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The re-creation and resolution of the 'problem' of Indigenous education in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cross-curriculum priority

Abstract:

This paper focuses on the 'problem' of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education represented in the Australian Curriculum's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority. Looking beyond particular curriculum content, we uncover the policy discourses that construct (and reconstruct) the cross-curriculum priority. In the years after the Australian Curriculum's creation, curriculum authors have moulded the priority from an initiative without a clear purpose into a purported solution to the 'Indigenous problem' of educational underachievement, student resistance and disengagement. As the cross-curriculum priority was created and subsequently reframed,the 'problem' of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education has thereby been manifested in policy; strategised as curriculum content and precipitated in the cross-curriculum priority. These policy problematisations perpetuate contemporary racialisation and actively construct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, histories and knowledges as deficient.

Keywords: policy problematisation; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education; Indigenous education; Australian Curriculum; cross-curriculum priority

Introduction

In late 2010 the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) published an online, national curriculum intended for progressive implementation in all Australian states and territories. The release of the Australian Curriculum represented the most significant progress toward replacement of disparate state-based curricula since instigation of national curriculum projects in the late 1980s (Bartlett 1992). Transparency and community engagement were key platforms of the Federal Government at the time (Davis 2008), and ACARA's curriculum development process was undertaken in consultation with community, professional, and government groups. One result of these discussions was the introduction of a curriculum initiative that would require topics of significance in contemporary Australia to be included across all subject areas; this initiative would eventually become known as the 'cross-curriculum priorities' (CCPs). The three CCPs charged with ensuring a curriculum relevant to all students via content that "addresses the

contemporary issues they face" were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia, and Sustainability (ACARA 2011, para. 2). The CCPs were intended to be embedded across all subject areas in a manner determined by teachers and other stakeholders such that they would "have a strong but varying presence depending on their relevance to the learning areas" (ACARA 2011, para. 4).

This paper presents analysis of both the original and recently rewritten rationale of one of the cross-curriculum priorities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. Each of the authors is intimately familiar with the Australian Curriculum, particularly the CCPs, due to our research and teaching areas. In the course of studying the latest version of the curriculum, we noted that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures CCP, which was previously published without an explicit rationale, had suddenly gained a new reason for existing. We argue that this backdated statement of intent does the dual work of reproducing an educational 'problem' and presenting the CCP as its 'solution'. Rather than critique the accuracy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content within the Australian Curriculum or the extent of teachers' knowledge of such content (see, Author 2014 2015), this paper focuses on the foundational, socio-political, historical and educational discourses embedded in the Australian Curriculum via the explanatory text associated with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures CCP. These discourses are analysed via problematising statements made by curriculum authors that communicate a powerful position on the nature and value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, communities, histories and cultures. In the context of a national curriculum policy narrative, these policy problematisations (Bacchi 2009) perpetuate historic racialisation and active construct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, histories and knowledges as deficient. This paper explores two questions of policy analysis. First, what are the 'problems' and the presuppositions which underlie their representation in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures CCP? And second, what 'solutions' are proposed and purportedly deliverable through that CCP? Our approach to policy analysis seeks to question the epistemological, pedagogical, and conceptual premises of policy solutions in order to make the discursive effect of governing rhetoric visible. We also raise the question of how policy might develop otherwise.

Policy analysis

This analysis focuses on representations of problems that inform constructions of particular solutions; in this case the attempted mobilisation of a constructed cultural identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, apparently intended to close the achievement gap with curriculum content. It accords with both Bourdieu and de Certeau's critical cultural policy approach (Ahearne 2004), which analyses the position developed within curriculum such that it can be seen as cultural policy. Cultural policies such as the Australian Curriculum are heteroglossic and complex, born of multiple voices that struggle to influence the intent, structure and content of curriculum toward a particular proposition and narrative about knowledge, learning, and value (Doherty 2014). Seeking to assert a national curriculum narrative across states, educational jurisdictions and interest groups has resulted in complementary, supplementary, oppositional and juxtaposed voices where "there is never a clean page, but rather [an] ongoing dialogue" (Doherty 2014, p. 187) between competing positions. Such ambitious policy texts are not clean nor neutral, but culturally constructed products deployed to do governing work.

