became apparent that the focus was still too narrow. To draw out the impacts of colonialism and related issues in Aboriginal education it would be necessary to place the discussion within the broader context outlined in the portfolio structure.

A final change was dictated by the small number of participants. Having moved far from the case study approach informed by participants, the research paradigm changed. The focus on critical theory is presented next, and discussed in relation to how it meets my research aims and questions.

Paradigm

Changes in method which occurred early in the research process led to a reconsideration of the research paradigm. I was no longer developing thick descriptions of the experiences of people within the higher education system. Rather the project now was to identify and illustrate the factors which contributed to historical disadvantage and which continue to perpetuate it.

It is inevitable that the researcher's experience will influence the way in which material is gathered and presented, just as the experience of readers will be a factor in how they interpret information and incorporate it into their construction of knowledge. My background and experience influenced my choice to explore the history of Aboriginal organisations and education. This will be from a perspective which seeks to illuminate the marginalising structures inherent in Australian society, structures which perpetuate historical Aboriginal dispossession and disadvantage.

Critical theory is a form of qualitative research which can be described as 'a site or arena for social scientific criticism' (Schwandt 2000:190). It is worth noting two aspects of critical theory. These are that there is no single critical theory, and that this form of research is not static (Kincheloe & McLaren 2000:281). With this understanding in mind I have adopted some aspects of critical theory in interpreting how policy and practice have marginalised Aboriginal Australians.

Researchers have been attracted to critical theory because of its emphasis on the social construction of power, and its critique of the production of knowledge (Smith 1999:5-6). This supports the exploration of how discourses and social and historical power relations have contributed to academic disciplines (Kincheloe & McLaren 2000:280) and to perceptions of Aboriginal people. Discussion of discourse can include patterns of social organisation which situate people within society (Moreton-Robinson 2000: xxi). This approach allows researchers to consider how power relations within society shape people's life chances.

Australia, along with a number of other western nations, has come to be seen as democratic and providing equal opportunities to all (Kincheloe & McLaren 2000:281). Critical theory demands the questioning of this assumption. Adoption of critical theory as a research paradigm facilitates identifying the socio-political conditions of 'domination, powerlessness and oppression' (Rigney 1997:120) which are part of Australia's continuing relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

A related aspect of critical theory outlined by Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) is referred to as critical enlightenment. Their description reflects Rigney (1997) to an extent when they state that work within this paradigm 'analyses competing power interests between groups and individuals within a society – identifying who gains and who loses in specific situations' (Kincheloe &McLaren 2000:281). Factors which produce and maintain the unequal distribution of power are sought after and exposed and this may lead to mobilising support for projects which provide impetus for emancipation (Kincheloe & McLaren 2000: 282).

Critical theory is adopted by Rigney (1997:120) in conceptualising an Indigenist approach to research because he sees it as based on principles which could contribute to a more just world. Smith (1999:4) asserts that Aboriginal researchers are often attracted to critical approaches because they facilitate the unmasking of aspects of racism which have been and continue to be part of Aboriginal life and life chances. This is seen by Rigney (1997:120) as the aim of many contemporary researchers in the area of

Aboriginal related studies and as it became the intent of my research, I adopted the critical theory approach.

It is possible to adopt a number of different research methods from this philosophical stance. Reading, writing and speaking back from Aboriginal perspectives is one approach to challenging the accepted Western knowledges (Nakata 1998:4; Rigney 2001:8) and this was adopted when my research focus changed from social constructionism and case studies to critical theory.

Method

> Some important work is related to theorising Aboriginal issues at the level of ideas, policy analysis and critical debate. (Smith 1999:143)

Three methods of research – reading, writing and representing – which relate to theorising Aboriginal issues are suggested by Smith (1999:149-151). She refers to these as projects; methods adopted by a number of researchers with complementary aims, who could be seen as collectively engaged in presenting similar aspects of Aboriginal life and experience. These methods or projects relate to critical theory and social scientific criticism and have been adopted in this research.

Research often involves a literature review or reading. Reading as a research method or project is described by Smith (1999:149) as a critical approach to history and the location of the Aboriginal role in that history. In discussing this approach to research, Smith (1999) makes a statement that relates very closely to my research aims.

> 'The genealogy of colonialism is being mapped out and used in a way to locate a different sort of origin story, the origins of imperial policies and practices, the origins of the imperial visions, the origins of ideas and values' (Smith 1999:149).

A similar position is expressed by Nakata (1998:4) who asserts that while learning to read and understand extant academic literature, the Aboriginal scholar is faced with the task of also interpreting how this has positioned Aboriginal people in broader society. This research project looks at policy and practice in relation to Aboriginal Australians. Emphasis is on locating and identifying the political and societal factors underpinning the policies and practices related to education and participation in decision making. The impacts of these on Aboriginal people are also analysed.

Related to the reading project is the fact that Aboriginal people are writing (Smith 1999:149). Much of Smith's discussion of the writing project relates to the writing of

literature. I would contend that the writing project can be extended to include academic writing which is based in critical theory. Hart (2003:14) describes this form of writing as a challenge to the historically dominant body of writing about Aboriginal people and Aboriginal issues.

Representing is another project which is a political concept in that it strives for recognition of Aboriginal voice and an expression of Aboriginal viewpoints (Smith 1999:150). Part of the political aspect of representation involves exposing the paternalistic legacy of colonialism which is illustrated by the way issues, which impact on the lives of Aboriginal people, are decided by governments, local bodies and non-government agencies (Smith 1999:150). This aspect of Aboriginal and mainstream relations forms part of the framework of my work. Another aspect of representation is about presenting an Aboriginal perspective to counter dominant society's image of Aboriginal people and their cultures, looking for new ways to represent and understand the life experiences of Aboriginal people (Moreton-Robinson 2000:93).

In my choices of reading material and authors I have, where possible and appropriate, privileged Aboriginal voices. Before discussing my reasons for this it is important to point out that I agree wholeheartedly with the following statement by Lester-Irabinna Rigney.

> Aboriginal Australians are indebted to the contributions many non-Aboriginal people have made to the personal, cultural and political struggles of my people. We are indebted too to the research contributions of non-Aboriginal Australians to this struggle. It is, however, inappropriate that the research contribution to the political cause should come solely from non-Aboriginal Australians. I am not suggesting in any way that critical research by non-Aboriginal Australians should not continue, or that such research cannot serve to inform the struggles of Aboriginal Australians for genuine self-determination. (Rigney 1997:118-119)

One reason for favoring Aboriginal writers relates to the critical theory vision that there is more than one world view and more than one interpretation of historical and contemporary events (Foley 2003:45). If research 'focuses on the lived, historical experiences, ideas, traditions, dreams, interests, aspirations and struggles of Aboriginal Australians' (Rigney 1997:11), then it is appropriate that it accesses and presents Aboriginal voices in relation to these concerns. This is particularly so as over the past 200 years research has privileged non-Aboriginal voices.

Smith (1999:20) discusses how imperial literature presents notable characters in colonial history in laudatory terms such as heroism and bravery. This discourse would not be chosen by Aboriginal people who were subject to the processes of colonization.

She raises the viewpoint of Greg Lehman, a Tasmanian Aborigine, who states that the French are remembered in Tasmania because 'it was with an arrogant death that they presaged their appearance and from that time on it has been death that has characterised the island we call Trowunna' (Lehman 1996:54). It was not for any reasons that glorified the French expedition that the Tasmanians remember their arrival (Smith 1999:20-21).

The literature review or reading project was supplemented by a small number of formal interviews and yarning with current and past Aboriginal graduates, postgraduates, educators and policy makers. Yarning, or informal discussion, has been used as an alternative to formal interviews in a number of research projects. For example in a collaborative research project between the local police and the Aboriginal community of a West Australian town, yarning was identified as the preferred methodology by the Aboriginal student research group (Eversole & Routh 2005:631). An Aboriginal researcher with the Australian Institute of Family Studies described yarning as a way of listening to the knowledge of Aboriginal community members, while Aboriginal voices express their own concerns and aspirations, and share their experiences (Burchill 2004:7).

In addition a small group of people formed an informal reference group with whom I could discuss changes in direction and yarn about the results of my research. We shared our experiences and discussed how they were reflected in the literature. In this I was seeking information on everyday experiences and the relationship of these to theoretical writing. These individual experiences and viewpoints were those of the people who chose to share them with me and are not claimed to be representative of all Aboriginal Australians. They are simply examples of the diversity of ways in which Aboriginal people experience interaction with facets of mainstream society. Email contacts with Aboriginal postgraduates working in universities, formed another valuable reference group allowing me to share my interpretations and receive their perspectives.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented my personal background that directs my research. It has also outlined the evolution of the research project, the aims adopted and the paradigm adopted.

The socio-economic disadvantage which is the daily life experience of many Aboriginal Australians can not be denied. Addressing the situation requires an understanding of the reasons for it. One approach could be based on accepting the historical base for the contemporary situation. Australia's colonial history, accompanied by racism, structural violence and cultural violence is this base. The manner in which these factors have assigned Aboriginal people to the position of an underclass is the subject of the next chapter.

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CHAPTER 2
KEY CONCEPTS

Introduction

Australia's Aboriginal people have been marginalised in the society created by Eurocentric interests that dominated the agenda of the colonial powerbrokers who arrived in 1788. In the previous chapter the relationship of colonialism, racism, cultural violence, structural violence and this marginalisation of Aboriginal people was raised. A number of academics including Ryan (1996), Parbury (1999) and Eckermann et al (2006) have discussed these concepts as they have attempted to identify the causes of marginality as a first step in considering how to redress the situation.

These concepts are intrinsic to the analysis presented in this portfolio and are outlined in the first section of this chapter. In the second part of this chapter the concepts of Social Justice and Cultural Safety are explored as approaches which may help to erode the barriers which marginalise Aboriginal Australians.

Marginalising Processes

Colonialism

> Colonialism and its racist ideology is not a relic of Australia's past, it is a part of the fabric of Australian identity, how we are governed and how we respond to claims of Indigenous people in the contemporary debate. (Dodson & Strelein 2001:838)

> One of the most effective instruments of colonialism in terms of management and control is that of education. Whether it is the denial of access to a culturally inclusive education process or the immersion within an education system which does not reflect value and/or accommodate the worldview and practices of the community from which the student is drawn, the outcome is the same, assimilation. (Morgan 1992:55)

In Australia's post 1788 history the lands of Aboriginal people of Australia were claimed as a British colony and this dispossession (Short 2003:495) was the first institutionalised act of violence carried out by the colonisers against the original inhabitants. Dispossession was an ongoing process as the new arrivals pushed their

'settlement' out from the coastal regions across the ranges and into the hinterland and desert areas of the continent. The process of progressive colonisation 'deprived the Aboriginal people and their part Aboriginal descendants of both their cultural heritage and their economic independence' (Pittock and Lippmann 1974:64). The ongoing colonisation of Australia pushed Aboriginal people to the social, economic, cultural and political margins of the developing settler society. This process has become part of the consciousness of Aboriginal people. The memory of dispossession is more recent for some groups than others.

Countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States of America experienced settler colonisation where the colonisers stayed, their numbers grew and they became the dominant political, economic and social force. Further, as Jiwani (1997:2-3) described, they subsequently opened their national doors to immigration, creating tiered societies in which the original inhabitants occupied the bottom tier. Thus in Australia colonial structures from the beginning marginalised Aboriginal Australians to the lowest tier of society, creating and maintaining an underclass where many were dependent on the handouts of the colonisers (Pittock & Lippmann 1974:57).

As Eckermann et al (2006:12-13) asserted there were economic motives for colonisation. Rapid change resulting from industrialisation had promoted a belief that hard work could lead to material advancement. Religion was able to incorporate the work ethic by suggesting that material success was a divine reward for hard work. Desire for accumulation of wealth was manifested both at an individual and a national level. Within this framework the goals of the colonisers and the colonised were incompatible and competition for land and resources was inevitable (Hughes 1995:370).

The colonisers had a narrowly defined perception of how the land should be used. This was summarised by De Vattel (1760:ch7) who unequivocally stated that there was a moral responsibility to cultivate the land, and that those who didn't cultivate were guilty of an idle lifestyle which resulted in inefficient use of the resources of a disproportionately large area. Within this philosophical framework the colonists were easily able to resolve the conflict over land. As Aboriginal people could be observed not to be cultivating the land in the manner approved by Europeans, the solution was to subject 'the continent and its Indigenous inhabitants to rule of state and to domination by European culture and agriculture' (Hughes 1995:370-371).

It is worth noting Davidson's (1991: xiii) similar view that an early priority of the colony was the creation of Australian settler citizens in a process that

> can be reduced to settling sufficient numbers of people on the land at a controlled pace and marrying them off in a formal, legal way to secure a place and a role for the heirs to their property – their children. This settling and marrying resulted in a world where everyday life was that of possessive individualists driven by their belief that through work everyone could attain well being.

The Protestant work ethic, illustrated in the process of property acquisition, continues to influence both political and societal views of Aboriginal disadvantage. The socio-economic disadvantage faced by Aboriginal Australians is attributed to lack of individual application and effort, to laziness (Eckermann et.al. 2006:12).

As Hughes (1995:371) pointed out the process of colonial settlement left the original custodians of this country with two, equally unpalatable, choices. The first was to abandon their lands and cultures and to modify their ways of life in order to assimilate to the goals of the colony; the second was to be dispossessed and possibly exterminated.

Australia's colonial history is divided by Hughes (1995:369) into four phases, which he refers to as 'external colonialism, internal colonialism, welfare colonialism and dependent autonomy'. These can be equated with the four policy periods of 'subjection and exploitation, protection and segregation, assimilation and integration, and self-determination and reconciliation' (Hughes 1995:369). This conceptualisation of colonialism is a useful way to look at the history of Aboriginal–European contact in Australia.

The first phase, that of external colonialism, was when a distant country came into control of the economy and polity of the colonised country. It was during this phase that the roots of later attitudes, policies and practices were laid down. Foley (1999:3) refers to early land appropriation as an example of contempt that has continued until today. There was initial conflict of interests over use of the land. Ways of resolving such conflict ensured that Aboriginal Australians would be viewed and treated as non-citizens. 'The political, social and economic practices of the invaders, together with their superior weaponry and the infectious diseases which they introduced, were utilised to the advantage of the colonists' (Hughes 1995:370). Advantaging the colonists produced parallel disadvantage for the Aboriginal people and this process created,

continued, and perpetuated inequity in many areas, including education which is my main focus in this work

External colonialism ended with Federation in 1901 to be followed by internal colonialism. Internal colonialism can be described as the subordination and domination of previously independent people by the dominant settler society (Welch 1988:206). Exclusionary policies and practices established under external colonialism were maintained. The new federal constitution specifically excluded Aborigines from the census, and from being subject to national policy. Dodson & Strelein (2001:829) suggest that colonial (state) governments desired 'to retain their discretion to exploit Indigenous people, their wealth and resources without interference from the Federal government' and this was one reason for the exclusion. During this phase of internal colonialism, control was exercised through the policy of protection which confined most Australian Aboriginal people to reserves and missions, and dictated their daily lives and life chances.

In 1951 protectionism officially gave way to assimilation as the policy of state governments (Eckermann et al 2006:26) in relation to their Aboriginal Australian populations. This did not remove the continuing influence of colonialism on Aboriginal people; it facilitated continued economic exploitation and political control of Aborigines and ushered in a new period of colonialism (Hughes 1995:375).

Hughes (1995:375-377) refers to the assimilation period as 'welfare colonialism'. The use of the term welfare does not refer solely to cash payments from the government to individuals administered by Centrelink or its predecessors. Rather, welfare refers to the control exercised by the state over many aspects of Aboriginal people' daily lives. A good example of welfare control during the assimilation era is seen in the regulations of who could live on the reserves and missions which had been set up in the protection era.

Provision of basic services such as health and education was another aspect of the broad colonial welfare function of the state. During the period of assimilation there was an increasing emphasis on the education of Aboriginal Australians within the mainstream system. The education extended was largely inadequate and inappropriate and it did not equip Aboriginal people to share in the economic wealth created from the use and abuse of their appropriated lands. Parbury (1999:69) pointed out that the assimilation policy stated that education was to be provided within the limits of the students' abilities and to enable them to provide services useful to mainstream society. In this way the state maintained control over Aboriginal life chances. Although

education was second rate and was seen as a means to attain the attributes required for citizenship, the education provided actually served to exclude Aborigines from full participation as citizens (Hughes 1995:376).

Further 'through policies and programs of Aboriginal welfare the state constructed a status for Aborigines in which they were subject to and dependent on the state, yet different to normal citizens' (Hughes 1995, 377). Jennett (1987:58) asserted that such dependence on the government prevented Aboriginal people from altering their colonised status within Australia. She further argued that such state control of Aboriginal people's welfare was a continuation of internal colonialism (Jennett 1987:77). Behrendt (2001:855) concurred when she stated that Aboriginal people remained dependent on the colonial state and welfare while there was no policy framework that promoted the 'rights agenda'[4], which she described as vital for economic independence.

A new form of colonialism, dependent autonomy, was ushered in with the 1972 introduction of the self-determination policy (Hughes 1995:369). In the next twenty years successive Australian governments established and worked with Aboriginal advisory and consultative bodies which provided advice on issues which the governments determined were to be of importance. Colonialism continued as the government exercised control over the role, official agenda and budgets of the advisory bodies. The creation of ATSIC in 1990 was publicised as a significant step towards self-determination, but as Hughes (1995:378) emphasised, the government still prescribed the parameters within which ATSIC could operate in relation to policy making and allocation of government funds. The continuing existence of ATSIC remained subject to government control, dependent on the goodwill of the government and subject to government reviews. The body was abolished in 2004 by the Federal government.

The apparent contradiction in the term dependent autonomy is accounted for by describing the self-determination policy of this phase as one that promoted 'autonomy through increased dependency on the state' (Hughes 1995:369). Consequently the colonial relationship between the government and Aboriginal people was maintained and funding for organisations and projects remained dependent on the goodwill of the incumbent government and could be withdrawn at any time.

[4] O'Donoghue (1997:18) asserted that two sets of rights must be granted to Aboriginal people. The first are citizen rights, those related to everyday living conditions. The second are Aboriginal rights, those related to claims over the land and to status as the 'First Australians'.

The promotion of autonomy has produced a situation where an increasing number of Aborigines participate in the state 'as state employees, employees of state funded organisations and recipients of programs provided or funded by the state' (Hughes 1995, 381). The state's continued good will is needed if these people are to be able to continue to work towards a degree of autonomy in decision making related to Aboriginal issues. The state maintains a colonial relationship of power over Aboriginal people.

Practices associated with colonialism in Australia were based in racist beliefs of the inferiority of Aboriginal Australians (Eckermann et al 2006:8-9). Scientific racism provided a justification for the exploitative behaviour of the colonisers and led to the entrenchment of institutional racism. Racism is explored in the next section.

Racism

> Racial discrimination is any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of life. (International Council of Human Rights Policy 2000:5)

In 2001 representatives of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) of Australia participated in the United Nations World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. As a lead up to this, HREOC (2001b) released a discussion paper, *Combating Racism in Australia,* and held national civic consultations. 'The vast majority of participants [in the consultations] agreed that racism is pervasive and entrenched throughout all aspects of Australian society' (HREOC 2001b:4).

To understand contemporary racism it is worth exploring notions of race, the hierarchy of race and the relationship with colonialism, the link with power and how racism is manifested. These factors form the basis of the following discussion.

Notions of race and hierarchy of race and colonialism

A notion that humankind consists of distinct and identifiable groups that are defined as "races" 'is a core ideology on which racism draws' (Dunn 2003:7). Dunn (2003) conducted a survey to establish the extent of racism in Australia and tested the

underpinning constructs. He found that 77.6% of respondents agreed with the concept of distinct races (Dunn 2003:8). The belief in the distinctiveness of racial groups allows for a perception that there is a hierarchy of races.

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) asserts that the notion of a hierarchy is an important component of racism. It posits that racism is generated by 'a set of beliefs, often complex, that asserts the natural superiority of one group over another, and which is often used to justify differential treatment and social positions' (HREOC 2001a:5).

Notions of a hierarchy of races developed as a result of European imperialism and colonialism, scientific theory and capitalism (NSW Anti-Discrimination Board 2003:14-15). These European developments allowed people to perceive 'their economic and military dominance as evidence of their racial and cultural superiority [and to attribute this to] inherent and biologically determined racial differences' (Anti-Discrimination Board of NSW 2003, 15). Concepts of biological difference underpinned what some saw as a scientific basis for racism (Tatz 1995:39). Scientific racism involved identification of discrete races, based on biological differences, which then formed the basis for ascription of a hierarchy of 'social, intellectual and moral qualities' (Eckermann et al 2006:9).

Ideas of racial superiority arrived with the first British colonists in Australia. Aboriginal people were seen by the colonists as primitive, and writings from early colonial history made this evident. These ideas continued and are illustrated by comments made in parliament by Senator Ross Lightfoot of West Australia. Shortly after his election to the Senate, Lightfoot created an uproar in the media when he told parliament that Aborigines were 'the bottom colour of the civilisation spectrum' (Dixon 1997:28).

The positioning of the original inhabitants of Australia at the bottom tier of society can be seen as an outcome almost predicated by the scientific racism and sense of cultural superiority which underpinned colonialism. Dodson and Strelein (2001:826) succinctly outline this viewpoint with the statement that

> as a colonial country, racism was a founding value of Australian society – it justified the wholesale denial of Indigenous people' rights to retain their social, economic and political structures, while denying their rights to participate in the polity under construction.

Eckermann (1999:5) offers a similar analysis stating that 'scientific racism justified dispossession and land alienation'. Racist views of superiority help to justify the capitalist motives of the squatters (Armstrong 2004:3). However, as the Conference of Education Systems Chief Executive Officers (2000:1) asserts 'the concept of race is a social construct, not a scientific one', it is merely justified by an appeal to a scientific base.

In summarising its national consultation HREOC (2001b:4) stated that participants saw contemporary racism as a legacy of early colonialism which was inherently racist and laid the foundations for 'systemic [or institutional] racism in Australia' (HREOC 2001b:4). Institutional racism has been described by Scheurich & Young (1997:3) as the situation where the standard method of operation of an organization or institution privileges members of the dominant race and disadvantages minority group members. This institutional discrimination is supported by laws which apply specifically to members of a particular minority group. Systemic or institutional racism can be seen to be the result of the 'mono-cultural paradigm' (HREOC 2001b:4) within which the colonisers established social and political structures.

Racism and power

Racism can be conceptualised as having two components: difference and power (Fredrickson 2000:9). Viewing people as permanently and unchangeably different justifies using power advantages in ways which would be regarded as 'cruel or unjust if applied to members of our own group' (Fredrickson 2000:9). These power inequalities which support racism are deeply rooted in Australia's history, colonial culture and social structures (Conference of Education Systems Chief Executive Officers 2000:1).

The interrelationship between racism and power was a recurrent theme in the 2001 HREOC consultations. The desire to maintain positions of power and privilege and the fear of having to relinquish these was described as a major factor contributing to continuing racism (HREOC 2001b:5). A West Australian participant in the consultation process linked power and privilege to economic security and asserted that competition between groups for economic security is a significant factor in racism (HREOC 2001b:5). This was supported by the International Council of Human Rights Policy (ICHRP 2000:17) when they linked racism to the protection of political and economic interests of those who practiced discrimination. Reactions by pastoralist and mining lobby groups to land rights legislation in Australia could be seen as an example of this.

Manifestations of racism

Racism can be overt and obvious in the form of physical violence and verbal abuse. Overt racism can also be seen in the many laws passed in relation to Aboriginal Australians. Tatz (1979:49-52) describes many negative laws. These have included laws:

- which created and perpetuated an inferior legal status for Aboriginal Australians and in some cases made Aboriginal Australians minors,
- which branded as criminal for Aboriginal Australians behaviours which were legal for the rest of the population,
- which controlled the geographic movement of Aboriginal people, and
- which excluded Aboriginal people from benefits enjoyed by the rest of Australians. (Tatz 1979:49)

Racism can also be more subtle and difficult to identify. Underlying 'beliefs or values [can become] built into the operations of social institutions in such a way as to discriminate against, control and oppress various minority groups' (Henry, Houston & Mooney 2004:517). This is an aspect of institutional racism (Henry, Houston & Mooney 2004:517) or systemic racial discrimination (HREOC 2001a:6).

It has been contended that institutional racism has been inherent in Australian society since 1788 (Craven & Rigney 1999:44-45; Eckermann et.al. 2006:17). Support for this assertion was provided by Henry, Houston & Mooney (2004:517-518) who cited the initial declaration of '*Terra nullius*', the relative silence of the 1897 Convention on Federation in relation to Aboriginal issues and the Stolen Generations as historical examples. Similarly the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) (1991) reported evidence of systemic racial discrimination. The Royal Commission found that the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system illustrated in the statistics in Chapter 1 was a result of the disadvantage faced as a result of 'historical inequality and discrimination' (HREOC 2001b:6). A national initiative *Racism; No Way,* discussed the fact that racist practices have been embedded in Australian legal and social institutions. Three significant examples were given: the practice of removing Aboriginal children to foster or institutional care, the denial of full citizenship rights, and the White Australia Policy (Conference of Education Systems Chief Executive Officers 2000:3). Although the White Australia

Policy related to immigration, it illustrated the view of Australia as a 'white' society which ignored the presence or claims of the original custodians of this country.

Another subtle form of racism described by the International Council of Human Rights Policy (2000:6-8) and discussed by HREOC (2001a:7) is denialism[5]. Two extremes of this are identified as 'denial in good faith (I didn't know) and the *outright lie*, when truth is deliberately denied using falsehoods, misinformation or evasion' (ICHRP 2000:6). Between these two extremes are variations which include denying the facts or the way in which the facts are interpreted. The event in question is said not to have happened at all or the report exaggerates the facts (ICHRP 2000:6; HREOC 2001a:7).

In Australia denialism is manifest in what has come to be known as the 'Aboriginal history war' (Attwood 2005: ii). Until relatively recently most of the written history presented to Australians was what Attwood (2005:15) refers to as 'settler history' – a history that concentrated on the achievements of the British and of white Australians. Reynolds (1995:3) contends that Aboriginal Australians were increasingly overlooked by Australian historians during the first half of the twentieth century. Attwood (2005:17) discusses Stanner's assertion that the silence of history over Aboriginal and mainstream relations was a structural matter – a deliberate exclusion. This began to change in the 1970s as a result of Aboriginal activism (Reynolds 1995:3).

The production of new interpretations of Australian history, which focussed on 'violence, exploitation and racism' (*Anti Discrimination Board of NSW* 2003:29) and its results, produced a back lash in the broad Australian community. In line with the form of denialism that does not accept critical interpretation of facts, conservatives have claimed that the facts are misrepresented. For example the issue of removal of Aboriginal children has been described as an 'historical blemish [and] the claims of the stolen generations refuted for being statistically insignificant' (Clark 2002:2). Tatz (1998:10) describes this form of denialism as a 'vanishing trick that represents a collective repression of troubling memories and awkward truths'.

Another form of denialism can be identified in Dunn's 2001 survey. While 83.1% of respondents recognised that racism exists in Australia, only 57.4% acknowledged that it has created positions of privilege for some groups (Dunn 2003:7).

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[5] Although the word 'denialism' is not found in standard dictionaries it is coming to be widely used. A Google search reveals many websites other than ICHRP and HREOC which use the term.

Racism continues to be evident in a number of arenas in Australian society. These include the political sphere, employment, education, accommodation, service provision, criminal justice, regulation of public space and everyday social interactions (HREOC 2001b:5-8). Similar findings are evident in Dunn's (2003:9) research where respondents identified workplace, education housing and policing as areas where racism was identified.

The HREOC consultation process uncovered what people experienced on an everyday basis and revealed that racism continues to influence the life chances of Australian Aboriginal people. In Dunn's (2003:4) survey approximately 10% of the sample openly stated that Aboriginal Australians did not fit into the mainstream Australian society. In discussion of which groups are out-groups, Dunn (2003:4) noted that 'anti- Indigenous sentiments appear to have relentless longevities in Australia'. Out-groups are partially maintained in that position through structural violence.

Structural Violence

One legacy of colonialism in Australia is the structural violence which pervades our society and marginalises many people including the vast majority of Aboriginal Australians. This marginalisation has come to be recognised and written about both in the academic realm and in more widely read works such as Nene Gere's 1961 novel *The Fringe Dwellers*. Structural violence is one of the pervasive and insidious factors within Australian society which pushes people to dwell on the fringes. Knowledge of the process contributes to an understanding of how the marginalisation of Aboriginal Australians occurred and continued.

What is structural violence? It has been discussed by a number of writers (Winter & Leighton 1999; Pilisuk & Tennant 1997; Webb 1999: Eckermann et.al. 2006) since the concept was first introduced into sociological discourse by Johan Galtung in 1969. A number of definitions or conceptualisations of structural violence will be discussed and links drawn between the theory and the situation of Aboriginal Australians. Transcend (2004:6), an organisation of which Galtung is a director, posits that structural violence occurs when people are harmed through the denial of basic needs.

These basic needs are defined by Galtung (1990:292) as survival, well-being, identity and freedom needs. Galtung (1990:295) states that direct and structural violence creates 'needs deficits'. Needs deficits are illustrated in the statistics related to access to

basic citizens' rights such as health and education for Aboriginal Australians. Examples of the inadequacy of provision of services include that Aboriginal life expectancy is at least 20 years lower than the national average and Aboriginal infant mortality higher continues to be at least twice the rate of that for other Australians (Eckermann et.al. 2006:64). Another example is that participation in and outcomes from education are not comparable to mainstream statistics.

Galtung's conceptualisation of structural violence is based on the following four components:

> 1. Exploitation: the extent to which interaction is based on a division of labour that is vertical, meaning that the net benefits of the interaction process are asymmetrically distributed.
> 2. Penetration: the extent to which the exploiter in the process of exploitation is able to penetrate 'under the skin' of the exploited, establishing in the exploited ....a dominance of consciousness of the underdogs if the generic term refers to a person.
> 3. Fragmentation: the extent to which the underdogs generated through exploitation and penetration are separated from each other, having little or no bilateral interaction among themselves.
> 4. Marginalization: the extent to which the exploiters form their own patterns of multilateral interaction and organization, tying them together, constituting a concept of first class citizens, making of the others second-class citizens or countries. (Galtung 1975:264-265)

In discussion of these concepts Galtung (1990:294) points out that 'penetration and segmentation prevent consciousness formation and that fragmentation and marginalisation prevent organisation against exploitation and repression.' It could be argued that structural violence in the form of denial of appropriate education is a particularly effective way of preventing Aboriginal people from developing the tools to function in mainstream society. Inadequate education also limits people's ability to call attention to the exploitation and repression which have been an integral part of Australian Aboriginal history since 1788.

The Transcend manual (2004:6) defines two types of structural violence: vertical and horizontal. These two types 'can be identified as some kind of frozen power' (Transcend 2004:6). Vertical structural violence is said to include repression, exploitation and alienation. Repression is an exercise of political power, exploitation an exercise of economic power and alienation an exercise of cultural power. These practices deny the needs of freedom, well-being and identity. Direct violence insults the fourth need, which is that of survival. Horizontal structural violence is said to involve the separation of people who want to live together, and the practice of keeping together

people who would prefer to live apart. The principle of 'divide and conquer' is promoted by the social disharmony resulting from these practices. This form of structural violence violates identity needs (Transcend 2004:6).

It is not difficult to analyse the history of Aboriginal contact with the colonisers in light of the Transcend definitions of structural violence. The following is only a thumbnail discussion. Survival needs of Aboriginal Australians were ignored by the invasion of the different Aboriginal nations and direct violence was widespread. Survival needs have continued to be poorly met through the health issues faced by many Aboriginal people; an insult illustrated in the higher infant and child mortality rates and the lower life expectancy of Aboriginal people. The practice of forced removal of people from their lands to missions and reserves neglected freedom, well-being and identity needs and was an example of both vertical (repression and alienation) and horizontal structural violence. Economic exploitation in relation to the development of Australia's pastoral industry has been widely discussed. (e.g. Foster 2000; Castle & Hagan 1998)

A slightly different interpretation is offered by Winter & Leighton (1999). They describe structural violence as the disadvantage which results from social structures – political, legal, economic and cultural – which favour the dominant group. Within this context structural violence can be seen to result in 'unequal access to resources, to political power, to education, to health care, or to legal standing' (Winter & Leighton 1999:1). Other writers (Webb 1999; Pilisuk & Tennant 1997) take a similar view and discuss structural violence in terms of institutions within society which deny people equal access to society's resources and which results in poor housing, inadequate education and health care, unemployment and poverty.

Colonialism inherently produces unequal access to resources which is fundamental to structural violence. Colonialism in Australia has definitely produced a situation where Aboriginal people are subordinate in the access to control and allocation of resources. This reflects Roberts (1998:1) statement that 'structural violence occurs when the difference is caused by the economic structure of society'. The inherent racism of colonialism contributes to a sense of cultural superiority which leads to another form of violence which is known as cultural violence.

Cultural violence

The existence of 'cultural violence' is one of the central assumptions of my work, along with its historical impacts on the lives of Aboriginal Australians, especially in the area of education. Cultural violence can be identified at many levels including in the theorising related to educational inequalities of Aboriginal people.

Johan Galtung, who has written extensively in the field of peace studies, offers a definition, which is a good starting point for considering what cultural violence actually is and how it can influence people's lives and life chances.

> By 'cultural violence', we mean those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence – exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science [logic, mathematics] – that can be used to justify or legitimise direct or structural violence.
> Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right – or at least not wrong. Just as political science is about two problems – the use of power and the legitimation of the use of power – violence studies are about two problems: the use of violence and the legitimation of that use. (Galtung 1990:291)

Within Galtung's definition is the beginning of a framework for considering the Australian situation. It highlights that cultural violence involves a mindset which enables people to justify – albeit at times unconsciously – the discriminatory and marginalising policies and practises which are the basis of colonisation and which have been, and continue to be, an integral part of post-invasion Australian colonial society.

White Australia's written history began with an act of direct violence – the invasion of the territory of sovereign nations by a colonising force focussed on its own political, social and economic agenda. The declaration of '*Terra nullius*' – a declaration which appeased the consciences of the invaders and avoided heeding the regal decree to treat properly with the natives – was in itself an act of cultural violence. The declaration diminished members of sovereign nations to a status less than human.

Bain Attwood (July 25:2004) in a radio interview describes the term '*Terra nullius*' as having two legal definitions. The narrower definition means that the land is uninhabited; the broader one asserts that the occupants have no sovereignty, and therefore no property rights. Laborlawtalk (ud) describes the expansion of the concept of 'empty land' or 'no mans land' in the 18th century. The principle was to also cover 'settlement' of land occupied by 'backward' people who were not putting the land to good use – good use, of course defined within European agricultural and industrial parameters and culture of the time. An assumption of the superiority of the culture of the invaders justified the initial and continued direct and structural violence.

In the resultant hierarchy Aboriginal people were relegated to the bottom. This type of hierarchy was succinctly discussed by Jiwani (1997:2-3) in the Canadian context. She described Canada as traditionally a multi-cultural society, consisting of many Aboriginal nations which were consistently destroyed in the process of colonisation by the colonising culture. Other groups of people with their own cultures were brought in and a hierarchy of cultures developed. Aboriginal cultures were at the bottom, overlaid by immigrant cultures and with the dominant colonising cultures at the top. This hierarchy was structured on premises of racism and inequality, grounded in the violence of colonisation and perpetuated by ideologies of racism, sexism and classism. This description of Canada parallels the Australian situation and the forces at work which sustained the hierarchy were supported by the cultural violence of those at the top of the hierarchy.

Cultural violence could be seen as a close relation to ethnocentrism, which can be defined as 'the tendency to view the world through one's own cultural filters' (Matsumoto & Juano 2004 cited in Eckermann et al 2006:7). In a colonial society a dominant culture 'promotes the view that it alone embodies the norm, and that its own cultural and social expression is superior to any other' (Reed ud). Proximity and power combined with ethnocentric beliefs promotes cultural violence. As a result the 'totality of values, norms, attitudes, beliefs, gender relations, child-rearing practices, governance etc [as well as] the economic, political, social and spiritual organisation of a people's existence' (Jiwani 1997:3) are denied their legitimacy. In Galtung's (1990) definition, this denial of the legitimacy of another culture can then be seen as a justification of direct and structural violence against the members of the other group and structural violence serves to maintain the hierarchy.

The often-discussed practice of 'othering' (Canales 2000) is an aspect of ethnocentrisms and racism. It can also become a manifestation of power relations (Canales 2000:4). The 'other' group comes to be described in terms of how the members differ from the mainstream or dominant group in society and the difference is damned as inferior and justifies the subordinate place people are forced to occupy.

In discussing the issue of violence in Canadian communities, Jiwani (1997:6-7) points to the exclusionary impacts of 'othering' by the dominant section of society. She asserts that the creation of a list of binary opposites is a result of the 'us' and 'them' mentality. The 'other' is seen as not assimilating to the dominant culture, and holding onto backward cultural traditions. The implicit understanding becomes that the 'other' is

inferior and should adapt to the superior ways of the dominant culture. This denial of the worth of minority cultures is cultural violence and underpins scientific and institutional racism. It justifies the structural violence which marginalises the members of the 'other' group, blaming them for their inability to progress within the dominant culture and its structures and institutions. This perception fails to recognise the

> reality of colonialism. In most areas of the world which were colonised, European educational systems, European languages, and European forms of social, political and economic systems were imposed. This means that the kind of cultural prescriptions that are being generated in the name of cultural sensitivity, are based on stereotypical and static caricatures of cultures, rather than on the complexity, diversity, and dynamic cultural traditions which have emerged out of necessity from the cauldron of conquest and colonisation. (Jiwani 1997:8)

Evolving cultures are considered as inferior, a further example of cultural violence. Adaptation is an aspect of cultural vitality (Eckermann et al 2006:84), but can be seen as simply a watering down of traditional culture. It is not uncommon in Australia to hear the disclaimer that only the remote Aborigines still have an Aboriginal culture (Craven & Rigney 1999:51). Another often heard claim is that people who have lost their traditional language have no 'culture'. This is another example of cultural violence against many contemporary Aboriginal Australians who no longer speak a traditional language. It is a denial of their culture. Many speak a variety of Aboriginal English, which is usually belittled as sub-standard English, rather than recognised as a language of adaptation and cultural vitality. Such denial of cultural vitality is another manifestation of cultural violence, as is the denial of the continuation of kinship groups and networks.

The official policy of assimilation expected Aboriginal Australians to embrace the dominant culture developed by the descendants of the original colonisers. Although assimilation is no longer the official government policy it is entrenched in many expectations dominant society holds for Aboriginal Australians, and permeates approaches to service delivery within the mainstream. It is a paradox that while assimilation was promoted and expected, structural and cultural violence circumscribed chances of assimilation into the higher levels of the colonial social, political and economic hierarchies where Aboriginal people could promote their own voices. However Aboriginal activism and a level of sympathy in some sections of broader society meant that those voices were eventually heard, at least partially. As a result new

approaches came to be developed. Social justice was a concept espoused in these new approaches.

NEW APPROACHES

Social Justice

> Social justice is grounded in the practical, day-to-day realities of life. It's about waking up in a house with running water and proper sanitation; offering one's children an education that helps them develop their potential and respect their culture. It is the prospect of satisfying employment and good health (HREOC 2003:1)

This definition is appealing in its simplicity and its relationship to everyday life and rights. There are however a number of more theoretical approaches to social justice. Taylor & Singh (2003:2) suggest that interpretations of social justice can be classified as economic and cultural, and that since adoption of the concept of social justice the emphasis has been on recognition of economic inequality and redistribution of resources as a form of redress.

To an extent social justice as redistribution of resources could be seen to underlie the welfare system, where those with unequal access to resources receive targeted support from the government. This can take the form of income support, subsidised housing, public health provision and compensatory education programs. One criticism that can be levelled at the redistributive approach to social justice is that it ignores the structural causes of unequal access. It deals only with the result not the causes.

Within the redistributive framework of social justice, provision of opportunities for individuals to access society's resources, if they have the innate ability and willingness to exert themselves, is emphasised by the school of thought known as liberal individualism. This is closely linked to the Protestant work ethic described in the discussion of colonialism. Differences in outcomes are seen as the result of fair competition (Sturman 1997, 14). The concept of 'desert' is important; people receive what they earn through individual effort. The role of the state in promoting social justice is minimal, only involving provision of resources and access (Rizvi & Lingard 1993, 6-7; Sturman 1997, 22-24).

The redistributive approach has been adopted in relation to the provision of socially just education but can be seen as too limited. No account is taken of whether the education services being accessed are culturally appropriate or adequate. Connell (1993:18) argues that schools need to address curriculum issues in order to provide social justice, 'for education is a social process in which the "how much" can not be separated from the "what".' Connell's proposal recognises the role of structural and cultural violence in alienating and marginalising Aboriginal people from mainstream offerings by suggesting that we need to appraise the cultural appropriateness of what is being offered. It is appropriateness that will achieve social justice.

Henry & Taylor (1999:7) discuss the complexity of new approaches and that the two, redistribution and recognition, need to be addressed simultaneously in many cases. The example they use is race. Racially based injustice is both economic and cultural as it involves poverty and blindness to the impact of cultural difference. To some extent the question of recognition of difference is addressed in the social democratic approach to social justice.

Sturman (1997:24-25) outlined the social-democratic approach to social justice which shifted the emphasis away from the individual to the group. It also considered the effect of group membership on production of advantages for some and disadvantages for others. Recognition of the role of group membership in people's life chances led to a focus on provision of funds to correct injustices which resulted from the structure of society and the economy. The social-democratic approach promoted government programs which were designed to improve educational outcomes for targeted groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Criticisms of this approach arise out of the deficit nature of much of the theorising. Concern is that the problem is seen to be with the members of a group and this needs to be 'fixed', rather than a perception that the problem is systemic (Sturman 1997:17). Further criticism is levelled at this approach on the grounds that membership of groups may intersect for any individual. It is not difficult to imagine a hypothetical individual who is an Aboriginal girl in a remote community whose first language is not Standard Australian English, who has issues with either sight or hearing because of endemic health problems, and who lives in poverty. Thinking of social justice issues for this girl simply in terms of her Indigineity could narrow the focus of planning and also entirely overlook the fact that despite the perceived disadvantages she is gifted and talented. Labelling a person as a member of a particular group may ignore or negate the

influences of membership of other groups. Moreton- Robinson (2000) discusses such labelling in relation to feminism. She contends that many feminists concentrate on the impact of gender to the exclusion of the importance of factors such as race, ethnicity, religion or poverty for many women.

