Australian Education Review

The Case for Urgency:

Advocating for Indigenous voice in education

Kevin Gillan   Suzanne Mellor   Jacynta Krakouer

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Foreword

Seen but still to be heard

As a younger man I was once berated by an Elder when I declared that I thought something to be a coincidence. In the rebuke it was made clear to me that 'coincidences were for those who had lost their belief in Ancestral intercession'. While that topic and the dichotomy that underpins it is a debate for another time, the concurrence of two events, without apparent causal connection yet in accord with each other, certainly contributes to the conversation this Australian Education Review is engaged in.

In May this year and in the shadows of Uluru, a group of Indigenous people gathered to discuss constitutional law. Standing on the consecrated red sand of Mutitjulu, they made a declaration from the heart. In their *Uluru Statement of the Heart*, while claiming their Ancestral mandate and sovereignty, they lamented that while we as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were recognised at the time of the 1967 Referendum, we are still to be heard. This declaration intersects, coincidently or otherwise, with the theme of *Australian Education Review 62*, 'The Case for Urgency: Advocating for Indigenous voice in education'.

As far back as the 1960s an emerging cosmopolitan sentiment in a maturing nation sought to shed the chains of a colonial past. However, 50 years on we are reminded in the most sobering of statistics that there is unfinished business in regard to the base social indicators. By marking the 50th anniversary of the nation-setting referendum of 1967, it presents as the high point in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relationship. As far as referendums go, it enjoys the status as the highest 'Yes' vote, 90.77%, in an electoral history that, since Federation, carries an extraordinary high attrition rate. The actual fiat read somewhat innocuously – allowing the federal government to make laws for Aborigines and allowing Indigenous people to be counted in the Census.

Just as significant around the late 1960s was the dismantling of differing state versions of the Aborigines Protections Acts. These Acts and their subsequent amendments had existed for almost a century, intruding pervasively into the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders across the length and breadth of the continent. They included systematic removal of children and other structural interference with children and their families and a cultural embargo on Indigenous language and knowledges. And this was in a land in which, from the late 1800s, education had been made free, secular and compulsory, but included the targeted exclusion in the early secondary years of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

In this review we are confronted by the exact same sentiment that was marshalled at the foot of Uluru. The catalyst for the change being advocated in the review is that it has to be

predicated on the insistence that the elevation of the Indigenous voice in education is pivotal. In the last 50 years, the Indigenous education policy landscape has become cluttered with concepts and positions challenging the education profession, yet among this clanging discord of multiple voices, the Indigenous voice, whose cadence is clear and consistent with the *Uluru Statement*, coming from standing on solid ground, has not changed.

In prosecuting its advocation of Indigenous voice in education, the publication revolves around five separate yet interlinked contentions. The first perspective introduces and encompasses the full range of Australia's brutal history of colonisation, derivative vestiges of which pervade the curriculum, pedagogy and classrooms today. From the reading mat to quantum maths, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have been relegated to the periphery, and the current NAPLAN statistics perpetuate the notion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as 'fringe dwellers'. In particular Section 1 reminds readers that colonisation happens on a range of planes, in addition to land acquisition by social and military forces, and that for the Indigene, the consequences propagate and replicate trans-generationally.

The pursuit of a western Nirvana in the great south land, fuelled by distorted notions of 'eugenics', has long scaffolded and augmented both covert and overt notions of 'whiteness', with ramifications still being felt today. Colonialism in Australia rarely wandered far from the base script of appropriating land, dismantling and erasing cultural expression and language, disrupting family and community structures and obstructing access to education and commerce. As the colonial footprint was rolled out across the Gadigal land of the Eora nation, the model was highly influenced by perceived concessions and mistakes on behalf of the colonisers in other places, such as the raising of a continental army in the American Revolutionary War 1775–83 and the Treaty of Waitangi in New Zealand in 1840. So application of the colonial script here was applied with a much harsher intensity, with just one measurement of it being the juxtaposition of the first Maori and Native American degrees being awarded to First Nations graduates almost a hundred years before the first Australian Aboriginal was awarded a degree. The relics of colonial brutality are revisited on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders through education, through the hubris and hegemony of an education system that deems the Indigene virtually invisible and mute in the curriculum.

The second proposition of this review explores one of the enduring consequences of the colonisation in this land and its continuing effect upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders demographically. The *Stolen Generations* policies forced the migration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and the systematic disruption to traditional ways has led to what can be described as multiple Aboriginal constructs. Many Australians subscribe to a romantic notion that 'real Aborigines' are those who live in the north in the remote lands, which belies the reality that the greatest concentration is urban and in the western suburbs of Sydney. Traditional ownership intersects with the forced diasporas and the challenges of stolen and dislocated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders returning contribute to the intense complexities of modern-day Aboriginality. This requires the education practitioner to be fully informed and cognisant of the programmatic nuance required for the type of bespoke, innovative and aspirational offerings that are place-based and demographically responsive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population dispersal.

The next proposition of the review relates to the social and economic disadvantage that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders live with, and in turn carries a 'flow-on effect' on both the wellbeing and educational attainment of Australia's First Nations people. A cursory scan of talkback radio would counter this proposition with the tired old notion of treating everyone the same. In fact, equity has two viable definitions: one saturated in the unrealistic fervour of equalitarianism; the other is opposite – treating everyone 'not the same' in order to create a level playing field. People who subscribe to the former will never understand nor make a productive contribution in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' education. Social and economic disadvantage is a reality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, as it is for other members of the Australian community. The nexus between social and economic disadvantage and poor educational outcomes is stark and well scribed in the educational literature. Fifty years since

the referendum, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders on the whole are more likely to reside on 'Struggle Street' than on 'Main Street'. On any scale Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage rivals third world standards, but in a first world nation. Critical gaps have barely been arrested let alone closed, despite government investment and the cumulative efforts of the education profession. While all the social indicators are important, it is education that is the catalyst in the long term for closing the other 'gaps'.

Fourthly, the review contends that there has been little substantive improvement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in education despite the concentration of policy and resources. Around the early sitting of Parliament every year the government of the day is required to report on 'closing the gap' targets. Like a dedicated sports follower of a recalcitrant team, we listen annually with optimism for shifts in the score, but all we get is eloquently crafted spin. In some states there are disparate signs of progress, such as Year 12 completions; however, they rarely translate into ATAR scores that are viable for tertiary entry, so the real progress being registered is low. The review insightfully addresses this aspect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' education.

Policy is the lifeblood of government, and the Westminster system has in its political architecture an inbuilt mechanism for change. As one government is dismissed, the new one replaces it, assuming a stance that is usually different from the previous one. All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy falls between the two for the wrecking ball, which can cut a swathe across the sector, with communities often being reduced to 'ground zero'. The extreme example of this was the introduction in 2013 by the Abbott Government of the IAS (*Indigenous Advancement Strategy*), which moved education from the functional expertise of a dedicated department to the 'strategic domain' of Prime Minister and Cabinet. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders hold this as a complete failure. As the review's fourth proposition evolves, it is the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice that must be protected from the vagaries of Westminster. By way of contrast, in Victoria the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community enshrined in the VAEAI (Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated) has, with the state education department, crafted a ten-year education plan that accommodates future changes in government.

The final proposition of this Australian Education Review review, calls for the elevation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice in education through fuller engagement by institutions, systems and policymakers with families and communities. In the last 50 years we have seen a number of significant touchstones by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in policy. The *Coolangatta Statement*, captioned in the review as the 'Magna Carta' of Indigenous education, is in fact a high point, with its probity being more realised overseas than here where it was actually crafted, after the 1999 WIPC-E (World Indigenous Peoples Conference - Education). It declares the inalienable right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to an education where their values are represented. Likewise, another touchstone has to be the 21 goals of the *National Aboriginal Education Policy* (NATSIEP). First crafted in 1989, their value and relevance still resonate today.

But, going beyond the scope of the review, to drill right into the heart of community, it is hard to go past the network of AECG (Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups), also referred to as IECB (Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies), around the nation. These bodies relied heavily on volunteers, and also had secretariats that survived on federal funding. That funding ceased with the current federal IAS policy arrangements, meaning that only half the nation's Indigenous population's community voice is today represented through the direct and inexorable links the IECBs provide. The groups that cascaded to local communities also garnered engagement and advocacy. The stronger ones morphed from political constructs into dynamic and responsive policy providers, and have been the powerhouse of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education voice in education. But they are now reduced to less than half the states.

Australian Education Review 62, 'The Case for Urgency: Advocating for Indigenous voice in education' is a compelling contribution to the discourse on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

education. It is insightful and lucid, surfacing and addressing complex issues, with reason and a persuasive logic. It provides insights that will challenge the practitioner and the policymaker in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. AER 62 traces and captures over time the evolving trajectories in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policies. The sections supported by relevant case studies reveal the tide of the times. The multifarious and intricate nature of shifting demographics and changing narratives draw the reader into the essentials of education. The rubrics from NAPLAN to PISA are interrogated and handled in a compelling and informative way throughout the review. Courageously, the review's authors do not shy away from the tough areas in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. Through its foundational propositions it engages in the more insidious nature of deficit and race-based curriculum, boarding schools, attendance, early childhood as the best start and engaging communities authentically. The review should be compulsory reading for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators, practitioners and any future practitioner.

The review 'The Case for Urgency: Advocating for Indigenous voice in education' is of significant merit and rigour. The authors model within its parameters the centrality and probity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in education. I congratulate the authors and ACER on this unique and salient piece of work – it is a seminal contribution to academy.

Furthermore, the review encompasses the spirit and foundational platform for addressing education going forward. In every way it is in the vein of the Uluru Makarratta, which comes from the heart. Its sentiment and purpose is echoed in the sound of those feet thumping the sand of the Mutijulu desert, and it sits alongside the dried ink of the *Coolangatta Statement* or the intensity of a hastily arranged community meeting in the back of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander co-op. The synergy of these iconic statements and this well-crafted review, which is in accord with the *Uluru Statement*, is far more than just a base coincidence. The *Uluru Statement* and this review speak with one voice and their mutual existence and timing is a palpable endorsement of 'Ancestral intercession' – with both mounting the case that, while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders might have been recognised – we are still to be heard!

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Introducing the 'case for more change'

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In 2004 the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) published an Australian Education Review (AER) on Indigenous Education: *The Case for Change: A review of contemporary research on Indigenous education outcomes*, AER 47 (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004). In the 13 years since its publication, the state of Indigenous education outcomes has remained substantially unaltered. All the social indicators demonstrate that Australia's First Nations people continue to be the most socio-economically disadvantaged population cohort in Australian society. This is after decades of continued policy efforts by successive Commonwealth, state and territory governments to ameliorate Indigenous education disadvantage.

We still struggle with understanding how best to get Indigenous children to go to school, keep them in school, help them finish school and then go on to future education or employment. Despite the seemingly elementary nature of the problem, policy practitioners will be all too familiar with the complex nature of Indigenous education in Australia. Consequently, addressing Indigenous educational disadvantage attracts a multitude of solutions that manifest themselves as ever-changing policy approaches, often underpinned by ideology. The authors of this review paper argue that no *one* solution will remedy Indigenous social or educational disadvantage, but neither will policies premised on ideological views.

This review paper will seek to highlight the multitude of factors that can impede educational success for Indigenous Australians. It seeks to support understandings about the ways in which Indigenous students are faced with additional constraints, over and above general socio-economic disadvantage, that can impede learning in a Western world. The intent of the authors of this review paper is to reflect on research that indicates how more appropriate education policy and practice can be developed and implemented. Only if policies and practices that better address Indigenous education disadvantage are implemented, can it be expected that the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous educational outcomes across the lifespan will be improved.

This AER can be seen as a sequel to AER 47, insofar as it revisits largely the same issues, although it will be evident throughout that the extensive data on Indigenous outcomes (educational and other) that are now collected, and being open to scrutiny and analysis, allow for closer analysis and interpretation. Thus, while the essence of the picture has not changed greatly, its precision has. This constitutes an advance in the field but, given the meagre improvement the data reveals, a policy analysis disappointment.

In this review paper, the term 'Indigenous' is generally used to refer to Australia's First Nations Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, though other terms (such as 'Indigenous' and 'Aboriginal' Australians) also are applied. The plural form reminds us there were many nations and there is no single cultural model that fits all those who identify as Indigenous. Aboriginal

Australians are a very diverse population, the members of which retain their cultural identities in different intensities and act in accordance with them.

The review paper's five key propositions

Section 1 seeks to introduce five key propositions, each of which informs the whole of this review paper. They are:

- The history of Indigenous Australia includes a brutal colonisation and for many individuals and communities this is an ongoing experience.
- The characteristics of Australia's Indigenous populations are more complex than previously generally appreciated and they require nuanced, variable and flexible policies that reflect these realities.
- The basic social and economic disadvantage that attends the Indigenous population needs acknowledgement and explicit recognition by government and broader society, particularly for its general effect on wellbeing and for the negative effects it has on educational attainment.
- Indigenous education outcomes have not markedly improved despite large sums of money being spent, so significant policy and practice changes need to be actioned.
- Active engagement of Indigenous families and communities in the education of their children is paramount. Anything that detracts from this participation will contribute to the unlikelihood of 'closing the gap'.

Analysing the research literature and making the case for the significance of these five propositions will infuse the whole of this review paper. Evidence will be presented to support these propositions from the relevant research literature, and they will be argued at length in subsequent sections of this review.

Knowing Indigenous history and its present impact

Although Indigenous history has been outlined in multiple general and expert publications, research indicates it is rarely known by Australians (Yunupingu, 1997; Pascoe, 2011). This ignorance allows the impact of historical policy on living Indigenous Australians to be misunderstood or downplayed. It could be argued that the policy narratives of even the last decade indicate that policymakers do not appreciate the full significance of the pre- and post-colonial history of Australia's First Nations people.

Simply put, this review paper's position is that we cannot move forward with ameliorating Indigenous educational disadvantage before appreciating the diverse effects that colonisation has had on generations of Indigenous Australians. Additionally, the future effects that colonisation will continue to have on generations of Indigenous children to come must be addressed. Indigenous history cannot be regarded as irrelevant to current educational practice and policy, because Australia's colonial history continues to negatively affect Indigenous Australians in the present. Acknowledgement by policymakers of these histories and of their past and current significance must be part of any enlightened approach to Indigenous educational reform. This is the first of the key propositions to be considered in this review paper. History matters because it exists, evidenced in the traditions and legends of a society, in its archaeology, in painting, ceremony and storytelling. Past events impact on the present situation of people because participants remember history, and so it still lives on in the present. It does not slide from their view.

Pre-invasion Aboriginal Australia

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is one of the oldest living cultures in the world, dating back more than 45,000 years. Prior to 1778, it is variably estimated that there were 750,000 Indigenous Australians living on the mainland and in the Torres Straits. This included

more than 200 different tribal groups whose people practised their unique and diverse traditions, spoke their own languages, and lived in harmony with their area of the land to which they felt a spiritual connection (Yunupingu, 1997). The languages spoken by different tribes in Aboriginal Australia were especially diverse, with over 600–700 dialects stemming from over 250 separate language groups (Bourke, 1993).

Of most importance, however, was Aboriginal peoples' relationship to the land. Mary Graham, Indigenous lecturer at Queensland University, reminds us that land was not viewed as an object to be possessed and conquered, but as a spiritual entity to be cared for by the people (Graham, 2008). Similarly, Ambelin Kwaymullina, Indigenous writer from the Plkyu people of the Pilbara region in Western Australia, attests to the importance of land to identity, relationships and community for Indigenous Australians.

> *This continent, named Australia by Captain Matthew Flinders early in the nineteenth century, is a land of many countries – and for every country, there is a people. We are the Nyungar, Plkyu, Martu, Gumilaroi, Worrimia, Bardi, Indjarbandi, Palawa, Tangenekald, and Meintangk, and we are many others. We were formed with the hills and the valleys, the water and the sky, the trees and the plains, the crows and the kangaroos, created by the ancestors who gave meaning and life to our world. And for each of us, our country is not just where we live, but who we are. The countries of our hearts are the red sands of the desert, the green gullies of the forests, the white shores of the coast and all the places in between. Our blood is carried by the rivers and the streams, our breath is on the wind, and our pulse is in the land. There was a time when the rhythm of our hearts was strong and steady and sure, but now we all struggle in our different ways to care for country, to hold up the connections between all life that is our life, in a world where those connections are so often unseen and unheard.*

(Kwaymullina, 2008, pp. 7–8)

For the most part, Indigenous Australians lived in harmony with one another as spiritual people guided by the 'Dreaming', a 'religious' concept unique to Indigenous Australians. Elders played a significant role in the community as authority figures, while all other people in the tribe, including children, women and men, had specific roles in decision-making that contributed to the wellbeing of the group. The collective wellbeing of the group was prioritised over and above individual wellbeing. Aboriginal societies were not perfect, nor blissful even, but they had harmoniously developed, survived many changes over a very long time, and functioned well for their populations (Yunupingu, 1997). They were successful societies.

Post-colonisation history for Indigenous Australians

The history of Indigenous Australia, post-colonisation, is a story premised on exclusion, entitlement, oppression, racism and notions of cultural superiority. It is also characterised by Indigenous resistance (Reynolds, 1981/1982). This historical narrative is still largely unknown by most non-Indigenous Australians, despite the pioneering work of historians such as Henry Reynolds (1972, 1981/1982, 1992, 1993, 2001), whose publications, underpinned by primary historical evidence over four decades, have continued to challenge the more comfortable narratives of the post-invasion period of Australia's history. Additionally, the work of the next generation of historians, some of whom are Indigenous, has assisted in further uncovering Australia's black history. However, despite these advances in knowledge, the European view of the post-colonial period continues to dominate the accepted narrative, in school textbooks and in the general media (Attwood & Griffiths, 2009). Indeed, it should be pointed out that the Indigenous narrative of pre- and post-invasion history, despite strong historical supporting evidence, was marginalised, traduced even, in the destructive 'black armband' view (Windschuttle, 2002), which resurfaced less than 20 years ago and was intensely argued across historical and general society, as well as engaged with by government. The revisiting and denial of Australia's violent colonial past, in this 'debate', constitutes an added recent historical burden for Indigenous Australians.

From the arrival of the British in 1778, Australia's colonial history was predicated on the English legal concept of *Terra Nullius*, a Latin expression meaning 'nobody's land'. *Terra Nullius* was declared, based on the belief that there were no 'civilised' inhabitants in Australia prior to British arrival (Broome, 2002; Yunupingu, 1997). Aboriginal people *were* noticed upon British arrival; however, their use of the land, as witnessed in a mostly cursory review by the colonisers, was incompatible with the British conception of land settlement: no evidence of agriculture, buildings or other 'civilised' systems of manipulating the land for human use were identified (Broome, 2002; Attwood, 1989). This colonisers' view of Aboriginal land use remained unchallenged until more recent times and it is now known (by experts) that semi-residential land use for fish farming and other pursuits was actively pursued (Dingle, 1984).

The ownership concept of *Terra Nullius* was not challenged in Australian law for almost 200 years, until Edward 'Eddie' Koiki Mabo took the notion of Indigenous native title to the High Court in 1992 (Yunupingu, 1997; Reynolds, 1997 & 1988 (2nd ed.), 1992, 1993). The Mabo decision saw the beginning of the formal acknowledgement of our Indigenous peoples' occupation of Australia prior to European settlement. We still have much further to go on acknowledgement issues, as evidenced by the official *Recognise* campaign (n.d.), which began with the establishment of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in 1991.

The Referendum Council has been charged with seeking the views of all Australians on the forms in which recognition in the Constitution of Indigenous peoples in the Australian Constitution might take. It published a discussion paper in 2016 (Referendum Council, 2016), which outlined its task, how it intended to pursue those instructions and the timetable for readiness for a referendum most likely to be held in 2018. The issue of whether a minimal response to constitutional change should be sought in a referendum, or one which encompassed the full range of acknowledgement (recognition), racial discrimination and telling the First Peoples' history has been contested at the highest levels.

Policy implications of *Terra Nullius*

The early declaration of *Terra Nullius* meant that no formal treaty with Indigenous Australians was deemed necessary, thus enabling the British to colonise Botany Bay and the surrounding land as they saw fit (Broome, 2002), regardless of the local inhabitants. While there are records of two informal treaties being entered into in Tasmania and Victoria, in 1830 and 1835 respectively, these treaties were not formally recognised due to Australia's *Terra Nullius* status (McGrath, 1995). Still to this day, unlike our North American and New Zealand counterparts, Australia is the only first world country that has not entered into a formal treaty with its Indigenous peoples (Reynolds, 1992; Yunupingu, 1997).

Dispossession in colonisation

Under the declaration of *Terra Nullius*, the dispossession of Indigenous lands, invasion of country and even the attempted genocide of Indigenous Australians were ignored or discounted (McGrath, 1995). During the initial century of colonisation, from 1778 to approximately 1880, the British dispossessed Aboriginal people of their lands, negating their capacity to survive using traditional hunting and food-gathering methods (Broome, 2002).

It is the view of the authors that three dominant factors contributed to the destruction of Indigenous peoples and their culture during the initial period of colonisation. Each of these factors is graphically demonstrated in the TV documentary series *The First Australians*, where the powerful interviews by Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons filmed for this series express a range of views on the effects of colonisation (Perkins, 2008). Firstly, the British colonised Indigenous lands, subsequently killing native animals and native food sources (Perkins, 2008). Not only did this mean that Indigenous Australians lost their homes, but the British colonisation of Indigenous land also made it increasingly difficult for Indigenous Australians to live independently off the land. Secondly, the British brought foreign animals with them to Australia, which introduced foreign diseases (Broome, 2002; Perkins, 2008). Disease killed native animals and Indigenous Australians who did not have immunity to new, sometimes

deliberately introduced diseases such as smallpox. Thirdly, cultural misunderstandings between the British and Indigenous Australians led to violence and massacre (Reynolds, 1972, 1981/1982, 2001). British relations with Australia's Indigenous peoples revolved around misunderstandings, cultural assumptions and power struggles, subsequently leading to violence, cultural genocide and massacre, with frontier violence used to gain pastoral lands between the late 1790s until the 1890s (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [HREOC], 1997; Reynolds, 2001; Perkins 2008; Perkins & Langton, 2008).

Domination of Social Darwinism

In the 1870s, Social Darwinism incorporated beliefs concerning the genetic inferiority of Aboriginal peoples and expectations of the eventual extinction of the Indigenous race (Attwood, 1989; McGrath, 1995). The 1906 edition of a local paper *The Golden West* expressed the stereotypical view of Indigenous people at the time:

> *The Western Australian aborigine stands right at the bottom of the class to which we belong … The native black has no intelligence, though his powers of imitation carry him up to the border line. He is as a general rule, to which there are few exceptions, brutish, faithless, vicious, the animal being given the fullest loose, a natural born liar and thief, and only approached by his next of kin, the monkey, for mischief.*

<div align="right">(quoted in Zubrick, Silburn, Lawrence, Mitrou, Dalby, Blair, Griffin, Milroy, De Maio, Cox, & Li, 2005, p. xvii)</div>

The Social Darwinian policy responses saw the establishment of the Aborigines Protection Boards in some colonies in the late 1880s, with missions and reserves set up to segregate 'white' society from the dispossessed Aboriginal people of different Indigenous nations (HREOC, 1997; Hasluck, 1988). Aborigines Protection Boards also removed 'half-caste' Indigenous children from their families, offering a limited education in domestic skills to a minority of them (HREOC, 1997).

The reduction in Aboriginal populations as a result of massacre and disease, and then protectionism and segregation was taken as 'proof' that Social Darwinism was evidence based, and the domination of the 'white' colonial nation was inevitable (Austin-Broos, 2011; McGrath, 1995). The era of protectionism and segregation policies was underpinned by the notion that Indigenous Australians would eventually 'die out' (Fejo-King, 2011). This conviction lasted until well into the 20th century.

Assimilation in colonisation

The unexpected survival of Australia's First Nations people by the end of the 19th century required new policies. Aboriginal welfare policy in the various colonial jurisdictions from 1912 until 1960 was premised on assimilation, with some elements of 'conditional inclusion' (Murphy, 2013). The intent of assimilation policies was to eradicate the 'Aboriginal problem' by absorbing 'half-castes' into 'white' society. By the 1920s, assimilation policies supported the ongoing removal of children and 'half-castes' from reserves, missions and from their families (Attwood, 1989; Broome, 2002). Essentially, the *Stolen Generations* policies were premised on the misguided belief that Indigenous culture could 'die out' if fair-skinned Indigenous Australians were placed with white Australian families and 'raised white' (HREOC, 1997). The report *Bringing Them Home*, quoted from Brisbane's *Telegraph*, which had reported the following in 1937:

> *Mr Neville [Chief Protector of WA] holds the view that within one hundred years the pure black will be extinct. But the half caste problem was increasing every year. Therefore their idea was to keep the purebreds segregated and absorb the half-castes into the white population. Sixty years ago, he said, there were over 60,000 full-blooded natives in Western Australia. Today there are only 20,000. In time there would be none. Perhaps it would take one hundred years, perhaps longer, but the race was dying.*

<div align="right">(HREOC, 1997, p. 24)</div>

The *Stolen Generations* policies of forced assimilation and displacement, especially of children from their families, remained dominant up until the mid-1960s and continued thereafter (HREOC, 1997). Unsurprisingly, this last stage of colonial history has resulted in a legacy of pain and distrust of government systems by many Indigenous Australians.

It is a matter of pride to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders that in the end they prevailed. They did not die out; they survived. The shift in emphasis over the last decade in the protests contesting the national nature of January the 26th, from 'Invasion Day' to 'Survival Day', can be taken as a grassroots indicator of this pride, and acts as a focus for support by non-Indigenous Australians.

Growing demands for self-determination

The year 2017 marks the 50th anniversary of the 1967 Referendum, a historic event that saw for the first time a pro-Indigenous campaign led by Indigenous Australians. Faith Bandler, as general secretary of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, led the national campaign to change the Australian Constitution. With nationwide campaigning, parliamentary and considerable support by Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, the Referendum was successful in achieving the highest 'YES' vote ever recorded – 90.77 per cent of voting-age Australians agreed to the constitutional change. This afforded Aboriginal people the right to citizenship in Australia (Attwood & Markus, 2007). The objectives were that Aborigines should be counted in future national censuses and that the federal government be granted powers in the Constitution to legislate for Aboriginal peoples. In policy terms these two changes were highly significant, although as will be discussed in Section 3 of this review paper, Indigenous Australians experienced little change until after the election of the Whitlam Government in 1972.

However, it contributed to a climate of change in the 1960s, with Indigenous voice and activism creating an environment of possibility. One powerful activist was Charles Perkins, who as a Sydney University student led a group of university students on the Freedom Rides through regional New South Wales in 1965, raising awareness of the discrimination experienced by many Indigenous people in those towns (National Museum of Australia, n.d.[a]). They had three key objectives: to draw attention to the poor state of Aboriginal health and housing, to expose and lessen the social barriers that existed between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, and to encourage and support the Indigenous population to take an active role in resisting public discrimination (Perkins, 1975). From this resistance movement Perkins joined the Commonwealth Office of Aboriginal Affairs and by 1984 he was Secretary of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, often finding himself involved in controversy as he attempted to push for his people's agenda. In 1988 he resigned after clashes with his Minister and returned to Alice Springs, where he mentored several Aboriginal athletes. He was elected to ATSIC in 1993 and served as Deputy Chair 1994–95.