This paper takes an approach that integrates Bacchi's (2009) "*What's the problem represented to be*?" policy analysis with critical race theory's analysis of racialised power structures to focus on the acts of governing, not the governed, to interrogate the CCP as a vehicle that creates and perpetuates problems about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. Central to this approach is the study of particularities that underpin public policy development and the assumptions about the problem of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' education, to which the CCP offers a solution. Above all this approach facilitates recognition of the 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education problem' as an analytic one; that is, it does not exist as a problem independent of education policy, but rather is represented as problematic by policy authors who simultaneously present an intersection of policies purporting to offer solutions to priority problems.

Drawing on Foucault's (1979) population-focused notions of governmentality, Bacchi (2009) proposes a policy analysis approach which evaluates policy authors' rationales and techniques that influence public engagement with those policies. Bacchi (2009, p. 31) argues that "every policy constitutes a problematisation and in effect, we are governed through these problematisations rather than through policies". In revealing these problematisations we are better able to understand how policy is structured and how policy authors direct thinking on their proffered solution. Bacchi cautions against accepting such evolutions as the "best attempt to deal with 'problems'" (2009, p. 1). The approach looks beyond policy as problem

solving, to interrogate the assumptions of such solutions and the ways in which they represent and construct problems (Bacchi 2009; Bacchi and Goodwin 2016). In this case, the reiteration of problems is bound in the realities of an unresolved history of nation-making and efforts to resolve the ontological impasse at the centre of a policy purporting to reconcile the supposed problem of being an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person. This proposes that governments have a "creative or productive role…in shaping particular understandings of 'problems'" (Bacchi 2009, p. 2).

The process of establishing problematisations that represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as deficient in multiple ways has been a highly successful vehicle for exerting government control over Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Rudolph 2016). The social and political impacts of government practice of constructing and homogenising Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples' identities are significant (Rowse 2009). Policies such as the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Reform Agenda (commonly known as Closing the Gap) construct population binaries that fix colonial ideologies of pan-Aboriginality in ways that by definition deny uniqueness, specificity and affiliations to Place or Country. We contend that these discourses continue to inform the body of policies that determine limits and possibilities of policy solutions. Australian education policy development reveals various policy moments (Patrick and Moodie 2016) from self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to one of normalisation or the recalibrating of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander autonomy through a neoliberal lens.

Furthermore, how policy authors (re)construct racial or cultural minority groups by indenturing conceptual premises that replicate rather than resist racialisation and racism (Moreton-Robinson 2016) is critical to unpacking presuppositions which underlie representations. Education policy texts such as the Australian Curriculum are understood by the authors as sites of interest convergence of such norms (Bell 2004; Author and Author 2015), where inequities faced by minoritised groups appear to be remedied with additional culture-based content, therefore appearing to equally address interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and governments. However, closer inspection of the problem construction within the shifting rationale of initiatives such as the CCP reveals that this policy solution has not been introduced due to perceived inherent worth of such content, but because the initiative benefits policy makers, by appearing to meet election promises and party policy (Allen 2007). Primary policy goals of minoritised groups (such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples) are subservient to the interests of a (non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander) majority (Bell 2004). Consequently, the solutions offered by the curriculum, and the problem representations associated with these *appear* to represent a move away from historical exclusionary, racist curricula, but consist of the same distinguishing features of previous Australian education policy. Curriculum content (in the case of the CCP content related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories) is still broadly determined by a government body.

