UNESCO Observatory Multi-Disciplinary Journal in the Arts

Indigenous Education In Australia: Policy, Participation and Praxis

Marnie O'Bryan, Prof. Mark Rose

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EDITORIAL TEAM

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ABOUT THE E-JOURNAL

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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UNESCO OBSERVATORY
Multi-Disciplinary Research in the Arts

Volume 4, Issue 1
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

Walking together so all might learn
Anzack Newman
Courtesy of the Artist

Compelled to innovate:
facilitating partnerships in
cross-cultural education

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the 'crisis' in Indigenous education in Australia is a two-ways crisis. While much attention is given to the underperformance of Indigenous students in Australian schools, little is paid to the lack of serious engagement with Indigenous experience or knowledge systems. This has implications for Indigenous students who are more likely to resist or disengage from education, but also for mainstream students and society at large. This paper argues for the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and experience in the curriculum for the benefit of all Australians. It suggests that this necessitates a new level of engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and argues for inter-school partnerships to be encouraged through education and fiscal policy. Beyond leveraging the social and education advantages of high performing schools, centres of cultural knowledge should be established in strategic communities in order to facilitate cross-cultural collaborations and build community capacity and employment opportunities in remote communities.

In [this] context... 'two ways' has the same meaning as 'both ways'- it infers a partner relationship between First Peoples and Settler cultures in Australia. By extension this means that both cultures have much to learn from each other, and that teaching and learning should occupy a neutral, negotiated space in which neither presumes superiority or authoritarian dominance. It is sometimes called a 'third space', to imply that, like the littoral zone where land and sea meet, it comprises both, yet is not exclusively, consistently, uniformly or permanently either (Purdie et al. 2012, p. xx).

INTRODUCTION

If there is an ongoing crisis in Indigenous education in Australia, it is a 'two-way' crisis. On one side of the equation, 'deficit' narratives point attention to the discrepancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes, as measured by government mandated national testing regimes and school attendance and completion rates. On the other is the less explored historic failure of mainstream systems to seriously explore how schools can engage with Indigenous people, their experience, their stories and their knowledge, both as a way of engaging Indigenous students and, just as importantly, as an integral part of a civics and citizenship curriculum that given due weight would contribute to the emergence of a new, truly Australian national identity. These 'gaps' are two sides of one coin and the correlation between them should inform education priorities in this country.

This paper suggests two vehicles for changing educational outcomes for Australian students: curriculum and cross-cultural co-operation. It will begin by arguing that prioritising Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in the curriculum is important for understanding Australia's place in the globalised world. It will go on to suggest that such a focus necessitates new and innovative approaches to education partnerships that work to reshape the education landscape in this country.

Schools have an important part to play in developing a shared national imagination. By developing strategic cross cultural school partnerships, education disparities between Australian students could be mitigated and the cause of real reconciliation transformed. Such collaborations would enable serious, curriculum based engagement with Indigenous experience and ways of knowing, negotiated with and delivered

by the traditional holders of knowledge. Such engagement is the sine qua non of educational empowerment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Cross-cultural inter-school partnerships should be encouraged and incentivised by government, both through direct funding and by encouraging private sector investment through the taxation system. Although the argument is equally apposite to inter-school partnerships in any setting, this paper will explore the potential for mainstream schools to partner with schools in remote settings as a way of addressing issues particular to those places. Beyond the singular focus on sending young people from remote communities away from home to attend urban or peri-urban boarding schools, opportunities should be explored for mainstream schools to partner with their remote cousins in shared educational endeavours designed to meet the needs and maximise the outcomes of disparate student populations.

SITUATING MYSELF IN THE SPACE:

I am not an Indigenous Australian and I recognise that writing into this space is fraught with danger: any 'initiative,' however well meaning, that seeks to engage with Indigenous peoples runs the risk of causing more harm than good (Bishop 2003, Smith 1999). I begin, therefore, on a personal note and acknowledge the limitations of my own perspective.

My first sustained engagement with Indigenous Australians was in 2005, when a young man from a remote community in the Northern Territory joined my Year 11 English class and stayed through to the end of his VCE the following year. At the time, he was one of two Aboriginal students in the school, of a total population of approximately 1,800. For those two years both of us were on a steep learning curve. He arrived when we were mid-way through studying Shakespeare's Richard III, and it was only when he made his first oral presentation to the class that I began to comprehend the vast gulf that lay between his life experience and that of his classmates. I have kept the drafts he handed to me. He spoke powerfully of his own 'secret paradise', where 'the ocean waves crashing onto the white sandy beach' was the alarm clock that woke him in the morning, and where '[D]uring the dry season myself and my cousins would walk off on any random day with only about three bottles of water, one spear and a couple of fishing reels to go camping on the beach for a couple of days'. He spoke about the shock of going to boarding school first in Darwin and then on to Melbourne; the homesickness and sadness and the dawning realisation that 'most non-Indigenous people may look at an Aboriginal person and think that they're just the same as any other', that they have no appreciation that 'there are thousands of different tribes throughout Australia and every tribe has a name and each have (sic) a different dialect'. He spoke candidly of the problems in his community: the drinking and smoking and aimlessness of young lives devoid of role models. At the end of his presentation his peers, never an easy audience, broke into spontaneous applause and rose in standing ovation.

