Growing up Indigenous
Developing Effective Pedagogy for Education and Development

Raymond Nichol
La Trobe University, Australia

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There has never been a greater need for a socially and historically informed, yet critical account, of the mismatch between traditional ways, realities of life in Indigenous communities, villages and enclaves, and the forms of education provided in schools.

Raymond Nichol, a specialist in Indigenous education and pedagogy, surveys the links, too often disparities, between ethnographic detail of life 'on the ground' and the schooling provided by nation states in this vast region. Most importantly, he explores and suggests ways community developers and educators, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, may work to bridge the gaps in social rights, educational and economic development. This is relevant for all Indigenous communities, their survival and development.

Many vexed issues are discussed, such as race, ethnicity, identity, discrimination, self-determination, development, and relevant, effective pedagogical, learning and schooling strategies.

Dr Raymond Nichol is Head of Social Science Education and Co-ordinator International in the Faculty of Education, La Trobe University, Bendigo, Victoria, Australia. He is an anthropologist and teacher educator. His many publications in the fields of education and social science include Socialization, Land, and Citizenship among Aboriginal Australians: Reconciling Indigenous and Western Forms of Education, Lewiston, NY: Edward Mellen Press, 2005. This is a follow-up, comparative extension and update to that book.
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Bibliography
GROWING UP INDIGENOUS

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Raymond Nichol
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When does education amount to brainwashing? Arguably always, in the sense that we are all taught how to understand the world, what values to hold and how to behave appropriately. We do not invent these for ourselves, but inherit them from our forebears, acquiring such knowledge from those who socialise us, such as parents, relatives, friends and teachers. Albeit we may modify what we know and how we behave in the light of life’s experiences, perhaps contributing to a change in the body of knowledge passed on to the next generation. But the philosopher’s idea of the individual in a ‘state of nature’, entirely free to learn and behave however s/he wishes, is a totally imaginary construct; for such generationally transmitted culture has always been an aspect of being human. The palaeo-anthropological evidence shows that when modern humans emerged some 100,000 years ago they had the rudiments of a cultural inheritance as we know it, and probably language too, evolved by their pre-hominid ancestors over the previous million years or so. Consequently, it is human to be brainwashed: a deliberately provocative characterisation of education broadly, to underscore the importance of Raymond Nichol’s welcome book - for which it is a privilege to supply a foreword.

It is perhaps more appropriate to think of such cultural inculcation as ‘brain filling’. The rub is that when our ancestors emerged from Africa to occupy all the continents on Earth, they developed a myriad of different ways of doing this, of knowing and being in the world. We biologically all have the same hardware but we are programmed with a wide range of cultural software, as evident today in the world’s large variety of languages and cultures. Notwithstanding that this variety is currently diminishing at an accelerating rate under the forces of globalisation, which themselves starkly reveal education’s brainwashing aspects. We see this when one socio-cultural tradition moves on another and seeks to dominate it, as has occurred many times in human history when those from one region conquered those in another, such as when the Romans invaded England and set about Romanising the defeated Celtic natives. A more recent, and ongoing example, is European exploration and colonisation of much of the world, during which colonisers set out to transform, or as they expressed it ‘civilise’, the natives they encountered to their ways, such as the Australian Aborigines and peoples of New Guinea, the subjects of this commendable book. The efforts of missionaries to convert ‘pagans’ to Christianity is a graphic example, their establishment of formal schooling in many regions being considered one of their great successes, along with saving souls. The process continues today largely under the banner of development, particularly evident where agencies fund education programmes of various kinds. The expressed aim of these activities is to change peoples’ traditional brain filling.

The consequences have proved dire for some peoples. A cruel example is the ‘stolen generation’ of Australian Aborigines, where children were taken from their parents and put into boarding schools with the expressed aim of breaking the link with their natal cultures and promoting their assimilation into White Australian society. The intellectual and emotional damage inflicted on those so treated amounts
to a crime against humanity. Not that all brainwashing has been forced on people, many have sought education voluntarily; to know more, for instance, about experimental science and the formidable technology it underpins, or the capitalist system and how better to access its alluring consumer goods. But sometimes such well intentioned education has spawned similar problems to colonial activities; for instance the army of disaffected school leavers in Papua New Guinea who swell the ranks of so-called rascal [violent criminal] gangs that menace the country’s fragile social order and contribute to the impression of a failed nation state.

Some of these problems, ironically for a critique of education, are the result of ignorance. To continue the computing-cum-artificial intelligence analogy, we know that tampering with software without full knowledge of programmes can lead to incompatibility problems, even cause operating systems to fail, and so it appears with humans too. If those who seek to teach people from different socio-cultural backgrounds, knew more about their cultures and histories, they might ask more searching questions about the relevance of Western style education and avoid some of its more crass and detrimental assumptions. This valuable book takes the part of the indigenous movement that argues forcefully that we need to know more about those in whose education we presume to intervene. Not with a view to brainwashing and changing them in ways that we think best (after those missionaries who learnt local languages and ways, to use the knowledge better to civilise the natives) but with a view to facilitating and informing the brain filling changes they think best meets their needs and aspirations in a globalising world. In this way we should seek to empower people to take responsibility for their education, helping them to make any arrangements meet their cultural expectations and wants more aptly. It is to advance on the long debate about the appropriateness of vernacular education, further challenging the idea that ‘proper’ education can only take place in a European language.

Furthermore, in arguing that we should learn about others’ brain filling ways of education, Raymond Nichol’s estimable book also contributes to the critique of Western formal schooling, teaching us that this is only one approach, and in the history of humankind a strange, even bizarre one. It invites us to learn from these other ways of being in the world and passing on associated lore, and to reflect on the possibility that Western systems of education may not necessarily be the best and certainly do not have all the answers, particularly when viewed from the perspective of the stress experienced by learners. It is critiques such as presented in this fantastic book that point the way to modifying our overly examined and bureaucratic system of education with its learning outcomes, teaching strategy documents, lists of key skills and so on, that make teaching and learning such an unpleasant experience, intent on marking out successes and failures rather than passing on wisdom to all. They can perhaps help us to put some humanity back into education, as it is after all, in all its manifold forms, a defining characteristic of what it is to be human.

Finally, encouraging people to draw upon their own pedagogic traditions and values may help promote the continuance of minority ways of seeing and being in the world. Language loss epitomises threats to these ways; in New Guinea, for instance, an island renowned for the variety of its languages, there is growing concern
at their disappearance, together with associated encoded cultural knowledge, with the spread of lingua franca. The globalising erosion of the many different knowledge traditions and accumulated wisdom that have evolved is impoverishing humanity’s cultural heritage. It is analogous to loss of species. It is not just a matter of aesthetics, as evident for example in the emergent idea of bio-cultural diversity, which builds on the realisation that environmental conservation has to involve those living in any region because their culturally informed activities have invariably contributed to the natural environment seen today. Again, we have much to learn from these other cultural traditions where they represent sustainable environmental adaptations, lessons that the capitalist order urgently needs to heed with the planet under serious threat from its industrial activities. It is possible that not only how but also what is taught in Western style education may literally prove to be a dead-end for humanity. If these issues are of concern to you reader, read on.

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INTRODUCTION

The education provided for Indigenous students is often seen by them, their parents and communities, as being differentiating and alienating. It is feared or resented. Following are a few anecdotes and insights, some from my own experiences in schools and communities. They shed a little introductory light on why this should be so and why change in Indigenous education is sorely needed.

The first is a cartoon scene drawn from the work of Professor Betty Watts and Dr H. C. ‘Nugget’ Coombs. Picture a primary school Parent Teacher Night, an Indigenous mother, a schoolteacher, and, between them, the student. The child, towered above by the adults, says, “So, each of you says she is helping to bring me up. How about you get together?”

Dr Coombs and Professor Colin Tatz observe, in regard to the parlous state of most Indigenous communities and the wide gaps in social, health and educational indices, that, “It’s not a black problem, it’s a white problem.”

The next, a white teacher in a class of students from town and fringe communities, admonishing a ‘town’ child, saying, “You can do better than that, you’re not from the mission!” Talk about self-fulfilling prophecies!

Nearly all of us have ‘habits’ of some form or another, whether drinking, smoking, gambling, over-eating and over-consuming. We all know what ours are… In Australia, a $150 per week habit on a low income is a disaster. The family isn’t fed, housed or educated adequately. However, such a habit on a good, steady income means all, but especially children, can still be well cared for. Poverty and social disadvantage are crucial to an understanding of how the ‘gaps’ in education and health are created.

A ‘well taught’ Central Australian Aboriginal man commented, ironically, “Blackfellas only know the desert, whitefellas know about cities.” In a twist on this, and a good example of black, defensive, self-deprecating humour, Johnno from Murrin Bridge, Central-Western NSW, told me how when he went on his first trip in a plane he made sure to get a seat near the back. “I didn’t want the left hand passenger side; you know, where you have to jump out to open the gates” [as you do when driving around outback properties].

A leading Indigenous Australian educator, Professor Paul Hughes, addressing a large group of Aboriginal teachers and community representatives at an Indigenous Education Conference in Fremantle, Western Australia, asserted strongly that, “Nearly all of the teachers working with our children are non-Aboriginal and that will be so in the foreseeable future. Most teachers have good hearts and want the best for all the children in their class. If you mob keep ‘bashin’ the teachers round the head then you won’t be helping the Indigenous kids in their classes.” Ten years earlier, I heard the African American social educator, Professor James Banks, say something very similar to a group of African Americans at a conference of the National Council of the Social Studies, Washington DC. He told them that by around 2010 more than half of Americans would be ‘of colour’; however, their teachers would still be
mostly white. Alienate and abusing white teachers, as some in the audience had done in earlier NCSS conference presentations, especially in regard to the teaching of American history and race relations, would not help the ‘child of colour’.

Inherent anger, perfectly understandable after ‘years of being worked-over by whitefellas’, but counter-productive, was also evident when an Aboriginal activist, protesting in Bendigo’s Hargreaves Mall, screamed, “You raped my mother” [meaning the earth] to bewildered shoppers passing by. In another Mall, in Alice Springs, Central Australia, I sat with Indigenous teachers from the Yipirinya School. We were lunching on grilled focaccia and drinking cappuccinos and café lattes. Todd Mall and the cafes were full of tourists. A ‘bush mob’ of Aboriginal people wandered through the centre of the Mall, men, women and children speaking in the Arrernte language and accompanied by their dogs. They totally ignored the watching shoppers, diners and tourists. It was as if we did not exist. In many senses it could have been three hundred years ago, or that we were from different worlds.

What can we draw from these insights and anecdotes? Clearly this is a complex, difficult, paradoxical field and we need to think through many issues if we are to close the gap in educational and other crucial indices of minority groups’ cultural and existential survival. Inclusive and empowering discussions and negotiations are much needed between communities, State and other stakeholders, such as teachers, principals, school councils and administration, local, regional, state and national. History tells us that ‘top down’ interventions, while effective in the short term, are not a long-term answer. For example, I have seen many former reserves or ‘missions’ where the people say, or documents reveal, that during the high period of colonialism, paternalism and intervention, that is, up until the late 1960s, when managers, matrons, welfare officers, truancy inspectors, police sergeants, school masters and mistresses ruled supreme, there were well tended orchards, gardens, crops, houses and community facilities. Children’s nutrition, school attendance and academic performance were often much better than now. Today, in many cases, there is no evidence remaining of these, for the people were allowed to develop little sense of control and ownership, or the necessary skills of maintenance. Ownership, decision-making, self-respect and empowerment, are the keys to self-determination and to the end of Indigenous anomie, oppression and poor outcomes in pedagogy and education.

This book, grounded in community and school case studies, argues for Indigenous self-determination, for social justice, and the powerful role education and pedagogy can play in healing, transformation and decolonization. It provides historical, anthropological, educational and comparative backgrounds, to identify possible productive pedagogies and practices for Indigenous education in Australia, Melanesia and elsewhere. It further investigates how such practices might be applied in disparate cultures and communities, acknowledging that relevant and effective practice is inherently situational. There is considerable comparative data, particularly from Melanesia, chosen for its insights into colonialism and Indigenous pedagogy. It is important to note that pedagogy is more than ‘performing’ or teaching. It is also discourse, involving the values, philosophies, policies and contested stratagems that inform and shape teaching and learning. There is abundant evidence that educational provision often fails to meet the needs of Indigenous students.
The book is somewhat different from past research and writing in that while scholars have written extensively about Indigenous knowledge systems, most recently on their loss or transformation amidst changing social, economic and environmental conditions, few focus on the underlying educational practices, and even fewer address how historically-based power structures transform Indigenous educational systems. By examining issues of education and pedagogy concerning Indigenous Australians and Melanesians, I offer alternatives to much current educational provision. For example, creative and practical ways are suggested to develop relevant pedagogies and to integrate key traditional educational practices into current Western ‘best practice’. Complex processes are identified, of Indigenous cultural, social, and economic exclusion that have helped to shape the educational systems and sense of identity and citizenship in Australia, Melanesia and other Indigenous contexts.

While examining traditional Indigenous socialisation, education, knowledge, pedagogy and citizenship in Australia and Melanesia I view the understanding of these as essential for those who plan and work with and for Indigenous communities in this vast region. Crucial issues of relevance, identity, efficacy, employment, decentralization, self-management and control are discussed, and recommendations made.

