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Indigenous Education In Australia:
Policy, Participation and Praxis

Marnie O'Bryan, Prof. Mark Rose

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The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is based within the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. The journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

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Indigenous Education In Australia: Policy, Participation and Praxis

Guest Editors

Marnie O'Bryan

Prof. Mark Rose

THEME

This special edition of the UNESCO Observatory E-Journal focuses on education for and about the First Peoples of Australia and bears witness to the many faces of Indigenous education in Australia. It testifies to a complex landscape; places on a map, places in minds and places in spirit that taken together present a snapshot of the tone and dimension of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in early 2015.

Indigenous education policy is framed by a bi-partisan commitment to 'closing the gap'. In some instances, Indigenous leaders are framing the debate over how this is best achieved. At the same time, non-Indigenous educators are increasingly becoming aware that equality and mutual respect can only be established once the Australian community opens its mind to the ancient wisdom and the true stories of this place. Many of the articles in this publication identify the 'gap' as an epistemological divide and argue that, like any bridge, education measures aimed at 'closing the gap' need to be constructed simultaneously from both sides. To that end, a number of papers focus on initiatives being developed and explored by mainstream schools to give authentic voice to the perspectives of First Australians for the benefit of non-Indigenous students.

COVER ART

Majority Rule

Michael Cook

*Courtesy of the artist
and Andrew Baker
Art Dealer, Brisbane*

The papers in Volume One, '**Indigenous Education in Australia: Policy, Participation and Praxis**', are all concerned with how Western educational structures and institutions work for and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Volume Two of the Journal is entitled '**Indigenous Education In Australia: Place, Pedagogy and Epistemic Assumptions**'. Each of the articles in this volume pertains to the education experiences of people living in remote Australia.

The articles in this publication take the reader through a rich multidisciplinary tapestry that points to the breadth and complexity of the Indigenous education landscape in Australia today. The papers are honest and true to the heterogeneous communities that are the First Peoples of Australia. Similarly, the poetry and artworks that appear here bear witness to the breadth, depth and diversity of artistic talent and tradition in this country. Taken together, they challenge the reader to move beyond a simplistic quest for 'the silver bullet' to redress disparity in education outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. They encourage reflection, innovation, reciprocity, respect and empowerment through education.

We recommend each and every article.

Prof. Mark Rose & Marnie O'Bryan
Guest Editors

Accompanying Piece



Ngarrka-kurlu
Lily Nungarrayi Hargraves

Courtesy of the Artist

Indigenous Languages in Education – Policy and Practice in Australia

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous Australians have long been advocating for recognition of their languages, cultures and identities. They have sought the inclusion of their languages in schools to revitalize and maintain languages and cultural knowledge, and to take an active role in the education of their children. This paper provides an overview of Indigenous language programs and activities in education and looks to future directions and innovations that may strengthen languages in education, and in turn Australian languages. The paper argues that policy and practice for Indigenous language education interacts with policy and discourse for Indigenous languages, education outcomes and Indigenous policy more broadly. It identifies strengths and challenges for Indigenous languages, and examines national legislative frameworks, which would support Australia's languages into the future, a goal Australia has set itself.

KEYWORDS

Indigenous language education policy in Australia, bilingual education, language revitalization and maintenance, constitutional recognition

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN EDUCATION

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were discouraged and banned from speaking their languages in schools in the past (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner 2009). Over the last four decades many Indigenous Australians have increasingly advocated for recognition and inclusion of their languages, cultures and identities in schools, in order to share, revitalize and maintain language and cultural knowledge and take an active role in the education of their children (Australian Council for Educational Research & Principals Australia Institute-Dare to Lead 2014; Commonwealth of Australia 1992, 1996, 2012; Hartman & Henderson 1994; Hobson et al. 2010; Lester 2014; Lo Bianco 1987; Marika 1998; McConvell & Thieberger 2001; McKay 1996; Walton & Eggington 1990). Though student numbers are low, approximately 70 languages are taught in some 260 schools in Australia. These span from newly re-awakened languages in urban contexts to clan languages spoken by children in remote multilingual settings.

Across the country in urban, rural and remote settings programs there is a plethora of local grassroots education initiatives (Bucknall & Bucknell 1994; Hobson et al. 2010; Hoogenraad 1994; Purdie et al. 2008). Such programs may run for up to a few hours each week in at least one year level, generally in primary schools. In recent decades, many Australian languages have undergone a renaissance, with a groundswell of language reclamation and revitalisation efforts across the country. Language activists in Australia have gone to great lengths to research, reclaim, teach and learn their languages (Amery & Buckskin 2012; Amery & Gale 2008; Hobson et al. 2010). In these community-driven programs, schools have been a significant site for language revival endeavours (Ash et al. 2010; Federation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages (FATSIL) 2004). This ground up activity accounts for the increased inclusion of language programs in southern states since the 1990's in southern states (Gale 2011, p. 295; Purdie et al. 2008). In the north and west of Australia, where Indigenous languages have continued to be spoken as languages of everyday communication, however, education policy towards Indigenous languages has waxed and waned since the 1970's. The (NT) Territory bilingual education programs sought to include student's first language as a medium of instruction and initial literacy, with English language and literacy development staged through the program. It ran in 25 very remote schools, during a period of enormous education

I
A comparison of the census data from 2006 and 2011 implies an increase of 8,500 speakers of an Indigenous language at home. Almost 3,000 of these respondents reported speaking one of the three contemporary speech varieties, leaving an apparent increase of 5,783 respondents identifying as speaking a Traditional language at home. This is an increase of roughly 10%. As the percentage of respondents reporting as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander increased by 20.5% over the time, due to population increase and also as a factor of increased Indigenous participation in the census and in reporting Indigenous status, it is likely that the increase in numbers of speakers of a Traditional Language at home reflects an increase in participation and reporting, rather than speaker numbers.

II
Australian census gathering methodology is not so fine-grained that respondents can indicate language practices, and

innovation and engagement from the 1970s to 2008 (Devlin 2011; Disbray 2014; Hoogenraad 2001). Many NT schools without a bilingual program developed language and culture programs that ran on a more part-time basis (Hoogenraad 1994). Bilingual programs also operated in Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland in the 1980s (Gale 1990; Harris & Devlin 1997).

Today, Indigenous and non-Indigenous students learn Indigenous languages in primary, secondary and tertiary settings. In some cases, teaching takes place on the traditional country of the language, for instance Arrernte in Alice Springs primary schools. Other languages are taught off country, in the case of Pitjantjatjara in some Adelaide primary and secondary schools, and in a long-standing program at the University of South Australia.