From that time on I have been involved in some capacity in Indigenous education, but always working within the mainstream. At first this was as a classroom teacher with one or two Indigenous students in a class; later in developing partnership projects

with Indigenous schools and communities both locally and in remote Australia, with the sincere but ambitious aim of making the school for which I worked a culturally safe place for its Indigenous students. In a professional and personal capacity I have worked with young people who credit their school experience with enabling them to live in both worlds, but also with those for whom the challenge of boarding school has left them displaced, unsure of where they belong and with no clear vision of a future life.

I am currently researching a PhD on the lived experience of Indigenous students in boarding schools. My initial findings and my own experience suggest to me that beyond accepting relatively small numbers of high achieving and resilient Indigenous students from remote communities whose families have chosen to accept boarding scholarships, the private sector should be encouraged to explore a multitude of ways in which the reach of their social, financial and professional advantages can be deployed to redress educational disparities in this country. The ambit of that reach is great, and I believe it is matched by goodwill and an honest desire to make a difference.

My friendship with many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who live in vastly different circumstances across this nation reminds me that what I propose is not a 'solution' to be imposed, but a commitment to dialogue. To gain any traction, projects must be undertaken on a basis of mutual respect and reciprocity, responsive to setting and enabled through long-term, trusting relationships where power is equalised and colonial assumptions of superiority, however astutely concealed, are laid aside.

CURRICULUM AS A VEHICLE TO ENGAGE INDIGENOUS LEARNERS

Whereas literature makes the connection between the tendency for Indigenous students to fail to engage, or even actively resist, euro-centric curriculum, education policy in this country persistently fails to do so. Much has been written about difficulties faced by young Indigenous Australians as they negotiate their school years but less attention is given to the nexus between curriculum and performance for Indigenous students (Buckskin 2013). Poor levels of literacy and numeracy, irregular school attendance and engagement, and disproportionately low school completion rates continue to blight the nation's education record despite concerted attempts by government and the private sector to reverse these trends (Guenther 2013b, Langton & Ma Rhea 2009, Purdie & Buckley 2010). Increasingly, a focus on producing graduates who are 'job ready' predicates a functionalist approach to pedagogy, relegating the place of culture in school curricula to that of 'an affectionately acknowledged add on' (O'Toole 2009 p150). At the same time, the work of Martin Nakata, Tyson Yunkaporta, Peter Buckskin and others reaffirms the central place of culture and identity at the 'cultural interface' (Buckskin 2013, Nakata 2007, Yunkaporta 2009). Rather than being seen as a desirable addition to core learning priorities, cultural relevance and integrity is, by this analysis, recognised as the sine qua non of engagement for Indigenous students (Beresford B. 2012, Harris 1990, Kral & Schwab 2012, Marika 1999, Osborne 2014).

It is uncontroversial to argue that curriculum and student engagement are two sides of one coin. As early as 1978, the Commonwealth government established the first major inquiry into Aboriginal affairs which recommended to the Fraser government that more Indigenous teachers be trained, more culturally relevant programs be developed and awareness of Aboriginal issues be improved in the wider community (Beresford B. 2012, p112; quoting Watt 1978). What is absent in current government policy priorities is any recognition of the correlation between the content of curricula, the language of instruction and the level of engagement demonstrated by Indigenous students (Buckskin 2013). Literature suggests that a number of significant issues find their roots in attitudes and assumptions built into euro-centric schools, curricula and dominant achievement ideologies (Berryman 2011, Guenther 2013b, Nakata 2007, Osborne & Guenther 2013, Rigney 2010, Smith 2012).

For Indigenous students in mainstream schools, a lack of cultural relevance, basic awareness or even misrepresentation often leads to active disengagement. Martin Nakata describes powerfully the 'strange sensation' he experienced as a tertiary student of coming across 'what is supposed to be a representation of yourself in a text' and the 'sick feeling' that followed as he thought

> *'But this isn't me' or, 'This isn't how I perceive my position' or, 'This wasn't my experience'. And then comes the related anxiety, of course: 'Is this how others see me?' 'How do others see me?' 'And all Torres Strait Islanders?' (2012, p. 88)*

'Resistance' is a recurring theme in academic literature, where students associate success in mainstream school to 'whiteness' and therefore actively choose to disengage (Beresford B. 2012, Bishop 2003, Nakata 2007, 2012, Ogbu 2003, Osborne 2013). A student whose existing knowledge base is neither recognised nor celebrated in mainstream classrooms can quickly internalise feelings of inadequacy that discourage active participation in class (Bishop 2003, Hayes 2006, Lingard 2003).