Obstacles to social learning and public participation are examined, as is social change. The field is so complex, and often fraught, that there is a need to take account of shifting interdependencies of factors influencing Indigenous learning and the need to recognize the tensions in any decisions made about sequence and relative importance of how these component factors are represented. One must take these interdependencies and tensions into account when untangling complex pedagogical approaches and systems. All seeking productive outcomes in Indigenous education must strive to reduce antagonism, fear and sense of otherness. Agency, communicative action and responding to change inform the writing, analysis and findings in the final chapter.

In regard to social change it is more fruitful to explore the process, the agency and multi-causal situations of change, rather than envisaging traditional structural-functional, social order, polar opposite paradigms, and inevitable deterministic stages.

Culturally appropriate education for people of Indigenous descent is not a privilege; it is a fundamental right (see Nichol, 2005). A leitmotiv of the study is that such an education is also a powerful resource for all educators, community developers, and all cultures. It explores Indigenous Australian and Melanesian education and selected forms of Indigenous education elsewhere in the world, particularly over the last thirty years.

The major objective is to examine closely educational and pedagogical provision for Indigenous peoples, shaped by themes of relevance, culture, language, pedagogy, curriculum, citizenship and school type, and to suggest forms of reconciliation between the dominant western and Indigenous forms of education.

It is proposed that non-Indigenous people have much to learn from the Indigenous world. We can learn a great deal from Indigenous cultures; however, their knowledge and methodologies are often ignored or discounted by metropolitan,
industrial societies. The book should assist educators, community developers and those in related fields who read it, and, crucially, put the recommendations into practice, to work towards greater reconciliation, understanding, inclusive citizenship, peace and productivity.

The Melanesian component, even more than the Australian, is shaped by the uncertainty, threatened marginalization and, often poor, reward for investment in western schooling posed by patchy modernization. The concluding recommendations, concerning possible strategies to reconcile Western and Indigenous education and pedagogy, are informed and refined by wide consultation with Indigenous people and organisations.

The period from the 1970s to the early 2000s is chosen because it encompasses significant periods of transition in education and community dynamics in Australia and Melanesia. In Australia, policies change from those of assimilation in the 1940s and 1950s, towards integration in the 1960s and 1970s, and then to dimensions of self-management. Education was always supposed to be a key agent of change in implementing these policies. Papua New Guinea attained Independence from Australian control in 1975 and education was seen as a key factor in establishing a national identity and purpose.

There is analysis of education and change, examination of the factors that underpin these relationships, the forms they take, and the social, political and economic consequences for the respective communities. The policies and practices of educating Indigenous Australians for cultural and economic assimilation into the dominant Anglo-Celtic Australian society are critically examined and contrasted with more recent policies and practices. Comparisons are drawn between education for colonialism and self-government in Australia and Melanesia. The comparative is included and analysed for its wealth of insights into the Australian and Melanesian colonial and post-colonial experience. The comparisons, before and after, nation to nation, are fascinating and instructive.

If we are to achieve social and political reconciliation between Indigenous and other citizens there is a need for a broad, inclusive and participatory form of citizenship, one that acknowledges Indigenous forms of learning. The provision of the most appropriate education for Indigenous students is extraordinarily complex and presents an enormous challenge to educators, in Australia, Melanesia and elsewhere. The implications are profound: continued ignorance and arrogance from the dominant cultures will lead to even greater resentment, social alienation, poverty and divisiveness. These issues and concerns are explored in broad historical and, more particular, localised senses, each informing the other.

Education and citizenship are central themes: education understood in its broad social and cultural, as well as its narrow institutional sense, and citizenship in terms of inclusion and exclusion, involvement and alienation. Overwhelming evidence of dysfunction and inadequate educational provision and outcomes leads me to ask the following questions, many of which are interrelated. Have non-Indigenous Australians, through the imposition of their political, economic and educational systems, dominated and undermined the beliefs and values of the Indigenous people of Australia and Melanesia? How can we best understand and respond to the challenges
INTRODUCTION

of Indigenous pedagogy and education in the twenty-first century? What is a relevant and effective contemporary Indigenous education and pedagogy that bridges cultural and historical gulfs?

The first chapter introduces the compelling needs of Indigenous people and their communities, and the issues facing them. Chapter 2 focuses on educational, pedagogic, community, citizenship, social, racial and hegemonic themes. Chapters 3 and 4 explore ethnographically the traditional forms of education and socialisation in Australia and Melanesia respectively. Chapter 5 discusses colonialism and western education in these two regions. Chapter 6 reveals the possible integration of traditional knowledge and pedagogy with education and development. The final chapter, Chapter 7, provides many recommendations concerning the potential roles of Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy in education and development in Melanesia and Australia. As noted earlier, key themes shaping the book are relevance, culture, socialisation, pedagogy, language, curriculum, citizenship and school type (the form and function of the school), and the nature of the teaching force. Far-reaching recommendations are made, particularly concerning pedagogy, citizenship education and learning outcomes.

Indigenous people today, in Australia, Melanesia and many other regions, accommodate much of what the plantation, pastoral, managerial and teaching agents of the dominant culture bring them. However many fear that the education imposed will take the children away, physically and psychologically. They reject their powerlessness and dependence on the system of authority and education imposed upon their communities and struggle to pursue their best interests in the face of differentiating state controlled, school-based knowledge versus community traditional knowledge and skills. There is growing assertion of Indigenous identity and community control, of cultural, economic, legal and citizenship rights, and desire for full recognition as citizens of their respective regions and countries.
INTRODUCTION

*Murrin Bridge children at play, 1980s. The photographer is John Morton.*
CHAPTER 1

A COMPELLING NEED

It is a … truism that human beings are moulded and formed by their cultures. Control of what is taught and preached is vital in any society and has been the root cause of crucial conflicts in many countries (Perry, in Hughes: 1993).

Overview: Ethnographic and Historical

This chapter provides a brief introduction to the history of the Murrin Bridge people since traditional times and an overview of contemporary life and conditions in the community. It ends with a brief description of the fieldwork and research conducted in the community and elsewhere in Australia, mainly in Victoria, New South Wales (NSW), the Northern Territory (NT), and Melanesia. Such historical and cultural background knowledge is necessary for educators and community developers seeking to understand the need for, and place of, Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy in their programs.

The members, all with Aboriginal and European ancestry, of this small Indigenous community, live on the eastern fringe of extensive dry inland plains that stretch between the Lachlan and Darling Rivers in western NSW. Since the mid-nineteenth century the region has undergone enormous pastoral and agricultural development. This has had profound ramifications for the descendants of the people who formerly possessed this land.

From the 1820s white settlers in New South Wales realised that fortunes could be made from extensive wool production in Australia. With their convict-workers they ventured out from the coastal regions to ‘squat’ on the lands of the inland tribes. They commandeered hundreds of square miles of land for their sheep, cleared the land by massacring or driving off the original owners and protected the frontier with a united militia against Aboriginal resistance. They ‘dispersed’ the clans and tribes to ‘clear the run’ (often euphemisms for shooting, poisoning and intimidation) and, once suppressed, the survivors were permitted to camp near the owners’ headquarters, to earn their living by working with stock or becoming farm labourers. As Charles Darwin observed, “Wherever the European has trod, death seems to pursue the aboriginal.” The old people at Murrin Bridge, the burba generation (those who had been traditionally initiated) told me about ‘the killing times’, recounting that there were massacres in the far west of NSW as recently as the 1920s. However, they were vague regarding places, times, numbers and other details.

For the Wanggaapuwan and their neighbours this change in circumstance was catastrophic. They ceased living as politically independent gatherer-hunters, their economy was smashed and the fabric of their social life torn apart. During this period
(the 1820s to 1880s) the original inhabitants of the inland plains were a people being placed in bondage to a new rural Australian social order. The social and historical complexities of this pastoral adaptation are important. Closer pastoral settlement in the early years of the 20th century, because of the growth of soldier settlement schemes and the building of the Condobolin to Broken Hill railway, meant these groups or ‘mob’ of Indigenous pastoral workers, created by adaptation to pastoralism, could not be maintained by the smaller properties.

Similar histories are found across Australia. The Indigenous Australians were displaced. Being poor, landless and subject to the vagaries of the *laissez faire* capitalist economy, their plight became an embarrassment to governments, who established reserves and managed stations for their protection and sustenance. From the beginning, and perhaps as justification for the establishment of segregated institutions for Aboriginal inmates, the authorities depicted these stations as training institutions that would transform the ‘natives’, stripping them of their culture, seen as being heathen, primitive, ‘stone-age’ and backward. They were to become more acceptable, as well as useful, to the dominant Australian society. The imposition of western schooling played a significant role in this stratagem. The following provides a brief introduction to the long period of institutionalization and transformation wrought by church and government.

Murrin Bridge, central-western NSW, was founded as an Aboriginal station in 1949 when the residents were transferred from the reserve at Menindee, over 300 kilometres to the west. The people previously had lived in the government settlement at Carowra Tank, being transported to Menindee in 1934 when the tank ran dry.

The reserve at Menindee was also known as ‘the mission’ because of the involvement there of Roman Catholic Sacred Heart missionaries. Murrin Bridge, although established and managed as a government Aboriginal Station, has always been known by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the region as ‘the mission’. The leaders of the community today prefer it to be termed ‘an Aboriginal community’, perhaps in response to the occasional sneering, heavily accented, comments from outside Koories, such as, “Eh, you from mission, bud?” They imply that the ‘mission mob’ is backward, uses Aboriginal English, is afraid of the outside world and lacks sophistication. Over the years many comments from townspeople, from children to professional and leaders, have reinforced the negative, critical stereotype.

The Menindee settlement was a disaster for the residents, particularly during the economic depression years of the 1930s. It became an acute political embarrassment for the New South Wales government; consequently, an alternative settlement was sought. On 15 June 1945, the Chief Secretary announced that a model Aboriginal settlement was to be built at Murrin Bridge, with accommodation for 300 Aborigines, including a church, school, recreation area, and 500 hectares for agricultural development. It was to be ‘a model agricultural village’.

The chosen location was advantageous for those who had maximum influence on the decisions of government, namely local white townsmen and landholders, as well as the administrators and interested whites on the Aborigines Welfare Board. Being placed beside the Lachlan River, a permanent source of water, the settlement avoided the water shortages that had bedevilled the former stations to the west; it was
well off the Euabalong to Lake Cargelligo road and so was out of sight, but remained a convenient location for a pool of workers, especially for the large pastoral stations to the west.

The community’s location adhered to the Welfare Board’s official policy by the 1940s of assimilation of Aborigines. The policy focused on fitting those Aboriginal people with ‘an admixture of European blood’ into Australian society. Murrin Bridge was seen as a necessary staging post on the path to assimilation. In regard to ‘admixture’ some residents state, ‘Our grandmothers were taken advantage of.’ There are red-haired, freckled Murrin Bridge people, with few Indigenous physical features, who are socialised and identify completely as ‘black’ and ‘Koorie’. This leads to assertions by local whites such as, “Why should they get grants when they’re as white as me?” There is frequent questioning by outsiders of what constitutes Aboriginality. In Australia, for official government recognition, there must be some Indigenous heritage, but is not quantified, unlike some states in the USA.

From 1949 the population ranged from 200–300. In the early 2000s it reduced rapidly to around 150, as many people made the decision to move ‘to town’, that is to Lake Cargelligo. The 2006 Australian Census reveals a Lake Cargelligo Indigenous population of 267, with a non-Indigenous population of 852.

In brief, government policy towards Indigenous Australians has been for segregation and protection 1880s–1930s, assimilation 1940s–1950s, integration 1960s, and, increasing self-management, local autonomy and recognition of citizenship, 1970s–2000s. The provision of education for Aboriginal Australians during the periods of these various policies is compared and contrasted. Does practice in situ reflect policy concerning self-determination and self-management?

**CONTEMPORARY LIFE: AN INDIGENOUS IDENTITY**

By the twenty first century, more than 50 years after the establishment of the Murrin Bridge community, the people have not been assimilated into the dominant white society. Most, however, are integrated to varying degrees. After 150 years of struggle, defeat and control at the hands of white settlers they, like so many of their fellow Indigenous Australians, are detribalised and rendered virtually landless; the ‘permanent source of water’, the Lachlan River, is often polluted. The main problem is excessive run-off into the river of fertilizer. This, in summer, leads to eutrophication, production of poisonous algal bloom.

Local white townsfolk, particularly professional people, perceive the Aboriginal people as being a ‘culturally and economically deprived’ group, sharing a culture of poverty with other lower-class groups. A Marxist might say they constitute a kind of black rural lumpen-proletariat. The conventional perception is that their culture is in disarray; the family a loose form of matrifocality and that they are virtually leaderless. This is during a time when many small, remote, Indigenous communities across Australia are seen to be dysfunctional, with enormous social, violence, health and educational problems.

The research at Murrin Bridge and elsewhere reveals, however, that this is too narrow a perspective. The people, living on the fringe of the general Australian
society, are under considerable pressure to commit themselves to the town and to ‘acceptable’ white, rural economic and social standards, to integrate, assimilate, pass into the broader society, or to suffer a perpetual fringe existence. And yet they retain their Aboriginality, their sense of identity as Aboriginal people, through a multitude of social, economic, and political relationships within the community and the local region. They perceive themselves as ‘the mob from the mission’, a group of people who have ‘grown up in the ashes’, the term used by older community members to symbolise the development and expression of Aboriginality. Their identification, behaviour and values derive from a strong extended family system that has developed as a result of their history of dispossession and oppression. One finds positive responses within these families to the historical threats of physical extermination, racism and cultural domination. They have many children. There is maintenance of familial obligations and order and there are strong egalitarian norms and sanctions against those of their people who ‘act flash’ or ‘think they are white’. These are integral factors in their individual and community survival and sense of identity. This is not to deny that the attractions and resources of town and city are strong integrative forces.