A shift in Aboriginal Commonwealth policies had occurred in the 1960s, partly as a result of the success of the 1967 Referendum, which may well also have galvanised, and was certainly followed by, continued Aboriginal activism and protest against exclusion. Indigenous Australians were granted the right to vote in federal elections in 1962 (Murphy, 2013; Griffiths, 2006). The Referendum's practical outcomes further strengthened Aboriginal activism: one example was the establishment of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra in 1972, which articulated the lack of progress on land rights and discrimination; continuing to this today (National Museum of Australia, (n.d.[b]).

The inclusion of Indigenous Australians in the collection of Census data for the new Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs also supported productive shifts in policy, although this often proved to be a mixed blessing since it enabled new patriarchies to enact laws for the 'betterment' of Indigenous Australians. Throughout the 1970s, 80s and 90s, for the first time, Aboriginal welfare policies were predominately concerned with notions of self-determination, self-management, inclusion, land rights and access to welfare entitlements (Broome, 2002; Griffiths, 2006; HREOC, 1997).

Yet there were clear contradictions between policy and practice in Indigenous affairs in the 1970s, 80s and 90s. Despite moving forward in its reconciliation path with Indigenous Australians, children were still being removed from their families as part of the *Stolen Generations* policies up until the late 1970s (HREOC, 1997). While the processes of stealing and losing children may have changed with time, strikingly similar underlying values and attitudes are evident in current policies, with similar dire individual and social outcomes. As recently as February 2017, the Independent Member for Nhulunbuy in the Northern Territory Parliament, the Hon. Yingiya Mark Guyula, raised, in parliamentary sittings, the fact that Indigenous children were still being removed from their families (Daly, 2017). Under parliamentary privilege he named eight Yolngu children who had been forcibly removed from their families by the Department of Children and Families and 'stolen away to Darwin' without consultation with their families. The Northern Territory Children's Commissioner also relayed her concern that not enough was being done to find out whether Indigenous children taken from their families for wellbeing issues, could not be better placed with related families in their communities. The Commissioner's most recent annual report indicated that in June 2016 there were around 908 Indigenous children in out-of-home care in the Northern Territory, with just 36 per cent placed with Indigenous carers (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2016).

Similar policy contradictions between Indigenous policy and practice in Australia are still evident today (e.g. Moran, 2016, on housing funding). These are the subject of further analysis in Section 3, as are the political ideologies underlying policy development over time.

The lasting legacy of colonisation

There is not a single Indigenous Australian alive today who has not been affected by the policies of colonisation, protectionism, segregation and assimilation. As indicated earlier, Indigenous Australians have experienced a range of traumatic events as a direct result of colonisation, including dispossession of land, forced removal of children from their families, forced dislocation from homes, frontier violence, and the massacre of entire Indigenous communities (HREOC, 1997). It is evident that British invasion and the attempted genocide of Indigenous Australians has resulted in the disruption of traditional Aboriginal culture and identity (Healing Foundation, n.d.; HREOC, 1997). It is with this fractured identity, the associated loss of culture and the traumatic baggage that Indigenous Australians are expected to be fully self-reliant in modern society, as evidenced by former Prime Minister Abbott's infamous words regarding remote-living Indigenous people having made lifestyle choices.

> *What we can't do is endlessly subsidise lifestyle choices if those lifestyle choices are not conducive to the kind of full participation in Australian society that everyone should have. If people choose to live miles away from where there's a school, if people choose not to access the school of the air, if people choose to live where there's no jobs, obviously it's very, very difficult to close the gap.*

(Abbott, cited in Medhora, 10 March 2015)

Policymakers and all interested parties need to ask themselves what kind of a skill set is needed for such a transformation and how best the Indigenous population can expedite its acquisition, This review's authors believe that to hope for the skill set to be developed quickly is neither reasonable nor likely to be achieved, but that a deep analysis of how best to develop it should be the focus of policy and grassroots analysis and work.

Intergenerational trauma

Manifestation of trauma is commonly understood to be part of the experience of many human rights refugees, and others, whether directly or indirectly affected by actual or attempted genocide. That Indigenous Australians experienced trauma resulting from dispossession and colonisation in the past is easier to acknowledge than the impact of intergenerational trauma

on current generations of Indigenous Australians. The past can all too easily be denied, cast as 'done and dusted' and not 'our' fault.

Trauma expert, Professor Judy Atkinson – an Indigenous woman who descends from the Jiman people of Central West Queensland and the Bundjalung people of northern New South Wales – has researched the impact of intergenerational trauma on Indigenous people throughout her career. When conducting interviews for her doctoral thesis, Atkinson (2002) spoke with many Aboriginal survivors of trauma about their experiences growing up in a world where their culture and identity were abused and suppressed. One survivor, 'Lorna', recalled memories of her childhood, living on a mission with her family, and reflected on its effect on her.

> *The biggest memory of my childhood was that I wasn't good enough, I could never be as good as the white man that was in charge – that was the overall feeling of my childhood. I was not a good person. I just felt, even back then, that I could never be good enough for anything or anyone.*

(Atkinson, 2002, pp. 98–99)

Dr Eduardo Duran, an historical trauma expert of Native American descent, and his partner Bonnie Duran, also an intergenerational trauma researcher, state that:

> *... historical trauma becomes embedded in the cultural memory of a people and is passed on by the same mechanisms by which culture is generally transmitted, and therefore becomes 'normalised' within that culture.*

(Duran & Duran, 1995, cited in Atkinson, Nelson & Atkinson, 2010, p. 138)

That there are many *Stolen Generations* survivors alive today and suffering from trauma cannot be questioned. At the time of the Apology in 2008, many of these stories were shared publicly. Prime Minister Rudd's speech, to Parliament and on behalf of the nation, referred explicitly to the ongoing impact of the trauma inflicted on Indigenous Australians as a result of the *Stolen Generations* policies.

> *The pain is searing; it screams from the pages. The hurt, the humiliation, the degradation and the sheer brutality of the act of physically separating a mother from her children is a deep assault on our senses and on our most elemental humanity … But the stolen generations are not intellectual curiosities. They are human beings, human beings who have been damaged deeply by the decisions of parliaments and governments. … this policy was taken to such extremes by some in administrative authority that the forced extractions of children of so-called mixed lineage were seen as part of a broader policy of dealing with the problem of the Aboriginal population.*

(Rudd, 13 February, 2008)

These *Stolen Generations* survivors are likely to be transferring their trauma to the next generation of Indigenous Australians (e.g. Blanco, cited in Atkinson, Nelson & Atkinson, 2010). Such intergenerational trauma can manifest itself in problematic behaviours in later life, including family violence, alcoholism, an inability to secure employment or even limited parenting skills (Healing Foundation, n.d.). For children in particular,

> *… the higher level of distress in some Indigenous families suggests that children and adolescents are at risk of exposure to a toxic mix of trauma and life stressors.*

(Atkinson, 2013, p. 7)

The review paper will consider the concept of racism in Section 4.

Wyn's concept of 'historical debt'

In this introductory Section 1, the authors believe it will be helpful to consider Johanna Wyn's concept of Indigenous disadvantage: a complex issue, much compounded by the historical debt that is attached to being Indigenous. Wyn extended Ladson-Billings's (2006) concept of moving from achievement gap to educational debt. Wyn's extension from that of educational debt to the concept of historical debt has interpretive power in relation to Indigenous intergenerational trauma, racism and lateral violence in the present day. In her AER 55, *Touching the Future*, Wyn states that when the concept of a 'gap' (as in *Closing the Gap*) is replaced with the metaphor of a 'debt', it becomes apparent that all children born into disadvantage carry with them the historical debt of their parents, families and ancestors. For many socio-economically disadvantaged children, including Indigenous children, disadvantage is experienced as a result of their parents' and family's socio-economic position and to that extent is construed as intergenerational.

> *... what is called an achievement 'gap' between student populations is actually a measure of an education 'debt', incurred through past deficits that have been historically and systemically incurred through social exclusion and poverty.*

(Wyn, 2009, p. 38)

The concept of historical debt recognises that it is the debt that disables the individual. Wyn contends that historical debt can only be ameliorated through breaking the cycle of disadvantage given that:

> *... for many Indigenous Australians, formal education has either been absent or has involved an emptying out of their own cultural heritage, an experience of loss and division rather than growth.*

(Wyn, 2009, p. 39)

Wyn argues that governments and society have the responsibility to address the disadvantage, and it needs to be done in such a way that the individuals affected can be freed to act against the disadvantage. Responsibility should not be placed solely on the individuals.

Going to school with the baggage of educational debt

Many of the problematic issues evident in Indigenous Australian communities today – such as alcohol abuse, family violence, lateral violence and even lower educational attainment – stem from the effects of colonisation and

> *... the failure of Australian governments and society to acknowledge and address the legacy of unresolved trauma still inherent in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.*

(Atkinson, 2013, p. 6)

Consequently, according to the analyses of Wyn (2009) and Atkinson (2013) regarding historical debt and intergenerational trauma, Indigenous Australian children carry with them the educational and trauma debts of their parents, grandparents and communities. So when Indigenous Australian children step into their classrooms, this is the baggage they bring with them.

Policymakers and teachers must be alert to the traumas these children carry by way of their personal and cultural histories. Bridging achievement gaps under such conditions is tough and individuals cannot be expected do it alone – they will need help from the education practitioners they encounter and they will need appropriate educational policies. Since Indigenous Australians were not afforded a mainstream education until approximately 60 years ago (Burridge, Whalan

& Vaughan, 2012), educational equity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians may take decades to achieve. In Section 4 the authors will analyse a range of policies and programs that have attempted to face, head on, some of these hard questions of Indigenous educational experiences.

Australia's First Nations population

Varied personal and historical experience account for some of the variations identifiable in Australia's Indigenous population but other factors require consideration. This subsection speaks to the second key proposition mentioned earlier in Section 1: the need for policymakers to consider complex realities and develop nuanced policies.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics Census, undertaken in 2011 and published in 2013, approximately 670,000 people identified as having Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage, which is about 3 per cent of the total Australian population (2013a). However, locational diversity has significant consequences for social and educational outcomes for Australia's Indigenous population, with the population spread and density varying from state to territory.

The density and distribution of Australia's Indigenous population differs from the population spread of the non-Indigenous population. To clarify the differences between the data in Table 1.1, population refers to the given number of individuals in a particular area. Conversely, population density refers to the number of individuals residing within a particular unit of measurement, such as one square kilometre. In considering Australia's population, density increases along the coastal areas since most of our major cities are situated along the coast. Table 1.1, based on the 2011 Census data (ABS, 2013a) provides the relevant data.

Table 1.1 Proportion and Density of Indigenous population in Australia by State and Territory

State or Territory	Proportion of population (%)	Density of population (%)
New South Wales	32	2.9
Queensland	29	4.3
Western Australia	14	3.6
Northern Territory	10	30.0
South Australia	6	2.3
Tasmania	4	4.7
Victoria	3	0.9
Australian Capital Territory	1.7	0.02

(Author data file)

According to the 2011 Census, nearly 80 per cent of the total national Indigenous population resided in locations defined by the ABS as major cities and regional locations, and as Table 1.1 shows, the Indigenous population in Australia is characterised by a range of locational diversities. For example, while only 10 per cent of Indigenous Australians live in the Northern Territory, 30 per cent of the Northern Territory population is Indigenous. Figure 1.1 shows the comparative Indigenous and non-Indigenous population according to the ABS five key geolocations.

Figure 1.1 indicates the differing distribution, and by implication the varying density, of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. Almost three-quarters of non-Indigenous Australians are urbanised; whereas only almost one-third of Indigenous Australians live in major cities; and almost one-quarter live in remote or very remote locations. Policy implications arise consequent to these variations.

Figure 1.1: Proportion of the Australian population by geolocation, June 2011
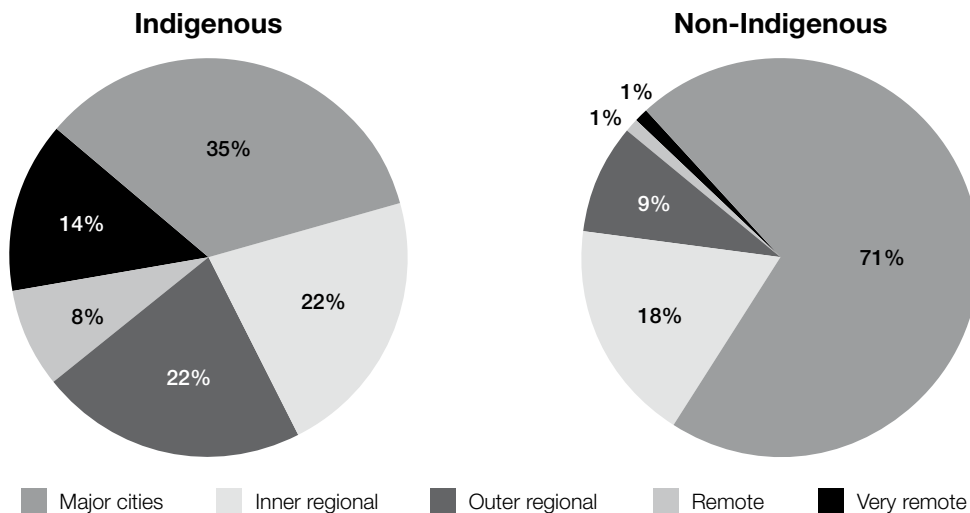
(Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision [SCRGSP], 2014a, p.3.12)

Policy implications of variations in the Indigenous population

As is the case with many First Nations people of the world, the scale and its proportion of the total population is small. This review paper will argue that variations in the size and distribution of the Indigenous population across the nation should be regarded as key factors requiring consideration in the development of effective policy. These demographic variations highlight that population location and context are always critical to policy development. The inappropriateness of developing any single policy for Australia's heterogeneous Indigenous population is self-evident.

Indicators of Indigenous socio-economic disadvantage

This subsection of Section 1 speaks to the third and fourth key propositions for consideration in this review paper: The basic social and economic disadvantage that attends the Indigenous population needing recognition for its general effect on wellbeing and for the negative effects it has on educational attainment. The concepts of socio-economic and educational disadvantage constitute the third and fourth key propositions to be considered in this review paper. Given the problematic and interconnected issues relating to the effects of colonisation already outlined, there are multiple socio-economic indicators which clearly indicate that Indigenous Australian communities experience stark disadvantage relative to their non-Indigenous counterparts. In policymaking the federal government relies on data from the Productivity Commission, which is the Australian Government's independent research and advisory body on a range of economic, social and environmental issues affecting the welfare of Australians, and it acts as the Secretariat for the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP).

Tables 1.2 and 1.3 indicate a range of social and educational indicators by which Indigenous disadvantage has been identified and quantified. The 2014 Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP) report *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* (2014a), showed there were gaps of between 5 and no less than 1300 per cent between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians across a range of socio-economic indicators. Table 1.2 provides comparative data on a range of socio-economic indices.

Table 1.2: Socio-economic indicators of Indigenous disadvantage, 2014

Year	Socio-economic Indicator	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Gap
2010–12	Male life expectancy	69.1 years	79.7 years	10.6 years
2010–12	Female life expectancy	73.7 years	83.1 years	9.5 years
2012	Infant mortality rate	5.0 deaths per 1000 live births	3.3 deaths per 1000 live births	1.7 deaths per 1000 live births
2012–13	Proportion of 20–24-year-olds completing Year 12 or above	59 per cent	86–88 per cent	27–29 per cent
2012–13	Proportion of adults whose main income was employment	41 per cent	77 per cent (between 2011–12)	36 per cent
2012–13	Proportion aged 18–64 years in full-time employment	65 per cent	70 per cent (2011–12)	5 per cent
2012–13	Gross weekly household income (EGWHI)	$465	$869 (2011–12)	$404
2012–13	Proportion of adults reporting high/very high levels of psychological distress	30 per cent	–	Almost 3 times higher than the proportion for non-Indigenous adults
2012	Disability rate	23 per cent	–	1.7 times higher than the rate for non-Indigenous Australians
2000–13	Adult imprisonment rate	Increased 57 per cent	–	13 times higher than the rate for non-Indigenous Australians (2013)

(Based on SCRGSP data, 2014a)

Table 1.3 provides comparative data on a range of the educational indices, compiled from data contained in the same report, which was published in 2014.

Table 1.3 Education performance indicators of Indigenous disadvantage

Year	Educational Indicator	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Gap
2013	Preschool enrolment	74 per cent	91 per cent	17 per cent
2013	Preschool attendance	70 per cent (urban/regional) 75 per cent (remote/very remote)	89 per cent	19 per cent (urban) 14 per cent (remote)
2012–13	Postsecondary education (i.e. 20–64-year-olds with Certificate level III or above, or studying)	43 per cent	67–68 per cent	24–25 per cent
2012–13	Proportion of 17–24-year-olds participating in post-school education, training or employment	40 per cent	75 per cent	35 per cent

(Based on SCRGSP data, 2014a)

The data in Tables 1.2 and 1.3 demonstrate the serious dimensions of the general socio-economically disadvantaged situation of the Indigenous population in 2013, and the statistically significant lower educational outcomes Aboriginal people had compared to non-Indigenous Australians. There was virtually no change in the proportions of students achieving national minimum standards for reading, writing and numeracy from 2008, as reported in the 2009 *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report (Australian Government, 2009), to that reported in the 2014 report. These educational data will be analysed in more depth in Section 2.

Stung by the stark contrast between Indigenous and non-Indigenous socio-economic outcomes identified in the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report of 2008, the Rudd Government introduced the most comprehensive Council of Australian Governments (COAG) *Closing the Gap* (CTG) policy, with targets designed to bridge the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous disadvantage. The CTG targets were set following the National Apology to the Stolen Generations, delivered by former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd on 13 February 2008 (Rudd, 2008).

The Apology signalled an expressed shift in commitment by government to ameliorate the current state of Indigenous disadvantage inherited as historical debt. High hopes were held that, with improved knowledge and the public acknowledgement signified by the Apology, more effective policies would be implemented and disadvantage would lessen. However, Table 1.4 demonstrates how few of the *Closing the Gap* policy intentions, as represented by the educational targets, have been effectively achieved.

Table 1.4: Progress made by 2015 against the 2008/9 *Closing the Gap* targets

Target	Target year	Progress	Results
Close the gap in life expectancy within a generation	2031	Not on track	Limited progress.
Halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade	2018	On track	Long-term progress.
Ensure access for all Indigenous four-year-olds in remote communities to early childhood education	2013	Not met	In 2013, 85 per cent of Indigenous four year olds were enrolled compared –to the target of 95 per cent.
Close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance within five years	2018	New target, baseline 2014.	
Halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for Indigenous students	2018	Not on track	There has been no overall improvement in Indigenous reading and numeracy since 2008.
Halve the gap for Indigenous Australians aged 20–24 in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates	2020	On track	The gap is narrowing in Year 12 or equivalent attainment.
Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians	2018	Not on track	There was a decline in employment outcomes since the 2008 baseline.

(Commonwealth of Australia, *Closing the Gap* report, 2016, p. 5)

Table 1.4 shows that over the period 2009–15, despite ongoing policy attempts and very substantial budget allocations, few targets were 'on track' to being achieved. The table reveals how small the improvement in educational outcomes has been for Indigenous students after almost a decade of focused funding. Data from both the 2016 and 2017 *Closing the Gap* reports detail similar findings (Commonwealth of Australia, 2016, 2017). Detailed analyses of Indigenous achievement data will be provided in Section 2.

A new target date concerning Indigenous school attendance was set in 2015, in recognition of the research evidence that demonstrated links between school attendance and student performance at school (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015). Another change was made to the original 2008 education targets in the 2016 *Closing the Gap* report (Commonwealth of Australia, 2016), where the focus on early childhood education access was widened and given a new time frame to include Indigenous children in urban and regional settings. The new early childhood education target – 95 per cent of all Indigenous four-year-olds to be enrolled in early childhood education by the year 2025 – was set because jurisdictional data indicated that Indigenous children living in urban and regional areas were enrolled in early childhood education at lower rates than their remote-living counterparts, at the rates of 67 per cent (urban), 74 per cent (regional) and 85 per cent (remote) respectively (Commonwealth of Australia, 2016). Further discussion of these data, and the policies and targets that underpin them, will be conducted in Section 2.

Expenditure data on Indigenous Australians

Expenditure by Australian governments on education occurs in the broader context of a range of government service areas. Table 1.5 shows the relative levels and focus of education-based funding for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians 2012–13.

Table 1.5: Australian Government plus state and territory government direct expenditure, Australia, 2012–13

	Total expenditure				Expenditure per head of population		
	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Total	Indig. share	Indig.	Non-Indig.	
	$m	$m	$m	%	$/pers	$/pers	Ratio
Early childhood development education and training	335	5 730	6 065	5.5	479	255	1.88
School education	3 406	39 791	43 197	7.9	4 878	1 774	2.75
Tertiary education	768	20 053	20 821	3.7	1 099	894	1.23
Total	4 509	65 575	70 083	6.4	6 457	2 923	2.21

(Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2014b, p. 36)

Table 1.5 shows the divergent relativities in educational expenditure for Indigenous and non-Indigenous. The differentiation indicates that governments recognise the comparatively greater Indigenous disadvantage, and concomitantly, the greater funding needs of Indigenous education. From the very large scale of the sums indicated, it would appear that a lack of financial investment is not the problem with the failure to achieve better Indigenous education outcomes.

Factors in Indigenous educational disadvantage

This subsection of text speaks specifically to educational outcomes: the fourth key proposition for consideration in this review paper. Research regarding the relationship between socio-economic and educational disadvantage was conducted by O'Keefe, Olney and Angus in 2012 as part of an investigation for the Australian Primary Principals Association. It incorporated evidence from government, Catholic and independent schools across Western Australia, South Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland. In reviewing obstacles to success for Indigenous students,

O'Keefe and colleagues emphasised the significance of multiple factors, some of which are external to schooling.

> *The problem facing education policy makers is that there is no single factor explaining why Indigenous students achieve, on average, at lower levels than other Australian students; the explanation is most likely found in a complex array of factors … Further, some of the key determinants lie outside the school.*

<div align="right">(O'Keefe, Olney & Angus, 2012, p. 2)</div>

Educational researcher, Bruce Wilson reaffirmed O'Keefe et al.'s (2012) argument in his 2014 analysis of Northern Territory education, published as *A Share in the Future* (Wilson, 2014). The fact that there are multiple factors that can impede Indigenous educational success is reflected in the array of policy approaches taken to improve Indigenous educational outcomes. Section 3 of this review paper scrutinises the various educational policy 'solutions' the Commonwealth Government of Australia has put in place to address Indigenous underachievement.

General issues with policy-based attempts at remedying disadvantage

O'Keefe et al. (2012) reinforced their evidence-based view that single-factor explanations of disadvantage are unlikely to reveal insights. Other researchers have observed that evidence-based solutions for policy development are complex. Social science researcher Brian Head has affirmed that policies addressing disadvantage are difficult to develop because:

> *… policy decisions emerge from politics, judgement and debate, rather than being deduced from empirical analysis.*

<div align="right">(Head, 2008, p. 1)</div>

Politics, with its associated mixed motivations and goals, impact on the weighting given to the various factors in decision-making. Head proposed that confronting complex policy issues, such as disadvantage, should encompass a broad, systematic approach situated in multi-stakeholder networks. The authors of this review paper will argue that politics, judgement and ideology are potent factors in policy formation and the impact of these will be discussed further in Section 3. Additionally, as the fifth proposition of this review paper, it will be argued that when there is deeper engagement by the recipients of policy it is more likely that the factors most relevant to success can be incorporated into policy and its implementation.

Geolocation as a factor in Indigenous educational disadvantage

There are considerable and persistent variations in disadvantage between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, and also within the Indigenous population in Australia. Geolocation, according to the five locational reference points identified in Figure 1.1, is one such differentiating factor. Given that different sub-cohorts are rarely disaggregated in the reporting of Indigenous achievement data, neither from the other Indigenous sub-cohorts, nor of the non-Indigenous from the whole Indigenous cohort, close examination of the impact of geolocation on educational outcomes by sub-cohorts is an uncertain activity. But in Section 2 some disaggregated data will be presented and analysed.

Figure 1.4 presents aggregated unreleased data on a selection of key social outcomes for one sub-cohort of Indigenous people, according to the factor of the remoteness of their geolocation.

Figure 1.4: Selected outcomes for Indigenous people, by remoteness, 2012–13
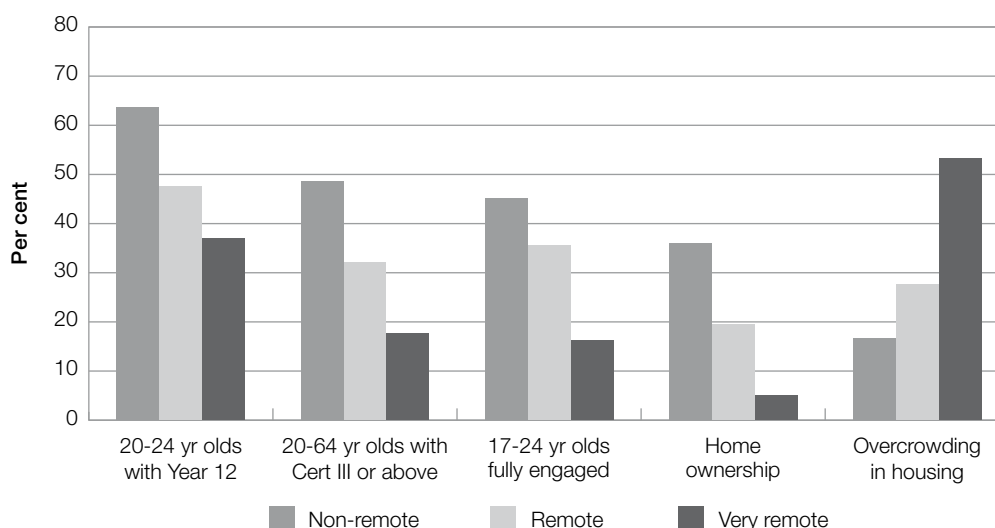
(Based on Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2014a, p. 8)

Figure 1.4 indicates that the attainment of educational qualifications declines as remoteness increases. It also shows that the number of 20–24-year-old adults with Year 12 or equivalent qualifications falls significantly as the location becomes more remote. Similarly, the proportion of 17–24-year-olds who are fully engaged in post-school education, training or employment falls with remoteness. None of these findings is unsurprising, given the general relative disparity in service provision and the paucity of employment options that exist in remote areas, nor are they confined to Indigenous Australians.

This review paper has already demonstrated that the levels of socio-economic disadvantage are substantial for Indigenous people, and that these levels need to be considered as the context and basis for the unequal educational outcomes. Amelioration of non-educational factors of disadvantage will undoubtedly impact on educational outcomes. This is the belief underlying the policies and targets identified in Tables 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4. But policy coherence across all areas of funding for disadvantage is required for efficacy in educational outcomes. Poorly-directed funding is money wasted. The critical issue here is the slight impact this social disadvantage expenditure, by governments, appears to have had on educational disadvantage. Extrapolating from Johanna Wyn's work (2009), one can say that the expenditure has failed to significantly lighten the educational debt Indigenous students are labouring under. Section 2 of this review paper will focus on the ongoing differentials in achievement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, and will present an analysis containing possible explanations for the gap.