In any context, to be fully engaged in their learning journey, what students learn in the classroom must have a direct and obvious relevance to their everyday life as well as to their 'imagined future' (Nakata 2007). An excellent teacher begins by understanding the worldview of his or her students: education that is not connected to a student's life or support their cultural identity will fail (Bishop 2003, Fogarty 2012, Hattie 2009, Hayes 2006, McKew 2014, Sarra 2008, Sarra 2012).

A constructivist approach that makes space to begin with the learner's own life experience and build on his or her strengths should be an essential part of engaging young Indigenous people as it is in any other educational setting (Hattie 2009, McKew 2014). It enables them to work from the known to the unknown, and sets them up for educational success (Fogarty 2012, Harris 1990, Langton & Ma Rhea 2009, Nakata 2007, Osborne 2014, 2013, Schwab 2012, Wearne & Yunupingu 2011, Yunkaporta 2009).

CURRICULUM AS A VEHICLE FOR CHANGE: BUILDING UNDERSTANDING IN THE MAINSTREAM

If the place of traditional culture is of central importance to Indigenous students, it is also vital to the wider Australian community as it claims its place in the modern, globalised world. Inga Clendinnen in her 1999 Boyer Lectures posited that nations are 'imaginary communities' that

> *'cannot hold together unless they share a common vision as to how the world works, what constitutes the good life, what behaviour is worthy of respect, what behaviour is shameful' (Clendinnen 2008, p12).*

Citizenship begins in the classroom and is fundamental to the healthy operation of a democratic society (Nussbaum 2010). Citizenship assumes awareness, and if Australia aspires to be an inclusive nation, Australian citizenship must include awareness of the experience and cultural inheritance of the First Australians.

Over recent years, the Australian public has registered an increased understanding of the deep wrongs visited on the First Australians by colonisation. This was spearheaded in the first instance by great aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander activists in and out of the political arena, and later litigated in the courts. Atrocities have been examined through Royal Commissions and Boards of Inquiry at Federal and State level. All of this culminated in the 2008 National Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples for the laws, policies and practices that decimated generations of Indigenous families through the forced removal of their children (Rudd 2008). At the same time, the work of filmmakers such as Rachel Perkins (First Australians, One Night the Moon, Redfern Now inter alia) has humanised the pain associated with the wrongs of the past. Indigenous scholars and a generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and thinkers have challenged the status quo on issues relating to power and the privileging of knowledge, background and class that redistributes unequal outcomes in education and society.

Nakata has identified the knowledge contest that exists in Australian education institutions as a 'cultural interface' where knowledge is negotiated between traditional understandings and experiences of western and Indigenous knowledges. There is a chorus of committed, non-Indigenous voices that take an honest 'outsider looking in' approach in the hope of provoking and facilitating a new imagination to counter a 'white-out' version of history which Clendinnen describes as ' a simple tale of the triumph of the Anglo Celts over deserts and empty places, ignoring the mosaic of different peoples we have always been, ignoring our first people' (Clendinnen 2008, p.19).

Whereas exposure builds awareness, transformation begins with relationship. In turn, relationship begins with dialogue. While 'Indigenous perspectives' are important across all subject areas, and particularly in uncovering the events of history, only Indigenous knowers can communicate with integrity a worldview that is based on a different locus of knowledge to that of the dominant Western culture (Aikenhead 2011, Nakata 2007). For this reason, opportunities must be created for students and teachers to build relationships with the keepers of that knowledge.

CO-OPERATION: SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES WORKING TOGETHER ACROSS CULTURAL SETTINGS

This paper has argued that for all Australian students, engagement with the 'true stories' of this land should be an educational priority. It has drawn on literature to claim that for Indigenous students, their worldview is a necessary starting point for learning; it enables a strengths based approach that minimises the need to resist and maximises the likelihood of educational engagement and success. For non-Indigenous learners, it has been argued that engagement with Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies is part of a civic education that sets young people up for active and informed participation in the democratic process. For these reasons it has argued that a curriculum priority that embraces Indigenous perspectives is not an add-on aimed at mollifying the mandates of political correctness, but should be part of the core business of education.

This then raises a series of essentially practical issues. The majority of teachers in this country are not Indigenous, and reflecting the historic failure to engage with the First Australian peoples, most have had little exposure to Indigenous language, cultural traditions and knowledge systems. Despite Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL] 2012) mandating that teachers demonstrate skills, knowledge and understanding about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and life-ways, many teaching degrees still do not include compulsory participation in Indigenous studies (Buckskin 2013). For those teachers already in the system there are opportunities for professional development through organisations such as Dare to Lead and the Stronger Smarter Institute, but progress is slow and many practitioners are rightly aware of their lack of cultural competence. Many would like to call on the expertise of the keepers of traditional knowledge but in the absence of established relationships are unsure of how to do that.