Despite the power and unquestioned control that government-appointed managers, welfare officers and teachers exercised for many years on this government station, the Aboriginal people maintain an ethos and cultural life at odds with the dominant culture. Their response to the various policies towards Aboriginal Australians adopted over the years by state and federal governments is a fascinating measure of resistance and adaptation by people who endeavour constantly to create a *modus vivendi* between the European and Aboriginal way of life. Thus, I argue that they are not a culturally deprived people; they are neither leaderless nor in disarray. This is not to deny the enormous challenges facing this and many similar communities, in health, employment and education.

From the early 1960s, in response to the policy of integration of Aborigines into the wider society, the Aborigines Welfare Board permitted rudimentary forms of Indigenous involvement in the management of the Murrin Bridge community. The Board’s successor, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA), continued the process. From the mid 1970s the community company, initially termed the Coonchie Corporation, and its Indigenous staff, conducted much of the organisation of day-to-day community affairs, especially in regard to housing and amenities. The company was established in 1976 under the auspices of the New South Wales Aboriginal Lands Trust to administer funds for community improvements, was controlled by a Board of elected residents, and was vested with ownership of the 400 hectare Murrin Bridge property. In 1989, Coonchie became the Murrin Bridge Advancement Aboriginal Corporation.

An image of Aboriginal people as being lazy and irreclaimable helps to justify the dominant culture’s unwillingness to provide any material compensation for the dispossessed and their seemingly obstinate refusal to adopt a ‘respectable’ white lifestyle. Such people ignored the fact that one requires a very considerable and stable income in order to adopt this favoured lifestyle. They also pointed to the ‘rubbish’ growing where wheat could be sown on some of the community’s land and questioned the Indigenous people’s right to expect more land for community development if
A COMPELLING NEED
what was already available was not being fully utilised. There was oppressve ethno-
centricity inherent in their resentment. By the 2000s the initiative of establishing a
commercial vineyard on the ‘mission’ land had lessened this sentiment.

For many years, as for other communities, there was a disincentive to produce
on the community’s land. If they made a profit the grant from DAA was reduced
accordingly!

Contrary to the prevailing government policies and practices designed to
promote integration, self-reliance and self-management, there was, indeed still is,
an increasing dependence on government agencies such as the Welfare Board, later
the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Commission (ATSIC), the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP)
‘work for the dole’ and social service benefits. The employment situation for
Indigenous people, whilst always inadequate and precarious, has become far worse
with changing rural technology and land use in the western region.

A SENSE OF PLACE AND IDENTITY
Many of the Aboriginal people still hold the status of a rural underclass and their
culture and colour results in, for many, lack of acceptance and participation in the
life of the white town. Local whites stress that it is the behaviour of the blacks that
they object to, such as destruction of houses and other amenities, public drunkenness,
begging, fighting, poor personal hygiene, and so on. The researcher is regaled by
such stories all over Australia, which, however, often lead to more overt, physical
denigration of their appearance, physiognomy and intelligence. This hostility led
to more use by the Murrin Bridge community for sporting and recreational ties
of the smaller, more integrated and accepting, less threatening western town of
Euabalong. Even those who, due to provision of housing and increased facilities
and opportunities, have tried to conform to white values and behaviour and live in
Lake Cargelligo, find that often they are not accepted by many of the town whites.

Also, as noted earlier, other Aboriginal people are often aggressive and abusive
of ‘Koories who think they’re white’. Placed in this invidious situation they have to
choose, and an increasing number, while continuing to reside in town, identify with
the black community, visit their families in Murrin Bridge more frequently than
before, and travel to Euabalong with them for sporting and other social occasions. They
cite numerous instances of unfriendliness, rudeness and being ignored and socially
disparaged in Lake Cargelligo to justify their decision. Thus, there are important
social and psychological reasons to remain part of the Aboriginal community and
to identify as Koorie. Within the populace there is a hidden resolve to fight on, despite
their beleaguered situation. In recent years, particularly the early 2000s, relatively
large numbers of people from the ‘mission’ moved into Lake Cargelligo. In 2007,
people I interviewed ‘in town’ indicated that access to resources, especially new
homes, but also, jobs, health, education and shops (including take-away food, pubs,
gambling) and sporting facilities, were the major reasons for the move.

Although, as a community, the Indigenous people in the region have little political
and economic power and exhibit the behaviour of a depressed and persecuted
people, they are far from rootless; for example, most of the people at Murrin Bridge identify strongly with the ‘mob’ or community. Most see the mission as their home and frequently stress the fact that, “you could pull these houses down and those people, they would just camp on the river, they wouldn’t go to town to live.” Individuals referring to ‘them’ and ‘those’ people not moving are often most content to remain on the mission; they rarely venture outside.

While they cling to the support of the extended families and are particularly supportive of maternal kin, forming close relationships of reciprocity, they also, from the last decades of the 20th century to 2010, developed a measure of community leadership and established common goals for land acquisition, economic development, housing and leisure activities. This process accelerated after the last resident welfare officer left in 1975. The managerial, assimilative power waned, symbolised by the manager’s superior residence being occupied by local families, the first that of the chairman of the community organisation. Today, the new brick houses are superior to that of the former manager’s.

Automation, mechanisation, changing land use from extensive pastoral activity to cropping, especially wheat, closer settlement, improved transport, drought, and the need for less labour and new skills for the Information Age, have altered the employment pattern in all of these marginal grazing and wheat-lands. Employment levels were catastrophic from the 1970s to 2000s. Where in the 1970s the people had hopes of gaining extra community land for economic development and employment they found that their applications to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Western Lands Trust were unsuccessful or rejected. Much of the surrounding cropping and pastoral country worked by whites became, by the 1980s, a sea of cleared wheat fields. Where once community members could at least hunt on the adjoining Eribendery pastoral station they found paddocks of crops. Few local property owners would permit any hunting on their land. Prospects of outside work were extremely limited. This led often to anomie, despair, depression, alcohol abuse, violence and self-harm. More positive responses were some individual initiatives to obtain land, increased use of the community’s land, particularly the vineyard, working bees to clean up, and lots of humour, much of it sardonic and self-deprecating.

SOCIAL ORGANISATION

It is interesting to compare the behaviour of young Aboriginal men in the mid-twentieth century, as described by the anthropologist, Jeremy Beckett (1958), and life in the community more recently. The young men, or ‘poddies’ as they were called after the term for calf, found single life very pleasurable and were not usually inclined to rush into marriage. Some liked to ramble about the countryside, working and moving on, visiting the Aboriginal settlements to the west, staying with whomever would take them in, finding sexual partners now and again, drinking and fighting. Others preferred a lazier, less adventurous life, lounging about Murrin Bridge, riding horses, running errands, cadging meals, working as little as possible, and spending what they did earn on drink. Whether these ‘poddies’ had their affairs with young girls or older, married women, the tendency was to avoid responsibility.
For girls there was little work to be found and no readily available employment. Thus, although they could travel about, they were virtually tied to the community where life presented few excitements beyond the gambling school. Gossiping and housework occupied most of their time. Most, too, had the burden of a child by the time they were twenty. Beckett found that the young single girls felt inferior to the married women. They showed ‘an unconcealed eagerness to get a boy and settle down.’ Their aspirations and identity focused mainly on marriage and family.

In 1957 these young people made frequent visits to other Aboriginal settlements, often finding lovers and spouses. They could marry whomever they wished except for ‘relations’, that is, siblings and consanguineal kin who were either cousins or second cousins, as in the traditional system. Most people married and established a household for their family. About half of these unions were regularised by religious or legal ceremonies, mostly as a result of pressure from white religious and state authorities.

From the late 1970s to 2010 the young people of Murrin Bridge have a way of life that reveals considerable continuity with that described by Beckett. There have been considerable changes, nevertheless, since the time of Beckett’s study. For example, from the 1980s the lack of employment opportunities restricted the possibility of young people going on leisurely journeys about the countryside, but the improved road system, the community bus, and the greater availability of cars, enabled frequent weekend and other brief trips, especially to Menindee and Wilcannia. These were usually undertaken to visit relations, attend funerals or to participate in cultural and sporting events. The usual brevity of these excursions was conditioned by the requirements of schooling, Technical and Further Education, employers, or the need to guarantee the security of unemployment benefits at Murrin Bridge.

Beckett found that the Aboriginal people in the settlements to the west of New South Wales often found marital partners in other settlements and suggested that in the future, with even greater mobility, this practice would increase. But at Murrin Bridge during the 1970s and 1980s few outsiders married into the community. Almost all of the marriages in this period were between people from the Lake Cargelligo, Euabalong and Murrin Bridge Aboriginal communities. However, it should be noted that Beckett’s predictions concerning the results of increased inter-marriage and mobility do seem to have occurred elsewhere, for the relatives of the Murrin Bridge people, although still centred in Menindee and Wilcannia, have spread as far afield in New South Wales as Wentworth, Dareton, Deniliquin, Griffith, Condobolin, Sydney and Albury, and in Victoria, to Robinvale, Bendigo and Shepparton.

Perhaps the relative stability at Murrin Bridge can be explained by similar factors to those which appear to have changed the old visiting patterns, namely that changes in the pastoral industry, land use and employment, education, and certainly the availability of improved and new housing and environmental conditions at Murrin Bridge and nearby Lake Cargelligo, have both forced and encouraged the members of the community to adopt a more settled way of life.

In the 1980s only six of all the marital unions in Murrin Bridge had been recognised by a legal or religious ceremony and these were between older people. This compares with Beckett’s assessment twenty-five years before of approximately
half of the marital unions being regularised. An older woman explained the con-temporary practice to me in the following way, “No young people are ‘married’. Once the manager left there was no need to get ‘married’. If you like it with one partner you stay with him. At sixteen or seventeen the girl lives with a boy and they are seen as a couple.”

Discussions and observations in recent years, particularly 2007, indicate that this is still the practice. During the initial fieldwork period, four marriages ended. Generally marriages were quite stable, although the pressures deriving from drinking did create a deal of tension. There was a high level of jealousy and mistrust among the younger couples. Loud arguments, violence, self-harm and damage to houses resulted from these conflicts.

There is, quite obviously, a strong tendency to live in the same locality as one’s parents, and, if possible, women prefer to be close to their grandmothers’, mother’s and sisters’ houses. However, in such a small community, even if the relative is a block or two away, or living in Euabalong or Lake Cargelligo, it is possible to maintain the continuous round of visiting and exchange which is typical of most families. At Murrin Bridge most of the residents maintain a close circle of kin and affines. Even those not recognised as relatives are well known and probably distantly related. Their relationship with these people, especially the close maternal kin, ensures a level of basic social and economic security for all.

The people use English kinship terms. These determinations of relationship are based on similar categories and as they expressed them to me. They have a strong sense of obligation to ‘our own people’, that is, those in close kin relationship to them. This is primarily expressed in terms of basic assistance in times of need so that food is obtained, children cared for, and transportation offered. The old people often say, “Our own people shouldn’t be tight with each other.”

This assistance also extends to the distribution of the wild meats: emu, echidna, kangaroo and fish, of which the people are so fond. These, when they can be obtained, are exchanged within the circle of close kin, often to a form of rough equivalence. For example, on one occasion, the favour of a gift of a hindquarter of ‘porcupine’, that is, echidna, was reciprocated by the gift of a forequarter of lamb. In general, accumulated favours can be repaid on pension day. In the 1980s, a time before ATMs, and a community with an economy based largely on the receipt of social service cheques, a late delivery put many people in dire straits and made them dependent on the generosity of kin. As one young man explained,

If the cheques are late, sometimes up to a week, we’re starving. We fill up on ‘Johnny cakes’ [made of flour, baking powder and water, rolled flat like a pizza base and, for cooking, placed on iron mesh or griddle iron over an open fire] and tea. If we run out we go to relations and ask for tea, baking powder, flour, milk, sugar, Wheat-bix…usually to my aunty, my mother’s sister.

Life continues to be, well into the 2000s, for most, an economic struggle. Many say, “We just get by.”
It is clear that although Murrin Bridge is an economically depressed community it is nevertheless a community in the true sense of the term. There is a clear kinship structure and, despite the conflicts within and between families, stable unions are formed, children born and reared, and there are strong bonds of mutuality, obligation and trust between the members of the community. As well, a ramifying field of ties links the people to other Aboriginal communities, particularly the local ones and those at Menindee and Wilcannia to the west. They also identify with other Indigenous Australians and issues affecting their people. This is evidenced in conversations regarding issues brought up in newspapers, on television and radio. On occasion there was identification with black people elsewhere, for example, cheering black athletes from other countries who did well during the Olympic Games. Australian Indigenous athletes, such as Cathy Freeman and many star footballers, are a source of pride. All of this is of great social worth and reinforces the communal quality of social life as well as developing a fundamental Aboriginal identity. It also breeds for many Indigenous Australians, at Murrin Bridge and elsewhere, a fear, suspicion and mistrust of outsiders. This is often justified, given the racial disparagement to which they are so often subjected. For example, I saw a skit in a football club magazine ‘joking’ that a group of Aboriginal youth is to take over from the McLaren Grand Prix pit stop team. The Koorie team, “…with no specialized equipment, can take a set of tyres off a car in six seconds; the crack McLaren team, with the best equipment in the world, takes eight seconds!” The author added that, “…there’s more…given less than half an hour they will have the car re-sprayed and engine number and registration plates changed!” Notwithstanding the grudging recognition of productive capacities, behind the humour is the old stereotype of thievery and anti-social behaviour. Again, it reminds me of ‘Nugget’ Coombs and Colin Tatz arguing that, “It’s not a black problem; it’s a white problem.”