Rizvi (1995:25) argues that there needs to be an integrated approach to determining the 'overlapping needs of disadvantaged students', that a compartmentalised approach ignores the intersection of causes of disadvantage. He also contends that an emphasis on the cultural differences of a group of students produces a pedagogy which is ahistorical and apolitical and ignores the social, economic and political contributions to the disadvantage experienced by many members of minority groups (Rizvi 1995:27).

Related to this is the argument for maintaining the group approach presented by Young (1990), who sees social injustice as the result of 'domination and oppression' of minority groups (cited in Sturman 1997:111). Given the power imbalances which result from domination and oppression, social injustice can best be addressed by positive discrimination in favour of members of minority groups.

An alternative to the redistribution approaches to social justice is based on recognition of cultural difference (Taylor & Singh 2003:3). I would suggest that respect and valuing of cultural difference, not just recognition, needs to be spelled out clearly as goals of this approach to social justice. The lack of respect of cultural difference contributes to social injustice in the form of cultural violence.

We can pursue the academic arguments over social justice indefinitely but would be well served to go back to the HREOC definition and consider that social justice is about rights rather than compassion. Social justice can best be achieved by the identification and removal of the marginalising effects of cultural and structural violence. Social justice is a concept that is subject to different interpretations from different philosophical and political agendas. As a result, the delivery of the HREOC vision of social justice is at the whim and goodwill of incumbent governments who may adopt different interpretations. When I use the term social justice, I use it in the sense of the delivery of rights to all members of Australian society: and when I use it in the Aboriginal context I mean it to imply both basic citizens' rights and Aboriginal rights; the practical and the symbolic rights, as the current conservative government rhetoric divides the two. I would suggest that the inclusion of Cultural Safety principles could enhance progress to achieving social justice for Aboriginal Australians.

Cultural Safety

When I first came across this term it seemed to have nice 'warm-fuzzy' connotations, but I had no understanding of what is actually involved .What is cultural safety? What would culturally safe service delivery actually 'look like'? How could a service provider promote cultural safety for clients/consumers?

Aboriginal people in post-colonial countries share a similar history of dispossession and experience of the negative aspects of colonialism. As Eckermann et al. (1992:191) point out, Australia's colonial history, in common with most colonial nations, subjected, and continues to subject, Aboriginal people to 'subjugation and special legislation, directed to managing, controlling, protecting and "uplifting" the minority'. These people consequently suffer from the results of a serious imbalance in power within society which expresses itself in marginalisation, at least partially illustrated in lack of adequate access to services which are basic citizens' rights. Health and education are two amongst many areas of disadvantage.

International forces have created a social and political climate which at least pays lip-service to the need to redress the disadvantage faced globally by people who have been the victims of colonialism, imperialism and the racism of those in power as a result of the imposed regime (Morrissey 2006:350). As previously stated the economic underpinnings of colonial practices which seek to advantage the colonists and the colonising country naturally contribute to the disadvantage faced by the marginalised first inhabitants of colonised countries.

Within this climate, the concept of Cultural Safety was developed by members of the nursing profession in Aotearoa. An important proponent of Cultural Safety in nursing in Aotearoa has been the late Irihapeti Ramsden who wrote from her Maori perspective. I have relied heavily on her 2002 PhD thesis in developing my understanding of the concept. Although others, (Williams 1999; Bin-Sallik 2003; Eckermann et al. 1992 & 2006) have written about this concept, I have restricted most of my discussion to the work of Irihapeti Ramsden, who emphasises the need to understand the 'politics of marginalisation' (Ramsden 2002b:5), as the essential starting point.

What is Cultural Safety?

Ramsden (2002a:9) describes Aotearoa as monocultural in terms of access to power and resources. Cultural Safety is concerned with power and resources, including information, its distribution in societies and outcomes of information management (Ramsden 2002b:1). Ramsden (2002b:3) goes on to state that 'history shows that through a process of colonisation Maori have been victims of oppression and racism and today their poor health figures represent the outcomes of 160 years of monocultural domination'. Cultural Safety is involved with the transfer of power to Aboriginal people who are the recipients of services provided by the mainstream (Ramsden 2002b:2).

Australia's history and the current status of Aboriginal Australians in relation to health, education and other socio-economic indices are similar to those of Maori in New Zealand. An understanding of the impact of socio-political processes of marginalisation and disempowerment can lead to more socially just provision of citizens' rights within a culturally safe framework – a framework where Aboriginal Australians have effective input into designing and delivering the services which they access.

The concept recognises that historically health and midwifery services have been delivered in an environment that 'diminishes, demeans and disempowers' (Nursing Council of New Zealand 2005, 4) the Maori client of the health services. In looking at how to redress this situation and provide health services that would improve Maori health status the proponents of Cultural Safety identified the need for 'reflection, recognition and respect' on the part of health service providers in relation to their interactions with Maori clients.

Wepa (2001, 16) quotes from the Nursing Council of New Zealand (1992, 1) that cultural safety is defined as:

> ...the effective nursing of a person/family from another culture by a nurse who has undertaken a process of reflection on own cultural identity and recognises the impact of the nurse's culture on own nursing practice. Unsafe cultural practice is any action which diminishes, demeans or disempowers the cultural identity and well-being of an individual.

Williams (1999, 213) offers the following definition of Cultural Safety as:

> .an environment that is spiritually, socially and emotionally safe, as well as physically safe for people: where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity: of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared knowledge and experience of learning together.

From my reading to date, I would offer as a brief definition or explanation the following:

> Cultural safety is a process that involves service providers in critical reflection of the historical and socio-political factors which impact on the life chances of both themselves and their clients. Positions of power and powerlessness result from these factors. Recognition of this promotes respect for clients and avoids perceptions of them through the looking glass of deficit theories. This facilitates clients' input into defining what is safe for them.

In attempting to address the poor comparative health statistics for Aboriginal Australians, some health service trainers adopted the principles developed in New Zealand. The manner in which these can be adapted to Aboriginal education in Australia will be discussed in chapter 7.

Conclusion

Aboriginal Australians have been subject to a number of different policies formulated by State and Federal governments. These are influenced by colonialism and the associated factors of racism, structural violence and cultural violence. As a result of colonial practices and the various policies Aboriginal people in Australia are variously described as disadvantaged, marginalised and an under-class. Hughes (1995:369) aligns the four phases of colonialism with four policy periods. These are subjection and exploitation, protection and segregation, assimilation and integration, and self-determination and reconciliation, and form the subject matter of Chapter 3. The introduction of the concept of Social Justice in the policy making arena has been one step forward. Adoption of Cultural Safety principles could provide another alternative approach.

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CHAPTER 3
HISTORY OF ABORIGINAL POLICY

Context and introduction

Understanding of the contemporary circumstances of powerlessness and poverty (Pittock & Lippmann 1974:55) in Aboriginal Australia cannot be achieved without knowledge of the history of contact between Aboriginal Australians and the colonial society and governments which have dominated Australia since 1788. Important in the historical narrative are the policies adopted by successive state and federal governments

Only a brief account of historical Aboriginal policy is provided in this chapter, in order to set some context for the discussion of the more contemporary situation. Policy has developed and changed from the time of first contact to today. The history of Aboriginal policy is presented in the chronological sequence of contact, conflict, protection, assimilation, integration, self determination and self management, reconciliation, native title, the stolen generation and practical reconciliation and mainstreaming.

Contact

Captain Arthur Phillip, the first governor of the penal colony of Australia, arrived with instructions from the British government that superficially could be interpreted to have promoted positive dealings with Aboriginal Australians. However on analysis it can be seen that economic considerations underlay the earliest dealings of the colonists with Aboriginal Australians, and that improving the economic potential of the new colony would require control of the original inhabitants (Lippmann 1981:13). Phillip's instructions were,

> ... to endeavour by every possible means to open an intercourse with the natives, and to conciliate their affections, enjoining our subjects to live in amity and kindness with them. And if any of our subjects shall wantonly destroy them or give them any unnecessary interruption in the exercise of their several occupations, it is our will and pleasure that you do cause such offenders to be

> brought to punishment according to the degree of the offence. You will endeavour to procure an account of the numbers inhabiting the neighbourhood of the intended settlement, and report your opinion to one of our Secretaries of State in what manner our intercourse with these people may be turned to the advantage of the colony.
>
> (Instructions to Governor Phillip, 25 April, 1781, Historical Records of Australia, Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament (1974), Sydney. Cited in Parbury 1999:103)

In analysing the language of this document, Parbury (1999:103) points out that as only 'unnecessary interruptions' were to be punished, it would seem clear that invasion and colonisation were considered necessary interruptions to Aboriginal lives. He also calls attention to the use of the phrase, 'if any of our subjects', and asserts that it implicitly excludes Aboriginal Australians from the status of subjects of the crown. Lack of status as subjects of the crown, or citizens of the country, leads to marginalisation from rights received by members of the mainstream society. In considering the language used in the instructions to Governor Phillip, I would also draw attention to the instruction to report on 'in what manner our intercourse with these people may be turned to the **advantage** of this colony' (emphasis added). If the emphasis is on colonial advantage the Aboriginal non-subject population is excluded from discussion of 'advantage'.

The issue of economic conflict was also raised by Rowley (1968:6-8), who related it to access to the grasslands and water sources and pointed out that Aboriginal Australians were not included in the new economy developed by the colonisers. In this way the colonisers took from the original inhabitants through direct violence their means of economic survival and through structural violence excluded them from accessing appropriate and adequate alternative means. In many instances the alternatives which were available led to more sedentary lifestyles (Moreton-Robinson 2000:6). Sedentary life styles have been associated with health problems.

Phillip at first tried to deal with Aboriginal Australians with a degree of humanity and issued orders including statements of penalties which would be meted out to British subjects disobeying those orders, although the application of these penalties was rare (Lippmann 1981:15). The situation soon deteriorated as Aboriginal Australians realised the colonisers were here to stay. Their presence disrupted traditional food sources and access to sacred places was denied by pastoralists who drove Aboriginal people away (Broome 2001:42). Consequently Aboriginal Australians started to fight for their land.

The imbalance in power, that would mark the relationship between colonisers and Aboriginal Australians, became evident as this early conflict developed. Although initially Aboriginal people outside the relatively heavily settled coastal centres enjoyed some success in their resistance due to their highly developed hunting skills, this advantage was lost when breech loading repeating rifles became available to the colonisers in the 1870s. This changed the power balance in the struggle for the land in favour of the colonisers (Broome 2001:44). The remote nature of the 'frontier' meant that rudimentary centralised governments and militia could exercise little control over the use of guns against Aboriginal Australians (Rowley 1968:7).

Conflict

Conflict over land continued even into contemporary times, as evidenced by current land rights and native title arguments. Decimation of the Aboriginal population was the common method used by the colonists to solve this conflict. As Parbury (1999:104) asserted 'frontier wisdom was that Aboriginal people were naturally treacherous and only waiting for a chance to attack the unguarded; the best policy was to "teach them a lesson" first'. This perception created a climate of fear, which coupled with the belief that Aboriginal Australians were subhuman, encouraged atrocities and murder in the name of protecting colonial economic interests. These interests were being developed by settling and cultivating the land (Reynolds 1995:55 & 59; Moreton-Robinson 2000:4). Aboriginal perceptions of colonists' actions were summed up by a late Kurnai man, Phillip Pepper. 'The white come here and took it [the land] by force with a lotta blood bein' shed by the Aboriginal Australians (cited in McGrath 1995:16). The violence and power imbalance was further illustrated in the recollection of a Queensland woman whose grandfather's advice had included the dictum to never kill a white man, because there were more who would arrive to exact revenge (Moreton-Robinson 2000:4).

Direct violence was supported, or justified, by the cultural violence and belief in white racial superiority which underpinned colonialism. This became an entrenched part of white Australian thinking. As Lippmann (1981:16) described it,

> one may trace to this period the beginnings of the scorn and dislike of them (Aboriginal Australians), the indifference to their fate, which were to become so

> strongly characteristic of Australian mentality. Such friendliness as was offered was on the white man's terms: he could formulate the rules and mark the limitations. By and large, Aboriginal Australians, for sheer lack of numbers and technology, had to obey.

While conflict between Aboriginal Australians and the colonisers continued, government policy changed and became one of protection of the original custodians of this country. This policy, which had begun during external colonialism and continued once Australia became self-governing, included the creation of reserves for Aboriginal Australians. People from different language groups were rounded up and confined on government reserves and church controlled missions.

Protection

The protection era and practises associated with the policy have been discussed by a number of writers, including Lippmann, in her 1981 publication *Generations of Resistance.* The creation of reserves and missions was partly based on the notion that Aboriginal Australians, as an 'inferior race' (Behrendt 2001:851), would die out and the reserves were to provide a place of protection while the process of extinction occurred. This belief in racial inferiority was related to widespread acceptance of theories of Social Darwinism based in scientific racism (Broome 2001:96).

Beliefs about the inferiority of the Aboriginal 'race', which underpinned the protection policy, were reinforced by the theories underlying Darwin's *On the Origin of the Species,* published in 1859. Survival of the fittest, as the basis of evolution, could be used to explain the dying out of an inferior race and, in the Australian context, to explain the severe reduction in the Aboriginal population and justify the actions of the colonists. Some authors (Dodson 1997:13; Symon 2000:3) attributed the establishment of protection policies to this belief, and to a Christian desire to 'smooth the dying pillow'. Attwood (2005:15) also referred to the widespread belief that Aboriginal Australians were a 'dying race'. Lippmann (1981:20) however, suggested an added motivation was to remove the traditional custodians to land of little value to the white colonists. This eliminated competition for the land considered more valuable to the colonists. A similar position was adopted by Broome (2001:53), who asserted that protection policies worked 'to protect the lives and interests of the Europeans from the

Aboriginal resistance'. Legal structures, which Tatz (1979:49-50) refers to as negative and discriminatory laws, were established to allow for the removal of Aboriginal people from their traditional lands These structures were a form of institutional racism which marginalised Aboriginal people from full participation in the country's developing economy.

Whatever the motivation, and it was probably a mixture of the two, smoothing the path to extinction and the economic, policies of protection were adopted in all colonies/states, and Aboriginal Australians were largely confined to reserves and missions. Economic independence and sustainability were not possible for the residents as the lands allocated were located in the least desirable parts of the country which were both isolated and unproductive (Pittock & Lippmann 1974:56). Economic marginalisation of the country's original custodians continued and increased the power imbalance between the two groups, reducing Aboriginal people to dependence on handouts from the usurpers of the country's resources. The quality and nature of the handouts became subject to the whim and transient/fickle goodwill of the usurpers (Rintoul 1993:106). In a way this situation has continued to present times, when funding for Aboriginal programs has remained dependent on the goodwill of political parties and subject to the change in governments (Jonas & Dick 2004:4). Economic dependence perpetuated the power imbalance between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, and reinforced racist notions that Aboriginal people were at a lower level of evolution and needed care and control from non-Aboriginal Australians.

At the same time that reserves were being established on a fairly widespread basis, the beginning of what Hughes (1995) referred to as welfare colonialism was occurring. Lippmann (1981:27) described conditions on cattle stations in the north where

> overt and large-scale brutality had given way to feudal dependence, with wretched allotments of food, clothing and blankets being given as a reward for labour or, at least, obedience. Even in the 1960s medicine and bandages were still being dispensed, in seigneurial fashion, usually by the station owner's wife, to those deemed deserving recipients.

Missions and reserves provided easy access to Aboriginal people for those who wished to 'civilise' and 'Christianise' the noble savage. Political and economic motives were also involved in the establishment of reserves. Although some administrators, as pointed out by Hughes (1995:373), recommended that Aboriginal Australians be given

land to establish a self-governing state, reserves were preferred by governments as the land would still be available for colonial interests once the inhabitants died off.

Social structures designed to maintain the status quo of the reserves were violent. Paternalistic control was exercised over all aspects of Aboriginal residents' lives (Dodson 1997:15), and this control prevented equitable access to the emerging Australian society's resources. Control was described by McGrath (1995:7) as intrusive structures and processes which influenced most aspects of Aboriginal Australians' everyday lives, including financial and economic activities and decisions. Aboriginal Australians were classified as childlike and in need of protection through control, until they acquired the necessary skills to move into the dominant colonial society (Bennett 1989:50-51).

Administration of these reserves was similar to that of prisons, hospitals, orphanages, boarding schools and other institutions (Long 1970 cited in Hughes 1995:373). They were established to accommodate beliefs that Aboriginal people had 'failed to absorb the standards of appropriate behaviour and had to be trained, punished, normalised and controlled' (Khoury 1989:225 cited in Hughes 1995:373). The discipline meted out on reserves has continued into living memory for many Aboriginal Australians. A previous workmate of mine recounted an 'incident' from her childhood where her father was removed from the reserve on which she and her family lived and sent to Palm Island. This occurred because the father had a beer with his dinner after work. His wife was left to provide for three young children without the wage to which the family was accustomed. Such disciplinary aspects of reserves reflect Wolpe's (1995:231) definition of internal colonialism as 'a structure of social relations based on domination and exploitation among culturally heterogenous, distinct groups'.

A number of writers, including Hughes (1995:374) and Watson (2004:207) describe reserves, missions and children's institutions as something more than places of protection, but rather as enclaves which provided cheap and sometimes unpaid labour according to seasonal demand. People could be released from the reserves and missions for exploitative domestic and farm labour.

Many of these reserves were run as Christian missions, which Lippmann (1981:22) described as resembling a British workhouse. Watson (2004:207) went further and likened them to concentration camps. In this manner Aboriginal people were further marginalised from opportunity to participate in the economy. By indiscriminately mixing people from different language groups (HoR 1992:8) the

reserve system worked to break down social cohesion which could have contributed to resistance. Control had been established through what Tatz (1979:44-52) described as 'negative law'; laws which created an inferior status for those to whom it was applied. The legal system created systemic discrimination by means of institutional racism.

Fundamental to Christian missions was the aim of converting the residents. Antithetical to this aim was any attempt to help the residents to maintain their cultural traditions. These cultural traditions were in fact considered 'primitive, atheistic and pagan' (Tripcony 1996:5) and therefore to be actively discouraged in line with the goal of introducing the superior western religious, spiritual and cultural practices.

It was postulated in the House of Representatives Report on Aboriginal Language and Culture (1992:19) that the colonial assessment of Aboriginal technology and utilisation of material resources as inferior fed the assumption that languages and cultures must also be inferior. This cultural violence led to the fact that traditional languages were not seen as 'legitimate forms of communication' (Tripcony 1996:5).

People from different language groups, who were rounded up and placed on reserves together, were actively discouraged from communicating in their own languages (Tripcony 1996:5; Dodson 1997:15) and expected to learn and adopt English. In some cases Aboriginal languages were banned from use on missions and government reserves in an example of institutional racism, and children who were separated from their parents and placed in dormitories were denied the opportunity to learn language and traditions from their parents (House of Representatives 1992:8). Aboriginal cultures and experiences were being denied, demeaned and diminished by these practices.

Education provided under the policy of protection was limited and an illustration of the institutional racism which was to become firmly entrenched. What was provided served as a tool of colonial oppression and control (Tripcony 2000:3). By limiting both the quantity and quality of education provided the authorities also restricted the aspirations of Aboriginal people under their control in reserves and missions, and the capacity for organised resistance. Limited education provided was largely designed to equip the people to serve the economic needs of the burgeoning pastoral industry as cheap labour. Watson (2004:207) described reserves as 'enclaves of cheap labour for the local pastoral and agricultural industries'.

It was during this time that the practice of removing children from their families became entrenched. This was to continue well into the 20th century, and to increase under the policy of assimilation. Many children on reserves and missions were placed in

dormitories out of the control of their parents, while others were removed to institutions and non-Aboriginal foster homes where they could be trained in 'white' behaviour and beliefs (HREOC 1997:25). This was a blatant display of the ethnocentric belief that white was better. Although it was not till 1937 that a policy of assimilation came under discussion, earlier efforts to 'improve', 'civilise' or 'Christianise' Aboriginal Australians were essentially assimiliationist practices aimed at converting Aboriginal Australians to the perceived superior habits of whites (Parbury 1999:119). Children were particular targets.

Assimilation

The practices that promoted assimilation were formalised into official policy in 1951. The philosophy underlying the policy is summed up in the following statement:

> the destiny of the natives of Aboriginal origin, but not the full blood lies in their ultimate absorption by the people of the Commonwealth, and it therefore recommends that all efforts be directed to that end.
>
> (Native Welfare Conference 1937;
> cited in Parbury 1999:118).

This illustrated that there was recognition that the Aboriginal population was not dying out. Their 'destiny' had come to be seen as being absorbed into white society, not in extinction. The possibility that Aboriginal people could and might want to maintain their own cultural traditions was ignored in a display of cultural violence. In fact, Aboriginal numbers were increasing which did not sit comfortably with the ethnocentrism underlying the White Australia Policy. Public fear of the increasing numbers was summed up in the following statement by A. O. Neville, the chief protector of West Australia:

> We have power under the act to take any child from its mother at any stage of its life...Are we going to have a population of one million blacks in the Commonwealth or are we going to merge them into the white community and eventually forget that there were ever any Aboriginal Australians in Australia?
>
> (Native Welfare Conference 1937
> cited in Parbury 1999:118).

The desire to 'merge' or assimilate the Aboriginal population was qualified. As stated in the Native Welfare Conference of 1937, only those of mixed descent were to

be assimilated. Education offered was to be limited to those who were perceived as capable of benefiting from it by virtue of being less traditional, or in the manner of speaking of the time, less 'pure-blood'. Under the philosophy of scientific racism the admixture of white blood would raise these people on the evolutionary scale. Reserves would be maintained for the remainder of the Aboriginal population (Lippmann 1981:35), and unequal power relations based on institutional racism enabled Aboriginal people to be forced onto the reserves. Decisions about the future of Aboriginal people were made by colonial authorities and Aboriginal people were not consulted and their preferences not considered. This paternalistic approach was justified by beliefs in racial differences, which placed Aboriginal people in the position of children needing guidance and for whom decisions must be made by more knowledgeable outsiders (Bennett 1989:50-51). Aboriginal people and their viewpoints were marginalised from the polity of the country,

In such a socio-political climate early activism, such as that of the Aboriginal Progressive Association in the late 1930s and the Cummeroogunga walk off in 1939 (Bennett 1989:5), achieved little in raising awareness of the plight of Aboriginal people produced by colonialism and its aftermath. As Bennett (1989:6) asserted, lack of public concern over living conditions of Aboriginal people meant there was little electoral mileage in the development and promotion of policies for Aboriginal advancement.

The policy of assimilation can be accused of being guided by ethnocentrism (Lippmann 1981:38). Folds (1993:31) concurs, stating that the assimiliationist policy put pressure on 'Indigenous society to make a dramatic shift towards the mainstream values' based on the mainstream assumption that mainstream was inherently better.

Lippmann (1981:39) further pointed out that such a policy change could have alarmed the 'white racists' in Australian society and that Paul Hasluck

> was quick to point out that the rate of acceptance of Aboriginal Australians would be slow and that they would only merit a ranking in the white community "as soon as their advancement in civilisation permits them to take their place on satisfactory terms as members of that community".

Statements such as this allowed for the continued marginalisation, exploitation and dominance of those judged by the white community not to have achieved this 'advancement in civilisation'; and that judgement would be made in accordance with criteria decided by the colonial powers.

Rowley (cited in Parbury 1999:119) suggested assimilation could be considered as progress in Australian Aboriginal policy and be described as humane. The policy could be seen as less marginalising than protection and segregation in that it espoused the notion that Aboriginal Australians would be able to have equitable access to Australia's resources and associated lifestyles (Hasluck 1963 cited in Dodson 1996a:3). Under the policy of assimilation Aboriginal people were to be provided citizens' rights and socio-economic equality and were expected to observe the same customs and be influenced by the same beliefs as other Australians (Hasluck 1963: cited in Dodson 1996a:3).

In his report on the findings of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Deaths into Custody Johnston (1991:20.3.3) pointed out that assimilation was adopted by states as official policy at different times. He ascribed economic and political interests as the reason for the differences. In supporting this, he asserted that Queensland only adopted the policy after mineral resources were discovered on Aboriginal reserves. The *Bringing Them Home* Report suggested a different economic motive, linking the increasing cost of running reserves with forcing Aboriginal people into mainstream communities (HREOC 1997:68). Either reason illustrates that policy was again defined and implemented in the interests of the powerful, not in the interests of, and certainly not in consultation with, the people whose daily lives were to be influenced by the policy.

Each state had its own legislative and administrative systems in relation to reserves, but there was similarity in intention and practices. South Australia, as discussed by Mattingly and Hampton (1988), was one example. South Australia has been recognised as one of the more enlightened states and this should be kept in mind when considering the Aboriginal Act of South Australia.

The Aboriginal Act in South Australia was modified in 1939 and reflected the unofficial movement towards assimilation. Two of the amendments were particularly significant in relation to Hughes' (1995:375-377) concept of welfare colonialism, an approach which imposed control over the everyday lives of Aboriginal people. The definition of who was classified as Aboriginal was extended to include fifth generation descendants and the possibility of exemption from the Act was introduced (Mattingly & Hampton 1988:46).

The changed definition of course increased the number of people under government control. This included the power to dictate where Aboriginal people could live. They could be confined to a particular reserve or institution, transferred or removed and their visitors could be restricted (Mattingly & Hampton 1986:45).

The second amendment allowed for people to be exempted from the provisions of the Act. People could be exempted 'by reason of their character, standard of intelligence, and development [which indicated they were] capable of living in the general community without supervision' (Mattingly & Hampton 1986:48). Individuals and whole families could be exempted without their application or consent, and exemptions could be revoked at the whim of the authorities. It could also be used as punishment, as exempted people were prohibited from living on the reserves (Mattingly & Hampton 1988:48). The exclusion from reserves in many cases separated people from their kin, caused alienation and rifts, and contributed to identity problems (Mattingly & Hampton 1988:49).

Exemption also created material difficulties for people. It excluded them from accessing some assistance which was specifically for Aboriginal people. An example, cited by Mattingly and Hampton (1988:50), was the case of parents who were refused assistance from the Aboriginal Department for costs associated with their daughter's school expenses. Access to the whole range of Commonwealth social service benefits was not available to holders of exemption certificates (Mattingly & Hampton 1988:52) and exclusion from reserves would have diminished the chances of support from family and community members.

The policy was rife with problems. One was that education was still lacking for many. What was provided continued to only be at a level designed to train Aboriginal people to be of service to the mainstream economic interests, and to promote the adoption of dominant attitudes and values (House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education 1985:26 cited in Tripcony 2000:3). The structure of society remained violent, institutional racism continued and Aboriginal Australians remained marginalised on the fringes of Australian society and denied their rights to an equitable share of the country's economic and social resources. Rowley (1968:4) pointed out that a policy of absorption into mainstream society was based on the belief that this could happen with appropriate controls from the government and therefore justified the rigid controls.

One of these controls was the removal of children from their families and communities. Wilson-Miller (1999:138), who gave evidence at the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families, described the practice as 'the main mechanism that all governments around this country used to force Indigenous people into conforming to the so-called right and proper social

standards to live by'. This illustrated the colonial belief that Aboriginal people needed to be taught the ways of mainstream society before they could be successfully assimilated and granted equality, and that children were easier to teach if removed from the influence of their families and communities (Rowley 1968:10). The *Bringing Them Home* report from the National Inquiry outlines the startling and blatant structural and cultural violence which underlay the removal of children from their families and communities. Dodson (1997:13) described the practice as designed to eliminate the descent lines of the children, thereby destroying Aboriginal culture and in doing so to remove the 'troublesome vestige of the past'. There was no recourse in the social and legal structure for either the parents whose children were taken from them, or for the children removed from their basic rights of kinship and cultural ties.

Underlying violence continues today. Sections of the wider Australian community have continued to refuse to recognise the extent of the practice of removing Aboriginal children, and in some cases even its historical existence. In a report, tabled to the Senate in 2000, John Herron, then Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, denied the existence of a *Stolen Generation* on the grounds that only ten percent of children were taken from their families (ANTaR udb:2). Newspaper columnists such as Andrew Bolt (Herald Sun: 26/04/06) also attempted to refute its validity and therefore ignored the underlying racism and violence. Aboriginal experiences and their memory of them and their impact were denied and diminished.

Populist denial of the content of the report facilitates socio-political blindness to the intergenerational effects which are part of the legacy of the widespread government policy of removing children from their families and communities. The Report (HREOC 1997:189) asserts that the impact of the practice is inherited by the children of those who had been removed. Having been deprived of attachment to a parent or parent figure, those directly affected by the policy have no role models on which to base their own parenting and nurturing. Fear that their own children may be taken can prevent people from utilising mainstream services which could bring their family to the attention of perceived authority figures. Also identified in submissions to the Inquiry (HREOC 1997:191-196) were issues of high levels of behaviour problems amongst children whose parents were members of the *Stolen Generation*, along with violence and self harm, unresolved grief and trauma, depression and mental illness.

The Report (HREOC 1997:368-369) found that the removal of children continued under the various state child welfare provisions and that the removal of Aboriginal

children on the grounds of 'neglect' was disproportionate. However, the Inquiry questioned the definition of 'neglect' used by essentially mainstream, middle class bureaucrats and asserted that poverty was unfairly classified as neglect (HREOC 1997:27). The unfairness of this was spelled out very clearly in the following statement.

> Legislation making poverty or homelessness grounds for removals was at best unfair and unconscionable in light of the history of colonialism segregation and control. Most Indigenous families had been forced into poverty, dependence on handouts and inadequate housing. They were then expected to attain a standard of living which was effectively denied to them. (HREOC 1997:226)

The historic and continuing socio-economic disadvantage described by the Inquiry has been commented on by others, including the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Johnston 1991). It is the result of entrenched structural violence. Thus Gilbert, Thomas, Dingwall et al (1983 cited in HREOC 1997:372) stated that consideration was not given to the 'structural circumstances which are part of a wider historical and social context', and the viewpoint that Aboriginal families were the problem persisted. Although attitudes from the policy eras of protection and assimilation continued, there was an official policy change in 1965 to integration.

Integration

Integration was a softening of policy rather than a complete change. The difference was that the new policy recognised Aboriginal identity, offered an element of choice and recognised value in Aboriginal cultures. It allowed choice by Aboriginal people and formed a base for the new policy of self-determination (Parbury 1999:119), which became the official policy in 1972 under the newly elected Whitlam Labor government.

Self-determination and self-management

The introduction of the policy of self-determination was prompted by an increase in level of Aboriginal protest which demonstrated the lack of support for past and existing policies (Hughes 1995:377). There has always been some confusion and disagreement about what self-determination really meant. Disagreement existed

between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, and also within each community (Johnston 1991:20.2).

If there was to be any chance for progress towards self-determination it was necessary for Aboriginal voices to be heard. Without this it would simply be another policy imposed by the powerful government. However as Hughes (1995:377) pointed out the government wanted 'a **single** voice for policy advice' (emphasis added), and therefore acted to deny the diversity of Aboriginal cultures.

In order for there to be an Aboriginal voice for the government to listen to it created political structures through which the Aboriginal voice could be expressed. It ignored the fact that there were problems with seeking a single voice. The history of these government created political structures, or policy advisory bodies, has been one fraught with difficulties and dissension, and is presented and analysed in its own right in chapter four of this portfolio.

Self-determination was defined in the Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia[6] (Horton 1994:977-978) as 'the right to take responsibility for setting the course for further change, to specify the agenda for action, and to control policy implementation'. A different definition was put forward at a seminar of administrators of Aboriginal affairs in 1973. The seminar was instigated and attended by non-Aboriginal people. The outcome was a definition of self-determination. Aboriginal communities would decide 'the pace and nature of their future development within the legal, social and economic restraints of Australian society' (Lippmann 1981:73). The constraints imposed by the conference definition of self determination were based on government controlled bureaucratic and financial considerations, and thus continued to place restrictions on Aboriginal self-determination (Lippmann 1981:73). Aboriginal people had no influence on the bureaucratic and financial structures of government and society, and therefore no way to combat the constraints imposed by these structures.

The definition of self-determination applied only to communities, excluding urban and fringe-dwelling groups. It would appear that a large segment of the Aboriginal population was still expected to integrate with mainstream society. Exclusion of urban and provincial Aborigines from self determination could have reflected the fact that they were largely of mixed ancestry. As previously stated, perceived benefits bestowed by white ancestry would have been seen to mean that these people were easily able to

[6] The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia was compiled largely by non-Aboriginal people.

choose to fit into white society and accept the life goals of mainstream Australia. Recognition of the impact of structural violence on the life chances of urban and provincial Aboriginal people was absent. The cultural vitality of these groups was not recognised, and this was an act of cultural violence.

Self-management became the official policy in 1975 with the change of government. Lippmann (1981:81) stated that the two concepts, self-determination and self-management, were hard to differentiate, and both had little meaning to Aboriginal community members. The confusion over what had been meant by self-determination compounded the difficulty of assessing the difference between the two policies. However, Ian Viner's statement in 1978 gave an indication of the thrust of the self-management policy:

> The policy of self-management requires that Aboriginals, as individuals and communities, be in a position to make the same kinds of decisions about their future as Australians customarily make, and to accept responsibility for the results flowing from these decisions. The Government sees this policy as offering to Aboriginals a means of breaking from the state of dependency which for so long enchained them. (cited in Lippmann 1981:81-82)

Increased emphasis on responsibility, rather than rights, can be described as one of the main differences between the policy of self-management and its predecessor (Sanders 2002:21). There were also echoes of assimilation in Viner's statement with his emphasis on Aboriginal people engaging in the same decision making as mainstream Australians. Imposed policy continued to pursue the line that Aboriginal people must abandon their own cultural traditions and adopt mainstream ways.

Labor, in power between 1983 and 1996 under Hawke and Keating, used both self-determination and self-management in the rhetoric of policy discussion and it is difficult to ascertain any real difference in the meaning of the terms (Sanders 2002:2). One change could be seen during this period in the nature of the government created and sponsored national Aboriginal organisations. These will be analysed in detail in chapter 4. In short criticisms had been levelled at the purely advisory and consultative roles allowed to the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee (NACC) and the National Aboriginal Conference (NAC). An example of this criticism can be seen in one of the conclusions of the 1984 Coombs inquiry into the NAC. Coombs found that the committee was seen as having little impact on progress towards self-determination, due, at least partly, to the fact that it 'delivers no services, provides no funding and shows little capacity to influence government'(Coombs 1984:32). In response to this the

Hawke government established the now defunct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). In doing so it proffered the prospect of an effective voice for Aboriginal people. It held out hope for change.

Although there were many criticisms of ATSIC, and it was dissolved in 2004 by the Howard government, its creation was recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians occupy a unique place in Australian society and have the right to have a say in policy related to their lives, life chances and position in broader society: a right to some form of self-determination. With the defeat of the Labor government in 1996 there has been a 'retreat from the embracing of self-determination as Australian Indigenous affairs policy rhetoric' (Sanders 2002:2).

Systemic frustration continued with the 'carrot' of involvement in policy making and influence in daily life chances being dangled in front of Aboriginal people, only to be removed again. The structures of society left Aboriginal people marginalised from the polity and from access to power. New approaches were needed and reconciliation was one considered.

Reconciliation

Keating introduced the concept of reconciliation into the national discourse related to Aboriginal affairs and established the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) in 1991. Legislation enabling the formation of the council also mandated a life span of ten years.

> The Council's formation was an acknowledgement of the past and ongoing failure of government policy to recognise and address the cultural, social and economic needs of Indigenous Australians. It was also recognition that progress required a sea change in the understanding and involvement of non-Indigenous Australians. Reconciliation refers to a process whereby Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, non-Indigenous Australians and the nation of Australia can forge a new relationship based on mutual understanding, recognition and respect. (ANTaR uda: 1)

Such a process could have formed the basis of introducing principles of Cultural Safety into Australia's political and social institutions if pursued in its essence.

The main thrust of the Council was at grass roots level, where activities were aimed at increasing non-Aboriginal awareness of Aboriginal histories and cultures

(Dodson & Strelein 2001:831). In terms of influencing official policy reconciliation seems to have had little impact. Some conflict over the purpose of the council in terms of what policy it should recommend became evident. As Dodson & Strelein (2001:831) pointed out there had been talk of the need for a treaty in the late 1970s and early 1980s[7].

Geoff Clark, while chair of ATSIC in 2000, promoted treaty as part of the reconciliation process, but met with resistance from members of the council who saw this as too confronting, and therefore likely to undermine the acceptance of lesser political recommendations (Behrendt 2002a:21). Successive governments have had difficulty with the idea of a treaty. This was illustrated by the statement that 'it is an absurd proposition that a nation should make a treaty with some of its own citizens' (Howard 1988:7), and by a Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (1990/91:3) statement referring to the inappropriateness of negotiation with 'British subjects as though they were foreign powers'. The irony of this position is that it was not until 1967 that Aboriginal people as a group were counted in the census of this country and therefore granted full citizenship, let alone official subject position. The lack of a treaty could be seen to have contributed to the perpetuation of lack of official status within Australian colonial society in the first place.

Aligned with the issue of a treaty is the lack of any formal negotiation process between Aboriginal Australians and the Australian government. Political structures of this country locked Aboriginal Australians outside any effective negotiation concerning their everyday experiences of discriminatory practice in housing, health, education and employment. This was illustrated by the fact that it was not till 1962 that legislation was passed giving some Aboriginal Australians the right to vote in Commonwealth elections (Bennett 1989:114). The right to vote in Commonwealth elections was dependent on Aboriginal people having the franchise in state elections, which had not occurred in all states by 1962, and therefore the Commonwealth franchise was not universal (Tripcony 1997:9). The right to vote did not guarantee effective negotiation, but at least offered a chance to influence representation. However existing relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians are based on 'the liberal values of equality through

[7] In 1979 Stewart Harris of the Aboriginal Treaty Committee published *It's coming yet – an Aboriginal treaty within Australia between Australians.* and thus put the question of a treaty up for discussion.

uniformity based on the superiority of the institutions and culture of the colonial society' (Dodson & Strelein 2001:832).

Reconciliation has been discussed by ANTaR (uda: 1) as a process, and by Dodson & Strelein (2001:831) as a movement, rather than as a policy. In this context policy was needed to support the people' movement. Further support of the political leadership of this country was also necessary in order to progress the recommendations of the Council. Policy supporting change was not forthcoming.

Two events occurred during the reconciliation decade which could have contributed to the reconciliation process: the recognition of Native Title in 1992 and the *Bringing Them Home Report* on the *Stolen Generations* in 1997 (ANTaR uda: 1-2). Both of these opened up the debate in relation to recognition of the structural violence which caused dispossession and the fragmentation of families. However the government's response to both the judicial decision and the report supported and perpetuated a blinkered vision of Australia's colonial history.

Native Title

The continent of Australia was claimed by the British and the rights of the original custodians were ignored in the culturally violent denial of their rights to the country under the premise of '*Terra nullius*'. The 1992 Federal Court decision overturning the legality of the doctrine of '*Terra nullius*' was significant in relations between Aboriginal Australians and mainstream Australia. Pearson (1995:1) described the pervasive effect of the doctrine of *Terra nullius* as underpinning relations between colonisers and Aboriginal people, justifying not only dispossession from the land, but also denial of other rights. However, he asserted that the legacy of the Meriam Case[8] has caused Australia to confront its colonial past and consider new directions for the future (Pearson 1995:2). Antonios (1998:2) in the Native Title Report concurred, when he suggested that the judgement presented a different perspective of Australian history: a perspective which included Aboriginal people and their treatment under colonialism. In this way it could be said that 'Native Title offered a powerful symbolic and practical

[8] The High Court decision is commonly referred to as the Mabo decision. I will refer to it as the Meriam decision in respect of the expressed wishes of the family after the death of Eddie Mabo.

opportunity to build new relationships based on recognition and co-existence' (ANTaR ud.d: 1).

Pearson (1995:5) asserted that limited land reforms of the 1970s and early 1980s in some states had been based on the belief that there was no legal basis to Aboriginal claims for land, and therefore any land claims were subject to the goodwill of governments and their willingness to legislate to grant land to the traditional custodians. The 1992 decision was important in that it moved questions of Aboriginal land rights from a question of charity to one of rights.

Recognition of the fallacy of *Terra nullius* did not automatically improve the processing of native title claims. Dodson (1996b:8-9) described the power imbalance which resulted from historical and economic circumstances. This affected every aspect of the lives of Australian Aboriginal people, and played an important role in native title claims.

Structural violence can be identified in Dodson's (1996b:9) description of the mediation process where Aboriginal people have in the past had to prove their rights to the land because they come to the process without recognised rights, while those with opposing claims, the pastoralists, mining companies or the government, have rights already recognised under common law.

An important Native Title claim after the Meriam decision was that of the Wik people of Far North Queensland. The High Court made a judgement on 23rd December 1996 to the effect that Native Title and pastoral leases were not mutually exclusive claims to land (Norberry 1997:1). Central to the debate of this case had been whether pastoral leases 'extinguished' Native Title (Oxfam 1997:2). Australia had adopted a system of pastoral leases in early colonial times. Under this system pastoralists engaged in agricultural activities and constructed buildings, fences and bores, but the land was essentially publicly owned and therefore open to access for other activities (Oxfam 1997:2). The rights of Aboriginal people to Native Title on leasehold land were first tested by the Wik claim. The fact that approximately 42% of Australia had been assigned pastoral lease status (Norberry 1997:4) indicated the importance of the issue.

The Wik ruling that Native Title rights could co-exist alongside pastoral rights was particularly important to the many thousands of Aborigines who had continued to live on traditional lands covered by pastoral leases (Northern Land Council 2003:2). It was however ruled that, if there was a clash between the rights and interests of leaseholders and Aboriginal people, the rights of the former would be paramount

(Norberry 1997:1). In this way the legal structures of Australia continue to define Aboriginal concerns to be of secondary importance.