Supporting active Indigenous participation in policy

This subsection of Section 1 speaks to the fifth key proposition for consideration in this review paper: the importance of active participation by parents and communities in their children's education. This proposition will be further discussed in Section 3 and is the key focus of Section 4. The SCRGSP Committee in 2014 recorded a range of Indigenous experiences, and factors which, though external to school, impacted on education outcomes. It also inferred that government alone is not capable of overcoming the multiplicities of Indigenous disadvantage and insisted that:

> *Meaningful change also requires continuing involvement and action by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians themselves.*

(Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2014a, p. 13)

This statement would come as no surprise to Indigenous academics, educators and school community members across Australia, who have advocated for such participation for many years. AER 47 (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004) identified and advocated for exactly this in its identifying of Issues 6 and 7 in Section 4 (pp. 39–41).

The authors of this review paper contend that Aboriginal people cannot hope that Australian governments can or wish to 'fix' all of the issues inherent in contemporary Indigenous affairs. But this review will posit that to be more active in their own success and achievement, Aboriginal people must feel, and be, empowered to effect positive change in their lives. Empowerment comes with acknowledging the past and giving permission to Indigenous Australians to heal from past – and present – traumas. Aboriginal people are capable of helping themselves, but this requires targeted and appropriate government – and general community support so they can realise their full capabilities and potential. A people who bear the historical and socio-economic baggage Aboriginal Australians do will need support, especially with their children in school, but it needs to be support they own, not help that is 'granted' them.

Roche and Tran (2014) provide an example of the positive impact Indigenous ownership can have over community development projects. In 2016, Nyangatjatjara College, through the Kaltukatjara community, took control of the Docker River Primary School from the Northern Territory Department of Education. Under the new arrangement of community governance student enrolments and attendance increased markedly from previous years, and parent and community participation in school operations improved significantly.

The research literature on addressing disadvantage confirms that people do not readily find or articulate their voice and/or know how to exercise participation when loaded with histories like these. This is articulated by Judy Atkinson in her doctoral thesis:

> *Within an Aboriginal cultural context, people do not heal alone. Because all people have the need to be part of supportive and caring families and communities, the study found that individual healing helps to rebuild families and communities, which in cyclic action, helps again in individual healing processes. Healing also strengthens the cultural and spiritual group identity which allows people to be contributing members of the society in which they live.*

(Atkinson, 2002, p. 216)

In the context of general social disadvantage, the education of, and by, Indigenous Australians will be critical to this healing and empowerment. It will not be easy to achieve nationally, but there is evidence from the more general field of socio-economic disadvantage that 'having ownership' in the policy and practice of education outcomes relates to success in improvement (Zubrick et al., 2005).

Longstanding advocacy for Indigenous voice in educational policy

For more than 40 years, First Nations people across the world, including Indigenous Australians, have argued they have been denied the right to equitable education that is inclusive of culture, language and spirituality. Six years of work on a blueprint for the transformation of education for Indigenous peoples, commenced just prior to the World Indigenous People's Conference on Education (WIPCE) in Australia in 1993, and was endorsed in Hawaii at the WIPCE in 1999. This blueprint represented the collective voice of Indigenous peoples from around the world and was endorsed as the landmark *Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous People's Rights in Education* (1999). The statement, viewed as the 'Magna Carta' of Indigenous education for Indigenous peoples worldwide, outlines the key principles fundamental to educational reform for Indigenous peoples. These principles include: Indigenous peoples' right to an education in Indigenous language; and the teaching of Indigenous cultural knowledge, content and spirituality.

In Australia, in 1989, the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* (NATSIEP), a ground-breaking joint policy statement endorsed by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, acknowledged that Indigenous Australians were the most educationally

disadvantaged group in society. The policy will be discussed in Sections 2 and 3 of this review paper. The Task Force that prepared the policy, chaired by Indigenous academic Paul Hughes, stated that:

> *A new approach to Aboriginal education can only succeed if the Aboriginal community is fully involved in determining the policies and programs that are intended to provide appropriate education for their community.*

<div align="right">(Commonwealth of Australia, 1989, p. 7)</div>

This Australian work fed into the international statement. Yet, in Australia, more than 25 years since the joint policy was endorsed by the Australian Government, little has changed with regard to a collective Indigenous voice being able to influence educational policy at the national and local levels. This empowerment will not be easy to achieve nationally, but there is evidence from the more general field of socio-economic disadvantage that 'having ownership' in the policy and practice of education outcomes relates to success in improving them.

Structure of this review

This review paper will argue that there is no doubt that improving educational outcomes is essential to overcoming the rates of multiple disadvantage that Indigenous people endure across Australia today. It is well documented that improved educational outcomes lead to improved health outcomes, and students who achieve strong literacy and numeracy outcomes increase their employment and income prospects, and these are desirable social outcomes (Zubrick, Silburn, Teoh, Shepherd, Carlton & Lawrence, 1997). *How* they are to be achieved is really the matter to be debated.

Section 1 of this review paper has laid down the five key propositions it intends to pursue. It outlined the colonial and post-colonial history, the diversity of the Indigenous population, the social and economic disadvantage and the policy parameters needed for effective Indigenous education policy. Section 1 has already indicated that, in the authors' view, active participation by Indigenous learners and communities in policy development and implementation is a critical, and to date largely unutilised, element to improving social and educational outcomes that are meaningful to both stakeholder participants and to governments.

Section 2 provides and examines the key national data sets that determine the current education performance of Indigenous students across Australia. Jurisdictional and geolocational comparisons are made to investigate patterns of strength and weakness in educational performance of the students. In drawing on analyses of all these educational achievement data sets, the text will focus on both the ongoing differentials in achievement between cohorts and present an analysis that addresses the many factors related to possible explanations for them.

Section 3 outlines and analyses policy trajectories in Indigenous affairs, and more specifically in education, over the last quarter century. In that analysis, efforts will be made to link policies to ideological positions and to the main issues previous identified as being significant to Aboriginal advancement: Indigenous history, the survival of the race, the political and social ideologies and how they played out in policy in all its forms in various, predominantly Commonwealth, governments, over that period. In examining policies, attention will be paid to the development, the cumulative nature of policy impacts, policy implementation and evaluation (or lack thereof). Reference will be made to global perspectives on First Nations policy and to the efforts to increase recognition of the importance of the participation of Indigenous populations in developing their own education policy perspectives.

Section 4 identifies five key and immediate challenges in the area of Indigenous education that require solutions. A number of existing educational programs that have been implemented in schools with a view to meeting these challenges are examined to determine the ways they were inclusive of Indigenous participation, have an evidence base in their research design and, most importantly, whether they are achieving successful outcomes for the students.

Section 5 explicitly addresses the central argument to be put in this review paper. It is that, *only* when there is deeper engagement by the recipients of policy, is it likely that most of the factors relevant to success can be incorporated in policy development and implementation. The authors of this AER will contend that, especially as demonstrated by the case studies in Section 4, a critical component in breaking the cycle of disadvantage among Indigenous Australians will be their active participation in decision-making processes. The participation processes need to be real and they need to result in policies that directly and efficaciously impact on Indigenous Australians' lives. In support of this stance, the last section of the review will draw on the very recent *Uluru Statement of the Heart* (2017).

2

Indigenous educational achievement

Section 2 of this review paper will address the current state of Indigenous education through various data sets harvested via analyses from the National Assessment Program and other related national and international assessments. The analysis, primarily in the domains of literacy and numeracy, uses a variety of comparative approaches of Indigenous with non-Indigenous student performance. Jurisdictional and geolocational data have been disaggregated, where possible, to enhance an appreciation of the relationship between school geolocation, socio-disadvantage and student performance.

Indigenous schooling population

In 2016, there were 207,852 students in compulsory schooling (Prep to Year 10) who, on enrolment, identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017). This was an increase of 15,367 students from 2014, and continued a trend that has seen national Indigenous student enrolment grow by over 75,000 in the past 10 years. Indigenous full-time students now account for over 5.5 per cent of all full-time student enrolments (almost double their proportion of population).

New South Wales had the largest number of full-time Indigenous students (government 56,673, non-government 10,616), followed by Queensland (government 52,463, non-government 10,108) and Western Australia (government 21,814, non-government 4130). In all jurisdictions the majority of Indigenous full-time students attended government schools in 2016. However, being enrolled is not the same as attending and completing compulsory schooling.

Indigenous student school attendance

Active participation in education and training is a fundamental determinant in maximising life opportunities for Indigenous Australians. Students who attend school regularly and complete Year 12 have broader employment options, as well as improved economic and social wellbeing. A plethora of evidence (Ladwig & Luke, 2014; Wilson, 2014; Perso, 2012; Sarra, 2011) suggests that regular attendance at school is critical for students' academic achievement, particularly in the literacy and numeracy domains. Achieving a quality education is viewed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) as improving social, educational and employment outcomes according to the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP), (SCRGSP, 2012). Figure 2.2 compares the Indigenous student attendance rates in Semester 1 2014 to those in Semester 1 2016, by state and territory.

Figure 2.1: Enrolled full-time Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, by jurisdiction, 2016
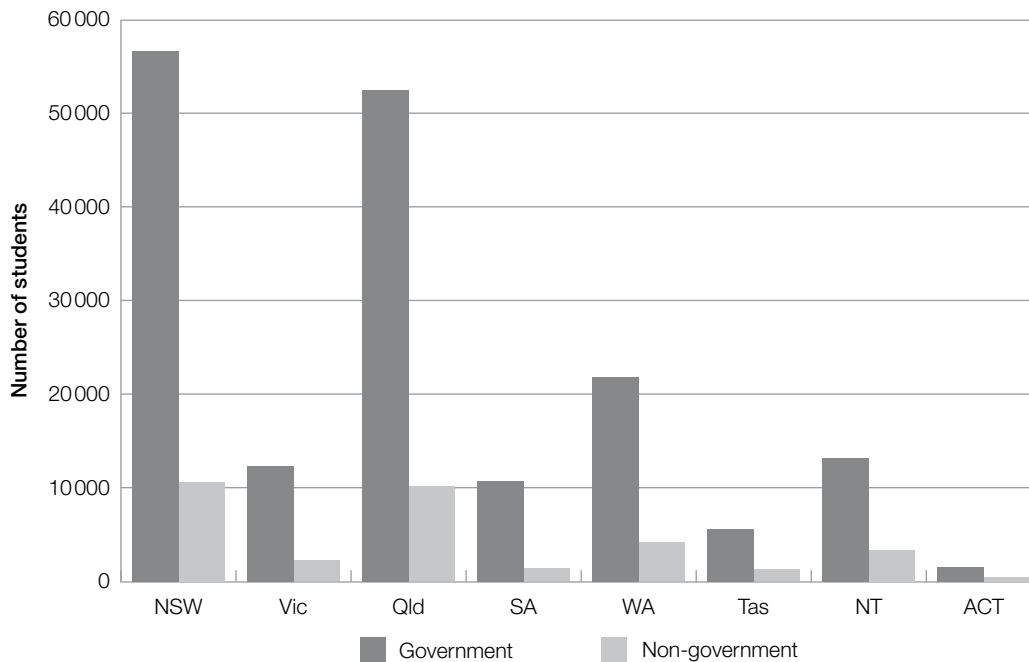
Figure 2.2 shows a very small variance in attendance rates between 2014 and 2016 across all states and territories, with small increases only in two of the eight jurisdictions. Given the considerable focus and resources provided by the jurisdictions during this time to improve attendance rates, especially in the Northern Territory, they are very disappointing and appear to indicate policy failure.

Figure 2.2: Indigenous school attendance, Years 1–10, by jurisdiction, as a percentage of total enrolment, 2014 & 2016
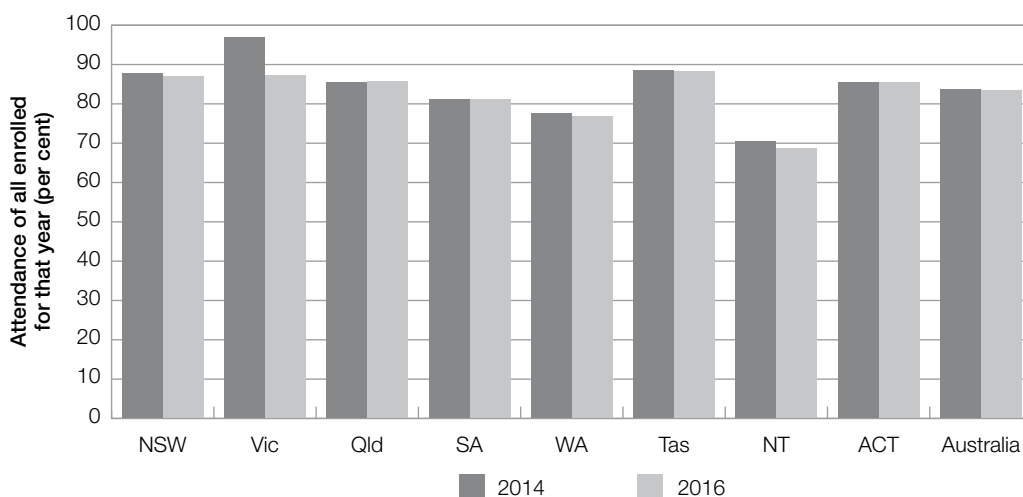
The Figure 2.3 presents data using the Australian Bureau of Statistics Australian Statistical Geography Standard five geolocation categories, to compare student attendance rates by location. The major cities category includes cities such as Sydney, Brisbane and Geelong; the inner regional category includes cities such as Hobart, Ballarat and Bathurst, the outer regional category includes large towns such as Darwin, Cairns and Bendigo; the remote category includes regional towns such as Mount Isa in Queensland, Broken Hill in New South Wales, Alice Springs in the Northern Territory and Kununurra in Western Australia; and very remote

includes communities such as Aurukun in Queensland, Warburton Ranges in Western Australia, and Oodnadatta in South Australia.

Figure 2.3: Student attendance by geolocation, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, 2016
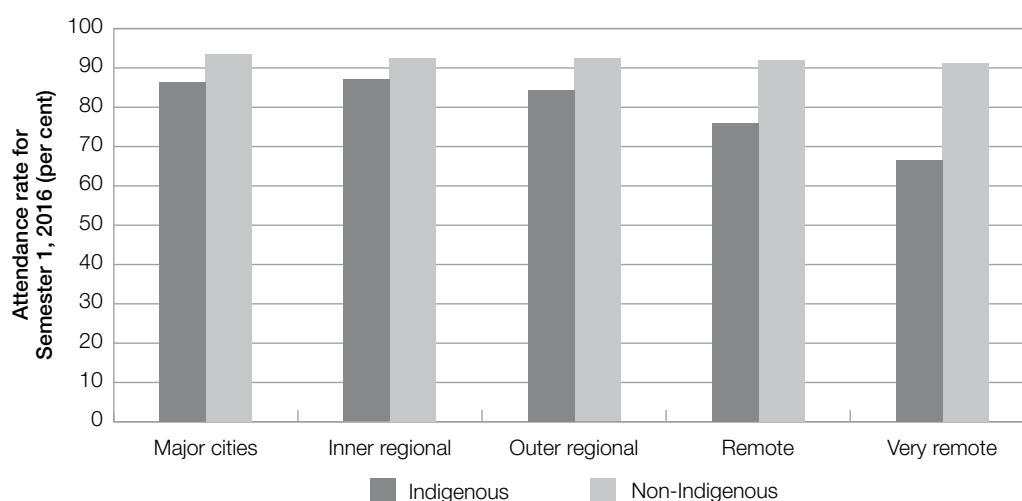
(Commonwealth of Australia, *Closing the Gap* report, 2017, p. 37)

The data in Figure 2.3 show substantial national differences in the rates of attendance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. The differential between the two population cohorts is marked in all geolocations, and it widens further in remote and very remote areas. However, it is worth keeping in mind that the majority of Indigenous Australians reside in urban locations (Hughes & Hughes, 2013), which suggests there is a host of factors that interfere with Indigenous school attendance in major cities.

Reasons for Indigenous absence from school

Attendance rates vary considerably from one year to the next, and from one school to the next. Cultural reasons are commonly cited as reasons for students not attending school, especially in remote community schools, but there are many others, some of which reflect a disengagement from the school and learning environment.

Considerable research into Indigenous school has been conducted (Purdie & Buckley, 2010; Gray & Partington, 2003; Bourke, Rigby & Burden, 2000). Armstrong and Buckley (2011) found that the reasons for Indigenous non-attendance at school vary across four domains: the individual, the family, the community and the school. Consequently, non-attendance reasons may vary from the child being disengaged at school, to the student having a strained relationship with a teacher, to the parent not encouraging school attendance, to community and cultural obligations, to lack of cultural safety in the schooling environment. Armstrong and Buckley argued that low school attendance can stem from a mixture of home, school and individual factors:

> *While parents and students tend to stress school-related factors as the main cause, staff in education jurisdictions and teachers tend to believe that parental attitudes and the home environment are more influential.*

(Armstrong & Buckley, 2011, p. 63)

The transitory movement of Indigenous families, especially in remote settings where cultural obligations may place specific cultural expectations on Indigenous people, is exemplified in the Pitjantjatjara and Ngaanyatjarra Aboriginal lands, which encompass the huge area of the intersecting state and territory borders of South Australia, the Northern Territory and Western Australia. Here, Indigenous community members frequently travel to other communities for funerals, ceremonies and sporting events. This level of constant movement of people impacts on school attendance as well as creating assessment reliability problems.

Another reason for leaving community can be the payment of royalty funds. Traditional owners on Groote Eylandt Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria, for example, have a royalty fund fed by the Manganese mining operation on their community's land, from which every traditional owner over 18 years of age receives approximately $2000 in royalties twice each year. During these times of payment, large numbers of families leave the island to spend their royalties. Angurugu School on Groote Eylandt has had an average attendance rate of around 20 per cent for most of 2015, and even less during royalty periods.

Despite their importance to Indigenous learning, regular school attendance rates for Indigenous students across all geolocations have remained significantly lower than for non-Indigenous students over many years, with little sign of improvement. This impacts on future economic and social disadvantage, and reflects on unsuccessful policy.

Links between social disadvantage, attendance and achievement

University of Western Australia researchers Hancock, Shepherd, Lawrence and Zubrick (2013) conducted a longitudinal study in Western Australia in 2013 to understand if there were any links between social disadvantage, student attendance and student learning outcomes. The study was commissioned by the Australian federal government and was conducted using the data sets supplied by the Western Australian Department of Education, of all students enrolled in government schools in 2008, when NAPLAN testing began, and again in 2012. The data also included student attendance and enrolment records, NAPLAN results and other information on the students collected by their schools.

The researchers found that relative disadvantage was linked to poorer attendance from the very beginning of schooling. The data indicated that students with poor attendance in the early years of schooling were more likely to increase their absences as they progressed through formal schooling, and especially so when they entered secondary schooling. Indigenous students had lower levels of attendance, on average, influenced by events prior to school entry, such as transiency and health issues. All of the analyses conducted in the study found that the average academic achievement on the NAPLAN assessments declined with absences from school. As absence rates increased, student achievement declined on each test domain.

Given that reasons for Indigenous non-attendance at school are varied and complex, reducing the factors that contribute to Indigenous disadvantage and interfere with Indigenous students' capacity to maximise their future life options should be the primary policy goal. This review will argue that informed stakeholder participation in decision-making about schooling and life options is a positive force in achieving these legitimate goals of education for all Australians, including Indigenous Australians.

Policy responses to Indigenous school attendance

Based on its analysis of the 2014 attendance rates the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) report projected increased rates of non-attendance in the future, as the students progressed through the years of schooling. So concerned was COAG in May 2014 at the presentation of this data, that it decided to subscribe to the idealistic target of 90 per cent attendance rate for Indigenous students by 2018 which, if achieved, would effectively close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance, based on a 2014 baseline. This target is not on track to be met, as reported in the 2017 *Closing the Gap* report, which outlines meagre progress on Indigenous school attendance (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017).

One can question the appropriateness of the COAG target. Why is it believed that setting any target will address the problem of non-attendance? Targets are only effective if accompanied by appropriate remediating interventions, which are immediately implemented. The authors believe the likelihood of achieving 90 per cent attendance by Indigenous students, even by 2023, is at best small, and even less likely in remote and very remote locations, especially given that Figure 2.3 shows that even in metropolitan areas only 90 per cent of the non-Indigenous students currently achieve a 90 per cent attendance rate.

Student retention rates

Even though the attendance rates of Indigenous students at school continue to be extremely problematic, the retention of Indigenous students to Year 12 is improving, albeit slowly. Retention rates are reported on a jurisdictional basis only, so closer analysis, by location for example, is not possible. In the period 2002–12, the rate of full-time retention to Year 12 of Indigenous students increased from 38 per cent to 51.1 per cent (ABS, 2013b).

Retention improved between 2012 and 2013 across all jurisdictions when the apparent retention rate from Year 7/8 to Year 12 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander full-time students rose by 4 per cent across Australia. There is a difference in retention rates by gender, with the apparent retention rate for females rising from 52.9 per cent to 58.2 per cent, and for males from 49.2 per cent to 52.0 per cent. As a reality check, however, the comparative national rate for all non-Indigenous full-time students rose by 1.6 percentage points from 81.3 per cent to 82.9 per cent, approximately a 30 per cent difference in apparent retention. The most recent *Closing the Gap* report indicated Year 12 retention rates for Indigenous Australians had continued to improve (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017).

Year 12 or equivalent attainment of Indigenous students aged 20–24

Debate persists as to the equivalence of vocational certification with Year 12 completion, as students studying each pathway have differing aims. When Tom Karmel, then Managing Director of the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER), and Patrick Lim conducted research using the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) comparing outcomes, by age 25, of alternative qualification routes, they claimed there was no educational equivalence between Year 12 completion and a Certificate II qualification, concluding:

> If a 'vocational equivalent' is required for rhetorical purposes, it should be at least at certificate III level.

(Lim & Karmel, 2011, p. 5)

Lim and Karmel's analysis indicated that any kind of vocational certificate obtained by males was more likely to lead to full-time employment. In 2009, COAG set the ambitious target of halving the gap for Indigenous Australians aged 20–24 in Year 12 (retaining the equivalent Certificate II in vocational education training attainment) by 2020. Figure 2.4 provides relevant data.

Figure 2.4: Proportion of Indigenous 20–24 year olds with Year 12 or Cert II attainment, by geolocation categories, 2008 to 2014–15
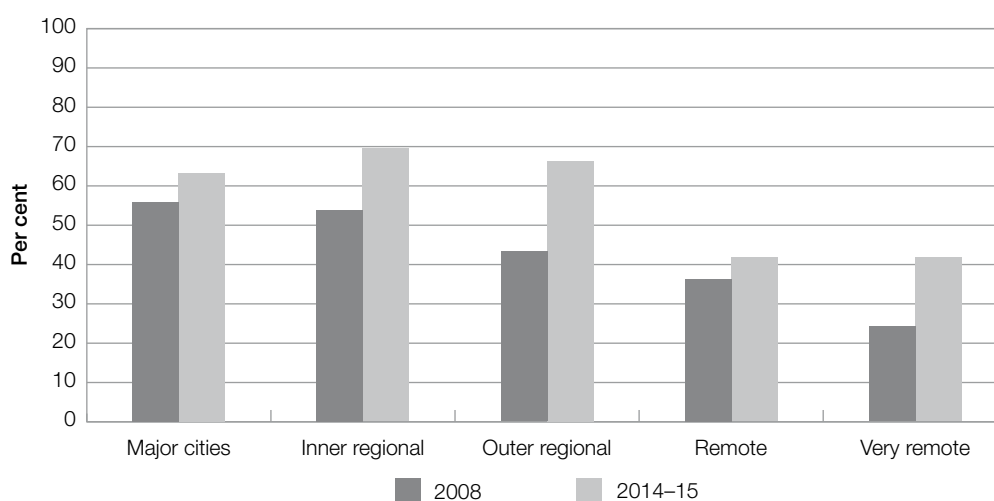
(Commonwealth of Australia, *Closing the Gap* report, 2017, p. 44)

Using the same locational categories as Figure 2.3, Figure 2.4 shows sizeable improvement in attainment and indicates that the COAG target for Year 12 or equivalent is currently on track, with statistically significant increases occurring in the outer regional and very remote geolocations. The growth in attainment in the regional and remote areas is supported by post-secondary school training qualifications being offered at Technical and Further Education (TAFE) centres, and through other registered training organisations such as the Batchelor Institute for Indigenous Tertiary Education in Darwin. Another driver of this trend in regional and remote areas, where employment opportunities in the agribusiness, rural operations and on-country ranger positions exist, students find gaining a Certificate II or especially Certificate III, is more likely to lead to employment than completing Year 12, and sooner. In urban or regional areas on the other hand, students are more inclined to focus on Year 12, as it is the more general employment requirement.

Indigenous enrolment rates in higher education and training

Enrolment data show that Indigenous participation in higher education and training has increased steadily in recent years. In 2015, Indigenous students made up 1.5 per cent of all university enrolments, with females making up 66 per cent of the cohort (Commonwealth of Australia, *Closing the Gap* report, 2017). The 2014 *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report had presented data of students who are undertaking 'post-school education or training'.

> *Between 2002 and 2011–13, there was an increase in the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 17–24 year olds who were participating in post-school education or training or were employed (from 32.4 per cent in 2002 to 40.3 per cent in 2011–13). The non-Indigenous rate remained around 75 per cent, leading to a narrowing of the gap (from 42.8 percentage points in 2002 to 35.2 percentage points in 2011–13).*

(Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2014a, p. 7.17)

Ongoing differentials in university completion rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students were reported by Swinburne University of Technology researcher Ekaterina Pechenkina and colleagues (Pechenkina, Kowal & Paradies, 2011). They found that despite small improvements, the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous university completion rates remains high.

Differential completion rates have been explored in a recent study using a new data cohort-tracking approach, which allowed an analysis of each domestic Bachelor student from 2005, over a nine-year period through the higher education system, from commencement to completion (Edwards & McMillan, 2015). The study was premised on the view that:

> *In a time of rapid growth in the Australian higher education system, resulting in expanded opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, it is critical to understand which characteristics are linked to a lower likelihood of completion, in order to target retention policies for 'at risk' groups at the national and institutional levels.*

(Edwards & McMillan, 2015, p. v)

Figure 2.5: Enrolment outcomes of Indigenous students in Bachelor courses, 2005–14

Indigenous

46.7%
20.4%
25%
8%

Non-Indigenous

8.1%
13.9%
4.2%
73.9%

■ Completed (in any year)
■ Still enrolled at the end of the nine year period

■ Dropped out some time after first year
■ Never returned after the first year
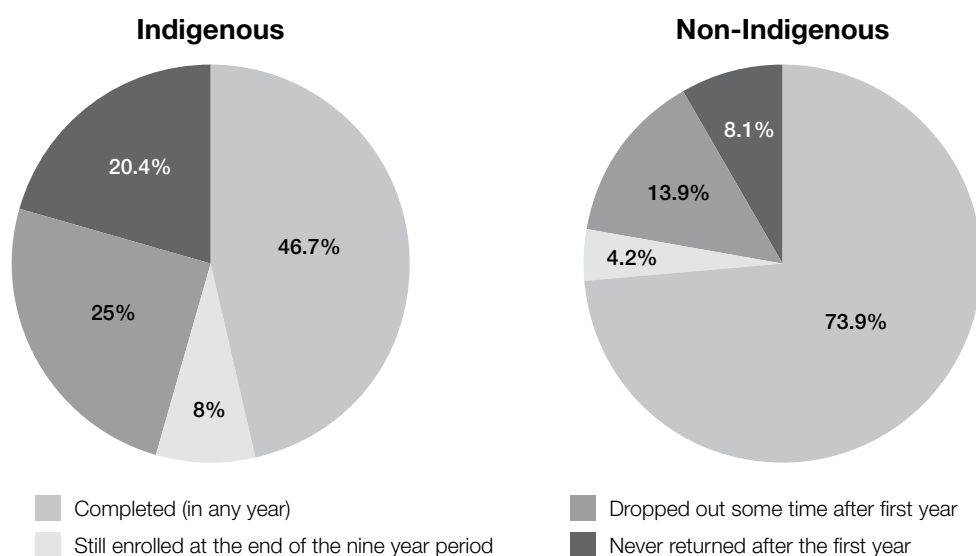
Figure 2.5 shows that more than one in five Indigenous students had dropped out of university before their second year and another quarter had dropped out at some other stage in the nine-year period. The completion figures recorded for Indigenous students were substantially lower than for any other group in this report of outcomes of enrolment for students from disadvantaged groups. This report confirms a significant challenge exists for higher education policy – to enable Indigenous students to complete their tertiary degrees, once enrolled.