While the people suffer from an historically created sense of powerlessness, resulting from the long-run effects of conquest, racism and subjugation, they live by definite rules and values, and work to sustain the solidarity that exists between them. It is these bonds and shared heritage that the old people refer to when they say that young Koories ‘grow up in the ashes’. It is these qualities and experiences that the identification with the term ‘Koorie’ encapsulates. They evince the existential, ideological and societal elements of community.

RECREATION

With little local employment and few opportunities for extended experience outside, recreational activities within the community have adapted to these conditions. For example, the older people spend a lot of time visiting each other, laughing and reminiscing about the past, or gambling. There are many good card players and like most serious, time-consuming, recreational events involving money, card playing is highly specialised and formalised. The amount of money involved is quite high in relation to the generally low-income levels in the community, with sums of fifty or more dollars being regularly won or lost, but with the functioning of kin obligations, few people go without basic necessities. The favoured games are euchre, poker,
bingo and lotto. In general, the old people play cards, go fishing, and do not drink very much, while the young people drink a lot, gamble and fish a little. For the older people gambling provides, as it has in many other Indigenous communities, a sedentary occupation which consumes hours of time, and provides a medium of sociability, suspense and excitement. It is an involving, enjoyable event that reaffirms the ties between friends, family, and kin.

Of course, gambling, especially on the ubiquitous ‘pokies’, can be highly addictive and damaging, financially, psychologically and socially. In 2007 I went to meet friends and acquaintances to help me to identify the people in some old photographs. I was taken into the kitchen of a house where middle-aged and elderly women were engrossed in a card game. Soon they shifted their attention to the photographs, exclaiming excitedly the various names and laughing at how all of us have changed. On a more sober note many in the photographs, then children, are now dead or in jail. Gambling in the community is mostly about boredom and sociability. ‘Town’ gambling on poker machines is, accordingly to the health workers at the Murrin Bridge Clinic, often destructive to individuals and families, particularly those on already low incomes.

From the 1980s all homes had both radio and television receivers, with both usually tuned to the commercial stations in Griffith. All of Australia has access to the programs of the Australian Broadcasting Commission. Increasingly its radio and television productions and, from 2007, National Indigenous Television, became more relevant and of interest to the community. It is now often heard and seen. The radio is usually on until about midday, after which there is television. The afternoon is often spent having a few drinks, watching television, and perhaps playing cards.

If a good film is on television at night, the streets of Murrin Bridge are almost deserted. Radio, television and computers provide the residents with a steady stream of popular music, often country and western, supermarket advertising, but also with a much wider world perspective than that observed by Beckett in 1957. The community and vineyard have websites (http://www.murrinbridgeweb.com/).

From the 1980s world events, such as the attempted assassinations of President Reagan and the Pope, were matters of common discussion. Current events, such as the ‘War on Terror’ and Kevin Rudd’s Apology to the Stolen Generations, are followed with a high degree of interest.

For the unemployed youth, in the case of the young men, apart from the very limited opportunities for boomerang making, some participation in a month-long, summer holiday program, and practising and playing rugby-league football, they were largely left to their own devices. Over the years this comprised most of the time on most of the days. A typical day for a youth was recounted to me by a group of young men as follows:

The boys wake up, having stayed out and up for most of the previous night. We often sleeps (sic) until almost lunch time, play pool with mates, or watch a show on T.V. In the afternoon we walks (sic) around the mission, go to the shop, watch TV, sometimes drink, mostly at night. Sometimes we play touch football, practise football near the oval. Just before dark we get a lot of wood.

[Often the wood came from the old fences around the mission. Also the
rubber tyres in the adventure playground were used.] We sit around a fire and listen to music.

This music came from ‘ghetto blasters’ and it comprised popular hits and country and western songs. School-aged children too would sit around the fire singing along with the pop and country songs. The older children took great delight in the ribald nature of many pop songs. For example, a favourite one, sung and danced to with great fervour and sexual suggestion, went, “Hit me, hit me, hit me with your rhythm stick.” The younger children, especially in warmer weather, enjoyed considerable freedom, being able to participate in the fireside activities or visit the homes of relatives and friends at will.

The drinking boys go up to the horse-yard. [About 500 metres from the nearest houses.] They often use blankets, for if you make a fire you’re seen by the drunks. This is to stop the drunks standing over you and pinching your grog. This has happened countless times. We pass around whole bottles of beer or De Bortoli or McWilliams flagons of port or muscat. ‘All-right’ is when you’re happy after a few beers, ‘charged’ is half-dizzy, perhaps sick, couldn’t drive. We mostly get the grog by taxi.

Younger and older Murrin Bridge residents, drinkers or not, often decried those few ‘fools’ whom they saw as being really ‘hopeless drunks.’ They said that they would drink methylated spirits and water, Pine O’Clean and tinned milk, and related, often mirthfully, their ‘stupid’ behaviour. For example, one ‘hopeless drunk’ was described as being,

So stupid that a bloke will say, “Here’s the money for a flagon, go into town and buy me one.” He’ll walk to the road to Lake Cargelligo and walk and hitch a ride in, buy a flagon, and then book up a taxi-ride at fifteen dollars to return and then, when the flagon does the rounds of his drinking mates, be lucky to get a swig or two. Another time he cashed his cheque in town, bought a dozen bottles, took them back, shared them out among his mates and relatives [who had fed him for the previous fortnight] till none was left, caught a taxi into town to buy more, within hours most of his money had gone.

It is this binge behaviour, a form of release mechanism, which accounts for the notoriety of pension night and for the common saying about mission life that for many, “It’s a feast or a famine.”

The more ‘progressive’ residents said of those people who had binge habits, “That’s why they’ve got nothing.” They saw themselves as meeting their obligations to kin and yet being tough and determined enough to keep something for themselves and their own children. However, the crucial fact in their ability to uphold their position appeared to be that they were usually operating from a position of relative financial strength. Often they were people who had access to employment or land, and who could afford to both meet their obligations to kin and mates, and still retain enough income, possessions, and prestige ‘to have something’. Like many non-Indigenous Australians, those Murrin Bridge people with adequate incomes who were drinkers, could afford to both pay for the habit and maintain a reasonable
standard of living. This is something that poor people everywhere, Indigenous or not, cannot do. So, despite the egalitarianism that marked community life, there were important socio-economic differences between individuals and families.

DISCRIMINATION AND EXPLOITATION

Most whites in the region have money and cars. These give them considerable power over those Indigenous people who are desperate for alcohol. This leads to allegations of sexual exploitation of some Aboriginal women and girls. Certainly, Murrin Bridge men, over the years, suspected any male white visitor of being ‘after a black gin’. In Lake Cargelligo even a journey to Euabalong, past the Murrin Bridge turn-off, would often occasion a suggestive comment. On occasion visiting men were offered sex for payment. A number of non-Indigenous informants in Lake Cargelligo claimed that some men from the town (often married) had girlfriends at Murrin Bridge and that some respected townsmen chose to forget the liaisons they had at Murrin Bridge in their youth. Quite often there were people at Murrin Bridge who were desperate for a lift to town and the means to obtain alcohol.

Some Aboriginal people also complained of more general discrimination and exploitation in Lake Cargelligo. They claimed, for example, that electrical goods taken into the town for service had been ‘buggered up’ rather than repaired, ‘blacks are taken advantage of’, and that ‘we put things in and don’t get them back, or have to wait for ages.’ A record player never came back, while two cassette players took twelve months and three years, respectively, to be returned. They suspected that the shopkeeper thought ‘they’re easy meat’, and that he was selling some goods left there for service. They also cited the fact that there was not one Aboriginal person working in a shop in Lake Cargelligo. Another complaint related to their treatment in hotels. This was that, “If one black fights one white, all blacks are banned. It’s never the whites.”

Aboriginal footballers from Murrin Bridge and Lake Cargelligo who played in Lake Cargelligo teams, accused the selectors of favouring any white players, even newcomers, and most left to play for Euabalong. The Murrin Bridge players said that after a match they were ‘just dumped’ on a corner in Lake Cargelligo and had to find their own way back to the mission. The Lake Cargelligo players related how, after transferring to Euabalong, they, in a town hotel, were taunted by their former teammates and called ‘piss-weak’ and derogatory terms related to their ancestry. After the resulting fight it was they who were banned from the hotel.

A more subtle form of discrimination, one that provides an insight into the perceptions of some white townsfolk, occurred in the Country Women’s Association. An Aboriginal woman was interested in joining and, because she had a big family, her joining fee was waived. To some members’ surprise she was not shy but forthright, spoke up and joined committees. “She did not act in a humble manner, or grateful, and like a charity case at all. Therefore, some of the women felt that she should be asked to pay the annual fee.” It appeared to my informant, a member of the CWA, that if she had been submissive this would not have occurred to them. The issue was a vexed one but the new member left Lake Cargelligo before it could be resolved.
The legacy of this prejudice and discrimination is a profound distrust of all outsiders. The motives and actions of all whites are treated with extreme suspicion and this includes those of academics who worked previously in this area. People complained that they were not paid for information provided, that they did not receive the books they felt entitled to, or were not taken on trips away with previous researchers. One even suspected that deliveries of artefacts had not arrived at the correct destination. This was part of the general mistrust of whites and I found no evidence of unethical behaviour by researchers.

Therefore, it was factors of changing land-use, lack of Aboriginal land, few opportunities for employment, meagre pension and unemployment benefits, poor health standards, discrimination, and a legacy of educational deprivation and political oppression, which hampered Indigenous concepts of self and community worth and led to suspicion of the outside world. This is hardly a background for inclusive education and citizenship.

CONTEMPORARY EMPLOYMENT AND COMMUNITY

During the 1980s and 1990s little changed in regard to employment opportunities outside the community. By 2001 there were approximately 140 residents at Murrin Bridge, almost all living in new housing (see above), far removed in quality from the old cottages on the ‘mission’. In 1999 and 2000 eight families relocated to Lake Cargelligo, as part of the National Aboriginal Housing Strategy. The Land Council’s Aboriginal Housing Corporation in Lake Cargelligo, ‘...own the mission land and are in charge’ (CDEP Manager). The community organisation, as noted above, managed the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP). It was a variation of the ‘mutual obligation’, ‘work for the dole’ programs instituted by the Federal Government for all unemployed people in 1999/2000. It employed 68 local Aboriginal workers and coordinated 30 more in nearby Condobolin. They worked in parks and gardens, the cemetery and other community maintenance, women’s craft, the community office, the town hospital, in establishing and maintaining the vineyard enterprise, and on the contracts for garbage pick-up and rubbish tip maintenance in Lake Cargelligo.

Essentially, the community had received no land rights, although one member worked on Barooga Kaari, a property “...past Euabalong West, far from the mission, … run by the Aboriginal Lands Council, Dubbo” (CDEP Manager). In an almost unchanging circumstance from the early 1980s, there was one Aboriginal Health Worker at the Murrin Bridge Clinic, three Preschool aides, an aide at the Central School, three at the Convent School, and one Lachlan Shire employee.

Some casual and itinerant work was available; of private enterprise, opportunities for permanent work there was virtually none. The vineyard initiative is of note. The community land has about 100 acres suitable for grape production. By 2003 about a fifth of this had been planted with Shiraz grapes for wine production and Menindee Seedless for table grapes. Twenty tonnes were harvested in 2001 and approximately thirty tonnes in 2002. The community produces its own red wine for commercial production. The TAFE College in Griffith provides winemaking
facilities and skills. This is a source of considerable anticipation and pride, however by 2007–2010 it had considerable financial difficulties. As for most of Indigenous Australia and Melanesia the lack of business experience, knowledge and skills, is a major concern.

A number of talented artists and designers contribute to community pride, expression of culture, tradition, and identity.

In regard to education, the isolation of Murrin Bridge, the paternalism of the Welfare Board and the later offshoot welfare agencies, combined with the predominantly integrationist attitudes and practices of the school systems and the seeming irrelevance of much of their pedagogy and content, have resulted in most of these Indigenous Australians not developing the skills needed to cope with the changing rural, indeed increasingly global economy. The history of this educational malady is explored and explained in my 2005 book, Chapters 7–10. Many of the features of education at Murrin Bridge and Lake Cargelligo have far wider resonance for all Indigenous people, in Australia, Melanesia and elsewhere.

In brief, with important exceptions, especially the case of ‘the chief’, a Murrin Bridge man who became a significant local entrepreneur, the community became increasingly dependent from the mid 1970s to 2010 on welfare and bureaucratic administration. But the picture was neither so simple nor dismal as this. While the employment rate worsened, there were local initiatives to get more land and develop community industries, particularly craft and wine production, and to increase employment. The standard of housing is comparatively good and has shown considerable improvement since the influx of funds for community improvements, which came initially from the Whitlam Australian Labor Party national government, 1972–1975. Improvement of infrastructure continued with the subsequent Fraser, Hawke, Keating, Howard and Rudd national administrations. The old single-men’s barracks and other sub-standard housing were demolished, new homes with all amenities were built, and the remaining cottages were painted, renovated with new stoves, baths, basins, floor coverings, and provided with solar hot water heating.