Instead of building on the opportunity offered by the decision, the government gave into the fears of pastoralists and the mining interests and engaged in a process of creating structural impediments to the successful pursuit of native title claims. The Howard government introduced the 10 point plan and the Native Title Amendment Bill 1997 (Cwth), which Dodson (1997:36) described as a 'concentrated drive towards the permanent extinguishment of native title'. This use of legislative power by the government illustrated the position of power imbalance from which Aboriginal people operated in seeking rights denied by the structurally and culturally violent legacy of colonialism.

Another opportunity for reconciliation was presented by the 1995 release of the *Bringing Them Home* Report. The findings of this report and the response to it illustrated another wasted chance at true reconciliation.

Stolen Generation

Removal of generations of Aboriginal children had devastating results. The Report stated that the 'bulk of the Inquiry detailed damaging and negative effects' (HREOC 1997:11) and outlined these in depth. Amongst the recommendations of the report was one for a government apology. This recommendation was based on international principles. The United Nations had commissioned van Boven in 1989 to research the needs of 'victims of gross violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms' (HREOC 1997:239). Based on van Boven's principles, the Inquiry recommended that acknowledgement of the removal of children and of the effects of this removal was essential, as was an apology for both the policy and practice (HREOC 1997:240 & 245). Basic though this recommendation was, it has been steadfastly resisted and denigrated as mere 'symbolism'.

The report also recommended that a Board be set up for dealing with compensation claims, because it recognised the difficulty that victims of the policy of enforced removal of children would have in facing court proceedings (HREOC 1997:263). This has also been resisted by the government (ANTaR uda: 1), and as a

result claimants have had to face not only the personal difficulty of a court appearance, but also the costs of legal representation against the government. The Federal government in 2001 used part of the Aboriginal specific budget allocations to fight the compensation claims of Peter Gunner and Lorna Cabillo in the Northern Territory court (Behrendt 2001:854). Aboriginal claimants did not have access through any economic, political or legal structures to similar levels of funding to engage with the court system. Power imbalance in access to resources, illustrative of the power structure of Australian society, hampered the attempts of Aboriginal people to seek redress for the results of violent colonial policies.

Resistance to so called 'symbolic gestures', such as the recommendation for an apology, reflects the contemporary emphasis on practical reconciliation and the associated mainstreaming of many services.

Practical reconciliation and mainstreaming

The practical reconciliation approach, which separates questions related to institutional reform from debate about symbolic gestures, is criticised by Anderson (1999:3) as dangerous, in that it undermines the building of relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. These relationships can not be built when the debate is only about those issues defined by the mainstream as relevant or important. Again the structures which maintain the unequal power relationships are denying Aboriginal voices and favouring the mainstream definition of Aboriginal concerns and policy. Paternalism continues, the problem child needs to be told what is good for it.

Practical reconciliation and mutual obligation are the main foci of the government in addressing Aboriginal issues today. Dodson & Strelein (2001:832) describe practical reconciliation as 'a new term within Australian public policy that seeks to address Indigenous people' place in Australian society within a liberal democratic model of unitary government and individual responsibility'. This is reminiscent of the self-management era when, as Sanders (2002:21) points out, the emphasis was on responsibility. Short (2003:502) asserts that practical reconciliation is an attempt to shift the discourse of reconciliation away from the group rights agenda through focus on the individual. By ignoring the rights agenda policy makers can ignore the structural

violence which deprives people of both their citizens' and their Aboriginal rights. The funding provision which receives publicity under the banner of practical reconciliation is funding that provides services such as health, housing, education and employment. These are services that mainstream Australia considers as basic rights (ANTaR ud.c: 1).

The emphasis on practical rather than on symbolic reconciliation was illustrated by John Herron, (former Senator for Aboriginal Affairs), in his speech to the Working Group on Indigenous Populations of the United Nations in 1999. He stated that the coalition government was working towards:

> Policies that facilitate and promote genuine economic independence for Indigenous people, policies that go beyond the 'catchcry' of land and mining royalties and encompass both individual-skills development and productive business enterprises. There have been assertions that the solution ultimately lies in the direction of forms of Indigenous sovereign self-government as contemplated by the 'self-determination' provisions of the Draft Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People. The Draft Declaration itself is at risk of becoming a distraction from the **real tasks and priorities** (emphasis added) before us. The Australian government rejects '**the politics of symbolism**'. (emphasis added). We believe in practical measures leading to practical results that improve the lives of the individual people where they live. (Herron 1999 cited in Short 2003:502)

Herron has in this statement categorically rejected the validity of issues which continue to be of considerable importance to Australian Aboriginal people, issues of land and self-determination. In a blatant, and rather classic, example of cultural arrogance and cultural violence this statement reasserted previous policies and practices where the government made decisions related to what was important for Aboriginal people. John Howard, the Australian Prime Minister, had foreshadowed this approach to Aboriginal policy in 1997 in an address to the Australian Reconciliation Convention. In his speech Howard categorically rejected what he referred to as 'symbolic gestures and overblown gestures' in favour of practical measures (Howard 1997:3). He nominated an apology for the historic policy and practice publicised by the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children as a symbolic gesture and worthless. In doing so he denied the continued impact of the extreme institutional racism responsible for the removal of children from their families and communities on grounds that were based on cultural violence. In the same speech, Howard also rejected any notion of 'the establishment of different systems of accountability and lawful conduct among Australians on the base of their race or any other factor' (Howard 1997:3). Although this statement may, on the surface, have appeared reasonable, it was grounded in long held resistance to recognition of the distinctiveness and value of

Aboriginal cultures and social practices, and the existence of Aboriginal rights. 'Concern with "rights" was not merely irrelevant to "practical reconciliation" but in tension with it', according to the Howard government's submission to a 2003 Senate inquiry into reconciliation (Rowse 2005:5).

Mainstreaming of Aboriginal services is justified by these philosophies, even though statistics paint an undeniable picture of the previous failure of mainstreaming of services. As Behrendt (2002b:2) has pointed out, 'the need for specific services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has occurred because of the inability of mainstream services to provide for the specific needs of Indigenous people'. This inability is also referred to by Rowse (2005:3) in discussion of the new emphasis on mainstreaming. He asserts that the assumptions made about clients by mainstream service providers are not appropriate for many Aboriginal clients, and that this serves to alienate some Aboriginal people from accessing the full range of services which should be available as citizens' rights. The structure of service delivery is locking some people out of equal access to society's resources, a practice which equates with the definitions of structural violence.

There is a recent practice in the delivery of services to Aboriginal people which is not adopted in mainstream service delivery. In a Council Of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting on 25/06/04 a *National Framework of Principles for Delivering Services to Indigenous Australians* was tabled. This document outlines an approach to improving living conditions for Aboriginal people based on co-operation between all levels of government. Principles include the statement that partnerships will be built 'based on shared responsibilities and mutual obligation' (COAG 2004:1). As a consequence some funding from Aboriginal specific sources is subject to Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs). These are a form of institutional racism, as only Aboriginal Australians are expected to negotiate such agreements. In essence these agreements require the community to commit to a course of action in order to receive funding from the government for a specific project. In some cases, as McClausland (2005:9) points out, the commitment can be to behavioural changes. She cites the agreement negotiated with the community of Mulan, where adults agreed to promote basic hygiene practices amongst the children in return for a petrol pump as an example. The actual wording of the agreement was that adults 'will **continue** [emphasis added] to ensure that children shower and wash their faces on a daily basis' (Calma 2005:351). As McCausland (2005:9) points out, the community had already identified and adopted this

strategy in an attempt to reduce the childhood trachoma rates: a reduction that had been identified before the signing of the SRA. This agreement has been variously criticised as a form of blackmail, an example of racial discrimination, and as totally illogical by connecting hygiene with the provision of a petrol bowser (McClausland 2005:9). Kristiansen & Cox (2005:10) express concern that illogical connections between the espoused goal and the expected behaviour change could lead to 'social engineering by government decision makers'.

A 'carrot' approach is often used with our children, but the paternalism inherent in the SRAs with communities is repugnant to many, as evidenced in the criticisms by McClausland (2005) and Kristiansen & Cox (2005), and reminiscent of the days of the protection policy when food and other necessities were rationed by white authorities. Agreements often involve the provision of facilities for which the communities have to commit to supply labour as part of their shared responsibility. Examples include the construction of an ablutions block and laundromat at Yungngora (Calma 2005:351), and the replacement of a community store which had been destroyed by a cyclone at Minjilang (Calma 2005:345). Such basic infrastructure is provided to non-Aboriginal communities without strings attached. Expectations in relation to labour would seem to contravene the recommendation of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991) that Aboriginal expertise and input be adequately recognised and recompensed.

The government side of the shared responsibility did not however seem to be subject to the same scrutiny and accountability as that of the communities. In a press release, Chris Evans, Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs, pointed out that ten months after the signing of the agreement the bowser had not been provided at Mulan. He also stated that the key performance indicators of the agreement did not include scrutiny of the government's shared responsibility performance (Evans 2005:1). This was also evident in one Northern Territory community, Wadeye, where it was reported that the school did not have the facilities and resources to cope with the increased attendance which resulted from the SRA (NIT 2006). The system frustrated Aboriginal communities who failed to receive the full benefit of participating in the government initiated agreement.

Another criticism levelled at this approach is that it is a return to the missionary mentality in that

> the SRAs (which acknowledge Indigenous difference) carry the potential for stigmatising Indigenous Australians as people who, unless they are watched very closely, abuse taxpayers' money. "Special treatment" – as Paul Kelly's song reminds us – has long been a two edged sword. (Rowse 2005:4)

The introduction and implementation of SRAs, as described by Rowse above, both encapsulate and illustrate factors which have contributed to continued marginalisation of Aboriginal Australians. Finances are allocated to address statistical inequality, but the persistence of the belief that Aboriginal financial management must be monitored reflects the racist perceptions from the protection era. The culturally violent treatment of Aboriginal Australians as perennial problem children who still need paternalistic guidance continues to be evident.

Structural violence and institutional racism have created and perpetuated the situations of socio-economic disadvantage that SRAs partly aim to address. However, they address them in a way that continues the culturally violent stereotyping and shift the blame for the situation from the government to the victims by making Aboriginal communities responsible for the provision or lack of infrastructure (McCausland 2005:10).

SRAs are part of the practical reconciliation approach which emphasises 'statistical equality' in its focus on material disadvantage (Rowse 2005:5). This emphasis on provision of material equality is at the expense of actions designed to provide Aboriginal rights (Rowse 2005:15). Aboriginal rights are classified as symbolic, and therefore demeaned in importance. Moreover the responsibility for the provision of citizens' rights becomes unclear. Government roles in providing for the rights of citizens are no longer the focus of attention and the complexities of history which created disadvantage may become oversimplified (Kristiansen & Cox 2005:18). The emphasis is on the citizens' responsibility to maintain 'appropriate relationships with the social whole' (Rowse 2005:15). Power imbalances, which stem from Australia's history and continue to marginalise Aboriginal Australians in their relationships with the larger society, are not recognised. Structural violence and systemic frustration, which contribute to the unequal relationship between Aboriginal Australians and political and social institutions, are ignored.

Emphasis on citizenship responsibility and SRAs functions 'to remind the public that people may fail to live up to the goodness of their governments' (Rowse 2005:6). It feeds the populist perceptions of an Aboriginal gravy train which wastes huge amounts

of tax payers' money. Instead of a recognition that government neglect has led to provision of substandard facilities and infrastructure for Aboriginal communities, the emphasis can be, for example, on the poor school attendance rates for which the blame is attributed to neglectful parents rather than a culturally inadequate education system.

Larissa Behrendt sums up the problems inherent in the policy of practical reconciliation:

> The clear agenda is one of assimilation and integration. This, of course, is not a new ideology, but a throwback to the paternalistic days when Welfare Boards and Aboriginal Protection Boards dictated the lives of Indigenous people and their children. It is an ideology that has been used in the past, did not work then, and has not only been rejected by Indigenous people, but has left a lasting legacy of disadvantage, trauma and family breakdown that is still plaguing Indigenous communities and families today. (Behrendt 2002b:1)

Conclusion

Although policy in relation to Aboriginal Australians has undergone change, some common themes recurred. Underlying characteristics based on the colonial nature of Australian society have continued to permeate relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians through the different policy periods. These characteristics have included racism, structural violence and cultural violence. Reflection on and recognition of these characteristics, accompanied by respect for Aboriginal people and their contemporary cultures could form a base for a way forward.

To some extent policy change is reflected in levels of government consultation with Aboriginal people. Since the early 1970s and the introduction of the notion of self-determination into political discourse there have been a number of national bodies set up to provide advice to the successive governments.

The history of these bodies was somewhat rocky and the role they were allowed to play, determined by the whim of governments, has not been that to which many Aboriginal people may have aspired. The history of these organisations illustrates the different approaches taken by government policy, since 1972, to the inclusion of Aboriginal people in the process of making policies which influence their lives and life chances. It also illustrates the continuation of structural and cultural violence in relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. This history forms the basis of the next chapter of this portfolio.

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CHAPTER 4

ABORIGINAL NATIONAL CONSTULTATIVE BODIES

Introduction

Federal governments since 1972 have attempted to consult with Aboriginal people about their needs and aspirations through the creation of national consultative bodies. The history of these bodies, the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee (NACC), the National Aboriginal Conference (NAC), the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and the National Indigenous Council (NIC) will be presented. Their relationships with the government will be traced and the influence of colonialism, racism, structural violence and cultural violence on these relationships will also be drawn out. Similarities in the problems faced by these organisations will be presented as the conclusion to this chapter.

National Aboriginal Consultative Committee (NACC)

The Federal Labor government of the early 1970s encouraged the development of pressure groups to provide an organised method for minority groups to present their aspirations to the government. This was in line with their intention to develop positional policies; policies which incorporated the viewpoints of those affected by the policies (Weaver 1983:4). As a result the government sponsored the formation of a national Aboriginal pressure group, the NACC, to present a unified voice on specific issues (Loveday 1975:50).

As a result of the advice of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs (CAA), the Whitlam government established two bodies specifically to deal with Aboriginal issues in 1973. The NACC was the representative Aboriginal body established to advise the Minister. It consisted of 41 elected regional representatives. Regions had been established by an Aboriginal steering committee, but the structure of the committee and the roles of the members were not established prior to the election (Weaver 1983:6). The other body, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA), was created as the

bureaucratic arm of government which would administer funds allocated to Aboriginal Affairs and was staffed pre-dominantly by non-Aboriginal public servants (Castejon 2002:28).

To an extent, the establishment of the NACC reflected the practice of reactionary policymaking, policy formed in response to the attention brought by activists to the conditions in Aboriginal Australia. In the hearts of some of the instigators it may have been meant to be capacity building, as, in the words of Weaver (1983:6), 'it was an unconventional policy initiative by the minister in which Aboriginals, not the government, were to organize and operate their own national organisation'.

Foreshadowing the fate of many Aboriginal organisations since the 1970s, the NAAC had a short life span, and was disbanded in 1976. That the membership of the committee was determined by election (Bennett 1989:38), should have been a positive start as it provided a chance for a level of representativeness. However, a number of factors caused difficulties and contributed to its early demise.

Imposition of western bureaucratic structures on Aboriginal people has been blamed by some for the difficulties faced by Aboriginal organisations and was criticised by Foley (1999:3), who saw this as part of the ongoing problem with national Aboriginal organisations. Castejon (2002:31) raised a different concern. She believed that desire to open up a dialogue between the government and Aboriginal people actually resulted in a monologue: a monologue which related to topics decided by the government. She made a further interesting observation that such a move by the government 'answered claims for political independence by offering a determinate place to Aboriginal people within the Australian political system' (Castejon 2002:28). This could be interpreted as an attempt by the government to control and curtail Aboriginal input into Aboriginal governance, and therefore as an example of the structural violence perpetrated continually on the Aboriginal population by an elite section of the non-Aboriginal population with considerable power.

Hiatt (1976:60-61) questioned the criticism along two lines. He stated that examples were already extant of traditional Aboriginal people adapting to the concept and practice of representative bodies in the context of land councils. More pertinently he stated

> that support for the notion that blacks cannot represent other blacks helps to perpetuate not only traditional political individualism, **but also the system of white patronage upon which the representation of Aboriginal interests in modern society has depended until now.** (Hiatt 1976:61) (emphasis added)

Although he doubted the appropriateness of western democratic styles of representation for Aboriginal people, Foley (1999:3) contended that the responsible minister, Mr Gordon Bryant, supported Aboriginal representation, and that as a consequence he established an Aboriginal electoral roll because many Aboriginal people were not on the mainstream electoral roll. A high voter turnout, over 80%, would indicate a mandate to the members of NACC to represent Aboriginal interests to a government seen as sympathetic.

Bryant had been a co-founder of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI), an organization founded in 1958, which had been quite influential in bringing Aboriginal issues to the forefront and lobbying for the 1967 referendum. FCAATSI leadership was largely non-Aboriginal and Bryant was a supporter of increasing Aboriginal political participation; a goal that the NACC could potentially achieve. However fundamental mistakes were made in the planning and implementation phases which left the committee powerless, and contributed to its short life (Weaver 1983; Hanks 1984).

According to Weaver (1983:6) the decision that Aboriginal people would organize and operate the committee was a departure from the conventional policy of the government organized committees. In addition, the committee was to deal directly with the minister, rather than through the bureaucratic arm of the DAA. Although this could be seen as a well intentioned initiative to deal with the historically rooted Aboriginal distrust of government bureaucracies, it helped set the stage for tension between the committee and the department.

Placing the organisation and operation of the fledgling NACC in the hands of Aboriginal people can be viewed as an example of good intentions and the beginning of participatory democracy. However, expecting people with no experience in dealing with Eurocentric organisational structures, procedures and communication styles and channels, to establish and operate an effective national organisation as a quasi government arm could easily be seen as a form of structural violence. It imposed systems which were alien and therefore unlikely to increase Aboriginal people' access to society's resources. It did so based on the assumption that these systems were unquestionably the best, and created another situation likely to produce systemic frustration.

Another significant difficulty for newly elected members of the NACC was the fact that at the time of election the structure of the committee and the role of its

members had not been determined. The minutes of the NACC State Conference in Cairns in June of 1973 stated that the organizing strategy was to establish the body first and then determine its role (Weaver 1983:6). When this uncertainty of role was added to the alien nature of involvement with mainstream governance the difficulties faced were exacerbated and the accusations of structural violence were supported. This accusation was further strengthened by the fact of inadequate provision of resources such as secretariat support (Hiatt 1976 in Weaver 1983:7).

Challenges to the functioning of the NACC continued during its short life. Significant among them was the relations between the DAA and the NACC. Continuation of the colonial practice of imposing decisions from a position of power was reflected in the creation of the DAA and was resented by many Aboriginal people, especially the urban activists. Thus Foley (1999:3) pointed out that many of the original senior staff had previously worked for the old State Protection Boards, or had been colonial patrol officers in Papua New Guinea or the Northern Territory. They were therefore of a mindset which would find it difficult to adapt to Aboriginal people who wanted to be politically active and demanded a say in their own governance. In its early years the DAA had its own internal problems, particularly with its relationship to the Minister and the government. Distrust between the Minister and the Department was exacerbated by the Minister's consultation with advisors who were not members of the public service and by his subsequent ignoring of some advice from the department (Weaver 1983:7).

Staff of the DAA also harboured resentment over the way in which the NACC had been set up as a non public service body advising the Minister and bypassing the public service. Further difficulties for the DAA were created, as Weaver (1983:7) pointed out, by a flurry of new initiatives which were approved by cabinet on ministerial advice, but outstripped the capacity of the Department to implement.

The DAA was not popular with many Aboriginal people and this was aggravated by the transfer of Bryant to a different portfolio after the uncovering of financial management problems in the Department (Weaver 1983:7). Protests escalated, accusations of racism were made in the media against officials, along with virulent attacks related to the functioning of the Department. This environment was not conducive to a productive working relationship between the bodies or to the sharing of bureaucratic knowledge between the experienced public servants of the department and the newly elected NACC members.

Conflict between the DAA and the NACC was partly the result of the different perceptions of the NACC. A number of the elected committee members were activists and had aspirations for the role of the committee which were in opposition to anything envisaged by the entrenched public servants who made up the senior management of the DAA. Members of the NACC wanted to name the organisation the National Aboriginal Congress, a name which, as Weaver (1983:8) pointed out, was seen by the press as suggestive of a 'black parliament'. This Eurocentric fear of recognition of Aboriginal people as a separate nation seemed to be embedded in the colonial mentality. It has continued to be reflected in the Howard government's aversion to the term 'self-determination' and the concept of a treaty, both of which were considered as being divisive. The fear of separatism continued to be illustrated by adherence to the principle of advice from Aboriginal people rather than negotiation and policy.

Committee members developed and proposed a new constitution which would have given the NACC policy making and administrative functions; a concept that was not accepted by the government (Bennett 1989:38). The government lack of acceptance of NACC proposals contradicted its rhetoric of self-determination:

> a policy which spoke of Aborigines eventually being able to decide the pace and nature of their own development where they would take a real and effective responsibility for their own affairs. (Bennett 1989:24)

None of the changes in Aboriginal affairs after 1972 gave the NACC any power to develop effective mechanisms to achieve its own aspirations. It was simply an advisory body whose advice could be ignored at any time, as the committee occupied no real place within the structure of broad Australian governance and there was, and still is, no recognised structure of Aboriginal informed governance. The rights of Aboriginal people to a say in policies determining their life chances continued to be denied and demeaned and their capacity to determine their own priorities was diminished.

Whitlam's government departed in an unforgettable and ignominious manner after the opposition-controlled Senate refused supply, and Fraser's subsequent success in his bid to have Kerr dissolve parliament on Remembrance Day 1975 which forced an election. Once entrenched, the Fraser government undertook an assessment of Whitlam's innovations including the NACC (Coombs & Robinson 1996:8). A review of NACC had in fact been one of the election pledges (Weaver 1983:12).

Advice to the incoming government was provided by the DAA and supported by the CAA. Both bodies had been sceptical of the NACC since its inception. In their

kindest analysis of the committee they described it as premature. Both had advocated a 'system of delegated authority from local Aboriginal organisations as the basis for any national association' (Weaver 1983:9). Over the life span of the committee the views of the more powerful bodies had hardened into almost total opposition to the existence of Aboriginal advisory bodies, questioning both the advice of Aboriginal people and the usefulness of national bodies (Weaver 1983:9). In fact fears were expressed by the Attorney General and the DAA secretary that such bodies could contribute to the development of an Aboriginal community separate from the mainstream, and could form a base for pursuit of self determination (Anderson 1990:15). This was an example of what Tatz (1997:307) referred to as mainstream Australian society's neurotic twitching at the mention of separatism.

Within such a negative environment the new government initiated an investigation into the policy and body to replace the NACC. The conservative government had a very different philosophy to that of the ousted Labor government. Fraser advocated tight cabinet control and ministerial accountability and as a result the policy development for the new body was conventional, both in method and purpose (Weaver 1983:10). Here lay the seeds for the policy that would not reflect Aboriginal viewpoints and aspirations, but rather would serve pragmatic political purposes to the advantage of the government.

In addition to doubts about the usefulness of such bodies as the NACC (Weaver 1983:7), there were also concerns about the costs. However it was politically expedient to continue with a visible Aboriginal presence on the fringes of the government. Public opinion was sympathetic to the notion that the government should do 'something' to address Aboriginal disadvantage, particularly in the highly visible areas of socio-economic disadvantage. Political pragmatism then was, at least partially, responsible for the fact that the concept of Aboriginal advice on government policy was not totally abandoned (Weaver 1983:8 & 102).

How some Aboriginal people interpret government intentions in relation to national Aboriginal organisations is encapsulated in the following comment. 'Whenever we got too smart they simply disbanded the organisation.' (personal communication with Penny Tripcony, 21/11/04) This interpretation is also bound up with power relations. A small section of mainstream society had the power to prevent others from developing the capacity to access decision making and attain influence

National Aboriginal Conference (NAC)

The dilemma then for the Fraser government was to create an organisation which satisfied the need for appearing to be addressing the needs of Aboriginal people, while at the same time creating an organisation which conformed to the government policy of ministerial control. A number of sources of advice were available to inform the decision making process. An inquiry, chaired by Hiatt, had been held into the NACC, and a report submitted in 1976 (Weaver 1983:85). The Hiatt team, which included three Aboriginal people consulted with Aboriginal communities across Australia, recommended the establishment of the NAC. O'Donoghue, a member of the inquiry committee, submitted a minority report (Weaver 1983:14). These reports included suggestions for the future of national Aboriginal political bodies, and the inquiry process had received input from Rowley and Coombs who both had a history of involvement with Aboriginal Affairs (Weaver 1983:14- 15).

Hiatt (1976:72) recommended that 46 electorates be created for the NAC elections, but that rearrangement of electoral boundaries be undertaken to increase representation of traditional communities. The rearrangement occurred, but ignoring aspects of Hiatt's advice, the number of electorates and consequent state branches was reduced to 35 (to be increased to 36 in 1980 when Tasmania was granted representation in its own right).

State branches, which were to meet at least twice a year, were responsible for electing an executive of ten members who were also to meet bi-annually (Weaver 1983:96-97). A related body, the Council for Aboriginal Development (CAD), was created. It consisted of the chairman and one other representative of the NAC and senior officers of the DAA (Anderson 1990:17).

One explanation for the government's readiness to adopt the recommendation regarding increased representation of traditional communities was suggested by Lippmann (1981) who asserted that it

> had been a constant ploy of politicians and public servants, with the possible exception of Gordon Bryant, to avoid the more militant and demanding urban spokesmen, and to prefer those from traditional areas as being less knowledgeable of the white political scene and therefore easier to manipulate. (Lippmann 1981:82)

This could be seen to weaken the bodies because as some writers, including Tatz (1997), Lippmann (1981) and Weaver (1983) have discussed, such government created and sponsored forums were even more alien to traditional people than to the urban representatives. Traditional consultation practices were not feasible within the Eurocentric meeting procedures of a body conceived of and created by postcolonial politicians and public servants. This cultural violence was exacerbated by the more outspoken and in some cases overbearing, urban activists' tendency to dominate meetings because of their greater familiarity with the Eurocentric procedures (Royal Commission into Australian Government Administration 1976 cited in Anderson 1990:14).

Formulating a policy[9] to guide the creation of a body to replace the NACC meant the policy makers had to decide between the concept of a government sponsored/funded pressure group and an advisory body. As Weaver (1983:87-88) pointed out the government and the public service preferred advisory bodies because it allowed them to 'bring into close personal orbit persons with whom they felt more comfortable'. A pressure group, of course, did not fit into the philosophy of the coalition government with its strong emphasis on ministerial accountability.

Proposed policy was submitted to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PMC) by the DAA (Weaver 1983:92). All modifications to the Hiatt proposal were made by the DAA, which had not had a good relationship with the NACC. One significant modification was that the new body was not given a lobbying function (Weaver 1983:92).

A number of key points about the proposal adopted are pertinent to the central concepts of colonialism and its legacy of institutional racism, structural violence and cultural violence. National Aboriginal organisations, the policy related to them and their relations with the government are examples of these underlying aspects of Australian society. This is evident in the following aspects of the NAC.

- It had no power to ensure influence on government Aboriginal policies as it was created with a purely advisory role.
- Urban activists had been seen as dominating and disrupting the NACC. The structure of the new NAC, with its three divisions, the CAD, the national executive and

[9] Both the NACC and the NAC were not created by legislation, rather by Ministerial action. Lippmann 1979:85: Bennett 1989:38) Therefore I refer to formulation of policy in relation to the creation of the NAC.

the state branches, was intended to curtail the influence of the activists. Cohesiveness of the organisation was sacrificed to achieve this and resulted in a lack of credibility in any statement the executive made, as these statements came from an organisation designed to be non-representative (Weaver 1983:93).

- Control over the NAC was one of the goals of the policy writers. One way of creating and maintaining power was by controlling the finances of the organisation. The NAC executive was required to legally incorporate in order to 'manage' any funds provided by the government. Legal incorporation, of course, introduced prescribed accountability responsibilities, the rigidity of which were foreign to most people without specific training (Weaver 1983:93). The imposition of this can be seen as systemic frustration, in that it created an environment in which it was difficult for NAC members to function effectively. As Weaver (1983:93) pointed out 'finance would be provided only for 'approved' meetings, and no provision was made for either the part-time national chairman or state chairman to travel and consult with the Aboriginal public'. By providing no funds for consultation the government reinforced, albeit maybe unwittingly, the accusation that it had no intention for the new organisation to be anything other than symbolic, and for Aboriginal people to remain marginalised and powerless in the policy making process.

- In keeping with the intention that the body be advisory only, it was designed as a 'local body' (Weaver 1983:93) whose members only met annually and then only to share and debate views raised locally on Aboriginal issues. Indeed Hanks (1984:42) maintained that it had been relegated to the status of a 'debating society'.

- The CAD was seen as the 'formal advisory body' (Weaver 1983:93) with established communication channels to the Minister, and these were to be in writing. This formality was intended to add to the credibility of the communication, but the lack of any provision for face-to-face interaction was culturally inappropriate. The NAC was to be consulted at the whim of the Minister, not when the members wished to raise any matters (Weaver 1983:93). It was little wonder that many came to see the whole exercise as tokenistic and futile. This was summed up by one member who stated 'I could be bloody forgiven for thinking that we are only window dressing for the Australian Government' (Mrs Nessie Skuta cited in Anderson 1990:17).

- Hiatt had envisaged in his recommendations that the NAC and the CAD be the prominent national 'face' of Aboriginal input into government decisions related to Aboriginal people. If this prominence had been evident it would potentially have

enhanced the credibility of the groups. This did not happen. Separate specialist advisory groups such as the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) were established and the 'peak' body was told not to duplicate the activities of the specialist bodies (Weaver 1983:94).

There were many departures from the recommendations of the government commissioned reports and as a result the NAC was created with its hands tied behind its back. David Anderson, a NACC member (cited in Weaver 1983:86), had called the Hiatt report 'a continuation of internal colonialism' and the final policy produced a body with even less power and influence than that proposed in the report. Consideration of the role of the NAC led M. Anderson (1990:17) to conclude that all that was offered to the NAC was a 'rubber stamp' role.

Given the power differential between the two key players, the government and Aboriginal people, it is not surprising that the resultant NAC was a politically impotent organisation. The members of NAC had no control over the role they were to be assigned. Their only options were to accept or reject the crumbs offered; they had no power to demand more of the cake. Howard's (1982:8) description of the position of the members of the NAC reiterated this point. He stated they were forced to accept the definitions of their roles that were acceptable to those in power who wanted Aboriginal people they could point to as leaders, but who would not upset the status quo (Howard 1982:98). Government structures continued to lock Aboriginal people in a position where they had no say in factors affecting their life chances.

The issue of how much power the body should be given had arisen during the life of the NACC. Aspirations to have a real input into the process of decision-making about their rights and place in the wider Australian nation had developed amongst Aboriginal people. Demonstrations of these aspirations include the rise of activism in the 1960s, the creation of the Tent Embassy[10] in 1972 and the conflict that had developed between the NACC and the DAA and Minister[s] for Aboriginal Affairs in relation to the role of the NACC. The Commonwealth government had demonstrated its desire to appear to be addressing the gross disadvantage suffered by Aboriginal people while maintaining the 'status-quo' in relation to power and control of resources; a status quo created by colonialism, and perpetuated through institutional racism and structural violence. A

[10] Land rights campaigners established an Aboriginal Embassy in tents outside Parliament House in Canberra to draw attention to their claims and the lack of progress (Lippmann 1981:51).

dichotomy, in fact an enormous gulf, existed between the interests of the two groups, and it could well be argued this gulf has not narrowed to this day.

A continuing theme that was one of the fundamentals of this dichotomy was the aversion to the implementation of policies which might be perceived to create separation within the nation and in doing so have the potential to share power. This aversion could be seen as one of the underlying reasons for the insistence that any Aboriginal body remain advisory only; not policymaking nor with any financial independence. The NACC's motion to rename itself the National Aboriginal Congress, with the title's implication of a separate parliament, met with the threat of financial censure of the members in the form of withholding salaries (Hanks 1984:40). The developing 'politicisation' of the NACC illustrated in its desire to change its name was one of the factors contributing to its demise and replacement by the NAC.

The government's intention that the NAC be merely advisory was illustrated by a number of factors which could also be clearly seen to contribute to powerlessness and systemic frustration.

- The title 'conference' carried implications that the body was only a 'talk-fest'.
- In announcing the establishment of the NAC, Ian Viner, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, stated that it was merely a forum to allow for the expression of Aboriginal views (Bennett 1989:39).
- No formal lines of communication between the NAC and the Minister were established. Instead, the Council for Aboriginal Development (CAD) was the recognised body providing formal advice to the government (Lippmann 1981:82).
- In the 5th report of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, 1997, it was pointed out that whereas the NACC was free to comment on any issue of its choice, the NAC was restricted to offering advice only on the topics referred to it by the Minister (Dodson 1997:32).
- The non-legislative status and role of the two bodies was made clear by Viner. (Lippmann 1981:84).

Like its predecessor, the NACC, the NAC was set up by ministerial fiat (Bennett 1989:39), not as a statutory body and therefore its continued existence remained at the whim of the Minster and the government. This was a situation that perpetuated powerlessness.

Considerations of the role assigned by the government to the NAC suggest that the government never had any intention to assign a legitimacy to the place of Aboriginal

voices in decision-making processes (Bennett 1982:39). One case where this was clearly illustrated was in the handling of the issues related to the management of the Aurukun and Mornington Island communities in northern Queensland.

The importance of the Aurukun and Mornington Island management issue, which arose in 1978, is illustrated by the number of policy analysts who discuss it (Lippmann 1981; Bennett, 1982; Hanks 1984). In March 1978 the Queensland government, under the stewardship of Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen, announced its intention to take control of the two reserves from the Uniting Church. This move was not welcome by the communities involved or the church, and both had publicly expressed their wishes. The Aurukun community announced its desire for the Commonwealth government to take control in conjunction with the Uniting Church (Lippmann 1981:85). In this environment the NAC held its first meeting and requested that the Commonwealth government delay legislation on the issue for a week to allow consultation, a request that was not granted and the 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (Queensland Reserves and Communities Self-Management) Bill was rushed through Federal parliament. Queensland was able to circumvent this legislation by removing the two reserves from Commonwealth control (Hanks 1984:43). It had been made clear to the NAC that it was not to be treated seriously, and the powerlessness of Aboriginal communities to have any say in their own management made a mockery of the avowed government policy of 'self-management'. The interests of bauxite mining in the area and the desire of the state government to stop the outstation movement were said by Neville Bonner to be the main reasons behind the Bjelke-Petersen regime's determination to ignore Aboriginal wishes and to resist Federal infringement on state control (Lippmann 1981:85).

The Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration, held between 1974 and 1976, stated that Aboriginal claims to authority in decision making related to their own affairs faced difficulty related to issues of power. The report asserted that

> realities of power mean that ultimate decisions about them [Aboriginal people] and the allocation of resources to them will finally be made, in the present circumstances, by white decision makers. (cited in Hanks 1984:46)

Aboriginal people would have to adapt to the social order dictated by non-Aboriginal decision makers (Hanks 1984:46). This was the political climate in which the NAC operated from its formation and was recognised by Coombs in his 1980 study when he reported that it was the government's failure to grant 'real authority' to the

NAC that constituted the major weakness of that body. Colonial marginalisation of Aboriginal people continued to be perpetuated by the structural constraints on power sharing.

In 1983 the Labor party returned to power under the leadership of Bob Hawke. The policy platform on which they had campaigned included the following statements.

> A Labor government will:
> 10 Develop and make effective the NAC as the advising body to the Government and extend its powers as a policy making organising authority among Aboriginal and Islander communities.
> 11 Ensure that the NAC has a structure and procedures acceptable to Aboriginal and Islander communities.
> 12 Support the policy of self-determination and make an annual allowance to the NAC to enable it to operate its own activities. (Hanks 1984:46)

Labor policy platform held out hope for changes that had the potential for Aboriginal voices to actually be heard. However for this to happen a number of things needed to change. The extent to which promises would be met depended on the government's willingness to make significant changes. Specific constraints on the NAC had included direct ministerial control, lack of defined responsibilities and power, reliance on the government for resources and dependence on Parliament for its continued existence (Hanks 1984:46). These constraints would have to be removed if Aboriginal aspirations raised by the Labor policy platform were to be met.

It appeared initially that the government was going to make good on its electoral promises. In July 1983 the Minister announced that funding for the NAC would be doubled (Bennett 1989:40). However, by February 1984 both the chair and the deputy chair of the NAC had resigned. Their stated reasons for this action included problems with government support and direction. The Minister had stated that the NAC was the senior government advisor on Aboriginal affairs, but the lack of resources to fill this role contributed to the resignations (Bennett 1989:40).

Relations between the NAC and the government were tense during 1984 and illustrated in attacks on the DAA, demands that Aboriginal needs be made the subject of a national awareness campaign, criticisms of the lack of progress on national land rights and complaints of ministerial interference in the body's internal affairs (Bennett 1989:40). The NAC was also subject to criticism. Some constituents complained about inadequate representation, and the Minister and the department were critical of the NAC's management of finances (Bennett 1989:42).

The Minister's response to the situation was to commission Coombs to conduct a review of the NAC (Bennett 1989:41). Coombs produced a report containing a number of negative evaluations of the NAC. As Bennett (1989) pointed out Coombs made the following observations.

- Aboriginal people did not see the NAC as useful in the pursuit of self determination,
- it provided no services or funding to its constituents,
- it did not seem to have any influence on the government,
- it was poorly managed, and
- it failed to fully utilise its closeness to the government (Bennett 1989:41).

As a result of his investigations Coombs recommended that the government recognise that the NAC was neither suitable nor effective in representing Aboriginal interests (Coombs 1986:31-32). He recommended it be replaced by a National Aboriginal Congress which should be integrated with other Aboriginal controlled organisations and have real and defined responsibilities (Coombs 1986:34).

Coombs intended his report to be the impetus for discussion about the future of the NAC. Instead it was used to justify rapid dismantling of the NAC in 1985 (Bennett 1989:41). The DAA was subsequently abolished in 1987 (Bennett 1989:100).

The experience of the NAC reflected aspects of earlier relationships between Aboriginal people and colonial governments. Bennett (1989:42) likened the situation during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s to the old days of annual rations of blankets; that Aboriginal people should be grateful for what was given to them. This gratitude would necessarily imply that Aboriginal people would not, or should not, express any dissatisfaction with the government and the government allocations (Bennet 1989:42). To express ingratitude, to demand more, could and did result in punishment. Examples of this can be seen in the threats of withholding wages of the NACC and the dismantling of both the NACC and NAC after both bodies had started to insist on more of a role than they had been allotted. The dissolution of the NAC did not indicate the abandonment of the concept of Aboriginal representation, or at least consultation and advice. The government explored possible alternatives and the concept of a more powerful and legislated body was developed, which led eventually to the legislation establishing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission

Background to Creation

What was the intention of the government when it proposed ATSIC and set about the process which led to the enabling legislation? Gerry Hand, the responsible Minister, described the intention as follows.

> We wanted an organisation or a structure that involved Aboriginal people in the running of Aboriginal affairs, that transferred power to the users of the program, that was representative in the sense that it took into account cultural and regional issues at a local level, but was able to present at a national level a voice that was accepted as being representative of the community (Hand 1999:17).

The issue of power has been identified as one of the crucial factors impacting on Aboriginal disadvantage in colonial and post-colonial Australia. Transfer of power to Aboriginal Australians was a stated intention in the creation of ATSIC. However the extent to which power can be exercised is circumscribed by the incumbent government, even when the body has been created by legislation.

There was much debate in parliament and the bureaucracy when ATSIC was proposed (Hand 1999:18). Dillon (1996:91-92) described the furore that erupted and the resistance the proposed bill met in the Senate, which forced many amendments to the original bill. Pratt (2004:7) quoted John Howard, then Leader of the Opposition, who expressed his lack of support for ATSIC on the grounds that it would promote separatism on the part of Aboriginal Australians and in so doing would be detrimental to national interests and unity. Despite such opposition the legislation to create ATSIC was passed on 17th October 1989 (Hand 1999:20).

In his policy statement which heralded the creation of ATSIC, Gerry Hand (1987:2) committed the government to consultation with Aboriginal and Islander communities as an essential pre-requisite for effective implementation of the government's proposals. Extensive consultation was carried out in an attempt to recognise and incorporate diversity. Information from these consultations was included in the design of ATSIC which was seen by many as the peak national Aboriginal organisation. However,

> it was a limited translation of diversity, subject as it was to prevailing government concerns about the need for financial and administrative efficiency, and the sheer difficulties involved in translating complex Indigenous cultural differences into a nationally representative organisational framework. (Smith 1996:24)

Various House of Representative Standing Committee reports recommended 'that Aboriginal cultural practices and proclivities be accommodated in structures to monitor administrative concerns for accountability and performance' (Finlayson & Dale 1996:83). That this had not been done in the past was illustrated in the need for the House of Representative Standing Committees to point it out, and should have been taken into account in the formation of ATSIC.

Foley (1999: 5) pointed out there were criticisms of the government consultation process and the major one was the rushed nature of the meetings. Hand (1999:19) commented on this criticism, and basically defended himself and the process. However, negating Aboriginal complaints about the process ignored the implications that cultural protocols may have been breached and was tantamount to stating that the consultation process devised by post-colonial bureaucrats must be correct. Thus it could be said that the creation of ATSIC involved a level of cultural violence. However there was advice from the community consultations related to the structure of the proposed body which was heeded. Hand had proposed twenty eight Regional Councils grouped into six zones (Smith 1996:23). After nation wide community consultation the proposed structure was changed quite drastically (Hand 1999:21). As Smith (1996:23) noted, this change resulted from significant criticism of the NAC structure expressed during consultation.

Structure

ATSIC was created with sixty regions grouped into seventeen zones (Smith 1996:23). Regional councillors within each zone voted for one Commissioner to sit on the national ATSIC Board in a full-time capacity (Pratt 2004:8). Two other councillors were appointed directly by the Minister, who was also responsible for nominating the chairperson from the elected Commissioners (Smith 1996:25). Thus the national ATSIC board of Commissioners consisted of nineteen people.