Consequently, we contend that the very nature of being an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person, and what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories consist of is governed, if not solely determined, by government policy authors, and the appropriate time and manner of deploying information about each topic is similarly directed by ACARA and (majority, non-Indigenous) teaching personnel (Author and Author 2016). The following section traces how this is enacted via the iterative evolution of priority problems in national education vision statements for Australian schooling released by the Council of Australian Governments, and their increasing intersection with the national closing the education gap policy. In the case at hand, we propose that the authors of the CCP are both creator and purveyor of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and identity. In offering their solution to the achievement gap, the curriculum authors have gone so far as to actively construct representations of who and what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are by reconstructing, reflecting and interpreting those students' cultures and histories via this curriculum initiative.

CCP 'solution'

Early versions of the Australian Curriculum saw CCPs included as an initiative created to enhance the relevance of the curriculum for all students to better enable them to "prosper in a globalised world" and contribute to the "social intellectual and creative capital of our nation" (ACARA 2011, para. 1). Furious discussion ensued during and following the initial consultation and implementation phases of the new national curriculum. Critique came from those concerned about a lack of depth and epistemic engagement with historical experiences (Austin and Hickey 2011; Burgess 2009; Author 2013; Petriwskyj 2014), a lack of sustained systemic support for the genuine inclusion of cross curriculum content (Author 2015) and political backlash from those who claimed that the curriculum lacked sufficient focus on Australia's colonial and Judeo Christian heritage (Berg 2014; Donnelly 2011, 2013; Pyne 2014). The online format of the curriculum was touted by ACARA as enabling a particularly

responsive and agile curriculum. This was clearly demonstrated after the election of the Abbott Liberal/National Government in 2013.

Less than four months after the new federal government was sworn in, the Commonwealth Minister for Education, Christopher Pyne, commissioned Kevin Donnelly, one of the curriculum's most outspoken critics, and Kenneth Wiltshire to undertake a review of the Australian Curriculum. In their Final Report (Australian Government Department of Education 2014) the reviewers acknowledged that the CCPs had been "singled out as an area of concern, both in the media [including in articles by Donnelly e.g. 2011] and in consultations for this Review" (p. 3). Donnelly and Wiltshire suggested that stakeholder concern was explicitly related to the content of the CCPs, which they reported as having broad support, but perceived politicitisation of the curriculum prompted by the very existence of the CCPs, and the "confusing", "educationally unsound" practice of embedding priority topics across all subject areas (p. 247). While supporting the retention of the priority topic areas in a revised curriculum, Donnelly and Wiltshire recommended a reconceptualisation of the priorities, redesignating them as "curriculum priorities", and embedding teaching and learning about those topics "properly within particular learning areas, only where relevant, and where their inclusion can be justified on epistemological grounds" (p. 247). While this recommendation appeared to be a retreat from Donnelly's earlier incendiary comments on the legitimacy of Indigenous content in the curriculum (Donnelly 2011), it clearly directed the curriculum authors to render epistemologies of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as subservient to the very content and narratives that have sanctioned dispossession and disadvantage throughout Australian history (Ditchburn 2012).

By late 2015, a new version of the Australian Curriculum (version 8, hereafter, V.8) went live. This new version contains substantive changes to the phrasing and framing of the CCPs (ACARA 2016b). In V.8 the CCPs are no longer framed as tools to improve the nation's competitiveness in a globalised world, but are introduced as a mechanism to partially achieve a vague pedagogical remit of the Australian Curriculum – "to meet the needs of students by delivering a relevant, contemporary and engaging curriculum that builds on the educational goals of the Melbourne Declaration" (ACARA 2016b, para. 1). In addition, and of particular interest here, is the reconceptualisation of the purpose of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures CCP which, in the new version, contains explicit reference to the CCP's role in closing "the gap in learning outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their non-Indigenous peers" (ACARA 2016a, para. 1). Prior to V.8 of

the Australian Curriculum, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP contained no reference to specific education needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, nor the achievement gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, nor the role curriculum content might play in solving these problems. Earlier versions of the curriculum indicated that the CCP had potential benefits for "all learners", but not Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, specifically (ACARA 2015b, para. 3). In the latest iteration of the Australian Curriculum, however, the gap has taken centre stage as the reason for the CCP's existence.