If they are to embrace their civic responsibility, schools must engage in the first instance with local Indigenous communities. Even a cursory exposure to Indigenous epistemology makes clear the centrality and particularity of place, and my experience of working with urban Victorian Indigenous communities has helped me to understand how easily and how often they are marginalised by programs that deflect attention from their own heritage and experience. Mark Rose addresses the notion of 'exoticism', and explains that because the colonial thrust in the southern states preceded the northern invasion by nearly one hundred years, different assaults on identity characterise the contemporary experience of southern Aboriginal peoples. Rose writes that:

> *'Indigenous Aboriginal people in Melbourne, for instance, often watch in bewilderment as 'the suits' drive through Fitzroy to catch planes to Fitzroy Crossing for that 'real Aboriginal experience' when all they needed to do was get out in Fitzroy'* (Rose 2012, p.72).

This paper does not address this issue, or suggest that engagement with a remote community diminishes the need to engage locally. Rather, it will argue that in the sharply differentiated schools market in Australia where remoteness correlates strongly with educational underperformance, there is much to be learned from

strategic partnerships that leverage the social, human and educational capital of the highest-performing schools to help to mitigate some of the disadvantages associated with remoteness. At the same time, mainstream schools and teachers would have the opportunity to learn from place-based knowledge systems and locally recruited, locally trained and locally working Indigenous teachers.

It will be suggested that to extend the reach of interesting and creative collaborations, sophisticated and well-resourced cultural knowledge centres should be developed in strategic communities and operate as a 'third space' where remote and mainstream schools could collaborate on joint projects shaped and overseen by the rightful owners of traditional knowledge in conjunction with teachers from both remote and urban school settings.

EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS: THE STATUS QUO

To date, the focus of remote community/mainstream school partnerships has been on the capacity of boarding schools to improve educational outcomes for students from remote areas through scholarship programs (Biddle & Cameron 2012). Increasingly the claims of boarding schools and scholarship providers attract government funding and uncritical media attention. While government and industry recognise the human capital potential that mainstream boarding schools have to offer in educating Indigenous students from remote communities (Schwab 2012), little base line or longitudinal data are available to evaluate the impact that this experience has on them in terms of educational, cultural, social and psychological outcomes (Kleinhenz 2007, Mander 2012). Even less work has been done to assess how effectively schools have supported students through pastoral care structures, education support services and the adoption of inclusive curricular that honour students' cultural background and enable them to work from a strengths base. There is much to be done before mainstream schools can claim to have made themselves culturally safe or inclusive places for Indigenous students.

Beyond the boarding school phenomenon, there has been little attention paid to how well resourced schools could work with remote students on their own country, in ways that avoid the social dislocation of taking young people out of their cultural and familial milieu (Mander 2012, Osborne 2013).

UNDERSTANDING THE SCHOOLS MARKET IN AUSTRALIA

The precondition to understanding the nature of any collaboration between mainstream and Indigenous schools is to understand the complex 'assemblage' of values that shape education policy from time to time in this country and which are in turn shaped by 'the changing political architecture of the state' (Rizvi and Lingard 2010, p8). This paper recognises the capacity of schools in the Independent school sector to spearhead a movement towards strategic collaboration as one means of engaging with Indigenous Australia in order to satisfy the imperatives of citizenship education, while at the same time redressing the educational disadvantages associated with remoteness.

Australia likes to think of itself as the classless land of the 'fair go', but since colonisation it has been shackled with a sectarian legacy that has given rise to a multi-tiered education system delivering vastly different outcomes for its constituents (Connell 2010, Kenway 2013, Savage 2013). Three powerful and sometimes competing interest groups; the State, the Catholic and the Independent sectors each play an important role in provision of education this country. The inalienable right to choose between these providers is deeply ingrained in the psyche of Australian parents who have the financial means and who place a high priority on the education of their children. Far from being the land of opportunity, within this paradigm the opportunity for students to make the most of the education system is determined in no small part by socio-economic status and by the capacity of families to exploit options within schooling systems (Teese and Polesel 2003, p12). Add to this the compounding effect of educating children such that their milieu is limited to those with like social and cultural capital (Connell 2010, pp6-7) , and the result is a perfect storm which over time cements inter-generational patterns of social division according to class (Connell 2010, pp101; 289) .

For many Indigenous Australians the barriers to educational participation and achievement are amplified: not only do they face the difficulties and trauma associated with being a 'subset of [the] wider problem' of society's 'persistent failure to close the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and disadvantaged schools on the one hand and wider school population on the other' (Pearson 2011a, p23), they also have to live with the assumption that their cultural knowledge base has little currency in a 'society where whiteness is positioned as normative, [and] everyone is ranked and categorized in relation' to this racial norm (Ladson-Billings 1998, p9).