Community recreational and health amenities and services were greatly improved, with corresponding rises in health standards. In 1977 the sewerage system was completed. By 1980 clean town water replaced the water piped directly from the Lachlan River. This had been frequently unfit for human consumption. Miraculously a summer went by without an epidemic of gastroenteritis. An infant did not require hospitalisation during the first year of her life, the only child in living memory, a source of great pride for her mother and the community nurse. Commonwealth-funded Health Sisters and Aboriginal Health Workers provide medical aid and advice at the community clinic. As noted above, the feature of later improvements was new housing, at Murrin Bridge, Euabalong and in Lake Cargelligo.

While changes in the pastoral economy, the dependence upon welfare and administrative agencies, and the irrelevance of much of their schooling over the years, prevent many of the people of Murrin Bridge from learning and developing new skills, there is a growing Aboriginal perception and demand for a more useful and relevant education for the community, and for greater control over the future of their children and their own lives. This book responds to these changes and needs.
A COMPELLING NEED

ISSUES OF IDENTITY, CITIZENSHIP, EDUCATION AND POPULATION

These relationships and changes are of particular interest to educators, as well as those interested more generally in issues affecting Indigenous Australians, because they provide evidence of a desire for movement towards community involvement in economic development, management, and, of course, in education, especially in language, culture and relevant, developmental, skill-based programs.

The history of Murrin Bridge indicates the obstacles created by Australian society in this struggle for survival of identity and community. The descendants of the Wangaaypuwan and Wiradjuri living at Murrin Bridge are a people in poor health, living on low incomes, with inadequate land, able to exercise little control over the administration and future of their community, and with low standards of educational attainment and few employment opportunities other than government programs.

Most Indigenous Australians, including urban, rural and remote families, have to deal with discrimination, grief, violence, drug and alcohol dependence, feelings of being second rate and discrimination in education and employment (CDEST, August, 2002).

While they constitute a rural working class (albeit, often underemployed or unemployed), their Aboriginal features and culture, combined with the unique community characteristics mentioned above, make the people of Murrin Bridge stand apart from the wider community, even from other wage labourers or long-term unemployed. This is nation-wide. The sociologist Don Edgar referred in 1980 to Aboriginal Australians as ‘the recurring forgotten’ of the minority ethnic groups. While this is no longer so much an omission, issues of Indigenous recognition, citizenship and equity, are still to be addressed satisfactorily by sociologists, anthropologists, educators and governments, state and federal.

Some anthropologists and sociologists see assertions of distinctiveness and claims to autonomy as evidence of ethnicity, but many Aboriginal people in the region reject this label. They say, “We’re the real Australians, not like migrants.” They do not want to be lumped together with hundreds of minority cultures in a multicultural Australia, although many do appreciate the ancillary benefit of “mine no longer being the only black face in the crowd.” Theirs is the Indigenous culture. As Colin Tatz asserts, theirs is the local civilisation.

A few Koories in the region have been or are union organisers, and most vote for the Australian Labor Party because “it’s the working man’s party”, but there seems to be no partisan zeal in their strategies for their own and their community’s betterment. They often say that, “you have to take people as you find them”, and that they “will support anyone who will give the blackfella a go.”

ACCESS TO LAND

In the early to mid 1980s there was still some prospect of obtaining additional land in the form of a large leasehold in the Euabalong district, but the protracted battle for access to land and the various obstacles to viable and settled community leadership and self-determination had caused the optimism observed in the early
years of the fieldwork period to wane. By 2010 they still have, essentially, just the community land.

The Aboriginal community or ‘mission’ is about a kilometre from the Lake Cargelligo– to -Euabalong road, which until ten years ago was rough, unsealed and unsafe. Now all roads in the vicinity are sealed. While the 400 hectares of community land are on the moderately fertile Lachlan River flats, in a region where paddocks are often measured in thousands of hectares, it could not support hundreds of people. In 1972 Charles Rowley suggested that it might comfortably support one family. There have been over thirty families at Murrin Bridge, and so a ‘model agricultural village’ as expressed in the Sydney Sun in the 1940s has never been possible and could never be the answer to the need for the Murrin Bridge community to have a sound economic base.

This is a common dilemma in South-Eastern Australia where small land grants have been made to Aboriginal communities without consideration of the fact that they will not support the hundreds of people in the community. However, much the same can be said of many remote Northern Territory, South and Western Australian communities with enormous land bases, especially if they are desert country. Also, some Aboriginal leaders, for example Colin Bourke, Pat Dodson and Noel Pearson, argue that if everything is community-owned then individual initiative and effort may be stifled. Certainly, it is counter to both the prevailing system of ownership and raising capital in Australia and to the local power relationships.

There have been unsuccessful attempts by the Murrin Bridge community to acquire property and access to a more useful economic land base in the form of substantial ownership within the extensive farming properties located on their traditional ‘bull-oak’ homeland or ngurrampaa. ‘Traditional’ is, of course, the link with the past. In this case it refers to continuity with, and rights derived from, an Aboriginal past, identification with Aboriginal elements as against others. It is also, in essence, a term connoting pre-colonial times, for the colonizers ignored the notion of any Aboriginal ownership of this land under the doctrine of terra nullius, or empty land. As the reader well knows, the question of land-rights, post the High Court’s decisions, Mabo, 1992, and Wik, 1996, is a fundamental issue facing the Australian legal and political system.

The proximity of Murrin Bridge to the traditional ngurrampaa of the Wangaaypuwan and Wiradjuri could form the basis for additional land acquisition in the region through the 1993 Native Title legislation of the Federal Government. As a community they were, and still are, a group living within its traditional lands (Murrin Bridge is in Wiradjuri country), but the Native Title Act’s emphasis upon granting land to “traditional Aboriginal owners” would make this difficult. Specific links with the land surrounding Murrin Bridge, for example, evidence of sacred sites, were difficult to prove when the community attempted to acquire more land.

By 2010 this means of acquiring additional land for the community has not been used to any meaningful extent, although the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, and later ATSIC, which exercised considerable control over the management and planning for Murrin Bridge, had purchased additional land for Aboriginal communities elsewhere in New South Wales. There is an existing potential process of acquisition of
A COMPELLING NEED

farming properties through the purchase of private deed property or the granting of leasehold, under the auspices of the New South Wales Government’s Western Lands Trust.

Employment

In 1998–99 the unemployment rate was 41.4% for Indigenous people compared to 8.5% for all Australians. This excludes Indigenous employment associated with the CDEP ‘work for the dole’ Scheme. By 2002 the unemployment rate had dropped to 23 percent. Analysis of the 2006 census data (see below) reveals that between 2001 and 2006 the Indigenous unemployment rate fell from 20% to 16%. So, there has been an increase in labour force participation and the qualifications required for employment. Despite these gains, in 2010, a time of recovery from recession, unemployment for Indigenous Australians is over three times the non-Indigenous unemployment rate of 5.5%.

In 2006, there were an estimated 160,300 Indigenous people aged 15 years and over in employment. This represented half of the Indigenous population aged 15 years and over. After declining to a low in 2004 (45%), the employment to population ratio for Indigenous Australians has increased to 50% in 2006. The employment to population ratio for Indigenous males (57%) continued to rise in 2006 after falling to 52% in 2004. The employment to population ratio for Indigenous females has increased to 44% in 2006 after remaining relatively stable between 2002 and 2005 (Canberra, ABS, July 2007).

Remote, rural, isolated Murrin Bridge, and other remote Indigenous communities, fare worse than the average. For the Murrin Bridge community further land acquisition would provide a buffer to the vagaries of the seasonal and cyclical demand for rural labour. In the case of acquisition of a large community property, it would provide outlets for training and educational opportunities for those school leavers who have, at present, few employment opportunities.

From the early 1980s fewer of the Aboriginal students who attended the Lake Cargelligo schools were in attendance beyond Year Nine, and after leaving school their educational levels mattered little, for the employment prospects for Aboriginal school leavers in the region were virtually nil. Indeed, over 80 percent of the adult Aboriginal people at Murrin Bridge eligible for employment were unemployed. While there was, on occasion, some casual work available within the community or in the surrounding district, few were in permanent, full-time employment.

Clearly, prospects for work were severely limited by their low educational status and unwillingness to move to places where there was work. Women had slightly better opportunities, in that they predominated in health, education, secretarial and cleaning jobs, as they still do in 2010. Community Development Employment Projects (work for the dole) and community jobs, including establishing and maintaining the vineyard, still constitute the majority of employment opportunities. But, are they ‘real work’? Some Indigenous leaders, including Marcia Langton, consider such schemes to be ‘the principal poverty trap’ for Aboriginal people and their
communities. In 2004–2007 the Murrin Bridge workers were part of a central NSW CDEP program employing 750 Aboriginal people. This is evidence of a desire to work, the paucity of non-community employment opportunities in this region and the prevalence of low incomes.

Education

Since the 1970s there has been significant commitment by successive Australian and State governments to more effectively provide education for Indigenous students. There has been some improvement in key indicators over the last three decades. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, in general, are still not served well by the Australian education system. There is great concern about the continuing disparity between outcomes achieved by Indigenous Australians compared to other Australians. The educational status of Aboriginal people is lower than any other minority group in Australia. At all levels, from preschool to tertiary, the structures and processes of education generally are inappropriate and give little recognition to the needs and aspirations of Indigenous people and their communities. Facilities of general education systems are often not available in Aboriginal communities, while resources for special programs are often inadequate and participation rates are significantly lower than average (Commonwealth Department of Education, 2007).

School participation rates, historically, have declined significantly with age. For example, the 1981 census figures revealed that only 4.1 percent of Aborigines aged 15 years and over had attained a post-school qualification of any sort. This compares most unfavourably with that of the total Australian population where 24.2% of those aged 15 and over had a post-school qualification. There was a marked decrease in the number who had not attended school at all, from 35 percent in 1966 to less than 20 percent in 1979.

A study in the early 1970s by Broome and Jones revealed that at every age, Aboriginal Australians were behind their white age peers. They entered school later, progressed slower, quit sooner. Australia is a highly literate country, but in 1970 at age 45 and above, one-half to three quarters of the Aboriginal population was presumptively illiterate, with no formal education.

Gradual improvement in school attendance is clear; however, much is still to be achieved. In 2010 attendance remains at least 10 percent less than for other students and is far worse in remote locations. Participation in remote NT schools is 62 percent (National Indigenous Literacy and Numeracy Survey, Canberra: 2008).

As for attendance, qualifications in the 2000s also show improvement from a very low base. The Australian Bureau of Statistics Social Trends document reveals that in 2006, Indigenous people aged 19 years had lower rates of Year 12 completion than others of the same age (37% compared with 74%) and across all remote areas. In regard to non-school qualifications, between 1996 and 2006, increases in educational attainment among Indigenous people corresponded with increased levels of participation in education. The proportion of Indigenous people aged 25–64 years with a non-school qualification (29%) had nearly doubled from 1996 (15%). There was a marked increase in Indigenous people whose highest qualification was a Certificate
or Advanced Diploma, from 12% in 1996 to 23% in 2006. The proportion whose highest qualification was a Bachelor degree or above was relatively small compared with the non-Indigenous population, but doubled in the ten years to 2006 (from 3% in 1996 to 6% in 2006).

Many teachers see attendance and retention as the most significant factors in poor educational outcomes. The national average attendance rate of Australian Indigenous school students is two to three times lower than for non-Indigenous students. This means that, on average, Indigenous students are missing out on two years of schooling.

In 1998 32% of Indigenous students continued to Year 12 compared to 73% of non-Indigenous students, a difference of 41%. In 2006 Social Trends revealed that there was an increase in participation in education for Indigenous people aged 20–24 years (from 11% in 1996 to 13%). Just over half (51%) of all Indigenous 15–19 year olds were participating in education, up from 43% in 1996. This increase occurred in major cities as well as regional and remote areas. The biggest proportional change occurred in very remote areas, representing a 27% increase.

By 2007 43% of Indigenous and 76% of non-Indigenous students completed secondary schooling, a reduced, but still significant margin of 33% (ABS 2008). Thus, there are some improvements in educational participation and attainment.

It is important to recognise that these are the overall figures for Indigenous people throughout Australia and that there is wide variation according to the nature and distribution of the population. In New South Wales and Victoria the majority of Indigenous Australians live in cities or small country towns and their lifestyle is, in many respects, closer to the rest of the Australian nation than to that of the pre-colonial cultures. For example, in the 1980s few of the people at Murrin Bridge had never attended school and most forty-five years of age or under attended high school in Lake Cargelligo. However, only three Aboriginal students were in senior secondary classes and none from the community had obtained tertiary training. In 1998 only two Aboriginal students were in senior classes and still no ‘local’ Indigenous person had obtained a tertiary degree. This situation, according to Central School staff in 2007, remained unaltered.

Reasons for Low Levels of Achievement

One explanation for the apparent lack of success in schooling by Indigenous people is that the “… system forces the Aboriginal child to go to school and then denigrates his cultural background” (FAUSA Report). That is to say, schooling instils an intrinsic lack of self-confidence and engenders a double-sided alienation, from Aboriginal cultural roots and from Australian society. Historically, more detailed information on educational provision and outcomes for Aboriginal students has been difficult to obtain, as racially separate records were often not kept by the states.