Reference to the gap follows ACARA's assertion that the Australian Curriculum "sets consistent national standards to improve learning outcomes for all young Australians" (ACARA 2016a, para. 1). The V.8 curriculum authors identify "two distinct needs in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education" which are presented as inherently bound to the achievement gap:

- that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are able to see themselves, their identities and their cultures reflected in the curriculum of each of the learning areas, can fully participate in the curriculum and can build their self-esteem
- that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority is designed for all students to engage in reconciliation, respect and recognition of the world's oldest continuous living cultures. (ACARA 2016a, para. 2)

These new paragraphs set the ground work for both problem construction and solution; the problem is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' outcomes are deficient; the solution can be partially found in a curriculum which sets consistent standards for all students and enables achievement of them via cultural content.

The gap is not new. Monocultural curricula are also not a recent discovery. However, prior to V.8 the CCP was published without reference to the specific education needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, the achievement gap between Australian students, or the role curriculum content might play in solving these problems. Such omissions do not necessarily mean that ACARA constructed the curriculum without these problematisations in mind; key documents referred to during the development of the Australian Curriculum contain references to the gap and participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

students (see, e.g. Review Steering Committee 2007) and presentations from curriculum workshops suggest that the CCPs were expected to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with "opportunities to see themselves and their own experiences in the Australian Curriculum" and "opportunities for excellence within education settings which respect and promote their cultural identity" (Palmer 2012, slides 12-3). However, until the revised version of the curriculum was published in 2015 (and added to in 2016), these goals were not publically articulated. The purported rationale for the CCP has taken years to surface, with a social justice impetus bolted on in V.8.

Historical 'problems'

Since the 1980s, impetus for inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content has been associated with government social justice policies. This agenda was evident at a critical point in the evolution of Australia's state-based education system, when all state and Commonwealth education ministers agreed to a common set of educational goals within a "framework of national collaboration" (Australian Education Council 1989, para. 1). These goals were captured in the *Hobart Declaration on Schooling*, and later the *The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty First Century* (hereafter the Adelaide Declaration; Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA] 1999), whose authors articulated a commitment to curricula that were to provide "students with an understanding and respect for our cultural heritage, including the particular cultural background of Aboriginal and ethnic groups" (Australian Education Council 1989, para. 8). This requirement became entrenched in the first *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* (Department of Education and Training 1989, section 3.2) and has continued to inform subsequent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education policy documents.

From the late 1980s increasing criticism of monocultural curricula prompted promises to educate all students about aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' histories and cultures, leading to common inclusions in both state and Commonwealth education policy. However, policy texts do not reflect policy enactment, nor the complex workings of school agents such as leaders and teachers in first choosing whether to take-up policy, and if so, navigating how it will be enacted (Ball 1993). Importantly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents criticised what they saw as tokenistic inclusion of Indigenous knowledges in school programs (New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated

and New South Wales Department of Education and Training [NSW AECG and NSW DET] 2004). Rarely did curriculum content address difficult topics such as the legitimacy of the Australian state, the legacy of genocide on contemporary cultures, and the ongoing impacts of systemic racism (Hickling-Hudson and Ahlquist 2003; St. Denis 2011). National discourse on the benign and legal occupation of Australia, and obvious tensions of that narrative with the place, legitimacy and sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has continued to underpin ongoing contestation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples and the state (Altman 2010; Beeson and Firth 1998; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision [SCRGSP] 2009, 2011, 2014).