Indigenous school student achievement

Indigenous young people remain the most educationally disadvantaged group in the nation. In AER 47 Mellor and Corrigan reported that:

> *Despite improvements in Indigenous education outcomes, and substantial funding, there nevertheless has been no significant reduction in the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in the last decade.*

(Mellor & Corrigan, 2004, p. 42)

A decade on there has been little change in the size of the gap between the academic performance of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in the compulsory schooling years. The *National Indigenous Reform Agreement* (NIRA), formulated by COAG in 2008, had set out an integrated approach to a national reform strategy, with the intended outcome of reducing Indigenous disadvantage by closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, across education, health and employment. The COAG Reform Council, reporting on Indigenous Young People's outcomes from 2008 to 2012, noted:

> *There was no improvement in school attendance rates … there were few improvements in the proportions of Indigenous students meeting minimum standards in reading and no improvements in numeracy … more Indigenous young people attained Year 12 or equivalent but over 60% were not fully engaged in study or work after leaving school.*

(COAG Reform Council, 2013, p. 55)

This low attainment is a social problem of considerable dimensions for Australia's Indigenous population and for the nation as a whole. Australian education and health researchers and academics Johnston, Lea and Carapetis (2009) maintain that these continued poor outcomes perpetuate intergenerational cycles of disadvantage and poverty, limit post-school options, and

restrict life choices and participation in the national economy for Indigenous people. It appears that we are still allowing Indigenous children to carry with them the 'educational debt' of their parents who were unable to benefit from Australia's education system (Wyn, 2009).

In 1975 the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) conducted the first national survey of literacy and numeracy achievement of students aged 10 and 14 years, with the purpose of providing a general outline of the state of literacy and numeracy outcomes in Australian schools. The researchers reported that

> *… differences in performance between the Aboriginal students and the overall Australian student samples are sufficiently large to make it clear that a problem exists.*

(Bourke & Parkin, 1977, p. 154)

In the 1990s individual education jurisdictions developed their own numeracy and literacy assessments to determine student progress against jurisdictional benchmarks. The Western Australian Education Department developed the Western Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (WALNA) (Independent Schools Targeted Programs Authority Inc., 2007), which enabled schools and departmental bureaucrats to track cohort progression and compare results with like schools across the state. Local school principals received intensive data literacy professional learning to enable them to use the data to lead curriculum change in their schools.

National Assessment Program

The National Assessment Program (NAP) is the measure through which governments and other interested parties are able to determine whether student performance is meeting the expected outcomes outlined in the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008) and its subsequent iterations. The NAP operates at the direction of Education Council, a consortium of state and territory Ministers for Education. Although not technically high stakes for individual students it has a high stakes impact on schools, and entails additional work for staff as they seek to prepare students and deal with high stress levels in all involved. The NAP's main components include:

- The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) in which all students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 are assessed annually.
- The NAP became inclusive of the three-yearly cyclical sample surveys, which had commenced in 2004, in Science literacy (Year 6 students), Civics and Citizenship (Year 6 and 10 students), and Information and Communication Technology literacy (Years 6 and 10 students).
- International assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in Year 9, Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in Years 4 and 8 and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) in Year 4.

This review paper will consider data on Indigenous outcomes from each of these assessments and also one other national instrument: the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) which assesses, in early childhood, students' readiness for learning.

NAPLAN

The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is administered to all Year 3, 5, 7 and 9 students across Australia in May each year. These instruments assess students in the domains of reading, numeracy, spelling, grammar and punctuation, and writing. The assessment is conducted under the oversight of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), in close collaboration with all relevant education authorities. Around one million Australian students sit the NAPLAN tests each year. ACARA asserts the following:

(ACARA, 2013, p. 4)

The NAPLAN program provides jurisdictional, national and school level data on mean scale scores, and the proportion of students at or above the national minimum standard for each of the NAPLAN assessment domains. Changes in student performance have been calculated and reported in each domain since 2008 (except Writing, which was only tested in 2011), against the 2008 baseline on which targets for the national *Closing the Gap* reform agenda were set. Figure 2.6 provides a longitudinal comparison of the Reading achievement of Years 3 and 9 Indigenous and non-Indigenous students on NAPLAN assessments since 2008.

Figure 2.6: NAPLAN Reading achievement of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Years 3 and 9 students, Australia, 2008–16
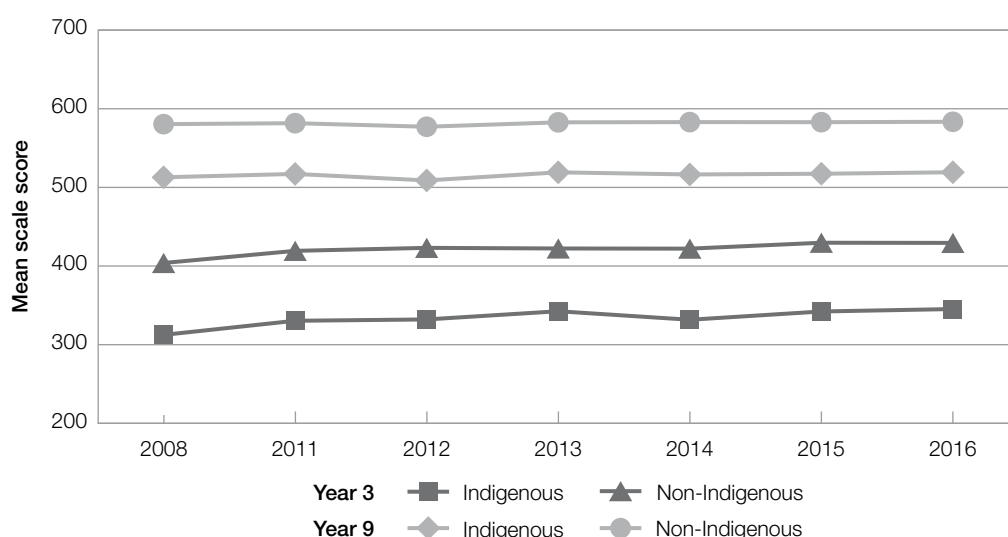
(ACARA, 2016, pp. 263, 266)

Figure 2.6 shows that NAPLAN data reveals that Indigenous students continue to score markedly below their non-Indigenous peers in all of the assessment domains. The mean scale score represents the average Australian cohort score on the achievement scale. The mean scale score gap between the Year 3 cohorts in 2008 was 91.3 and by 2016 it had only improved marginally to 84.0. Similarly, with the Year 9 cohorts, the gap over that period reduced only by an equally poor 3.4 points. Figure 2.7 shows the Numeracy results achieved by both population cohorts at Years 3 and 9 over the nine-year period.

In Figure 2.7, the Year 3 Indigenous students' results proved to be little better than those for Reading, with less than a four-point increase over time in the average mean scale score. But an upward trend in achievement by Year 9 Indigenous students since 2013 has enabled the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to close by more than five points since 2008, although this is not statistically significant.

Figure 2.7: NAPLAN Numeracy achievement of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Years 3 and 10 students, Australia, 2008–16
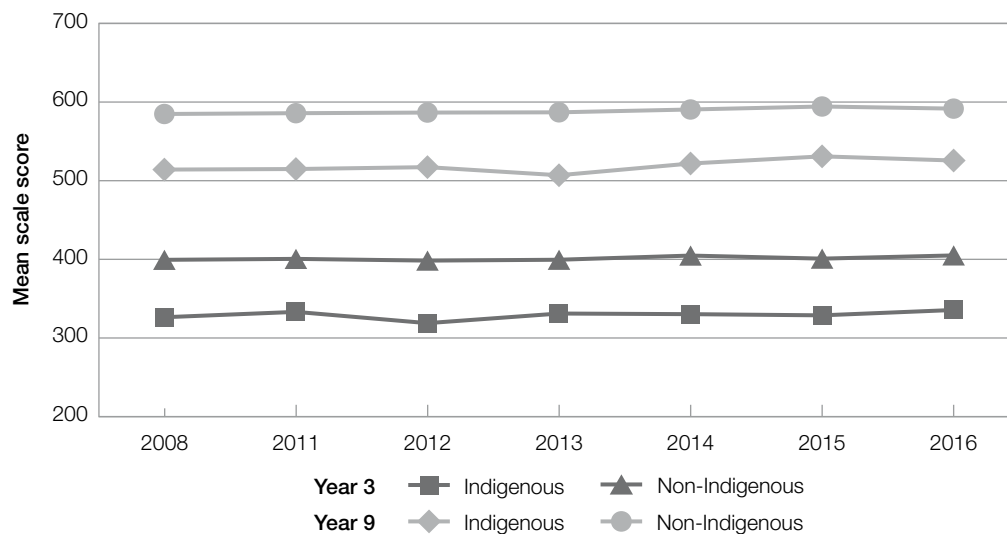
Figures 2.6 and 2.7 depict the stark and persistent difference in performance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in the key assessment domains of Reading and Numeracy. Readers should note, that in both Reading and Numeracy, average mean scores have remained fairly consistent for both cohorts, meaning that neither Indigenous nor non-Indigenous students have improved their achievement levels. This has implications for both policy evaluation and development. Why has there been so little improvement in both population cohorts? What differentiation in policy can be made to effect greater improvement for Indigenous students? Additionally, is there the need for a new assessment instrument that can more adequately measure the complexity and depth of Indigenous knowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children bring to school?

Reporting by National Minimum Standards

ACARA provides jurisdictional and geolocational student progression data annually in its *National Assessment Program Report*, where it is presented as students achieving *at and above* the point on the scale declared as the national minimum standard. The national minimum standard, agreed to by the Ministers of Education from all Australian jurisdictions and the Australian Government, is defined as follows:

> *… the agreed minimum acceptable standard of knowledge and skills without which a student will have difficulty making sufficient progress at school.*

(ACARA, 2014, p. v)

Thus, students who score *below* the point on the scale at which the national minimum standard is decided, in any of the NAPLAN domains, are defined as not achieving the expected learning outcomes for that year level and are defined by ACARA's National Minimum Standard as being at risk of not being able to progress in a satisfactory manner in their schooling without direct intervention. The 2014 ACARA NAPLAN Reading and Numeracy results demonstrate that between 20 per cent and 40 per cent of Indigenous students achieve *at or below* the national minimum standard and are thus *at risk*. There is some contestation around the most useful standard for assessing student capacity and thus for when and what kind of intervention is best for students at different levels. The case has significant policy implications (Woodroffe, Fry & Gillan, 2017).

Tables 2.1 and 2.2 provide a snapshot of the progression of the two tested Indigenous student cohorts' achievement, *at and below* the national minimum standard, in the Reading and Numeracy domains of NAPLAN, over seven years.

Table 2.1: Progression in NAPLAN Reading of the Years 3 & 9 Indigenous student cohorts, over the period 2009–15, by geolocation

Geolocation	At or below National Minimum Standard %			
	Year 3 – 2009	At NMS %	Year 9 – 2015	At NMS %
Metro	38.5	17.0	48.1	30.6
Provincial	41.3	19.8	54.6	32.7
Remote	67.6	24.4	71.1	31.3
Very remote	82.0	22.5	88.7	19.0

Table 2.2: Progression in NAPLAN Numeracy, of Year 3–9 Indigenous cohort of students, 2009–2015, by geolocation

Geolocation	At or below National Minimum Standard %			
	Year 3 – 2009	At NMS %	Year 9 – 2015	At NMS %
Metro	40.9	24.2	42.2	32.5
Provincial	43.1	26.1	47.3	36.1
Remote	68.6	31.6	62.6	41.5
Very remote	84.3	28.5	81.4	37.1

Note: not all jurisdictions have every geolocation within their boundaries.

(Author data file, 2016)

The authors of this review argue that the data in Tables 2.1 and 2.2 show that between approximately half and more than three-quarters of this cohort of Indigenous students will be unable to graduate from Year 12, and therefore will be unlikely to proceed to tertiary education or to find employment unless they receive intensive intervention and support to provide them with the skills they need to progress in their schooling. The data also show that the longer they stay in school, the poorer the Indigenous students' collective results in literacy become.

The longitudinal performance of the 2009 Year 3 Indigenous student cohort depicted in Tables 2.1 and 2.2 complement the data displayed in Figures 2.4 to 2.6, and taken together they paint a very bleak picture about the probability of closing the gap in literacy and numeracy achievement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in the short to medium term, especially for those Indigenous students residing in very remote communities.

Reporting high achievement

A further perspective on Indigenous achievement in NAPLAN literacy and numeracy assessments is displayed in Table 2.3. The NAPLAN assessment scale is divided into ten bands which are used to report student performance and progress through Years 3 to 9. Each band covers a range of scores and is not a specific point on a scale. Band 10 is the highest band. Table 2.3 shows the percentage of Year 9 Indigenous and non-Indigenous students achieving at the Band 10 level, 2013–15, based on the NAPLAN reports pertaining to those years.

The data in Table 2.3 confirm the achievement of Indigenous students, at Band 10 in both domains, is low relative to non-Indigenous students, across all geolocations. While Indigenous students can be in the top band, they are very rarely from remote or very remote locations. NAPLAN data do not indicate where the students are attending school, so no further analysis is possible into what factors are contributing to their achievement. Table 2.3 reveals the pattern of Indigenous achievement has flatlined over the three years, except for minor positive variations in the metropolitan cohort, and gives little indication that the gap in this band will close by 2018 as targeted.

Table 2.3: Percentage of Year 9 students achieving NAPLAN Band 10, in Reading and Numeracy, by geolocation

		2013		2014		2015	
		Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous
READING	Metro	4.8	0.6	6.0	0.8	7.3	0.9
	Provincial	2.6	0.3	2.8	0.5	3.6	0.4
	Remote	2.4	0.0	1.6	0.3	3.0	0.2
	Very remote	2.4	0.0	0.6	0.1	2.2	0.1
NUMERACY	Metro	11.8	1.5	9.7	1.2	11.1	1.2
	Provincial	5.6	0.6	4.1	0.5	4.5	0.5
	Remote	3.8	0.3	2.2	0.1	3.2	0.3
	Very remote	3.6	0.1	0.4	0.2	2.0	0.0

(Author data file, 2016)

Caveats remain around the appropriateness of generalising from the data in Figures 2.6 and 2.7 centering on participation rates, which showed strong variations across jurisdictions, even though the overall participation rates across Australia remained fairly consistent. Participation rates in NAPLAN assessment also vary considerably from one year to the next, and from one school to the next, especially in remote community schools, so interpretative care is urged.

National Sample Assessments

The NAP sample surveys, part of the NAP suite, assess student skills and understanding in science literacy, civics and citizenship, and information and communication technology (ICT) literacy. The NAP assessments focus on skills and understandings identified by educators as ones which people will need to operate effectively in the 21st century, so the concern is for the restricted future options of below-standard students.

Selectively sampled groups of Year 6 and Year 10 students from all Australian jurisdictions participate in the survey assessments, except in science literacy where only Year 6 students are assessed. The survey sample assessments are conducted on a cyclical three-yearly basis and student achievement is reported on a proficient standard. Students scoring at or above the Standard are considered to be at or above their school Year level in knowledge and understanding of the curriculum content.

NAP – Science Literacy

The first NAP Science Literacy sample survey assessment commenced in 2003, with successive assessments occurring in 2006, 2009 and 2012. The survey measures a student's ability to apply a broad range of conceptual understandings of science to make sense of the world and their understanding of natural phenomena. The achievement scores indicate a significant gap between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous cohorts. The difference between the mean scores for the two cohorts is statistically significant: 20.1 per cent of Indigenous students performed at or above the Proficient Standard, compared to 52.8 per cent for non-Indigenous students, with similar gaps recorded in 2006 and 2009.

NAP – Civics and Citizenship

The NAP Civics and Citizenship sample survey assessments have been held every three years since 2004. The survey measures students on their civic knowledge and understanding and the skills and values needed for active citizenship. Again, the performance by Indigenous students in the 2013 NAP–CC showed a statistically significant gap between Indigenous and

non-Indigenous students for both Year 6 and Year 10 students. Twenty-two per cent of Year 6 Indigenous students achieved at or above the Proficient Standard, compared to 51 per cent for non-Indigenous students. Among Year 10 students 17 per cent of Indigenous students performed at or above the Proficient Standard, compared to 45 per cent for non-Indigenous students. No comparisons are available against results from previous assessments, due to the large amount of data on student background that could not be collected from schools.

NAP – Information and Communication Technology Literacy

The NAP ICT Literacy sample survey assessments commenced in 2005. Students are assessed on their ability to access, manage, integrate and evaluate information. General, rather than technical ICT skills, are assessed. Data on Indigenous students was collected in the 2011 and 2014 sample surveys. Results show a significant difference in achievement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students across Australia in both Year 6 and Year 10 levels. In 2014 only 22 per cent of Year 6 Indigenous students attained the Proficiency Standard, compared to 57 per cent for their non-Indigenous peers, with the corresponding Year 10 figures being 20 per cent and 53 per cent. As with NAP–CC, the high levels of missing background information for the 2011 student cohort made further analysis difficult.

Issues with the NAP program for Indigenous students

Since the introduction of the NAP testing of students across Australia in 2008 there has been an ongoing critique by some of the assessments, in terms of them not adequately measuring the particular Indigenous knowledges that the students bring to school and apply to their learning.

Low Indigenous participation rates in NAPLAN

Nationally, there has been a steady decrease in participation rates in NAPLAN for all students since 2008. ACARA reported a 1.9 per cent average decrease since 2008 in its 2016 Summary Report. The 2016 NAPLAN average national participation rates, across all jurisdictions and geolocations, show that Indigenous rates decrease from 88.4 per cent in Year 3 to 74.5 in Year 9, compared to the relative stable national participation rates for non-Indigenous students from 95.4 per cent in Year 3 to 92.0 per cent in Year 9. In 2016, the Northern Territory had the lowest average participation rates for Indigenous students, dropping from 80.05 per cent in Year 3 to 62.30 per cent in Year 9 (ACARA, 2016).

The authors of this review paper believe there is a widespread misunderstanding about the purpose of NAPLAN and the use that can be made of its data. Additionally, efforts are made during the testing regime to reduce the alienation experienced by Indigenous students in testing. When schools are first approached to undertake NAPLAN, test administrators seek to meet with the Indigenous Education Worker; subsequently, arrangements can be made in the actual administration of the test for Indigenous students, such as reading the questions out to a test group. However, if students do not regularly attend school it is understandable they might wish to avoid illustrating the level of their learning. The national goal is for students to want to actively engage with the assessment measures in order to reveal their learning outcomes, but to date the goal is proving difficult to achieve.

The previously cited evidence by Hancock et al. (2013) into links between social disadvantage, student attendance and student learning outcomes identified that reasons for absences and poor achievement are likely to be complex, especially for Indigenous students. The researchers affirmed that any method to improve Indigenous students' learning outcomes will require multiple approaches, with shared responsibility between students, parents, schools and government agencies. This is the approach implicit in the NATSIEP policy and the *Coolangatta Statement* (1999). More rigorous research of the kind Hancock et al. conducted into rates of drop-off in school attendance at test times, for all cohorts, should be undertaken, and all factors need consideration.

Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), sponsored by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), is the second strand of national achievement data collection to be discussed in this review paper. PISA's aim is to collect and provide data for governments, in self-nominating nation states, and in some cases parts thereof, to better understand and monitor the achievement of their students, aged 15 years, and approaching the end of their compulsory schooling. PISA assesses students' acquired skills and knowledge on 'real-life' tasks that are considered relevant for their effective participation in continuing their studies, entering the workforce and for lifelong learning. The participating education systems' outcomes are measured and publicly reported on, using the students' performance on the PISA assessment instruments.

PISA is primarily used by Australian governments to compare Australia's students' performance in the domains of Reading, Mathematical, and Scientific Literacy to those of students in other participating countries and from different demographic groups. The assessment is also used for establishing benchmarks for improvement and determining the strengths and weaknesses in the national education system. Unlike the national assessments, PISA also uses an index of Economic, Social and Cultural Status to measure socio-economic background. Across all domains, the results show the higher the students' level of socio-economic background, the higher the level of performance. The difference in the performances of students in the lowest and highest socio-economic quartiles equates to about three years of schooling.

Indigenous participation in PISA

PISA data on students participating in this assessment show that Indigenous students' participation in PISA (i.e. completing the test and questionnaire) is lower than for non-Indigenous students. Also, participation in PISA for Indigenous students in remote schools is much lower than for Indigenous students in metropolitan schools.

Table 2.4: Student participation rates in PISA 2015, by location

Geolocation	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Metro	69%	84%
Provincial	67%	84%
Remote	37%	82%

(Author data file)

The results of PISA assessments, first conducted in 2000, indicate that Australia's Indigenous students performed across the three areas of literacy at a significantly lower level than the non-Indigenous students. These findings were confirmed in the 2015 PISA results, where Indigenous students across Australia, on average, scored significantly lower than non-Indigenous students and by a similar margin to those reported in previous PISA reports.

Table 2.5: 2015 PISA Performance, by Indigeneity & Non-Indigeneity

Assessment	Low Performing Students		High Performing Students	
	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Mathematical Literacy	49%	21%	3%	12%
Scientific Literacy	42%	17%	3%	12%
Reading Literacy	40%	17%	3%	11%

(Thomson, De Bortoli & Underwood, 2016, p. 54)

Table 2.5 compares the Indigenous and non-Indigenous cohorts from the 2015 assessment cycle in relation to low and high performance. High performing students are those performing at a

proficiency of Level 5 or above. Low performing students are those students performing below a proficiency of Level 2. Their proficiency is considered too low to enable them to participate effectively and productively in life (Thomson, De Bortoli & Underwood, 2016). Table 2.5 clearly shows Indigenous students are over-represented in the lower proficiency bands and under-represented in the high proficiency bands. The difference in performance between the two cohorts equated to more than one proficiency level, or two and a half years of schooling.

When examining the contextual factors for the lower Indigenous performance in the first three PISA reports from 2000 to 2006, ACER researchers De Bortoli and Thomson found three major influences impacting on achievement.

- *Home educational resources, engagement in reading and academic self-concept were found to significantly influence reading performance.*
- *Disciplinary climate, absence during primary school, elaboration strategies, socioeconomic status, self-efficacy in mathematics, self-concept in mathematics, gender and preschool attendance were found to significantly influence mathematics performance.*
- *Socioeconomic status, home educational resources, self-efficacy in science and general value of science were found to significantly influence science performance.*

(De Bortoli & Thomson, 2010, p. 87)

Efficacy of preschool attendance

Further, De Bortoli and Thomson (2010) had reported that Indigenous students who attended preschool for at least one or more years scored, on average, almost one proficiency level higher academically on their PISA assessments than those who did not attend preschool. In 2012 when the question was last asked, the 2010 results were replicated, with Indigenous students who did not attend preschool performing almost one proficiency level lower Indigenous students who attended preschool (author' data analysis file). This research-based insight is exactly the kind of finding that researchers hope will be derived from large-scale testing programs. This finding is of critical value to understanding the importance to Indigenous children attending preschool education.

Health and education researchers Harrison, Goldfeld, Metcalfe and Moore, in their 2012 resource sheet on early learning programs that promote quality outcomes for Indigenous children, produced for the *Closing the Gap* Clearinghouse, claimed that:

> … *Australian and international studies have shown that children's literacy and numeracy skills at age 4–5 are a good predictor of academic achievement in primary school.*

(Harrison, Goldfeld, Metcalfe & Moore, 2012, p. 1)

The importance of quality and culturally safe preschool education, with an emphasis on literacy and numeracy development for Indigenous students, is paramount in providing Indigenous students with the readiness skills for the formal learning program in the early years of their primary school education. Further discussion and analysis of some programs will be undertaken in Section 4.

The PIRLS and TIMSS studies

Australia's participation in two international studies, Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) is sponsored by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) and managed in Australia by ACER. The Australian component is funded by the Australian

Government and conducted by ACER. The TIMSS assessments are conducted on a four-year cycle that commenced in 1995, and the PIRLS, on a five-year cycle that commenced in 2001. These assessments provide comparative information about student performance across countries with the aim of informing education policy and improving teaching and learning in Mathematics and Science in Year 4 and Year 8 (TIMSS), and Reading in Year 4 (PIRLS). Over 6000 Year 4 and over 7500 Year 8 Australian students participated in the 2011 assessments. Students sampled and selected to participate in the assessments are representative of the student population across Australia.

Table 2.6 shows that in the PIRLS 2011 Reading, 48 per cent of the Year 4 Indigenous students did not meet the Intermediate benchmark; with 21 per cent below the Low benchmark. This is compared to 22 per cent of non-Indigenous students not meeting the Intermediate benchmark. As reading is probably the most important skill for students to develop in the early years of their education, these results are very concerning and complement the same gap in achievement displayed between the two cohorts in the NAPLAN results. Although no proficient standard has been set for the PIRLS assessment, the fact that nearly 50 per cent of Indigenous students are unable to reach the Intermediate benchmark is of real concern, given that Year 4 is the critical point in student's learning trajectory at which time they move from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn'. Table 2.6 combines data collected from PIRLS and TIMSS on three domains, by the international benchmarks levels.

Table 2.6: Year 4 PIRLS & TIMSS 2011 Performance, by Indigeneity and Non-Indigeneity, on three domains

International benchmark	Reading		Mathematics		Science	
	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Advanced	3%	11%	2%	10%	2%	8%
High	18%	33%	14%	26%	14%	29%
Intermediate	31%	34%	29%	36%	31%	37%
Low	27%	16%	27%	20%	27%	19%
below Low	21%	6%	28%	8%	26%	7%

(Author data file, 2015)

The Proficient Standard set for TIMSS in Mathematics and Science is attainment of performance at or above the Intermediate benchmark. In TIMSS 2011 Mathematics, 55 per cent of Indigenous students did not reach the Intermediate international benchmark, compared to 28 per cent for non-Indigenous students. Over a quarter of the Indigenous student cohort did not reach the Low benchmark. Similarly, in TIMSS Science, 53 per cent of Indigenous students did not achieve the Intermediate benchmark, including 27 per cent who did not reach the Low benchmark. In each domain, the percentage of non-Indigenous students not achieving the proficient standard was around half that of Indigenous students. The comparable 2015 data for Year 4 Mathematics are 61 and 28 per cent, and for Year 4 Science they are 53 and 23 per cent. These discrepancies, and the results in general, are of real concern for Indigenous students, especially in the Mathematics domain, where over a quarter of students are described as 'assessed as unable to apply basic mathematical knowledge in straightforward situations'. These data echo the NAPLAN results, highlighting the achievement gap between the two student cohorts, and the future limitations being attached to the lives of Indigenous students.