The increase in the number of regions, zones and therefore of national Commissioners was significant because the vision that Hand promoted placed considerable importance on the role of the Regional Councils which were regarded as capable of 'ensuring that the views of Aboriginal and Islander people can flow from the grassroots to the centre of government' (Hand 1987:3). This was seen by some as important in progressing the goal of self-determination. The Labor party had promoted the concept of Aboriginal self-determination, at least rhetorically, in the early 1970s. Smith (1996:23) pointed out that the original twenty eight regional boundaries had been

based on administrative criteria whereas the new boundaries were decided taking into account 'cultural commonalities and differences'. This would have to be seen as a significant improvement in terms of representativeness.

In 1993, when ATSIC was reviewed, the number of regions was reduced to thirty six, with an accompanying reduction in councillor numbers from eight hundred to around six hundred, (Smith 1996:25). The Torres Strait Islands were granted a zone in its own right, but the overall number of zones remained at seventeen (Pratt 2003:9). At the same time it was decided that ATSIC staff would remain as public servants. According to Sanders (2002:7) these two developments 'compromised the idea of ATSIC becoming more Aboriginal and more independent of the government that had created it'. The 1993 review also recommended that the chairperson of ATSIC should be elected, rather than appointed by the Minister. This was rejected, and it was not till 1999 that elections for the chairperson occurred (Pratt 2003:9-10).

ATSIC also had an administrative arm which was made up of Commonwealth public servants who prior to 2003 took direction from the elected officials, but were answerable to the Minister through a Ministerially appointed CEO (Pratt 2003:10). Initially the administrative section was largely made up of ex employees of the DAA and the Aboriginal Development Commission (ADC) who had dual responsibilities, accountability to the government and advocacy for elected arm of ATSIC (Smith 1996:28). In 2003 there was a change to the financial administration of ATSIC programs. ATSIS was created as a separate entity to replace the previous administrative arm of ATSIC. This separation of powers was designed to address apparent conflict of interest created by the previous structure in which elected representatives also made funding decisions (ATSIC 2003:1-2).

Structural problems

Coombs (1986:38) stated that a replacement for NAC 'should be quite separate from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs'. His reasons for this lay in his analysis of the problems encountered by the NAC in dealing with the DAA. The creators of ATSIC ignored his advice and set it up so that it incorporated both the advisory/consultative function of the NAC, and the administrative/bureaucratic function of the old DAA and ADC. The establishment of ATSIC with two sections created a potential from the outset for tension between the two arms and sets of functions of the peak Aboriginal body; a

body created with two sets of responsibilities, to the government and to Aboriginal people. Tension did in fact develop. Finlayson (2003:16) pointed out that

> ATSIC's statutory roles as an advisory, advocacy and monitoring peak body are complex and poorly clarified because the organisation operates, of necessity, in a highly contested political domain characterised by often conflicting priorities and demands.

ATSIC has been described by Smith (1996:29) as 'a contested structure', and she went on to say that it was promoted as a partnership between the elected Aboriginal arm and the administrative team, however 'if this is the case, it is a partnership characterised by role conflict and an uncertain distribution of decision–making powers'. In Foley's interpretation, inevitable tensions resulted related to which branch of the structure would make the decisions related to allocation of resources and control of the process (Foley 1999:5). Conflict over funding also occurred at the regional level between organisations competing for limited funding. As Finlayson & Dale (1996:76) pointed out, contested decision making had been moved from the political arena of Canberra to regional and local Aboriginal politics. If regionalisation was, at least rhetorically, a move towards self-determination or self-management, the creation of a conflict situation within the regions effectively undermined that goal.

The combination of representative and executive functions was seen by some as a bold innovation (e.g. Pratt 2003:11), but by others as problematic because of the conflict between the principles of representative democracy, group autonomy and ministerial responsibility (Ivanitz & McPhail 2003:193). Ivanitz & McPhail further contended that the conflicting systems of accountability within the structure of ATSIC would make it difficult for the body to achieve its stated aims of Aboriginal empowerment and could push it to a crisis of legitimacy (Ivanitz & McPhail 2003:193). Difficulties resulting from the structure of ATSIC were also commented on by Palmer (2004:5) who asserted that the dual roles of administration and representation had created a 'predicament that has been called "separation of powers", but which is probably better termed "separation of responsibilities"'.

The three-tier structure of ATSIC, imposed upon its members and constituents, bred tensions between the centralised national body and the regional councils charged with representing local interests. These tensions were exacerbated by ambiguities in the roles expected of members of the council. National Commissioners were sometimes also Regional Councillors and regional councillors were often also members of other

local Aboriginal organisations (Smith 1996:28-29). This duality, or multiplicity, of roles meant that potentially individuals had competing or conflicting loyalties in decisions related to allocation of resources or provision of policy advice.

In his review of literature about ATSIC Palmer (2004:14) cited Rowse (1991) who questioned how representative Councillors and Commissioners were of their constituencies. The limited power exercised by the Regional Councils had also been subject to criticism. ATSIC itself had identified this as an issue in some of its own reports (e.g. ATSIC 1993; ATSIC 1998). This lack of power constituted an example of structural violence. Publicity had built up certain expectations of what ATSIC could do for its constituents. The lack of power, along with limited funding and consequent competition for funding and inevitable disappointment for those who missed out, created frustration for those administering the Regional Councils and those seeking to provide and access programs.

Work with one Regional Council in Queensland formed the base of a paper published by Finlayson & Dale (1996). The issues they identified can be seen as a microcosm of issues faced in the process of regional devolution. In opening comments they pointed out that the Regional Planning aspect of ATSIC represented 'a new, and until recently untrialled experiment in the decentralisation of government administration and the implementation of self-determination policies' (Finlayson & Dale 1996; 71). However, they questioned how committed to this new process the bureaucracy really was. They pointed out that there had been a lack of promotion or financial support for the concept of community-based planning within any of the community organisations in the region. There had also been no training for staff in community development practices (Finlayson & Dale 1996:72). Funding had also not been provided for 'the process to facilitate ongoing strategy development, strategy negotiation, community consultation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation' (Finlayson & Dale 1996:74). The lack of support for implementing a new process could only lead to systemic frustration.

The inherent tensions between the centralised national 'commission' and the regional councils were exacerbated by the fact that the ATSIC corporate plan was finalised before Regional Councils had time to develop their planning priorities and input to the larger picture. The Commission was therefore established with corporate priorities that did not incorporate those of the regions and communities (Finlayson & Dale 1996:72).

In the early years, most Regional Councillors in the Queensland region studied by Finlayson & Dale (1996) had little capacity to participate, as they were in full-time employment in addition to their ATSIC role. There was no financial re-imbursement for time involved in ATSIC activities. Within education circles it has come to be recognised that Aboriginal people should be remunerated for their time, and that their time and knowledge must be valued. Lack of payment for ATSIC regional councillors negated that value.

If the non-remuneration of ATSIC councillors is considered in this way, then the value of the input of local representatives into policy and process decisions was belittled and cultural violence was evident. The input from Aboriginal people became tokenistic and the post-colonial decision makers were still imposing their ideas of what was good for Aboriginal people from a position of total power.

Underlying the difficulties faced by Regional Councils was the relationships between Aboriginal communities and the state governments. Contemporary relations and Aboriginal attitudes to government processes have been influenced by the historical colonial practices of governments. In Finlayson and Dale's (1996) case study the problems were reflected in a level of scepticism on the part of Aboriginal communities about government initiated programs, and this scepticism extended to the Regional Planning process. The researchers summarised this in the statement that it was 'the inequality of the power relationship inherent in the relationship between Indigenous people and the state which [was] irksome' (Finlayson & Dale 1996:81-82).

Interactions between Aboriginal people and government administrations have often been marked by oppositional strategies, and the associated practice that have involved presentation of demands to the State were at odds with the new needs for organisations to lobby for initial and ongoing funding (Finlayson & Dale 1996:82.) Further difficulties arose for Regional Councils as it was they 'who are left with the task of soothing tempers over the disparity between the community demands and limited resources' (Finlayson & Dale 1996:84).

The concerns related to the role of Regional Councils and their relationships with the national body expressed by these writers in 1996 were reiterated in similar form in a number of publications by the Commission (ATSIC 1998; ATSIC 2000; ATSIC 2003). The ATSIC documents indicated these crucial issues continued to plague the Commission until its demise.

Further to the role confusion for individuals was the lack of clarity related to the processes which linked the regional and national levels of policy formulation and distribution of funds. This led to competition between different interests which was aggravated by the need for different Regional Councils to establish credibility with their local organisations by securing funds for them (Smith 1996:33). These difficulties in defining roles, competing for funds and being answerable to representatives of local interests have all the ingredients for systemic frustration in daily working lives of the members of ATSIC; frustration that could easily spill into their lives outside work.

Another area of criticism arose from the philosophical rationale underlying the creation of the Regional Councils (Smith 1996). One of the criticisms of the NAC had been that it did not accommodate the diversity of Aboriginal communities. As a result the government developed a perception that not only was cultural diversity important; moreover it was also a problem that needed to be managed (Smith 1996:22). The ATSIC Regional structure was theoretically meant to incorporate and cater for cultural diversity. Smith (1996:24) quoted Hand (HoR Debates No.7, 27 April 1988:2177) who stated that the Regional Councils would 'reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander requests and recognise historical, cultural, linguistic and other important factors.'

As is so often the case, the rhetoric does not necessarily reflect the reality of what occurs. Implementing policies and creating new political structures requires the government to find defensible and workable grounds for these policies and structures. These grounds are compiled by sifting through myriad reports, reviews, briefing papers and other documents. This may seem to imply that the government has been systematic in its incorporation of issues of diversity into policymaking. However, how the information from these documents is used to create a knowledge base is a 'political as well as an intellectual activity, shaped as it is by the historical relationship between Aboriginal people and the state' (Smith 1996:20). It often ignores the historical realities of colonialism, racism and forms of violence which are entrenched in Australian social structures.

Criticism has been levelled at ATSIC for reasons other than its complex structural problems. These are discussed in the next section.

Other Critiques

Gary Foley (1999:5-6) presented a sceptical view of the process of the creation of ATSIC. Although Hawke had, while campaigning for the Prime Minister's mantle, made many promises to Aboriginal people there were soon signs of Aboriginal discontent. By the end of 1987 a number of factors were placing political pressure on Hawke, or as Foley (1999:5) stated, 'Hawke was beginning to feel the heat of Aboriginal political agitation'. He ascribed pressure caused by the political agitation at the 1982 Brisbane Commonwealth Games, the damning report by the World Council of Churches Report on Racism in Australia, the increasing public debate about deaths in custody and Aboriginal health statistics, as well as threats of disruption to the bicentennial celebrations for the Hawke government's rush to create ATSIC. This rush then resulted, in his opinion, in flaws in ATSIC's structure and process from the beginning, flaws which were the result of the 'political opportunism and expediency involved in its creation (Foley 1999:5). From this perspective it is possible to view the creation of ATSIC as an example of abuse of power by the dominant post-colonial policy makers. Although there were inherent problems in the organisation, it was the only form of Aboriginal participation in the polity on offer.

Foley's criticisms can be seen as part of what Dillon (1996) referred to as the 'radical critique' of ATSIC. Dillon (1996:94) saw the early criticisms as the result of the influence of

> 'radical indigenous interests, plus disenchanted players associated with the ADC. In essence, this radical critique argues that ATSIC is an imposed structure, and thus does not and cannot truly reflect Indigenous views and aspirations'.

Dillon summarises Coombs' description of ATSIC as a 'co-opted part of government, and inherently insensitive to the real needs of Indigenous people and communities' (Coombs 1994 cited in Dillon 1996:94).

A second aspect of the radical critique described by Dillon (1996:94) was that ATSIC staff were inherited from the previous agencies, and that they were employed under the Public Service Act. This was also seen as a structural problem by other writers. Palmer (2004:5) asserted it was an issue because many of the bureaucrats had been part of the defunct DAA and were perceived as not being supportive of Aboriginal autonomy. These public servants remained ultimately answerable to the government, not to the elected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissioners. Foley (1999)

pointed out that the public servants, predominantly non-Aboriginal, were offered contracts with ATSIC before the first elections were even held, which created an

> administrative structure and system, in which the newly elected commissioners had not only had no input into creating, but were also totally unfamiliar with, and on arriving in Canberra were given instructions on how the public servants would now administer the new system (Foley 1996:6).

Dillon (1996:93) pointed out that many Aboriginal people were of the opinion that ATSIC staff should not be public servants. This caused structural tensions. Again, it is not difficult to describe this behaviour as the practice of cultural violence, underpinned by the assumption that the majority ways was the best, with inbuilt potential for 'systemic frustration'.

Sanders (2002) pointed out that criticism from Aboriginal communities in the early 90s of the Commission related to the way in which it had been constituted. The increased numbers of representatives (as compared to the NAC and NACC) had been the 'Hawke government's concession to the idea that more links were needed between the national and local levels of Indigenous political representation' (Sanders 2002:7). Despite this concession many critics saw the Commission as 'primarily a Commonwealth government body operating at the national level' (Sanders 2002:7). Establishment of working relationship with people in its regions and communities was a difficulty the Commission needed to overcome because of the imposed structure.

Concerns with excessive bureaucratic influence and the level of accountability imposed on ATSIC and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander funding in general have been two major difficulties (Dillon 1996:94). Issues related to accountability have been the subject of a considerable body of writing and are explored in the next section of this chapter.

ATSIC and accountability

It is reasonable to expect that expenditure from the public purse be open to scrutiny, and that governments and other bodies who have access to the public purse have some expectation that they are accountable for the way in which the public monies are dispersed. Certainly, the economic rationalist and managerial philosophies that have come to underpin Australian government demand that financial accountability exists in relation to all public expenditure.

When ATSIC was created by the Hawke government the demands of economic rationalism and managerialism prevailed. Ivanitz (2000a:4) pointed out that when the idea of ATSIC was first mooted in 1987 'the government was subject to relentless questioning regarding the public accountability of past and current administration of Aboriginal affairs'. The extensive revision to the proposed legislation included many amendments involving accountability (Sanders 1993:8). Thus from the outset ATSIC was subject to stringent accountability requirements. Gerry Hand, the Minister responsible for drafting and implementing the enabling legislation, wrote ten years later that ATSIC was probably subjected to stricter financial accountability requirements than any other department (Hand 1999:19). He went on to say:

> No-one ever questions the waste and duplication of other departments, but the regime in place in ATSIC came about this way. Peter Walsh was saying; "Oh, bloody ATSIC, Aboriginals, DAA – it's bloody money going out the door!" He could not help but say that because there was all this turmoil in the press. I wrote to Peter Walsh and asked him to devise a financial regime, so the Finance Department did so. You cannot blame ATSIC and you cannot blame Aboriginal people if the Finance Department's own regime does not work. You never hear the Finance Department standing up and saying at a press conference: "That problem with ATSIC – that was really our idea. We are really responsible." But those are the facts and we tried as best as we could to fit in with Finance. (Hand 1999:19)

Hand was making it very clear that he believed racist assumptions that money was wasted in Aboriginal affairs had led to the imposition of an unwieldy and unworkable system which then created problems related to onerous accountability expectations. That these expectations would create difficulty was foreshadowed by Jennett & Stewart (1990:264), when she commented that 'the insistence by many whites that the government remains accountable for tax payers' funds means that criticism of activities in [the Aboriginal Affairs] portfolio are likely to continue unabated and, indeed, to centre on ATSIC'. ATSIC was meant to promote Aboriginal autonomy, but this autonomy was compromised according to O'Donoghue (1997a:7) because the organisation was in receipt of public money which had to be accounted for by standards which were imposed and measured by outcomes not designed in consultation with Aboriginal people. Hughes (1995) described the ATSIC situation as one of dependent autonomy, which he considered simply a new phase of internal colonialism.

The potential for systemic frustration, caused by cumbersome and unfamiliar accounting and accountability procedures in administering ATSIC programs and funds,

was inherent from the beginning if Jennett and Stewart and Hand's analyses were accepted. Ivanitz (2000b:8-9) stated this issue clearly.

> The divergent views of accountability held by Aboriginal organisations and mainstream governments represent two very different theories on the nature of governance. Communication between the two systems is not easy. Their codes are far from transparent to each other, and the power imbalances between those demanding accountability – governments – and those complying – Aboriginal organisations – are enormous.

An example of the difference in the theories of governance is discussed by Ivanitz (2000b:8). She maintains that community expectations of what services and support should be provided by the government through the Regional Councils and Councillors is very different to mainstream expectations, and that inevitably they clash. The example she uses relates to the cultural expectations related to the burial of deceased community members. The cultural protocols involved in ceremonial and kin obligations do not fit with mainstream accounting procedures, yet for the community these obligations are as important as the paving of the roads. As a result Regional Councillors have to account to the government for expenditure which does not fit the mainstream procedures and are accused of rorting the system, but are seen by the community as having met their obligations as Aboriginal politicians.

The strict accountability, promoting tight ministerial and parliamentary control, served to inhibit the Commission's capacity to act independently, and maintained the power (im) balance. Rowse (2002:184-5) pointed out that in the eyes of many, ATSIC's capacity to function to achieve outcomes for Australia's most disadvantaged people was restricted by these measures. This restriction may have been the result of the fact that 'ATSIC has spent a lot of its time looking over its shoulder' (O'Donoghue 1997a:8). The situation was described by Palmer (2004:18) as a political trade-off that enabled the establishment of the Commission. He went on to say that 'there is also the unstated implication that Indigenous people are not to be trusted to spend their money properly' (Palmer 2004:14).

The media in Australia is ever ready to report and sensationalise issues of supposed financial mismanagement that are seen to illustrate the inability of Aboriginal organisations to make informed decisions related to expenditure of 'public money'. The public response which results provides ammunition for the opponents of 'redistributive' spending. This has historically served well those who are opposed to Aboriginal control of specific funds and to Aboriginal organisations in general and ATSIC specifically. It

has also fed the demand for public accountability and promoted general public acceptance of the government's excessive demands on ATSIC. As Dodson (1996:8) stated,

> before the election in March 1996 ATSIC was already Australia's most heavily accountable body. It has its own internal office of audit and evaluation. Reporting requirements for organisations funded by ATSIC are stringent. But in April this year the Government, **with minimal consultation,** (emphasis added) imposed even more onerous accountability requirements on the Commission in the thick of claims of nepotism, that the organisation was wasting money and that it was failing to deliver services to Indigenous people. Prejudice, popular stereotypes and hearsay have become the basis for policy.

It is possible to consider the accountability issues as an example of the use of power to create a regime that is inherently structurally and culturally violent for Aboriginal participants, who are then subject on a daily basis to systemic frustration. An example of how this could work at a regional level is described by Ivanitz (2000b:14). She quotes a personal communication from the Finance Officer of an Aboriginal Council who describes the difficulties of meeting the accountability requirements and points out that the Council's finance staff often spend 12 hours a day just on the task of acquitting grants from government agencies, leaving little or no time for other activities. This frustration had earlier been expressed by the Independent Aboriginal Organisations of the Kimberley (IAOK) who commented on the onerous nature of the accountability procedures which 'were dominated by excessive paperwork' (cited in Sullivan 1996:107)

The speed of change expected as a result of the allocation of funds created other problems.

> When government departments are asked why the more than $400 million allocated to them to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody has not led to a decrease in the rates of incarceration or death, they point to the gravity and enormity of the problem. When our organisations do not solve the gamut of problems faced by Indigenous people the problem is apparently, lack of accountability. (Dodson 1997:33)

In 1996 Howard's government decided to not only cut funding to ATSIC, but also to quarantine some programs from the cuts, thus leaving ATSIC with extremely limited discretionary spending capacity. This was an action which produced systemic frustration. The government dictated that ATSIC sponsored employment, housing and infrastructure programs were to be quarantined from funding reductions and ATSIC was

to make its cuts in other areas that it might consider important, such as culture and language maintenance programs, which did not fit the circumscribed government priorities (Dodson 1997:29). It can be argued that the state and federal governments were responsible for providing the mainstream 'citizens' rights' of health, education, housing and employment, and that the ATSIC charter was to provide extras not basics. The government unfairly blamed the failure to meet its own responsibilities in reducing disadvantage on an organisation which had not been created or financed to take over the governments' responsibilities in these areas.

A number of writers have commented on this issue of blame for continued disadvantage including Mick Dodson in the 1997 Social Justice Commission report.

> Only a small portion of the decisions which affect our lives are within ATSIC's jurisdiction, let alone control. By far the majority of policies affecting us, or services we might wish to access in relation to health, education, employment, housing or infrastructure, are determined and controlled by mainstream Commonwealth, state or territory departments or local governments. (Dodson 1997:33-34)

Sullivan (1996:97) has presented a similar argument. He has suggested that ATSIC should confine its activities and that the provision of basic infrastructure be left to the states, who after all are responsible. The States' lack of commitment to meet their responsibilities was a major policy issue in Aboriginal affairs. State governments should not be permitted to utilise their position of power to abrogate responsibilities to a section of the community.

In an economic climate that places global competitiveness in a position of paramount importance and insists that outcomes from public expenditure be measurable in very tangible and practical terms, the 'sacred cow' of accountability has the potential to be used by those in power to circumscribe the activities of an organisation and even as an excuse to start preparing to administer the 'last rites' The official accountability requirements can be difficult for those trying to work within a social justice framework, as the outcomes of programs and expenditure may not 'measure up' as sufficient return for the financial investment. In Aboriginal affairs, it can be particularly pertinent because of the tension between the government's clearly stated priority of 'practical' reconciliation and Aboriginal pursuit of' symbolic' reconciliation. The tension is expressed by some as the difference between the pursuit of 'citizenship rights' and the pursuit of 'Indigenous rights'. O'Donoghue (1997b:18) in an address to the National Press Club describes these two sets of rights:

> Citizen rights relate to living conditions, the provision of services other Australians take for granted, equality of opportunity. Indigenous rights relate to our claims over land, and to have special status as the First Australians.

Populist politicians were often able to gain considerable support by 'beating the drum' of 'unfair distribution of Australians resources'. This was evident in the initial success of Pauline Hanson's One Nation political party. One Nation was based on an anti affirmative action platform, with associated demands that all Australian's be treated as if this country was one big level playing field with equal starting points for all who compete for a share of the nation's resources. Widespread dissatisfaction with ATSIC fed this populist viewpoint and contributed to an environment where the dismantling of ATSIC entered the political agenda.

Undermining and dismantling of ATSIC

One way Aboriginal people could express their dissatisfaction with ATSIC was by not turning up to the polling booths. This they often did, which then led to accusations that the Commission was not representative. In fact, in the first ATSIC election in 1990 fewer than thirty percent of eligible voters exercised their voting rights (Foley 1999:6). This figure was differently interpreted, depending on the motivation of those assessing the figures. Some activist groups who did not support the creation of ATSIC in the format dictated by the Labor government had campaigned for a boycott of the election and

> hailed the 70% stay away figure as a great success, while the Minister declared the 30% voter turnout as a "great success for democracy". The eligible voter turnout rates seem to be essentially the same to this day, further highlighting the need for an alternative voting system if ATSIC is to ever gain a credible mandate. (Foley 1999:6)

As arguments intensified over the validity of ATSIC's role, the poor voter turnout and consequent perceived lack of representativeness were ammunition for the critics. The reasons for the low turnout might reflect a variety of factors, which could include lack of understanding of ATSIC's role in improving the everyday lives of people, disillusionment with dealing with government departments and perception of ATSIC as simply an arm of the government, and the cultural inappropriateness of the electoral system.

The government had the power to express its dissatisfaction in much stronger ways than the Aboriginal choice to not vote. The formation of ATSIS (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services) in 2003 can be seen as the first step in dismantling ATSIC. ATSIS was set up as a separate agency charged with the administration of ATSIC programs and with decision-making in relation to funding for applicant organisations. Behind the rhetoric of 'separation of powers' ATSIC was effectively stripped of the bulk of its power. As Murphy (2004:2) stated, the Commission was reduced to a body which was 'simply to advise and lobby government'. Aden Ridgeway (Radio National, 27/04/03), in a discussion of the future of ATSIC, referred to the creation of ATSIS as a return to the model of the NACC, a model that had not worked. In the same interview, Aden Ridgeway described the move as somewhat of a knee-jerk reaction to criticisms of financial mismanagement and pork-barrelling, criticisms which centred around two personalities within the Commission, rather than the Commission as a whole.

> In parliament, we gave the Minister additional powers to be able to look at those things. He's sidestepped the opportunity to be able to do that and punished Indigenous people by changing the nature of how ATSIC would operate, and hasn't spelt out what that means for service delivery through community-based organisations or the role of regional councils. (Aden Ridgeway 27/04/2003, The National Interest, Radio National).

Bob Collins, in the same program, pointed out that the Commission had received a lot of negative publicity which centred on its leadership in the previous twelve months. He went on to say that, people at the grassroots level with whom he had spoken were disillusioned that the focus of attention and proposed changes were the result of such negative publicity surrounding the Chair and the Deputy Chair. The emphasis on the negative served the purposes of those in power who wished to impose their construct of how Aboriginal affairs should be managed and to disband the ATSIC experiment.

Dana Robertson, during the ABC Lateline program (15/04/04), suggested an ulterior motive. She contended that the government, by using its power to abolish ATSIC saved itself from a decision in relation to the position of the suspended chairman Clark, and avoided a possible drawn out and expensive lawsuit. Bob Collins, in the same program, was quoted as saying that ATSIC delivered itself into the hands of its worst critics and stated that from the day that the Board decided to protect Clark the organisation was finished.

A quick look at the coalition's history with ATSIC could lead a sceptic to consider that the abolition of ATSIC was inevitable. Gerry Hand (1999:20), while reminiscing about the process of setting up ATSIC, described the opposition's reaction in rather colourful terms including the statement that 'John Howard was frothing at the mouth at the despatch box [in Parliament] about how I was trying to provide the nation with the treaty and with ATSIC'. Andrew Bartlett, of the Democrats, indicated the resistance to ATSIC was long standing. He stated the Prime Minister had been seeking an opportunity to abolish ATSIC since his election. Indeed, he claimed that the move to get rid of ATSIC had nothing to do with its perceived failings, but was based on anti-ATSIC ideology alone (ABC Lateline 15/04/04).

The number of amendments to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act of 1989 before it passed into legislation was indicative of the resistance to the concept, the fear that a fourth level of government was being created and the ongoing fear of separatism. These fears could certainly be interpreted as resistance to any alteration in the balance of power between the heirs to colonial power and the Aboriginal people of this country.

Once instituted ATSIC faced a number of reviews which in Finlayson's (2003:16) opinion caused problems through resultant restructures in the 1990s, which led to instability. She also asserted that changes were designed to align ATSIC's organisation and management with mainstream departmental structural and procedural models which had been previously identified as inappropriate and often unworkable for Aboriginal people. Difficulties for the Commission were compounded by the extent and speed of change, the loss of staff and the relocation of staff to other departments which led to a 'loss of corporate knowledge' (Finlayson 2003:16).

If it is accepted that the creation of ATSIC was the imposition of a western system that was culturally inappropriate, then attempts to further align the Commission with conventional western models would hardly address this problem. They simply undermined the chance for ATSIC to become what it had, in utopian terms, been described as: a body to advance Aboriginal self-determination.

A review of ATSIC was announced by the government on 12 November 2002. The panel for this review consisted of John Hannaford, Bob Collins and Jackie Huggins. Writing about the review Hartley (2003:4) stated that the final report of the review was not due out until later that year. Despite the ongoing review, the government chose to pre-empt findings by going ahead with the creation of ATSIS. Again, the question of

imposing Western models on Aboriginal organisations arose. The panel recommended changes, not abolition. Changes recommended were aimed at strengthening the level of community input, and electoral changes reflecting local decision-making processes were part of this (Hartley 2003:4). These changes also included an increase in the role of regional councils, the re-unification of the elected and administrative arms of ATSIC, priority on improving the relationships between ATSIC and State and Territory governments, and the extension of auditing to include how all service providers, including governments, spend Aboriginal funds (Hannaford, Huggins & Collins 2003:14-15).

Despite all its problems ATSIC, or a model like it, has come to be seen as an essential part of the Australian political scene if Aboriginal people are going to be able to pursue their dual rights as citizens and as the first people of this nation. 'ATSIC is a national and regional peak Indigenous advocacy and representative body operating at the political and administrative interface between Indigenous people and the general Australian society' (Finlayson 2003:18).

Bill Jonas (2003:2) in the Social Justice Report had recommended the re-unification of ATSIS and ATSIC, as well as the retention of a national board of Commissioners. However, it is not surprising that this advice was ignored. As Jonas pointed out in his media statement concerning ATSIC (16/04/04), the government had been intolerant of any criticisms of its own approach. He justified his stance when he commented on the government's failure to act on the 1996 Social Justice Package proposal by ATSIC, the failure to adopt the advice of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and failure to implement, or even to fully respond to many of the recommendations in the yearly Social Justice reports from HREOC (Jonas 2004:2).

> This does not reveal a failure of representative Indigenous structures. It reveals a deep antipathy on the part of the government towards engaging with Indigenous people and acknowledging the legitimacy of the aspirations and goals expressed by Indigenous people. (Jonas 2004:2)

Despite the recommendations of the review and of the Social Justice Commissioner the government went ahead with the abolition of ATSIC. The ATSIC Amendment Bill was passed in Parliament on 16th March 2005, and heralded the end of national Aboriginal elected representation. The ALP had also stated its intention to disband ATSIC if it won government. The coalition was able to claim this stated intention as support for their plans. However, there was an important difference in the

plans of the opposing political factions. The ALP planned to replace ATSIC with an alternative elected body.

Post ATSIC

The government continued to pay lip service to the principle of consultation and established its preferred model, the National Indigenous Council (NIC), a group of fourteen Aboriginal people whose stated role was to advise the government. This was not well received by many who still aspired to Aboriginal self-determination. Brian Johnstone, in a scathing opinion piece in the National Indigenous Times (NIT Nov 10, 2004), suggested that for those who still hoped for true Aboriginal involvement in policy making and administrative mechanisms the council would come to be known as the 'No Ideas Committee'.

Although ATSIC had not been the perfect mechanism to achieve the goal of self-determination, the formation of the NIC was seen as a backward step. Arthur Ridgeway (NIT 20 January 2005) referred to the members of the council as the 'government's new puppets', and asserted that they would be used by the government to justify development of new assimiliationist policies. Chris Graham (NIT 10 November 2004) described the replacement of ATSIC with the NIC as a regressive step which would set the struggle for Aboriginal rights back by decades. His main argument related to the appointed nature of the Council and the fact that as a consequence it could never be seen as a representative body speaking on behalf of Aboriginal people. He went on to say that

> some might view it as the height of arrogance to believe that abolishing a full-time, democratically-elected body which boasted 406 representatives and replacing it with a part-time, hand picked council of 14 people could possibly be considered a better outcome for Aboriginal people. (Graham 2004)

Jull (2004:14) was also very scathing of the appointed nature of the NIC. He suggested that the government did not like what the elected body had been saying, whereas an appointed body could be hand picked on the basis that they would not be likely to challenge the government. He also questioned whether the government would like a body such as the United Nations to select which distinguished Australians could speak in international forums on behalf of the Australian people, in the way that the

government had chosen who would speak for Aboriginal people. Jonas (2004:2) concurred and expressed concern that the replacement of ATSIC with appointed advisors would ensure the government would only have to talk with Aboriginal people about issues and at times of its choosing.

One wonders to what extent, if any, the coalition government, considered the lessons of history when establishing the National Indigenous Council to replace ATSIC. ATSIC had been legislated as a response to the failure of mainstream services to provide for Aboriginal people. Establishment of ATSIC had involved recognition that a representative, national Aboriginal advisory body was needed to progress the struggle to redress two centuries of racial oppression and its effects (Murphy 2004:2). This representativeness was lost and services were once again mainstreamed.

A number of writers have questioned the practice of mainstreaming on a variety of grounds. As well as the fact that it was a return to a failed past Jull (2004:6) criticised it on the grounds that for a number of reasons mainstream systems can't cater for the needs and aspirations of some Aboriginal people. Altman (2004:308) concurred when he stated that the effects of colonialism, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander choices might continue to leave many outside the mainstream. Morris (2004:326) suggested that mainstreaming was a reaction to populist perceptions that specialised Aboriginal programs and policies were a form of reverse racism, and that it also neutralised power and influence that may have been developing within and through specialist groups.

If the NIC can be seen as the replacement of the elected arm of ATSIC, then to an extent the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) can be seen as replacing the administrative arm of ATSIC. The provision of services to Aboriginal Australians is in the hands of mainstream federal and state government departments. The role of the OIPC, which is situated within the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs[11], is to coordinate a 'whole of government approach' (http://oipc.gov.au/).

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[11] Grouping Aboriginal affairs into a portfolio including immigration and multicultural affairs could lead to questioning the importance of Indigenous affairs in the philosophical framework of those responsible for this grouping. Three issues can be easily identified. The disadvantage faced by Aboriginal Australians is so profound that there should be a single portfolio charged with the task of addressing this disadvantage. Secondly, to group Aboriginal affairs with issues faced by migrants to this country is yet another denial of the legitimacy of the First Nation status of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. Finally, policies related to multiculturalism are widely viewed as aimed towards incorporation and acceptance of the cultural background of 'new Australians'. Many Aboriginal people do not see themselves as occupying a position in multicultural policies and programs.

Criticisms of the management of Aboriginal Affairs that had been levelled at governments in the 1980s could be seen to still apply to the approach adopted by the creation of the NIC and the mainstreaming of services with the emphasis on practical reconciliation.

> 'The failure to delineate clearly the functional responsibilities of different government agencies typically sees programmes proliferating. This in turn hinders efforts to secure a concerted attack on a particular policy area, not least because of competition between agencies to establish a relationship with Aboriginal clients which will justify the agencies' existence. Eventually such competition weakened the national policy of self-determination, for it resulted in the fragmentation of Aboriginal administration. (Collman, 1988:17)

Bennett (1989:105) cited the Miller committee which had levelled similar criticism that duplication of services across several mainstream government departments produced confusion for both Aboriginal clients and departmental staff and resulted in inefficient administration of resources.

There are similarities between the issues faced by the different national Aboriginal bodies established by Commonwealth governments since 1972. These are discussed as the conclusion to this chapter.

Conclusion

An underlying conundrum in Aboriginal affairs can be seen in the creation of the successive advisory bodies. How can the imposition of policies by the government, no matter how well informed, be considered 'self-determination'? Is not the 'Tent Embassy', established in 1972 on the initiative of some Aboriginal people (Howard 1982:91), more an attempt at self-determination than any appointed or elected advisory body created by the initiative of the non-Aboriginal post-colonial government?

As a tool for progress towards self-determination, the establishment of organisations to advise government Ministers and Ministries in Aboriginal affairs would appear a positive step. Further, the establishment of an organisation with some funding discretion would also seem positive. However, some care is needed in analysing these government moves. The manner in which these bodies are set up, administered and expected to report and relate to mainstream agencies embodies ingrained practices of

systemic bias, structural and cultural violence, and unequal power relations based in the colonial history of Australia.

Prior to the establishment of ATSIC Bennett (1989) expressed concerns about the relations between the government and elected Aboriginal bodies. This included his perception of the grounds on which critics denied the need for Aboriginal involvement in policy making and Aboriginal scepticism about government intentions.

> If one listened only to those critics who portray Aborigines as a malign influence, leading by the nose soft-centred politicians, church leaders and trade unionists, one would believe that the Aboriginal interest had gained a power and influence far greater than the total number of Aborigines in the community would warrant. Aboriginal voices suggested, however, that although the increased government spending indicated more concern by white politicians than had been the case for most of the years since 1788, there was still much tokenism involved, with Aborigines still forced to dance to the tune of their white political masters. (Bennett 1989: vii)

The negative public opinion and Aboriginal perception of tokenism described by Bennett continued through the history of ATSIC, and the tokenistic aspect of Aboriginal and government relations is certainly illustrated in the handpicked nature and very small numbers of the NIC.

The very terms used by successive governments to describe the government sponsored national Aboriginal 'pressure groups' are indicative of the intentions behind their creation. These groups have always been conceived as 'advisory' or 'consultative', rather than as policy making bodies. One result of this has been that successive governments have been free to ignore any 'advice' which did not fit in with the current political and electoral priorities. Aboriginal people have had no power to place in the political arena the matters of importance to them such as calls for a treaty, effective self-determination policies, and consideration of the issues of 'rights agenda' .

In fact some writers, including Castejon (2002:3), suggested that these organisations were 'used by the government to confine political activists within a segregated part of the political system', and in doing so reduced their capacity to agitate for reform in areas that were not on the government's agenda. Power over the political system was used to dictate which aspects of Aboriginal aspirations would be addressed, and these aspirations were not permitted to be determined by Aboriginal people and their elected representatives. Jull (2004:4) concurred when he stated that the main priority remained control of Aboriginal people, 'rather than their *consent* to governing institutions or policies'.

Further criticism has been levelled at the establishment of the successive advisory bodies in the accusation that they were a result of reactionary policymaking. An area of 'need' was identified, or the continued government failure became a political embarrassment and an electoral disadvantage. In a knee-jerk reaction the government set up an advisory or administrative body to appear magnamanious, forward thinking and in touch with the Aboriginal population whose status as a nation it denied. Behrendt (2002:3) argued the need for capacity building rather than reactionary policy and practice. The structural and cultural violence inherent in relations between powerful governments and the colonised and disenfranchised Aboriginal population has resulted in extremely limited opportunity for capacity building within government created organisations.

To build the capacity of advisory bodies and create a powerful Aboriginal arm of the government would require some significant paradigm shifts. Australia's ingrained racism is one impediment. This racism is institutionalised and evident in structural and cultural violence which permeate the private and public arenas of Australian life (Eckermann et al 2006:19-20). Systemic frustration, one form of structural violence, is endemic in government and quasi-government structures, at all levels of government and is evident in the history of Aboriginal 'consultative' bodies, where they were offered the enticement of self-determination but remained dependent on the mainstream bureaucracy (Eckermann et al 2006:66).

The ethos, at least, of the policy goals of assimilation and/or integration continues. The reality of diversity is not a popular notion. Evidence can be seen not only in the area of Aboriginal policy, but also in the popular expectation that migrants from non Anglo-Celt backgrounds will assimilate with the culture of colonial Australia. The aversion to acceptance of diversity undermines development of policy that really addressed the question of 'self-determination' for Aboriginal people and communities.

Strong resistance to implementation of policies which could be seen to create separation within the nation has continued to be an impediment to implementation of effective self-determination policies. Fear of 'separatism' was illustrated in many public statements. Hanks (1984) described the objections of Robert Menzies in 1965 to proposed constitutional amendment of s.51 (26), the change passed in the 1967 referendum giving the Commonwealth the power to legislate in relation to Aboriginal Australians. Menzies expressed fear that the change could 'allow the Parliament to set up special codes of industrial, social, criminal and other laws relating exclusively to

Aborigines' (Hanks 1984:23). Menzies was expressing a fear that had been evident in the White Australia Policy and that has continued in segments of Australian society to the present.

Relationships between national Aboriginal representative groups and successive governments have always been problematic, despite the apparent evolution of these groups and the changes in the political persuasions of the Commonwealth governments they have dealt with. In his 1984 discussion of the NACC and the NAC Hanks raised a number of questions which have remained as pertinent today as they were then.

> The difficult question for the future is not whether the Commonwealth has power to legislate to implement national policies in Aboriginal affairs but the choice of those national policies; will the Commonwealth continue the Australian tradition of imposing on the Aboriginal people policies and programs chosen by European-dominated institutions of government? Or will it establish structures and processes which ensure the national policies and programs are chosen by the Aboriginal people? Is the Commonwealth prepared to use its substantial powers in a way which responds to one of the most serious problems in Aboriginal society: powerlessness, the inability to influence (let alone control) the political decisions which impose on Aborigines inappropriate and counterproductive programs in such fundamental areas as health, housing, education and land use? (Hanks 1984:37)

The two subsequent national Aboriginal representative bodies, ATSIC and the NIC, were both imposed upon Aboriginal people. While the creation of ATSIC had included national consultation there were criticisms, amongst them that the consultation was rushed (Hand 1999:19) and the government attitude was one of 'take it or leave it' (Hand 1999:20), the policy and structure could be tinkered with, but not fundamentally changed as a result of Aboriginal input.

The Commonwealth hasn't addressed powerlessness of Aboriginal people. The statistics in Chapter 1 illustrate that programs in the fundamental areas identified by Hanks (1984) have not produced significant change in the disadvantaged status of the majority of Australian Aboriginal people in those areas of health, housing, education and land use. Issues which arise out of the legacy of colonialism related to educational disadvantage are discussed in the next two chapters.

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CHAPTER 5
ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

Context and introduction

Aboriginal education has historically received different levels of attention and been subject to the influence of legacies of colonialism. Changes which have occurred in approaches to education provision have reflected broader policy changes related to the position imposed on Aboriginal people in Australian society.

Education provision and underlying philosophies during the historical periods of contact and conflict, segregation and protection, and assimilation will be outlined, under the heading of Early History of Aboriginal Education. This leads to discussion of deficit models of education in Australia and their application to Aboriginal education. These theories are linked to the concept of cultural violence.

Concepts of social justice and equity entered the discourse concerning Aboriginal education in the 1970s. These have been discussed in Chapter 1 and provide background to Aboriginal education policies and reviews since 1972. Accompanying the advent of the rhetoric of self-determination for Aboriginal Australians, in 1972, was recognition of the need for consultation with Aboriginal people in relation to policy formulation. Education was one of the areas where mechanisms were established to promote Aboriginal input. A number of reviews of Aboriginal education and the development of specific policies resulted.

The consultative approach and resultant reviews and policies since 1972 form the basis of the remainder of the chapter. Three consultative bodies between 1972 and 1988 led to the formation of the first truly National Aboriginal Education Policy (NAEP) and these are discussed. This is followed by presentation of the basic tenets of the policy and the criticisms that have been levelled at it. Such criticisms led to reviews in the early 1990s. The reviews are considered in relation to the basic underlying themes of the portfolio.