Despite declarative statements of good will, purposeful intent, and commitment to action on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, government agencies have historically, and continue to, collectively categorise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and cast performance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences as deficit in public and educational policy discourse. Between the late 1990s and 2000s these discourses reflected rhetoric of the Liberal-National Howard government: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences could be aggregated in a population binary that categorised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians as objects of "socio-economic disadvantage" that "demanded remedies" (Rowse 2009, p. 42). The Northern Territory National Emergency Response (see e.g. Howard-Wagner 2007; Hunter 2008) and Shared Responsibility Agreements (see e.g. de Plevitz 2006), for example, were key 'remedies' ostensibly designed to assist Aboriginal children in identified communities to escape cycles of abuse and inequitable access to resources, respectively. Constructed as inept, a majority of Aboriginal communities were ill-resourced to effect change without the guidance of policies that empowered governments at the expense of community agency (NSW AECG and NSW DET 2004; SCRGSP 2014). Ironically, this rhetoric endorsed government intervention to remedy failure of the government's own policies which had progressively undermined the promise of self-determination, autonomy and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's human rights (Maddison 2009). However, failures of policy strategies to specifically effect change in student achievement was increasingly recognised in reports such as the *Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education* (NSW AECG and NSW DET 2004) and the *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008* report (Australian Education Senior Officials Committee [AESOC] 2006), which emphasised systemic, underpinning causes and effects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student underachievement. In addition to the social and educational

impetus behind education reform, the AESOC report authors framed the apparent underachievement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as an economic burden, signalling increasing attempts to connect improvements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education with increased national prosperity (Brennan 2011; Connell 2013; Rizvi and Lingard 2009).

This education/economic impetus was again evident in late 2008, twelve months after the federal election saw a decisive victory for the Rudd Labor government, with the development of the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (hereafter the Melbourne Declaration; MCEETYA 2008a). The Melbourne Declaration was heralded as part of an impending educational revolution that would provide an "education [to] equip young people with the knowledge, understanding, skills and values to take advantage of the opportunities and to face the challenges of this era" (MCEETYA 2008a, p. 4). While some commentators noted the government's claim of enacting revolution in educational policy in Australia was overblown in that much remained unchanged from the decade old Adelaide Declaration (O'Meara 2011; Ministerial Council of Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA] 1999; Reid 2009), the Melbourne Declaration clearly articulated and formalised a framework which rationalised educational policy in reference to the nation's economic prosperity. The document was significant in subsequent years, with ACARA authors heavily referencing the Declaration to justify various features of the Australian Curriculum (ACARA 2016b; National Curriculum Board 2008). In addition to economic priorities, the Melbourne Declaration contains goals to develop citizens who recognise the "value of Indigenous cultures", and the need for schools to "build on local cultural knowledge and experience of Indigenous students as a foundation for learning" (MCEETYA 2008a, pp. 9, 8). This latest Declaration reflected then Prime Minister Rudd's electoral promise for an educational revolution in a politically and economically unsettled global context (O'Meara 2011; Reid 2009) and a socially just nation that recognised and addressed past errors.

Prior to the publication of the Melbourne Declaration in December 2008, a draft was made available for public comment in September of that year (MCEETYA 2008b). A section of the draft containing most of the content about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families, cultures, and learning outcomes was changed prior to the release of the final version of the Declaration. While the draft referred to "improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged young Australians, especially those from Indigenous and low socioeconomic

backgrounds" (MCEETYA 2008b, p. 7), the final version contains a section about "improving educational outcomes for Indigenous youth and disadvantaged young Australians, especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds" (MCEETYA 2008a, p. 15). This change indicates an attempt to move away from such an obvious deficit positioning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (MCEETYA 2005), but one that is not quite realised. A statement that appeared in the draft but not in the Melbourne Declaration said "improving educational outcomes for Indigenous children and young people is a key component of our educational goals for young Australians, and requires additional, targeted support" (MCEETYA 2008b, p. 11); with the omission suggesting that although the improvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student outcomes was a concern in the Melbourne Declaration, it was part of a larger goal not a goal in and of itself requiring targeted resources.