Current national policy discourse presents a consensus on the importance of recognising, celebrating and maintaining Australia's Indigenous languages as a national agenda, acknowledging a place for them in education delivery (Australian Government 2013; Commonwealth of Australia 2012). The 'National Indigenous Languages Policy' acknowledges the "that the situation of Australia's Indigenous languages is grave and requires urgent action" (Australian Government 2009, p. 1). Despite this, language in education programs encounter a range of challenges. Sustainability is often fragile in the face of shifting priorities in individual schools or education departments, lack of resources, lack of language speaking teaching staff, and in some cases, a lack of community support (Commonwealth of Australia 2012; Gale 2011, p. 288; Marmion, Obata & Troy 2014, p. 22; McKay 2011; Nicholls 2001). Further, unlike other countries with First Nations Peoples, Australia has no legislative framework that recognises Indigenous languages.

This paper explores Indigenous languages in education; the diverse contexts in which language education takes place, its benefits, and the interaction between policy and practice in this domain. The following section provides an overview of who learns Australian Indigenous languages, where and why. Next, policy settings influenced by and impacting on ground-up aspirations and initiatives for Indigenous languages in education are explored. Here it is argued that the discourse of Indigenous education failure impacts on practical support and implementation of Indigenous language programs, particularly in remote contexts. The next two sections look to recent ground up innovations and partnerships on the one hand, and potential broader societal support and legislative means on the other, which strengthen Indigenous language teaching and learning. The paper ends with a brief concluding passage.

WHO SPEAKS AND LEARNS INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES?

An estimated 270 languages were spoken across the Indigenous nations of pre-colonial Australia (Walsh 1991). According to 2011 census data, 60,550 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians speak or know some of their heritage language^I (see Morphy 2001 on methodological considerations for census data). Some 170 languages are named (Biddle 2012), reflecting both a diverse and extremely fragile language ecology characterised by significant language endangerment^{II}. Australia is one of five language endangerment hotspots world-wide (Marmion, Obata &

responses may reflect a language loyalty and affiliation, rather than everyday usage. Census methods are not designed to reveal patterns of language usage or multilingual practices. The data must be analysed with this in mind (2008, p. 5). This is important also when comparing these data other language survey data, such as that in the National Indigenous Languages Survey Report (Commonwealth of Australia 2012, pp. 38–9).

III
In the Australian 2011 Census data, 1037 people reported Aboriginal English, 6692 Kriol (NT) and 5148 Yumplatok (Torres Strait Islands) as the Indigenous language they speak at home.

IV
Clearly, in some school classes, both heritage speakers and non-heritage speakers may be present.

Troy 2014, p. x). 18 languages are still passed on as the first language of children, 14 of these are spoken in the Northern Territory of Australia. All are vulnerable (Marmion, Obata & Troy 2014, p. 8). Approximately 70 languages are used or known by between 200 and 400 people. A further 80 of the traditional languages are listed as having under 50 speakers, some as few as 3.

Irrespective of language situation, speakers often place great value on their languages and draw on their language repertoire in a range of innovative ways (Amery 2012; Amery & O'Brien 2007; Meakins 2010; Simpson 2014). Younger Warumungu speakers in Tennant Creek, for instance, use their heritage language in new ways, as insertions in the contact language 'Wumpurrarni English'. In the following example, Warumungu utterances are in bold:

pawumpawu *im purldan, it-im im-kayi purluju tri-kina*
poor thing he fell down and hit his head on the tree
(Morrison & Disbray 2008, p. 109)

Similar traditional language use is widespread in settings where languages are spoken fully by few, or by no speakers. Such language practices maintain traditional language and traditional language knowledge, albeit in a contact language vessel, (Morrison & Disbray 2008, p. 110). In language revitalisation and renewal settings, school programs can validate and build on such knowledge. Almost a quarter of the census respondents (12,977) reported speaking one of three contemporary Indigenous languages, Aboriginal English and two creole varieties^{III}. However, speaker numbers for these languages are likely to be underreported. In the 2011 census data, for instance no speakers reported speaking well described contemporary varieties such as Light Warlpiri (O'Shannessy 2008) and Gurindji Kriol (Meakins 2008). Despite wide usage, contemporary speech varieties suffer low prestige (Marmion, Obata & Troy 2014) and many lack a reference term. This contributes to their 'invisibility', evidenced by low reporting and, in education settings, lack of attention to the learning needs of students as learners of English as an additional Language/Dialect (Malcolm 2011; Sellwood & Angelo 2012). Other estimates have proposed up to 25,000 speakers of contemporary creole varieties (Butcher 2008, p. 695; Commonwealth of Australia 2005) and many more speakers of varieties of Aboriginal English (AE) as home languages.

To accommodate the range of language situations and varied learner profiles, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, the Australian Indigenous Languages Framework (1993) was developed for languages in education in the early 1990s, initially for senior secondary programs. As can be seen in Table 1 below, language programs are defined according to the extent to which a language is still used or known in a speech community; Language Maintenance programs involve learners who are first/full language speakers, in communities where there are speakers of all ages. Three types of Language Revival programs follow; Language Revitalisation, Language Renewal and Language Reclamation, to reflect the level of knowledge and use in these settings, and also to establish realistic learning goals for students of these languages. Recognising differences in the relationship of learners with their own heritage language, in comparison to non-heritage learners, Language Learning and Language Awareness programs are defined on this basis, rather than according to the state of the specific language^{IV}.

V
For more on Language
Perspectives

<http://indigenous.education.qld.gov.au/school/languageperspectives/Pages/default.aspx>.

A number of states have drawn on the Framework to develop curriculum and syllabus across the school years (Government of South Australia 2001, nd.; Northern Territory Department of Education and Training 2002; NSW Board of Studies 2003; Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority 2009). For further discussion of the various curriculum documents, see McKay (2011, pp. 305-8). The schema is largely adopted in the Draft Languages Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages for the newly developed Australian Curriculum. It will have three pathways: First Language Learner Pathway (L1), Language Revival Learner Pathway (LR) and Second Language Learner Pathway (L2) (Australian Curriculum 2013).

Less attention has been paid to the language learning needs of first language speakers of contemporary Indigenous languages, or their inclusion in education programs (Disbray & Loakes 2013; Sellwood & Angelo 2012). Exceptions include work on Kimberly Kriol (Berry & Hudson 1997) and Aboriginal English in Western Australia (Department of Education Western Australia and Department of Training and Workforce Development 2012; Malcolm 2011), and in Queensland, the Language Perspectives program^V.

The Australian Indigenous Languages Framework (1993) is set out as follows.