In terms of current enrolments, as we saw above, the situation does look brighter, and has for some time. There are now over 60,000 Indigenous students in vocational education and training (VET), a tremendous increase and improvement. However, literacy and numeracy standards, while improving, are still only half that of
non-Indigenous students. At Year 5 one in three Indigenous students does not meet agreed minimum reading standards. “Serious gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes remain in literacy, numeracy, student attendance, retention…” (DEST, Commonwealth of Australia, 2004).

In 2010, many similar assertions can be found, in reference particularly to remote and rural communities, but affecting all. It is crucial to examine the reasons for these gaps and to suggest reform, particularly in terms of more appropriate pedagogy and ways to improve attendance and build effective and productive relations between community and school.

Population

Closely related to the above pressing educational issues is the clear demographic evidence that the proportion of Aboriginal children in Australian schools is increasing and will continue to do so. The Aboriginal population is expanding at a greater rate than the total Australian population; it is young and is being rapidly urbanised.

The 1996 Census revealed that the Indigenous population had soared in twenty years from 161,000 to 372,052 (1.16 to 2 percent of the total population). In part this is due to the pertinent Census question being re-phrased in terms of ‘origin’, namely, ‘Is the person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Origin’? This is more inclusive than the former ‘racial origin’ question. By 2009, 2.4 percent of Australians, over 500,000 citizens, identified as being Indigenous.

In the last 20 years changing cultural and social attitudes, community and political developments, improved statistical coverage and the broader, more inclusive definition of Indigenous origin, led to more people identifying as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Despite the tragically high death rates of Indigenous men and women, the Indigenous growth rate is double the national average. This is a high rate of natural growth by Australian standards, over twice that of the population as a whole, and, if it continues, sufficient to double the population in less than thirty years.

While the last forty years has seen the percentage of the Indigenous population living in urban areas rising from 43.5 percent to over 60 percent the number of rural dwellers in absolute terms is still considerable compared to other Australians and will probably remain so. The Indigenous population is much more widely spread than the total population. Ninety percent of Australians live in only 2.6% of the continent, dominated by Sydney, Melbourne, and other State capital cities, whereas about ninety percent of Indigenous Australians live in 25% of the continent.

Because of a higher birth rate and shorter longevity, a relatively large proportion of the Aboriginal population is of school age. This population has a large proportion of females in the childbearing, or younger age groups. Today the Indigenous population has a very young age structure, with 40% of the population under 15, and only 3% over 65. The age structure reflects both high fertility and high death rates. Life expectancy for men is about 57 years and for women 66 years, each approximately 15 years below the national average.

In the western region of New South Wales the Indigenous population is growing steadily, for Aboriginal families usually have three, four or more children compared
with an average of fewer than two for the wider society. The reduction at Murrin Bridge, from 250 to around 160, is due to families moving out to live in local towns, especially Lake Cargelligo.

It is compellingly clear that the problems Aboriginal Australians have experienced in native title, social justice and education, must not be ignored, for they shall certainly not fade away. Further attempts to marginalise Aboriginal people and to leave their representatives out of deliberations directly affecting them are likely to seriously misfire, cause long-term disaffection and imperil hopes of a more inclusive and workable Australian citizenship.

The next chapter discusses the rationale, focus, design, methodology and findings of my research and this book, in Australia and Melanesia. The key concepts explored, for Australia, Melanesia and elsewhere, are social change, community, cultural and racial relations, socialisation, education, pedagogy and citizenship. I focus on educational policy and practice, and their implications.

NOTES

1  For more ethnographic detail and thorough academic acknowledgement of sources for my main ‘case study’, see Nichol 2005 and 2008.

2  In the 2000s, amenities in the local community improved significantly, with 47 new or extensively renovated homes, a new preschool, renovated and expanded health clinic, a community hall, and sports ground and play equipment. The NSW State Government has plans for many improvements.

3  CDEP was introduced in 1977. Tens of thousands (32,000 in 2000) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people voluntarily opted to work for their communities to earn the equivalent of unemployment benefits. It is administered locally by Indigenous community organisations and regionally by elected representatives, or was until 2007, when administered from Griffith due to ‘receivership’. There are 35 Regional Councils. Until 2004 ATSIC oversaw and funded this program. With the Federal Government’s abolishing of ATSIC in 2004, and subsequent negative reports, in 2010 CDEP’s future is problematic. It is often seen as being not real work, as stifling initiative. Given its focus on local needs, it, or something better, more accountable, should be supported.

4  It is difficult to quantify, as there is still a ‘floating population’, with people coming and going, especially to towns both close by and far to the west. They go to seek employment or to visit ‘lations’ (relatives). In 2007 the general view, in the community office, clinic and preschool, was that it is ‘around 150, sometimes up to 200.’

5  For more information about Murrin Bridge Wines, plus some very interesting detail about the contemporary community, see: http://murrinbridgewines.com.au.

6  Certainly not with the front page news on 22 June 2007, when Prime Minister Howard virtually took over remote Northern Territory Indigenous communities, with police, military and medical intervention, because of child-abuse convictions and extensive allegations. Nor, when Prime Minister Rudd made his Federal Parliamentary Apology or ‘Sorry’ to the ‘Stolen Generations’, on 13 February 2008.
CHAPTER 1

CHAPTER 2

KNOWLEDGE TRADITIONS AND CHANGE

The future for local knowledge traditions is, I believe, dependent on the creation of a third space, an interstitial space, in which local knowledge traditions can be reframed, decentred and the social organisation of trust can be negotiated… Knowledge…will tend towards universal homogenous information at the expense of local knowledge traditions. If knowledge is recognized as both representational and performative it will be possible to create a space in which knowledge traditions can be performed together (Turnbull, 1997: 560–561).

The ‘compelling need’ discussed above, leads me to ask the following questions: Does schooling, compulsory education in State approved or operated institutions, do something different from what it purports to do for Indigenous children in Australia and Melanesia [and many other regions and countries]? Have the school-aged Indigenous children in the Murrin Bridge - Lake Cargelligo, Alice Springs, Wewak or Rabaul, ‘mainstream’ schools received an education appropriate to their needs? Are their communities’ convenient pools of rural or urban labour? Are they refuges for the survivors of a race? Is education another form of class control? Are Vanimo, Goldie River, Wewak, Murrin Bridge or Yuendumu unique in experiencing the suppression of communally based knowledge and pedagogy and the usurpation of community control over education by the state and private systems of schooling? Can Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy enrich the wider, dominant education and society?

Policies and practices of assimilation and paternalism are clearly destructive of Indigenous culture and identity, but many in power thwart community involvement and measures of control of cultural and educational programs. The reality is that profound cultural issues, such as language, custom, law and the spiritual values and traditions of a people, never exist separately from questions of economic and political power.

Social Change

Changes in education and social behaviour are key to this field. Resistance, persistence and adaptation of Indigenous elements in behaviour and organisation are of high interest to many social scientists and educators. How do they conceptualise change and Indigenous people?

Following Radcliffe-Brown and Durkheim, traditional Australian and Melanesian anthropology was dominated by the structural-functional, social order paradigm. ‘What keeps society together’ was the central question. The clan, tribe or horde was seen as the commencement of a unilineal paradigm or pattern on a positivistic
progression towards modern, namely western, society was embedded in anthropological thought. Marc Gumbert and many others argue that this concept fosters a form of social Darwinism, a justification for internal colonialism and external colonial control. It diminishes our understanding of social change in Indigenous communities and the institutions with which they operate. While appreciating the value of much structural-functional research we certainly need to assess critically the conservative, functionalist, social order approach to analysis in this field.

The background to the conceptual challenges facing educators and community developers is the diversity of contexts in which Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Melanesian and many other Indigenous people live, and to which education must be appropriate. There could be seen to be a structural, unilinear paradigm between tribal, village and urban societies, but, as we shall see, it is more fruitful to explore the process and multi-causal situations of change than to envisage polar opposites and inevitable, deterministic stages.

Similarly, Robert Redfield’s folk-urban continuum has little relevance here. In brief, Redfield conceptualised ‘folk’ and ‘urban’ as polar types on his continuum of social change. A folk society was depicted as small, relatively isolated, homogeneous, non-literate, traditional and personal, while metropolitan society (with contractual relationships) was thought of as the antithesis of these.

Redfield’s dichotomy rests on a wealth of philosophical precedents. These include the gemeinschaft and gesellschaft of Tonnies and Loomis, Durkheim’s mechanical and organic solidarity, Merton’s local and cosmopolitan, Sorokin’s familialistic and contractual and the sacred and secular types of Becker. In the Australian- Bendigo, Melbourne, Murrin Bridge, Lake Cargelligo, Euabalong, Darwin, Alice Springs, and Papua New Guinean- Munari, Wewak, Vanimo, Goldie River, and other Indigenous contexts in which I have worked, the continuum proved to be too simplistic and value-oriented. As we shall see in regard to the concept of community, it does not allow for an adequate exploration of the complexities and paradoxes of community life.

In Murrin Bridge, as in most contemporary, local societies, there are elements of both ‘community’ and ‘association’, but no tidy coincidence of either within neat boundaries. For the futurist Peter Ellyard, the three big agents of change for all communities, are globalisation, tribalisation and technological change. The fieldwork and wider research reveals that all three have relevance and application for students, teachers and community.

Thus, the dichotomous model appears to me to be of limited value when conceptualising the changes taking place in Indigenous societies. Even the most urban of Indigenous societies are not large, assimilated, heterogeneous or impersonal, and so they bear little resemblance to the polar urban type. However, the power of these assimilative, urban influences on all Indigenous societies cannot be ignored, if only to remind one of Indigenous resistance to these influences. Also, in the Australian context, as Marcia Langton forcefully asserts, we need to be aware of “…the insidious ideology of seeing tribal Aborigines as the ‘real’ Aborigines and detribalised Aborigines as losing their Aboriginality.”

Identity is an historical phenomenon and therefore is constantly open to evolution and transformation; in the contemporary period, although it may have deep roots
going back into the past, identity, whether political, cultural or psychological, is immensely sensitive and crucial to community control and development. The community of Murrin Bridge is but one case and each requires specific historical and contemporary social and educational research and analysis if one is to understand the nature and forms of the changes that have taken place.

The notion of a ‘folk-urban continuum’ implies an urban drift, and there is one at Murrin Bridge and elsewhere around the world. An example is the establishment of ‘town-camps’ around Alice Springs and Darwin in Australia, Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea, and many other towns and cities in the regions. Nevertheless, it is important to note the significant decentralisation trend of some Indigenous people elsewhere, who are working towards their own community’s development or moving back to tribal lands in the ‘homelands’ or ‘outstation’ movement. Another interesting phenomenon is of people with high academic or business success who, despite being exposed to Western culture, sustain a strong Indigenous identity. Many urban Melanesians maintain strong relationships with their home villages, returning for ceremonial occasions, investing in commercial enterprises, and so on. Urban Indigenous Australians often retain links to former ‘missions’, homelands and communities. There are, as elsewhere, individuals who are agents of change, who embrace modernity and more efficient or profitable ways.

Comparative Indigenous education in this vast region is explored. It is a way forward to counter our, often deadly, sense of ‘otherness’; for example, the erosion of respect for human rights, the wretchedness of life for so many Indigenous people, and of our ability to imagine new pathways for thought and action. It is helpful and creative to see the research findings as conjectural, problematic, to be trialled and compared. The major objective is to examine issues of education and pedagogy and to suggest forms of reconciliation between the dominant western education and the rich variety of Indigenous forms of education.

From the 1980s to the 2000s the prevailing principles in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education stressed Indigenous self-determination and a need for other Australians to accommodate to Aboriginal concepts and to provide services requested by Aboriginal people and communities, rather than imposing what the wider society considered they ought to have ‘in their best interests.’ Many reports stress that different concepts and practices of education must be developed to accommodate this diversity of Aboriginal contexts and needs. The simplistic folk-urban continuum model cannot cope with this. The educator needs to explore the dynamics of social processes and relationships, in this case, arguably through the concepts of community, race relations, education and citizenship.

Community

We prefer ‘Aboriginal community’ to ‘the mission’; it sounds better, ‘tho amongst ourselves we still call it ‘the mission’ (CDEP manager and Community Chairman, Murrin Bridge, 2001).

At Murrin Bridge it became clear that the concept of community was of enormous significance, if only through frequent usage, oral and written. Here, over the last
few decades, we find a group of between 150–250 people, of shared biological and cultural Wiradjuri and Wangaanypuwan background and descent, who identify as the Murrin Bridge ‘mob’, with a history of being moved and located as a discrete population from one geographical area to another. They are a collection of people with a particular family and social structure, a sense of belonging or community spirit, patterns of exchange and support, a shared heritage, and, as a relatively isolated settlement, they are spatially self-contained. Thus, we have a social order based on interdependence through personal and family relationships, consanguinity, locality and custom. In this sense, for the local people, the community simply exists. There are other elements to experience of community, namely communion, emotion and ideology. The group is defined by its members, which both implies common interest or cooperation among its members and also defines its boundaries and relations with other groups.

More structured elements of community, social organisation and society, become apparent when patterns or definitions of communion become routine and bridged by the adoption of visible and rational connections such as contracts and laws and patterns of sanctions or reinforcements. In a bureaucratic expression of these ideological and class relations the State is formed. Class, ethnic, racial conflicts and other disputes, for example regarding native title and land-rights, run through the State, its departments and agencies. When examining Indigenous identity, citizenship, cultural life and educational provision, the three elements of community: existential, ideological and societal, are of particular relevance.