Once the national policy was released the government abolished the last of the specific national advisory bodies related to Aboriginal education. Consultation

regarding the educational needs of Aboriginal people since is outlined, and this leads to a discussion of the contemporary situation and the need for change, which forms the final part of this chapter.

Early History of Aboriginal Australian Education

Colonial powers arrived with their concept of what education should include, whom it should be for and what results were expected. These concepts and definitions changed as colonial society evolved, but were still determined by the colonial/Eurocentric power brokers to suit the needs of the dominant society. Consequently traditional Aboriginal education was ignored within the parameters of cultural violence, which assumed all aspects of the dominant culture to be superior.

Little attention was paid to the rights of the colonised people of this country in the first century of 'settlement'. In the prevailing socio-political climate scientific racism was espoused by the majority, and used to justify taking land from Aboriginal inhabitants. There was little room within this for consideration that the 'primitive savages' had the same human rights as the colonisers. In the early years of colonisation, little consideration was given to providing any form of mainstream education to Aboriginal children, let alone a form that would be appropriate and would provide for equality in the developing colony. It should be recognised that this partly reflected the fact that education was not yet provided for all children.

Christie (1994:47) summarised the philosophical debate of the era related to whether the Aborigines were capable of civilisation. This debate was based on the prevailing notions of scientific racism. It is important to note, as Christie (1994:47-48) did, that this debate not only effected the question of the provision of education, but also was evident in attitudes adopted by settlers in relation to Aboriginal people and influenced how they were treated by the government and by broader colonial society. This was illustrated in the *Geelong Advertiser* where one writer argued that

> all measures taken with a view to the eventual civilisation of future generations are founded upon delusion.....That they are an inferior race of human beings it is vain to deny; and it is no more desirable that any inferior race should be perpetuated, than that the transmission of an hereditary disease such as scrofula or insanity, should be encouraged. (Geelong Advertiser 2 May, 1984, cited in Christie 1994:48)

McConnochie (1982:21) attributed the failure of Aboriginal people to embrace Christianity as part of the reason for the negative opinions formed about them. In his description of 'hard and soft religions' Galtung (1997-1998:439-411), asserted that adherents of hard religions, including Christianity, believe in a 'divine command' to proselytise, and that this missionary zeal justified exportation and repression of those who didn't follow the true religion. Adherence to the dominant faith, seen as part of civilisation, also assured a higher position in the vertical hierarchy of society. Within this culturally violent belief in the superiority of Christianity, the only reason the colonisers could assign to Aboriginal resistance to missionary efforts was that of stupidity. This interpretation was supported by Parbury (1999:67), who reported that Aboriginal rejection of Christianity was seen as evidence of degradation.

Christie (1994:47) described the debate over whether Aboriginal people could be civilised as an example of educational colonialism because of the underlying lack of recognition of an Aboriginal education system. Some attempts to provide education to Aboriginal children did occur. One early experiment was the establishment in 1814 of a school at Port Jackson. The intentions behind such experiments were described by Tripcony (2000:2) who stated that 'colonisers planned to use education as a controlling mechanism through which Aboriginal families would conform to British social mores'. The failure of the school was attributed to the fact that both elders and children were not supportive. The elders were concerned that Aboriginal values were being destroyed by the school, and the children recognised that the curriculum was not relevant to their needs (Lippmann 1981:138).

Another experiment was detailed by Christie (1994). He pointed out that in the late 1840s two young Aboriginal children came into the care of a schoolmaster at Merri Creek, in Victoria. The school in which these two young boys found themselves had been started in 1845 by two Baptist catechists and had inspired debate in the contemporary media. Although the school was seen to have some success and was supported by philanthropists, the broad colonial society was not enthusiastic. The *Geelong Advertiser*

> argued against the school's success on the grounds that the Aborigines would die out, [and] it also implied that any hope of "civilising" an "inferior race" was illusory. A few years earlier the *New South Wales Magazine* had printed a similar article arguing that it was futile to attempt the civilisation of Aborigines because apart from their natural predilection for the savage state, they were intellectually incapable of acquiring those skills necessary for a civilised way of life. (Christie 1994:8)

Supporters of the school did not accept the tenet of innate intellectual inferiority related to race. Their argument was based on the premise 'that there was no intrinsic impediment to civilising the blacks, and that it was only their "depraved habits and barbarous customs" that stood in the way' (Christie 1994:49). This view was further illustrated in the sentiments of the Protector of Aborigines in Adelaide who posited the argument that success in educating Aboriginal children would be promoted by removing the children from the influence of their parents and other adult community members (Rowley 1972:103). This culturally violent notion implied that imposition of the values of the settler society would resolve perceived problems.

Curriculum at the school was practically oriented, influenced by ideas from England concerning education of the 'Coloured Races of the British Colonies' (Christie 1994:49). Pronounced wisdom from far-distant England directed that any education should have practical application, and the inclusion of a garden and a model farm in the school and the development of educational activities based around the management of these complied with the colonial dictates. Parbury (1999:66) and McConnochie (1982:22) both pointed out that the education provided in such a model only equipped students to participate in the lowest levels of the workforce. This can be related to Pilisuk & Tennant's (1997) description of structural violence in societal institutions which denied people equal access to society's resources.

In his description of the theories of both the supporters and detractors of the experiment in 'educational colonialism' illustrated in the Merri Creek school, Christie raised arguments which would continue to plague Aboriginal education. Woven with the theoretical discussion was the case study of two young boys whose circumstances left them in the care and control of colonists. More emphasis was placed on the experience of Thomas Bungelene than that of his brother, who died quite young. Christie highlighted the fact that for Thomas, his education may have equipped him with skills to work in the white world of Melbourne, but the white world of Melbourne did not accept Bungelene as an equal. He found this situation difficult, as his ties with his own people had been severed and he had come to identify with the dominant society which would not allow him to be an equal member of it. Christie (1994:52) saw this as foreshadowing the trauma experienced by many Aboriginal people 'when they realised they had been prepared for a life in no man's land', after having been 'taken from their parents and schooled as whites'.

The inadequacy of educational provision for Aboriginal people has not only been evident in the experience of those removed from their families and communities. Misunderstandings and ethnocentrism illustrated in the Merri Creek 'experiment' became institutionalised. The belief that education based on European values and aspirations was the only appropriate form of education persisted, and the imbalance of power which prohibited Aboriginal input into educational theory and practice became an entrenched part of Australian society.

Under the policies of protection and segregation many Aboriginal people were forced onto government reserves and church missions. McConnochie (1982:23) asserted that this practice was based in institutional racism, as the laws that enabled it were specific to Aboriginal people. The institutions in which Aboriginal people were legally segregated maintained control over the lives of the residents. Little education was provided and that which was offered was normally more in the nature of training for menial jobs. The missionaries and 'their government counterparts on reserves concentrated their activities on training Aboriginal people to be good servants' (Eckermann 1998:305). Tripcony (2000:2) concurred when she described the training on the reserves as instruction in English language and literacy, based on the bible, and training in British social protocols; skills perceived as essential in equipping Aborigines to meet the settlers' demands for labour. McConnochie (1982) also agreed with this position when he highlighted the lack of qualifications and experience of the mission and reserve staff who were responsible for providing educational programs that fitted people for 'ill-paid seasonal work, and provided no possibility for movement out of this situation' (McConnochie 1982:22). Other writers have presented similar perceptions of under-education and asserted that it was deliberate. Parbury (1999:70) maintained that the creation of an 'underclass for the economic benefit of whites' was intentional. Eckermann (1998:305) concurred with the concept of 'deliberate under-education'. McConnochie (1982:23) asserted that education offered was designed to perpetuate the Aboriginal position at the lowest levels of society.

The situation in relation to education of Aboriginal children not on reserves and missions was no better. Lippmann (1981:138) pointed out that

> throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century Aborigines were excluded both legally and spatially from the society at large and were, therefore, exempt from the *Public Education Acts* of the 1870s and 1880s.

The 1880 New South Wales *Public Education Act* 'prescribed free, secular and compulsory education – for all children (Parbury 1999:68). Exemption of Aboriginal people from this act contributed to the creation and perpetuation of a situation where white parents could, and did, complain about the attendance of Aboriginal children in mainstream schools, and such complaints were responded to by exclusion of Aboriginal children (Lippmann 1981:138). Exclusion of children wishing to access the education system amounted to structural violence where the legitimate aspirations of the minority group were frustrated by the system and its structures. It was also an example of institutional racism because it represented laws that were only applied to Aborigines.

When assimilation replaced protection and segregation as the policy of state governments in 1951 'it was a policy in which schooling was to have a key role. Aborigines were to be encouraged to forgo their habits and traditions and be absorbed into ways of white Australians' (Connell 1993:436). In 1948 there was a review into the schooling offered Aborigines and a number of glaring deficiencies were identified. There were no Aboriginal teachers. No teachers had received training specific to teaching Aboriginal students. No adaptation had been made to the standard white syllabus. Large numbers of Aboriginal children did not attend school and very few of those who did progressed to secondary level. Mission schools still existed and these largely followed the doctrine from the previous century and placed emphasis on practical training for unskilled work (Connell 1993:38).

The assimilation period did see some attempts at improving educational provision for Aboriginal Australians. Developments in New South Wales were discussed by McConnochie (1982:23-25) as an example. He emphasised that the attempts at improvement were aligned strongly to the goal of assimilation. Two major developments were the provision of trained teachers and the movement of Aboriginal children to mainstream schools. Mainstreaming was however resisted by many in the community and as Parbury (1999:78) noted, Aboriginal children could still be excluded from schools in New South Wales at the discretion of the principal.

The failure of the assimilation policy to provide improved access for Aboriginal people to the resources of society such as employment and economic stability was becoming very evident by the early 1960s. Education as a tool of assimilation had failed and came under scrutiny. Superficially the goals of assimilation in education had been met. There were improvements in Aboriginal enrolments, and most primary age children enrolled in state schools and were taught by qualified teachers (McConnochie

1982:25-26). However improvement in secondary enrolments was less significant and pre-school and adult education provision had largely been ignored. The structural improvements had done little in terms of improving educational attainment for Aboriginal students: 'achievement levels were low, absenteeism was high, and Aborigines [sic] were dropping out of school with inadequate educational qualifications' (McConnochie 1982:26). The system perpetuated the positioning of Aboriginal Australians as an underclass.

Aboriginal cultures and power were eroded by western education systems and this erosion was not accompanied by the creation of access to the power and resources of the dominant culture (Keeffe 1992:6-7). This was illustrated by Keeffe's (1992:6) discussion of his time at Kowanyama, where education was perceived by the Aboriginal population as the 'key' to power, employment and economic stability. Unfortunately it was not found to open the doors. The situation was an example of systemic frustration which was defined by Eckermann et al (2006:64) as the denial of effective participation in the structures of society. Ena Chong (cited in Eckermann et al 2006:65) summarised systemic frustration quite succinctly with the analogy of the carrot and the donkey. In the Kowanyama situation the carrots of power, employment and economic stability, were held out to promote education participation, but the carrots were not subsequently available.

Numerous studies and reports were completed to attempt to explain the negative trends in Aboriginal education. The philosophy of scientific racism which had prevailed through most of Australia's colonial history continued to cast Aboriginal Australian people as less intelligent than the mainstream population. Deficit approaches to education were being developed across the world to explain the underachievement of various groups of people. As Eckermann (1998:305) has pointed out, the underlying racist beliefs about Aboriginal people' inferiority facilitated the adoption of deficit approaches to reform in Aboriginal education.

Deficit Theories of Education

Deficit theories in education can be described as a 'blame the victim' approach to explaining the failure of individuals or groups of students to attain educational results which are equitable with the results of mainstream students. Within the conceptualisation of those who adopt 'deficit' theory, students who fail to reach assessment benchmarks are seen to be lacking in the fundamental skills and attributes necessary to engage with the Eurocentric curriculum offerings of schools. Further, they are seen as unable to develop the skills and knowledge needed to successfully manage the assessment tasks which are an integral part of the curriculum (Parbury 1999:76-77).

Theories of deficit (Gale & Densmore 2002) describe perceived inadequacies in a number of areas: cognitive, cultural, social and linguistic. Aboriginal students are seen as lacking in one or more of these areas, and the role of education is to redress these deficits and provide the student with the wherewithal to 'achieve' in the manner dictated by the mainstream power brokers. Causes of these 'deficits' are variously described as the results of cultural difference, race, ethnicity and poverty.

The deficit model of education developed overseas in countries also attempting to redress the educational disadvantage experienced by minority groups (Eckermann 1998:305) and was adopted in Australia in the 1960s. This was an attempt to address issues related to Aboriginal education, because it had become part of the political agenda (McConnochie 1982:26; Eckermann 1998:305). Similar observations related to the origin of deficit theories had been made by McInerney (1991). He also raised the point that there were shortcomings in the adoption of 'theories, principles and measurement techniques based on American or western European research [which] were considered transferable across cultures' (McInerney 1991:154). Poor performance, assessed against these overseas models, came to be ascribed to student deficit in 'achievement motivation and other desirable traits' (McInerney 1991:154). Local historical impacts of colonial practices could be ignored.

Solorzano and Yosso (2001) asserted that deficit theories were based in racism. Race was described as 'a socially constructed category, created to differentiate racial groups and to show the superiority or dominance of one race over another' (Solorzano & Yosso 2001:4). Scientific racism, which equated race with culture, Eckermann et al 2006:9) justified the structural exclusion of some people from accessing the benefits of

society, such as education. Scrimgeour (2001:16) discussed the roots of deficit theories in 'traditions of cultural determinism [which she describes as] inherently racist'. Cultural determinism can be defined as 'the idea that it is culture that accounts for all differences and forms of behaviour in human groups, including learning styles, and educational success and/or failure' (Henry 2002:6).

Within this framework of racism, exclusion and cultural determinism it is possible to identify 'two traditions of deficit thinking – genetic and cultural deficit models' (Solorzano & Yosso 2001:1). This categorisation is succinctly described by Valencia (1998: ix) who states that

> the deficit paradigm posits that students fail in school because of alleged internal deficits (such as cognitive and/or motivational limitations) or shortcomings socially linked to the youngster – such as familial deficits and dysfunctions.

Gale and Densmore (2002:7) discuss the discourse of deficit as a form of 'exclusive social relations', which could be seen as a feature of colonial societies. They make a distinction between the exclusionary discourse of deficit and that of disadvantage, which is useful and in some ways parallels the genetic/cultural deficit description. Deficit is described as the perception that school performance is influenced totally by genetic differences in intelligence (Gale and Densmore 2002:8). In this scenario the school can make no difference to the outcomes for students because the environment cannot override genetics. The discourse of disadvantage, on the other hand, focuses on the effects of group membership, proposing that 'students from non-dominant groups [are seen as] deprived, lacking in motivation, stimulation, proper values and discipline for success in school' (Gale & Densmore 2002:12). This is similar to the description of cultural deficit provided by Solorzano and Yosso (2001:6) which focuses on the cultural and home backgrounds of the students. The two discourses, deficit and disadvantage, are linked in that both perceive students as being 'without some quality [innate or environmental] important for academic achievement' (Gale & Densmore 2002:13-14).

Theories of deficit led to the introduction of compensatory education programs (Lippmann 1981:139; McConnochie 1982:26). Lippmann (1981:139) related the new policy direction of integration to the adoption of

> remedial and compensatory education programmes to make up for what was seen as the 'disadvantage' of not having been born white and therefore not slotting readily into white-style institutions.

Integration could be encouraged through education designed to overcome perceived disadvantage of group membership.

An emphasis on early childhood education as a way to provide timely compensatory education developed. The early childhood education teacher's role was to facilitate students' adoption of 'white middle to upper class values' (Fleer 2004:52). This view was clearly illustrated by Dexter (1971 quoted in Fleer 2004:53) who believed that research into pedagogy was needed. However, the necessary research was perceived as that which would give teachers the tools to rescue Aboriginal children from the 'bondage of their background'. This approach focussed on the replacement of cultural responses which were regarded as inadequate and was in effect a tool for assimilation of Aboriginal students (Partington 2002:3).

The presupposition that the existing decisions related to curriculum and assessment were the only valid ones was innately assimiliationist. These decisions were embedded in the structural and cultural dominance of the majority. The task of Aboriginal students was to absorb and conform to the dominant white values in order to be able to function within and to the advantage of the colonial society. Thus McConnochie (1982:26) that;

> Developments in Aboriginal education over the period of 1966-1972 were generally designed to improve the contribution of education to the process of assimilating Aborigines. In this education programmes were in line with official policy....Aborigines were still expected to modify their behaviour, values and skills, and become acceptable to white society as a pre-requisite to entering the general community.

The concept of cultural deficit and the discourse of disadvantage suggest that educational disadvantage can be blamed on 'the poor and intellectually unstimulating environment of these children' (McConnochie 1982:22). He expands the discussion, describing the definition of the Aboriginal 'problem' as being couched in terms of the 'inadequacies of the minority population [and that these have been defined] in terms of cultural deprivation, language deficit [and] experiential deficit' (McConnochie 1982:27). Consequently Nakata (1995:68) points out that 'if the experts have named it, then we lack it. We have at various times, lacked intellect, language and education'.

Cultural violence, exhibited in the paternalistic policy of protection and in the assimilation policy, is perpetuated further in education theories of deficit and need for compensatory education. Scrimgeour (2001:215-219) suggests that barriers to reform in Aboriginal Education constitute 'system constraints'. She proposes that deficit theories

are 'an ideological constraint which effectively concentrates on what students do not know, and reduces opportunities for building onto existing linguistic and cultural knowledge bases' (Scrimgeour 2001:217).

Little discussion seems to have occurred within the discourse of deficit about the influence of structural violence and institutional racism in Australian political and societal systems which have contributed to marginalisation, poverty and the so-called social deficit. Consequently McInerney (1991) points out that emphasis on deficit allows attention to be drawn away from 'the one major element in the under-achievement of minority children – namely, those inadequacies within the education system itself that failed to take account of the particular needs of minority children' (McInerney 1991:154). Consequently 'the need for major alteration in the organisational structure or policies in schools' (McInerney 1991:154) can then be ignored and attention focussed on the assimiliationist practices of compensatory education.

Recognition of problems with deficit theories and earlier approaches contributed to the development of consultative processes in Aboriginal education. Successive national consultative bodies were established to elicit Aboriginal input into policy development.

Consultation, Reviews and Policies post 1972

Context and introduction

In the lead up to the 1972 Federal election education had become an issue. Schools were perceived as being in crisis and the role of the Federal government in solving this crisis was subject to debate (Schwab 1995:3). Promoted as a critical aspect of the education debate, was the choice between policies of uniform or differential allocation of resources. Uniform distribution of resources was grounded in the notion of 'individual educational advancement based on the principle of merit' (Schwab 1995:3). The alternative approach was to allocate resources 'based on need underlined by the principle of a fair go for all' (Schwab 1995:3). This debate reflected the evolving

discourses of social justice as discussed in Chapter 1, and was very pertinent to the evolution of Aboriginal education policy.

One of the early initiatives of the Whitlam government was the convening of the 'Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission', chaired by Peter Karmel (Schwab 1995; Christiansen and Lilley 1997/98:1). As Christiansen and Lilley (1997/98:1) pointed out, the terms of reference of the committee did not facilitate an extensive exploration of issues related to Aboriginal education. However, the report did make two recommendations in relation to Aboriginal education. The first of these identified the need for a specific investigation (Karmel 1973:4). The second highlighted the need for co-ordinated national approaches (Karmel 1973:106).

Schwab (1995:1) states that developments in Aboriginal education policy have occurred mainly as the result of national reviews, rather than 'as a result of breakthroughs in local educational practice or evaluation of programs in the field'. He further asserts that although a cynical perception of reviews suggests that they are merely a political tool which allows the government to demonstrate concern, this is not the case in Aboriginal education where 'reviews have been significant and powerful tools for steering Indigenous education policy in Australia' (Schwab 1995:1). As a result of the recommendations of the Karmel Report, an Aboriginal Consultative Group (NACG) was established in 1974.

National Aboriginal Consultative Group (NACG)

Budby (1981:99) maintained that the formation of the NACG was the first time that a significant attempt had been made to consult with Aboriginal people in relation to their educational needs and aspirations. Schwab (1995:5) acknowledged it as 'a landmark in Australian education policy'. Recognition of the need for consultation with and involvement of Aboriginal Australians in analysing educational needs was an important policy direction and the recommendations of the consultative groups have to an extent been instrumental in the development of specific policies

The National Aboriginal Consultative Group (NACG) was comprised solely of Aboriginal people who represented each state and territory (Budby 1981:99) and in this way was an attempt to recognise the diversity that exists in Aboriginal Australia. It was established with specific terms of reference. These included presenting the Schools Commission with Aboriginal viewpoints on:

- ' present policies and educational provision in respect to Aborigines;
- present patterns of administering funds for the education of Aborigines;
- specific matters the Group feel are of importance in respect to the education of Aborigines' (Schwab 1995:5).

The historical significance of the NACG has been described in a number of different ways. Recommendations for the first time actually had what Christensen & Lilley (1997/98:1-2) referred to as 'any clout at national level'. Further 'the recommendations of this group have provided a blueprint for the development of Aboriginal education over the subsequent quarter of a century' (Partington 2002:6). Budby offered two additional factors in his discussion of the legacy of the NACG. One was the influence it exercised in setting up state based Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups in Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales (Budby 1981:99). The second was that the NACG became an important influence in the establishment of the NAEC (Budby 1981:99).

National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC)

The NAEC, established in 1978, had a similar membership to the NACG (Budby 1981:99). One full time chair and eighteen part time members (Bin-Sallik & Smallacombe 2003:16) were appointed to carry out the NAEC charter. This differed in some aspects from that of the NACG.

The advisory role continued. However, additional roles assigned to the NAEC included assistance to the DAA in monitoring programs, conduct of investigations and development of programs and policies (Schwab 1995:5; Bin-Sallik & Smallacombe 2003:16). Its role also included the co-ordination of advice from state AECGs for presentation to the commonwealth government and in this way it became influential in the eventual development of a national education policy (Schwab 1995:5). Another difference between the two bodies was that the NACG had reported to the Schools Commission as a branch of the Minister of Education's portfolio, whereas the NAEC reported directly to the Minister and his Department (Budby 1981:99).

No literature has been located that describes or discusses any difficulties faced by the NAEC in its dealings with the government. The possible reason for this is outlined

in personal communication with Paul Hughes (14/06/05). Paul, once chair of the NAEC, had the following to say:

> As for finding 'commentary on the way in which it functioned and the difficulties faced as a government sponsored advisory body - Or issues such as systemic frustration and the continuation of colonial power imbalances' - you will not find any.
>
> This is because none of us involved then or now had any such problems. we chose to work with the minister and government, and all of our day to day work was with other education authorities at state and territory level. As such we were integrally involved at both operational and ministerial level, and did not have the same problems as the other more political and separatist bodies.
>
> Whilst we had our fights with authorities they were not major, nor did they become intractable situations that could not be resolved together over time and consultation.
>
> We only lasted 12 years - so if we had gone on maybe we might have got into very major public fights???

Budby (1981:99) pointed out that the NAEC members were chosen and 'appointed by the Minister of Eduction in consultation with the Prime Minister and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs'. This could be seen as a structural limitation on the effectiveness of the committee. As Yunupingu (1994:12) commented, the independence of the consultative groups and their capacity to offer unsolicited advice could be jeopardised when members were chosen by the bureaucracy rather than elected by a constituent base. In April 1988 the NAEC was replaced by the Aboriginal Education Policy Taskforce, chaired by Paul Hughes

Aboriginal Education Policy Taskforce

Establishment of the Taskforce was partly a response to the release of the 1987 Aboriginal Employment Development Policy- commonly referred to as the Miller report - which had drawn clear links between education and employment opportunities. As Schwab (1995:6) highlighted, there was an undeniable link between equality in education and equality in employment and consequently income. This link between education and employment was illustrated by the fact that employment rates for Aboriginal people with tertiary qualifications were comparable with those of non-Aboriginal with similar qualifications (Senate 2000:23).

The Task Force charter was to 'advise the Ministers on all aspects of Aboriginal education in Australia, assess the findings of recent research and policy reports, and

prepare priorities for the funding of existing programs and new initiatives' (Hughes 1988:3). Central to the recommendations of the Hughes report was the need for a co-ordinated national policy related to Aboriginal education (Schwab 1995:11; Senate 2000:23). This recommendation, already flagged by Karmel (1973:106), was accepted by the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments. Proposed co-ordinated policy development was announced in October 1988, and the national policy was released one year later (DEET 1989:7).

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP)

The decision to develop 'a national policy rather than a Commonwealth policy' (Robinson and Bamblett 1989:7) was important. Co-ordination between the States and Territories was a crucial advance because it was the first time that national goals for Aboriginal education were identified and supported by all States and Territories. (Schwab 1995:7). The authors of the National policy noted the previous lack of co-ordination in relation to policies and programs (DEET 1989:6) as one of the problems contributing to the poor situation in Aboriginal Education, and suggested one way forward was the introduction of long term strategies developed co-operatively between States and Territories (DEET 1989:6).

The policy document states that its aim is 'to develop more effective processes for the education of Aboriginal people' (DEET1989: 5). Response to Aboriginal needs and aspirations, the promotion of educational equity and the development of a concerted approach are described as the purposes of the policy (DEET1989: 9-12). Common goals related to Aboriginal education principles, long term goals[12] and intermediate priorities are presented (DEET1989: 13-16). Arrangements for the implementation of the policy form the conclusion of the document (DEET 1989:17-19).

Consultation with Aboriginal people as part of the policy development process occurred at two levels. A reference group[13] was set up which mirrored the broader state and territory co-ordination and it included representatives from all State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (DEET 1989:8). The policy development

[12] These are attached in appendix 1.
[13] The reference group was temporary. It was set up for the purposes of policy development, not as a replacement for the NAEC.

process included consultation with Aboriginal community representatives (DEET 1989:8).

Reservations can however be expressed in relation to Aboriginal involvement with the policy development and adoption. 'The Joint Policy does not reflect an equal partnership between governments and Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders – Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders are not signatories to the document' (Yunupingu 1994:6). A number of other criticisms have been levelled at the Joint Policy. It cannot be denied that since the introduction of the NATSIEP, and its associated supplementary funding that educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have improved across all sectors of education (Tripcony 2000:5), but the critics should be heard.

A major emphasis of the NATSIEP was promotion of educational equity. This equity was to include access and participation across all sectors of education (DEET 1989:9). Emphasis on access to and participation in mainstream education had been criticised by some as 'assimiliationist' (Yunupingu 1994:6). Walker (2004:44) concurred when she stated that discourse centred on notions of 'equality of opportunity have been perceived by many Aboriginal stakeholders as little more than further attempts to assimilate and control'. The policy could have offered support for the development of alternative models of schooling to suit different communities, and control of curriculum should have been devolved to Aboriginal people in communities (Coombs 1974 cited in Scrimgeour 2001:239). Similar criticism was levelled by Bin-Sallik et al (1994:9) concerning the policy's silence in relation to support for 'alternative and community controlled education initiatives'. Educational choices were reduced by the apparent support for mainstream approaches to Aboriginal education in the Joint Policy (Coombs 1994 cited in Scrimgeour 2001:239).

The policy has also been criticised for its emphasis on statistical measures related to access, participation, retention and outcomes without direction about operationalising measures to increase these statistics. There was little mention of the critical issue of Aboriginalising the curriculum even though goals 20 and 21 referred to the need to increase awareness and appreciation of and respect for traditional and contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures (DEET 1989:15). However the need to review and revise curriculum that had been based on what John Pilger (1989:2) referred to as 'imperial propriety' was not specifically mentioned. Further the

need to include Aboriginal history and perspectives in curriculum was not specifically spelt out.

A review of literature and research related to the NATSIEP noted that most writers were concerned with the content and language of the policy (Bin-Sallik et al 1994:7). Nakata (1995) analysed the policy from his position as a Torres Strait Islander[14] and expressed concerns with the language in the policy. Nakata (1995:40) stated that he was not 'speaking on behalf of the Aboriginal people'. However his critique should be considered as it reflected some broad general concerns raised in relation to the language used by the policy writers.

Nakata (1995) pointed out that educational theory and literature emphasised the 'otherness' of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and concentrated on the 'exotic experiences, habits, languages, economies and culture', and that this emphasis on 'otherness' continued in the NATSIEP (Nakata 1995:43). Emphasis on simple recognition of cultural difference could not guarantee the inclusion of 'the other' because 'patronising, condescending and racist interactions can still continue' (Nakata 1995:47). Spotlighting the cultural aspect of educational disadvantage in the Joint Policy allowed the need for institutional reform to be ignored, and for the mainstream practices in education which contributed to the disparity in outcomes to remain unchanged (Nakata 1995:48). In other words emphasis on cultural aspects of educational disadvantage marginalised discussion of structural or systemic factors which contributed to disadvantage. Walker (2004:44) summed up the problem that this approach emphasised what Aboriginal people lacked culturally, and this lack was defined by the dominant colonising culture.

Further criticism of the way in which the language of the policy positions Aboriginal people was levelled by a number of other writers. Bin- Sallik et al. (1994:8) summarised some, and pointed out that criticism occurred because the policy was seen to ignore the cultural vitality of Aboriginal people who have actively resisted oppression and were

> 'creators of changing cultures. Instead, the critics say, the policy perpetuates the view of 'Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders as victims of racist oppression and cultural alienation...hankering for some state of static "noble savage" type culture and needing protection from forces causing the erosion' (Bin-Sallik et al. 1994:8).

[14] It is important to recognise that Torres Strait Islanders are a distinct group of people and that there is also diversity amongst Australian Aboriginal people.

This view was also described as paternalistic by Bin-Sallik et al (1994:8).

I would argue that ignoring cultural vitality and thereby invalidating changing Aboriginal cultures could also be seen as a form of cultural violence which alienates Aboriginal people from mainstream educational institutions. If changing cultures are not recognised then they are excluded from the dialogue about inclusion.

A final criticism of the Joint Policy relates to its emphasis on involvement of Aboriginal people in consultative ways. This is seen by some as being a watering down of the 'commitment to self-determination of the 1988 Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force Report' (Yunupingu 1994:6). The Joint Policy remains the overarching policy in relation to Aboriginal education. Its twenty one goals still feature on the DEST website as the focus of Aboriginal education. In Katu Kalpa (Senate 2000:37) it is pointed out that considerable consensus exists in relation to the aims of the NATSIEP and the 'durability' of the policy is attributed to the fact that it was actually legislated. Robinson and Bamblett (1998:10) also discussed the legislation of the Joint Policy noting the bi-partisan support and the fact that the policy persists because it is an Act of Parliament.

Reviews in the 1990s of Policy Development

In 1993 a review of the NATSIEP was announced and a reference group set up (Schwab 1995:7). Yunupingu (1994:1), in the introduction to the report, pointed out that in the spirit of the NATSIEP the review occurred with Commonwealth, State and Territory governments' co-operation. To support the review process Bin-Sallik, Blomely, Flowers and Hughes (1994) conducted a literature review of publications related to the Joint Policy.

McConaghy (1997) was critical of both the Bin-Sallik et al. review and Yunupingu's Report. She was particularly concerned with the failure of both to adequately address the concerns raised by Nakata in his 1991 thesis (McConaghy 1997:128), concerns which Nakata re-iterated in his 1995 journal publication. One of Nakata's criticisms related to the way in which Torres Strait Islanders were represented in the policy. This was drawn to the attention of the Review committee but only included in the Report in a much simplified form as 'a need to watch our language and recognise diversity when talking abut Indigenous people' (McConaghy 1997:128). Other important criticisms were seen to be ignored by the Review. These included 'issues of representation, the need to more adequately conceptualise race, the authority

bases of discursive production and the technologies of classification and naming used in the policy' (McConaghy 1997:128). Despite the criticisms the review team saw many positives in the Joint Policy, and recommended that 'all Australian governments reaffirm their commitment to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy' (Yunupingu 1994:7).

In response to the review MCEETYA appointed an Aboriginal taskforce which developed the *National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People 1996-2002.* The strategy linked the goals of the NATSIEP to the recommendations of the review and identified eight areas of priority in Aboriginal education. These eight priority areas are:

> 1. to establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in educational decision-making
> 2. to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed in education and training;
> 3. to ensure equitable access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to education and training services;
> 4. to ensure participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in education and training;
> 5. to ensure equitable and appropriate educational achievement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
> 6. to promote, maintain and support the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies, cultures and languages to all Indigenous and non-Indigenous students; and
> 7. to provide community development training services including proficiency in English literacy and numeracy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults.
>
> An eighth priority is:
>
> to improve NATSIEP implementation, evaluation and resourcing arrangements. (MCEETYA 1995:8).

In presenting outcomes and strategies in each of the eight priority areas the authors of the document linked these to the relevant goals of the Joint Policy. The strategy to an extent addressed the criticism that the original policy did not provide any direction on how to operationalise the goals. It did not however consider the other criticism levelled at the NATSIEP and stated that it presented 'the core actions that need national agreement to advance significantly the aims and goals for the NATSIEP across Australia by the year 2002' (MCEETYA 1995:8).

Schwab (1995) also conducted an analysis of policy developments. He analysed reviews across a twenty year period and defined categories into which individual recommendations of reviews could be slotted. An important observation Schwab (1995:9) made was that in the 20 year period of recommendations he reviewed none of the identified needs appeared to have been addressed sufficiently. This was evident in the fact that the needs identified in the 1975 NACG review were all still identified in the 1995 National Review of Education. When I have talked with Aboriginal education workers I have found that a common theme was the frustration experienced when the same issues recurred again and again with little apparent progress towards resolution.

Four areas of concern can be identified in the 1975 review. These are:

- 'Involvement, appointment and training of Aboriginal administrators and decision makers;
- Strategies to increase the number of Aborigines in the education professions and technical trades;
- Educational needs of Aboriginal children;
- Needs of those who lack opportunities in education' (Schwab, 1995:8).

The NACG made some specific recommendations related to implementing these broad goals. These included a call for recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, the introduction of Aboriginal studies and 'development of special curriculum for schools with high percentages of Aboriginal children' (Schwab 1995:13). All these themes recurred in Yunupingu's review of nearly 20 years later (Schwab 1995:8-17).

Structural and cultural violence can be identified as contributing to the some of the identified needs. Aboriginal people have been kept out of the professional decision making by the structural and cultural barriers which have prevented them from achieving the success in the mainstream education system, and subsequently to access to the decision making positions. Lack of significant improvements in Aboriginal educational attainment in the years since the Joint Policy was released, despite averred commitment by governments, is evidence of the continuing role of structural violence.

Consultative mechanisms post NATSIEP release

The NAEC was disbanded prior to the release of the NATSIEP and since then there has been no national Aboriginal education consultative body. A literature search was unable to locate any reports or analysis of national AECGs since the task force finished its work. Personal communication with the chair of the QIECB, Dr Penny Tripcony (26-08-06), confirmed this situation.

National level advice was instead provided by MCEETYA which had been established in 1993 by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). It was formed by amalgamating a number of existing ministerial bodies in order to optimize co-ordination of education policy (MCEETYA ud: 1). The work of the council is supported by taskforces created for specific purposes when a need is identified (MCEETYA ud: 2), and at various times Aboriginal task forces have been appointed.

One recommendation of the National Review of the NATSIEP was for the creation of a 'new national and independent body to oversee education for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders' (Yunupingu 1994:10). This recommendation was included in the *National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People 1996-2002* (MCEETYA 1995:10). The *Katu Kalpa* report (Senate 2000:41) also recommended 'the appointment of an independent national consultative body to advise MCEETYA on Aboriginal education needs and policy'.

The government however did not support the recommendations of the NATSIEP Review, the MCEETYA strategy or the Senate committee. In outlining the reasons for the lack of support for the senate recommendation it was stated that the MCEETYA Taskforce on Aboriginal education, established in April 1999, was all that was needed to provide the necessary advice on achieving equitable outcomes for Aboriginal students (Commonwealth Government 2001:7).

Contemporary situation and the need for change

In 2004 Mellor and Corrigan released a review of Aboriginal education policies and outcomes through the Australian Council for Education Research (ACER). In their report they criticized contemporary approaches to Aboriginal Education on a number of grounds.

In opening their discussion they point out that disadvantage continues, equitable outcomes are still not achieved, and significant funding has not removed the gap in primary Standard Australian English literacy and numeracy rates between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people (Mellor & Corrigan 2004:1-2). Zubrick et al (2006:iv) concur when they assert that it is crucial to face the reality that all the reviews, strategies and policies of the past thirty years have failed to improve the outcomes of education for Aboriginal people, and that the failure has marginalised three generations of Aboriginal people in the areas of life long learning, employment and economic opportunity.

Further, Mellor and Corrigan (2004:4) asserted that the 'underlying structures and conceptual frameworks may have changed [but] the actual means of tackling Aboriginal education proposed by governments have remained the same'. These methods have included:

- culturally appropriate pedagogy,
- inclusive curriculum and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies,
- raising attendance rates,
- encouraging parental participation, and
- increasing both the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and other education workers. (Mellor & Corrigan 2004:4)

Paul Hughes, in the foreword to the report, asserted that emphasis on curriculum and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers is simply not enough (Mellor & Corrigan 2004:ii).

The NATSIEP has continued to be the national policy despite being in place since 1989. (Mellor & Corrigan 2004:4). Ten years after the NATSIEP was released the Adelaide Declaration of the *National Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century* (MCEETYA 1999). The full document is attached in appendix 2. Briefly it emphasised a socially just education which would fully develop the capacities of all students. These goals are consistent with those released ten years previously in the NATSIEP (Zubrick et al 2006:43)

Although the NATSIEP has continued to dominate Aboriginal education there have been some changes. Mellor and Corrigan (2004:4-5) pointed out that 'policy initiatives have become less nebulous and more targeted'. Targets have been created in programs such as the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program (IESIP), the

Indigenous Education Direct Assistance Programs (IEDA) and the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NIELNS).

IESIP delivers extra funding to education providers to cater for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Five areas have been identified for this supplementary funding. These are

- 'improving (English) literacy,
- improving numeracy,
- improving education outcomes for Indigenous students,
- increasing Indigenous enrolments ,and
- increasing Indigenous presence, involvement and influence in education'. (Commonwealth of Australia 2002 cited in Mellor & Corrigan 2004:5)

These priorities can not be seen as independent of each other, but the relationship between them has not been the subject of significant research (Mellor & Corrigan 2004:5). A further criticism of the IESIP relates to the flexibility of programs meant to improve literacy, numeracy and attendance. This flexibility has been accused of allowing providers to devise programs with limited targets, which therefore limits the chances of program failure and subsequent funding implications (Mellor & Corrigan 2004:5-6).

Criticism of research and policy making has been leveled by Mellor & Corrigan (2004:2-3) in relation to the aggregation of data collected by the Commonwealth and made available to researchers. The data are presented as national data and do not recognise the differences between urban, regional and remote areas. Reasons for the anecdotally reported differences between geographical regions can not be analysed when data are aggregated. Zubrick (2006:48) also suggest that data are presented in a way that hides persistent problems. For instance presentation of improved participation rates for primary children based on enrolments, masks issues with attendance and factors underlying poor attendance.

Further criticism of contemporary approaches relates to the manner in which research concerning Aboriginal Education isolates Aboriginal issues from mainstream research. Mellor & Corrigan (2004:16) assert that the wider discourses concerning Education, Educational Psychology and Developmental Psychology have much to offer. They continue to argue that there is a need to distinguish between those theories and principles which apply to all children, and those which are specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. In particular they contend that identifying factors which

contribute to educational success for mainstream students could provide a useful perspective for considering the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (Mellor & Corrigan 2004:17). Research specific to Aboriginal education is also seen to place an emphasis on the situation of students in remote and community schools. This means that the needs of the many Aboriginal students in urban schools are neglected (Mellor & Corrigan 2004:17). The Australian Education Union's Darcel Moyle expresses similar concerns. She states that changes in resource allocation, resulting from research results, may disadvantage Aboriginal students in urban and rural schools. Many of these students are receiving benefits from programs operating in cities and country towns, but these programs could be at risk if funding is cut (cited in Packer 2005:46).

A recent development in national level consultation has occurred in 2005 and 2006. Regular meetings of the chairs of State Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies (IECBs) are now convened. This is a move initiated by DEST (Personal communication, Dr. P Tripcony).

The chairs of the state IECBs were among community advisors to the recently released document *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008* (MCEETYA 2006). Improving outcomes remains the top priority (MCEETYA 2006: ii)

Although deficit theories which attribute student failure to their inferiority are now discredited, the impact of these theories lingers. Stewart (1999:31) asserts that 'low teacher expectations of a student's potential' persist as a form of racism in the classroom. This theoretical base has underpinned past policies and new policy directions need to value the 'cultural, linguistic and social capital these Indigenous students bring to the classroom' (MCEETYA 2006:4).

MCEETYA (2006:4) suggests a paradigm shift that moves the focus to 'developing schools and systems that have the capacity to engage all students in learning'. Engagement is defined as 'a construct involving three dimensions: behavioral (involvement); affective (personal attachment to others, such as teachers and classmates); and cognitive (application to learning)' (MCEETYA 2006:4). An important recommendation is for a review and update of the NATSIEP (MCEETYA 2006:13). Hopefully this would take into account the criticisms leveled at the policy.

For too many years there has been a covert, and at times overt, acceptance that change is too difficult and will only occur over a very long period of time. Zubrick et al

(2006: vi) state that this viewpoint must be discarded, that a new belief, that Aboriginal people can all reach their full potential, must be embraced.

The urgency of adopting this change is succinctly expressed in the following statement.

> There is a growing demand for an educated, more highly trained and more technically skilled workforce. However, most Aboriginal workers are at the lower, shrinking end of the employment market and are becoming part of the growing underclass. These [economic] structural changes will require highly skilled and well informed people who will address the needs of large corporations and Governments. Education systems and training providers will have to provide skills requited for the workforce. (Zubrick et al 2006:viii)

Those who the education system fails will continue to be marginalised from the opportunities which will flow to Australians from increased involvement in international market participation and technological development.

Conclusion

Education provision by colonial administrators has gone through a series of changes since the 1800s. This has been particularly marked in the provision of education for Aboriginal Australians. Almost complete structural exclusion, based on scientific racism and cultural violence, grounded in assumptions of the innate superiority of the dominant colonial culture, have gradually been replaced by policies which were seen in their time as being more enlightened. The educational gulf has not been eliminated and a new approach is needed.