In the Melbourne Declaration's epigraph, and again as part of a goal related to active citizenship and reconciliation, the authors twice assert that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultures are to be valued. The separation of culture from people is impossible (Hokowhitu 2009) so it is helpful to explore the notion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in the Melbourne Declaration alongside its authors' representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, parents and communities. While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are said to be "value[d] as a key part of Australia's past, present and future" (MCEETYA 2008a, p. 4), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are always referred to as deficient. In the document, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are not achieving educational benchmarks; their educational "outcomes" (not learning, but outcomes) need improvement (MCEETYA p. 4); Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community expectations of students need to rise (as they are, presumably, low); and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community member participation in schools needs to be heightened (again, due to assumed low engagement). Despite positively framing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures the *people* in whom Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are embodied are consistently located within a deficit position by the authors of the Melbourne Declaration.

Although the language may have changed across national education policies the intention remained largely unaltered, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures have been positioned as an impediment to schooling success. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges have been juxtaposed as being outside the 'Australian' cultural experiences that

informed teacher knowledge, schooling success and social inclusion. This position, which transitioned across policy iterations from the 1980s, was informed by a deep seated view that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and knowledge placed students at the cultural margins and was a source of resistance to their willing sublimation into the Australian state. This deficit theorising has a long history within discourses associated with the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Australia which fail to acknowledge the non-Indigeneity of policy and curriculum (Fforde, Bamblett, Lovett, Gorringe, and Fogarty 2013; Rudolph 2016). This conceptualisation of cultural difference on both policy and practices of schools, whereby Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-white peoples are different and the white, non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander majority is normal, has been shown to be pernicious in impact on student, teacher, and parent expectations by naturalising the view that schooling is culturally neutral, and that adherence to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural identity and practices is a cause of educational underachievement (Gray and Beresford 2008; Harrison 2007; Patrick and Moodie 2016; Rowse 2009). From this deep history of deficit understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, cultures, and communities, arise policy problematisations, and the solutions which are purported to respond to them.

Discussion

In V.8 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are represented as persons who are underachieving, and the curriculum authors suggest that this, in part, is a result of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students failing to engage with the curriculum because its content is not relevant enough. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are represented as having low self-esteem resulting from inadequacy of previous curriculum content. By constructing the problem of underachievement this way, the Australian Curriculum becomes the solution to the gap. In ACARA's problematisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, the curriculum content needed to be more culturally responsive but the standards set via the Australian Curriculum are presumed culturally neutral, universally appropriate and inherently good. Written off as an unfortunate result of insufficient cultural content and self-esteem issues, it may seem logical but unproblematic that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students reportedly fail to participate and succeed at the inherently good and universal standard. Far from this curriculum representing a revolution in education, the Australian Curriculum reiterates the notion that curricula is inherently culture and race neutral (except

those explicitly cultured components like the CCP) and the onus for achievement of its neutral standards lies with students, their communities and teachers.

As agents of curriculum development, ACARA authors do not deny the impact of curriculum on outcomes, and appear to accept some responsibility for the reported lack of participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. ACARA has sought to remedy the perceived engagement problem by including content that is intended to allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to "see themselves, their identities and their cultures reflected in the curriculum" (ACARA 2016a, para. 2). Such an approach makes sense given that culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogies are promoted by Australian and international researchers and educators alike. What is concerning about conflating the CCP with a culturally responsive curriculum, however, is the manner in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, cultures, and histories have been constructed within the curriculum and the broader policy context. The paradoxical representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (deficit) and cultures (desirable, but only to the extent that it does not interfere with schooling) suggests that there is a need for educators, and the public, to be wary of a curriculum initiative which purports to be a solution to historical and contemporary failings of the education system, while being firmly rooted in the very same racialised belief system of previous curriculum iterations.