In the Murrin Bridge context the concept of community has particular complexities, contradictions and paradoxes. For example, can we see a contradiction between people with a supposed sense of belonging, community spirit and social solidarity and who yet have also a propensity to criticise and shame those who are successful, ‘flash’, or who leave to better themselves and their families? Is this criticism a form of sanction against those who would threaten the community’s survival by seemingly ‘identifying white’ and leaving Murrin Bridge?

The oldest Ngiyampaa speakers in the community are also caught in a paradoxical position. The conditions for survival of the language (adaptation, flexibility, learning through mistakes) threaten the identity of those who know or would like to know the language, and thus militate against an important component of traditional community identity. This is a genuine paradox and is beyond my abilities to resolve. However, the language persists and a number of speakers wish to impart elements of it to the young, as evidenced by their compilation of a Ngiyampaa alphabet and willingness to work in the local schools as visiting speakers and cultural resource teachers.

To know and share the language, to identify as one of the ‘mob’, to have group aspirations for the community as a whole, and to work towards amity and opportunity may be the ideal, but at Murrin Bridge, as with other Indigenous communities, there are frequent faction fights and quarrels.

The complexities and difficulties within the community are compounded by the limitations of time for research and the ability of anyone, insider or participant observer, to explain the total reality of community life. Any outsider’s view of their world must be limited and partial. However, in order to come to even a tentative
understanding of the link between education and community life the researcher does need to structure any observations within a framework or model. As noted above, the Murrin Bridge people, as for so many Indigenous people, do live within a community framework, even if it increasingly extends to Euabalong and Lake Cargelligo. They live within a finite and bounded physical location. They share a history and tradition. There is a locality-based system of interrelated social institutions, organisations and relationships, and a shared ideological view of what it is to be one of the ‘mob’. It is an identification of Aboriginality, of being one of a tiny minority, with some limited, potential native title rights, in a vast land owned by whites and the State. This is common to many other former ‘missions’ in Australia.

The community survives precariously in the face of great pressures from within and without. For example, some Aboriginal people tell me that they would like to better themselves outside. Some whites, with assimilationist and integrationist views, advocate dispersing Aboriginal housing throughout the predominantly white towns. Others, especially those who strongly identify black, say that they would camp on the riverbank rather than live in the white town. Some whites prefer segregation, fearing any increase in the numbers of blacks in the town schools. They say they know of other towns where, “Blacks are in the majority in the school and give the other kids a very hard time.”

Much of this tension derives from both the competitive relationship between the demands of local Indigenous communities and those of the wider Australian society and some rather narrow, restrictive views regarding what it is to be an acceptable, respectable Australian citizen. Local Indigenous communities develop on a basis of social and economic interdependence through traditional relationships and shared heritage. The wider society insists on the priority of its obligations and demands on the individual over traditional social or collective obligations. For a community economically dependent upon the wider society for its daily sustenance, the strictures and demands of that society imply that schooling and employment opportunities outside will mean the loss of its younger generation. The power and ties of rational-legal society, in particular mechanisms of the State, are increasingly pervasive. After the High Court’s Mabo and Wik judgments of the early 1990s, landed, ruling class and conservative political representatives of the State came together, declaring their interests against the Indigenous quest for native title and land-rights.

My 2005 book examines this process in detail, particularly in regard to socialization, land, citizenship and leadership. Because a community study allows analysis of the interrelationship of whites and blacks, of dominator and dominated, at a relatively intimate level, it allows the unravelling of ideology in practice.

Race Relations

The reader needs to be very conscious of the importance of race. Many Indigenous Australian informants say that they are victims of racial discrimination. They cite instances of unjust or unfair treatment and material deprivation ‘for the blackfella’, of having fewer rights than other Australians. Conversely, white townspeople and farmers often criticise all Aborigines ‘for getting too much government money and
not being prepared to work’ and of having ‘...too many rights’. ‘They’re a protected species’, is a negative, dismissive expression of this sentiment heard Australia-wide. Racial stereotypes abound. When examining race relations, any analysis should be placed within the wider context of the nature and history of the community, and the notions of social stratification, power and inequality, plus the degree of applicability in each case.

A number of stages can be seen in the whole span of Australian Indigenous-invader colonial experience and very different conditions operated in each. There are fascinating parallels with Melanesia, not least in terms of race. The earliest colonial phase was the period of penetration of territories and the establishment of the basic structures of the colonial system. External political control was achieved during this period. This was followed by a period of high colonialism when settlers and State wrought major economic and social transformations. The master-servant relationship was at its strongest and domination was seen by whites to be permanent. In Australia this relationship corresponded with the long period of segregation and institutionalisation of Aborigines. For the Murrin Bridge ‘mob’, their parents and grandparents, this was the period from the mid-1920s to late 1970s. In Melanesia it was until the 1960s.

However, the illusion of stability, born out of exclusion, was ended by Indigenous striving towards autonomy and self-management and a weakening expansionist will among the colonising whites, brought about by public indignation and guilt at the destruction of traditional societies and devastating contemporary conditions, highlighted by the media, particularly of poor health and high rates of mortality.

In Australia this concern was exemplified by the extraordinary success of the 1967 Referendum. This gave the Commonwealth government the right to legislate and act on behalf of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Recent government policies of self-determination and self-management, and High Court decisions in regard to Native Title, also reflect this awareness.

By the early 1970s some urban, educated Papua New Guineans were chafing at white colonial rule. Others, particularly in villages, worried about the possible loss of government and missionary resources.

In pre-colonial times Indigenous peoples well understood notions of reciprocal dependency and generosity. The worthiest person was one who gave unstintingly to those with legitimate claims on him or her. Those traditional leaders with knowledge and power, held control over their subordinates, but, in return, were expected to look after those they managed. Communities were dependent upon these leaders for their spiritual and temporal wellbeing.

The fact that the Wanggaaypuwan used the English term ‘boss’ for both the wireenan, ‘powerful, clever ones’, and the white pastoralists indicates that they recognised the pastoralists’ power, accepted a reciprocal contract between the boss and the mob of Aborigines camping and working on the station, and expected that there would be provisions provided for the whole group. Some women and many men worked for the whites and in return the whole community was fed. This period of pastoral adaptation was characterised by employment on the pastoral stations, alternating with periods of ‘walk-about’, conducting ceremonies and eating bush foods.
However, this state changed to one of increased resentment, confusion, and resistance, when closer settlement and rural economic depression severed the relationship between large landholders and their subject Aborigines, who often became indigent and subject to government control.

The Missions

In Aboriginal settlements, as in Melanesia, the pathway to cultural change and European proselytizing, indeed often the spearhead of the West, was the Christian missionary. In mission eyes spiritual redemption through acceptance of the Word had to be accompanied by social and economic change. ‘First we must civilise, and then Christianise’ was a common maxim. Aboriginal societies, as the missionaries found them, were seen to be the antithesis of the good Christian life, and had to make way for western values of individuality, personal initiative, modesty, cleanliness, and acquisition of property. Trade and the gospel were regarded as being interdependent, one justifying the other. Since education was the main weapon of ideological effect, the schools opened in settlements were, from the beginning, instruments of control and social and cultural change. Because they threatened strongly held values, beliefs, and practices, they were hardly welcomed. The Victorian Chief Protector Robinson and his Assistants, appointed in 1838, regarded the Aboriginal people as being inferior, child-like creatures who could become saved and useful once they accepted the benefits of Christianity and civilisation.

Under these conditions of white dominance the pressures to conform became a form of cultural oppression where the white culture was imprinted on the black. Each concession towards equality made the remaining differences seem the more intolerable. This ethnocentricity created enormous resistance as Aboriginal communities strove to maintain their Law, even after the loss of their traditional land. However, many Indigenous people were ‘saved’ in both senses of the word, and Christian missions, schools and influences continue to play an important role in Indigenous Australia (and Melanesia).

A Dominant Ideology

Dominant groups in all cultures organise the education system to strengthen their position. Some examples are the white middle classes in the USA, UK, Australia and New Zealand, the People’s Action Party (PAP) in Singapore, the Communist Party in China, the Catholic Church in Ireland and Poland, and elites, often one-party dictatorships, in many post-colonial Third World countries, including Melanesia’s Papua New Guinea, Fiji, New Caledonia, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

For Indigenous Australians the ruling ideology has been largely one of a deep ethnocentrism- that European, Christian, white, capitalist civilisation is superior to their cultures, reflected and furthered in schooling. This ethnocentrism is closely related to racism.

Ethnocentrism becomes oppressive and racist when we are prepared not only to feel ourselves to be superior, but also to thrust inferiority on to others. Assimilationist,
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liberal and philanthropical attitudes may be explicitly anti-racist, “There is no reason why a native cannot be as civilised as we are”, and yet be oppressively ethnocentric.

Some sociologists have been inclined to argue that since race is a category based upon scientific untruths, a false consciousness, then it is the duty of scholars to reduce all statements about racial difference to other kinds of socially differentiated structure, such as class or ethnicity. The evidence makes this so-called duty nonsense. Racial perceptions and justifications cannot be ignored.

The forms of oppression over the last two hundred years were military-political, then economic and educational, and upon these bases there were constructed extensive legal and cultural forms of domination. Many of the settlers and missionaries were not content with subjugating Indigenous Australians and Melanesians; they were driven, indeed obsessed, with punishing them for being Indigenous, ‘primitive’ and different. There was certainly a manifestation of extreme ethnocentrism, perhaps as a justificatory ideology rationalising the dispossession. Paradoxically, the colonial English society had a dominant ideology of social development and a belief that all human beings were born equal.

To justify the dispossession and exploitation of Aboriginal people they had to be thought of as less than human. Hence racism was an endemic feature of cultural colonialism and Aborigines and Melanesians were largely excluded from white society.

PERCEPTIONS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

The attitudes and opinions of the English colonial settlers towards the ‘black savage tribes’ need to be examined if we are to understand their subsequent cultural arrogance and myopia. Conscious political and social discrimination requires and generates an ideology to uphold it. Perceived differences in physiognomy, colour, intelligence or behaviour, are used to provide the grounds for ideologies of discrimination. One needs to ask whether these ideologies represent the culmination of social and political forces, or a scientific impulse to examine a gap in the orderly structure of knowledge about humans and their capacities and behaviour. Strong bursts of contention about the natural inferiority of racially defined populations came with the spread of Europeans into the New World. The discovery of the Native Americans, the Papuans, New Guineans, the Australian Aborigines, and the domination, exploitation, or extermination of them, precipitated heated discussions about whether there was an innate, natural inferiority of races of men.

Indigenous cultures in this region apparently differed so radically from the European that they were accorded even less respect than that for African societies. For example, note the sentiments expressed by Peter Cunningham (in Miller, 1985), one of the first settlers to receive a land grant in the Hunter Valley, NSW, when he wrote that Aborigines lived in an “abject animal state ... at the very zero of civilisation ... constituting ... the connecting link between man and the monkey tribe.”

The lack of respect amongst the educated and learned filtered through to the illiterate convicts and hut-keepers, fed their hatred, and they believed, excused their brutal treatment of them. The invaders could shoot and poison the inhabitants
and steal their land because they were regarded as being like animals. There were, of course, strong economic and political interests underlying this racist attitude.

COMPLEX SOCIAL RELATIONS

The contemporary Indigenous community of Murrin Bridge and the mainly ‘white’ township of Lake Cargelligo, in the central-western region of New South Wales, are the result of long and complex social, political and economic processes. Each group has been formed by a combination of shared racial background, history and way of life, economic interests, common relationships to authority and power, and an exclusion of outsiders. They have much in common with Indigenous communities and nearby towns and cities all over Australia. Stated baldly, the dominant colonising whites took over the lands and water supplies, the means of production of the Aboriginal inhabitants. The main divide in the local stratification system is between the minority who own land and the majority who work for wages or form an under-class who don’t or can’t work. In regard to income and status we can include, with the owners of land, local professionals such as physicians, teachers, lawyers, stock and station agents, and retail owners and managers.

Indigenous Australians, as a group, are clearly in the second division. This broad stratum is crosscut in a variety of ways, for example by sex, religion, ethnicity and race. The latter category is highly significant for an understanding of Indigenous status and life-chances. Of course it is a social construct rather than biological. We should ask the question: who constructs it and why? As a participant observer in many communities and classrooms I am well placed to explore and assess such construction and explanation. For example, it is clear to me that so many teachers’ ready explanation that Indigenous children are shy, timid or negative to learning, and therefore do not do well at school, requires analysis and criticism.

In sum, for most of the previous two centuries, Indigenous Australians were turned into a pariah status group and were denied normal political privileges and citizenship rights. They were a colony, a Fourth World, within the dominant European society, even in the so-called ‘settled’ south-eastern Australian region. This notion of internal colonialism provides an important framework of analysis with which to explain policies and practices in Aboriginal education. Racism is seen as a justifying ideology in a colonial and exploitative situation, as it was so often in colonial Melanesia.

However, the European colonisation of the continent had the consequence of creating a system of race relations, which, while possessing similarities with other situations in the world, also manifested characteristics peculiar to Australian circumstances. There were all kinds of differentiation and conflict that had arisen out of the military, political, economic and social interactions between Aborigines and whites. Despite these obvious truths it seems clear to me that something additional to a class conflict or stratification analysis is required when collecting and evaluating fieldwork evidence of stereotyping and prejudice.

