

To What Extent Can the Legacies of Colonisation and Resistance Be Found In More Recent Practices and Initiatives in Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander Education?

Iyad Alharafesheh

I. INTRODUCTION

Colonisation and resistance to colonization have significantly contributed towards establishment of education policies that have been beneficial to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The gradual advances in education policies as well as a variety of programs put in place with a view to increasing the participation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in schools has bore fruits, although the number of practising native teachers and university graduates is significantly lower than that of the rest of the Australian population.

The paper has been divided into four sections, each detailing a particular study outcome. The first outcome deals with the influence of Australian colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education, the second outcome deals with the contemporary issues and debates in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education in relation to their historical, sociological and political contexts, the third outcome deals with the current understandings of curriculum, pedagogy and power in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education, and the fourth outcome deals with the initiatives in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education in relation to other developments in educational and social reform.

II. INFLUENCE OF AUSTRALIAN COLONISATION ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER EDUCATION

Australian colonization had various impacts on the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. A number of researchers have discussed ways in which colonization influenced education in Australia (Smith, 1999; McConaghy, 2000; Mills, 2008; Nakata, 2007; Keffe, 1992). There has always been significant dispute concerning the influence of colonization on the education of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders with respect to Australian education policies and systems. However, the manner in which the legacy and the importance of these events have necessitated heated debates with regards to interpretation. The debates have been on the impact of education on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, effects of a variety of educational practices and policies, and the manner in which the Indigenous people have responded.

The education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders has broadened their understanding of colonization. Smith (2009), while contextualizing colonization, stated that, exercising imperial power acts as an antidote to debates concerning Indigenous culture and response to colonisation. The Indigenous people have significantly known the worth of their culture through the education which came about as a result of colonization. McConaghy (2000) contributed on the debate of culturalism by stating that culturalism distorts a contextual comprehension the key issues in the education of Indigenous people as it is biased towards cultural approach.

As a result of education of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, there has been a significant increase in the level of their recognition even in the constitution. In the report by the Prime Minister's Expert Panel of 2012 whose title was "*Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the Constitution*", various infringement of the rights of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander were recommended to be removed from the constitution. These included the removal of section 25 which allowed the state to ban individuals or groups from voting based on their race. There was also the removal of section 51(xxvi) which allowed for passage of laws that discriminate against an individual or groups based on their race. On the other hand, new sections were recommended to be inserted such as section 51A which was "to recognise Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander peoples and to preserve the Australian Government's ability to pass laws for the benefit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples"; section 116A which bans racial discrimination by the government, and; section 127A "recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages were this country's first tongues, while confirming that English is Australia's national language." The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander felt the readiness for self-determination, and referendum was the agreeable method for making the decision on self-determination.

III. CONTEMPORARY ISSUES AND DEBATES IN ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER EDUCATION IN RELATION TO THEIR HISTORICAL, SOCIOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXTS

Various contemporary issues and debates have been engaged in with regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education. Lippmann (1994) gave the impact of colonization on Aboriginal education thumbs up. She mentioned that there has been a significant improvement, especially in the later years, in various major aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education. She emphasized on the significant development of Aboriginal schools and national education policy. However, she also mentioned that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have a continuing, historically-conditioned distrust of the educational initiatives directed by the government. Pilger (2002) tends to be in agreement with Lippmann (1994) in as far as the distrust in educational initiatives directed by the government is concerned. According to Pilger (2002), colonization took a lot from the pre-colonial education of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. He juxtaposed the lives as well as interests of the elites in Australia to those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. He stated that the elites have enormously benefitted from colonization of Australia through the processes of attempted cultural obliteration, dispossession as well as despoliation.

According to Parbury (2011), the system of education was not welcomed by the Aboriginal people since they considered it to be imposed on them. Parbury (2011) placed various major occurrences which brought twists and turns observed in the educational policies into periods such as "Protection, Assimilation, Integration and Self-Determination" by also taking into consideration the Aboriginal views on their experiences with education and policies put in place. He also brought into focus the importance of looking critically into the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education.