Remote and very remote education faces further challenges including:

- Difficulty attracting and retaining culturally aware and culturally responsive teachers equipped to understand and teach into the reality of a child's life and world view;

- Paucity of on-going, place-based professional development opportunities for teachers;

- Small schools mean a functionalist approach to curriculum and pedagogy: this is exacerbated when the only measures of 'success' used are the 'blunt instruments' of government mandated testing regimes which assume English as first language proficiency;

- Isolation limits student opportunities to experience social and cultural contexts beyond their own world. It is equally difficult for mainstream students to experience life in remote Australia or to engage with the world views of First Nation peoples.

THE ROLE OF PARTNERSHIPS IN REMOTE SCHOOLING:

One approach to mitigating inequity in the Australian education system is to explore ways in which the advantages of high performing schools can be leveraged for the

benefit of those challenged by circumstance. The Nous Group report (Nous Group 2011) commissioned by David Gonski, suggested a strong focus on the capacity of high performing schools to combat disadvantage by opening their doors to students from low SES backgrounds even to the extent of forcing the hand of schools to take these students by 'restructuring some or all of the public subsidies so that they are retrospective and 'reward-based' (Nous Group 2011, p. 9). The final report hinted at the capacity of the Independent sector to adopt practices that would break down the cycle of disadvantage, but did not tie funding to any obligation to do so (Gonski 2011).

The potential for disadvantaged schools to leverage the socio-educational advantage of high-performing schools is also canvassed in the 2010 McKinsey report 'How the world's most improved school systems keep getting better'. This report suggests that by 'opening up the channels between schools to sharing learning, standardize practice, and support each other,' system wide improvement can be accomplished (McKinsey 2010, p. 86). Consistent with these findings, the Grattan Institute report 'Turning around schools: it can be done' (Jensen 2014) identified five steps consistently implemented in schools that have turned around a history of low-performance:

- Strong leadership that raises expectations but is responsive to local circumstances;

- Effective teaching with teachers learning from each other, including mentoring from teachers in high-performing schools;

- Development and measurement of student learning;

- Development of a positive school culture, including new norms of classroom behaviour;

- Engagement of parents and the community including building parents' pride in their children's outcomes (pp9-10).

School/community partnerships are foreshadowed by the 2014 Wilson Review of education in the Northern Territory entitled 'A Share in the Future' ('The Wilson Review') and in literature more broadly (Altman 2004, Ma Rhea 2012, Wilson 2014). These generally contemplate ways for Indigenous schools or students to benefit from the capacity of external organisations and community engagement programs. The Review concludes that 'they have not achieved the success they aimed for' (p102). Disappointing and inconsistent take-up of community engagement initiatives is attributed to the fact that:

> *'They were aimed at a very broad group of target schools, not focused on specific activity and did not address clear outcomes. Equally important, they suffered from 'policy churn' and the cessation of funding, so they were not given the chance to succeed' (p102).*

The Wilson Review does not explore in any depth the potential for effective inter-school partnerships to address practical problems associated with remote Indigenous education despite an increasing recognition in the private sector that they are in a position to make a difference for remote Indigenous communities.

LEVERAGING THE SOCIAL, FINANCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL CAPITAL OF THE HIGH–PERFORMING SCHOOLS:

Within the Australian independent school sector there is a long-held commitment to engagement with our First Nation peoples, but many are only now realising that this requires a purposeful commitment to building and maintaining relationships both within and beyond their own school community. Taking Victorian Independent schools as a case in point, many have church affiliations that inspire programs to maximise inclusion and diversity. Accordingly, in recent years a number have taken advantage of the Indigenous Youth Leadership Program and other government and private sector funding to accept Indigenous students from remote communities, although typically in small numbers [1] . Partly due to the presence of these students in boarding houses and as members of the wider school community, and partly from an existing commitment to social justice, there is a sense of urgency, but also some uncertainty, about how schools can develop integrated, embedded and sequential programs to engage all students in learning about both the cultural heritage and the colonisation experience of our First Nation people.

To these ends, a significant number of Independent schools in Victoria have established relationships with remote Aboriginal communities (Figure 1). These have, in turn, helped them to understand the potential for a different level of engagement. While each school has developed its own model, typically involving trips, tours and sometimes exchanges, very few have explored the potential for sustained curriculum-based interactions enabling each to access the highest intellectual elements of the other's culture (Nakata 2007, Yunkaporta 2009).