Australian Early Development Census

The last system-wide assessment to be reviewed here is the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) (2016), formerly known as the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI). It was developed by the Commonwealth Government as a national community level measure

of children's readiness for learning across five domains. It is conducted when children enter their first year of full-time schooling and its use is increasing.

Based on work by Canadian health experts Dan Offord and Magdalena Janus in the 1990s, the AEDI was created following a national pilot conducted in 60 communities by the Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2014). The quality of the data obtained in the national pilot led to the Australian Government committing to the ongoing national measurement of the health and wellbeing of Australian children, commencing in 2009. Teachers do online training and are responsible for completing the instrument online for each student in their class.

The assessment measure is not complex and assesses the following:

- Physical health and wellbeing

- Social competence

- Emotional maturity

- Language and cognitive skills

- Communication skills and general knowledge.

Across the five domains, three levels of assessment are applied – on track, developmentally at risk, and developmentally vulnerable. Information is collected every three years by the classroom teachers and analysed by researchers at the CCCH.

In reporting the 2009 data, COAG (2012) noted that over 50 per cent of Indigenous children were developmentally on track in each domain (that is, in the top 75 per cent of the AEDC population), compared to 74 per cent of non-Indigenous children. Indigenous children were more than twice as likely as non-Indigenous children to be developmentally vulnerable (defined as the lowest 10 per cent of the AEDC population) across the five domains measured, with the largest difference being in the language and cognitive skills domains.

The 2015 AEDC data reported by the Australian Government (2016) indicated that the proportion of Indigenous students developmentally on track had improved from 2009, when it was 53 per cent, to 58 per cent, a 5 per cent improvement over the six years. However, the data also show that a quarter of Indigenous students are vulnerable in any two or more domains, which is more than double the rate of the 10 per cent figure for non-Indigenous students. Additionally, the data indicate that 47 per cent of Indigenous children who resided in very remote communities were developmentally vulnerable, compared to 21 per cent of those residing in major cities; they are twice as likely as their urban peers to be developmentally vulnerable on entering school.

It should be noted that the AEDC is not without its critics as a measure of children's readiness for school and learning. The use of teachers as observers and recorders, the inevitable existence of contextual bias and the assessment's lack of consideration of cultural and linguistic factors is viewed as problematic by Joseph Agbenyega, an Australian academic and educational researcher specialising in cross-cultural knowing and early childhood teacher development and policy. He critiqued the instrument within a cultural-historical theoretical perspective of child development and questioned whether:

> *… teachers have all the cultural lenses through which to measure children? Whose cultural tools are being used for measurement?*

(Agbenyega, 2009, p. 34)

These questions are particularly apt in the remote community schools, where cultural integrity is paramount, many with graduate teachers often living in an Indigenous community for the first time, and not well-placed to evaluate their student's competence in areas unfamiliar to their own life experiences. This concern is supported by research that argues that teachers tend to teach knowledge and values that reflect their own class and cultural position (Corrie & Maloney, 1998).

Debate over suitability of assessment measures

Much concern has been expressed by many Indigenous communities that the national and international assessment regimes are culturally biased in favour of non-Indigenous students and therefore their students cannot succeed in adequately measuring the full literacy and numeracy capacity of Indigenous student knowledges and learning outcomes. The *Coolangatta Statement* condemns the assessments utilised to determine Indigenous learning outcomes:

> *When measured in non-Indigenous terms, the educational outcomes of Indigenous peoples are still far below that of non-Indigenous peoples. [B]ut … this failure is that of the system, not of Indigenous peoples. In this context the so-called 'dropout rates and failures' of Indigenous peoples within non-Indigenous educational systems must be viewed for what they really are – rejection rates.*

(*Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Education*, 1999, p. 231)

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (2012) in its report on language learning in Indigenous communities, raised several concerns regarding the administration of NAPLAN testing, and the cultural appropriateness of the assessments was also deemed problematic.

However, there is also strong support from some Indigenous communities and commentators regarding the usefulness, and cultural appropriateness even, of such assessment measures. Marcia Langton, Professor of Australian Indigenous Studies at University of Melbourne and a proud Indigenous woman with a high profile and a strong voice, is equally adamant that Indigenous students need to be taught and assessed in the same way as non-Indigenous students. She is very critical of efforts to make the curriculum and teaching methods culturally sensitive for Indigenous students, commenting on the need for remote Indigenous children to attend boarding schools:

> *The banner of culturally appropriate education covers a multitude of sins. And so for instance excuses are made for failure to attend schools, excuses are made for not including Indigenous students in the normal curriculum. And it's really an insult to our culture to say that second best is what people from our culture deserve.*

(Langton, 2013, Foreword)

Demonstrably there is no unity on this matter within the Indigenous population.

The argument being put here – albeit by implication – revolves around how the Western education system privileges Western knowledges and practices. Indigenous researchers in the postcolonial tradition, such as Martin Nakata (2004) and Linda Tuhiwai-Smith (2012), argue that the Western education system privileges the knowledges and practices of the Western middle class and, in doing so, can result in the marginalising of Indigenous knowledges and practices. This argument extends to the field of assessment the case for the importance of cultural relevance in teaching that was made in Section 1 of this review paper.

Mathematics pedagogy researcher Thelma Perso, who has had extensive experience working with Indigenous students in remote locations over many years, advocates a more bicultural approach to Indigenous education. She comments that:

> *Standardized testing is often used at system, organization or national level in order to facilitate efficiency and minimize costs in gaining wide-spread information about student achievement. However, this type of assessment can privilege select groups of students whilst marginalizing or segregating others. This is largely due to the fact that these tests require literacy in the dominant language and consequently are culturally and linguistically biased in spite of the best efforts of writers to ensure otherwise.*

(Perso, 2012, p. 60)

Perso explicitly refers to language inhibitors – which is of special pertinence to those who live in remote locations for whom English may be a second or third language (Wigglesworth, Simpson & Loakes, 2011). Extending Perso's comments, it is argued by whiteness theorists (Hage, 1998; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005; Ravenscroft, 2012) that the National Assessment Program can be considered a measure of normalised whiteness. The argument is that educational testing privileges Western knowledges and educational practices, and in doing so, marginalises Indigenous children who are not familiar with the Western educational system. Again the authors would remind readers that this is also the case for many non-Indigenous students. Research suggests that early childhood institutions and schools do place expectations on Indigenous students that derive from Western norms, norms that Indigenous students may not be familiar with in their home environments (Nakata, 2004; Kitson & Bowes, 2010; Taylor, 2011; Rahman, 2013; Reid-Loynes, 2017).

Thelma Perso and Noongar Academic Professor Colleen Hayward (Perso & Hayward, 2015) stress the need for teachers to be cultural responsive in their learning programs. They point to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (ACARA, 2011), specifically Standard 3, which focuses on implementing effective teaching and learning, and claim that cultural responses are clearly integrated into the Standard for all teachers to use in their pedagogical approaches, with students of all diversities.

This review would warn about dealing with the matter in dichotomous terms. In a literature review concerning cultural awareness with Indigenous Australian students, Krakouer (2015) found that cultural awareness is often spoken of in terms of a continuum, with cultural unawareness residing at one end of the continuum, and cultural proficiency residing at the other. Certainly, it is essential to ensure that Indigenous children are able to learn in a Western educational system; however, it is equally important to ensure that their cultural needs and strengths are not ignored.

One innovative research-based initiative, designed to addresses all these Indigenous readiness issues and objectives, as part of the wider School Readiness Initiative, is the production and delivery to public TV screens of the animated series, *Little J and Big Cuz*. The program was designed, developed and created by a team of Indigenous educators and voiced by well-known Indigenous actors and was released shortly before this publication. In the 13 episodes of the first series, Indigenous lead characters explore their world and discover more about the culture and what else school has to offer, in an integrated way. Developed by ACER with other major stakeholders, the launch of the *Little J and Big Cuz* website coincided with the launch of a raft of downloadable supporting resources developed for families, and educational resources for teachers, developed by ACER curriculum experts, in consultation with Indigenous education consultants. They have been mapped to both the Early Years Learning Framework and the Australian Curriculum (Foundation to Year 2). These are to assist

> *… teachers and schools to be confident delivering Aboriginal perspectives within the classroom and also asking educators to look at Aboriginal pedagogies and how they can use that within the classroom … The strongest part of …* Little J and Big Cuz *[is that] we're actually saying there is knowledge within country; that country holds its own curriculum.*

(Reid-Loynes, 2017)

Additionally, an evaluation into the consultation processes undertaken as part of its development, and their efficacy is planned.

One central goal of education should be to teach Indigenous students to 'code-switch' or 'walk in both worlds', whereby they are able to utilise their cultural strengths when necessary, and yet not also feel overwhelmed by the values perpetuated by the mainstream education system (Kitson & Bowes, 2010; Rahman, 2013). Many of the quarter of Australians not born here also need to learn this skill. The degree of code-switching and the value placed upon it by them and their communities varies, but the process is the same. For this to be achieved,

both skilled pedagogy and culturally relevant curricula are required and this perspective will be examined in Section 4.

Government policies in Indigenous educational programs use these assessment data to guide policy and funding, with the intention of ensuring students achieve at or above the minimum standards. So the reality is that the achievement testing conducted and the data collected by governments will continue to rely on such testing programs, along with other data. This section has suggested there needs to be broader-based, research-based analyses of policies and their outcomes. This research should include a re-examination of both curriculum and pedagogy, so that ultimately the assessment testing can be said to derive from and reflect such.

Pedagogical activities that prove difficult to measure or do not directly contribute to the tested are always at risk of being eliminated from the school curriculum. This is a frustration for all teachers, but it is also a cultural danger for Indigenous and other cultural minority children. The knowledges and languages that Indigenous children bring to school that are representative of their cultural upbringing are commonly omitted from testing regimes. This compounds Indigenous people's response to the assessment system and the curriculum it is said to be based on. Of course, there is no need for all assessment regimes to be of this nature, as Masters (2013) argued in his AER 57, *Reforming Educational Assessment.*

Concluding comments

Evidence from the National Assessment Program and related national assessments suggest that current schooling practices are not managing to successfully address the major issues facing Indigenous students in their learning. Each of the national and international assessments discussed in this section indicate that Indigenous student performance in literacy and numeracy achievement throughout the compulsory years of schooling remains significantly lower than that achieved by non-Indigenous students. NAPLAN achievement levels in literacy and numeracy for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students have flatlined since the assessments were introduced in 2008, with difference in achievement between each group remaining virtually static. Of greatest concern are the data showing that, as Aboriginal students progress through Years 3 to 9, the percentage of them achieving at and below the national minimum standard increases significantly, across all geolocations in nearly all jurisdictions. The data presented in this review paper indicates that the further away Indigenous students reside from major metropolitan locations, the poorer their literacy and numeracy outcomes are likely to be. As discussed earlier, it may well be that social disadvantage and poor attendance are the prime factors exerting an extremely strong impact on student performance, especially in remote locations. More rigorous research focused on these factors needs to be undertaken.

However, there have been some positive signs for Indigenous student achievement with progress in the number of students participating in higher education and training; positive gains in Year 12 attainment or equivalent qualifications; improvements in school readiness measures of the Australian Early Development Census; and steady if minute progress in the number of students achieving at Band 10 NAPLAN Reading and Numeracy in metropolitan geolocations across Australia.

Isolating curriculum, pedagogy and assessment from each other and from student contexts is not efficacious. All elements need to be interlinked to provide a coherent learning experience. Policymakers do not appear to have fully appreciated this essential connectivity. Section 2 of the review paper has provided some argument and research evidence that Indigenous children need some variations to the norm in order to excel. Further research into the inhibitors impacting on Indigenous school attendance and learning are urgently required.

Section 3 will examine the development of the national policy context over the past 25 years, and traces the trajectory of how government policy, influenced by the market-state, has shaped a measurement and accountability agenda for the education of Indigenous students, while neglecting the importance of the collective Indigenous voice in policy decisions at the national, local and school levels.

3

Indigenous education policy trajectories

The trajectory of policy development in Indigenous education over the past 25 years has moved from being grounded in social justice to a stronger orientation towards productivity (Ladwig & Luke, 2014). Over this time, there has been a proliferation of policies, reports and research proclaiming the importance of education in improving life outcomes for Indigenous Australians. Education has been viewed as one aspect of the solution to addressing poverty (Smyth & Wrigley, 2013).

Although the goals of Indigenous education policy have become more explicit over time, Indigenous children and young adults continue to be the lowest achieving students educationally in Australia, as Section 2 of this review demonstrated. Despite the paucity of improved outcomes, a persistent characteristic of Indigenous education policy development over the years has been the lack of Indigenous voice in its construction. This has come about primarily from the belief among decision-makers that bureaucrats, policymakers and politicians know best how to improve Indigenous educational outcomes. This belief has been further compounded by a process of governments listening to selective Indigenous voices that may not be representative of the Indigenous majority. Furthermore, the formation of policies in Indigenous affairs have often been driven from an ideological, rather than an evidence base. That the complexity of Indigenous education policy development plays out in a context of competing and often contradictory values is a challenge for any government, and precedence needs to be given to rigorous evidence over ideology, in order to ensure that policies are more effective. The authors of this review paper urge policymakers and readers to consider the importance of Indigenous voice as a first step towards building a sound evidence base for policy formation, in addition to quality research findings and teacher practice experience.

Section 3 of this review paper will identify and analyse a selection of key policies and strategies which the authors believe have shaped the Indigenous education policy landscape in Australia over the past 25 years. Our chief argument is that competing values between Indigenous communities, government and the market economy have each impacted significantly on the trajectory of Indigenous education policy. Indigenous education policy development has also been constrained by the reluctance of government to learn from past policy errors and weaknesses.

Conceptualisations of Indigenous education policy: 1989–96

Following the 1967 Referendum, Indigenous Australians slowly began to receive rights and access to entitlements in line with other Australians (Price, 2012). For example, under the leadership of Labor Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, Australia saw the introduction of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*, which ensured a commitment to achieving equality for all people, regardless of race (Soutphommasane, 2015). Policy approaches to Indigenous affairs were eventually premised on notions of *self-determination* (Partington, 1998).

> *In 1972 the Labor Party swept to power in federal government and brought with it a desire to implement major changes in Indigenous affairs. Under Labor, the government assumed authority for Indigenous affairs and considerably increased expenditure in that area. Assimilation and its euphemistic successor, integration, were replaced by a policy of self-determination that came to involve Indigenous people in matters which affected them. Education received immediate attention because it was seen as essential for the success of the new policy.*

(Partington, 1998, p. 48)

It was under this ideological framework – whereby notions of inclusion, voice, participation and self-determination were prioritised – that Australia's first national approach to Indigenous education was created.

A national approach to Indigenous education

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP) was implemented during the era of the Hawke Government (Commonwealth of Australia, 1989), at a time when self-determination for Indigenous peoples was being considered paramount across the world. Policies of self-determination had been popularised in the international human rights discourse through their inclusion in the United Nations' International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which stated that:

> *All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.*

(Office of the High Commissioner United Nations Human Rights, 1966)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination includes the right, as a people, to have a say in economic, social and cultural matters that impact on their lives. Consequently, Indigenous participation in policy decision-making is synonymous with Indigenous self-determination. Significantly, the importance of listening to Indigenous voices in national policy development was explicitly framed throughout the NATSIEP as an urgent priority in responding to and addressing Aboriginal needs and aspirations:

> *The fundamental purpose of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy is to develop appropriate ways of responding effectively and sensitively to the educational needs and aspirations of Aboriginal people. This requires an holistic approach, under the guidance of Aboriginal people, to achieve educational equity while accommodating cultural difference and recognising socio-economic disadvantage.*

(Commonwealth of Australia, NATSIEP, 1989, p. 9)

Critical to the NATSIEP argument is the requirement for Indigenous participation in the development, monitoring, evaluation and reporting on the success of national and local policy strategies designed to address Indigenous education disadvantage. A number of important Indigenous education programs were introduced by the Commonwealth Government as a result of the NATSIEP priorities. The Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS) established in 2004, renamed the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS) in 2005, provided supplementary tutorial assistance to Indigenous students to improve their literacy and numeracy skills in school, and in vocational and tertiary education. Eligible students received between two and six hours' assistance each week, although this varied according to the way that the funding was managed in the institutions. Funding for the highly valued ITAS program ceased for schools in 2014. The funding for vocational and tertiary students ceased at the end of 2015.

The Vocational and Educational Guidance for Aboriginals Scheme (VEGAS), funded by the Commonwealth Government, provided financial assistance to sponsoring organisations committed to encouraging young Indigenous Australians to obtain a full education. The program encouraged goal setting, learning good study habits and routines, and development of pathways to further education and employment. Funding for this scheme ended in 2004.

The Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness program (ASSPA), also funded by the Commonwealth Government, was introduced to provide parents with a greater say in their children's education, increasing the likelihood of better attendance and engagement of students and leading to improved student achievement. Indigenous parent committees were created in schools to encourage parents to participate in decisions affecting their children's schooling. The ASSPA committees received per capita funding from the Commonwealth Government to organise a number of activities including homework classes, parent meetings, and parent and teacher meetings. The ASSPA program ended in 2004 and was replaced by the Parent School Partnership Initiative (PSPI), which placed the emphasis on schools and the Indigenous community to apply for funding through a competitive, lengthy and time-consuming process. The Commonwealth Government allocated $62.5 million to the program between 2005 and 2008. The program ended in 2009, effectively leaving schools to determine how they organised parent participation in their operations.

The NATSIEP policy stands alone as a visionary but achievable set of goals and priorities to improve educational achievement for Indigenous students. Regrettably, the core principles of this landmark policy, particularly Indigenous consultation and participation in policy development, have been diminished over the years by successive national policy and interest groups with little or no background in Indigenous education.

Reviewing the national approach to Indigenous education

The 1993 review of Indigenous education policy was commissioned by the Australian Government under the new Keating Labor government. The committee, chaired by North East Arnhem Land musician and educator Dr Yunupingu, published its final report, the *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* two years later (1995a). Other Indigenous members of the reference group appointed by Minister for Employment, Education and Training, Kim Beazley, included: Hilda Kickett, a community representative; Colleen Hayward, member of the Australian Education Union; Gerry Moore, a member of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC); and Lionel Bamblett, a member of the Federation of Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1995).

The review was announced by the Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Robert Tickner, in January 1993, with the following terms of reference:

> Against the goals of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP), examine the effectiveness of the strategies developed through the first triennium of the Policy, the outcomes achieved and the extent of unmet need; and develop subsequent strategies in terms of
>
> - ensuring Aboriginal involvement in educational decision making
> - providing equality of access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to education services
> - raising the rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in education to those for all Australians
> - achieving equitable and appropriate educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people while acknowledging traditional and contemporary cultural differences, including gender issues
> - ensuring appropriate reporting, monitoring and evaluation procedures for the use of funds provided in support of the AEP
> - examining allocations, distribution and management of resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and compatibility of these resource allocations with needs.

(Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1995a, p. 1)

In essence, these terms of reference meant that the review committee was charged with critically examining the current effectiveness and achievement of the 21 goals of the NATSIEP a mere six years after its inception. It appears no consideration of the funding allocated to NATSIEP was to be undertaken by the review committee. A variety of evidence sources were accessed in order to address these terms of reference. The data obtained for the review included public submissions from individuals and organisations, and meetings with:

> *… hundreds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia.*

(Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1995a, p. 6)

Differing perspectives on appropriate participation for self-determination

The review found that two differing perspectives had formed in relation to what constituted appropriate forms of decision-making (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1995a). The report noted that Indigenous views tended to centre on self-determination, control, and being accountable to the local community for student achievement. Non-Indigenous views tended to focus on Indigenous community members having advisory or consultative roles, with lines of accountability being the domain of bureaucrats and government. This difference was neatly presented in one respondent's submission to the review:

> *The Aboriginal definition of self-determination is synonymous with control, while the bureaucratic definition is synonymous with involvement.*

(Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1995a, p. 34)

The difference in the relative roles in decision-making is actually about the level of control being wielded by the parties involved in any decision-making process. Self-determination is insufficiently met if participating parties are simply consulted. The review committee made 44 recommendations in total, many of which refined the 21 goals of the NATSIEP policy. The overwhelming emphasis throughout the report was on ensuring that Indigenous voices would be able to influence policy development and educational practice (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1995b).

> *A stronger interpretation of self-determination involves strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander decision making. In practice this means more direct control over a higher proportion of funding and at a lower administrative level than has occurred in the past. Further educational reforms need to begin and be controlled more at the community level than has been the practice in the past. We believe that reform is more likely to be effective from the bottom up rather than the top down, although grassroots reforms will continue to need higher levels of infrastructure support.*

<div align="right">(Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1995b, p. 32)</div>

Consequently, the review committee's prime recommendation was that all Australian governments should explicitly and strongly reaffirm their commitment to the core of the NATSIEP policy, namely through ensuring active participation in decision-making by Indigenous people at a number of tiers, including Commonwealth, state and local levels.

Reaffirming the commitment to Indigenous self-determination

The Keating Labor government, which took office in 1991, like the Hawke Government, espoused a commitment to achieving social justice through self-determination for Indigenous Australians. Its first policy approach was to announce *A National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (1996–2002)*, incorporating the findings and recommendations of the 1995 *National Review* report. The government also set up a task force, chaired by Paul Hughes, to examine the detail of the 21 NATSIEP goals, and the 44 National Review recommendations.

In its recommendations to the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), the *National Strategy* essentially restructured the NATSIEP and combined elements of the 1995 *National Review*. Eight priorities for action, known as the *Collaborative Action Plan*, were detailed in the 1995 *National Review* and recommended for adoption. The task force acknowledged that each state and territory had the right to determine their own actions in relation to the priorities through negotiation with their Indigenous communities.

The *National Strategy* priorities were as follows:

1. To establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in educational decision-making

2. To increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples employed in education and training

3. To ensure equitable access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to education and training services

4. To ensure participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in education and training

5. To ensure equitable and appropriate educational achievement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

6. To promote, maintain and support the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies, cultures and languages to all Indigenous and non-Indigenous students

7. To provide community development training services including proficiency in English literacy and numeracy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults

8. To improve NATSIEP implementation, evaluation and resourcing arrangements.

<div align="right">(Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1995b, p. 1)</div>

Significantly, priority one in the *Collaborative Action Plan* explicitly outlined the urgency of engaging Indigenous Australians in educational decision-making processes across Commonwealth, state, territory and local levels. The other aims of the *National Strategy* focused on increasing Indigenous participation in decision-making processes; with a view to ensuring

equality of access to and participation in education for Indigenous people and encouraging the development of culturally appropriate educational services for Indigenous Australians (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1995b). The *National Strategy* recognised that lack of specificity in previous advice as to how the goals might be achieved had been a weakness. Therefore, its recommendations were directed towards providing support to specific programs, and monitoring and reporting on them.

One signal National Strategy Taskforce policy idea was its recommendation to form an autonomous Indigenous education and training advisory body as the principal advisor to the Commonwealth Government (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1995b). Despite its merit, the policy idea was not implemented. Another meritorious *National Strategy* policy was the specification of measurable actions and outcomes to remedy Indigenous educational disadvantage, rather than simply setting a vision for the future. This contributed to Indigenous education policy becoming clearer, with subsequent policies detailing specific areas of Indigenous education that require improvement, such as literacy, numeracy and attendance.

Despite these implementation proposals, and its advice regarding how the priorities could be exercised, the *National Strategy* would have seen more success if the *Collaborative Action Plan* it set forth had been actioned by successive governments (Department Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 1995b). Once again it seems good policy intentions were, unsurprisingly, insufficient to produce real outcome change.

Changing approaches to Indigenous education policy: 1997–2007

With the election of a new coalition government, the decade from 1997–2007 saw a major shift away from the self-determination policies of the Whitlam, Hawke and Keating Labor governments (Sanders, 2006). The aims that the National Strategy set in Priority 1 concerning Indigenous involvement in educational decision-making and Indigenous self-determination, were not upheld by the Howard conservative Liberal/National coalition government, even though the *National Strategy* was technically still in effect.

Focus on 'success' and 'what works'

Prime Minister Howard had a history of advocating integrationist public policies, predicated on his belief that Indigenous disadvantage could be remedied through developing Indigenous capital to participate in the mainstream educational system (Sanders, 2006; Widdowson & Howard, 2013). Underpinning this policy approach were beliefs that Howard espoused in his opening address to the Australian Reconciliation Convention in Melbourne on 26 May 1997.

> *In facing the realities of the past … we must not join those who would portray Australia's history since 1788 as little more than a disgraceful record of imperialism … such an approach will be repudiated by the overwhelming majority of Australians who are proud of what this country has achieved although inevitably acknowledging the blemishes in its past history.*

(Howard, 26 May 1997)

With this slighting reference to 'blemishes', as he continued this address, Howard – and by implication his Indigenous policies – were publicly rejected by the Convention members, as Indigenous and other members stood and turned their backs on him (Cerexhe, 1997). The collision course was set. In December 1997, the Commonwealth Government allocated over $12 million to a new educational program, the *Strategic Results Projects* (SRPs), that aimed to ascertain the successes in Indigenous education (Price, 2012). Conducted through the *Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme* (IESIP), the SRPs were defined as 'capital'

and 'non-capital' projects (McRae, Ainsworth, Cumming, Hughes, Mackay, Price, Rowland, Warhurst, Woods & Zbar, 2000).

The capital projects of the initiative included funding to update educational infrastructure, while the non-capital projects included funding for research, teacher training and other educational projects (Price, 2012). Some projects were responses to recommendations in the 1995 *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, in particular, the recommendation on improving Indigenous literacy and numeracy outcomes (MCEETYA, 1997). Four examples of the non-capital research projects analysed were:

- an exploration of the reasons why some Indigenous parents in three rural locations sent their children to preschool and some did not
- an examination of scaffolding Standard Australian English reading and writing at school in a remote community in South Australia
- the production of a set of illustrated, culturally relevant books in the local Indigenous language (Walmajarri) in order for students to improve literacy skills while maintaining traditional language
- the use of computerised technology to improve literacy skills for Indigenous students in an urban primary school.

The non-capital SRPs were to be practical initiatives that could effectively demonstrate, via a strong research evidence base, how Indigenous learning outcomes could be improved. Successful tenders in a government bidding process, included several non-capital SRPs selected on the basis of the claim they could improve Indigenous learning outcomes in a one-year period. The non-capital aspects of the SRPs initiative were evaluated three years after the initial implementation (McRae et al., 2000). The preliminary findings of the evaluation reported initial successes of the SRPs non-capital projects, hailing their originality and focus on ascertaining what works:

> *The SRPs have no direct precedent … [they] have provided an opportunity for trialling a number of promising new practices and a foundation and impetus for much other work which will be of continuing value. For these reasons, if no others, they should be seen as a major contribution to revitalising efforts to produce success in formal education and training for Indigenous peoples.*

(McRae et al., 2000, p. 1)

But Mellor and Corrigan reported that:

> *The SRPs were structured along similar lines to the IESIP to the extent that the strategic direction offered by the government was limited, enabling those running each project to provide baseline data and then establish their own targets for improvement. McRae et al. (2000) reported that 60 SRPs provided largely self-assessed results, which showed 41 achieved their targets and 11 achieved at least one of their targets. It should be recognised that the project ranged in the level of their ambitiousness and, while the targets were meant to reflect the achievement levels of non-Indigenous students, there is little information on whether those who set the most difficult targets actually achieved them.*

(Mellor & Corrigan, 2004, p. 6)

Evidently the success of the non-capital SRPs is ambiguous at best, given that providers self-assessed the extent of their success via internally set targets. Regardless of the reported 'success' of the SRPs, the legacy of the non-capital aspect of the SRPs initiative remains to this day (Price, 2012), embedded in the Australian Government *What Works* program, supported through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). According to the current Turnbull conservative government, *What Works* has resulted in an increase in strengths-based research which is focused on positive, practical or successful

strategies that can be used to improve Indigenous educational outcomes (Hunt, 2016). The authors of this review could find no evidential support for this stance.