In the next chapter Aboriginal involvement with the higher education sector will be considered. It is possible that increasing participation at this level may provide an opportunity for the development of new approaches to all sectors of education.

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Appendix 1: Long Term Goals of the NATSIEP

1. To establish effective arrangement for the particular of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of pre-school, primary and secondary education services for their children.
2. To increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed as educational administrators, teachers, curriculum advisers, teacher assistants, home-school liaison officers and other education workers, including community people engaged in teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, history and contemporary society, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.
3. To establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of post-school education services, including technical and further education colleges and higher education institutions.
4. To increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people(s) employed as administrators, teachers, researchers and student services officers at TAFE colleges and higher education institutions.
5. To provide education and training services to develop the skills of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people(s) to participate in educational decision making.
6. To develop arrangements for the provision of independent advice from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities regarding educational decisions at State, Territory and National levels.
7. To ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children of pre-primary age have access to pre-school services on a basis comparable to that available to other Australian children of the same age.
8. To ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have access to primary and secondary schooling.
9. To ensure equitable access of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to post-compulsory secondary schooling, to technical and further education, and to higher education.
10. To achieve the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in pre-school education for a period similar to that for all Australian children.
11. To achieve the participation of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in compulsory schooling.
12. To achieve the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people in post-compulsory secondary education, in technical and further education, and in higher education, at rates commensurate with those of all Australians in those sectors.
13. To provide adequate preparation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children through pre-school education for the schooling years ahead.
14. To enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander students to attain skills to the same standard as other Australian students throughout the compulsory schooling years.
15. To enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to attain the successful completion of Year 12 or equivalent at the same rates as for other Australian students.
16. To enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to attain the same graduation rates from award courses in technical and further education, and in higher education, as for other Australians.

17. To develop programs to support the maintenance and continued use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.
18. To provide community education services which enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people to develop the skills to manage the development of their communities.
19. To enable the attainment of proficiency in English language and numeracy competencies by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults with limited or no educational experience.
20. To enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at all levels of education to have an appreciation of their history, cultures and identity.
21. To provide all Australian students with an understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditional and contemporary cultures.

Appendix 2

Adelaide Declaration on Inclusive Schooling for the 21st Century

1. Schooling should develop fully the talents and capacities of all students. In particular, when students leave schools they should:
1.1 have the capacity for, and skills in, analysis and problem solving and the ability to communicate ideas and information, to plan and organise activities and to collaborate with others
1.2 have qualities of self-confidence, optimism, high self-esteem, and a commitment to personal excellence as a basis for their potential life roles as family, community and workforce members
1.3 have the capacity to exercise judgement and responsibility in matters of morality, ethics and social justice, and the capacity to make sense of their world, to think about how things got to be the way they are, to make rational and informed decisions about their own lives and to accept responsibility for their own actions
1.4 be active and informed citizens with an understanding and appreciation of Australia's system of government and civic life
1.5 have employment related skills and an understanding of the work environment, career options and pathways as a foundation for, and positive attitudes towards, vocational education and training, further education, employment and life-long learning
1.6 be confident, creative and productive users of new technologies, particularly information and communication technologies, and understand the impact of those technologies on society
1.7 have an understanding of, and concern for, stewardship of the natural environment, and the knowledge and skills to contribute to ecologically sustainable development
1.8 have the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to establish and maintain a healthy lifestyle, and for the creative and satisfying use of leisure time.

2. In terms of curriculum, students should have:
2.1 attained high standards of knowledge, skills and understanding through a comprehensive and balanced curriculum in the compulsory years of schooling encompassing the agreed eight key learning areas:
the arts;
English;
health and physical education;
languages other than English;
mathematics;
science;
studies of society and environment;
technology;
and the interrelationships between them
2.2 attained the skills of numeracy and English literacy; such that, every student should be numerate, able to read, write, spell and communicate at an appropriate level
2.3 participated in programs of vocational learning during the compulsory years and have had access to vocational education and training programs as part of their senior secondary studies
2.4 participated in programs and activities which foster and develop enterprise skills, including those skills which will allow them maximum flexibility and adaptability in the future.

3. Schooling should be socially just, so that:
3.1 students' outcomes from schooling are free from the effects of negative forms of discrimination based on sex, language, culture and ethnicity, religion or disability; and of differences arising from students' socio-economic background or geographic location
3.2 the learning outcomes of educationally disadvantaged students improve and, over time, match those of other students
3.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have equitable access to, and opportunities in, schooling so that their learning outcomes improve and, over time, match those of other students
3.4 all students understand and acknowledge the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures to Australian society and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to and benefit from, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians
3.5 all students understand and acknowledge the value of cultural and linguistic diversity, and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, such diversity in the Australian community and internationally
3.6 all students have access to the high quality education necessary to enable the completion of school education to Year 12 or its vocational equivalent and that provides clear and recognised pathways to employment and further education and training.

CHAPTER 6
HIGHER EDUCATION AND ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIANS

Context and introduction

Aboriginal people participating in, or wishing to participate in, higher education have faced many of the issues identified in the general discussion of Aboriginal education in Australia. However, the arena of higher education also has a number of specific features or issues. In this chapter some aspects of Aboriginal higher education will be presented within the context of structural violence, cultural violence and continued assimiliationist policies, which may have contributed to low participation rates for Aboriginal students in Australian universities.

A brief discussion of the statistics will contribute to understanding of the historical background. This will include an exploration of the nature of courses undertaken by Aboriginal people; the level of awards, the area of study and the age at which Aboriginal people undertake higher education. An outline of some of the barriers faced by Aboriginal people in accessing and participating in higher education arena will follow the presentation of statistical information. Some of the issues discussed as barriers also affect non-Aboriginal students. However for Aboriginal students, they add extra complexity to the issues they must overcome.

Development of equity policies in higher education paralleled that of social justice policies and principles in the broad field of Aboriginal education. Ramsay (1999) posits that there are three distinct policy periods in the field of equity in higher education from the early 1980s to 1999. She states that the first, from the mid 1980s till the mid 1990s, saw the introduction of the national equity policy put into place by the Labor government. The second brief period commenced in mid 1995 and was the result of a government review of progress and an evolution of the first period. It is asserted that the third period, late 1996 to 1999, was marked by changes which threatened to reverse the progress made in the earlier periods (Ramsay 1999:173-174). Discussion of these policy eras follows the discussion of the barriers to Aboriginal participation in higher education which the equity policy was designed to ameliorate.

Since 1999, when Ramsay defined and discussed three policy eras, a number of other changes have occurred. Two of these are particularly notable. The first of these has been the changes in the guidelines related to Abstudy which are part of the Howard government's policy of mainstreaming. The rationale behind this and its impact on Aboriginal higher education participation will be presented. A second significant development has been the changes in direction illustrated in the discussion paper, *Achieving Equitable and Appropriate Outcomes: Indigenous Australians in Higher Education* (DEST 2002), which will be included in the discussion.

The introduction of enclaves in some higher education institutions in the 1970s was important in facilitating the increase in higher education participation by Aboriginal Australians. The original role of enclaves has evolved over the decades and the numbers have increased significantly. How the system of support for Aboriginal university students has developed and contributed to change will form the next section of the portfolio. The application of Cultural Safety principles will be raised, and discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

A number of initiatives intended to promote equity for Aboriginal people have been undertaken by higher education institutions. Inclusion of Aboriginal curriculum, promotion of Aboriginal research and an increase in the number of Aboriginal staff are three of these and they will form the basis of the rest of this chapter.

Statistics

Various statistics are available in relation to participation of people in higher education. Ones specific to Indigenous[15] people are often quoted in relation to equity issues. These include rates of participation, retention and success. Levels of courses undertaken, disciplines studied, gender balance and age are also often cited in descriptions of the involvement of Indigenous people in higher education.

Rates of participation and the changes in these across time are pertinent; they may reflect the impact of policy developments. Although these indicate improvement in the last fifteen years, they also clearly show that Indigenous Australians remain under-represented in student numbers in Australian universities.

[15] In this section related to higher education statistics I have used the term Indigenous instead of Aboriginal, because statistics are presented by government sources using this terminology.

In 1992 Indigenous students represented 0.98% of total university enrolments. This increased to 1.2% in 2001 but included numbers enrolled in enabling and other non-award courses. When these were removed the numbers were 0.85% for 1992 and 1.07% for 2001 (NIPAAC 2003: Table 1K). By 2004 the access rate had risen to 1.45% (DEST 2006: 94). These DEST figures did not offer separation of non-award course enrolments. Parity rates, which compared enrolment figures with the percentage of Indigenous people in the broad community, were also discussed by DEST (2006). They asserted that the rate for 2001 was 2.73% and for 2004 2.86% (DEST 2006:96–97). It was clear when comparing participation rates with parity rates that Indigenous people remained under-represented in Australian institutions of higher education.

Retention rates also highlighted continuing problems in the provision of appropriate higher education opportunities for Indigenous people. In 1997 Indigenous students had an apparent retention rate (APR) of 0.61% compared with the non-Indigenous rate of 0.80%. These rates remained fairly static and in 2004 the Indigenous APR was 0.62% compared to 0.81% for non-Indigenous students (DEST 2006:97).

Success rates were defined by DEST (2006:97) as student progress rates (SPR) which were expressed as 'the proportion of units passed in a year compared with the total number of units the students were enrolled in'. For Indigenous students this was 0.63 in 1997, rising slightly to 0.68 in 2004. This compared to non-Indigenous progressions of 0.86 in 1997, and 0.88 in 2004 (DEST 2006:97).

Patterns of participation in terms of the level of study undertaken also displayed statistical differences to the mainstream. Indigenous students were less likely to be engaged in post- graduate study than their non-Indigenous peers. While the percentage of Indigenous post graduate students rose from 0.37% in 1992 to 0.61% in 2001, the discrepancy between enrolments and parity figures rose from 1.03% in 1992 to 1.29% in 2001 (NIPAAC 2003:Table 1J). There has also been a trend for higher engagement in enabling and diploma courses than in degree courses. In 2004 10.8% of Indigenous students were engaged in enabling courses and 12.1% in other non-award courses, compared to 0.8% non-Indigenous enabling enrolments and 1.6% non-Indigenous enrolments in non- award programs (DEST 2006:99). This, along with retention rates, has been an issue of concern when success of courses and programs has been judged in terms of graduation rates from degree courses.

Traditionally higher numbers of Indigenous students have enrolled in courses from the academic disciplines of society and culture, education, health and creative arts.

Data from DEST (2004) confirms this. These four areas represented 72% of Indigenous university enrolments in 2003. A further 12.2% were enrolled in mixed field programs (DEST 2006:162). Indigenous students were therefore very much under-represented in the fields of natural and physical sciences, information technology, engineering, architecture and agriculture, environmental and related studies.

Gender imbalance is also a feature of statistical analysis of Indigenous enrolment. The participation rate for males is statistically lower than that of females. In 2004 males represented only 35.9% of all Indigenous enrolments, a 3.1% decline since 2003 (DEST 2006:95).

Mature age enrolment in higher education has been a readily identifiable trend for Indigenous students. In 2004 the average age for Indigenous undergraduates was 29.3 years compared to the non-Indigenous age of 23.4. For Indigenous post-graduates it was 38.7, compared to 34.6 for non-Indigenous students. (DEST 2006:95). The Koori Centre (2002:1) at the University of Sydney suggested that this added an extra dimension to the discussion of barriers faced in access to higher education as many 'mature ages students have entered tertiary education from the base of an incomplete secondary schooling'.

Barriers to Aboriginal participation on higher education

> Aboriginal people have won the right of access to higher education only after devoting many years to breaking through entrenched barriers of opposition, barriers which are invariably based on non-Aboriginal society's sense of gratuitous superiority. (Morgan 1992:58)

Charles Perkins, who graduated from Sydney University in 1966, was recognised as the first Aboriginal university graduate (Bin-Sallik 1990:19). As Bin-Sallik (1990:12) pointed out 'not only did he pave the way for others of his race, he validated the intelligence of Aborigines in the eyes of white Australia'. To some extent this view was overly optimistic. Aboriginal people aspiring to a university degree still faced a considerable number of difficulties in achieving that goal. These difficulties fell into a number of different areas including racism and discrimination, lack of Aboriginal curriculum, academic demands, leaving home and accommodation issues, mature age

enrolment and lack of family and community role models (Whatman 1995:37; AIDA 2005:6-7).

Participation of members of subordinate or minority groups in mainstream society, including higher education, is influenced by the 'history of oppression and continuing social, economic and political inequalities' (Sonn et al. 1996:2). Given the colonial and continuing history of oppression of Aboriginal Australians, the potential for racism and discrimination in universities was a barrier to Aboriginal participation. Participants in a study by Sonn et al (1996:6) discussed experiencing racism in 'terms of paternalism and other forms of cultural insensitivities'. Some attributed racism to ignorance, which was illustrated in relation to Abstudy. One participant stated that Abstudy was perceived as being 'at a higher rate than Austudy' (Sonn et al 1996:6). This perception has continued to today, to at least some extent, and was an issue raised by two of the undergraduate students interviewed during my research.

Lack of Aboriginal perspectives and lack of recognition of Aboriginal cultures, (AIDA 2005:9) in most curricula adds to the difficulties of academic study. Educational programs need to include an accurate history of Australian colonisation and compulsory units related to the social injustice which continue within Australian Aboriginal society (Malezer 1992:30). This would serve two purposes. By validating Aboriginal history universities would seem less Eurocentric and threatening to Aboriginal people. Equally as important, the provision of such programs would facilitate the processes of reflection, recognition and respect underpinning Cultural Safety for non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people.

Dealing with the academic demands of university is a challenge for most people who enrol, but this is made more difficult for students who have not experienced a satisfactory educational foundation. The failure of education systems to cater for the educational needs of Aboriginal students leaves many ill-equipped to meet the entry requirements or deal with the academic demands of higher education (Whatman 1995:37). Skills such as note taking, research and essay writing have to be developed simultaneously with learning/absorbing the academic knowledge content of the course being undertaken and the subject-specific jargon and 'specific language structures' (AIDA 2005:9) used in texts, lectures, tutorials and assessment. For some this difficulty is compounded by the fact that Standard Australian English is not their first language. The first language may be a traditional Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language, Aboriginal English or Torres Strait Kriol.

In *Healthy Futures* (2005:9) the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association (AIDA) points out that the impact of having to leave the family and community for study reasons is also a significant barrier. It is not only that responsibilities and obligations may be difficult to meet as a result of moving; there is also the isolation that students may then feel in an unfamiliar institutional environment and in their daily life in a new and unfamiliar community. Sonn et al (1996:4-5) indicate that relocation is a significant issue for most of the participants in their study. The loss of social ties and community support seems dominant in people's accounts of their relocation. This can also involve significant extra costs for items such as clothing if the move is such that students experience marked climate change.

Difficulty in finding appropriate and affordable accommodation faces many who have to relocate in order to attend university. Continued racism in the community exacerbates the general difficulties of finding affordable rental properties for Aboriginal people (YANQ 2006:9). Given the mature age of many Aboriginal students there is also the issue for some of finding accommodation suitable for children, with appropriate schools and child care in the vicinity. The child care issue is particularly pertinent to students who have to relocate to pursue their studies and therefore lose the practical support offered by family and community members in their home location.

Affordable accommodation is often on the outskirts of cities as illustrated on the Rental Tenancy Authority of Queensland website listing of median rents. This adds the issue of affordable, reliable and safe transport into the mix of challenges to be overcome in order to access higher education. Issues related to transport in outlying suburbs of cities affect many of the residents in these areas. They do however pose one extra difficulty for Aboriginal students, which can add to a snowballing of barriers.

One student who shared experiences for this research related difficulties in this area. While living at home was quite clearly the most economically viable option, the student's family home was on the outskirts of a metropolitan area. The university was inner city. Transport by train was generally the best option. However, when lectures were held at night this became a problem. The closest train station, thirty minutes walk from the student's home, was unmanned and poorly lit at night. Waiting for a taxi at the station was stressful, and some taxi drivers behaved inappropriately. Solving this issue necessitated the financial challenge of purchasing and running a car for safe access to the train service. Another student related how she chose to live with a family member for the financial and other support offered by this option. Again the distance from home

to the university was considerable, and in this case public transport did not offer a time efficient option. This student also faced the financial challenge of running a car, along with the parking problems on campus. Both these students were in undergraduate degrees which they had entered straight from high school, and accommodation needs were therefore potentially less complex than those of mature age students with dependents.

Mature age students are likely to have more family and community commitments. These commitments influence the time available for study. Financial commitments to family and community can impact on the student's ability to meet day to day living costs as well as the costs of study, particularly if it is necessary to rely on government income support during the period of study.

Many Aboriginal students are the first in their family and/or community to pursue tertiary studies (Brabham et al. 2002:14). Personal support from family and community is vital, and if the nature of the demands of tertiary study is unfamiliar people may find it difficult knowing what support to offer. Bennell (1988:30) cites the extended family's lack of understanding of student deadlines as one of the difficulties faced by many Aboriginal students.

Barriers faced by Aboriginal Australians in accessing higher education and achieving equitable outcomes are summed up in the following statement by an Aboriginal higher education worker.

> The structural barriers that deter Indigenous Australians from participating successfully in higher education continue to be the low levels of education attained by them, their access to education, including access which supports their varied cultural, educational, demographic, social and economic factors. (Anning 2002:5)

Despite the difficulties the numbers of Aboriginal people in the higher education sector has steadily increased and this is partly due to policies introduced by some Federal governments.

Government policies

The federal Labor government took over direct funding responsibilities for Australian universities in 1974. This move gave the government leverage to encourage policy changes, and to put in place an expectation that universities would meet national economic and social needs. Control of funding allowed the government to demand institutional accountability in relation to meeting these social and economic goals (Ramsay 1999:174).

Aboriginal participation in higher education prior to this change had been limited because of structural violence in Australian society which marginalised Aboriginal people and prevented them from gaining full access to basic citizens' rights. New South Wales, for example, had legislated 'free, secular and compulsory education' for all children in 1880 (Parbury 1999:68). That this had not been extended to Aboriginal children has been shown in Chapter 4. Inadequate educational offerings in the compulsory years left few Aboriginal Australians equipped to cope with the academic demands of universities.

Early Initiatives

Financial assistance is important in promoting equal opportunity in higher education. Difficulty in financing the costs associated with higher education has been, and continues to be, a barrier to Aboriginal Australians entering the higher education arena. In 1969 the Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme, later to be known as Abstudy, was introduced. Ellis (2002:58) described this as an initiative that arose from two developments in the 1960s. The first of these was the ratification of the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, which specifically called for governments to make 'higher education equally accessible to all on the basis of individual capacity' (Article 3 cited in Ellis 2001:58). The second was the 1967 referendum which gave the Commonwealth government the power to enact legislation specifically related to Aboriginal people and provided impetus to the process of change.

Allied to the new role of the Commonwealth government in Aboriginal policy making was a proliferation of reports and publications in the area of Aboriginal education. Gale (1988) discussed the four volume report published by Watts during 1981 and 1982 which reviewed twenty seven major reports and publications related to Aboriginal people published between 1971 and 1978. These included fifteen research

reports on Aboriginal education funded through the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. Equity was a major theme within the report (Gale 1988:3-4). Two other reports released in 1985 were important in the development of Aboriginal Education Policy. These were *Support Systems for Aboriginal Students in Higher Education Systems* (Jordan 1985) and the Australian Parliament House of Representatives Standing Committee report. *A chance for the future: training in skills for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander management and development.* The second is commonly known as the Blanchard Report. Gale (1988:4) associated these reports with shifts in government policy in the mid to late 1980s, and attributed the significant increases in financial resources allocated for universities to them. However increases in resources facilitated an increase in Aboriginal participation in tertiary education.

Enclaves offering support to Aboriginal students had begun to be established in higher education institutions, mainly in the Colleges of Advanced Education, in the 1970s (NAEC 1986:77) Jordan (1985) concentrated on the role of these enclaves in providing support for Aboriginal tertiary students and contributing to improved outcomes, whereas Blanchard (1985) emphasised participation rates for Aboriginal students. Gale (1998:7) identified a more important difference between the two reports. The Jordan report was described as concentrating on Aboriginal disadvantage and a welfare approach to alleviating this disadvantage. Blanchard was described as concentrating on levels of educational achievement across all education sectors, and emphasising parity compared to the non—Aboriginal population (Gale 1998:7). 'Inadequate or inappropriate curriculum' (Gale 1998:7) had also been identified by Blanchard, but policy development emphasised statistical equity rather than curriculum issues.

Equity policy development

According to Ramsay (1999) the issue of equity in higher education developed through three distinct phases: from the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s, from late 1995 to late 1996, and post 1996. Some writers point out a number of earlier developments had laid the foundations for the equity developments from the mid 1980s onwards (e.g. Gale 1998; Ellis 2001). These included efforts of Aboriginal activists and sympathisers in the 1970s that resulted in a socio-political climate which recognised the marginalisation of Aboriginal Australians and an increasing recognition of the need for change. In the higher education section this translated into a number of equity policies.

First equity era

The first equity era, as defined by Ramsay (1999), was described as an era of massive expansion in the higher education sector, increased accountability, structural changes resulting from amalgamations and the dismantling of the binary system of universities and Colleges of Advanced Education. Gale (1998:6) attributes these changes partly to the formation of the new Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) in 1986/87. The new department placed an emphasis on the nexus between education and employment opportunities.

Parallel with these changes was a public demand that universities cater not only for more students, but also for a diversity of students. This emphasis on diversity was underlined by the concern that under-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the workforce reflected their under-representation in higher education (Gale 1998:6), a concern first raised in the 1985 Miller *Report of the Committee of Review of Aboriginal Employment and Training*. The government priority was greater equality of access and participation (Ramsay 1999:174-175). This priority related to the emphasis on equity in the Blanchard Report (1985). Equity for a diversity of students could only be achieved if institutions examined and changed the exclusionary and assimiliationist structural and cultural characteristics which traditionally had created barriers to access and participation for many, including Aboriginal Australians. However, despite the positive interpretation presented by Ramsay, it must be noted that it was during this period of economic rationalism that fees for university education became entrenched again, after having been abolished during Whitlam's government.

Ellis (2001:59) discussed some other developments in mid to late 1980s designed to improve Aboriginal participation in higher education. She cautioned that although these can reasonably be seen as positive and significant improvements the work of Riley-Mundine is worth keeping in mind when assessing policy. Riley-Mundine (1988:155: cited in Ellis 2001:59) found that 'systemic bias occurs when the levels of participation and decision-making/resource manipulation are defined by controlling groups in order to maintain their power'. From 1988 the Higher Education Equity Program specifically targeted under-represented groups of people, including Aboriginal Australians and participation and graduation rates (see *Higher Education: A Policy Statement* Dawkins 1988). This policy statement also proposed the creation of a task force to replace the NAEC, development of national policy and it promoted consultation

with Aboriginal stakeholders. However the program, policy and levels of consultation were defined by the controlling group.

The second important policy in the 1980s was the Joint Policy on education for Aboriginal Australians, developed between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments, released in 1989. Gale (1998:7) described the two main themes of this document as equity and recognition of Aboriginal needs and aspirations, and further stated that the access, participation and outcomes were the equity foci of the policy. Although the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP) was a broad document it did make some specific mention of the higher education arena. The first mention was of the increase in Aboriginal enrolments between 1982 and 1989 from 850 to 2700 (DEET 1989:12). Related to the increased enrolments is the observation that,

> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are more likely to succeed in post-school education when they are provided with sensitive institutional support, especially from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in professional and consultative roles, and from their peers; and when institutions recognise incremental achievements of students, and are flexible in respect of course scheduling and course completion requirements. (DEET 1989:13)

By pointing out the factors which contribute to success, the policy writers, to an extent, implicitly illustrate the institutional practices which traditionally have been problematic in terms of Aboriginal participation and success. The NATSIEP is implying that lack of institutional support, few if any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professional and consultative personnel, lack of recognition of student achievements and lack of flexibility in scheduling of courses and completion deadlines have been inherent in the structures of higher education institutions.

A DEET commissioned report in 1994 analysed the then extant literature in relation to the NATSIEP. In the second volume of the report Bin-Sallik et al relate the discussion of the NATSIEP to specific education sectors. In the section on higher education they quote Colin Bourke;

> The future of Aboriginal people for the 21st century will largely depend on what happens in higher education institutions...Will universities make a commitment in curriculum development, research and teaching to ensure Aborigines don't join the Aztecs? (Bourke 1991:11)

Bourke was pointing strongly to the need for universities to seriously review what they are teaching to and about Aboriginal Australians, their histories and cultures. This

relates directly to broad based goals 20 and 21 of the policy, which refer education about Aboriginal histories and cultures, both for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students (DEET 1989:15). The NATSIEP contained twenty-one long term goals, five of which related specifically to higher education and target employment, access, participation and graduation rates (goals 3, 4, 9, 12 and 16).

Goal 3 of the policy referred to the need for 'participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and community members in decisions regarding the planning and delivery of education services for higher education' (DEET 1989:14). Indeed, involvement in decision-making was seen as important in all sectors of education. In 1991 work undertaken by McConnochie and Bourke (cited by Bin-Sallik et al 1994b:5) revealed that Aboriginal advisory committees were starting to become features in some, but not all, higher education institutions. However 'because the status of programs within their own host institutions varies according to institutional commitment and reporting structures, some of these committees were titular in nature' (Bin-Sallik et al. 1994b:5).

Employment of Aboriginal people in all areas of higher education institutions is targeted by Goal 4 (DEET 1989:14). Conditions in universities are linked to employment categories, qualifications and experience. Aboriginal academic staff in support centres are less likely to have tenure than both mainstream academic staff and non-Aboriginal staff in the support centres, and 'there is strong evidence of systemic discrimination against Aboriginal staff in the area of tenured university employment' (McConville 2002:9). Lack of associated conditions such as study leave make it difficult for these staff members to undertake the further study needed to advance their careers in academia (CAPA 1997:38). This is an issue of structural violence and systemic frustration.

Equitable access was the subject of Goal 9 (DEET 1989:14), while Goal 12 (DEET 1989:15) emphasised participation. Bin-Sallik et al (1994b:6) pointed out that although 'all higher education institutions have special entry provisions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, they are still not gaining access to science-based awards in any significant numbers'. Equitable representation across academic disciplines and across levels of awards remained an issue. Bin-Sallik (1993) suggested that the concentration of Aboriginal students enrolled in educational studies and in arts, humanities and social sciences was at least partly explained by the fact that the former Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs) were more welcoming of Aboriginal students,

and that the current universities which had their origins as CAEs continue this trend. It was within the former CAEs that the enclave system originated, the system that evolved into contemporary support units in all universities.

I would contend that another explanation of the pattern of enrolments across disciplines could be located within the inadequacy of earlier education. Very solid groundings need to have been established for people to undertake tertiary study in the physical sciences. This is not denying the academic rigour of other disciplines, but recognises that enabling courses tend to concentrate on language and study skills. In my personal experience a lack of grounding in science and maths precluded me from studying these at senior level, and dictated the nature of my undergraduate studies and, to an extent, subsequent post graduate work.

The method of funding prescribed under the NATSIEP was another common criticism identified by Bin-Sallik et al (1994b:8). Funding specifically provided for Aboriginal higher education was provided on a triennium basis, the same as other higher education funding. This alignment was applauded by some, but others were critical of the funding arrangements for two reasons. The first of these related to the imbalance between funding for teaching and administration and that provided for support for students. Secondly, the ability of universities to distribute funding at their discretion was a source of criticism. Gale (1998:9) pointed out that provision of funds for student places was prioritised and the need for funds for 'staff development, Aboriginal and Islander academic career development, or course and curriculum development' was ignored. Emphasis was on increasing numbers of students. However attention was not paid to the factors which would make the experience of higher education more appropriate and culturally safe for these extra Aboriginal students.

In 1990, shortly after the release of the NATSIEP, the document *A Fair Chance for All: Higher Education That's Within Everyone's Reach,* was released by the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET). Ramsay (1999:175-179) discussed a number of features of this document. Emphasis was placed on achieving equality of access to and participation in higher education for Aboriginal Australians. Annual planning and reporting on equity initiatives became mandatory for higher education institutions.

Since 1991 'all higher education institutions have been required to develop and implement an annual equity plan and a parallel, but distinct, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy (Ramsay 1999:176). As Gale (1998:9) pointed out

there was an emphasis on meeting numerical targets in order to obtain funding. While patterns of inequality in higher education access were recognised and described as unacceptable the government accepted no responsibility for the inequality.

Original equity goals were part of the introduction of corporate managerialism, which involved strategic planning, quality assurance, performance indicators, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (Ramsay 1999:178). This was linked to what Yeatman (1991:1) described as a move away from the delivery of welfare and public values to the 'management of scarce resources'. Ramsay (1999:178-179) levels a number of criticisms at this approach. Analysis of the societal causes of disadvantage and unequal participation was not facilitated. Emphasis was on numerical indicators and therefore on strategies likely to produce short term and quantifiable outcomes. The need to identify the causes of inequalities was ignored. Consideration of the role the institutions themselves played in perpetuating inequality was also excluded. As a result strategies adopted were likely to only have a short term effect. Staff responsible for equity provisions in universities were usually relatively lowly positioned in the structural hierarchy of the university and therefore relatively powerless to introduce, or influence the introduction of, effective long-term equity provisions. Equity measures in this first policy period attempted to address the statistical indices of educational marginalisation by concentration on the increase in participation and progression. This was a simpler task than the identifying and addressing the historical causes of the inequity.

Second equity era

By the mid 1990s analysts came to recognise the need for a theoretical and/or analytical base to plan and determine priorities and to evaluate progress. It was considered that it was time to move beyond provision of remedies for educational inequalities. Identification and elimination of the factors which had caused and continued to reproduce the educational disadvantage was essential (Ramsay 1999:180). I would contend the factors which Ramsay stated were in need of remedy were those inherent in a structurally violent society which has consistently excluded Aboriginal people from equality of access to society's resources.

The second equity era was marked by the release of the NBEET document *Equity, Diversity and Excellence: Advancing the National Higher Education.* This paper was intended to:

> ...assess the progress of the higher education system towards meeting the original equity objectives .... and provide advice on the appropriate foundation, principles, broad national policy objectives and means of monitoring achievements in the system in meeting these equity objectives over the next five years. (NBEET 1996:23)

Some progress had been made in Aboriginal involvement in higher education and the report included recommendations which could have led to the entrenchment of practices which had contributed to that progress. The higher education sector could have been given the opportunity to work towards 'fundamental and long term equity change' (Ramsay 1999:180) within the framework provided by NBEET. As Ramsay (1999:181) concluded this report drew attention to 'the social construction of educational disadvantage'. The report recommended that 'the need to remedy and redress the symptoms and outcomes and to eliminate the ongoing and more fundamental causes of educational disadvantage' should underpin both government and institutional planning (NBEET 1996: xiii). It needed to be recognised that educational disadvantage was not the result of innate racial deficits as had long been theorised. Rather it occurred and continued to occur because of social structures firmly embedded in colonial notions of white superiority, and policies and practices which successfully maintained and perpetuated scientific racism.

The need for 'recognition that the academic and administrative culture of the sector contributes to the patterns of access and success of different groups in society' was also promoted by NBEET (1996: xiv). Universities were being specifically asked to recognise the institutional structural factors which had limited access and success for Aboriginal students and staff. Ramsay (1999:182) suggested that the

> ...recommendations as a whole direct attention (and were intended to focus institutional equity planning and implementation) on the need to ensure that responsibility for equity is genuinely located in mainstream higher education planning, governance, management, and academic practice at both the institutional and system levels.

The second policy phase came to an abrupt end with the election of the conservative coalition government in 1996. Although the advice of the NBEET report was communicated to the new government, it has never been formally adopted. Indeed NBEET itself was soon to disappear.

Third equity period

In the third equity policy era institutional planning and reporting continued to be simply annual profiles of individual institutions presented to DEETYA as the funding body. Recommendations from NBEET, such as implementing approaches to higher education equity which were grounded in an analytical approach received little attention (Ramsay 1999:183).

Systemic frustration can easily occur when mechanisms have been identified which could improve equity and social justice in the provision of education. Policy commitment was needed to support implementation of these mechanisms. Many people I have spoken with during my career in education and as part of this research are disillusioned when confronting the lack of progress in the provision of culturally appropriate quality education for Aboriginal people. Part of this frustration results from their awareness of a plethora of reports, reviews and policies and a lack of government and institutional commitment to implementing the recommendations. The fact that these reports and reviews often seem to cover the same ground and make the same recommendations exacerbates the frustration.

New barriers to the implementation of successful equity programs result from:

> ...the highly deregulatory and market-dependent ideology which characterises the current Australian government's policy utterances gives good reason to fear the dilution or destruction rather than the strengthening and enhancement of the higher education equity framework as intended by *Equality, Diversity and Excellence.* (Ramsay 1999:183-184)

One of the barriers she described was the lack of an official discourse related to equity which indicated the government did not see itself as 'having any responsibility to make a significant investment in order to ensure the provision of a quality higher education to a broad cross section of the community' (Ramsay 1999:184).

A number of factors have been identified which were not conducive to equity objectives and activities. These include:

- 'Reduction in government funding to higher education,
- the related deregulation of the fee environment,
- the increase (and banding) of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme,
- changes to the support provided by AUSTUDY and ABSTUDY schemes,
- the lowering of the post-graduate salary linked HECS repayment threshold

and,

- The movement of government funding from the public to the private schooling sector.' (Ramsay 1999:184 – 185)

These changes have all focused on economic criteria. As a result the focus for institutions became that of maintaining funding. This type of planning was not conducive to social justice and equity program development and delivery, as the outputs from such programs, when measured on a financial yardstick and compared to mainstream outcomes, would often appear to offer little value for money.

Other government financial measures were aimed at individual students and impacted on the capacity of individuals to support themselves financially while undertaking studies. This had a particular impact on access for people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Ramsay (1999:184) made the following statement: 'I wish to stress the decline or indeed abandonment by the Australian government of the notion that higher education has significance for the nation as a whole, beyond the benefits it bestows to individuals'. Within this philosophy the government could justify charging fees to the individual who benefited from the education, and therefore reducing the public funding. If the nation wasn't seen to benefit, why should the nation pay? Inequality of access was then seen as a result of market forces which were outside the influence of any government. The socially constructed nature of inequality could be ignored. Structural violence which had contributed to the social inequality and therefore created barriers to equitable access could also be ignored.

Despite the government inertia in relation to higher education equity Ramsay (1999:186-187) believes that most institutions have accepted a responsibility for developing programs which promote equity. While the government hasn't embraced *Equity, Diversity and Excellence,* it also has not openly rejected the policy. This allows universities to informally adopt recommendations from the report. Research funded by the Australian Vice- Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) into patterns of enrolment and performance of different equity groups is cited by Ramsay (1999:186) as an example of the institutional and sector commitment to equity. This research led to equity policy considerations by some universities (Ramsay 1999:186). However, institutional commitment will always be constrained by economic considerations.

The Howard coalition government, in power during what Ramsay (1999) called the third phase of higher education equity policy, has remained in power till today. Discussion of two aspects of policy related to equity in higher education since 1999 forms the next section of this paper.

Policy: 1999 - 2007

Two developments which have occurred since 1999 are significant. The first of these has been changes to Abstudy which related to the coalition assimiliationist agendas of mainstreaming and practical reconciliation. The second development was a review of higher education, begun in 2002, which provided a snapshot of the contemporary situation in Aboriginal higher education.

Changes to Abstudy

NBEET (1996:23) stressed the multiple disadvantages faced by many Aboriginal people. Factors related to socio-economic status, gender and rural and remote residence intersect with Aboriginality. The introduction of the Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme in 1969 helped to address the socio-economic disadvantage and to allow people from rural regions to access higher education. The Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme evolved into Abstudy and continued to provide financial assistance in a number of forms.

The Howard coalition government was elected in March 1996. Changes to Abstudy were announced in 1997. Provision of Away-from-Base Allowance, which covered the costs of block release programs, suffered considerable curtailment.

Block release programs for Aboriginal students are important. They allow students to study from home and maintain family and community commitments but remain in significant contact with their university. They also provide the main pathway for rural and remote potential students and facilitate contact between post graduate students and their supervisors (NIPAAC 2003:20).

Prior to the changes outlined in 1997 students could undertake unlimited trips to their universities. Restrictions were introduced both in relation to the number of trips and interstate travel (NIPAAC 2003:20). Further restrictions were placed on travel for compassionate reasons and for dependents (NIPAAC 2003:20). While financial assistance had helped to overcome some of the barriers faced by Aboriginal higher education students, curtailment of the program re-erected some of the barriers. Power had been utilised to maintain the exclusion of one group from equal access to the social resource of education and its subsequent benefits.

Further significant changes to Abstudy were proposed for 2000. The main thrust of these was to align study grants for Aboriginal students with the mainstream allowances of Youth Allowance and New Start. In an address to the Menzies Centre Howard (2000:4) made the statement that as a government his party placed 'a great

degree of emphasis on 'practical reconciliation'. Many Social Justice and Equity policies developed since 1972 were referred to in derogatory terms as simply being symbolic. Howard was particularly critical of the Keating government for placing too much emphasis on the symbolic (Altman & Hunter 2003:7). The proposals in relation to Abstudy were in line with the general policy of practical reconciliation and also with those of mainstreaming services. Failure of previous mainstreaming practices, the need for specific services, and the historical and cultural reasons which created and perpetuate the need, were all ignored.

ATSIC commissioned a report into the effects of the proposed Abstudy changes which was released in May 1999. This report, *Analysis of the Proposed Changes to Abstudy on Indigenous Students,* examined in some detail the actual level of payment under the existing scheme in comparison to the proposed scheme, and also the number of recipients in the different allowance categories. A clear picture of the numbers who would be advantaged and numbers who would be disadvantaged as a result of the changes was presented. Based on proposed allowances for the year 2000, ATSIC found that independent students over the age of 21 would be financially disadvantaged by the changes. This applied to independent students who were single or partnered and with or without dependent children. Given the enrolment statistics which showed that the majority of Aboriginal university students are mature aged (Encel 2000:3) this change provided a strong disincentive for many Aboriginal people to begin or continue to pursue tertiary education.

Despite unequivocal evidence of the level of financial disadvantage which would be created by the changes, they were nevertheless introduced, at considerable dollar saving to the federal treasury. ATSIC estimated that in 2000 alone the total minimum saving from the changes would be $16,890,840: and would disadvantage 9,950 students. Students under 21, and those over 21 who were not classed as independent received gains from the changes, but those who gained only numbered 1,060 (ATSIC 1999:22).

In 2004 DEST released the discussion paper, *Review into the Impact of Abstudy Policy Changes That Came Into Effect in 2000.* This document opened with a statement that the review was undertaken by the Strategic Analysis and Evaluation Group of the Department in response to community concerns over the impact of the Abstudy changes (DEST 2004:iv). Any significant impact of the policy changes was negated in this document, through the manipulation of statistics and graphs to support the government position that the changes were positive. The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU)

submission to the review in February 2005 argued that this was not the case, 'that the policy changes to Abstudy implemented in 2000 have had a significant and detrimental impact on Indigenous Australians' participation in higher education' (NTEU 2005:1). The NTEU also debated the picture presented by the statistics which the DEST review chose to use.

Similar concerns were earlier expressed by the AVCC (2002:2):

> ...the government's changes to Abstudy which came into effect at the beginning of 2000 have in many cases had a deleterious effect on university students and may well be associated with the decline in Indigenous student numbers which closely followed these changes.

DEST (2004:4) discussed the decline in Aboriginal enrolments and suggested that the pattern was similar to trends for non-Aboriginal enrolments. The NTEU argued that this comparison was misleading and did not take into account population growth trends in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia. Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicated that the Aboriginal population was growing faster than the non-Aboriginal population, and that the Aboriginal population had a large concentration in the age groups likely to enrol in higher education (NTEU 2005:5). This meant that analogies between the two groups were not meaningful or useful in explaining the decline in Aboriginal enrolments since the changes to the Abstudy program.

The decline in Aboriginal participation was attributed by DEST (2004:5-6) largely to declining numbers of Aboriginal students enrolling in sub-bachelor courses such as enabling and diploma courses. This change was accompanied by a shift in funding. Funding decisions were increasingly based on performance rather than enrolments. It was argued that as a result there was a shift away from enabling courses to courses that lead to qualifications and awards occurred (NTEU 2005:6). The NTEU argued that the decline was across the board and that policy change in Aboriginal higher education between 1996 and 1999 had concentrated on outcomes, progress and completion rather than access

The emphasis on performance and outcomes rather than access was reflected in the Abstudy changes where there was a change in the definition of enabling courses for income support purposes. Many courses were classified as secondary rather than higher education courses and thus attracted a lower rate of income support.

Historic disadvantage in education means that many Aboriginal students need some form of bridging or enabling course to provide the base from which to approach

further studies or career paths. Reductions in financial support available for people who wish to re-enter the education system is a form of systemic frustration; aspirations are raised only to be dashed by changes to the system. Regression in policy which hinders chances to redress historical disadvantage is a recreation of the violent structures which caused the disadvantage by locking Aboriginal people out of the opportunity for equitable access.

Means testing of Abstudy allowances became more stringent in the 1997 reforms (NIPAAC 2003:17) and was tightened even further with the 2000 changes (NTEU 2005:11). As a result, the number of Aboriginal higher education students who receive no income support from Abstudy increased from 9% in 2001 to 19% in 2003 (NTEU 2005:1). As the NTEU (2005:12) points out these statistics are to an extent misleading and do not represent the true level of support. They are not broken down according to levels of support and may include people who receive only ancillary benefits such as the incidentals allowance. The actual number of students who may be struggling through with little or no income support is therefore probably much higher than indicated in the official data. This has had an impact on enrolment statistics at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

A Ministerial Review of Higher Education was carried out in 2002. In the National Indigenous Postgraduate Association Aboriginal Corporation's (NIPAAC) submission it was pointed out that a sharp decline in the number of Aboriginal post-graduate students between 1998 and 2000 had occurred, that the most significant decrease coincided with the change in Abstudy policy and that DEST had underestimated the impact of financial difficulty created by the policy changes (NIPAAC 2002:6). Changes in Aboriginal enrolment patterns related to Abstudy changes were also delineated in the submission to the 2004 Senate Committee Inquiry into Income Support for Students.