*Table 1
The Australian
Indigenous Languages
Framework*

Australian Indigenous Language Framework (AILF) Categories	Defining Characteristics
Language Maintenance	all generations full speakers
Language Revival (3 sub-categories—all involve learning the language of OWN heritage):	
Language Revitalization	generation of (older) speakers left—children likely good passive knowledge
Language Renewal	some remaining oral tradition but no full speakers—children likely little or no passive knowledge
Language Reclamation	no speakers or partial speakers—relying on historical sources to provide knowledge of the language
Language Learning (Second Language Learning)	non-speakers learning as a second language
Language Awareness	non-speakers learning about the languages

Table 1. The Australian Indigenous Languages Framework

SITES AND NUMBERS OF LEARNERS

Despite a strong set of curriculum documents in some states and, for some languages, teaching resources, teaching and learning Indigenous languages is not widespread in Australian schools. In their audit of Indigenous language programs nationally, Purdie et al. (2008, pp. x-xi) reported that over 16,000 Indigenous students and 13,000 non-Indigenous students in 260 Australian schools take part in some form

of Indigenous language program. This is a little over 1% of students nationally, 29,000 out of approximately 2.3 million. 150,000 of Australian school students are reported as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Data from submissions to the 2011 House of Representatives Inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities (Commonwealth of Australia 2012) indicate that most programs run in primary schools, and take place for less than 3 hours per week. Table 2 provides data from the 2012 report, augmented with data from other sources as marked.

Table 2
Language Programs
in Australian Schools

Jurisdiction	Number of schools teaching an Indigenous language	Number of languages taught
Western Australia	50	20
New South Wales [^]	36	13
Northern Territory	60	Approx. 24
South Australia [*]	42	11
Queensland ^{**}	2	2
Australian Capital Territory ^{***}	2	1
Victoria ^{****}	3	3

Table 2. Language Programs in Australian Schools

[^] Number of students taking part in an Indigenous language program in NSW - 7,986 (1571 Indigenous 6415 non-Indigenous of total 774,700 students)

^{*} South Australian data source refers to government schools, provided by Department of Education and Child Development (Department of Education and Child Development 2013)

^{**} Queensland data gathered in 2006 (Purdie et al. 2008, p. 73)

^{***} ACT data gathered in 2006 (Purdie et al. 2008, p. 58). Number of students taking part in an Indigenous language program in ACT - 166 (48 Indigenous, 118 non-Indigenous)

^{****} Victorian data gathered in 2006 (Purdie et al. 2008, p. 82)

VI
This is based on the author's extensive and on-going professional engagement with these programs since 2007.

In the Northern Territory, where languages continue to be spoken by many children and where languages are most endangered, the average teaching time reported was 3-4 hours per week (Commonwealth of Australia 2012, p. 90). Nine bilingual or Two-Way programs were reported as continuing, however in the four Central Australian Two-Way programs the time dedicated to teaching and learning first language ranges from 1- 5 hours per week, in primary classes only ^{VI}.

In universities and TAFE colleges, a small number of Indigenous language programs have developed (Gale 2011). This education domain offers potential growth, innovation and promotion of Indigenous language teaching and learning. To this end, the 2014 Australian Linguistics Society conference held a one day workshop 'Learning Indigenous languages – can universities help?' to identify strategies to further promote teaching and learning Indigenous languages at tertiary level. A Pitjantjatjara summer school was first introduced at the University of Adelaide in 1968, and continues to be taught, now at the University of South Australia. Bundjalung language was offered as a subject at Monash University in Melbourne in the 1990s. At Charles Darwin University teaching Yolŋu languages began in 1992. The current on-line Yolŋu Matha Studies involves Yolŋu educators and experts developing and delivering parts of the course using digital technologies from their home communities in very remote Arnhem Land (Christie et al. 2013). The program

is grounded in Yolŋu philosophies of knowledge, learning, collaboration, place, pedagogy, and now digital technology, allowing teachers on country to interact with distance students nationally and internationally through video link. Programs currently running also include Gamilaraay at the Australian National University and Kurna at the University of Adelaide. Both languages have undergone a process of language revival, Kurna in an urban, Gamilaraay in a regional setting, over decades of careful community language planning and action. The enrolment in university programs is overwhelmingly by non-Indigenous students, in contrast to TAFE courses, which “tend to serve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who are seeking vocational training in their own languages” (Gale 2011, p. 280). One such example are certificate level courses offered to Pitjantjatjara speakers through adult learning programs (TAFE SA 2014). The need for Indigenous languages teachers, along with a range of strategies to increase this workforce, such as expanding the Western Australian ‘Limited Authority to Teach’ program, are outlined in the 2012 House of Representatives Inquiry report (Commonwealth of Australia 2012).

Indeed who teaches Indigenous languages is as important a question as who learns them (Purdie et al. 2008, pp. 192-8). Purdie et al propose a number of key principles that should guide language in schools programs, highlighting the unique nature of Indigenous language as opposed to other language programs (Key Principles 2 & 3, pp. xvi-xv; also pp. 199-201; see also McKay 1996). One acknowledges the ownership of the language by a group of custodians, whose support and permission is required to develop a language program. A further highlights the need for partnership between custodians and the school, which can be difficult to achieve and maintain. School staff can be unfamiliar or impatient with collaborative practices and protocols with Indigenous staff and community members, necessary for a successful program (Lowe & Howard 2010). Poetsch and Lowe (2010) explain that Indigenous communities may approach language in schools programs with reservations, questioning the

capacity and sustained commitment of those institutions to offer the kinds of programs they value. [...] Community mistrust also stems from the perceived power of the institution, with its seemingly innate tendency to take ownership and control in a range of ways – including restrictive timeframes and lesson locations, set pedagogical approaches, differing notions of the role of teacher and unreliable sources of funding (p. 153).

Relatedly, Gale notes the sensitivities in tertiary contexts. Citing Amery (2007), she explains that the original Kurna program was called ‘Kurna Language and Language Ecology’, which

at the request of Elders, was more a course ‘about’ the social context of the Kurna language and its source materials, rather than an opportunity for students to learn the Kurna language itself. Most Kurna Elders appreciate the interest that non-Aboriginal people show in their language, and can see the process of reconciliation at work in language classes as non-Aboriginal and Kurna people congregate together regularly to learn their language. But there is still a mild sense of concern that if non-Aboriginal people learn to speak Kurna well, before their own Kurna people relearn their language, a sense of injustice and resentment may re-emerge, along with the accusation that ‘our language has been stolen’ once again (Gale 2011, p. 285) .

Note that Pearson argues, “Schools are not the places for cultural and linguistic transmission”. We need only look to the time spent in every Australian school on English to see that schools clearly are places for linguistic transmission, despite the out of school input all Australian children receive in English. And cultural transmission is a crucial part of schooling. One explicit example is the regular teaching on the ANZAC experience in the First World War in all schools, among many others.

WHY TEACH INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES?

Purdie et al (2008) discuss the purposes for teaching Indigenous languages in schools and highlight two themes. One rationale draws on the notion of the ‘social good’ (Rigney 2002), whereby education systems and individual schools support

the maintenance, revitalisation, and rebuilding of Indigenous languages is in one sense a cultural activity that both supports Indigenous people in maintaining a sense of self and their culture of heritage and [secondly,] provides an opportunity for non-Indigenous Australians to achieve greater intercultural understanding.