Table 1
Victorian Independent School / Remote community relationships

Table 1: Victorian Independent School/Remote community relationships

Independent School (Vic)	Remote Community or school
Genazzano FCJ College	St Mary's Broome
Methodist Ladies College	Ngukurr (NT)
Geelong Grammar School	East Arnhem Land (NT)
Scotch College	East Arnhem Land /Tiwi College (NT)
Melbourne Grammar School	Groote Eyland (NT)
The Geelong College	Shalom College (Cape York)(Qld)
Carey Baptist Grammar	Robinson River (NT)
Trinity Grammar School	Gunbalunya (NT)
Xavier College	St Mary's Broome (WA)
Ballarat Grammar	Timber Creek (WA)
Wesley College	Fitzroy Valley (WA)

The potential benefits for remote communities in partnering with these institutions are significant. The profile of schools listed in Figure 1 make for impressive reading on the *My School* website (ACARA 2013b); the Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage (ICSEA) ranking of each school reveals a deposit of rich, inter-generational educational advantage concentrated in the school community. This is in contrast to remote schools where universally low ICSEA scores reflect conditions that perpetuate inter-generational disadvantage in education, where the curriculum priority is on basic proficiency in (often English language only) literacy and numeracy, and recruitment and retention of culturally competent leadership and teaching staff with expertise with knowledge of first languages or ESL strategies is a recurring problem (Collins 1999; Wilson 2014).

ENCOURAGING INVESTMENT IN PARTNERSHIPS:

Australia is the only country in the OECD where schools are allowed to 'double dip'; that is, to charge fees whilst also receiving government subsidies (Nous Group 2011, Webpress 2013). This creates a moral imperative for schools in this sector to deploy their extensive social, financial and educational capacity for the benefit of those most marginalised within the education system. Were every high performing school in Australia encouraged to invest their social and educational capital in quality, genuinely two-way partnerships with disadvantaged schools, to be monitored and measured for their impact on student engagement and performance, the face of education in this country could be transformed.

It is easy to characterise such initiatives as 'add-ons' that lack the efficacy of system-wide transformation, or in more cynical terms as a 'commodified' form of equity that is more a marketing 'resource' for privileged schools than it is a 'right' for disadvantaged students (Windle & Stratton 2013) but such initiatives have the potential of being relatively cheap and uncontroversial for government, achievable and transformative for students and teachers across the educational spectrum. These are not partnerships that 'fit with the concept of "caring at a distance"' (p10) as Windle and Stratton suggest, but real, measurable programs which change the DNA of both schools.

For these reasons it is suggested that investment in inter-school partnerships should be encouraged through the taxation system. Providing incentives under the Charities Act, the Cameron government in UK has gone some little way down this path (Connell 2010, Kenway 2013). Kenway cites the example of Eton College, a school synonymous with privilege, which boasts on its website membership of an 'Independent State School Partnership' which:

> aims to raise pupil achievement; improve pupil self-esteem; raise pupil aspirations; and, improve professional practice across the schools. (Eton College) (p14)

While Kenway points to a number of risks attached to such relationships she also recognises that these could be handled through careful planning. My own experience is that philanthropists are eager to support the development of cross-cultural projects between high-end schools and those in remote Australia, if only on the assumption

that working with schools at the top of the league tables should logically benefit those that consistently underperform according to national testing regimes. Their enthusiasm is dampened, if not extinguished, when it proves impossible to find tax-effective ways to invest. Indeed, many philanthropic bodies are prevented from investing in projects that do not attract Designated Gift Recipient status (see for example http://www.ianpotter.org.au/eligibility).

EFFECTIVE INTER–SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMS:

The 'Yiramalay/Wesley Studio School Project' undertaken jointly by Wesley College, Melbourne and the Fitzroy Valley community in the Kimberley district of Western Australia is a radically deeper joint educational enterprise than most. A case study of this project is included elsewhere in this publication as an illustration of the seriousness with which mainstream schools are increasingly exploring their capacity to learn from communities and assist in the educational engagement of young Indigenous people in remote Australia (see Drennen & McCord, in this publication).

In 2010, the Yiramalay/Wesley Studio School received full registration as a senior school and now offers full-time, hands-on, work-related learning and training opportunities to Fitzroy Valley and Wesley College students through the new National Diploma of Education (Brown 2011, Jackson 2011). The Studio School operates for two terms each year, and offers Yiramalay students the opportunity to spend the other two terms in Melbourne. The initiative, funded through private investment, has provided Indigenous students the opportunity to complete Years 11 and 12, which would once have required them to leave home, as well as undertaking a new 'National Diploma of Education' alongside their Wesley classmates.

Further, it has provided highly trained non-Indigenous teachers to some of the most under-resourced students in the country and has enriched the lives and expanded the horizons of the middle to upper-middle class students enrolled at school in Melbourne (Melbourne Graduate School of Education 2013). It provides support for high quality Bunuba and Walmajarri language teachers and the opportunity for non-Indigenous teachers to learn more about local language and culture, a mutual reciprocity. Beyond benefits flowing to students and teachers, elders from the Kimberley community also spend a number of weeks each year in Melbourne, employed with Junior School students on language and culturally based units of work.

CARING FOR COUNTRY PROGRAMS:
EXPANDING THE PARTNERSHIP PARADIGM.