> The most significant growth in Indigenous Australian student participation levels over the past decade occurred between 1992 and 1997 which was prior to the most recent fundamental Abstudy changes. For Indigenous Australian postgraduate students, numbers reached a high, in absolute and relative terms in 1998, but in common with other course levels declined significantly in 2000. (NIPAAC 2004a:8)

Also in this submission NIPAAC acknowledged the role of targeted income support in raising the participation rates of Aboriginal people in higher education, but stated the need for Abstudy rates to be raised and for access to be broadened. It was

asserted that Abstudy living allowances were so low that they did not provide adequate income for financial survival, healthy living and successful study. 'In essence, poverty does not create good students, researchers or academics' (NIPAAC 2004a:4).

Financial difficulties are faced by many tertiary students as illustrated in the recently released report on student finances by the AVCC (2007a). However the associated fact sheet *Indigenous student finances and welfare in 2006* (AVCC 2007b) (Appendix 1) clearly noted that the level of financial stress for Aboriginal students remained significantly greater than in the wider student population on a variety of indices. These included the need for part time work, the need to take out loans, reliance on scholarship and Centrelink income support, worry caused by finances and going without food or other necessities on a regular basis. Also noted by the AVCC (2007b) was the fact that significantly more Aboriginal higher education students had dependents. While Abstudy assistance remained insufficient the financial stress continued to add to the matrix of disadvantage faced by Aboriginal higher education students.

Government policy in relation to targeted income support no longer recognises and provides for the unique needs of Aboriginal Australian students. The Young Liberals, in conference in January 2006, called for the total abolition of Abstudy. Instead they want to see the installation of a program that treats all people in the same way, and offers the same incentives to participate in education (NIT Issue 97, Jan 26, 2006). This reflects the continued confusion that social justice can be achieved through application of principles of equality which assume that everyone has experienced the same life chances. It ignores the more complex issues related to equity which stem from the fact that people experience different life chances. We don't all start on a level playing field.

Change to Abstudy policy and provision were not the only changes introduced in the most recent policy period. A significant review of higher education was launched by DEST in 2000 and included discussion of improving equitable outcomes for Aboriginal students. The review papers are discussed in the next section.

Achieving Equitable Outcomes

A discussion paper, *Achieving Equitable and Appropriate Outcomes: Indigenous Australians in Higher Education* (*DEST* 2002), was released as part of the higher education review process. This paper reflected changes in policy direction.

The legacy of equity policies developed in the first and second policy periods has succumbed to the practice of mainstreaming under the banner of practical reconciliation. Specific programs and policies had developed out of recognition of historical and continuing intergenerational disadvantage. This recognition has been classified as emphasising the symbolic, and deemed not productive.

While the discussion paper does recognise Aboriginal disadvantage in the executive summary and the background sections of the discussion paper, the emphasis is on practical reconciliation measures and statistical measurements (DEST 2002: ix). Discussion of changes in enrolment patterns of Aboriginal students is provided in terms of improvements between 1989 and 2001. The discussion does not however break these figures down and acknowledge the decline that occurred with the changes in Abstudy policy and administration.

A reasonably accurate account of issues facing urban, rural and remote Aboriginal Australians is provided (DEST 2002:3). These issues include discrimination, grief, violence, drug and alcohol dependence, feelings of being second rate and discrimination in education and employment. What is missing is any recognition of intergenerational issues: the cumulative effect of generations of people facing these and other issues caused by colonial and continuing structural and cultural violence and marginalisation. The Wollongong University Postgraduate Association (WUPA) suggests that higher education has the potential to address the issues of intergenerational discrimination experienced by Aboriginal Australians. Emphasis is placed by WUPA on the need for consultation with Aboriginal community members, students and academics in formulating policy and in designing new practices (2002:1).

While DEST (2002:4) acknowledges that Aboriginal higher education students are 'in general older than non-Australian students and more likely to come from rural and isolated parts of Australia' no recognition is given in the paper that this profile would suggest the need for increased personal financial support for these students. The University of Technology (UTS), in its submission to DEST, highlights that the discussion paper does not consider improved financial support needed to address

disadvantage and assist with the costs related to family commitments and issues of location (UTS 2002:2).

Failure in the discussion paper to address financial concerns is raised by other submissions to the review process. The Koori Centre (2002:5) asserts that there is a need for 'clear policies and dedicated resources [to address the] unique position' of Aboriginal Australians in higher education. Alarm is expressed by WUPA (2002:3) at the level of funding for Aboriginal higher education, which it describes as 'miniscule in comparison to other programs with equal merit administered by DEET'. The University of Tasmania (UTAS) is also critical stating that the 'issues paper is very thin in respect of new suggestions and funding in the area of support to improve progression rates' (UTAS 2002:2).

Caution is recommended by the Australian Catholic University (ACU) in relation to methods used to measure progression. It warns that significant differences in the life chances of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are not recognised when Aboriginal education participation and outcomes are benchmarked against those of other university students (ACU 2002:1).

The issue of enabling courses is also of concern. Treatment of the role and effectiveness of these is described by UTAS (2002:3) as superficial. UTAS is critical of two specific aspects of the discussion paper in relation to enabling courses. Concern is expressed at the 'prospect of separation, even outsourcing, of enabling programs from general Indigenous Support Funding' (UTAS 2002:3). It is asserted that integration of enabling courses with the support unit allows the courses to provide more than academic preparation in that students receive a grounding in the cultural life of the university and the personal requirements of an undergraduate student (UTAS 2002:3). Broader roles of support units are seen to be ignored when 'performance measures used only look at crude articulation rates of enabling [courses] to award courses within a single institution' (UTAS 2002:3). Enabling courses can serve purposes beyond simple progression to award courses. Skills gained may enable entry into a course at another institution or may allow entry into the workforce. Gineevee, the College of Indigenous Australian People at Southern Cross University, describes another purpose for enabling courses which is difficult to relate to performance indicators. They assert that these courses can assist in' undoing the psychological damage of previous educational experiences in primary and secondary educational institutions' (Gineevee 2002:5).

UTAS (2002:2) is also critical of the discussion paper on the grounds that it displays a lack of consideration of aspirations of Aboriginal people. A cross-sectorial approach between VET and universities to meet the needs of Aboriginal Australians is advocated by UTAS, but absent from the strategies suggested in the discussion paper. Such an approach would achieve best results if designed and administered in consultation with Aboriginal communities. The failure to emphasise consultation is a shortcoming of the discussion paper raised by UTAS (2002:1) and the Australian Council of Deans of Education (2002:5).

The various criticisms of the discussion paper highlight the need for more detailed consideration of why higher education continues to fail to meet the needs of Aboriginal Australians. Policy development needs to include consultation with Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal academics, and UTAS (2002:1) states current review processes seem to be based on anecdotal evidence instead of on 'solid social policy research'. These two processes could be considerably enhanced with more inclusive curriculum and increased numbers of Aboriginal staff in universities and a subsequent increase in research conducted by Aboriginal academics. To some extent the establishment of enclaves and support centres has contributed to some developments in the area of curriculum, staffing and Aboriginal controlled research.

Enclaves and support centres

The establishment of enclaves and support centres and the parallel implementation of special entry provisions are a response to historic and continuing disadvantage faced by Aboriginal Australians in the area of education. Initially these support units were referred to as enclaves. The first enclaves were established at the former West Australian College of Advanced Education and the South Australian Institute of Technology in the mid 1970s (Jordan 1985;1). The practice spread and by 1984 'eleven tertiary institutions around Australia were offering special entry programs for Indigenous students enrolled in education' (Whatman 1995:37). These special entry programs were part of the function of the enclaves and the students enrolled through them were supported by the enclave system and staff. Today all universities have some form of Aboriginal unit offering support to students across all academic disciplines and contributing at various levels to the academic programs of the universities.

Loos (1989:7) suggests that

> ...by providing personal, social and academic support for an enclave of Aboriginals and Islanders within white institutions, it was hoped that students would learn to cope with the demands of tertiary education and emerge with the same qualifications as other students in colleges.

This view recognises the need for practical support for Aboriginal students faced with unfamiliar academic demands.

Willmot (1989: xiii) proposes a more comprehensive view of the hoped for role of enclaves.

> Tertiary enclave programs are devices well beyond students' support or assistance. The Australian Aboriginal tertiary enclaves are a new and different approach to higher education. The enclave focuses the student and the institution on the process of learning in a different cultural mode. They concentrate support and assistance in a total social and academic context. In so doing they are able to reach beyond constructed preparatory scholarship to the elementary nature of the capacity for adult learning.

Willmot (1989) focuses the reader on the fact that overcoming barriers to Aboriginal participation requires broad, lateral thinking which goes beyond simply providing assistance in the practical areas such as finding accommodation or dealing with the bureaucracy over income support. He points to the cultural divide that can exist between the university and its entrenched methods and the life experiences and worldview of Aboriginal students.

Early enclaves provided support in a number of ways. Jordan, in her 1985 study of enclaves, identified a number of features and functions which were common to most enclaves included in her study. These can be grouped under headings of academic support, practical support, support for culture and identity and clerical and administrative duties.

In a report of a study involving Aboriginal students at Curtin University, Sonn et al (1996) included discussion of the role of the Centre for Aboriginal Studies. They based this on the notion that the Centre could provide a range of functions for students. These functions might include cultural and identity factors such as:

- coming together to validate and share experiences with others who have had a similar history,
- providing opportunities for members to experience a sense of self-worth, dignity, and a sense of belonging, providing a protective haven from a harsh external environment.
- to share resources and support and,

- providing supportive functions through validating norms, providing a sense of solidarity and providing opportunities for, and facilitating, social interaction. (Sonn et al 1996:8).

Some of Sonn et al's (1996) findings are reflected in comments from participants in my research. Two, who had both relocated geographically to attend university, commented on the support aspect their respective units provided in facilitating the formation of a social circle. Another who had lived all his life in the city where he attended university commented that in undergraduate years this role was not important for him. However when he progressed to postgraduate studies the unit became important for support.

In discussing the evolution of support units Whatman (1995) pointed out that they have gone beyond solely the provision of support to students. However the evolution of Aboriginal units had not been uniform. In 1992 a conference, *Towards 2000 – Maintaining the Momentum,* was held in Hervey Bay in Queensland. The published papers of this conference, attended by Aboriginal university staff and students, addressed a number of historic and (then) contemporary issues related to Aboriginal participation in what Malezer (1992:28) refers to as the 'Imperialist discourse' and 'operation of Englandism' in Australian higher education academies.

The output of this conference was summarised by Whatman (1995) who stated that two important features of universities were illustrated. The first of these was that the difference in the experience of Aboriginal students and staff in different institutions was vast. Secondly difference in the quality of experience 'invariably depended upon how far down the evolutionary road from assimilation to cultural survival the respective institutions had travelled' (Whatman 1995:39). This evolutionary path is illustrated in the following table.

Table 6:1 A continuum showing how an Aboriginal support enclave can evolve into a faculty

Enclave Model	Teaching/Research Centre	Faculty Status
Student support only No control over budget Full responsibility for Indigenous students' success or failure	Student support is main function Delegation of budget funds Large lecturing role in other faculties Research capacity Limited involvement in course planning Sharing of responsibility for Indigenous students' success or failure	Lecturing role is dominant Student support is maintained Full control over budget Active research and consultancy Full responsibility for Indigenous subjects Sharing of responsibility for Indigenous students' success

(Whatman 1995:41)

Whatman (1995:37) described the Oodgeroo unit at QUT at the time she was writing as similar to many around the country 'which focus on providing academic and personal support for Indigenous students, providing Indigenous perspectives to courses through lecturing, and conducting research and consultancies'. The reality is that many support units continue to focus on support roles and enabling rather than accredited courses. It is the broader roles which can place support units in a position of being able to contribute more effectively to the development of culturally safe universities

Curriculum issues and Aboriginal Studies

Traditional curriculum has been seen as one of the barriers to Aboriginal participation in higher education as it can be accused of being inherently assimiliationist. The experience of people of my generation who were enrolled in universities in the 1970s was of institutions which paid little attention to the history of contact between Australia's original custodians and the new arrivals. These new arrivals included the convicts sent to this new British dumping ground, the military and administrative personnel to control the new colony, and the individuals who came of

their own free will because they discerned the chance of economic benefit. Little serious attention was paid in traditional university subject offerings to the sociological impacts of colonisation on the marginalised Aboriginal people.

An illustration of this is in Larissa Behrendt's description of her experience in the Law Faculty of UNSW where:

> Aboriginal issues were never discussed in core subjects. In property law there was only half a class on land rights, a topic which was introduced as unexaminable, thus ensuring that hardly anyone in the class read the materials. In criminal law, issues relating to Aboriginal people and the criminal justice system were related as statistics. This is chilling when those statistics reflect personal experience. (Behrendt 2000:70)

Excluding Aboriginal issues in core studies illustrates the institutional marginalisation because, as Behrendt (2000:75) states, 'when subjects are not compulsory they tend to be studied only by the converted'. This perpetuates structural violence by contributing to the maintenance of ignorance of Australia's inherent racism and resultant marginalisation of Aboriginal people and their concerns.

Western traditional university curriculum

Prevailing attitudes in curriculum were described as being 'steeped in ethnocentrism and Christianity and hence assimiliationist, paternalistic and racist in nature' (Falk 2004:5). This helped to create and perpetuate stereotypes which supported the continuation of scientific racism based on Social Darwinism. The 'invisibility of Indigenous Australian people' (Falk 2004:5) in much curriculum material which has been largely 'Eurocentric in keeping with the myth of White Australia and in denial of Aboriginal people' (Parbury 1999:64) has been as important as the negativity that has occurred in the limited treatment of Aboriginal history and concerns.

Bourke and Bourke (ud:181) in discussion of the first conference related to Aboriginal Studies, held in 1969 in Canberra, pointed out that the 'total focus of Aboriginal Studies at that time was to record a dying culture'. A different focus was unlikely because Aboriginal people were not involved in the conference.

Colonialism and the societal structures which developed from it related to issues of inappropriate curriculum. Cultural violence, which underpinned and justified structural violence, supported the continued negative stereotyping of Aboriginal people. The high level of invisibility of Aboriginal Australians in much curriculum is a form of cultural violence. It implies that little worthy of inclusion in curriculum relates to

Aboriginal Australians. Australian society continues to be ethnocentric and paternalistic in its view and treatment of Aboriginal people, and the paucity of Aboriginal perspectives in curriculum until recent times reflects this.

For much of the history of Western focused higher education in this country, what attention was given to Aboriginal Studies had been in the fields of science and anthropology (Falk 2004:6). Eighteenth and nineteenth century studies were 'often done in the negative and in support of theoretical ethnocentric ideals' (Falk 2004: 6). Nakata (2004a:3) asserted this pursuit of knowledge was embedded in the belief that Aboriginal Australian people would die out and it was in the interests of science to record knowledge of these primitive people whilst the knowledge was still available. This focus continued into twentieth century scholarship and has remained with us in the twenty first century.

A current example of this focus on the anthropological and scientific knowledge that can be gleaned from study of Aboriginal people can be seen in the dispute between the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre and the Natural History Museum in Britain. In the nineteenth century remains of many Palawa people were taken to Britain for scientific study. Some have been returned for traditional burial practices and negotiations are underway for the return of more. However, the Natural History Museum argues that in the interests of pursuing scientific knowledge related to the evolution of humans it should be allowed to conduct an array of tests on the remains before they are repatriated to Tasmania for their descendants to conduct appropriate mortuary rites. This debate has been reported in a number of media outlets including the National Indigenous Times (Issue 123, 22 Feb, 2007). However, the fact that the debate is not only occurring, but being played out in international media indicates that an Aboriginal perspective is starting to be taken into account.

Process of change

One important step in achieving positive change is that university course offerings have started to include Aboriginal perspectives and subjects. These need to be developed by, or at least in partnership with, Aboriginal people in order to accurately portray the social, political and economic marginalisation that is the result of nearly 230 years of colonial control. This is vital in terms of goals 20 and 21 of the NATSIEP which promote education about Aboriginal issues for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people (DEET1989:15). Reflection and recognition are integral components

of Cultural Safety principles. It is imperative to Aboriginal people that their history is recognised and respected. For some, because of historical circumstances and social policy, this can even be a chance to learn their own history. In relation to non-Aboriginal people it is vital that they are given the chance to reflect upon and recognise the unequal power relations and life chances experienced by Aboriginal Australians as a result of socio-political historical facts. With the introduction of such curriculum, at all levels of education but especially in universities, education becomes more inclusive. Inclusivity not only encourages access to higher education. It also promotes the opportunity to advance self determination by skilling people to promote Aboriginal control in areas identified by practical reconciliation and it can promote the development of Aboriginal scholarship.

An early impetus towards inclusive curriculum was contained in the 1975 Report of the Commonwealth Schools Commission's Aboriginal Consultative Group. One of the recommendations was that teacher training courses should contain Aboriginal Studies. These studies should include contemporary studies, not just the traditional anthropological approaches, and by doing so promote an awareness of the colonial practices which have shaped the contemporary situation.

Congruent with early suggestions to include Aboriginal studies was what Nakata (2004a:4) referred to as a revision in history and literature which exposed the silence about colonial Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationships. As a result there was a burgeoning in the number of academic disciplines which examined Aboriginal Australia. 'We have become the subject of discipline of Law, Education, the Health Sciences, the Environmental Sciences and Fine Arts and others' (Nakata 2004a:4). However as Behrendt (2000:7) stated Aboriginal studies has largely remained at the periphery, offered as optional extras rather than core components.

Another important change in Aboriginal Studies to emerge in the early 1980s was formal recognition that Aboriginal people should have an input into the material which was being presented to students about Aboriginal cultures, histories and societies. The 1982 Report of the Commonwealth Aboriginal Studies Working Group to the Australian Education Council stated that the content of Aboriginal Studies courses should include 'insights and explanations of human experiences derived from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal sources' (Hill 1986:1). Nakata (2004a:5) sees this as important in that it meant 'our inclusion in the national story'.

Institutional implementation of inclusive curriculum has varied. Lampert (1996) described a number of issues which influenced the inclusion of Aboriginal Australian perspectives in curriculum at the University of Queensland. In discussion of the background to the study Lampert (1996:35) linked 'retention and success at university [to] what was being taught about Indigenous Australians at the University'. In discussion of her findings Lampert pointed out that many academic staff supported the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives in principle, but qualified her observation by stating that this would only occur where the content was directly relevant to the course being taught. Allied was the fact that lecturers were unclear what Aboriginal Australian perspectives were, or how they might apply to their discipline (Lampert 1996:38). She also found that some academic staff only saw the point of including Aboriginal perspectives if there were Aboriginal students in the class (Lampert 1996:7).

Another concern identified by Lampert (1996:38) was that lecturers were wary of the sensitivities involved in presenting Aboriginal materials and perspectives, and in some cases this led to restriction of what was presented. It was positive that the sensitivities were recognised however given the small numbers of Aboriginal academics in universities it was, and remains, important that this issue be addressed. Lampert (1996:38) suggested that one way of doing so was to implement procedures to improve knowledge of appropriate protocols, and that this could be enhanced by more liaison between academic staff and the staff of the Aboriginal Studies unit. Continuity of presentation of Aboriginal perspectives was threatened by the reliance on the individual interests of particular staff members. When particular staff left replacements rarely had the same interests. The presentation of Aboriginal perspectives in these cases was not embedded in the structures of the institution, but dependent on the changing academic staff (Lampert 1996:38).

Inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives and subjects continues to be open to debate. Falk identifies three major issues which are of concern to him; concerns he believes to be similar to those of many Aboriginal academics. These are:

- 'how universities should be approaching and incorporating Indigenous studies in curricula,
- the ownership of Indigenous courses, and
- the politics of teaching Indigenous issues'. (Falk 2004:1)

Further, Falk maintains that ideally courses should be written and presented by Aboriginal people, and owned by an Aboriginal university body. Where this is not possible Aboriginal people should be consulted and their endorsement sought for all Aboriginal courses to be offered. (Falk 2004:1)

Development and presentation of Aboriginal Studies courses without at least significant consultation with Aboriginal people is described by Falk as potentially dangerous. The absence of Aboriginal world views in such courses is a tool of integration and assimilation. Lack of Aboriginal voices allows the majority, Eurocentric, viewpoints to dominate (Falk 2004:25). Aboriginal concerns will continue to be interpreted through the perspectives of those who have historically held power in Australian colonial society and institutions. It is promising that universities have come to see the need to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives, but the difficulties presented by Lampert (1996) and the concerns expressed by Falk (2004) need to be addressed as we progress the development of Aboriginal Studies.

Nakata (cited in Hart 2003:14) states 'white academics still name the game, define the problems and propose the solutions to anything and everything Indigenous', and as Hart (2003:4) points out published Aboriginal voices are still hugely outnumbered by 'publications by non-Aboriginal people on Aboriginal people and issues'. As these are the publications available for non-Aboriginal designers of Aboriginal studies courses the inclusion of Aboriginal people in the design process is critical. The need for published Aboriginal voices raises the need for an increase in the number of Aboriginal people engaging in research and publication.

It is important that Aboriginal students progress through undergraduate to postgraduate study and into the staff of universities. It is only when this happens that Aboriginal voices will come to have an influence in academia. Post-graduate participation rates are even lower proportionally than undergraduate rates. The federal government recognised the importance of post-graduate participation in its 2002 discussion paper *Achieving Equitable and Appropriate Outcomes: Indigenous Australians in Higher Education.* However this could be seen as lip-service when the difficulties faced in following the post graduate path are considered, but it remains important if Aboriginal people are to be involved in academic research.

Research

Context and introduction

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies was founded in 1964 with a charter to conduct 'anthropological research and study in relation to the Aboriginal people of Australia (including research and study in respect of culture and languages)' (Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies Act, cited in Bennett, 1989:2). Nakata (2004a:3) points out that three academic disciplines dominated the original concept of Aboriginal Studies: anthropology, archaeology and linguistics. The field of Aboriginal Studies has since broadened and has been carried out in a range of disciplines and increasingly by Aboriginal researchers.

Three aspects of Aboriginal research will be explored. The first relates to the research training provided by post-graduate university studies. Historical issues faced by Aboriginal academics are the second aspect. Finally suggestions for the future will be proposed. Information in the last two sections draws heavily on the writings of Aboriginal researchers.

Postgraduate studies – research training

For the community of Aboriginal Australian researchers to grow there needs to be an increase in the number of Aboriginal Australians successfully engaging with the postgraduate level of university experience where research capacity is developed and accredited. In 2004 0.7% of higher degree students in Australian universities were Aboriginal (NIPAAC 2004b:3). However the most recent census figures available (ABS 2001:1) showed Aboriginal people represented 2.4% of the Australian population.

There is a complex mesh of interweaving factors which contribute to the low post-graduate participation rates. Discussion here will be limited to the issue of supervision and based on a report released in 1997 by the Combined Australian Postgraduate Association (CAPA). The difficulty faced by Aboriginal Australian postgraduates lies in identifying and recruiting appropriate supervision. There are few Aboriginal academics employed in positions within universities who meet the institutional requirements of providing postgraduate supervision; therefore simple statistics dictate that many supervisors will be from a different cultural background to the postgraduates with whom they work

Many non-Aboriginal academics have provided, and continue to provide, appropriate and effective supervision for Aboriginal postgraduate students. Some difficulties however can arise and are succinctly summarised in the 1997 CAPA Report. Aboriginal postgraduate students who informed the report point out that quality supervision involves not only in-depth knowledge of the subject, but relies equally on the relationship which develops between the supervisor and the student. It is possible the rapport could be nourished by mutual understanding of the cultures of the participants in the supervisor/student relationship. Incorporation of Cultural Safety principles into the structure of the institution has the potential to ameliorate potential problems by encouraging mutual reflection, recognition and respect between the partners in the supervisor/candidate relationship.

Without rapport between the supervisor and the candidate there is an increased power imbalance (CAPA 1997:34-35). Power imbalances could manifest in several ways. One fear expressed by the CAPA respondents is the appropriation of intellectual property by the powerful supervisor. When supervisors claim co-authorship, based on supervisory input, this fear is exacerbated (CAPA 1997:34 & 55). Aboriginal researchers, including trainee ones, often choose topics which specifically relate to the histories, cultures and social marginalisation of their immediate communities, or the broader Aboriginal situation. Informants for the research process are often Aboriginal people for whom such knowledge is part of their lived history and very personal. Ownership of this knowledge can be a contentious issue and potential for resolution lies partly within appropriate communication between all parties.

Free and open communication between the postgraduate student and the supervisor/s, I believe, is an essential aspect of the postgraduate experience, and possibly even more so when the study is undertaken in external mode. External modes of study are chosen by many Aboriginal people.

In 1997 30.7% of Aboriginal students were enrolled in external or multi-modal programs, compared to 17% of non-Aboriginal students (Encel 2000:7). In 2003, 34.9% of Aboriginal students were enrolled in these modes of study (DEST 2006:87).

The choice to study externally is influenced by family and community commitments which make it impractical or impossible for the student to relocate and engage with the institution as an internal student. In this situation the supervisor/s may provide the main, if not the only, contact with the institution, and are the conduit for understanding the academic and institutional expectations.

Co-supervision of Aboriginal postgraduates provides a way of dealing with the issue of the small number of Aboriginal supervisors who are available and meet the institutional requirements. Hart and Whatman (1998:5) point out that an Aboriginal postgraduate student may actually locate in the community an Aboriginal person with considerable expertise and experience in the area of research interest, but that this person may well not meet the institutional requirements of having completed a PhD or being employed in the faculty in which the student is enrolled. If universities are committed to equity for Aboriginal students and to playing a role in increasing the numbers of Aboriginal researchers engaged in the research process, more flexible arrangements need to be considered. Institutional structures can be altered to recognise the expertise that exists in communities and to incorporate this expertise. An initial step could be the recognition of a co-supervisory role for community people who could contribute to the discussion related to culturally sensitive issues, appropriate methodologies and consultation processes. This could be done through appointment of honoraries, but there is always the problem of payment. The university academic could also contribute in this area as well as monitoring the university's academic requirements.

CAPA (1997:51) puts forward the proposition that Aboriginal postgraduate researchers should be able to write in their own language, be it a traditional language or Aboriginal English. This would pose a significant challenge for universities, in relation to provision of appropriate supervisors and in locating and recruiting appropriate examiners. The CAPA (1997:51) report suggests that it is culturally arrogant/violent not to accept research reporting in any form other than Standard Australian English. However, this must be considered with caution. It is necessary that graduates be able to communicate with broader mainstream society and the academy, because academic language related to a specific discipline is also the language of power, and the only language in which specific content can be effectively conveyed. There is some merit in the concept that the appropriate aspects and sections of the research results could be presented in the language of the group whose concerns are explored in the particular piece of research, as well as in Standard Australian English.

As Aboriginal students attain post-graduate qualifications in increasing numbers the practice of research by Aboriginal researchers concomitantly increases. This will highlight the issues and difficulties faced by Aboriginal researchers.

Historical issues in Aboriginal research

Historically university research about Aboriginal Australians has been dominated by non-Aboriginal researchers. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics (Hart 1998; Rigney 2001; Moreton-Robinson 2004; Nakata 2004a; Falk 2005;) pointed out that much of this research has been from the perspective of Aboriginal Australians as 'living evidence of the human past, [and that research serves the purpose of contributing] to knowledge of the evolution of human societies' (Nakata 2004a:3). Rigney (1997:109) contended that research for these purposes has been carried out by people from an extensive variety of academic backgrounds, and has contributed to non-Aboriginal control over Aboriginal knowledge and the interpretation and presentation of Aboriginal knowledge within Eurocentric epistemological frameworks. Hart and Whatman (1998:7), in agreement with Rigney's view, described the traditional academic approach to research related to Aboriginal Australia as having a foundation in racism. Racism based on a scientific belief of European superiority encourages the forms of research described by Nakata (2004a), where the research is said to contribute to the knowledge of human evolution.

Scientific racism became a dominant way of viewing Aboriginal societies globally in the era when positivist approaches to research emphasised the concepts and methodologies of the scientific approach. Racism, grounded in scientific theory, 'informed colonial society's belief that differences in races are primarily biological and natural' (Rigney 2001:4). This belief dictated colonial research practices and structures. Critics (Hart & Whatman 1998; Falk 2005) viewed these approaches as disempowering to Aboriginal people who were the objects of the research. As objects of research Aboriginal people were seen as the known rather than the knowers (Moreton-Robinson 2000 cited in Falk 2005:6), known by non-Aboriginal academics from a non-Aboriginal standpoint and interpretation.

Research based in 'continuing Western imperialism and colonisation [and] privileging Western paradigms' is described by Walker (2003:37) as structurally violent. Such research is based in the colonial scientific discourse, which is based on a concept of racial superiority where 'the European scientist determined whose knowledge *is,* and *what* was legitimate' (Foley 2003:44). Aboriginal voices continue to be marginalised in this approach to research. In its extreme it can totally negate Aboriginal ways of knowing. If western scientific method dictates reality and states that 'there is no such thing as Indigenous Dreaming, then the Indigenous Australians whose

realities are informed by the logics of Dreaming are therefore deemed irrational' (Rigney 2001:3). Culturally violent processes which reify Western knowledge and knowledge construction and are based in colonial racism challenge Aboriginal realities.

Racism within universities is one of the factors contributing to structurally violent research (Walker 2003). Such research is embedded in the 'hegemonic ways of knowing and interpreting', and is the legacy of the colonial past (Walker 2003:38). One insidious aspect of this legacy is the continuing practice of non-Aboriginal policy makers 'defining and creating identities for Indigenous people. These imposed definitions then influence the researchers' choice of whom to interview and what to study' (Walker 2003:38). In practical terms the non-Aboriginal perspective of who is a 'real' Aborigine can lead to the exclusion of significant numbers of Aboriginal Australians and their concerns from the research agenda. Policy development is often based on the results of academic research and in this way the academy has contributed to the imposition of non-Aboriginal definitions of Aboriginality.

Langton (1993 cited in Rigney 1997:111) asserted that the policies and institutions of education in Australia have been 'marinated in cultural and racial social engineering theories; such theories have continued to influence current policy research, government debates and social perceptions in relation to Indigenous Australians'. Rigney (1997:112) described the process of colonial racialisation of Aboriginal people as an exercise in the establishment of power. He asserted that the construction of this racialisation was contributed to by the 'research methodologies and the protocols in knowledge construction [that have contributed to a] racialised research industry which excluded Indigenous people and their knowledges from the research community' (Rigney 1997:14). A further comment is that the dominant Western epistemologies are based on cultural assumptions that cannot take into account Aboriginal concerns as they are blind to them, or see them as irrelevant (Rigney 1997:114). Exclusion of Aboriginal ways of knowing and knowledge on the basis that they do not conform to Eurocentric epistemologies and ontologies is cultural violence.

An illustration of this is the 1997 work of Williamson, a researcher in the Torres Strait Islands. His work is critiqued by Hart & Whatman (1998:7) who dispute his assertions that western epistemologies, which emphasise empirical evidence, produce reliable and valid results superior to any other. The role of the participants' socially constructed knowledge is negated by such a research approach which favours the viewpoints of the colonisers and 'diminishes the experience and view of the colonised

other' (Scheurich 1997:404 cited in Hart and Whatman 1998:7). In terms of education such an approach allows the deficit viewpoints to be perpetuated to account for the 'failure' of Aboriginal students, while ignoring the structural and cultural violence which permeate the education system. It also encourages the favouring of non-Aboriginal epistemologies, and what Rigney (2001:7) refers to as epistemic violence, the power to impose an epistemology.

The Way Forward

As more Aboriginal Australians successfully negotiate their way through higher education institutions the pool of Aboriginal researchers, and potential Aboriginal researchers, has increased. Aboriginal researchers have begun to critique traditional research practices, and suggest future directions. When considering these perspectives and suggestions we must not lose sight of the fact that Aboriginal Australians are not one homogenous group. Herbert (2003:2) in discussing her doctoral research points out that one of the challenges she faced when choosing her research approach was 'that of how to address the diversity of the Indigenous experience'. This diversity of experience will influence Aboriginal researchers' views of what provides the best way forward, and it is not unreasonable to expect debate among Aboriginal academics in the same way that we accept debate in the broader academic community.

Important in the consideration of the directions and methodologies which Aboriginal research should take is the perception of the purpose of research. Research should become increasingly **for** Aboriginal people and communities, not **about** them. Wallace (2003:3) suggests that there are three ethical obligations that contemporary researchers must meet. The first of these is to determine and accommodate the expectations of the community in relation to any research and to accept that there may be reluctance, even resistance, due to previous research practices which people have experienced. Secondly it is vital that reporting be accurate and truthful. It could be that the implication behind this statement is that in the past reporting has been selective to suit the purposes of the researchers. Thirdly it as incumbent on Aboriginal researchers to educate non-Aboriginal researchers to 'hear what the people are saying' (Wallace 2003:3).

Nakata (2004b:4) points to the need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers to open effective communication with non-Aboriginal researchers and to educate and persuade them to recognise and respect our viewpoints, even if 'we are

tired of doing so'. Recognising the small numbers of Aboriginal researchers, Nakata (2004b:4) warns against placing the onus of this task on those who are still developing their skills and points to publication as the way to open up the dialogue between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal academics. We need to talk back to the hegemonic academy on their terms, using their tools, while making the talk ours.

That is not to say that the tools can not be modified. A number of writers including Foley (2003), Kinchloe & McLaren (2000), Olesen (2000) and Rigney (1997 & 2001) discuss new approaches to Aboriginal research, and some of these approaches suggest that Aboriginal research can best be carried on by Aboriginal researchers. A word of caution about this is the reminder that Aboriginal researchers are a very small community and there needs to be an effective dialogue with the non-Aboriginal researcher community, based on principles of Cultural Safety which recognise and respect the position from which both groups are commencing the dialogue.

Foley (2003:45-46) discusses three emancipatory epistemologies which he sees as useful to Aboriginal researchers as they involve 'deconstruction processes [and are] guided by a vision that there is more than just one worldview and interpretation'. These three are critical theory, standpoint theory and insider-outsider theory. Kinchloe and McLaren (2000:281) outline critical theory as 'analysing competing power interests between groups and individuals, within a society – identifying who gains and who loses in specific situations'. Such an approach to research has relevance to the colonial history and society of Australia and the disempowerment and marginalisation of Aboriginal Australians. Standpoint theory, which has underpinned much of feminist theory, argues that

> 'knowledge claims are socially located and that some social locations, especially those at the bottom of social and economic hierarchies, are better than others as starting points for seeking knowledge' (Olesen 2000:222).

The implication is that the knowledge sought not only applies to those from the bottom levels but to the interactions between these people and the rest of society. Thus Indigenous[16] standpoint would create knowledge from Aboriginal people and their perspectives instead of from the perspective of the colonial oppressors. Foley (2003:45) describes feminist standpoint as the evolutionary base of an Indigenous standpoint theory.

[16] I use the term 'Indigenous' here in relation to standpoint theory because that is the term used by the proponents. This also applies to the use of the term Indigenist research.

Rigney (1997) agrees with Foley about the similarities between Indigenous and feminist theorising, stating that an important area of similarity is the emphasis on 'lived experiences'. Significant in feminist theory from an Aboriginal perspective is the borrowing and adaptation of research approaches that derive from different paradigms (Rigney 1997:17).

Rigney (1997:118) employs the term Indigenist research to encapsulate three principles: resistance, political integrity and privileging Aboriginal voices. The resistance role of research relates to the role that research can play in self-determination for Aboriginal people. Self-determination must be based on acknowledgement of the colonial history of this country and the effects of this colonial history. Rigney's ideas relate to the fact that structural violence and cultural violence are concepts or themes which can contribute to an emancipatory dialogue, rather than a colonial monologue, helping to create a resistance to continuing colonising practices and policies. Indigenist research can emphasise cultural vitality and survival, moving the dialogue beyond the language of deficit and victimisation. While not denying the marginalisation and disadvantage, an emphasis on the positive can point to a way to the future based on assets analysis not needs analysis.

Rigney (1997:118) acknowledges the debt Aboriginal people have to non-Aboriginal people who have supported the pursuit of equity and social justice for Aboriginal people. These non-Aboriginal people have contributed to the body of research which has supported that pursuit by revealing the history of oppression, racism, structural and cultural violence and marginalisation. These roles are continuing. At the same time he believes that future political integrity of research into Aboriginal issues will come from research being conducted by Aboriginal researchers whose academic standing is recognised and whose struggle for liberation is linked to their research. In this way research can contribute to Aboriginal Australians empowering themselves to control the political agendas which influence their everyday lives.

Indigenist research must give prominence to Aboriginal voices. What Aboriginal people have to say from their own lived experiences must be given credence both by the academy and wider society. The *Royal Commission Into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (1991) and the *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* (1997) have provided a precedent for recognition of Aboriginal voices, relying as they did on testimony by Aboriginal people. The history of contact between Aboriginal Australians and settler Australians has bred mistrust and

misunderstanding. As a result in many instances an Aboriginal researcher will have more chance to access Aboriginal voices and then to give them prominence. Rigney (1997:19) suggests that Aboriginal researchers are more accountable to their communities and that therefore it is 'politically more appropriate that Indigenous Australians speak through Indigenous researchers'.

The following quote I believe sums up the future of Aboriginal research.

> What must be emphasised here is that from an Indigenous perspective, my people's interests, experiences and knowledges must be at the centre of research methodologies, and the construction of knowledge about us. Incorporating these aspects in research we can shift the construction of knowledge to one which does not compromise Indigenous identity and Indigenous principles of freedom from racism, independence and unity. (Rigney 1997:121)

An increase in the number of Aboriginal academics and researchers will contribute to a change in the curriculum that is offered by universities. This in turn has the potential to contribute to Cultural Safety for Aboriginal people in universities. Aboriginal academic staff face a number of specific issues which form the basis of the following discussion.

Staffing

Aboriginal scholarship has been absent, or at least under-represented, at all levels of higher education, including in the numbers of academic staff employed by universities. There are important roles for Aboriginal academic staff, and although the numbers are slowly increasing there are still numerous barriers for aspiring and incumbent Aboriginal academic university staff members.

Historically staff numbers have reflected the poor participation and completion rates of students. Nakata (2004b:5) draws attention to the fact that increasing numbers of Aboriginal academics can be related to the increasing number of graduates, and post-graduates, progressing through the system. Recent statistics related to Aboriginal staff numbers in universities were released by DEST in 2006. These figures show a slight improvement in the period from 2000 to 2003. Aboriginal academic staff numbers rose from 0.57% of the total academic staff in 2000, to 0.68% in 2003 (DEST 2006: 98).

Academic staff presence in universities continues to be concentrated in specific Aboriginal centres within universities (Nakata 2004a:5). While acknowledging the

effectiveness of Aboriginal centres in improving Aboriginal university participation, Nakata (2004b) expresses concerns that universities support the centres because they are a way of keeping Aboriginal people out of the 'core business' of the universities, and will in times of increasing accountability allow the universities 'the basis of blaming us for our failure' (Nakata 2004b:2).

Role of Aboriginal academics

A broader representation of Aboriginal people is needed to promote equity. Role models are important for Aboriginal students, as is mentoring and guidance by Aboriginal staff (McConville 2002:19). Aboriginal academic staff numbers as a proportion of total staff are lower than the proportional Aboriginal student numbers. This creates a situation where the mentoring role for Aboriginal staff is disproportionally higher than the mentoring role expected from non-Aboriginal staff. Consequently Aboriginal students may have less access to mentoring which is vital for them in overcoming the barriers they face in higher education institutions, and staff are overburdened.

Many policy documents and reviews raise the need for consultation with Aboriginal people in relation to changes which will increase Aboriginal participation in education and enhance the educational experience of Aboriginal students. Examples of these documents include the National Aboriginal Education Policy (1989), the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2000) and Partners for Success (2000). Aboriginal staff also need to be involved in the decision making processes of universities, allowing effective promotion of Aboriginal concerns and initiatives which will enable universities to progress further towards equity goals. Arbon (1997:77) describes this as a need for 'a constructive, meaningful, interconnected and reciprocal partnership', with Aboriginal staff involved in decision making at the local level. She cites the *Report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Taskforce* (Commonwealth of Australia, 1988) in support of this stance. The report emphasises the need for Aboriginal 'influence on the nature of education available' and the link between this influence and self-determination in education (Commonwealth of Australia 1988, 18). Involvement of Aboriginal educators in decisions about education for Aboriginal people at all levels, including universities, allows Aboriginal voices to be heard.

Barriers for Aboriginal staff

Tenured positions and career paths available to Aboriginal academics within universities have been limited. Limited term positions are more likely to be on offer, especially for Aboriginal staff in Aboriginal centres/units (McConville 2002:19). This has contributed to the low numbers of Aboriginal academic staff. It is acknowledged that Aboriginal students are more likely to be mature aged (Encel 2000:3) on entry and completion, and that this is accompanied by increased levels of family and community commitment (CAPA 1997:45), and on completion will be seeking secure employment, just as non-Aboriginal graduates will. Insecurity of employment and family commitments do not mix well. The need for security of employment is exacerbated by the financial sacrifices many have made in order to pursue academic studies. Lack of tenure has a more insidious effect than just the lack of financial security.

As McConville (2002) points out, contract employment places employees in a position where they are less likely to challenge the status quo, and for Aboriginal academic staff limits 'their capacity to be free to disagree with senior colleagues, or to challenge university teaching and research from their own Indigenous perspectives' (McConville 2002:19). McConville (2002:19) further claims strong evidence of 'systemic discrimination against Indigenous staff in the area of tenured university employment'. This systemic discrimination frustrates aspirations of Aboriginal staff. It is ironic that non-Aboriginal staff in Aboriginal support centres have been more likely to have tenure of employment than their Aboriginal colleagues. While this may be related to relative qualifications, it promotes the need for skilling of Aboriginal people to be able to occupy these tenured positions. McConville (2002:19) cites an unpublished NTEU report which reveals this anomaly; an anomaly which leads to questioning of the commitment to Aboriginal control of Aboriginal education.