The framing of social good here places value on language teaching and learning in a number of ways. It recognises the importance of language to Indigenous people’s cultural identity, and the importance of non-Indigenous Australians’ appreciation of Australian Indigenous languages and cultures. Further, while schools cannot be the only site for language maintenance, they do play an important role. Time spent on language learning not only expands students’ language knowledge and use beyond everyday communication needs, it validates languages as worthy codes and serious areas of learning.

Purdie et al note contrasting views on the purpose of teaching and learning languages in schools (p. 191). One is from Indigenous leader and education commentator, Noel Pearson, the other from the Federation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages (FATSIL).

Schools are not the places for cultural and linguistic transmission, and we must stop looking to schools to save our languages. This is because the primary purpose of schools is for our children to obtain a mainstream, Western education, including full fluency in English. Schools will never be adequately equipped to solve the transmission imperative, and all we end up doing is compromising our children’s mainstream education achievement. Indeed, without full English literacy our children are then illiterate in their traditional language. (Pearson, 2007)

In some locations, schools play a crucial role as a delivery point for language projects, which are initiated in, and controlled by, the community. These language programmes are of central importance to the students’ academic progress, personal development and cultural pride. (FATSIL, 2004)

The argument Pearson raises above, that Indigenous language teaching prevents English literacy development, is discussed below^{VII}. With respect to the second point, clearly schools cannot ‘save’ languages and language revitalisation activities must and do occur in and out of schools (Hobson 2010; McCarty 2003 on the successful revitalisation of Maori and Hawaiian). However, assigning schools to meet a (language) ‘transmission imperative’ is not how their purpose is envisaged. In fact, a key finding from the 2014 National Languages Survey was that language activities are “not just aimed at increasing speaker numbers and revitalising or maintaining languages, they are also about helping people to connect with language and culture and improving the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people” (Marmion, Obata & Troy 2014, p. xii). This supports findings on the link between use of, or connection with, heritage language and culture, and social and emotional well being for Indigenous people (Biddle & Swee 2012; Marmion, Obata &

Troy 2014; Purdie et al. 2000). The House of Representatives 2012 report lists social and emotional well-being, along with improved health outcomes, school-community partnership building and improved student engagement as benefits of language in schools programs (Commonwealth of Australia 2012). Finally, Indigenous educator and researcher, Lynette Riley, in her recent study of Indigenous students who performed well in the national benchmark tests NAPLAN (National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy), found a strong sense of their cultural identity and pride in their Aboriginality correlated with educational attainment (reported in McQuire 2014).

These links are accepted and articulated in current federal policy. According to the Closing the Gap Fact Sheet (Australian Government 2013, p. 2):

- International research shows that childhood Aboriginal language and culture programs lead to improved self-esteem, school attendance, reading skills and academic performance; and reduced dropout rates.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 13 to 17 year olds in urban and regional areas are more likely to attend school if they speak an Indigenous language.
- Strong Indigenous cultural identity and cultural participation are positively associated with secondary school completion.
- Participation in cultural activities and speaking an Indigenous language are positively associated with gaining a post-school qualification.

This leads to a further line discussed in Purdie et al (2008), which promotes second language learning more generally, for individual cognitive, academic and intercultural development. Research on second language learning has shown benefits beyond additional language learning, such as enhanced understanding of first language, metalinguistic awareness and reading readiness, and creative and divergent thinking in language and other domains (for a discussion, see Fernandez 2008 p. 6-8). Little research has been carried out in the Australian context, however a number of small-scale studies provide some evidence of higher scoring on English language and literacy tests among students in Aboriginal language (Chandler et al. 2008) and bilingual programs (DEET & Glasby 2005; Murtagh 1982) than students in English-only programs.

BILINGUAL EDUCATION

A further role for Indigenous languages, particularly in remote schools, is as a medium of instruction as is the case with bilingual education. Bilingual programs ran in a number of states, but the Northern Territory Bilingual Program was the most long-standing. It operated in 25 schools, for longer and shorter periods, in English and 27 Indigenous languages between 1973 and 2008. The program explicitly recognised Indigenous languages as medium of instruction, and as means of expressing identity and fostering bilingualism as a source of opportunity and empowerment (Northern Territory Department of Education 1986, pp. 12-3).

Of the eight aims of the program, three related to the use of first language for developing initial literacy, conceptual understanding and “positive self concept in each child” (Northern Territory Department of Education 1986, p. 12). Further aims included the development of “competency in English (reading and writing) and in mathematics to the level required on leaving school to function without disadvantage in the wider Australian community” (Northern Territory Department of Education 1986, p. 12). Empowering adults was also critical, with the “development of teaching skills, teaching responsibility and formal educational leadership in Aboriginal staff” a further stated aim (Northern Territory Department of Education 1986, p. 13). The number of local qualified teachers and para-professionals from schools with bilingual programs far outstrips schools which had English-only programs, a key achievement of the program (Hoogenraad 2001). The program was also designed to promote involvement and mutual understanding between the school and community. With the involvement of local adults in the school, as teachers, literacy workers, elders and leaders in education, many placed emphasis on cultural and language maintenance and indigenisation of schools (Harris & Devlin 1997; Yunupingu, MB 1999), local curriculum and pedagogy development (Marika-Munggiritji & Christie 1995; Ngurruwutthun 1991) and literature (Christie et al. 2014; Gale 1994), further notable achievements of the program.

However, the program was only ever evaluated against the criteria of English language literacy outcomes, resulting in the threatened closure of the program in 1998 and final closure in 2008 (Disbray 2014). Criticism of the 1998 decision over a lack of evidence for claims of lower student performance in bilingual programs than in English-only programs, strong community opposition and recommendations from a number of ensuing reports, meant that the program was reinstated in 1999 as Two-Way Learning (Nicholls 2001; Simpson, Caffery & McConvell 2009). However, the new program lacked the support, policy guidelines and resourcing of the previous bilingual program (Nicholls 2005).

The 2008 NAPLAN results were used to justify the closure of the Two Way Learning program. In a media release in October that year, the then Minister of Education announced that the first four hours of every school day would be taught in English (Scrymgour 2008). Unarguably, the poor results from NAPLAN testing are of concern, with results in the NT uniformly low. This is particularly true in very remote settings where children are speakers of a language or dialect other than Standard Australian English, irrespective of program type. Devlin (2009) reviewed and contested the 2008 NAPLAN data tabled in the NT parliament and used to justify the closure of the remaining bilingual programs. His review found the data deficient in a number of respects. The sample was poorly selected, incomplete and incorrectly treated, making the analysis unreliable (p. 13).