Inquiring into the effectiveness of Indigenous education programs – *Katu Kalpa*

In 1999, two years after the introduction of the SRPs initiative, the Howard Government commissioned a Senate inquiry into the state of Indigenous education programs. The senators' *Report on the Inquiry into the Effectiveness of Education and Training Programs for Indigenous Australians*, also known as the *Katu Kalpa* report (meaning 'reaching higher and further with your whole body and spirit'), was presented in March 2000 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2000).

The Senate reference committee surveyed the various recommendations from past government, parliamentary and agency reports on Indigenous education and training over the past 10 years with the following aims: to assess the ongoing relevance and efficacy of the recommendations; to examine the extent to which Indigenous participation and achievement had improved and the benefits that had emerged from them; to examine recent initiatives that had proven successful; and to provide a comparative account of Commonwealth and state resources directed at Indigenous education and training. In addition to the evaluation of past policies, data was also sourced from public submissions submitted by individuals, organisations and community interest groups.

Recommendation 1 of the *Katu Kalpa* report urged a renewed focus on improving Indigenous literacy and numeracy skills to the level of non-Indigenous Australians. It presaged the implementation, almost immediately after the report's release, of the Commonwealth's 2001 *National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* (NIELNS), which was subsequently evaluated (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2003a). The NIELNS strategy had been supported by the Commonwealth with funding in excess of $27 million over a four-year period from 2000–4, but its effectiveness in raising Indigenous literacy and numeracy skills, as reported in 2003a and outlined in Section 2 of this review paper, appears to have been minimal.

The second major *Katu Kalpa* report recommendation that was influential in Indigenous education policy, was in its recognition of the importance of early childhood education for Indigenous children. While early childhood education had been mentioned previously in the *National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (1996–2002)* (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1995b), the *Katu Kalpa* report identified the issue of access to preschools in remote communities. It provided explicit advice to the Commonwealth Government that the best way to improve Indigenous participation in preschools was to build more preschools in order to provide better access to preschools in the first instance, especially in remote areas (Commonwealth of Australia, 2000). This recommendation was only supported, in principle, by the Commonwealth, which referred it to the next level of government, claiming that the issue of access to preschools remained the responsibility of individual state and territory governments. It was not until 2009 – with the introduction of the *National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education* – that the Commonwealth assumed responsibility for improved access to preschools in remote Indigenous communities (Harrington, 2014).

Of the 34 recommendations in the *Katu Kalpa* report only two directly related to Indigenous engagement in decision-making. The recommended policy framework was the first since the NATSIEP policy to detail specific actions on community engagement in relation to developing genuine partnerships based on the principles of cross-cultural respect between the school and its Indigenous community. The first recommendation advised the appointment of an independent national consultative body to advise MCEETYA on Indigenous needs and policy – a recommendation already existing as part of the *National Strategy* (1996–2002). The *Katu Kalpa* report recommended that this body would include representatives of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission as well as representatives from state and territory based Indigenous education consultative bodies.

The second recommendation relating to Indigenous engagement in decision-making was the phasing in, by 2010, of agreements between schools with significant Indigenous cohorts

and their local Indigenous community. The goal was that agreements include broad community engagement in the selection of the principal and teaching staff, and community input into all school planning and decision-making processes. Significantly, the framework recommended the provision, in liaison with Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies (IECBs), of appropriately structured leadership training for community members to enhance their capacity to undertake educational leadership roles in their communities. Although these recommendations were laudable, there was little detail provided on how this would happen and who would be responsible for implementation and there is little evidence of them being implemented.

Integration as a policy framework

In Section 1 of this review paper, integration was introduced as the ideological stance underpinning the 19th- and 20th-century assimilation policies. Integrationist perspectives commonly cast Indigenous culture as a threat to educational success, and therefore argue for the minimisation of cultural influences if Indigenous children are to achieve at the same educational levels as non-Indigenous children.

Contrary findings from the Canadian context on the costs of the integrationist perspective expand on the notion that, while it can be effective in ameliorating educational disadvantage, it runs the risk of viewing Indigenous culture from a deficit perspective, meaning that culture can be:

> … *perceived in terms of the extent to which [it] aids or impedes individual integration into the wider society.*

(Widdowson & Howard, 2013, p. xix)

But again, in the 21st century, the Howard Government adopted an integrationist stance – averring that Indigenous disadvantage could be addressed by furthering inclusion of Indigenous Australians in the mainstream community. Reflecting on Indigenous affairs under the Howard years, William Sanders, researcher at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at the Australian National University, argued and concluded that the Howard Liberal government did not support the policy of self-determination for Indigenous Australians:

> *This right for Indigenous peoples to be recognised as enduring political entities is something which Howard, individually, and the Howard government more generally, has always had trouble accepting.*

(Sanders, 2006, p. 5)

Nonetheless, the *Katu Kalpa* report provided some signal recommendations as discussed, plus it recommended the introduction of a national attendance strategy, improving access to preschools for remote communities, and improving the literacy and numeracy skills of Indigenous students to the level attained by non-Indigenous students (Commonwealth of Australia, 2000). In essence, the committee recommended upskilling Indigenous Australians to the point where they would be able to successfully navigate the mainstream educational system. It remains recognised as a key moment in Indigenous education.

Abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC)

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was established in 1989 during by the Hawke Labor government, when self-determination and the participatory voice of Indigenous Australia was considered to be of paramount importance in Indigenous affairs, to represent the voices of Indigenous Australians. Indigenous law professor, Larissa Behrendt, wrote:

> *ATSIC was tasked to maximise the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the formulation and implementation of programmes and to provide an effective voice within government.*

<div align="right">(Behrendt, 2005, p. 1)</div>

In 2004, ATSIC was abolished by the Howard Liberal government, allegedly due to the corrupt practices of Chair Geoff Clark and his deputy Ray Robinson (Sanders, 2004). Prime Minister Howard, as an advocate for mainstreaming welfare services, did not support separate services for different cultural groups, claiming they created social division. He had been a constant critic of ATSIC, since its establishment.

> *I also say to the Government and to the Minister that they will never improve the lot of Aborigines in 1989 and beyond by empty symbolic gestures such as treaties. I take the opportunity of saying again that if the Government wants to divide Australian against Australian, if it wants to create a black nation within the Australian nation, it should go ahead with its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) legislation and its treaty. In the process it will be doing a monumental disservice to the Australian community.*

<div align="right">(Howard, 11 April 1989)</div>

Yet, the fact remains that ATSIC was the peak body that did, and was seen to, provide a voice for Indigenous Australians. Sanders (2004) defended the role of ATSIC, claiming that during its 14-year history the Commission had provided a national Indigenous voice, which had extended governance powers over some of the Indigenous-specific Commonwealth programs such as the Community Development Employment projects and the Community Housing and Infrastructure Program, which had been increasingly independent of government. The abolition of ATSIC signified the lack of importance the government gave to Indigenous people participating in policy and program decisions that impacted on their lives. This was a dramatic step away, symbolically and in real terms, from the policies of self-determination, that had driven Indigenous affairs policy-making in previous decades. Anthropologist and political sciences academic, Barry Morris's analysis was that:

> *The proposed abolition of ATSIC, in effect, conforms to the logic of these changes. We are dealing with a major shift from the Keynesian-styled welfare state to market-driven neo-liberal forms of governance.*

<div align="right">(Morris, 2004, p. 324)</div>

The abolition of ATSIC was referred to by Indigenous people as a backward step, even a return to the assimilationist policies of the 1940s (Morris, 2004). To this day, ATSIC has not been replaced by an alternative Indigenous peak body.

Seeking precision on educational outcomes for Indigenous students

In May 2005, MCEETYA commissioned a working party, comprising senior educators and bureaucrats from each jurisdiction, to develop recommendations to focus national effort on improving outcomes for Indigenous students (MCEETYA, 2006). Indigenous academics and community members who were part of the 2005 working committee included Mark Rose, John Lester, Kaye Price, Robert Somerville and Carol Garlett (MCEETYA, 2006).

The resulting *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education Strategy* sought to address the findings contained within the *National Report* (2003b), aligning its 12 recommendations with five educational domains, with specific recommendations for each.

- ***Early childhood education***
  Ministers agree to the principle that universal access to high quality early childhood education services for Indigenous children aged 0–5 is an essential precondition of 'school readiness' and successful participation in primary school education and recognise that enactment will require a national collaborative approach with cross-portfolio responses at the national, state and territory level.

- ***School and community educational partnerships***
  Ministers agree that formalised partnerships between schools and communities provide the opportunity to maximise the attendance, engagement and achievement of Indigenous students.

- ***School leadership***
  Ministers affirm that strong, proactive and informed leadership at the school level is fundamental to establishing and maintaining a culture of learning that is inclusive of Indigenous students and enables their engagement and successful participation.

- ***Quality teaching***
  Ministers agree that quality teaching in primary and secondary schools is essential to improving outcomes for Indigenous students while fostering in them a strong sense of identity as successful learners and as Indigenous Australians.

- ***Pathways to training, employment and higher education***
  Ministers agree that supplementary measures supporting Indigenous students through pathways into training, employment and higher education are pivotal to improving post-school transitions and breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty and disadvantage.

(MCEETYA, 2006, pp. 5–9)

The early childhood education recommendations included in the *Australian Directions* report may have contributed towards an increased policy focus concerning the importance of early childhood education for Indigenous children. Earlier reports had stated that early childhood education was of paramount importance for Indigenous Australians. However, it was not until after *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education* (MCEETYA, 2006) that the Australian Government started to affirm the importance of early childhood education for all Australians.

In 2009, a review into the effectiveness of the three-year program of projects associated with the *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education* was commissioned by MCEETYA and undertaken by a research team from the David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research at the University of South Australia. The report, *Review of Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005–2008* (Buckskin, Hughes, Price, Rigney, Sarra, Adams, & Hayward, 2009), emphasised the importance of policies such as *Australian Directions* being enacted over a long period of time before evaluation, in order for change to take effect, arguing four years was insufficient.

… over time there have been a myriad of schemes introduced to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. However, their application and success are uneven and spasmodic with funding limited to short-term solutions … All indicators from our review confirm that success would be achieved if longevity in program funding and monitoring of implementation occurs. In absence of these strategies it is almost impossible to know what works and to put in place long term programs.

(Buckskin et al., 2009, p. 3)

The review also argued for the need to develop a successor to the *Australian Directions* policy, one with a strong focus on measuring, monitoring and addressing Indigenous educational outcomes at systemic and local levels (Buckskin et al., 2009). The successor to the *Australian Directions* was the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–2014* (MCEECDYA, 2010), which will be discussed later in this section.

Closing the Gap: 2008 – present

In 2008, the new Rudd Labor government took office. This change in federal government prompted new policies in Indigenous education, and in Indigenous affairs more broadly. In Indigenous education, the first significant policy decision made by the Rudd Government was the announcement of the *Closing the Gap* targets. However, prior to the announcement of the *Closing the Gap* targets, the *National Apology* was made to the Stolen Generations by Prime Minister Rudd on 13 February 2008.

The National Apology to the Stolen Generations

On 13 February 2008, at the first Parliamentary meeting since a new government had been elected, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd opened Australian Parliament in the House of Representatives by formally apologising to Australia's Stolen Generations.

This national apology is historically significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, the 1997 *Bringing Them Home* report (HREOC, 1997) had urged reparation including acknowledgement and apology to the victims of the Stolen Generations . The Howard Government had previously refused to apologise. It was not until a change of government that the survivors of the Stolen Generations had their past acknowledged, via a formal apology. Secondly, it was nationally telecast from Parliament to the nation, in public places and watched by many hundreds of thousands of Australians across the country. It prompted a great deal of cathartic reminiscence by those most seriously affected by the Stolen Generations and the removals, reminders of the serious effect on thousands of lives. Thirdly, the national apology to the Stolen Generations signaled a renewed commitment and kindled hope that government would address the inequities experienced by Indigenous Australians. Fourthly, this was the first time in history that Indigenous Australians had been invited to Parliament to formally engage in a process of reconciliation and acknowledgement of the past injustices suffered by Indigenous Australians at the hands of the European colonisers.

In all these ways, the *National Apology* marked a significant milestone in the history of Indigenous affairs. It gave hope to Indigenous Australians that government would take significant measures to improve Indigenous wellbeing and remedy Indigenous disadvantage. As stated in former Prime Minister Rudd's apology speech:

> *Today's apology, however inadequate, is aimed at righting past wrongs. It is also aimed at building a bridge between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians – a bridge based on a real respect rather than a thinly veiled contempt. Our challenge for the future is to cross that bridge and, in so doing, to embrace a new partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians – to embrace, as part of that partnership, expanded Link-Up and other critical services to help the Stolen Generations to trace their families if at all possible and to provide dignity to their lives. But the core of this partnership for the future is to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians on life expectancy, educational achievement and employment opportunities.*

(Rudd, 13 February 2008)

The *Closing the Gap* targets

In 2008, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) launched six *Closing the Gap* targets in an effort to rectify Indigenous disadvantage. COAG agreed to:

> a. closing the life expectancy gap within a generation [by 2031];
>
> b. halving the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade [by 2018];
>
> c. ensuring all Indigenous four years olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years [by 2013];
>
> d. halving the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade [by 2018];
>
> e. halving the gap for Indigenous people aged 20–24 in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020; and
>
> f. halving the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade [by 2018].

(COAG, 2008, p. 8)

The *Closing the Gap* targets, which were analysed in Section 2 of this review paper, were endorsed by COAG in March 2008. This broadening of the policy to include education targets with other social targets was prompted by the *Social Justice Report* (Calma, 2005), prepared by Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma – Aboriginal elder from the Kungarakan tribal group and a member of the Iwaidja tribal group in the Northern Territory. The report had outlined major concerns regarding Indigenous health, the administration of Indigenous affairs, and the engagement of Indigenous people in high-level decision-making processes, and recommended the Australian Government commit to:

> … achieving equality of health status and life expectation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous people within 25 years.

(Calma, 2005, p. 16)

The *Closing the Gap* targets represented a significant policy shift and investment by Commonwealth, state and territory governments that, in order to rectify Indigenous disadvantage in the long-term, a number of elements of disadvantage needed to be addressed (COAG, 2009). Rudd's apology speech to the Stolen Generations one month earlier, made clear his commitment.

> We today take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians. A future where this Parliament resolves that the injustices of the past must never, never again happen. A future where we harness the determination of all Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to close the gap that lies between us in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity.

(Rudd, 13 February 2008)

Eight years later, in 2016, the *Closing the Gap* targets still form part of Australia's policy approach to ameliorating Indigenous education disadvantage. But as shown in Sections 1 and 2 of this review paper, the *Closing the Gap* reports state that many of the targets are not on track to being met (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015, 2016, 2017).

Limitations of the *Closing the Gap* strategy

Since 2008, the terminology of the *Closing the Gap* (CTG) reports, with the inherently negative critique it incorporates, has been widely used throughout government, the media and in educational circles. The general approach inherent in the reporting associated with CTG strategy has been debated by some as being negative in tone and approach, as was indicated

in Section 2 of this review paper. There has been a conflation of negativities here – the lack of progress annually reported and the lower Indigenous scores reported in the data. But the dilemma is that without this detail and the associated policy outcomes being transparently evaluated, how can progress be recognised or policy reshaped? This review paper has used these data to construct our main case – that the failure of policy to make more progress on approximating the targets clearly indicates different approaches to policy are required. And we have concluded and urge that the recipients of these policies have greater participation in their construction and implementation. This is a positive outcome of the CTG reporting policy.

Some have suggested that a discourse of 'success' as opposed to 'failure' would be more engaging for many Indigenous Australians. Indigenous Wiradjuri academic Laurie Bamblett, in a lecture at National Reconciliation Week in 2015 about the importance of governments promoting discourses of 'success' rather than 'failure', said:

> … I want to protest how people talk about our communities. Especially the slogan 'Aboriginal Disadvantage'. I don't like it. It does more harm than good. I want to get rid of it.
>
> … If we talk more about Aboriginal Advantage we'll be moving away from something that doesn't work. Telling people they're disadvantaged kills them. It takes their power and authority away. It disengages them.
>
> … So we have a choice, don't we? We can keep doing what doesn't work or we can talk instead about all the examples of Aboriginal advantage that show our young people how to live a good life.

(Bamblett, 2015, pp. 1-8)

Notwithstanding Bamblett's stance, by enshrining the *Closing the Gap* initiative within the *National Indigenous Reform Agreement* (NIRA) (COAG, 2008), a commitment by governments to increase accountability and visibility across Indigenous programs funded by the Commonwealth was established, and by detailing and reporting on the targets in federal policy, the NIRA (COAG, 2009) ensured that the CTG approach became a prominent feature of Indigenous education policy.

An ongoing policy commitment to change?

Following the introduction of the *Closing the Gap* targets in 2008, several key additional policy initiatives, demonstrating a renewed commitment by governments to reducing relative Indigenous educational disadvantage, were introduced. Among these are the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008) and the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (2010–14)* (MCEECDYA, 2010). These educational policy documents have positively impacted on Indigenous education policy in Australia; however, they remain flawed in the usual manner, as will be outlined.

Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (2008)

Every ten years, through the Education Council (formerly known as the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood, and the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs), the Commonwealth Government develops a declaration outlining broad educational goals for students across all educational levels. The *Melbourne Declaration* (MCEETYA, 2008), the third in the series, was endorsed by all Australian education ministers across federal, state and territory jurisdictions. The *Melbourne Declaration* (MCEETYA, 2008), firmly positioned Australian education within the global context, highlighting the importance of relationships with Asian countries, increasing international mobility, globalisation of the economy and rapid technological change. A clear shift from the previous *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* (MCEETYA, 1999) was the prominence provided to Indigenous education in the text:

> *As a nation Australia values the central role of education in building a democratic, equitable and just society – a society that is prosperous, cohesive, and culturally diverse, and that values Indigenous cultures as a key part of the nation's history, present and future.*

<div align="right">(MCEETYA, 2008, p. 4)</div>

A new focus on the recognition of the cultural knowledge and related experience that Indigenous students bring to school, as well as the importance of building strong partnerships with local communities is evident within the goal of promoting equity and excellence; themes implicit in the NATSIEP policy.

> *All Australian governments and all school sectors must:*
>
> • *ensure that schools build on local cultural knowledge and experience of Indigenous students as a foundation for learning, and work in partnership with local communities on all aspects of the schooling process, including to promote high expectations for the learning outcomes of Indigenous students*
>
> • *ensure that the learning outcomes of Indigenous students improve to match those of other students*
>
> • *ensure that schooling contributes to a socially cohesive society that respects and appreciates cultural, social and religious diversity.*

<div align="right">(MCEETYA, 2008, p. 7)</div>

Additionally, in the commitment to action regarding curriculum, the opportunity for all students to access Indigenous content where relevant, whatever this means, was highlighted. Further, as a commitment to action, the *Melbourne Declaration*, in acknowledging that the educational outcomes for Indigenous students were substantially behind those of other students, called on Australian governments to commit to strategic investment in an effort to close the gap for Indigenous young people.

Despite the existence of the *Melbourne Declaration*, the extent to which schools collaborate with local Indigenous communities, incorporate local cultural knowledge and consider the experiences of Indigenous students as foundations for learning (MCEETYA, 2008), remains subject to considerable variation across schools, jurisdictions and locations. More often than not, in the absence of any accountability measures, the onus is on schools and teachers to ensure Indigenous community collaboration and, simply put, some schools do this better than others (Moyle & Gillan, 2013).

The *Melbourne Declaration* is sometimes criticised for not providing sufficient accountability measures or advice on how to achieve the goals. But that was not its role. The declaration is a statement of a vision that is intended to inform and provide clarity for the various jurisdictions and federal departments. Section 4 of this review paper will discuss examples that show initiatives in this field. The *Melbourne Declaration* is still in effect and will not be superseded until 2018 at the earliest, so there is still time to provide a clear, accessible framework to assist schools achieve the goals set out within the *Melbourne Declaration*. Additionally, rigorous evaluation of more education programs would help support the case for increased efficacy.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (2010–2014)

In April 2010, a new national *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (2010–2014)* (MCEECDYA, 2010) was developed by a national working group of 'senior officials', some of whom, encouragingly, were Indigenous Australians (MCEECDYA, 2010). The *Action Plan*, based on the educational goals outlined in the *Melbourne Declaration 2008*, built on the recommendations listed in the *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005–2008* report (MCEETYA, 2006). Consequently, the *Action Plan* also acknowledged the educational goals and priorities listed in other preceding policies, which have been analysed in this review

paper. This process represented a significant improvement in consistency of policy in Indigenous affairs. The *Action Plan* comprised six priority domain areas, viewed as those most likely by the Ministerial Council to have an impact on closing the gap between the educational outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. They were:

- Readiness for school
- Engagement and connections
- Attendance
- Literacy and numeracy
- Leadership, quality teaching and workforce development; and
- Pathways to real post-school options

Unlike the previous *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education*, the new plan explicitly outlined 55 national common systemic and local level actions to be implemented and measured over a five-year timeline, which was the first real national policy commitment to measuring the operationalising of agreed strategies. National collaborative actions included progressing universal access to early childhood education access for Indigenous children and also implementing an evidence-based attendance strategy. The plan also contained jurisdictional and sector priorities to provide a further perspective on how national collaborative action and jurisdictional priorities will complement each other to close the gap. For example, Western Australia prioritised engagement with the Indigenous community and upskilling the workforce, while Queensland focused on improving attendance and retention and improving outcomes through enhanced access to digital teaching and learning opportunities. Old problems arose however, due to MCEETYA making no acknowledgment of the unique contexts and individual needs of schools in the stated objectives of the plan, and so insufficient attention was given to the need to tailor implementation and actively engage with local communities.

The present state of Indigenous education policy

There is much to decry in recent policy and the so-called 'Intervention' is one of them.

The Northern Territory Intervention

In the run-up to the 2007 federal election, which the Howard Government looked likely to lose and ultimately did, the Commonwealth Government used the release of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse (2007) *'Little Children are Sacred'* report into protecting Aboriginal children from sexual abuse and neglect, to trigger the National Emergency Response, commonly referred to as the Northern Territory Intervention. The Commonwealth Government declared a state of emergency (as it can, because the Northern Territory is not a state), and the army was sent into more than 60 remote communities. The *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* was suspended in order to implement a scheme whereby the income of Aboriginal people in those communities was managed by the government. Alcohol and use of pornography was banned in the communities and compulsory health checks for all children was undertaken by the army, usually on school premises, even though many of the communities had existing health clinics that kept detailed records on the children's health.

Notably only two of the 97 recommendations in the 2007 report have been implemented during the Intervention, which extended the surveillance and control of Indigenous people, and was termed 'coercive reconciliation' by Altman & Hinkson (2007). In 2012, the National Emergency Response was extended for a decade, when it was morphed into the *Stronger Futures* strategy, through the Commonwealth legislation: *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act 2012* (Australian Government, 2012). This extension further normalised the coercive governance of the Indigenous population of the Northern Territory across a range of areas, including education and school attendance, alcohol management, land reform and income

management. It was supported by both sides of politics. The similarities, both in underlying attitudes to Indigenous people and to the methods of implementation, are strikingly evocative of colonial legislation and policies.

With the restructuring of federal departments in late 2013 under the Abbott Liberal government, most of the government responsibilities for Indigenous affairs were shifted to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. This decision was ostensibly made in order to ensure that the Prime Minister could closely oversee the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of new and existing initiatives under the Indigenous affairs portfolio, and in 2017, it remains in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy

The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy* (2015) was developed in 2014–15 by senior education officials from the Australian Education, Early Years, Senior Officer's Committee (AEEYSOC) (Education Council, 2015). Many of the officials involved in the development of the Strategy (2015) were of Indigenous Australian descent and were representatives of various Australian, state and territory education systems (Education Council, 2015). AEEYSOC was tasked by the Education Council (formerly known as MCEECDYA) to develop a new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education strategy that would include a focus on improving Indigenous attendance and improving transitions from secondary school to post-school options. The Strategy (2015) identifies seven priority areas

> *… that will inform local approaches, and national collaborative actions to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people*

(Education Council, 2015, p. 4)

The designated *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy* (2015) priority areas were:

- Leadership, quality teaching and workforce development
- Culture and identity
- Partnerships
- Attendance
- Transition points including pathways to post-school options
- School and child readiness
- Literacy and numeracy.

In addition to the new focus on attendance and transition to secondary school, the Strategy differs markedly from the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (2010–2014)*, in that it allows each jurisdiction to develop its own strategy and plans to meet its specific contextual needs, similar to the recommendations of the 2005 National Review. The criticism of the 2010–14 *Action Plan*, that it did not acknowledge the diverse circumstances faced by Indigenous Australians across Australia, has been ameliorated by allowing each jurisdiction to use the Strategy as an overarching guide to inform local policy directions, allowing almost unfettered variability.

Since the Strategy has only been in place for less than two years at the time of writing, it is too early to generalise about its impact or effectiveness on educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians. The risk of the lack of jurisdictional oversight is that different jurisdictions will choose to work only in those areas they wish, rather than across all seven. No funding has been allocated for independent evaluation. However, the focus areas indicate a commitment to collaboration with local Indigenous communities, as well as recognition of the importance of culture in ensuring that positive educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians can be achieved.

Concluding comments

Section 3 has reviewed a selection of policy initiatives over the past 27 years in Australian Indigenous education. In evidence have been some examples of well-intentioned views and also some doctrinaire views on race and Indigenous Australians and what is best for them, socially and educationally. On the positive side, there is a continuing prominent view that all is not as it should be for Australia's First Nations people and at most times, the view is that government has a role in righting the disadvantage.

The degree of intuition and sensitivity in policy development and especially in its implementation, has varied greatly, as indeed has the knowledge underpinning much of the policy. The constant in-house reviewing by committees, usually tasked by government officials, does not constitute independent evaluation. The lack of educational data has been addressed in the last decade, as Section 2 showed. However, the cultural perspective has not, for the most part, allowed for policy development that can have a significant impact on national educational achievement, and has only shown some improvement in the broader national meeting of social targets. The authors of this review paper have suggested there are several reasons for this situation.

Firstly, as outlined in this review paper, and most recently in the 2017 *CTG* report, improving indicators of social and educational disadvantage for Indigenous Australia requires a concerted, consistent effort by governments over a long period of time, in excess of 20 years. The political processes, especially the election cycles, have not allowed for sufficient time to be allocated to policy implementation before it is halted or changed in some way.