On his part, Welch (1996) juxtaposed the traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander views as well as pedagogies and the understanding of philosophy and practice of education as viewed by the non-indigenous whites. Welch (1996) stated that a combination of Malthusianism, 'scientific racism', and imported religion have been used in subverting not only the Enlightenment ideas of liberty and egalitarianism but also the traditional indigenous societies in preserving forms of discrimination and exploitation considered profitable, which consequently denied humanity to the group being oppressed, which in this case included the Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders. According to Welch (1996), there are stages of 'black-white relations' enshrining the ever growing contradictory nature of such relations due to the gradual gain in rights by the Indigenous people, albeit within the parameters of assimilation or exclusion. He also noted that the business of land rights was still unfinished and that official accommodation of learning of the Indigenous people concerning self-determination while offered is usually hardly achieved.

In recent years, it is becoming increasingly evident that there is a change in the relationship between the colonized population and the colonizing state, albeit there is remarkable consistency in the motives of the government and the political demands of the colonized population. Furthermore, there has been an increasing stand by political leaders to have the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people recognized, although for such a recognition not to be part of the constitution. Such a stand has been supported by Noel Pearson in April 2015, as reported by Army McQuire for *New Matilda*. Michael Mansell, an Aboriginal activist, responded by referring to the *Recognise* campaign as a mere 'pipe dream' while calling for the actual social justice which includes legislation on national land rights as well as the native people having veto over legislation, in areas such as the Northern Territory. Moreover, Mansell stated that instead of swamping the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander vote in a referendum, the process of self-determination meant that the Indigenous people themselves should make the decision by themselves on the way forward before 'negotiating with the majority'.

While campaigning for elections in 2016, Malcolm Turnbull, the Liberal Party leader, reportedly contradicted the *Recognise* campaign's position that treaty negotiations and constitutional recognition can go on co-terminously. Furthermore, Bill Shorten, the Labor Party leader, in June 2016, stated that he was open to concluding a treaty with the Indigenous people, a startling return to the unfulfilled promise of a treaty made by Prime Minister Bob Hawke in 1988.

In 23-26 May 2017, the First Nations National Convention on Constitutional Recognition was held at Uluru. Although there was disagreement between the participants regarding the preference for the initial step being the conclusion of the treaty or the constitutional recognition, a statement in which the parties agreed, referred to as 'From the Heart', in which education dimension was captured with respect to a better future for

the children. However, the manner in which the Commonwealth government responds to the statement is still unknown.

IV. CURRENT UNDERSTANDINGS OF CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY AND POWER IN RELATION TO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER EDUCATION

The debate over the past “mistreatment” of as well as the future for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was raised to a new level following the election of John Howard in March 1996 in Australia. According to Burgmann (1997), the rejection of the ‘black armband’ by John Howard was as a result of Howard’s education. Burgmann (1997) opined that the battle over ‘blindfolds’ and ‘armbands’ was a reflection of the neo-liberal response to title claims by the indigenous people.

The academic debate over the history of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people after the invasion, which was a key part of the ‘history wars’, continued on and off towards the end of 1980s. The debate became more persistent in the late 1990s, before reaching its peak in 2002 with the publication of *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History* by Keith Windschuttle (2003). In the first volume, Windschuttle (2003) studied Tasmania between 1803 and 1847. He then mentioned that majority of historians of post-invasion Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people history had not only distorted evidence but also exaggeration of massacre claims for ‘ideological’ reasons. However, after publishing the White Australia Policy in 2004, a third volume of the *Fabrication of Aboriginal History* was released by Windschuttle in 2009. The volume dealt with the Stolen Generations between 1881 and 2008.

Mane (2003), one of the critics of Windschuttle’s histories, disputed not only the details but also the motives of these histories. A famous publication by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), *As a matter of fact*, which was originally published in 1998 attempted to counter the prejudice and ignorance. Its aim was to educate non- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as proposed by the Reconciliation movement.

It has also been reported that fabrications, distortions and myths came about and persisted by being inculcated and intimated in the school syllabus. This is evident even in the latest edition of the New South Wales primary school social studies (HSIE) syllabus. The syllabus seems not to give the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures the seriousness it deserves.

A strengthening commitment to Reconciliation was captured in the apology by Kevin Rudd, the Prime Minister, on the 13 February 2008 with regards to the Stolen Generation. The Prime Minister stated that the time had come for honouring the Indigenous people of Australia as the oldest continuing cultures in human history. He also stated that there should be a reflection on the past mistreatment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

V. INITIATIVES IN ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER EDUCATION IN RELATION TO OTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL REFORM

There are various initiatives that have been put in place in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island education. One of the most important initiatives was the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island education Action Plan of 2010-2014. This followed the announcement by the Minister for Education, who doubled up as the Deputy Prime Minister of Australia, at MCEECDYA, of an Indigenous Education Action Plan. The Action Plan was to help in the improvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. It was to focus on areas such as accessibility of early childhood education, quality teaching and school leadership, numeracy and literacy, rates of attendance, engagement with both parents and community as whole and post-school options. This was followed by a release of a draft plan in 2010, with the final version named Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Education Action Plan 2010 being released in 2011.