No policy has been developed to expand on the media release, no strategic redeployment of resources, no additional professional learning for teachers. Over decades there have been repeated recommendations to address the lack of specialist English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, a crucial impediment to student learning in remote communities, including just a year before in the Wild and Anderson Report (2007, p. 21). Yet no measures were undertaken at this juncture to address the language teaching and learning needs of remote students. Rather, the Northern Territory Department of Education (NT DoE) has remained in consecutive restructures ever

since, and at the end of 2013 disbanded its ESL unit and redeployed ESL support staff. The appropriateness of NAPLAN testing as a measure of educational achievement and English language development for English as an Additional Language/Dialect learners (EAL/D) and teaching practices it encourages have been questioned (Angelo 2013; Wigglesworth, Simpson & Loakes 2011).

The foregoing section has described the critically endangered state of Indigenous languages and some policy initiatives relating to languages in education. It reveals the wide range of contexts and languages taught, and explores the rationale from both community and government of teaching Indigenous languages. Yet despite these positive appraisals and National policy statements on the significance of Australian languages, their presence in education practice is limited. It argued that an important factor for this is the overriding discourse of education failure among Indigenous Australians, as measured by NAPLAN (Guenther, Bat & Osborne 2013). This focus on education failure, and attention to the need to prioritise (English) literacy eclipses other learning. Within this narrow focus, evaluations of success or failure do not include measures of first language and culture learning, for instance, and broader goals for education, particularly for remote contexts are left unexamined (Kral & Falk 2004; Osborne 2013; Osborne, Samuel & Guenther, John 2013; Osborne, Sam & Guenther, John 2013). The result is an ambiguous policy environment, in which the rhetoric of the value of Australia's heritage languages risks being cancelled out by the rhetoric that positions them as a barrier to mainstream education. This is exemplified in Pearson's account above, and in the Northern Territory's decree to teach the first four hours of each day in English. These matters are taken up in the next section.

INTERSECTIONS OF POLICY, DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE

Policy for minority languages world-wide is subject to tension and contestation as dynamics of social power and language status play out (Blommaert 1999; Liddicoat 2008). Schools are important sites of cultural validation and reproduction (Meighan 1986). Here, as elsewhere in society, implicit and explicit language ideologies, sets of beliefs about language(s) that link language, identity, and power relations, guide policy and practice (Rahman 2013; Silverstein 1979; Truscott & Malcolm 2010). Thus consideration of language in education policy requires positioning in broader language and Indigenous policy discourses.

Ground-up advocacy was part of a broader assertion of Indigenous rights and recognition by Indigenous people in Australia in the 1970s and 1980s and found fertile ground for progressive national language policy. Joseph Lo Bianco (2001) traces the era of pluralistic language policy discourse and citizen-driven policy-making, which positioned Indigenous, community and ethnic languages as valued resources in the nation's diversity, formalised in the 1987 National Policy on Languages (Lo Bianco 1987). Its framework acknowledged the special status of Australia's first languages and from it the National Aboriginal Languages Program was established, with financial support for Indigenous language revitalisation and maintenance efforts, including Aboriginal-controlled local language centres (Ash et al. 2010; McConvell & Thieberger 2001), the national curriculum document 'Australian

VIII
See also Angelo (2012) for an informative discussion on the conflation of language and literacy, and the implications of this for teaching, learning and assessing Indigenous learners of English as an Additional Language or Dialect.

Indigenous Languages Framework' (discussed above) and the growth of Indigenous language in education programs (Nicholls 2001). A sequence of policy turns took place through the 1990s, moving from an orientation to language as resource to language as problem, distancing and excluding Indigenous, as well as community and ethnic language interests from language policy. Such moves, according to Lo Bianco (2001, p. 18) were in part "motivated by concern that making diversity prominent in public policy would enshrine notions of language rights for minorities, or at least establish this principle as a basis on which public resourcing claims would be made". In addition, in the narrowing policy remit with its prioritization of economy over community in education discourse, Lo Bianco argues there was a collapse of categories; of 'languages' to 'language', then to 'literacy'. Literacy is defined here in its narrowest conceptualisation, English only and its use and relevance restricted to formal education or labour market settings (p.42). MacIntosh, O'Hanlon and Angelo (2012) have recently explored the complete disappearance of 'language' from education policy and documentation in one jurisdiction, with an increasingly intensive focus on literacy for national benchmarking^{VIII}.

In their recent paper on Indigenous language policy and education in Australia, Truscott and Malcolm (2010) observe that a prioritisation of literacy attainment has come to position English over Indigenous language learning. They discuss mechanisms such as language testing, education curricula and discourses of crisis, which generate

the ideology of Australian English as having an elevated political, social, cultural and economic status by associating it directly with Australian identity, the carrying of Australian culture, the community and the workplace (p. 8).

This prioritisation is clear, for instance, in the current Australian Indigenous Languages Policy (Australian Government 2009). Under the heading 'Working with Languages to Close the Gap' is stated:

Given the centrality of language to strong Indigenous culture, and the broader social benefits of functional and resilient families and communities, better targeting support for Indigenous languages as part of a broader national focus on Indigenous culture generally, will contribute to the overall well-being of Indigenous communities (heading 3).

However, no action related to language teaching and learning is discussed. Under heading (6) 'Supporting Indigenous Language Programs in Schools' are details of two funding programs, though neither is dedicated specifically to Indigenous language teaching and learning, and no statement about education systems supporting "the centrality of language to strong Indigenous culture" is made. In fact, the strongest statement in the document is that English is a fundamental skill that all Australians "must have in order to maximise their learning opportunities and life chances" (Australian Government 2009, heading 6). To this end

the Government is providing \$56.4 million over four years to provide extra assistance to schools to enable them to expand intensive literacy and numeracy approaches that have been successful with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (heading 6).

The same figure was committed for 2009 to 2012 through the Schools Assistance

Act 2008 to support the teaching of all languages, including Australian Indigenous languages, in non-government schools. However, no funding is committed specifically for Indigenous languages in education. The Indigenous Languages Support (ILS) program is available to support language activities, including education programs (Australian Government 2014). Its \$9 million annual budget falls far short of demand. According to the recent House of Representatives Inquiry “funding for language programs has remained at around \$9 million for 15 years [and in 2012-13] the budget for the ILS program is \$9.9 million, with applications exceeding \$21 million” (Commonwealth of Australia 2012, p. 65). In 2014, \$8.8 million was allocated for community language programs, not exclusively education related.

Truscott and Malcolm (2010) account for the apparent ambiguity of policy decrying on the one hand, the perilous endangerment of Australia’s languages and their value as cultural and social good to education and well-being more generally, and on the other, the low level of state support and action in practice with the notion of ‘invisible language policy’. This is

[t]he effect, intended or otherwise, direct or indirect, of government policies on language use. It is seen as the allocation of priorities – that is to say funding [and it might be argued, time] – whatever the rhetoric of the visible [official] policy (p. 16).