Secondly, perceived fiscal realities play a large part in allowing political leaders to rationalise why they do not implement their expressed beliefs. Two examples, from both sides of the political spectrum, illustrate this point. Despite his frank acknowledgement in his Redfern Address in December 1992 that 'Europeans had caused the woes of the First Australians', it is evident from the recently released Cabinet records for 1992 and 1993 that Prime Minister Keating would not support the quest for funds to address the effects of those woes, by his Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, Robert Tickner. The funding sought was explicitly designed to advance a broad agenda of services, with the express goal of addressing the marginalisation of Indigenous Australians that had been identified by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Johnston, 1991) as directly contributing to First Australians' disadvantage. Tickner's funding quest was cut by two-thirds (Murphy, 2017). Similarly, Prime Minister Turnbull, despite his impassioned assertions following the 2017 *Closing the Gap* report, regarding the importance of Indigenous participation in decision-making in the policies affecting their lives, his government's Budget, which closely followed the report's release, saw a substantial reduction in funding to a range of Indigenous programs (Australians for Native Title and Recognition [ANTAR], 2017). Talk is cheap, and though it can make politicians feel a lot better, it has a quite different, debilitating, effect on the Indigenous population.

Thirdly, over those 20–30 years, research underpinning policy design and implementation has been consistently lacking in the field of Indigenous education. As has been demonstrated throughout this review paper, for the most part the policy changes made have neither been inclusive of, nor resulted from independent evaluation or research. They have not encompassed the participation of a collective Indigenous voice, which as we have shown has been constantly reiterated as a necessary prerequisite to successful policy.

Furthermore the social division which results from selective listening, was referenced by long-term Indigenous rights campaigner, Yawuru Elder from the Kimberley in Western Australia, and recently-appointed Federal Senator, Patrick Dodson (2007) when he claimed that:

> *Some Indigenous voices (in policy debates) motivated by the urgency of ending the suffering in Indigenous communities, have been recklessly naïve in aiding and abetting the [then] Howard Government's agenda.*

(Dodson, 2007, p. 23)

Different perspectives by powerful operators (often with a range of unstated political agendas) have been allowed to dominate the views manifested in the adoption and development of policies and, additionally, they have paid little heed to what has gone before. This is what we mean by ideological policymaking. Reconciliation and recognition need to be widely agreed before such consistency can be achieved. The authors contend that it is not feasible to expect such complex, multifaceted problems to be 'fixed' in less than 10 years.

We now *know* the desired progress towards equity of educational outcomes is not being reached and if this review paper can be taken as a guide, then we are only just starting to realise what has been misguided with previous policy. The relative absence of active or influential Indigenous voices in Indigenous affairs over the last 20 years has been noted, and Section 3 has provided examples of the marginality of much of the participation of Indigenous voice in educational policy development, with even less in evidence in implementation and evaluation.

To ask the question 'what works' is already to be playing with assumptions – whose view of what functioning entails, whose articulation of 'works' do we seek? It is just possible that there are many versions of the kind of functionality Indigenous Australians are seeking in this modern world they variably inhabit. Indeed, given the variability in their settings this would appear to be inevitable. So the participants, the people being acted upon by policy initiatives, need to be at the table – in a meaningful way as articulated in the NATSIEP (1989) and the *Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Education* (1999) Clarifying and articulating goals for your children's education and for the broader community futures is never easy, nor does it always result in common agreement. But the target population and its decision-making need to be part of the process. Nor is it a simple matter of participation, but one of 'ownership'. Without ownership, the policy is likely to be misdirected, as this section of the review paper attests. Meaningful participation allows for commitment, holds the opportunity of responsibility for outcomes and can mean more appropriate policy development. So the policy is more likely to succeed. The history of Indigenous education is not replete with such examples. But there are some, and some of them are still in place.

In Section 4 we identify five key challenges in areas of Indigenous education that require resolution. For each key challenge, we review, analyse and critique programs in terms of the utilisation of the collective rather than the selective Indigenous community voice, and the degree to which meaningful participation by the 'recipients' of that program occurred. From this structure we hope to model programs that illuminate the power of 'participating voice' in policymaking, and encourage more rigorous research review processes of such programs.

Indigenous voice in key education challenges

4

In Sections 1–3 of this review paper the authors have described the historical undercurrents surrounding contemporary Indigenous education, the data on educational outcomes for Indigenous students, and government policy approaches to Indigenous education over the past 25 years. As has been noted earlier, one assumption underlying government policy development and implementation approaches is the conviction that Aboriginal education policy goals would automatically be the same as for the mainstream. This assumption goes unchallenged if appropriate Indigenous consultation, input and participation in the future direction for Indigenous education in Australia is not allowed or encouraged.

Policymakers do not generally know or fully understand what Indigenous parents, in all their diversity, want out of the education system for their children because, as highlighted in Section 3, consultation with Indigenous Australians on issues of education policy has generally been lacking or at best, tokenistic. This damning fact sits uneasily with international views that the inclusion of Indigenous voice in policy formation and implementation is considered the gold standard for effecting positive educational change for Indigenous peoples (Office of the High Commissioner United Nations Human Rights, 2008).

Five key challenges

Indigenous education is a complex area of policy debate, compounded by the fact that there is a multitude of issues – each of which contributes to Indigenous Australians' status as among the most disadvantaged Australians (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision [SCRGSP], 2014b).

In Section 4 the authors will argue for and demonstrate the critical role of Indigenous voice in policy and program development and for greater self-determination by Indigenous Australians in actively facilitating their positive educational outcomes. The discussion and analysis will be framed by five key challenges, identified as requiring resolution and urgent action in the education sector for improvements in Indigenous learning to occur.

- Challenge 1: Deficit and race-based assumptions in Indigenous education
- Challenge 2: Living away from home to study – Boarding schools
- Challenge 3: Raising school attendance and engagement levels
- Challenge 4: Providing the best start – Early childhood education
- Challenge 5: Engaging Indigenous communities in educational programs.

Each key challenge is followed by a description and analysis of one or more case studies of a program in a school where its staff and community educators have sought to address the associated challenge.

The authors' central proposition, pertinent to all five challenges, is that if Australia wants to increase the likelihood of Indigenous Australians achieving educational equality with non-Indigenous Australians, it is imperative that Indigenous Australians adequately participate in policy debates and decision-making, and in program development and evaluations concerning Indigenous education. The analysis of each case study serves to emphasise the range of ways in which this participation can be activated and maintained.

Challenge 1: Deficit and race-based assumptions in Indigenous education

While the experience of overt racism has lessened in Australia since the introduction of the Racial Discrimination Act in 1975 (Soutphommasane, 2015), some Indigenous Australians still continue to experience various forms of covert or indirect racism that can affect their daily lives (Bodkin-Andrews, Denson, Finger & Craven, 2013). The experience of racism in Australian society is hotly debated, with some arguing that covert forms of racism cannot be accurately measured due to racial discrimination laws (Biddle, 2013). Yet, self-reporting of racist experiences cannot be dismissed or taken lightly as Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation and the University of Tasmania's (2016) investigation into Indigenous Australian perspectives on racism showed.

> *The level of racism and prejudice is horrific. Daily accounts of misunderstandings or ignorance. It's real ignorance and a lack of wanting to understand or accept difference.*

(Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation and the University of Tasmania, 2016, p. 10)

The level of racism an Indigenous Australian may experience is dependent on a number of factors, such as the minority status within the broader community, skin tone, diversity of cultures within an area and the area's colonial history (Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation and the University of Tasmania, 2016). Those living in a remote community are more likely to be of the dominant culture, whereas in an urban community, Indigenous children are likely to be in a minority cultural group (Hughes & Hughes, 2013). Regional centres often include Indigenous persons from different clans, which can complicate social relations, including in school.

Behrendt (2006) asserts that urban Aboriginal communities, where 70 per cent of Indigenous Australians live, are often 'invisible' to the non-Indigenous people who live and work within the same communities. As an Indigenous person living in an urban community, Behrendt (2006) comments:

> *There are some tenacious stereotypes about Aboriginal people in urban areas like Sydney. I often get asked, 'How often do you visit Aboriginal communities?' And I reply, 'Every day, when I go home.' The question reveals the popular misconceptions that 'real' Aboriginal communities only exist in rural and remote areas.*

(Behrendt, 2006, p. 1)

There are widespread false presumptions about Aboriginality in urban Australia (Fredericks, 2013), with many non-Indigenous Australians believing that one must have dark skin and live 'out bush' to be a 'true Aborigine' (Behrendt, 2006). Urban Indigenous people frequently have to contend with racist and ignorant questioning about their identity and skin tone by non-Indigenous people, with its overtones of the criteria used to perpetrate the Stolen Generations agenda.

Remote-living Indigenous people contend with stereotypes of a different nature (Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation and the University of Tasmania, 2016). The ongoing Northern Territory Intervention reinforces the stereotypes (Altman & Hinkson, 2007) of the more remote Indigenous people as welfare dependent, unwilling to work, addicted to alcohol and

perpetrators of abuse. This wrongly characterised Darwin Indigenous resident was enraged, but also contemptuous, of the ignorance displayed.

> *They all stereotype us, you know. And I say to them 'I've paid taxes for 35 years you know. I pay your children's Centrelink too'. Because they're just judging the outside and they don't know that I don't drink and I don't do drugs and I don't whatever … I feel sorry for people who think that way. And I know I should be angry, but they need to educate themselves I think.*

<div align="right">(Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation and the University of Tasmania, 2016, p. 9)</div>

The *Bringing Them Home* report (HREOC, 1997) demonstrated that Aboriginality encompasses more than skin tone, but also spiritual connection to country, family and ancestors. The complexities of Indigenous identity construction are captured by Linda Burney, Indigenous member of the House of Representatives.

> *Being Aboriginal is not the colour of your skin or how broad your nose is. It is a spiritual feeling, an identity you know in your heart. It is a unique feeling that is difficult for a non-Indigenous [person] to fully understand.*

<div align="right">(Burney, cited in Bamblett, 2005, p. 20)</div>

Additionally, racial stereotypes fail to recognise the cultural strengths that many remote living Indigenous people possess. Some of these cultural strengths include fluency in one or more Indigenous languages, artistic ability that culminates in the production of paintings acclaimed by the international market, and, the possession of cultural knowledge that is passed down from generation to generation. These Indigenous people know their Country, in a way urban or regional persons rarely can.

Impact of deficit and race-based assumptions on educational outcomes

The deficit and racial assumptions incorporate a bias that contributes to the minimising of both the importance of Indigenous Australians having a say in their own educational futures and those of their children, and their opportunities to so act.

Quentin Beresford, Professor at Edith Cowan University (ECU), argues that having deficit perspectives can predetermine educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

> *A deficit perspective has its foundation in a conservative worldview that Aboriginal people lack the cognitive capacity of environmental stimulation to succeed at school.*

<div align="right">(Beresford, 2003, p. 27)</div>

Similarly, academic Greg Vass argues an excellent example of the deficit discourse surrounding Indigenous education is apparent within the mainstream media, where stories of Indigenous student disadvantage or failure are much more likely to appear than stories related to Indigenous success or achievement (Vass, 2013). He also is of the view that negative discourse about Indigenous education can be self-serving, and can additionally lead to problems in the classroom for Indigenous students who may be treated differently from their non-Indigenous peers:

> *Deficit thinking potentially leads to lowered expectations of Indigenous students academically and behaviourally in the classroom; poor education policies that fail to negotiate systemic concerns; and inadequate education research that is responsive to these concerns.*

<div align="right">(Vass, 2013, p. 88)</div>

Impacting on the prevalence of deficit assumptions about Indigenous education is not beyond the capacity of the education system to combat. Educators and schools can play a role, for their students and more broadly in their community, in challenging deficit and race-based assumptions

about Indigenous students. The Thornbury Primary School case study highlights how schools can challenge negative perceptions about Indigenous culture and education.

Case study: The Koori Cultural Program at Thornbury Primary School

Victoria has one of the most rapidly growing Indigenous populations in Australia (Flitton, 2015), with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census recording that 135 Indigenous Australians lived in Thornbury, a northern suburb of Melbourne in 2011 (ABS, 2011a). Thornbury is a hub of cultural significance for Koori Victorians, home to the Aborigines Advancement League (AAL), and the suburb has a history of active resistance and survival.

Thornbury Primary School has 43 Indigenous students in a total of 345 students. In 2012, the Woiwurrung Language and Culture Program became a formal Language Other than English (LOTE) subject under the Australian Curriculum, after years of refinement to ensure that it complied with national standards. Since then Indigenous and non-Indigenous students at Thornbury Primary School have been taught the Woiwurrung language as part of their Indigenous studies (Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated [VAEAI], 2014). Woiwurrung is the language of the Wurundjeri people, the traditional owners of the land Thornbury Primary School is on (Flitton, 2015). It is taught weekly across all classes and year levels, with Indigenous studies incorporated in the LOTE curriculum and more Indigenous teachers are being trained to deliver the subject (Thornbury Primary School, 2015).

Linguists at VAEAI assisted Woiwurrung Indigenous languages educators at Thornbury Primary School to design the Indigenous language program, creating teaching tools – such as alphabet charts and storybooks – in the Woiwurrung language, so students could effectively learn a 'new' language (Flitton, 2015). In May 2015, Thornbury Primary School released an interactive app, whereby users could listen to recordings of the Thornbury students singing three songs in Woiwurrung language (Flitton, 2015). This required effort that Uncle Phil Cooper, Wurundjeri Elder and Woiwurrung language educator involved in the development and teaching of the languages program, believes was well worth it. He commented on the enthusiasm students have shown towards learning an Indigenous language:

> *They love it, I've even heard parents use the class to get their kids out of bed.*

(Cooper, cited in Flitton, 2015, p. 1)

The Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages (VACL), which has a coordinating role in traditional Indigenous languages revival, also argues that learning an Indigenous language brings with it a wealth of benefits for children and communities, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike.

> *The language programs have fostered reconciliation, collaboration, pride and an enriched sense of identity, which has overflowed into school culture as a whole. These benefits have also extended into the homes of children who are more engaged with Aboriginal culture at school. Importantly, the language programs generate positive connections between schools and local Aboriginal community groups and Traditional Owners.*

(VACL, 2015, p. 1)

According to VAEAI linguists there are also reconciliation and healing benefits for Koori communities in the revival of an Indigenous language:

> *There is a lot of grief around language loss, and that grief is still there. There are lots of intense and mixed emotions felt when language is being revived and it can bring tears to Elders listening. However, the school language program is a catalyst for revival and reconciliation.*

(Elefsiniotis, cited in Flitton, 2015, p. 1)

Muriel Bamblett, Chief Executive Officer at the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, argues that in such programs Indigenous children form positive cultural identities which help break the cycle of Indigenous disadvantage:

> *Our children live in a hybrid world which is both Indigenous and post-invasion Australian. Sometimes our families aren't safe for children because they have learned to be helpless or they have internalised the trauma of 200 years of oppression to such an extent that they take it out on their kids. And much of the time the rest of society is unsafe for our children because it talks down to them, discriminates against them and tells them they are from a defeated people. But we need to fight that despair … The best protection we can offer any child is to give them a sense of belonging. Culture can provide that sense of belonging and through that belonging, resilience. That way we can begin the long process of creating a positive future for our children.*

(Bamblett & Lewis, 2006, p. 66)

Teaching an Indigenous language in a multicultural schooling context is an example of how schools can not only assist in strengthening Indigenous children's connection to culture, but also can help schools challenge racism and deficit assumptions about Indigenous education. Thornbury Primary School is an exciting example of how even urban schools can showcase the positive aspects of Indigenous culture to non-Indigenous students and families, while also fostering pride in Indigeneity for Indigenous students. Such highly integrated curriculum programs enable students to achieve better learning outcomes and help the whole school community to better live in the hybrid society they all inhabit.

Challenge 2: Living away from home to study – Boarding schools

Boarding schools are a necessary reality for many remote-living Indigenous children, as secondary education is not regularly offered past Year 10, and sometimes not past Year 7 in these regions. Due to lack of infrastructure, teaching staff and resources in their home communities, boarding schools are the sole option for remote-living Indigenous children who wish to continue their secondary education. The remote-living Indigenous child's view of learning is coloured by their knowing that to continue schooling past primary levels will involve them leaving their family, and this can act as a disincentive at many stages of education.

Indigenous students boarding away from home to receive their education is not a new phenomenon. The practice has been in place for more than 50 years across the nation, with many Indigenous communities having long-standing strong connections to particular schools with boarding facilities. As the number of students transitioning to secondary school increases, the boarding school option becomes more important but greater attention needs to be given to student care. Boarding options are increasingly being touted as a positive option to address educational needs as well as being powerful in building social capital (Pearson, 2011; Wilson, 2014).

Boarding school facilities include hostels, group homes and residential colleges. They are predominately located in major urban and regional settings across Australia, so the Indigenous students are absent from their home community. The management of student care programs and curriculum in recent years leaves a lot to be desired and requires analysis and core changes to deliver improvement in outcomes (Mander, Cohen & Pooley, 2015).

Not all boarding schools give students the opportunity to maintain family and community support networks (Mander et al., 2015). Mellor and Corrigan (2004) also highlighted the fact that many Indigenous students make the transition to boarding school at a time of increased vulnerability during early adolescence when students are developing their sense of identity, self-worth and self-esteem. In research undertaken with Canadian First Nations youth, Chandler and Lalonde (1998) found that cultural continuity acts as a protective factor against youth suicide. They found that students who had a firm sense of culture and identity were at a lower risk of suicide, while Indigenous youth who were subject to periods of intense change and

cultural discontinuity were at a higher risk of suicide (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998). Adolescent Australian Indigenous students who attend boarding school are faced with an increased risk of self-harm because their support networks are generally disrupted and their identity within a new community has to be re-established.

In her postgraduate study of Indigenous students who experienced boarding in Victorian secondary schools, De Campo (2010) concluded that when done well, boarding schools present a significant opportunity for students to be able to make an informed decision about their life choices upon exiting formal schooling. The study found that a key to successful outcomes was strong family and community support for the students (De Campo, 2010).

The Wunan Foundation boarding school model explicitly offers cultural continuity and continued support for students from the local community.

Case study: The Wunan Foundation approach to boarding schools

Established in 1997, the Wunan Foundation is an Aboriginal development organisation based in the remote East Kimberley region of Western Australia. Wunan offers a variety of general social welfare programs to residents of the remote East Kimberley region, such as employment, housing and education programs (Wunan Foundation, 2016). The overarching aim is to reduce the high levels of socio-economic disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal people living in the East Kimberley region:

> *While the East Kimberley is rich in natural resources, its Aboriginal population experiences significant disadvantage, particularly relative to its non-Aboriginal population … the Aboriginal population in the East Kimberley experiences significantly higher rates of: chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes; foetal alcohol spectrum disorders; incarceration; substance abuse; and suicide. Consequently, the median Aboriginal male in the region dies up to 30 years earlier than his non-Aboriginal counterpart.*

(Wunan Foundation, 2016)

The two main communities served by Wunan in this region are Kununurra and Halls Creek. Kununurra is located on the border of the Northern Territory. In 2011, it had a total population of 8206 with 34.8 per cent of it being Indigenous. By contrast, Halls Creek had an Indigenous population of 1076 that comprised over 70 per cent of the total population in 2011 (ABS, 2011b).

In an effort to ameliorate disadvantage, one of the programs Wunan offers is a boarding school scholarship program, so that Indigenous students living in the East Kimberley region have the opportunity to receive a high quality secondary education. The boarding school scholarship programs Wunan currently offer are the Dural Education Excellence Program (DEEP) and the Kimberley Education Excellence Program (KEEP) for students in secondary school (i.e. Years 7–12). DEEP commenced in 2011, while KEEP commenced at the beginning of the 2016 school year (Wunan Foundation, 2016). Students involved in DEEP attend Pacific Hills Christian School in Sydney, while KEEP students attend either Parade College or Mercy College in Melbourne. These schools have a partnership arrangement with Wunan which was established via consultation and collaborative engagement over a long period of time. Student numbers for the boarding school scholarship program are small, with no more than 10 students commencing the Melbourne-based KEEP program in 2016 and approximately 12 students attending the Sydney-based DEEP program (Wunan Foundation, 2016).

The DEEP/KEEP model ensures parental involvement through an application and interview process for the scholarship program (Wunan Foundation, 2016); parents complete an application form and, if approved, they and the prospective students attend an interview to discuss the program and what it entails. Wunan makes contact with the student's school to discuss their education and support needs.

In 2016, a KEEP scholarship was valued at up to $22,000, funded via a government and philanthropic funding mix. Parents make a financial contribution to their child's boarding

school education through Abstudy, costed on a sliding scale dependent on parental income (Wunan Foundation, 2016). Active parental engagement, through participation in making informed decisions about their child's secondary education, is mandatory in this program and confirms this review's conviction that ownership of educational objectives and processes is vital to educational success.

The key feature of the Wunan approach to boarding schools that distinguishes it from other models is the role of the 'House Parent'. Selected through an application and interview process that is no different to a typical job application and interview process (Wunan Foundation, 2016; Ethical Jobs, 2016), the house parents are paid employees who care for the Indigenous boarding students (Ethical Jobs, 2016). The Wunan model maintains cultural continuity by ensuring that students live with other students of the same community – whom in many cases they already know or may even be related to – while being cared for by a house parent who is often from the same community. In effect, the program fosters Indigenous students' connection to home and culture while they live away from their community.

> *KEEP's unique approach is built on the knowledge that Aboriginal students do better while they are away at school if they feel connected to home and culture. To achieve this, we offer a home-like setting for the students who live together in a house under the supervision and care of Aboriginal House Parents from the East Kimberley. The House Parents, together with dedicated school staff and after-school tutors, provide the extra emotional, pastoral and educational support the students need to succeed.*

(Wunan Foundation, 2016, p. 1)

Anecdotal reports in Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* of the DEEP program indicate that the program is having a positive impact on individual Indigenous student academic outcomes, including improved attendance and improved academic results (Ranke, 2015). Year 9 student, Gordean Winton, told media in March 2015 of her DEEP experiences.

> *Last term was the first time I passed maths. There's more to look forward to and there's more support. That's my number one goal because my parents didn't really have a choice to complete school because they had me at a really young age, so if I complete school I'll make the both of them proud. I'd be proud myself because I'd be helping myself but also my family as well.*

(Winton, in Ranke, 2015)

Wunan has anecdotally reported positive outcomes stemming from the KEEP program and an in-house evaluation of the KEEP program is currently underway.

> *The average attendance rate is near 100 per cent, the students' academic outcomes have dramatically improved, and many of them have achieved outstanding leadership and sporting success …*

(Wunan Foundation, 2016, p. 2)

Formal, preferably independent, evaluation should provide insights into retention rates and academic outcomes for the Melbourne-based scholarship program and how they can be facilitated by better management practices. For example, the power of active parental engagement can only become clearly apparent as a result of formal evaluation. The apparent success of the Wunan approach in boarding schools appears to stem from a combination of Indigenous students living and schooling with students from their local community, having an adult carer from their home community, which may alleviate issues stemming from homesickness and cultural discontinuity and provides a person, who is known to the students and their parents, who can act 'in loco parentis'.

Challenge 3: Raising school attendance and engagement levels

Improving attendance and engagement levels for Indigenous students is the core, base-level challenge for educators and schools. Learning is conditioned by the success in supporting each of these three elements. Multiple programs aiming to improve Indigenous school attendance exist, some explicitly using incentives to encourage students to attend school. Sport is one incentive used to engage Indigenous youth in their schooling.

Case study: The Clontarf Aboriginal Academy

Clontarf, a not-for-profit organisation, was founded in 2000 to improve the education and employment outcomes of young Indigenous men in secondary school, with the broader goal of better equipping them to have a meaningful and productive place in society. The Foundation uses the vehicle of Australian Rules football, cricket and Rugby League to assist the young men to attain this outcome. The Foundation has a network of 74 academies across Australia in host schools that run a series of programs focused on school engagement and attendance, behavioural and lifestyle choices, improving self-esteem and leadership. Specialist employment officers are utilised to assist the students in finding employment on completion of their schooling. Several similar programs for young Indigenous women and girls have recently been established in schools across Australia, with varying degrees of success. Limited data on performance outcomes is problematic. The most promising appears to be the recently established Stars Foundation, which uses both female and male role models in their program.

Clontarf relies on approximately $28 million from government and philanthropic funding to support its operations. The success of the program is nationally recognised, with Clontarf academies currently operating in four Australian states and territories across urban, regional and remote locations. Six new academies around Cairns in Queensland are currently being developed. The Clontarf Foundation, across all of its academies, achieved for its members:

- *4600 students participating (in 2016)*
- *An attendance rate of 80% (in 2015)*
- *61% of academy members had an attendance rate of 80% or better (2015)*
- *82% of 2015 Year 12 students remain engaged in employment or further education 12 months after graduating from the academy program.*

(Clontarf Foundation, 2016, p. 2)

These achievements are outstanding, given that the majority of the young men arrive from backgrounds of multiple disadvantage, where very few members of their families would ever have graduated from secondary education and entered employment. They far exceed national data or targets. What is exceptional about these outcomes is that are being achieved in remote settings, where a high percentage of students probably do not continue schooling past Year 8.

The Clontarf Foundation, in its annual reports, has used economic modelling, developed by its consultants ACIL Allen, to demonstrate that Clontarf graduates, compared to 'non-Clontarf students', are likely, over their working life, to:

- *Pay $51,000 more in income tax*
- *Receive $74,000 less in welfare payments*
- *Require $55,000 less treatment from the health system*
- *Avoid $114,000 worth of costs associated with offending and imprisonment*

(Clontarf Foundation, 2016, p. 6)

This modelling clearly indicates positive outcomes in the graduates' lives, as well as delivering economic benefits to society. Here Clontarf is making the case for Indigenous educational achievement having individual flow-on effects which also constitute a good social investment. The case study highlights the use of a specific incentive, valued by those engaged in the

program, in this case sport, to improve engagement and attendance at school and to provide a pathway through to employment. Again, independent program evaluation strengthens the case any program can make for efficacy, especially when conducted over time.

Challenge 4: Providing the best start – Early childhood education

Early childhood education has been an educational field, the critical nature of which for lifelong learning and living, has been consistently underestimated in the education sector. More recently the field has gained significant policy attention in Australia, seen as a key to closing the Indigenous education gap prior to the commencement of formal schooling. Research has shown that children who begin school 'ready' to learn tend to perform better throughout their primary school years, compared to students who are assessed as 'not school ready' (Liddell, Barnett, Roost & McEachran, 2011; Dockett, Perry & Kearney, 2010). Research conducted by medical and educational academics (Silburn, Nutton, McKenzie & Landrigan, 2011) found that early education programs for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, which focus on cognitive, language and social development in the years before they commence formal schooling, result in improved school readiness. This research is pertinent for Indigenous children.

Tables 1.3 and 1.4 in Section 1 provided data that relate to the *Closing the Gap* initiative, which focuses on the importance of ensuring four-year-old Indigenous children having access to a high quality, early childhood education. Yet, despite ongoing policy attempts, Indigenous children still commence school behind their peers (Commonwealth of Australia, 2016). Indigenous children have lower rates of enrolment at formal preschool centres, compared to non-Indigenous Australians (Kitson & Bowes, 2010; Dockett, Perry & Kearney, 2010). This reflects the impact of multiple factors, such as lack of culturally appropriate ECEC services, lack of availability of ECEC centres, especially in remote communities (Purdie & Buckley, 2010; Krakouer, 2016). Combined home- and centre-based programs, such as the Home Instruction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY), provide a viable alternative to formal ECEC for Indigenous children.