Before exploring how the benefit of partnerships can be extended to a broader range of schools and students, it is worth dwelling for a moment on the potential of a far more ambitious and robust model of education partnership that is already achieving life-transforming outcomes for young people in different parts of remote Australia, and specifically in communities in Arnhem Land.

The 'Caring for Country' movement began with a demand from the local community that people be equipped with a set of skills that encompassed both Indigenous knowledge and western land management practices and scientific knowledge. Beginning as a direct-action research project in 2007, the 'People on Country, Healthy Landscapes and Indigenous Economic Futures' challenged the dominant policy views that:

> ...fixates on just two possibilities: either mainstream commercial development, in situ, where you live; or migrate away from remote communities, move up the settlement hierarchy and then join the mainstream (Altman 2012, p7).

Researchers explored a 'third possibility', where people stay on country and 'pursue a different form of development based on working on country' (p7). This led to a 'natural, but gradual partnering between education providers and caring for country groups' that is known as the 'Learning on Country' program(Fogarty 2012). In this domain, programs use Indigenous land and sea management and rangers as a vehicle to facilitate student learning of skills and knowledge that are transportable to a host of employment, educational and livelihood pathways. The Learning on Country program:

> …is grounded in place-based pedagogy, where learning and communication are structured around what is most meaningful to the students- their places, their culture, their experiences (See Godinho et al, in this publication).

These are partnerships that bring together remote schools, mainstream universities and local Ranger organisations in a variety of eclectic projects that are quietly changing lives in remote Australia (Fogarty 2012).

If the debate around remote development has presumed participation in mainstream economies, the same is true in education. If policy makers take seriously the literature around student participation and the need for education to be connected to the reality of a students' life, then any initiative that can link student learning to traditional knowledge systems must be considered carefully. The possibilities that would emerge from three-way partnerships between remote schools, mainstream schools and Learning on Country programs, would be considerable. Were these to be facilitated though strategic education hubs as suggested below, this would provide stability of relationships, logistical support and the technical capacity for on-going school-based collaborations.

EXPANDING THE REACH OF PARTNERSHIPS: CREATING A 'THIRD SPACE' FOR COLLABORATION

There are many challenges inherent in developing and maintaining relationships across geographic distance and cultural contexts and these can act as major disincentives to developing partnerships between remote and mainstream schools. Few schools in this country would have the vision, commitment or financial capacity to engage in undertakings as ambitious as those described above. Strong trusting relationships between committed school and community leaders take time and are

built up through a significant investment of human and financial resources. They require a shared vision and commitment to engagement that equalises or reverses the typical balance of power (Windle & Stratton 2013). While there is ample justification for encouraging and supporting school specific partnerships, there is also room for approaches that enable a wider range of people to benefit from cross-cultural education initiatives.

Rather than limit the possibility of inter-school partnerships, the practical difficulties of establishing meaningful connections between remote and mainstream schools create a role for centralised 'cultural education hubs' developed on country in strategic communities. Such hubs would become important vehicles through which communities that have strong and continuing language and cultural traditions would be empowered to engage with mainstream schools so that depth and perspective can be added to school curricula and teacher training programs in both school settings. They would operate as sites of empowerment for communities where strategic focus on adult education and training build capacity to deliver programs to mainstream students. Community owned and run education hubs would create a 'third space' for remote and mainstream schools to come together, accessing expertise and purpose-built programs so that students could work together back and across cultural settings, building friendships and sharing the best of each other's cultural heritage.

Using place-based cultural education hubs as a means of empowering communities to communicate their language, culture, law and traditions to non-Indigenous Australian students would have benefits in both worlds. In the first instance they may be designed as commercial enterprises to meet the needs of mainstream students, but over time they would come to work as a 'third space' enabling connections between schools and teachers and mitigating some of the disadvantages associated with remoteness. In order to ensure maximum community buy-in, education hubs would need to call on the expertise of local education providers, the holders of traditional local knowledge and the capacity of existing businesses and organisations already working in the community. By being equipped with state of the art technology and calling on a range of community strengths, on- going and curriculum based partnerships could be built up over time.

This initiative would require an initial investment in infrastructure and training to equip remote communities for the challenges of working alongside urban and regional schools, but over time they should become self-funding in the same way as many outdoor education businesses around the nation. Beyond the commercial potential, training and on-going employment opportunities for people in communities where there are few opportunities to participate in mainstream economies should be justification enough to encourage government and private sector investment (Sabel 2011, p.3. Windle & Stratton 2013).

Many interesting and productive programs already exist in remote Australia to preserve and celebrate culture and a number of these are presented elsewhere in this publication. Education hubs would not seek to replicate or undermine these, but would be informed by them as a way of providing depth and sustainability of content. Supporting existing organisations and local initiatives led by local Indigenous leaders well connected to their country and their cultural groups would also ensure maximum community involvement.