McKay’s (2011) discussion of Australian Language policy makes similar observations, as does Nicholls’ (2001) earlier account. The new Australian Curriculum Framework for Australian Languages may be a further example of visible policy. While the Framework marks an official inclusion of Australian languages in education, as default policy, as Lo Bianco has recently suggested, invisible policy prioritising English literacy intersects with this. On the ground, English literacy testing is prioritized through the NAPLAN Program, placing significant pressure on schools. Thus, despite the presence of Indigenous languages in formal curriculum, there is no guarantee of their presence or that of their speakers or custodians in the enacted curriculum. These trends are yet to emerge.

MONOLINGUALISM – EITHER/OR?

Much attention is paid to the disparity between non-Indigenous and Indigenous students in NAPLAN results, with reviews, programs and policies aimed at ‘closing the gap’. English language and literacy proficiency are indeed fundamental skills. However, many Indigenous educators frame first/heritage language and culture skills as equally fundamental to learning opportunities and life chances. This approach promotes language maintenance/revival and English language learning, by fostering bi- and multilingualism (Simpson, Caffery & Mcconvell 2010). Warlpiri educators in central Australia who, through the establishment of the Warlpiri Education and Training Trust have demonstrated their commitment to their children’s education, express the significance of first language and culture here:

Knowing that our own language and culture play the biggest role in growing our spirit, our connection to our land and the stories of our grandmothers and grandfathers. With our language we know where we belong, we know the names from our country and

Jukurrpa (Dreaming stories and designs). Young people can't lead a good, healthy and happy life without this. Language and culture come first. When kids feel lost and their spirit is weak then they can't learn well or be healthy. They need to feel pride in their language and culture and know that they are respected. That's the only way to start closing the gap (Warlpiri Patu Kurlangu Jaru 2011, p. 6).

These educators do not see English and Indigenous language development as an either/or proposition. They understand the additive process that learners of a new language experience as emergent bilinguals, described also in the substantial literature on bilingual language development (García, Kleifgen & Falchi 2008). Of her education and language learning experience, Pitjantjatjara educator and education leader Makinti Minutjukur (2013) writes

[w]hen I went to school, it was a bilingual education at Ernabella. I learned my first language and then English. When I was 16 years of age it was my family's decision that I have to go away to school [...] I stayed and learned new things in a new place and environment [...] I'm still learning today and everyday" (p. 8).

In his Submission to the Standing Committee Hearing in Alice Springs in 2012, Donovan Rice from Yuendumu School explained:

Warlpiri is like a vehicle to learn a new language [...]. I think that the proper recognition of our identity and language makes us strong and grown-up, knowing English and Warlpiri together. I think that the Indigenous language can assist in many ways such as in translation, because that is what I grew up on, especially the experience in the classroom of always having two people, a Kardiya—a European—and a Yapa, an Aboriginal person, a Warlpiri person. They were both there for me to make sure that I got the proper education in both ways. That has been an important thing in my growing up in both worlds, Warlpiri and English (Commonwealth of Australia 2012, p. 25).

In a similar vein, in her recent speech Yalmay Yunupingu drew links between children's first language as a form of intellectual capital (cleverness), first language instruction and sound pedagogy for conceptual and second language learning, as well as arguing for the right to instruction in one's mother tongue.

We learn from our elders that language is sacred. Yolŋu kids think in their own language, which can then inform them about English, its meaning and its value. I consider that Yolŋu kids can be as clever as any one else in the world. And I don't want the cleverness left outside the classroom door. Not for my kids, or my grandkids. They should have equal rights, the same rights as any kids in the world, whether they're Chinese or Balanda, equal rights to learn in their own language. There should be a choice given to all schools and communities about how our schools should operate (Yunupingu, Y 2014. Transcription by author).

The issue of rights is taken up below, as one means of safeguarding Indigenous languages generally, and in education specifically. But first, we consider innovative proposals driven by ground up language and education policy, practice and aspiration, important to the task.

INNOVATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

Some effective Indigenous language in schools programs exist in metropolitan and remote schools, drawing on local and departmental curriculum resources, and in the future this may include the Australian Curriculum. Much of the current teaching takes place in classrooms, focussed on language and literacy teaching and cultural content, using conventional classroom teaching practices. This work is important, and to strengthen it, teaching and learning of Indigenous language needs a clear role and status in schools, adequate funding, with professional learning and support for Indigenous teaching staff and the involvement of community members and bodies such as school councils (Commonwealth of Australia 2012; Purdie et al. 2008). A small number of bilingual programs continue to run in the NT, and with support and commitment this important program would expand and achieve the variety of aims discussed above. Tertiary institutions offer further opportunities. In addition, a range of new learning activities taking place in and out of classrooms offer opportunities for locally-developed innovative resources and teaching and learning strategies, and creative, out of school partnerships. In particular, the burgeoning domains of digital technology and cultural and resource management embrace and enhance local knowledge and economic and cultural sustainability, offering training and employment opportunities.

New technologies are being harnessed to develop interactive learning resources to be used in and out of schools, such as the Central Australian sign languages project developed through a community partnership with Batchelor Institute (Iltyem-Iltyem 2014). The electronic Miriwoong Seasons Calendar was funded in part through the Indigenous Language Support (ILS) program as a language teaching and learning resource. It has now been adopted by the Australian Bureau of Meteorology (Australian Government Bureau of Meteorology 2014) with public on-line access. A further example of technology and language access and use is the Living Archive of Aboriginal Languages (2014), a partnership between Charles Darwin University and NT DoE (Christie et al. 2014). Here, printed material in Aboriginal languages produced in the NT bilingual program and other community projects are archived and made publically accessible. To add value and increase usage of these resources, teachers and language workers are invited to develop units of work based on materials, mapped, where possible, to Australian Curriculum. These packages will be loaded to the teacher site scootle, in a crowd sourcing collaboration. The projects above represent collaborations between members of language communities, schools and outside partners, and provide learning opportunities both inside and outside of the community, promoting languages in new, wide-reaching ways.

In the arena of performance and the arts, rich learning opportunities exist. In Lajamanu, also in the Northern Territory, for the bi-annual Milpirri Festival, Darwin based Tracks Dance company and local community members collaborate with the school to perform Warlpiri traditional song cycles, in a contemporary setting (Tracks Dance Company 2014). During the six-week lead up to Milpirri, students work with community elders, learning about the dances, designs and language of ceremony. The Warlpiri program in this community school also makes good use of the community arts centre, and has developed exhibitions and enterprises with senior girls classes through this partnership. Such affordances promote Warlpiri language and culture in the community and to wider audiences. Kral and Schwab

have detailed a range of community-based out-of-school multilingual and multi-modal learning opportunities in this arena also (Kral & Schwab 2012).