Case study 1: The Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY)

HIPPY aims to reduce social disadvantage by upskilling parents and preparing children from low socio-economic and cultural minority backgrounds for their first year of primary school (Gilley, 2003; Liddell et al., 2011; Dean & Leung, 2010). HIPPY is available to a wide range of cultural groups, including Indigenous Australians, refugee and migrant families, and others (Liddell et al., 2011). HIPPY is run at approximately 100 different locations throughout Australia, and appears to play a significant role in improving ECEC outcomes for Indigenous Australians (Krakouer, 2016). Commonwealth funding to the program has amounted to over $100 million since 2008 (HIPPY Australia, 2016).

Parents and children undertake the program over the two-year period prior to the beginning of formal schooling. Currently, children commence the program at four years, and a program for three-years-olds is being trialled (HIPPY Australia, 2016). The HIPPY model assigns each parent a tutor who is usually a member of the local community and they meet with parents fortnightly to teach the program material to parents, usually by role-playing. Program materials given to parents contain a set of age-appropriate activity packs that parents complete with their child, one per week (Gilley, 2003; Barnett, Roost & McEachran, 2012; Baker, Piotrkowski & Brooks-Gunn, 1999).

Research into HIPPY's effectiveness in Australia has demonstrated that HIPPY improves a child's academic, social and emotional skills, while improving parental skills, communication and involvement in educational pursuits (Liddell et al., 2011; Dean & Leung, 2010; Gilley, 2003). Children have reported other benefits from participating in HIPPY, including improved self-confidence and enjoyment in learning. (Dean, 2007; Dean & Leung, 2010). As part of the national evaluation of the program rollout and effectiveness, Monash University and the Brotherhood of St Laurence researchers used a case study approach at five Indigenous-specific

sites throughout Australia, in urban, regional and remote locations. Benefits reported by Indigenous parents and professionals, included:

> - *increased [parental] confidence to teach their child;*
> - *increased [parental] confidence to talk to their child's teacher;*
> - *improved parenting skills: patience and responding to difficult behaviour;*
> - *better relationship[s] between parents and child and improved quality time spent with the child;*
> - *social connectedness from meeting other parents;*
> - *the child becoming familiar and confident with schoolwork;*
> - *more insight about school's requirements and expectations;*
> - *better [parental] awareness of their child's skills, abilities and academic needs; and,*
> - *pride for both the parent and the child in the child's learning and achievement*

(Liddell et al., 2011, pp. xi–xii)

Liddell et al. concluded:

> *HIPPY holds significant promise as an appropriate and acceptable program with Indigenous communities and aligns with the Australian Government's Indigenous early childhood development initiatives.*

(Liddell et al., 2011, p. xii)

Findings about benefits listed in the above evaluation and Liddell et al.'s linking of the program with Indigenous early childhood targets, coupled with the program structure that involves high levels of structured active participation by parents, are congruent with Indigenous voice being part of successful ECEC programming.

Case study 2: Families as First Teachers (FaFT)

In an effort to improve the educational and health outcomes for Indigenous students, in 2009 the Northern Territory Government established Families as First Teachers – Indigenous Parenting Support Services Programs (FaFT) in six very remote communities. The FaFT program has now been extended to 30 remote, regional and urban locations across the Northern Territory and to over 10 sites in Queensland. The program, expressly designed for Indigenous children, services over 1400 in the Northern Territory (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2014).

In 2011 the Abecedarian Approach was introduced into all FaFT programs, in partnership with the University of Melbourne, to increase consistency and rigour. This is a set of evidence-based teaching and learning strategies for early childhood educators and parents to use with children from birth to five years of age. The approach is underpinned by the work of Russian theorist and psychologist Lev Vygotsky (2012), where the case is argued that a focus on quality individual adult–child interactions is paramount to a quality preparation for school entry and future success in learning.

The FaFT program assists family understanding of children's early learning processes, through on-site participation in the educational activities of the program, and operates for between 48 and 50 weeks of the year. FaFT uses culturally appropriate resources to provide parents with information about how young children learn and how family members can assist in the journey. Readiness for school is delivered through a focus on literacy and numeracy foundational skills, familiarity with the school programs in which the students will participate in the future, and it provides initiatives that engage parents and other family members with school staff, including the school principal. All these elements contribute to student readiness for school, to easier transition to school for students, and to parents' understandings and ongoing engagement in their children's schooling.

A three-year evaluation of the FaFT program is currently being conducted in the Northern Territory, through a partnership between the University of Melbourne and the Northern Territory Department of Education, with a final report due mid-2017. Other data indicates the program is starting to achieve successful outcomes. AEDC data (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2014) show that since 2012 the number of Indigenous children from very remote communities serviced by a FaFT program and assessed as developmentally vulnerable in one or more domains has fallen by 5.7 per cent. Noteworthy improvements have occurred in social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills, communication skills and general knowledge. A survey of principals in communities with a FaFT program also reported that children entering school for the first time were better prepared and had enhanced school readiness in comparison to previous cohorts (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2014).

Both HIPPY and FaFT demonstrate how to provide Indigenous children with the best start to their education, through increased engagement and empowerment of parents and communities.

Challenge 5: Engaging Indigenous communities in educational programs

This review paper has consistently argued for the importance of using evidence-based research in the selection of pedagogies and curricula, especially when educational programs with these characteristics are combined with high-level engagement of local Indigenous communities in educational decision-making processes. Under such conditions, regardless of location, positive learning outcomes are more likely to occur. Thornbury, our first case study, was urban and the next two case studies, both from remote community contexts, provide critical insights into the importance of Indigenous governance and self-determination in educational decision-making processes. The authors of this review paper argue that local Indigenous governance, is required at all levels, to achieve improved educational outcomes for Indigenous students, from grassroots input into service delivery to Indigenous engagement in high-level policymaking processes and decisions. Local conditions should always be kept in the frame, modifications to the administrative structures in these models can be made, and the lessons will apply, regardless of location.

Case study 1: Gunbalanya School – A co-principalship community-focused school

Since 2013 Gunbalanya School, situated in East Arnhem Land, has consistently outperformed all other remote schools across the Northern Territory in student achievement. The school is located in the Kunbarllanjnja community approximately 320 kilometres east of Darwin on the eastern border of Kakadu National Park and alongside the East Alligator River. The main language of the 1500 residents is Kunwinjku. The traditional owners of the land where the community is located are the Mandjurlngunj clan and there are 25 clan groups. This is a very complex community.

Gunbalanya School provides education through the Families as First Teachers (FaFT) program, from creche to Year 12, and it also provides educational outreach services to two outstation learning centres, over 80 kilometres away. The school is accessible only by air during the 'wet season' from January to March and has a very transient population of 275 Indigenous students and a staff of 25 teachers and 15 local Indigenous Assistant Teachers, and other local staff. The school's Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage is 477, which identifies its community members as having extremely educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. The average student attendance rate in 2016 was 53 per cent with 8 per cent of students attending 90 per cent or more of the time.

Given the above statistics, what sets Gunbalanya apart from other very remote schools is its ability to consistently have a core of students graduate Year 12 with a Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training (the Northern Territory's version of the Year 12 West Australian Certificate of Education). Over the past four years, 27 students have graduated with

this qualification and moved onto employment or tertiary education. A number of the students have been young mothers returning to school to complete their education. Graduation day is the largest event held in the community, with the whole community turning out to see the students sung and danced in by their proud families.

A combination of strategic elements engineered over a number of years has led to the success the school is currently achieving. First and foremost is the co-principal model where a fully qualified Indigenous principal from the local community works in partnership with a non-Indigenous school principal. They share and take end-of-line responsibility for the key educational leadership decisions. The Indigenous principal takes key responsibility for community engagement and the non-Indigenous principal for administration. Both take joint responsibility for curriculum provision. This is a model that could be adopted anywhere.

The school is the only very remote community, independent public school in the Northern Territory, and as such has the flexibility and responsibility to shape its own ethos, priorities and directions. The school has adopted innovative educational practice that meets the needs of its students and has increased flexibility in recruitment and selection of staff and has the authority to operate their school council as a board. In keeping with the spirit of the shared leadership model, the school board has two independent chairpersons, one a local Indigenous community member and the other non-Indigenous, with a strong business and governance background.

The leadership team at the school identified the strong fundamental connection between quality community engagement and student achievement and set in place a strategy developed around a freshwater turtle metaphor:

> *In my view, Gunbalanya people can be metaphorically compared to a turtle shell. The shell is composed of numerous parts and different shapes, as do the students, representing the cultural backgrounds of the Bininj people and the divergent knowledges and experiences they bring. The important feature of the turtle shell is that all parts are intrinsically held together.*

(Djayhgurrnga, 2002, in Moyle & Gillan 2013, p. 3)

'Turtle Talk' informs the school's planning cycle and community connection and focuses upon data interpretation, particularly on literacy and numeracy, with quality feedback on progress to the students and the community. Kunwinjku language and culture is a key part of the school curriculum and there is regular clear messaging to the community that it is not in competition with the students learning English and mathematics, but like the leadership model at the school, it is making the students strong in both ways, which enhances their skills for life and work. Using the 'both ways' approach, senior secondary school students regularly attend study camps with their teachers, in the region but away from the community. This practice enables the students to focus on their course requirements without the distractions of community life and also provides the opportunity for them to learn more about their culture and country from the Elders who attend the camps through 'learning on country'. The study camps have been instrumental in the increasing number of students graduating from school.

Teachers in the school undergo a rigorous and continuous induction program led by key community members. The program includes visits to important cultural sites, hunting and fishing excursions with community members, regular meetings with all the clan groups to discuss any school issues, information about areas in and around the community which should not be visited, and Kunwinjku language lessons. Since the development of this program the school has enjoyed a very low teacher turnover rate, which is a major achievement and a positive outcome against the serious impediment to student learning of frequent teacher rotation.
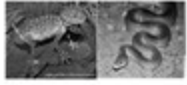
Teachers and some community members also conduct community engagement programs, with support from the Clontarf Foundation. The main aim of the program is to engage community, but students also join in, which has contributed to a slow but steady improvement in school attendance rates; it links the community and gets children to school. Figure 4.1 is the community engagement program for one week in 2017. As usual, it was constructed in consultation with

the local community, changes are made to the weekly program according to community need and the skills available in the community.

Figure 4.1: Gunbalanya's community engagement program for one week in January 2017

In response to community demand, the school was the first in the Northern Territory to change its school year to adapt to the demands of cultural and family commitments, which predominately take place during the dry season. The new school year now commences in the second week of January, when the community is locked in by floodwaters, making travel extremely difficult. The annual long term break, traditionally held over the New Year, is now held in the middle of the year, during the dry season. The school has also opened its library to the community so the wifi can be used for internet banking and for accessing the many historic artifacts and documents that were previously unavailable to community members. Gunbalanya School is still refining its strategy, but their journey to date provides a highly successful model of what is possible with student achievement when authentic community engagement is practised.

Case study 2: The Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy (CYAAA)

The Cape York region, in Queensland's far north, is home to Indigenous people from multiple remote communities. In 2008, four communities in the Cape York agreed to participate in the Cape York Welfare Reform (CYWR), in partnership with the Australian and Queensland governments and the Cape York Institute (CYI) (Minister for Families, Community Services & Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), 2007; Cape York Partnership, 2015; Katz & Raven, 2013). This governance arrangement was referred to as a 'unique' tripartite model of governance that involved the collaborative input of multiple actors, including different Indigenous communities (Katz & Raven, 2013).

In 2010, the Queensland Government approved an agreement for three primary schools in the Cape York region (Aurukun, Coen and Hopevale) to be linked together as the CYWR (ACER, 2013; Cape York Partnership, 2015). Governance of the CYWR was awarded to the newly created Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy (CYAAA) which received in excess of $8.3 million dollars to manage educational service provision in Aurukun, Coen and Hopevale

(Elks & Walker, 2016; ACER, 2013). This combining of several communities into an educational community was brokered by the Cape York Partnership organisation, led by Pearson, who became Chair of the CYAAA (Cape York Partnership, 2009, cited in McCollow, 2013).

The CYWR was based on the recommendations in the CYI report *From Hand Out to Hand Up* (Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership, 2007). The CYI report which was written by policy practitioners at the Cape York Institute, linked regional Indigenous social and economic problems to 'improper socialisation' which culminated in 'passive welfare dependence and the erosion of individual responsibility' (Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership, 2007, p. 1). The director of the CYI, Indigenous activist and lawyer Noel Pearson, hails from the Cape York region (Altman & Johns, 2008). As well as addressing these social concerns, the anticipated educational benefits of the educational program were that it would raise literacy and numeracy achievement of Indigenous students attending the CYAAA Aurukun, Coen and Hope Vale primary schools (McCollow, 2013; Katz & Raven, 2013), as measured by the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) scores.

The central tenant of this review paper is built on the importance of consultation between all parties affected by educational policy. The CYAAA was not an original part of the CYWR (Katz & Raven, 2013), which meant that not all of the Aurukun, Coen and Hope Vale communities were formally involved in the decision-making process for the set-up of the educational program, of which they became a significant part. The act of making decisions without the input of the community is generally aligned with bureaucratic principles of governance, whereby the state has authority to make decisions based on the assumption that the 'state knows what's best' for the community (Pierre & Peters, 2005). But in this case the communities appear to have largely, and possibly by default, delegated the governance of the CYAAA, to its Chair – Noel Pearson (Katz & Raven, 2013).

Pearson's belief is that quality pedagogy can improve Indigenous academic achievement, which is probably uncontested, but his belief that quality pedagogy can be provided by the specific pedagogical model known as 'Direct Instruction' (DI) is contested by many education experts and researchers (Luke, 2014a & 2014b; McCollow, 2013; Dow, 2011). Pearson (2009) has written about the influence of DI and its apparent success in the United States of America. However, in addition to the problematic pedagogical issues associated with DI, from 2010 until June 2016, students in CYAAA schools were not taught the Australian curriculum (ACER, 2013; O'Brien, 2016). This approach would not have assisted students achieve well on NAPLAN measures.

The first evaluation of CYAAA was undertaken by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) in 2012, as part of a contractual arrangement with the Queensland Government (ACER, 2013). The ACER evaluators found that most students at the CYAAA were still performing well below the national benchmarks in literacy achievement. Dissatisfied with the findings from the ACER evaluation, CYAAA invited a consultant from the National Institute for Direct Instruction, based in the United States, to evaluate the CYAAA program later that year (Grossen, 2013).

The second evaluation found that the ACER 'report has misidentified the population to which their conclusions would apply' (Grossen, 2013, p. 27), and concluded student literacy outcomes had increased in each year of the evaluation (Grossen, 2013). However, given that the second evaluation was completed by a DI program writer and consultant of the U.S. National Institute for Direct Instruction, the results of the second evaluation should be treated with caution. Political sciences academic, Professor John Loughlin from Cardiff University, argues that social actors with a vested interest in a reform agenda may believe and claim that change has taken effect when no change has occurred (Loughlin, 2004). Research evaluations must be independent for them to allow for evidence-based program reformation.

In 2016, six years after the agreement 'linking' the Cape York schools, the CYAAA had not achieved its intended educational achievement objectives. Sarah Elks, Queensland political correspondent for *The Australian* newspaper, reported that:

> *… the NAPLAN results from 2015 for Aurukun show that of the 28 children enrolled in Year 3, only 20 per cent were above the national minimum standards for numeracy, and 43 per cent in grammar and punctuation.*

<div align="right">(Elks, 28 May 2016)</div>

Furthermore, education columnist for *The Conversation* and Associate Professor at the University of Canberra, Dr Misty Adoniou (2016), reported that the CYAAA Aurukun school had the lowest NAPLAN participation rates in Queensland, with only 50 per cent of students sitting the Year 3 NAPLAN test in 2015. The publication of the latest NAPLAN results coincided with media reporting significant social disruption in the Arukun community, as the underlying governance challenges erupted, largely as a result of community objection to the program (Sarra, 2016). The impact of the CYAAA on academic outcomes is now impossible to fully assess, but the NAPLAN participation and achievement data clearly shows the anticipated benefits have not been realised.

Community attitudes towards the controversial education reform have been bitterly divided, with some community members supporting the DI approach and many others opposing it, because it was not preparing children for mainstream schooling (Elks, 2016; Australian Broadcasting Company, 2016; Elks & Walker, 2016; Geiger, 2016; Mitchell, 2016; O'Brien, 2016; Roberts & Wilson, 2016; Robertson, 2016a; Robertson, 2016b; Agius & Burke, 2016; Queensland Government Department of Education and Training [DET], 2016). One former principal stated the DI approach was overly scripted and had created distrust and disengagement from schooling in Aurukun (Robertson, 2016a). During 2016, violence towards teachers and general social disturbance resulted in closure of the Aurukun campus (the secondary section had been closed previously, in the mistaken belief the students would attend distant boarding schools). This community division will take time to heal.

The lack of broad-based participation by the community has been the key driver behind community tension, violence and disengagement in the school in Aurukun since the program was implemented. The recent government review into schooling at Aurukun found that community members voiced the desire to be more involved in the governance of the educational program (Queensland Government DET, 2016). The review resulted in the Queensland Government taking a stronger role in the day-to-day operations of the Arukun school, reintroducing the teaching of DI, not as a standalone pedagogy, but alongside the mainstream national curriculum, and Years 7 and 8 (Queensland Government DET, 2016). The primary schools at Coen and Hopevale, which have maintained good attendance and retention rates, will remain subject to Queensland Department of Education policy and procedures.

It is the view of the authors of this review paper that regardless of the genuineness of the intent of initiatives focused on improving student achievement, the usual errors of inadequate participatory community engagement in the development and implementation of education policies and programs have been made. Policies and programs need to be educationally sound and supported by evidence-based research. Policies and programs also need to be properly understood by those who will be affected by them, with consultations to the point of acceptance being critical to their success. Manifestly, these two criteria were not met by the CYAAA educational program. One can imagine how different the outcomes might have been, both educational and more broadly social, if the co-principalship model, for example, had been at the heart of the CYAAA implementation. It would have been a slower process, but it may have lasted longer and achieved the intended educational and social goals.

Concluding comments

Section 4 has detailed a selection of recent and current initiatives that have been implemented across Australia to try and improve the educational achievement of Indigenous students. Most are still works in progress, while others, such as the implementation of Direct Instruction in schools, are yet to show sustainable outcomes and have undergone change. Generally it is evident that programs fail because they are poorly planned, focused on finding the 'silver bullet' and/or did not fully engage the Indigenous community in the planning and operations.

The program examples provided in the case studies illustrate the many policy and implementation options that can exist to increase Indigenous attendance and retention in schooling. Each of them provides lessons in what can be a working proposition for communities who are able to play an active part in their children's education. Each of them also show how Indigenous parents *will* engage in their children's education, given the chance, given a model which they are comfortable with, one that meets their individual and community needs.

Section 5 is the conclusion to the review paper, which appears to have joined with a powerful Zeitgeist in the Indigenous community in 2017.

Conclusion: Being heard

The discourse about Indigenous education policy development is changing. Despite a growing understanding and acknowledgement of strengths-based practices, through both Indigenous and non-Indigenous research, Indigenous education policy continues to focus more on mainstream outcomes. Recent weak national, state and territory achievement data demonstrates the limited impact that the fragmented policy trajectory is having on improving the educational outcomes for many Indigenous students, particularly those in remote and very remote geolocations across Australia.

Since the early 1990s, a wide range of research and reports have highlighted the problematic outcomes and impact of Indigenous educational policy including a limited focus on geolocations and regional or community planning and implementation; a lack of continuity in funding; poor community consultation and engagement; a continued gap in achievement in literacy and numeracy outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students; and continued searches and funding for 'silver bullets' and the 'quick fix'.

Indigenous elder and academic Sue Stanton and her co-authors claimed that Indigenous affairs in Australia is

> … *firmly couched in colonial frameworks whereby the state decides what is good for the natives.*

(Stanton, Adachi & Huijser, 2015, p. 108)

Further, Kishore (2016), Principal Fellow at the Melbourne School of Government, claimed that models of public policy development and administration in Australia, with their focus on repetitional and incremental change rather than being future focused, have hardly changed since the early 1900s. He has argued that too much focus on new ideas (with the Indigenous Advancement Strategy initiative as an example) was not warranted, but rather the key was a greater discipline in implementing evidence-based solutions that are already known.

> *Under the guise of 'known problems' with 'known solutions', pious and repeated invocation abounds of the need to be 'outcomes-focused', to embrace 'place-based solutions', to 'integrate', to 'go digital', 'do more with less', to seek 'social impact'. But repetition has not led to a great deal of clarity about what these ideas actually mean in concrete terms. The obvious becomes the start and the end of the process, leaving strategy itself without penetration or insight.*

(Kishore, 2016, p. 57)

Published academic experts in the field of remote education urge that the individualistic and differentiated nature of educational policies should be seen as attempts to place Australia in the global forefront, where education is viewed as an investment, with a measured rate of return, rather than one where:

> *… you are educationally disadvantaged because your ways of being, valuing, believing and knowing do not align with the prescribed system requirements. Any attempt to live outside this system is not recognised as advantageous because there is only one education system that produces advantage.*

(Guenther, Bat & Osborne, 2013, p. 106)

Future Indigenous education policy development, at all levels, requires collective rather than selective Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consultation. Indigenous learning opportunities occur both within the classroom and outside the classroom, where students are able to apply their learning and wealth of Indigenous knowledge across a variety of settings, to contribute to community and to maintain a sense of belonging. The need for family and community engagement in their children's education cannot be understated. The core tenets of the 1989 NATSIEP policy and the *Coolangatta Statement* still ring true today, but have been ignored by a succession of governments and policymakers over the past 25 years intent on procuring the quick fix. Section 2 of this review paper has made clear that we need to acknowledge past policy failures and the reasons for them. It is time to reconsider the principles and goals outlined in the seminal NATSIEP and the *Coolangatta Statement* documents, rather than conjure up a new array of expensive, election cycle limited, silver bullets for improving the educational outcomes of our Indigenous students.

The *Uluru Statement of the Heart*

The revising of Section 5 of this review paper coincided with the weekend of the 50th anniversary of the 1967 Referendum, which had not delivered the relief and recognition it had promised. As has been intimated earlier in this review, too much had been asked of that one event and the consequent constitutional change. The promises inherent in the High Court's Mabo decision, the Apology and the *Bringing Them Home* report had also not been fulfilled.

The federal government, through the Recognise campaign, had sought the formulation of Indigenous views before considering voting in the Parliament on a referendum to acknowledge Indigenous Australians in the Constitution, planned for 2018. Over six months, the Reconciliation Council had conducted 12 dialogues with Indigenous community representatives regarding constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians and other issues, culminating in a historic National Constitution Convention at Uluru on this same weekend.

The Convention's *Uluru Statement from the Heart* is a momentous and moving statement of the determination of Australia's First Nations people to end 'the torment of their powerlessness' and reject the manifest policy outcomes failures, by taking control of their own affairs. To do this they totally rejected mere acknowledgement of Indigenous Australians in the Constitution (which some identify with the mild Recognise campaign). The *Uluru Statement* affirmed that 'In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard'. The *Uluru Statement* declares the National Convention's view that in order for the First Nations of the Australian continent to be fully heard, the following processes and institutions need to be put in place:

> *We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.*
>
> *Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: the coming together after a struggle. It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.*
>
> *We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.*

(*Uluru Statement of the Heart*, 2017)

The National Convention will report to the federal government at the end of June 2017 (after this publication goes to press). This final report will give shape to the processes and bodies it thinks are required to achieve their voice in the Constitution and in the Parliament, the make-up and powers of a Truth and Justice Commission, and what steps might be taken to lead to Treaty (or treaties) between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

The *Uluru Statement* has as its stated goal that:

> *With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this [that is First Nation's people's] ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia's nationhood.*
>
> *… We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.*

(*Uluru Statement of the Heart*, 2017)

The pressure to prepare for a referendum in a short timeline is already growing. The Convention's decision to seek substantial change and structural reform will not reduce pressure for the proposed referendum question and goals to 'be reasonable'. Funding from the Parliament and federal government will be required to support all this development, and for the ongoing bodies referenced in the *Uluru Statement*, but no funding has been made available and it is still not being publically discussed by the stakeholders.

But the voice has been sounded. It will not be silenced now. This review has urged the opinion embodied in the *Uluru Statement* as the only feasible and honest way forward. The current parlous state of policy outcomes – and of Indigenous prospects for full lives – is manifestly variable but commonly dire. The expressing of and engaging with that torment, through the solution of active Indigenous voice, in decision-making and participation, is the only possible way forward.

Final comments

There are two main policy and practice messages in this review paper. The importance of them being adhered to in policy is amply illustrated in the case studies in Section 4. They are:

1. Use evidence-based research in program development, implementation and evaluation.
2. Ensure that Indigenous voices participate in policy development, from the national level down to the school. Informed consultation and decision-making will encourage understanding and follow through.

Indigenous communities throughout Australia must be given control and ownership over the formation and governance of educational policies, programs and reforms that impact their lives. Positive change can only be achieved if education programs and policies are decided *by* Indigenous Australians *for* Indigenous Australians, with diverse representation of Indigenous Australians being included in decision-making processes.

There is a clear need and a desire for change, for fundamentally different policies in the area of Indigenous education policy and practice. We need to insist on Indigenous voice being heard in Indigenous education. The authors of this AER believe Indigenous Australians are capable of making quality policy decisions, collaboratively, with other stakeholders. Governments and other decision-makers need to listen harder, and fund according to the Indigenous advice they receive. Additionally, the authors think there are clear signs Indigenous Australians will insist on being heard, on being given a voice in the decision-making that affects their lives.

Indigenous Australians know their history well. They have learnt from it and non-Indigenous Australians need to do the same. Change is urgently required.

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Australian Education Review

Number: 62

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This review paper argues that improving educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians is essential to overcoming the rates of multiple disadvantage that Indigenous people endure across Australia today. *How* best to improve the educational outcomes is really the matter of urgency to be debated.

Section 1 identifies five key propositions in its case for urgency: the colonial and post-colonial history, the diversity of the Indigenous population, the social and economic disadvantage and the policy parameters needed for effective Indigenous education policy.

Section 2 provides and examines the key national data sets that determine the current education performance of Indigenous students across Australia. Jurisdictional and geolocational comparisons are used to investigate patterns of strength and weakness in students' educational performance. Analyses that address the many factors related to possible explanations for the differential data are presented.

Section 3 outlines and analyses policy trajectories in Indigenous affairs, specifically in education, over the last quarter century. Links are drawn between policies, ideological positions and to global perspectives on First Nations policy.

Section 4 identifies five key and immediate challenges in the area of Indigenous education that require solutions. Educational programs, implemented with a view to meeting these challenges, are examined, in terms of their inclusiveness, strength of evidence base and outcomes achieved.

Section 5 explicitly addresses the review's central argument: that only when there is deeper engagement by the recipients of policy is it likely that most factors relevant to success can be incorporated in its implementation. In support of this position the authors refer to the *Uluru Statement of the Heart*, which in May 2017 unequivocally called for Indigenous voice to be heard.

Kevin Gillan, Adjunct Professor in the School of Education at Charles Darwin University and Executive Director of Education Partnerships in the Northern Territory Department of Education, has extensive experience in Indigenous education policy and research.

Suzanne Mellor is the AER Series Editor and a co-author of this edition. An ACER Senior Research Fellow and an experienced researcher with extensive publications in a wide range of fields.

Jacynta Krakouer was a Research Fellow in ACER's Indigenous Graduate Research Program.

Mark Rose is Professor and Executive Director Indigenous Strategy at La Trobe University.