Racism is an issue Aboriginal Australian academic staff have to overcome. In personal conversations with Aboriginal educators, prior to and during this research, I have encountered a belief that we not only have to be as good as non-Aboriginal educators, we have to be better. The common perception that Aboriginal people receive special treatment and attain positions because of their background rather than merit underlies this. Creation of positions which are exempt from the discrimination laws and classified as for Aboriginal people only has exacerbated this to an extent. Hart (2003:13) in his own experience, and from conversations with other Aboriginal academics, believes that the biggest issue facing Aboriginal lecturers is 'unpacking and

exorcising the everyday, garden variety racism that the majority of white Australians bring consciously and unconsciously to learning'. This is expressed by Nakata (2004a:10) as a growing concern by Aboriginal academics about the nature and difficulty of the task 'of educating non-Indigenous students to more fully understand the Indigenous perspective or world view'. McConville (2002:19) discusses how 'the synergies between teaching and research' across various academic disciplines provide Aboriginal Australians with a chance to influence what is 'documented, taught and learned'. He sees the involvement of Aboriginal people in 'managing the process of inquiry and debate about them (selves) as essential'.

Conclusion

Aboriginal people have struggled to overcome the barriers to access to and participation in the arena of higher education. These barriers still face many who wish to undertake tertiary studies at both the undergraduate and postgraduate level. However, a number of developments have led to a slow, but incremental, increase in the number of Aboriginal people successfully engaging with the academy. Policy changes, institutional strategies and the introduction of support units have all contributed to this change.

As a result of this increase in student engagement there has been an increase in the number of Aboriginal graduates and postgraduates who can both take up positions in universities, and engage in research and reporting that challenges hegemonic practices. Such increased involvement has the potential for progression of the struggle to redress the legacy of colonialism in Australia. Aboriginal people whose qualifications are recognised by governments and bureaucracies have more opportunity to pursue positions that allow them to be part of the policy and decision making processes that impact on Aboriginal people's daily lives and life chances. This reflects my firmly held conviction that education is a source of empowerment, and therefore it is critical that small improvements be analysed and built upon. The Cultural Safety approach, outlined in the next chapter, could be included as part of the toolkit to eliminate the institutional racism, cultural violence and structural violence that has become so entrenched in Australia.

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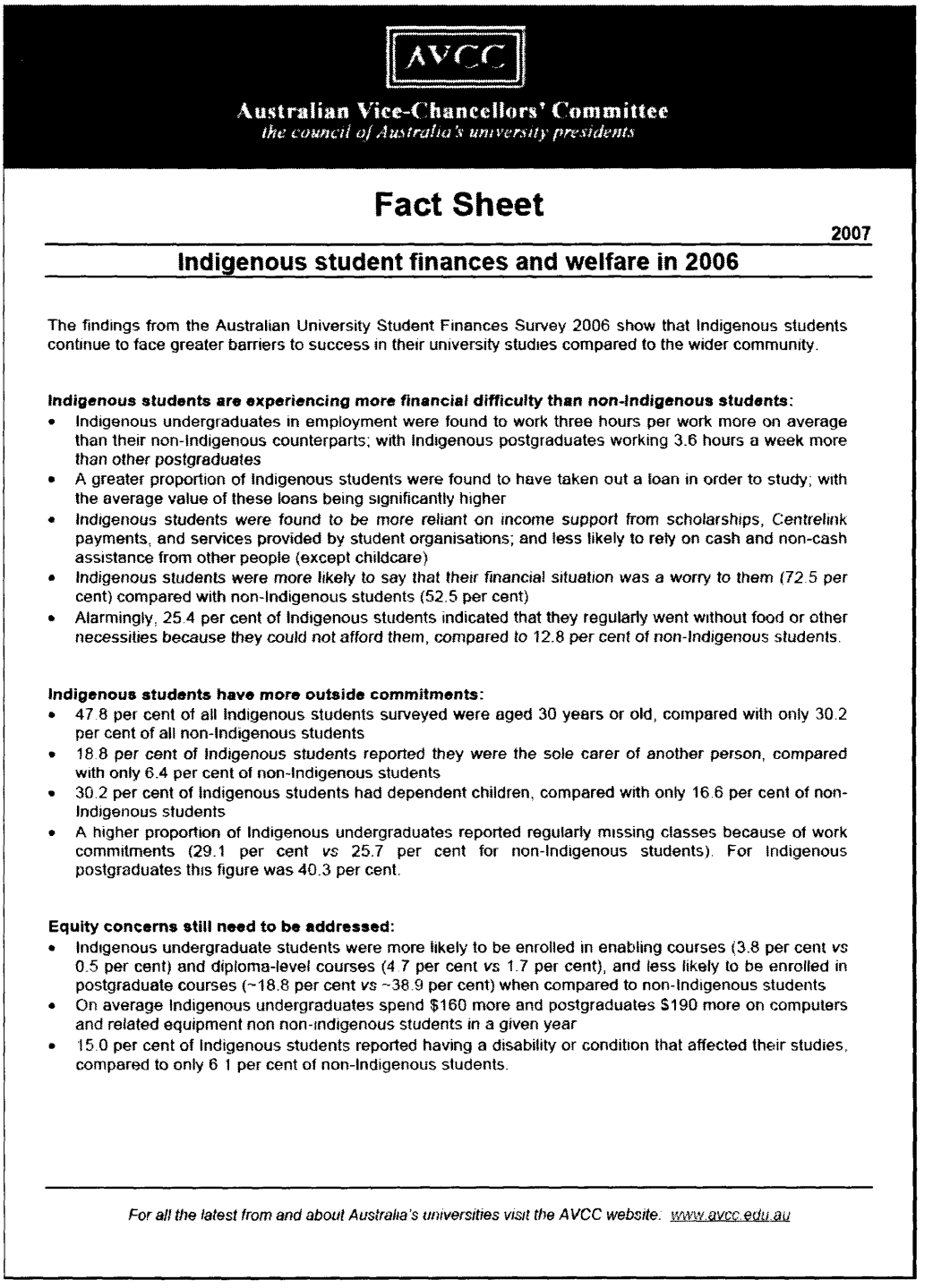
Appendix 1



Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee
the council of Australia's university presidents

Fact Sheet

2007

Indigenous student finances and welfare in 2006

The findings from the Australian University Student Finances Survey 2006 show that Indigenous students continue to face greater barriers to success in their university studies compared to the wider community.

Indigenous students are experiencing more financial difficulty than non-Indigenous students:

- Indigenous undergraduates in employment were found to work three hours per work more on average than their non-Indigenous counterparts; with Indigenous postgraduates working 3.6 hours a week more than other postgraduates
- A greater proportion of Indigenous students were found to have taken out a loan in order to study; with the average value of these loans being significantly higher
- Indigenous students were found to be more reliant on income support from scholarships, Centrelink payments, and services provided by student organisations; and less likely to rely on cash and non-cash assistance from other people (except childcare)
- Indigenous students were more likely to say that their financial situation was a worry to them (72.5 per cent) compared with non-Indigenous students (52.5 per cent)
- Alarmingly, 25.4 per cent of Indigenous students indicated that they regularly went without food or other necessities because they could not afford them, compared to 12.8 per cent of non-Indigenous students.

Indigenous students have more outside commitments:

- 47.8 per cent of all Indigenous students surveyed were aged 30 years or old, compared with only 30.2 per cent of all non-Indigenous students
- 18.8 per cent of Indigenous students reported they were the sole carer of another person, compared with only 6.4 per cent of non-Indigenous students
- 30.2 per cent of Indigenous students had dependent children, compared with only 16.6 per cent of non-Indigenous students
- A higher proportion of Indigenous undergraduates reported regularly missing classes because of work commitments (29.1 per cent *vs* 25.7 per cent for non-Indigenous students). For Indigenous postgraduates this figure was 40.3 per cent.

Equity concerns still need to be addressed:

- Indigenous undergraduate students were more likely to be enrolled in enabling courses (3.8 per cent *vs* 0.5 per cent) and diploma-level courses (4.7 per cent *vs* 1.7 per cent), and less likely to be enrolled in postgraduate courses (~18.8 per cent *vs* ~38.9 per cent) when compared to non-Indigenous students
- On average Indigenous undergraduates spend $160 more and postgraduates $190 more on computers and related equipment non non-indigenous students in a given year
- 15.0 per cent of Indigenous students reported having a disability or condition that affected their studies, compared to only 6.1 per cent of non-Indigenous students.

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CHAPTER 7
CULTURAL SAFETY IN EDUCATION

Introduction

This chapter will outline how the concept and principles of Cultural Safety could be adapted to education, specifically that provided for Australian Aboriginal people in post-colonial society. A review of Cultural Safety Principles will open the discussion. How Cultural Safety fits into the context of Australian Aboriginal education will follow. This will include consideration of indicators and example of the lack of Cultural Safety in contemporary education service provision for Aboriginal students. A comparison between recent cultural awareness programs and Cultural Safety will form the third part of the discussion about the application of Cultural Safety in the context of Australian Aboriginal Education. The importance of true participation in educational decision making as a contribution to Cultural Safety for Aboriginal students will follow. The specific role of Cultural Safety in the higher education sector will form the final section of this chapter. In conclusion advocacy for the adoption of Cultural Safety in Australian Aboriginal education will be presented.

Review of Cultural Safety principles

The concept of Cultural Safety and the process to achieve it were developed in response to the fact that much service provision is culturally unsafe or dangerous to clients from minority groups, who as a result either don't access the services or receive poor outcomes from their contact. The Nursing Council of New Zealand (2005:4) defines 'unsafe cultural practice [as] any action which diminishes, demeans or disempowers the cultural identity and well being of an individual'.

In Chapter 1 I proposed the following definition of Cultural Safety as a synthesis of the work of Ramsden (2002), the Nursing Council of New Zealand (2005) and writers such as Williams (1999) and Eckermann et al (2006) who have incorporated the concept into their work.

> Cultural safety is a process that involves service providers in critical reflection of the historical and socio-political factors which impact on the life chances of both

> themselves and their clients. Positions of power and powerlessness result from these factors. Recognition of this promotes respect for clients and avoids perceptions of them through the looking glass of deficit theories. This facilitates clients' input into defining what is safe for them.

Three core principles, reflection, recognition and respect (Nursing Council of New Zealand 2005:4) underpin the concept of Cultural Safety. These could be incorporated into teacher training and professional development. Cultural Safety education for service providers is discussed in its own right later in this chapter.

Cultural Safety in the context of Australian Aboriginal education

Why would we want to consider Cultural Safety as an approach to understanding Aboriginal education in Australia? Since the introduction of the utopian rhetoric of self-determination into Australian political discourse, numerous policies, strategies, approaches and theories have been formulated and embraced to attempt to redress the inadequacy of the provision of education services to Australian Aboriginal people However, as the statistics in Chapter 1 indicate, little progress has been made in improving the educational opportunities of Aboriginal students.

Lack of Cultural Safety in Aboriginal Education

Issue of culturally unsafe practices in schools could be discussed from a number of angles, including myriad aspects of curriculum content and pedagogy. However, I have chosen here to concentrate on issues of attendance, or non-attendance. Non-attendance, either voluntary or the result of suspension/exclusion, is a strong indicator that Aboriginal students experience disenchantment with the education systems, and then disengage and disappear (Withers 2004).

Apparent increases in participation and retention are reported and taken to indicate that the evolution of education policy and associated practices has led to improvement. Another measure of Aboriginal engagement with education has received less attention. This is the issue of attendance, or rather non-attendance.

Statistics related to truancy are not as carefully recorded and reported as those related to participation and retention (Bourke, Rigby & Burden 2000:1; Withers

2004:11). This is despite the recommendations of a 1996 House of Representatives report which advocates the collection and standardisation of national attendance data (Withers 2004:11). However it is important to consider the levels of non-attendance. It is accepted that attendance is a critical influence on educational outcomes for all students (Bourke et al, 2000:1). It also has wider implications, as reported by Johnston (1991 vol.2:pt. 16.6.1), who noted that many of the individuals whose deaths in custody were part of the investigation of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody had a history of non-attendance at school. Poor educational outcomes, compounded by non-attendance, diminish people's life chances and can contribute to increased likelihood of involvement with the judicial system and incarceration.

Some information is available in relation to attendance figures for Aboriginal students, despite the lack of national data or consistency in the way in which states measure and report attendance (Bourke et al 2000:1; Withers 2004:11). As Bourke et al (2000:1) assert it is clear from the literature and anecdotal information that absenteeism for Aboriginal students is much higher than for non-Aboriginal students. This would indicate that schools are not a place many Aboriginal children and teenagers want to be, and they are 'voting with their feet' to indicate that education on offer remains largely culturally dangerous for them.

Withers (2004:12) cited a South Australian Police document which reported that in Term 2 of 2002 the Aboriginal absence rate from school was 17.2% compared to an overall rate of 8.9%. Similar figures were suggested by the 2004 New South Wales Review of Aboriginal Education. Faced with the lack of available state-wide data the team sampled 200 government schools and found that the absentee rates for Aboriginal students were approximately twice that of non-Aboriginal students (NSW Department of Education and Training 2004:25).

Attendance rates vary considerably between different areas. Many communities have far higher non-attendance rates than the averaged figures presented above. Bourke et al (2000:12) quoted the Adelaide Advertiser (16 June 1999) report that in some Central Australian schools up to 47% of Aboriginal students were absent from school on any given day. Koch in *The Australian* (18 July, 2005) discussed Aboriginal communities in the Cape York region where attendance rates varied between 51% and 80%, and pointed out that an 80% attendance rate meant that a student still missed a day a week of school.

Reasons for non-attendance are varied. The concern here is to identify the behavioural management aspects of the school experience which alienate Aboriginal students because of lack of Cultural Safety.

Students identified racism as an aspect of their daily lives in schools (Bourke et al 2000:24; Sanderson 2002:6). How teachers, in their position of power, perceived racism in the schools influenced how they reacted to examples of it, and how they dealt with Aboriginal students' responses to racism from other students. Sanderson (2002:6-8) recounted that students in her research clearly felt that the behaviour of some other students was racist, but that teachers would not deal with it. They attributed this lack of action to blindness to the occurrences, or actual fear of the racists. The student perceptions were at odds with those of teachers, who stated that racism was not an issue in their schools. Problems experienced by students were blamed on their home lives and were not recognised as the result of the fact that schools were a 'context for unequal relations of power (Sanderson 2002:8). These unequal relations allowed demeaning racist practices to continue, and the disempowered Aboriginal students could do little about it, other than avoid it by non-attendance.

Another issue raised has been that behaviour management plans in schools are inappropriate. This is particularly relevant to involuntary non-attendance through suspension and expulsion. While many other aspects of schools have been subject to considerable attention, Sanderson (2002:2) suggests that the issue of 'regimes of punishment' have been largely excluded from critical analysis because it is seen as a necessary part of the system. They should be scrutinised because they both structure and are structured by power relationships. The purpose of the discipline regimes is described as to develop 'student compliancy and student identity with the values of the school' (Sanderson 2002:2). This is an assimiliationist goal which denies the validity of the students' own value systems, and demeans their lives in the community outside of school.

One aspect of the disciplinary regime is 'forced absenteeism' (Herbert 2003:9) that occurs as a result of suspensions and exclusions. Bourke et al (2000:13) discusses the disproportionate rates of suspension and exclusion among Aboriginal students, pointing out that in West Australia Aboriginal students are twice as likely to be suspended and four times as likely to be excluded as their non-Aboriginal peers. South Australian figures cited by Bourke et.al. (2000:13) indicate that Aboriginal students in that state face suspension or exclusion at three times the average state rate. In

Queensland Herbert (2003:9) states that Aboriginal students are subject to disciplinary measures at two to three times higher rates than other students. Sanderson (2002:5) raises the question of what demeaning message is being conveyed to young Aboriginal people about themselves by their over-representation in negative data bases.

If schools are providing a place of Cultural Safety for Aboriginal students it could be expected that they would be engaging with the school in a manner which did not produce such disproportionate censure of their behaviour. One of the participants in this research, who is now working in a secondary school, expresses concern that Aboriginal enrolments in the school have dropped considerably since last year. The students are not attending school or are going elsewhere. This participant is also worried by the high levels of suspension being experienced by our secondary students in her school, a sign that the behaviour management plans are not working. It would seem that in this school Aboriginal people are expressing the only power they have; they choose not to engage with the education system.

The pattern of disengagement has been evident since the establishment of the first Aboriginal school in 1814, which failed because it was not supported by community members, who saw it as destroying Aboriginal culture, and because 'the children found the curriculum irrelevant' (Tripcony 2000:2). As a result the children simply disappeared and the 1814 school was forced to close (Lippmann 1981:20). Contemporary law forces Aboriginal children to be enrolled in school during compulsory schooling years, but does not deal with continuing cultural danger. Failure to provide a culturally safe school environment leads to various forms of disengagement with the education system.

Limitations of the cultural awareness approach

The focus of many approaches to increasing Aboriginal engagement with education has been development of cultural awareness programs which emphasises cultural mores and kinship structures. Statistics such as those available on the Australian Bureau of Statistics suggest that this has not been successful. Cultural Safety, as presented by Ramsden (2002), is a concept that goes beyond cultural awareness and has been promoted in the pursuit of better health outcomes for Aboriginal Australians by number of people and organisations. These include the authors of *Binan Goonj* (Eckermann et. al, 1992, 2006) who have not only published their research in the area, but have also provided workshops for individuals and organisations (Eckermann et al

2006:ix). The Council of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses (ttpwww.indiginet.com.au/catsin/recommendations.html) and the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association (Minniecon & Kong 2005:9) have endorsed the adoption of Cultural Safety principles.

Ramsden (2002) discusses problems with the existing approach of cultural awareness training in Aotearoa, which resembles much of the cultural awareness training available in Australia, and suggests that its focus is problematic for a number of reasons. Three of these form the basis of the following discussion; the capacity of the approach to stereotype, the neglect of the issues faced by urbanised Aboriginal people and the issue of ownership of cultural knowledge.

The first of these concerns is that teaching simple ritual and custom to service providers stereotypes and rigidifies ideas of culture and does not allow for human diversity. In doing so it denies the existence and validity of living and evolving contemporary Aboriginal cultures. Cultural awareness training does not take into account the impact of colonial history on contemporary socio-economic status. It also cannot address the issues related to how language frames the perceptions of Aboriginal people and further demeans them. The approach is criticised by Ramsden (2002:2) as working within the power structure to provide culturally specific care to individuals and groups. While service provision is focused on the 'cultural activities' of the consumer, there remains a tendency to promote a stereotypical view of culture over time, thus making it difficult to respond to individual diversity (Ramsden 2002:4). Stereotypical views of culture ignore the diversity of contemporary situations which reflect the diversity of contact histories of Aboriginal communities, and don't support the reflection needed to provide opportunities for empowerment.

Secondly, Ramsden (2002:3) suggests that such cultural awareness approaches, which focus on traditional ethnographic detail, often neglect urbanised Aboriginal populations. They can encourage deficit perceptions of Aboriginal people as a supposedly homogenous group thus making it difficult to respond to individual diversity. Factors of social stratification, gender, geographical location and distinct local community histories are denied.

Early colonisation in Australia occurred in areas which were seen by the colonisers as more 'attractive' and easy to adjust to – the coastal areas. Colonisation spread as 'explorers' discovered the potential economic benefits of venturing further into the interior for pastoral reasons (Broome 2001:40-42). This pattern of colonisation

resulted in the development of urban, rural and remote communities who experienced contact with the oppressors in different historic eras. As a result the contemporary situations of these communities exhibit diversity, although all suffer socio-economic disadvantage and marginalisation. This diversity is not explored in traditional ethnographic and anthropologically based cultural awareness training. As Ramsden (2002:4) states skill and knowledge related to traditional communities, represented in much anthropological writing will not lead to effective service provision for urbanised Aboriginal people.

Homogenising of Aboriginal people can result from cultural awareness approaches based on checklists developed in remote communities (Keeffe 1992:99-100). Thus the historic and continued experience of marginalisation by urban and regional fringe dwellers is ignored, as is the experience of those considered assimilated or those declared extinct. Walter et. al (2006:341) point out that such a focus on the problems faced by traditional and remote communities

> disregards the endemic poverty, ill-health and restricted life chances that are also the lived experience of the nearly three-quarters of our Indigenous population who live in regional and urban Australia.

Crump (2001:20) warns against overgeneralisations and emphasises that in addition to a broad understanding of contact history, locally specific information should be sought when attempting to forge effective relationships with Aboriginal students and their broader community. Respect for the consumers of services could be promoted by reflection on specific local Aboriginal community history and contemporary concerns.

Ramsden's (2002:4) third criticism of cultural awareness training models is grounded in the assertion that cultural knowledge, which has strong links with language, belongs to the members of the culture. Consequently cultural identity and traditions should remain within the culture, and non-custodians of the culture should not attempt to transmit elements of it.

Many Aboriginal people have been dispossessed, through government policies, of knowledge of their own identities and traditions. Cultural awareness training of service providers may lead to them being seen as the trained 'experts', and so disempower their clients (Coup 1996 cited in Ramsden 2000:4). Colonial practices of dispossession, reserves and missions, and the removal of children have all contributed to the dispossession of knowledge of identities and traditions for many Aboriginal

Australians; but as an Aboriginal man said to me recently, 'we don't want to be told by "white experts" what our "culture" is or should be'.

Concerns about cultural awareness are addressed by the Cultural Safety model because it is an

> ...ecological model that actually argues for the health care professional to take into consideration the socio-political reality of the patient – not the cultural stuff in isolation – especially not as interpreted within the ideological framework of multiculturalism, but rather, in terms of the political status and historical experiences of the patient/group with which one is dealing. (Jiwani 2000:4)

Jiwani's comment relates to the first of two Cultural Safety foci described by Ramsden. One of these is the role of social inequality in the daily lives of Aboriginal people. The second is the issue of power imbalances.

Concern with structural and multi-faceted social inequality, a key part of Cultural Safety, emphasises **life chances** rather than life styles (Ramsden 2002:5). The role of historical and socio-political factors in the creation and perpetuation of disadvantage is emphasised, and the 'blame the victim' approach that can result from placing the cause of disadvantage in the realm of cultural difference is challenged. In the Australian Aboriginal education arena this requires that education providers, be they classroom teachers, lecturers or policy makers develop an awareness and understanding of the colonial history of Australia and of the geographical district in which they are working.

Life chances have been determined and limited by the racism, structural violence and cultural violence which are an endemic legacy of colonialism in Australia. Aboriginal people have 'suffered from the incursion of an expanding state' (McNeish & Eversole 2005:9). The expansion of Australia and the development of its economy created an economic burden on the traditional custodians as a result of their dispossession. Understanding the contemporary socio–economic disadvantage of Australian Aboriginal people requires recognition of that historical fact.

As part of the process of protecting the economic expansion of colonial society mechanisms of control based on institutional racism were put into place (McGrath 1995:7; Dodson 1997:25). The controls, in the form of laws regulating aspects of Aboriginal daily lives, effectively made Aboriginal people second class under the law (Bennett 1989:9). These controls put in place during the phase of external colonialism continued into the twentieth century and created an imbalance in power between the

traditional custodians and the broader Australian society that has continued into the twenty first century and is evident in the fact that

> ...whites have continued to determine the environment in which Aborigines have been allowed to act. In fact to an important extent the bureaucracy has been extremely reluctant to relinquish control over the lives of Aborigines. (Bennett 1989:85)

Reluctance to concede or even share power was further illustrated in an example provided by Bennett (1989). He pointed out that when the Whitlam government allocated funds and services for Aboriginal communities there was a marked increase in the European population who went to control and administer these funds and services (Bennett 1989:105). Power remained in the hands of non-Aboriginal advisers and was reflected in provision of education. Control of resources, program planning and service delivery was exercised by non-Aboriginal bureaucrats and teachers.

The second focus of Cultural Safety outlined by Ramsden is that it is concerned with the transfer of power from service providers to consumers, thus addressing issues of power imbalance (Cooney 1994 cited in Ramsden 2002:2). For Australian educators to engage in this transfer of power an examination of dominant power structures and how they impact on the educational experience of Aboriginal Australian students would be needed. Structural influences which have a significant impact on daily life experiences and chances cannot be ignored (Ramsden 2002:2) Eisenburch (2001 ch.5:20) indicates that Cultural Safety focuses on how groups within society are treated, not how they are different; and on the exercise of 'power and racism of the dominant over the native inhabitants'. It is further asserted (Eisenburch ch.5:24) that the important difference between Cultural Safety and other neo-colonial approaches related to culture and disadvantage is that 'there has to be a genuine sharing of power rather than appropriation of cultural knowledge by the experts', that is experts defined and identified by the academy and the bureaucrats. Power imbalance can be addressed when the definition of what is culturally safe is placed in the hands of the consumers of the services (Ramsden 2002:2). This is the real challenge for service providers, true involvement of Aboriginal people in the decision making processes.

Cultural Safety and Aboriginal Participation

The importance of community participation in decision making related to Aboriginal education, which has come to be acknowledged, is accommodated and encouraged within the Cultural Safety model. This is one of the focuses of the NATSIEP.

The NATSIEP identifies the need for Aboriginal people to be 'involved in the processes of education decision making' (DEET 1989:13). Such involvement is detailed by Tripcony (1995:176) who asserts that it should include participation at all levels of policy making, curriculum design and delivery and determining appropriate outcomes. Participation needs to include more than an advisory position and allow Aboriginal people a role in establishing guidelines for what they consider culturally safe policy, programs and practice. Education Queensland, in its publication *Partners for Success* (2000:10), promotes the need for local agreements between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and schools. Establishment of such local agreements has the potential to hand the power for at least some decision making in relation to education provision to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and deliver a degree of Cultural Safety for students. As such it remains a goal worth pursuing.

It seems to me that aspects of the discourse of Cultural Safety offer us a different and potentially more hopeful approach in the contentious area of Aboriginal education. Cultural Safety, with its focus on the impact of power imbalances between the service provider and the consumer, goes beyond the perceived limitations of current approaches. These power imbalances are embedded in the colonial history of this country and the socio-political structures created to serve colonial interests. They are perpetuated at least in part by the failure of education systems to provide opportunities of empowerment for Aboriginal Australians. Writers, including McConnochie (1982:20), have discussed education provision as clearly related to broader political goals, and empowerment of Aboriginal people has historically not been a mainstream political goal in Australia.

Cultural Safety and Higher Education

Education systems in Australia have historically failed to provide an experience with which Aboriginal people can comfortably or safely engage. The legacies of colonialism in the form of institutional racism, structural violence and cultural violence

as well as continued assimiliationist practices have all been embedded in education systems including universities. They have served to contribute to the alienation and marginalisation experienced by many Aboriginal students. McConville (2002:17) stated that

> ...for higher education institutions in particular, serious "business" exists arising from the nature of their foundation. Universities researched and taught the philosophies which were used to justify policies of separation and assimilation, acquired (stole) many objects of cultural significance thus assisting the cultural dispossession of many Aboriginal Australian people, while disciplines associated with the pastoral and mining industries contributed to material dispossession. The land on which universities are situated was never ceded, and teaching and research about Aboriginal Australia people was established from entirely non-Aboriginal frameworks.

This portrayal of universities posits that they have been culturally dangerous places where institutional practices were diminishing, demeaning and disempowering to Aboriginal people. They have had little, if any, power within the education systems at the levels of compulsory or post-compulsory education. They have been under-represented in positions which have an input into policy making.

The experience of the compulsory education years has a dual effect on Aboriginal participation in the tertiary sector. Negative experiences resulting from 'culturally unsafe' education practices have led to many people being reluctant to continue to expose themselves to 'demeaning and disempowering' practices. Another challenge is that academic skills necessary for satisfying participation in tertiary education have not been developed. Many, including Whatman, have commented on this phenomenon. Historically, this ongoing systemic failure has been blamed on the individuals by exponents of deficit theories. Life styles and cultural differences have been identified as the causes of Aboriginal 'failure', rather than life chances embedded in the power structure of Australian society. Redressing this situation requires a change in the balance of power. In line with principles underlying the Cultural Safety model, increasing Aboriginal input into decision making regarding the development and delivery of education programs is an important way in which this change can be encouraged.

At the higher education level, the establishment of enclaves in the 1970s heralded the beginning of some productive change. The roles of most support units have developed. Staff in some are asked to contribute to the inclusion of Aboriginal

perspectives in some disciplines. This was an important step because as Bunda (1988:1 cited in Herbert 2002:1) asserted,

> Aboriginal people wish to contribute to the academy and the strength of the contribution will be a reflection of the institution's ability to receive it. A true partnership between Aboriginal people and universities forges a path for understanding and respect. Without this, we are each diminished.

Support units have historically contributed to the Cultural Safety goals of reflection, recognition and respect by increasing the profile of Aboriginal people in Australian universities. With an increased role in the academic sector Aboriginal units have the potential to advance the process of embedding Cultural Safety principles into the mainstream. Units provide students with a range of practical support, which addresses some of the historical difficulties faced by Aboriginal students. These include special entry and academic assistance. Equally important is the support provided for students in dealing with the, still for many, alien environment of the university, by simply having their own 'place'.

An important role of support units has been in contributing to an 'Aboriginal presence' in universities. I use the term 'Aboriginal presence' to cover a number of recurring 'themes' I have encountered in reading and conversations related to how universities can become culturally safe places for Aboriginal students. When Aboriginal voices are recognised and respected by academia we will see an increased Aboriginal presence in the following areas: participation as students, staffing, curriculum content, research and publications, and funding commitments.

When Aboriginal students find themselves in the minority on university campuses and in some cases the sole Aboriginal students, the pursuit of a university education is a lonely and difficult experience. Lillian Holt (2000:11) describes her experience of university life in 1968 as 'strange and alienating', a description that would be familiar to many Aboriginal university students. Veronica Arbon (2000:31) expresses similar sentiments in her description of the isolation she felt in large classes in 1983. Increasing Aboriginal enrolments and the support of Aboriginal people, students and staff, in the units have helped to ameliorate this isolation.

As a result of the improvement in the number of Aboriginal graduates there are now people capable of filling academic positions within the mainstream faculties of universities. The presence of Aboriginal academics while contributing to a more Culturally Safe environment for Aboriginal students also opens up the opportunity for Aboriginal input into curriculum development; an input that is vital in order to develop

culturally appropriate content both for Aboriginal students and about Aboriginal issues. Goals 20 and 21 of the influential National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (DEET: 1989) emphasise the need for education which meets these two objectives.

The creation and evolution of Aboriginal support units has aided the beginning of the establishment of an Aboriginal presence in universities, but that there is still a long way to go towards this goal. The adoption of culturally safe practices based on reflection, recognition and respect, is a pathway towards that goal, and could also promote the situation where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people work together across faculties in teaching and research. It is not necessarily an easy task because of the explicit challenge it makes to the historical power imbalance which legitimises and enshrines the voices of those 'successful' in the white academic traditions and representative of colonial interests of this country.

For Cultural Safety to become entrenched in the provision of education for Aboriginal Australian students, and indeed for other minority groups, it is essential that it become part of teacher training and professional development and is one area where universities can play a role in promoting Cultural Safety. This involves an institutional commitment not only to making universities Culturally Safe, but also promoting the wider awareness of the concept and its implementation.

Education in Cultural Safety Principles

Much of the extant writing in relation to teaching Cultural Safety comes from New Zealand where most of the significant work to date has been done. The Nursing Council of New Zealand (2005) discusses Cultural Safety and the education of nurses in relation to the Treaty of Waitangi. Despite the fact that Australia has no treaty with Aboriginal people in which to contextualise Cultural Safety, there are still aspects of the New Zealand approach to Cultural Safety education which can be considered for Australian educators.

Cultural awareness approaches focus on attempts to learn and understand aspects of another culture. Cultural Safety concentrates on understanding one's own culture and position of power and therefore promotes appropriate service delivery in any context, not just the identified cross-cultural situation explored in a specific cultural awareness program (Nursing Council of New Zealand 2005:4). The progression from cultural awareness to Cultural Safety is illustrated in figure 7.1 below.

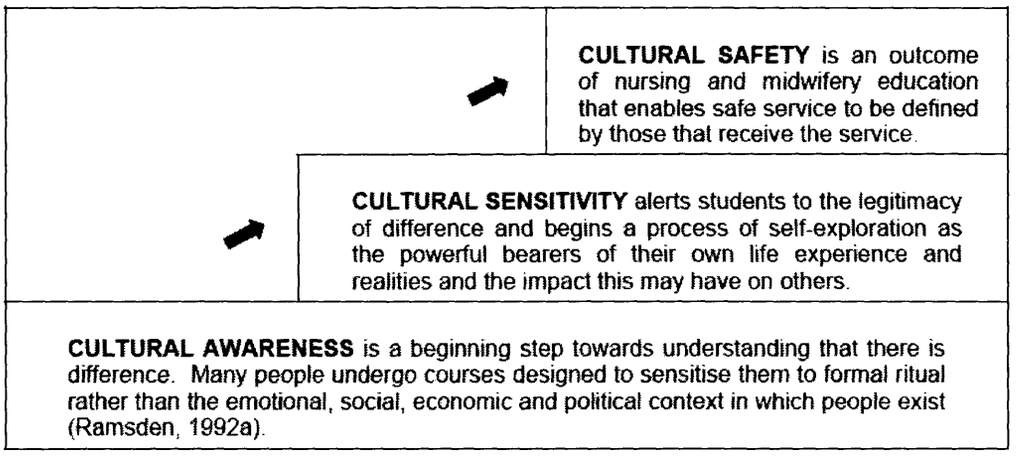

Figure 7.1. The process of achieving cultural safety (Ramsden 2002:117)

Culturally safe education for service providers requires that people are encouraged to,

- 'reflect on their own world views and experiences and how these influence the attitudes they bring with them to their encounters with individuals they interact with in their occupation,
- consider how historical, political and social process impact on the contemporary situation of their clients, and
- develop a flexible approach to relationships with people who are different from themselves' (Nursing Council of New Zealand 2005:8).

Teachers of Cultural Safety to Australian education providers should have a degree and experience in the field of education and this experience would preferably be in Australia. Specific Aboriginal content should be taught by Aboriginal people. Cultural Safety educators also need knowledge that is developed in the community and interaction with community members, not just university based knowledge (adapted from Wepa 2001:34)

Conclusion

Cultural Safety promotes the recognition of a number of factors which have continued to mar Aboriginal access to equitable education in Australia. Acknowledgement of the power imbalances between sectors of Australian society is not necessarily an easy task. It asks of service providers a level of reflection on colonial history which may pose a challenge to their perception of their own potentially privileged position in a very stratified society. However it offers a position from which power may be shared and Aboriginal clients may have a true partnership with education providers. This could lead to real improvements in educational outcomes for Australia's Aboriginal people. Policy change in Aboriginal education has occurred as a result of numerous reviews and reports. However this has not led to significant improvement. A new perspective that is somewhat more than a reform or revamp of what we have already tried is needed.

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CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

It is undeniable that the history of contact between the original custodians of this country and the dominant society which developed as a result of colonial policies and practices has left Aboriginal Australians locked in the position of an underclass. Despite reports, reviews, changes in policy and experimentation with consultative processes the situation has not significantly improved.

As discussed in Chapter 1, my personal background and professional experience led me to a search for information and knowledge which would contribute to a better understanding of the educational disadvantage faced by many Aboriginal people in Australia. Different theoretical approaches to Aboriginal education had been developed, promoted and tried. However statistics related to participation, retention and outcomes did not indicate that significant improvement was occurring, and my own experience with individual Aboriginal students illustrated a lack of engagement with the education system. I wanted a different personal way of interpreting the continuing marginalisation of Aboriginal students. Conversations and an initial literature search led to a desire to unpack the complex historical and contemporary socio-political issues which created and continued to perpetuate disadvantage. A number of qualitative research paradigms were available, and Critical Theory was adopted because it allowed for 'social scientific criticism' (Schwandt 2000:190). It was also an attractive paradigm because of its emphasis on the social construction of power, and its critique of the production of knowledge (Smith 1999:5-6).

Chapter 2 introduced some key concepts which are important in understanding the history of contact between Aboriginal people and Europeans. These include colonialism, racism, structural violence and cultural violence. The discussion of the different historical Aboriginal policy periods in Chapter 3 linked the policies to these underlying concepts. .

During the early period of British colonisation of Australia two important philosophies were becoming accepted in Britain and had a significant impact on the way the colonisers would come to view Aboriginal people. Scientific racism, based on principles of Social Darwinism, was prevalent. The Protestant work ethic was also dominant. These two intellectual frameworks promoted the perception that Aboriginal

Australians were inferior and that their apparent pattern of land disuse justified their dispossession. Dispossession dissolved the traditional cultural and spiritual ties to the land and removed the economic base of everyday life for many Aboriginal people and communities.

Scientific racism led to acts of overt racism and the entrenchment of institutional racism. Laws were enacted which applied only to Aboriginal Australians and curtailed many aspects of their lives, including where they could live, their right to take part in the polity through voting and their access to government welfare provisions. Rights to marry, to enter or leave missions and reserves and to access education were other aspects of Aboriginal life controlled by laws that applied only to Aboriginal people.

Structural violence exacerbated the effects of institutional racism and further alienated Aboriginal people from access to the resources of the wider society. In doing so their basic needs of survival, well-being, identity and freedom were denied. This structural violence occurred through four processes, exploitation, penetration, fragmentation and marginalisation (Galtung 1975). Exploitation involved the labour of Aboriginal people which contributed to the financial security of the colonist, but provided very little benefit for the labourer. In the process of exploitation Aboriginal people were not only placed in the position of an underclass, but also came to see themselves as worthless. This was what Galtung referred to as penetration. A third aspect of the process involved fragmentation where Aboriginal people were separated from each other and their interactions were limited. The final process of marginalisation involved the exploiters creating structural organisations which clearly placed people as first or second class citizens (Galtung 1975:264-265), a situation which occurred in Australia where Aboriginal people were relegated to the second class position.

Cultural violence was also a legacy of colonialism. Within the assumption that all aspects of the dominant culture were superior lay the seeds for imposing that culture and its institutions on Aboriginal people. This promoted the expectation that Aboriginal people would fit into Western polity and education systems.

Australia went through a number of policy changes in regard to the role that Aboriginal Australians were assigned within the broader society. When the policy of self-determination was adopted in 1972 it was accompanied by recognition of the need to involve Aboriginal people in policy development and decision making related to their everyday life experiences and life chances. As a result different Commonwealth governments created a succession of advisory bodies, discussed in Chapter 4. Decisions

related to the structure and role of these bodies were made by members of the incumbent governments and associated Departments, and imposed upon Aboriginal people who were still expected to fit into the dominant polity. The mainstream was not expected to adapt. These organisations experienced a number of problems with the government which were largely associated with their relative powerlessness. They also encountered difficulties with their constituents as they were imposed structures that did not necessarily serve the needs, or reflect the consultative styles of diverse Aboriginal communities. Public and political opinion surrounding the consultative bodies was haunted by fears of separatism and reluctance to truly share power between mainstream society and Aboriginal Australia.

The concept of consultation with Aboriginal people to achieve improved outcomes on statistical indices was extended to education when reviews and reports suggested the need for policy change. Chapter 5 dealt with the history of Aboriginal education including the consultative mechanism and policy development since 1972. The experience with mainstream education provisions for Aboriginal people had been negatively affected by racism, cultural violence and power imbalances. The process of marginalisation as defined by Galtung (1975:265) had created and reinforced the second class position experienced by Aboriginal students. Theories of deficit, which located the deficiency in the child or his/her family and community, dominated the approach to Aboriginal education for many years. When these became discredited new efforts were made to identify the causes of educational disadvantage and to develop policies and programs that would redress the situation. Legacies of colonialism continued to hinder attempts to reduce the disparity in educational outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, despite the introduction of consultative mechanisms.

Higher education for Aboriginal Australians, discussed in Chapter 6, has been characterised by under-representation in student and staff numbers. This has been evident at all levels; enrolments, completions, post-graduate participation, research involvement and staffing. Inclusion of Aboriginal voices in policy and research is a significant step towards redressing this under-representation.

Consultation and participation by Aboriginal people in relation to policy development has been emphasised in approaches since 1972. However, the dissolution of ATSIC and its replacement with new paternalistic approaches (Walter, Pyett, Tyler & Vanderwyk 2006:341) continues to marginalise Aboriginal people as second class citizens. Calma (2005:99) asserts that it is essential from a human rights perspective that

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people be given the chance to be effectively involved in all the policy making and service delivery that impact on their lives. Calma (2005) suggests that effective participation has four components. Aboriginal people must have representation at all levels; international, national, regional and local. Agreement making and planning at all levels must involve Aboriginal understanding of the process. Engagement with Aboriginal clients is essential and requires the development of an appropriately skilled public service. The final requirement is for accountability and transparency to all, which can be achieved through collection and dissemination of appropriate data on which to base monitoring and evaluation.

I would assert that it is vital that all personnel involved in service delivery to Aboriginal communities and individuals adopt the principles of Cultural Safety discussed in Chapter 7. By recognising different positions of power that have historically been assigned to them service providers can develop new and effective relationships with their clients. These relationships should be based on recognition of and respect for the history and cultural values of Aboriginal clients. The Cultural Safety basic premises of reflection, recognition and respect offer a way forward that would allow true participation by Aboriginal people in polity of this country and therefore in having an input into developing their life chances.

Suggestions for future research

This project raises a number of possibilities for future research.

- Analysis of contemporary policies and practices in detail to identify continuing institutional racism, structural violence and cultural violence, which could lead to suggestions for removal of these legacies of colonialism.
- Research identifying and collating examples of effective collaboration and participation in decision making and program delivery at local and regional levels could inform the establishment of a new national representative Aboriginal organisation with a real role in the nation's polity.

- Examination of policies related to educational partnerships compared to practice with a view to disseminating information related to 'success' stories and promoting models which truly involve Aboriginal people.
- Proposals for teacher training and professional development modules in Cultural Safety.
- Curriculum assessment with reference to principles of Cultural Safety could identify aspects of education provision which are alienating for Aboriginal people. This could lead to curriculum development for all sectors of education which promotes knowledge of the historical and contemporary socio-political positions of Aboriginal people in Australian society, and recognises and values diversity.
- Action research involving development and trialling of behaviour management policies that recognise the needs of Aboriginal students and reduce the rates of voluntary and enforced absenteeism.

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