Indigenous ecological knowledge projects allow for a range of education partnerships and outcomes, as in the example of the Miriwoong Seasons Calendar above. At Maningrida in the Northern Territory, for instance, in a collaboration between the school, the local Djelk rangers and The Australian Venom Research Unit (AVRU), part of the Department of Pharmacology at the University of Melbourne, students are taking part in developing health and ecological knowledge resources, through project-based learning on country activities (Webb et al. 2013). They learn from local elders and visiting scientists and produce diglot productions of their learning. Ranger groups, often under the auspices of local Land Councils and developed through Caring for Country programs across Australia, are providing meaningful and productive partners for school programs, involving local language and ecological knowledge, based on local arrangements (Fogarty 2013; Fogarty & Schwab 2012). And finally, Osborne's Red Dirt Curriculum (Osborne 2013), developed with Pitjantjatjara educators from South Australia articulates ways for communities to craft local education programs, incorporating local knowledge, aspirations and realities with mainstream education goals.

The innovations supportive of Indigenous language and culture teaching and learning discussed above are, like language revival projects, instances of agency on the ground influencing practice. The next section looks to legislative frameworks that could support such initiatives in education and serve Indigenous languages more broadly and in turn.

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN EDUCATION: FUTURE POLICY

International framework exist, such as The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), and some have appealed to these, to guide policy and practice on Indigenous languages (Minutjukur et al. to appear; Simpson, Caffery & Mcconvell 2010). Articles 14.1 and 14.3 for instance, acknowledge the right of communities to choose how their children are educated and the right to maintain their languages. However, this section focuses on at national legislative means to mandate policy on Indigenous Languages in Australia.

The absence of formal legislative recognition and protection and policy for Australian languages stands in contrast to similar post-colonial settings such as New Zealand, Canada and the USA. The Maori Language Act was passed in 1987 and amended in 1991 (Maori Language Commission n.d), promoting and enshrining Maori language in education and other spheres of public life. The Canadian Assembly of first Nations developed its first policy on language and culture in 1972, with a range of subsequent and continuing items of legislation (Chiefs Assembly on Education 2012). The Native American Languages Act was passed in 1990 and amended in the 1992 Native American Programs Act (NAPA). According to Warhol, its "importance and impact are largely connected to its power as official legislation which in turn provides credibility, legitimacy, and foundations to build upon" (2011, p. 293). The lack of a treaty underpinning the recognition of cultural and linguistic rights distinguishes the Australian context. As a result, policy statements about the value

of Australian languages risk remaining lip service, with no framework to ensure action and support. However, legislative recognition in Australia can be achieved. Constitutional recognition of Indigenous languages has been recommended in various reports (Recommendation 8, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner 2009; Commonwealth of Australia 2012, p. xviii & 73). It is included in the proposals in the current 'Recognise' campaign for constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Recognise 2014) Whether Indigenous languages will be included in proposed changed constitution is yet to be seen. It may be considered too radical to risk at popular referendum (The Australian 2014, June 19). Lomawaima and McCarty (2006) have described domains of Indigenous knowledge and rights in the US, that are perceived as a threat to, or as encroaching on those of the mainstream, as outside of the 'safety zone'. A key opportunity will be missed if languages and bi-/multilingualism are seen as unnecessary, too dangerous or controversial to be included in constitutional change in Australia.

CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and cultures are more visible and celebrated in the broader public now than previously and their increased prestige and value to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians has allowed them to be taught in some 260 schools. There is also now awareness of, and evidence for, the importance of teaching and speaking traditional languages in terms of both Indigenous community and individual wellbeing and a long-standing evidence base argues for the use of first-language instruction for better education outcomes. Yet discourses of education failure and monolingualism allow little space for Australian languages. The chapter also explored recent collaborations between schools and outside agencies, involving resource and event based projects which offer new and innovative affordances for language learning and use. Action outside of schools is an important source of prestige and validation to languages in schools. Yet, government rhetoric about the importance of Australian languages has not been matched by effective or sustained policy action, or necessary funding but that teaching and learning Australian languages and embedding them in legislation and policy are crucial for their on-going use and survival, goals that Australia has set itself.

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ART PIECE

Ngarrka-kurlu
Lily Nungarrayi
Hargraves

Courtesy of the artist
Photo: Courtesy
Carmel O'Shannessy



Lily Nungarrayi Hargraves is a prominent artist from Lajamanu. Lily along with several other women took part in producing approximately 50 artworks for the external walls and fascia of Lajamanu school in 2000. These community elders had already been involved in the school over decades, teaching children stories and cultural knowledge, leading ceremonies with the children at school, on bush trips and on country visits. For the school fascia project they came to school each morning and painted over several months before the paintings were mounted all around the school, where they remain. The paintings are a part of a Warlpiri curriculum, teaching about dreamtime stories and the tracts of country associated with particular dreamings, and which skin group is responsible for and belongs to the particular dreaming. The artwork depicted in this painting is Ngarrka-kurlu, a dreaming about men.

Artwork in schools has been a common of expression and presence of local Aboriginal knowledge. The Papunya murals and Yuendumu doors perhaps the most renown (Bardon 1999; Stewart 1987). Paddy Japaljarri Stewart (p. 14) wrote the following in the introduction to the book on the Yuendumu doors artwork, echoing the aspirations of the Lajamanu artists.

We painted these Dreamings on the school doors because children should learn about the Law. The children do not know them and might become like white people, which we don't want to happen. We are relating these true stories of the Dreamtime... we want our children to learn about and to know about our law and our Dreamings. That is why we painted these Dreamtime stories.

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ABOUT THE COVER

Majority Rule
Michael Cook

*Courtesy of the artist
and Andrew Baker
Art Dealer, Brisbane*



Michael Cook is an award-winning photographer who worked commercially both in Australia and overseas for twenty-five years. In 2009, Cook was drawn into art photography by an increasingly urgent desire to learn about his Indigenous ancestry and explore that aspect of his identity. Cook's first solo art exhibition, *Through My Eyes* (2010), contained images of Australian prime ministers overlaid with the faces of Australian Indigenous. This work explored the potential interconnectedness of generations of Australians and its importance was recognised with selection for the Western Australian Indigenous Art Awards 2011 at the Art Gallery of Western Australia.

Cook was adopted and brought up in a family who, while not of Indigenous descent, were heavily involved in supporting Indigenous rights. He said, "I was raised with a strong understanding of my Aboriginal ancestry thanks to my parents... When I produce art, I feel a stronger connection with my ancestry. This helps me to understand Australian history-in particular, my history." His Aboriginal heritage informs and extends his art.

Cook's photographic practice is unusual. He constructs his images in a manner more akin to painting than the traditional photographic studio or documentary model. Instead he begins with an idea, regarding the image as his blank canvas. Photographic layering is then used to build the image to provide aesthetic depth. Also, he characteristically works in photographic series. Unfolding tableaux offer enigmatic narratives which are not prescribed but left open to interpretation.

