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 Nation 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.
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