Some major orientations of the issues that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island education Action Plan 2010 addressed had been raised as a result of the reviewing of Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008. The reviewers raised critical and fundamental issues such as the partnership between the school and the community, the manner in which the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders students were being taught, whether basics were given a lot of emphasis that is recommended, whether first language instruction is considered, whether employment for school leavers is guaranteed, and whether the role of self-determination is upheld. Although most of these issues were seemingly addressed in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Education Action Plan 2010-2014, others were either addressed too simply or appeared to have been ignored.

According to Buckskin et al. (2009), the reviewers’ major concerns were, ‘Whilst jurisdictions throughout Australia continue to espouse the rhetoric of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership [in school-community partnerships], the realities are often somewhat incongruous... While some collective assumptions can be made about what might stimulate an Indigenous student’s intellect, it invariably demands the teacher has a good understanding of the child as an individual, including the cultural context in which the child has been raised... A great deal of the current debate concerns itself with acquiring the basics, but effective,

equitable participation relies on something more than the basics. Complex and sophisticated understandings are required in at least three literacies, as well as numeracy, if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are to participate equally in mainstream society. The three literacies often referred to are English, digital and scientific... Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the same right as any other people to receive instruction in their own language... the innovative concept of Guaranteed Service Outcomes pioneered by the Western Cape College in Weipa [where a] Guaranteed Service Outcome signals to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students that if they engage with schooling and complete Year 12 of high school then they are guaranteed either a job; a tertiary place; or a vocational training outcome... These writings [reviewed in the report] point to a “bottom up” approach as the solution, arguing for self determination through community empowerment and Indigenous cultural learning.’

As the Indigenous Action Plan was being announced, the government was also making an historic decision concerning education in Australia by inaugurating Maths, English, Science and History in Australia’s first national curriculum. The commentary concerning perspective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander was published at Reconciliation Australia 2010: Indigenous Perspectives in Australian Schools. However, the national curriculum has resulted in rising concerns as well as defensive responses to itself, especially in the manner in which it deals with both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and input in education. Burgess (2009) mentioned that the framers of national curriculum failed to consult the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders, although consultation during such a time was to be given first priority. Due to the nature of the national curriculum which was considered unrepresentative, Burgess (2009) stated that there is the need for the National Curriculum to embrace the importance of responsibilities and obligations of the community, and application of Indigenous approaches to family, among other practices.

Australian Education Union (AEU) is a key organization of teachers that takes part in the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. It plays a role in the promotion of positive developments in the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander due to the unavailability of permanent consultative organization for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. This is because just a small number of representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander were selected as advisors in the Labor government as far as both national curriculum and the Action Plan are concerned. Moreover, only a couple of Territory or State peak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consultative groups have been mentioned in the action plan. They include the Victorian Aboriginal Education Organization and the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group. The Australian Education Union, through these two education committees involving the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, whose membership is either of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander educators, have continuously attempted to progress its objectives, as stipulated in its policy, in conjunction with the government. However, only a few Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are represented by the Australian Education Union (AEU) as a union in the education sector.

VI. CONCLUSION

The colonisation and resistance has legacies that have been found in more recent practices and initiatives in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education. For instance, the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders has broadened their understanding of colonisation. The Indigenous people have also significantly known the worth of their culture through the education which came about as a result of colonisation. There has been a significant increase in the level of recognition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including in the constitution. The education resulted in the feeling of self-determination among the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, Pilger (2002) and Lippmann (1994) opined that there existed distrust in educational initiatives directed by the government is concerned.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Education Action Plan of 2010-2014 was one of the important initiatives put in place in improving the education of the Indigenous people. The Action Plan aim is to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, especially in as far as accessing early childhood education, quality teaching and school leadership, numeracy and literacy, rates of attendance, engagement with both parents and community as a whole, and post-school options. The Action Plan announcement was accompanied by the government’s historic decision which led to the inauguration of Maths, English, Science and History in Australia’s first national curriculum.

Finally, Australian Education Union (AEU) plays a role in the promotion of positive developments in the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander due to the unavailability of permanent consultative organisation for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.

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