In 2011 he exhibited two new series, *Broken Dreams* and *Undiscovered*, together under the title of *Uninhabited*. Their importance was acknowledged when they were acquired by the National Gallery of Australia and shown in its *UnDisclosed: 2nd National Indigenous Art Triennial*. They show Cook's developing artistic vision in their exploration of incidents from Australian colonial history, both real

and imagined. Visually striking, technically complex and with sensitive invention, Cook's images occupy a new space in the Australian artistic imagination.

His series *Civilised* (2012) was selected to promote The 7th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT7) at Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art in 2012, and was included in the ground-breaking *My Country: I Still Call Australia Home: Contemporary Art from Black Australia* (QAGoMA, 2013). Cook's latest body of work, *Majority Rule* (2013), has been selected for inclusion in the international 19th Biennale of Sydney: *You Imagine What You Desire*.

Extract from: Martin-Chew, Louise, *Michael Cook* [ex. cat.], Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane, 2013

MAJORITY RULE- DESCRIPTION

Majority Rule is marked by its aesthetic departure from Michael Cook's previous work. While thematic and conceptual connections with some of his earlier series are evident, the setting of this suite is in contrast to the Australian land- and beach-scapes of earlier images.

This is a depiction of the urbane within the urban. Colonial buildings, the style of solid sandstone architecture which may be seen in almost any city in the Western world, paved streets and a city skyline are the backdrop for a black man, dressed in a suit, carrying a briefcase like the archetypal businessman. His figure, in different attitudes, populates the footpath. He is multiplied (in some scenes up to twenty times), a pointer to the unreality of the scene.

Currently, Australia's Indigenous are a small minority, comprising only three to four percent of the total Australian population. Consequently, black faces have little visibility in Australian capital cities and this series of images defies that reality—yet acknowledges it simultaneously with the use of only one model multiple times to build the crowd because, Cook noted, “The reality is it is hard to find models who look characteristically Indigenous. ‘Indigenous’ is many things and physical characteristics have little to do with this identification. So while looking Indigenous has nothing to do with Indigeneity, in my aesthetic I seek out a strong character in a model's physicality.”

The multiple versions of the subject populate generic city locations: a subway tunnel, an old-style bus, and city streets. Old Parliament House and Canberra's High Court are more iconic buildings, and take Cook's protagonist to the seat of Australian political power. As such, Cook's imagery challenges our ingrained belief systems, yet these images do not offer judgement—they are observational, asking questions, setting up lively interactions within their scenes, without proffering neat nor prescriptive conclusions.

Cook noted, “I was never taught Aboriginal history at school, only about the European settlement of Australia. What I learnt in school was similar to the first European settlers' beliefs, with words like ‘natives’ and ‘discovery of Australia’. Looking back now, I realise that it was a false way of teaching, and that it hid the truth about the treatment of Aborigines over the past four hundred years.”

The colour of the man's skin is the disjunction that prompts the viewer to wonder, and then wonder at their own wonder. It becomes a gauge for internalised racism. Australian audiences may ponder why this collection of well-dressed black men in a city street strikes a discordant note, an atmospheric that feels wrong, unusual, discomfiting. The era of the photograph is undefined but feels vintage, retro, with its black and white tonality speaking to our protagonist's clothing—the lapels of his jacket, the flare in his pin-striped trousers, the sober hat, the dark braces over his white shirt and the stately dignity of his bearing, all of which suggest a period up to fifty years ago. Yet there are other references to iconic Western culture—the bowler hat in *Majority Rules (Memorial)* revisits the shape of the anti-hero in the anarchic 1971 Stanley Kubrick film, *A Clockwork Orange*, or a silent Charlie Chaplin-style comedic figure.

In *Majority Rule* Cook poses an insoluble dilemma as he acknowledges the discriminatory nature of society. How it would be if these statistics were reversed? After the explorers arrived in Australia, the Indigenous population was decimated. This was, in part, because Aboriginal people were without immunity to introduced diseases. “The majority always has the rule and the minority doesn't. Then there is racism that arises as a result.”

There is a formality in these works, with strong architectural lines and perspective to a distant vanishing point. *Majority Rule (Bridge)* is suggestive of Raphael's *School of Athens* (Raphael Sanzio, 1509-11). The synergistic connections between variations on the individual, the vanishing points created with the straight lines of the street, footpath pavers and the collection of rectangular assemblages of city buildings and windows provide a stage-like setting for Cook's individuals. The figures standing in the street appear as if alone, and lacking a social or familial relationship to each other in their physical attitudes, yet are visually bound together. Cook may be positing the kind of anomie or normlessness that isolates individuals within community—the type of First World dysfunction that regularly fills the columns of Australian newspapers.

Another image from the series, *Majority Rule (Tunnel)*, records Cook's model in multiple attitudes, standing, static again, in a public transport space generally characterised by rushing—of people and of the wind that echoes through these underground spaces as trains arrive and leave. Individuals are frozen within their tightly composed cocoon of concrete and tiles. This conformity—of dress, behaviour and social norms—is another theme in this series, particularly evident in *Majority Rule (Memorial)*.

Most Western cities have war memorials and in a particularly poignant image, the black businessman ascends and descends the sandstone steps that surround a rotunda-style war memorial in a city centre. The war memorial is sacrosanct returned servicemen's territory. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have been involved in fighting for Australia in all wars since the Boer War in 1901 but, while they were paid equally for their work in the armed forces and fought alongside white Australians, on their return home they were subject to the same discrimination they faced before serving their country. Following World War II, only on Anzac Day were they welcomed into returned services league clubs. On other days of the year, Aboriginals might meet their white comrades for a drink but had to stay outside

the building or on the verandah. (It is interesting to note that the right to vote on a country-wide basis was not granted to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders until 1967.)

Cook's images populate the war memorial with the black faces that have been unacknowledged in Australia's military history. The memorial itself speaks to other colonial buildings in the central business district, its roundness inspired by Grecian classic revival buildings, and Cook's figures occupy the steps, moving up one side and down the other, so as to surround and possess the rotunda.

Cook's use of the bespectacled figure in *Majority Rule* (Parliament) evokes the precedent and dignity of Australia's first Indigenous Member of Parliament, Senator Neville Bonner. In *Majority Rule* (Bus), a figure at the front reads a vintage magazine titled *WALKABOUT*, noting and satirising the stereotypes that have driven popular expectations.

There is a lean aesthetic and increased contemporary edge in this series. Cook's interest in the impact of Australia's history on its original inhabitants comes into sharp focus, and the highly choreographed images are witty, stylish and slick.

LOUISE MARTIN-CHEW, FEBRUARY 2014