The importance of an inclusive or culturally responsive curriculum was acknowledged in two historically significant documents, the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* (Department of Education 1989) and the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (RCIADIC 1991); and has been repeated in over three decades of Australian education research (see e.g. Hickling-Hudson 2003; Moreton-Robinson, Singh, Kolopenuk, and Robinson 2012; Nakata 2007; Sykes 1986; Yunkaporta 2009). The authors of these documents recommend holistic curriculum change, systemic support for such change, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander control over decision making related to schooling and curriculum of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. In fact, authors of these papers stress the futility of any change not accompanied by commensurate systemic change in practice that enable, for example, "[the] strengthening of Aboriginal identity, decision making and self-determination" (RCIADIC 1991, Recommendation 299). ACARA's curriculum authors have selectively attended to these demands. They purport to have designed a solution that can enable strengthening of the identities of Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander students, but do so via government constructed visions of what those identities entail. The policy solution thoroughly undermines foundational principles for change recommended over decades of research.

The logic of ACARA's response is premised on the belief that students will be responsive to what is being taught, by virtue of the inclusion of visible cultural content which will positively realign Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' dispositions to learning. Such recognition can be read as progress in a traditionally fraught relationship between policy makers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, it can also be considered in light of Hokowhitu's (2016) discussion of strategic essentialism, whereby an 'authentic' indigeneity is constructed from a handful of supposedly core elements of culture and cemented around diverse persons and peoples. The inclusion of content related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures has not been convincingly demonstrated to improve student outcomes (Moreton-Robinson et al. 2012) or eliminate racism by virtue of its presence alone.

> Aboriginal studies, done badly can be a greater problem for Aboriginal students than not having it at all. The key issue is not just about the incorporation of Aboriginal studies curricula, but the effect of the Australian education system as a whole. This involves interrogating and correcting the negative impact of hidden messages in the broader curriculum. (Zubrick et al. 2006, p. xx)

A major criticism of attempts to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges or other content related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures has been the notion of *fitting it in* to an existing framework; a pre-existing, culturally, ideologically, and pedagogically specific framework (Yunkaporta 2009). Such an approach means that, regardless of the accuracy of materials, the knowledge of teachers, the level of engagement with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities during the planning of lessons or curricula, the study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures must always inhabit a subordinate position to those disciplines and learning areas that make up the pre-existing framework. As a result, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, cultures and histories are liable to be deconstructed, reconstructed and metamorphosed in order to fit into the curriculum. Such attempts to *include* indigenous knowledges and/or cultures into curricula have been understood by some scholars to be acts of epistemological dismemberment and ontological violence (Hokowhitu 2009).

Conclusion

Through its very construction within curriculum, the CCP simultaneously problematises and resolves, enshrining the 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander problem' in the rationale of the CCP and offering a solution through the construction of the proffered content. This problem is underpinned by racialised assumptions of underachievement, revealed in V.8 as the explicitly emergent, but implicitly dormant, rationale for the CCP. In revealing this we do not suggest "intentional manipulation" (Bacchi 2009, p. 30) of the CCP, but we do propose that the way the rationale seeks to represent a "specific govern-*mentalit*[y]" (p. 266) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should not be "endorsed uncritically" (p. 30) as a policy that "'fixes' things" (p. 31). Instead, the CCP should be considered as "an entry point" (p. 31) into how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are 'thought' and represented in national curriculum policy which has undeniable lived effects as it governs how teachers in every classroom in Australia address the contemporary "issue" (ACARA 2011, para. 2) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. The CCP could serve as a stimulus for ongoing dialogue, however in this case complementary and supplementary colonial positioning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their cultures in deficit discourse appears to have trumped others, including the aspirations and interests of those colonised by such discourse. We contend that the development of these problematisations of students, their histories and cultures is far from haphazard, as they were born from the ongoing political contestations that surround the failure to recognise Aboriginal presence, sovereignty and legitimacy and consequently the current curriculum continues to be developed within a race-based deficit discourse (Moreton-Robinson and Walter 2009). The impact of such negative problematisations, assumed and enshrined in the national narrative of the Australian Curriculum, could be devastating if they remain unchallenged in a "'problem-solving' paradigm" (Bacchi 2009, p. 272). Alternately, considering curriculum construction as a reflexive dialogue opens up the possibility for oppositional and juxtapositional voices in the limited but promising spaces available.

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