BENEFITS OF PARTNERSHIPS FACILITATED BY A THIRD PARTY:

Partnership projects facilitated through an independent third party would have the advantage of stability; access to a wide reference group in developing genuinely useful curriculum based projects; no disruption to local schools, but increased opportunities for their students; authentic engagement with traditional culture, language and knowledge systems; access to local businesses and facilities, including community arts centres. Well- resourced hubs could facilitate year-long connections between schools or groups of students so that a broader curriculum could be offered to remote students: in language learning settings, students from different nations are increasingly able to enjoy the benefits of immersion education by coming together in virtual classrooms (Kirby et al 2013). Given the technological sophistication of the modern world, there is no excuse for remoteness to limit exposure to a wide range of educational possibilities.

Examples of further possible benefits are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Potential Outcomes of partnerships mediated through independent hubs of cultural knowledge

Civics and citizenship education- social justice. Building understanding to allow for 'real reconciliation';

Challenging students to see the world from a different perspective: personal development/'real reconciliation';

Re-engagement of students/young people through an inclusive curriculum, delivered with cultural integrity and minimising student resistance to more formal learning contexts;

Knowledge, culture and language maintenance;

Personal development: pathways to adulthood programs (already a feature of many schools that prioritise critical self- reflection as part of the curriculum) ; wellbeing; building confidence; feeling empowered as learners; developing leadership capacity;

Building social capital by creating networks, facilitating intercultural friendships;

Exposure to opportunities through mainstream schools / On-country experiences, benefits of experiential learning;

Peer teaching/learning opportunities where balance of power shifts and relationships are essentially power-sensitive;(Haraway 2004, Kirby et al 2013)

Opportunities for active, hands-on learning in keeping with Indigenous learning traditions that are based on watching and listening, waiting then acting(Ungunmerr 2009);

Reinforce foundational skills in literacy/numeracy/spoken English. Transfer of specialist knowledge;

Alternative pathways through certificate courses etc. (see Wesley/Yirramalay model);

Employment, developing financial literacy;

Support for teachers in remote locations, especially those relatively new to the profession. Experienced teachers as mentors and guides/ building capacity of new or pre-service teachers.

CONCLUSION

Modern technology has shrunk the world, and leaves no excuse for knowledge transfer or educational opportunity to be prevented by isolation. 'Remoteness' therefore reflects a lack of relationship, rather than a factor of distance. In a national education landscape distinctive for its inequality, the potential for mainstream schools to partner with those in remote Australia has yet to be fully explored. This paper has suggested that encouraging and facilitating inter-cultural, inter-school relationships should become a policy priority. This has implications for curriculum and fiscal policy.

The first section of this paper considered the importance of a culturally responsive curriculum for Indigenous students and mainstream students. It discussed the tendency for Indigenous students to passively or actively resist education that does not honour their cultural heritage or speak into their lived experience. For mainstream students, it was argued that education is the cornerstone of citizenship: cross-cultural understanding is essential to equipping all young Australians for a more holistic and integrated understanding of this nation and their place in it. It concluded that this has implications for schools, and importantly in teacher training programs.

From a practical perspective, however, embracing and engaging with Indigenous perspectives is fraught with difficulty for non-Indigenous teachers. This does not exempt teachers of their responsibility, but it does mean that new and creative ways of engaging with Indigenous knowers and knowledge systems need to be developed. While in the first instance schools need to do this within their local community, there is also a role for mainstream schools to engage with their remote cousins.

The second section of the paper addressed the practical dilemmas that face the education fraternity. It recognised the capacity and volition of high-performance schools in the Independent sector to work with remote communities. Beyond Independent schools, it suggested that developing cultural education hubs on country could be a powerful and authentic means of equipping and enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to safeguard and share their traditional knowledge and argue their case for its inclusion in all Australian schools. Non-Indigenous Australians would be better placed to grasp the richness and diversity of First Nation culture without compromising the integrity and intellectual property rights pertaining to it. Further, it was suggested that such centres could provide education, training and employment opportunities for people in remote communities and allow for the development of partnerships designed to address particular issues associated with remoteness. Although the concept could have application in other settings, this paper focused on the potential for remote communities to benefit from inter-school partnerships mediated by cultural education hubs.

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ARTIST'S PROFILE

Anzack Newman is a Torres Strait Island man who lives with his family in Bamaga on the northern tip of Cape York. His interest in art started when he was studying at Scotch College in Melbourne, and was further developed in his undergraduate studies at the Victorian College of The Arts. His work reflects the colours and images of the Torres Strait and is a modern interpretation of ancient artistic traditions associated with that place.

'WALKING TOGETHER SO ALL MIGHT LEARN'

This work was commissioned to accompany the article 'Compelled to Innovate', and explores ways that Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can work together to share knowledge and grow in respect and understanding.

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 Indigenes. 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 Indigenes 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