Various ideologies, ranging from crude stereotypes to ‘scientific’ theories, have been used to justify the processes of exploitation, expropriation, and exclusion. It is
crucial that the researcher has a phenomenological awareness; that is, takes into account the informants’ (the social actors’) racial attitudes and behaviours, if the full range of social and educational issues is to be analysed.

The class structure remains the basic form of differentiation in Australia’s capitalist system, but Indigenous communities are formed to the extent that group members are racial and cultural identities to themselves and others for purposes of social interaction. There is no doubt that many people in the wider society see the relations between Aboriginal and other Australians in racial terms. As the sociologist, John Rex asserts, “If men [sic] typify a situation as racial, racial it must be.” He argues some biological basis for racial inequality when observing that there is a “primordial tendency to advance the interests of... one’s own.”

However, this is not to say that the views of informants about racial and social relations are definitive: their perceptions, classifications and memory about race relations and attitudes and the history of culture contact can only be partly explored and, while this is a valuable approach, these findings need to be viewed in conjunction with an historical review, and be related closely to an analysis of social stratification in the region. Do these racial sentiments and ideologies represent the culmination of social and political forces? Does one find identification of racial differences with cultural and social differences? Is there an assumption by whites (including some teachers) that cultural achievements are directly, even chiefly, determined by the racial characteristics of Indigenous Australians? Is it possible for informants to conceive a more inclusive, multicultural citizenry where race is less important and cultural expression and contribution appreciated?

Many non-Aboriginal townspeople emphasise that it is the behaviour of Aborigines that is the problem. Stories are told which illustrate their lack of responsibility concerning community land and property, money, drink, work and care of children. Those who are described as ‘living white’ or ‘earning their way’ receive praise, but, for the majority, the category ‘Aboriginal’ means separation, dysfunction, exclusion, sympathy or vilification.

Related to the issues of inequality and exclusion is the need to investigate group identity. One needs to investigate the phases of colonial domination, from the frontier exploration phases to outright occupation, the period when the major transformation to the pastoral economy occurred, the long period of institutionalisation and finally the movement towards both a peripheral relationship to the Australian economy and a degree of self-management. All of these relate to the question of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity. Did Indigenous people experience forms of psychological inferiority during these phases? Were a state of dependency on whites and an acceptance of control by outsiders taught to the Aboriginal inmates during the long periods of institutional control? Have there been any changes in both Aboriginal perceptions of self and group and European perceptions of Aborigines during these phases? How effective have the various philosophical and policy changes by governments during these phases been in shaping the relations between governmental administrators and Indigenous people and the perceptions each had of the other? Is there an Aboriginal or community ideology at odds with outsiders and if there is one how does it affect racial relations, community development, schooling and
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affinity with other citizens and the State? How is the category ‘Aboriginal’ created and maintained in the face of changing identity and behaviour of both Aboriginal people and the wider Australian society in which the Aborigines live? To return to my example above, we need to explore and clarify the Aboriginal pupils’ so-called shyness in classroom behaviour. We also need to examine the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers’ perception of race. These are core questions and they shape the research and analysis. They are closely related to the educational themes.

I’ll now discuss the crucial relationships between education and community management and self-determination.

EDUCATION, POWER AND CITIZENSHIP

The relationship between socialisation and instruction on the one hand, and community management, authority, power, citizenship and self-determination on the other, is crucial. Effective teachers and community developers think about the fundamental differences between traditional Aboriginal forms and methods of instruction and those that prevail in the contemporary capitalist, nation-state system. The phenomena of power and instruction are always connected no matter what form the social system takes. What we do find, of course, is historical, cultural, and structural variation in the manner in which power and instruction are related. A people who no longer possess power over the form, content and method of instruction that is true to their culture, may face servility, alienation and despair.

When we come to what has occurred with regard to education and Aboriginal communities, while acknowledging the profound, destructive consequences of British settlement, we must not fall into the pessimistic trap of declaring that, “all is gone”. For, despite the destruction, there is much that remains. This research explores the notion of instruction or education towards gaining the deep-rooted sense of Aboriginality among contemporary Indigenous Australians, in particular that held by the descendants of the Wangaaypuwan and Wiradjuri. The Indigenous notion of education is not only cultural: it is also existential. The people are, and generally wish to be Aboriginal. Their reality as Aboriginal is being lived.

A difficulty here is the vast difference between the forms of power and authority in pre-capitalist Aboriginal communities and the authority structures of Australian society. There is a world of difference, as we have seen, between the wireenan (the traditional Wiradjuri and Wangaaypuwan ‘clever ones’, those with high knowledge), and the schoolteachers of the state and private education departments in contemporary Australia. Certainly, the imposition of an, often irrelevant Australian oriented, English language based education, upon the descendants of the Wangaaypuwan and Wiradjuri played a significant part in determining the character of the community today. Pedagogy too, moved from a more relevant, holistic, cooperative and person-oriented form to often didactic and imposed teaching methodologies.

A good deal of valuable information pertaining to this work can be gleaned from the general literature concerning Aboriginal Australians, education and power. This literature reveals that from the beginning the dominant settler class found it
incomprehensible that the Aborigines, whom they regarded as cultural beggars, could reject the riches of British civilisation. The invaders imposed and continue to impose their own forms of education on the Indigenous people and their descendants. The success of these forms is always measured by the dominant culture’s own values of what it means to be human, for example by renouncing paganism, learning to read and write, being diligent and industrious, having a fixed address and accepting and accommodating to the division of labour.

The description of Indigenous people as ‘half-caste’, ‘part-Aboriginal’ or ‘mixed-blood’ implies a causal relationship between degree of European genes and loss of Aboriginal, that is, traditional and cultural practices. Colin Tatz recognises this psychological inability of whites when he writes of “Aborigines and the White Problem”, Betty Watts and, as noted earlier, ‘Nugget’ Coombs, also referred to it being a white problem.

A corollary to the ‘white problem’ was that of the imposed perception of the woman’s role, considerably altered in the main by the efforts of women, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, during the 1980s to the present.

If we look at education from the Indigenous point of view then we may argue that whereas traditional Aboriginal instruction integrated individuals into the culture and the economy, academic Australian education, that is schooling, often threatens communities in that it severs the successful, educated person from the community, while stigmatising the rest and failing to provide them with opportunities in the Australian economy. In contrast, it could be argued that if self-management and self-determination are to be realistic goals for Indigenous communities then the leaders will need to be able to communicate, liaise, and negotiate with outsiders and these skills require academic education.

The National Indigenous Education Policy’s long-term goals are “To establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of pre-school, primary and secondary education services for their children, increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed as educational administrators, teachers, curriculum advisers, teachers assistants, home-school liaison officers and other education workers, including community people engaged in teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, history and contemporary society, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of post-school education services, including technical and further education colleges and higher education institutions, increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed as administrators, teachers, researchers and student services officers in technical and further education colleges and higher education institutions, provide education and training services to develop the skills of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to participate in educational decision-making, and develop arrangements for the provisions of independent advice from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities regarding educational decisions at regional, State, Territory and National levels.”
At Woolum Bellum Kurnai College in Morwell, Gippsland, Victoria, established in 1995, the goals are “To provide a quality education, that maintains a real focus on Koorie culture and identity, promotes and develops a sense of pride by all in the Koorie culture and identity, encourages all students in the pursuit of excellence, contributes to the achievement of better educational and employment outcomes for all students, and develops positive relationships among all members of the community. Our strength lies in believing that people learn together. We are a community of learners.” My experience in this school indicates that, in the main, it meets these goals, with an impressive degree of community involvement, sense of ownership and empowerment.

In essence, however, much contemporary formalised education, along with the commercialised economy, creates and perpetuates alienation for many Indigenous Australians. Modern education can undermine and destroy the people’s identity, whereas traditional socialisation and instruction integrated individuals into the culture and economy. But it did more than this. It also established a clear and constructive identity both for individuals and for groups, perpetuated the division of labour between male and female and maintained the authority structure between initiated senior men and uninitiated younger men. Education was a sacred activity for it created and recreated a society and culture that was whole, a way of life that possessed a clear and definite meaning. Today, most Indigenous communities no longer control instruction; the power over formal and informal education, in the main, lies outside the community, and this shift reflects the dispossession described earlier in this introduction.

Dominant groups in all cultures strive to control and organise the system of socialisation and inculcation of the primary cultural values, thus strengthening their command over society. In Australian and Melanesia, as in other nation-states with developed systems of social stratification, we find that there is a ruling class and that there are ideological elites who control the significant institutions. Usually these elites oppose constructive transformations in institutional and cultural life that contradict their immediate needs and interests, whether these be economic, political or cultural in origin. Through various mechanisms and strategies powerful groups structure and influence the knowledge, perceptions, and values of the various strata and communities constituting the total society. They lead to disempowerment, denial of land acquisition, cultural disrespect and educational inequality.

In effect, schools perform their function of reproducing an unequal social order, of perpetuating social inequality. But they also do other things that contradict this function. For example, they teach students to respect and value other people and to work for other than just competitive achievement. They produce progressive students as well as complacent ones and they inspire and prepare many working-class children for other than dreary employment. The schools involved in the case study and elsewhere in my research adopt a number of stratagems designed to counter the production of educational inequality.

This production of inequality is particularly true of complex systems of social inequality, but even in relatively non-stratified societies, such as in traditional Melanesia, dominant groups also structure and influence knowledge. Thus, we see
that in the Busama society of north-central Papua New Guinea traditional training was closely linked with property and power, and much of the instruction in kin-relations and property distribution was given by the mother’s brother, further reinforcing the matrilineal line of descent and inheritance. It is clear then that significant kinds of power lie with those who possess control over the dominant modes of thought and knowledge. As noted earlier, ‘well-taught’ Indigenous students often state variations of, “We know the desert; white fellows make farms and cities.”

If the movement towards greater community economic and managerial control is to be furthered then clearly the control of educational policies and practices must reflect this change in authority.

Educational relevance also requires investigation because if education is to be regarded as worthwhile by Indigenous people it must be seen to be useful and have practical application. The aims of education, expressed above by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy 1993–2008, are to relate education to Indigenous cultural values and identity and to community development. This is in accord with the Australian Government’s policy of self-management for Aboriginal communities. Community needs include administrative, civic, managerial, professional, technical, economic and political skills. These require local consultation and decision-making.

Perennial demand for relevant and appropriate education, from Indigenous groups such as state and national Aboriginal Education Committees, is a major concern for Australian education and requires response based on detailed, specific community research.

COMPARATIVE EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

In order to obtain a proper understanding of each educational situation it is necessary to consider the wide differences in lifestyle that characterise the Indigenous populations in Australia, Melanesia, and elsewhere. These vary from the metropolitan, country town, and fringe dwellers, to those who live in villages, on settlements, reserves, cattle stations and out-stations in the more remote parts of the respective country. Each requires an educational response based on the wishes of the community supported by specific anthropological, sociological and educational research. Teachers in the urban, country town and settlement schools need to become aware of the complex factors that affect the Indigenous child who is placed within a Western, dominant, ‘mainstream’, often ‘Anglo-centric’ school. It is also necessary that those involved in Indigenous education establish a comparative perspective that will enable them to assess recent developments and changes in education for Indigenous people and communities, as well as the lessons and insights that can be learnt from overseas developments in ethnic, community and minority education. There are many similarities in post-colonial and neo-colonial educational policies and practices in, for example, New Zealand, Canada, USA, India, Japan and Africa.

The forces engendering change will not diminish. Western forms of communication and popular culture affect even the most remote of communities, with money, mining, timber clearing, social services, schooling, religious proselytizing, decisions on native title, land tenure and the law.
MELANESIAN AND AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION: FROM ASSIMILATION TO INCLUSIVE CITIZENSHIP

In Melanesia and Australia, until quite recently, education was seen almost entirely by bureaucrats and governments as the major tool of policies of assimilation and nation building. This schooling, especially that which ignored the other cultural and social influences to which children and parents were exposed, was doomed from the beginning. Indigenous parents and children saw the education as at best irrelevant, and often, as destructive of local culture and of little economic value.

In Australia the results have been low academic achievement and high rates of truancy, and a consequent lack of Aboriginal teachers and other success models. Many Indigenous people turned their backs upon the educational institutions, for these institutions neither recognised nor met their needs.

The educator needs to see that an education isolated from the social and economic factors in a community can be anything more than futile and destructive. Conversely, how far can the localisation of the content of education proceed before it adversely affects the children? In small Indigenous communities can education be seen as one form of community development, along with communications, health, employment and housing? Is education an integral part of overall community control, management and development? Is it an agent for the development of economic and political relations between the Indigenous communities on the one hand and their respective societies on the other?

Teachers need to consider the involvement of the family in the education program. In Australia and Melanesia, a further factor for consideration is that if parents have meaningful participation in the planning and process of the education for their children, as for example, in a form of school-community partnership agreement, then perhaps this is a way to narrow the gap between the goals and values of the older people and the younger, western educated. It is best if the sense of group identity, solidarity and co-operation in the Indigenous community is joined with community development activities.

CREATING COMPRADORS?

In regard to this form of community-based education there is a paradox in that the creation of an educated Indigenous elite that can lead community responses to the problems confronting them might threaten the people whose cultural ethos is egalitarian. It can be destructive to educate an elite to provide leadership who subsequently feel superior and separate from their community. As noted before, “You think you’re white!” is a common insult directed against those apparently assimilating. This was a concern for Rene Dumont whose writings, it is reported, deeply influenced Julius Nyerere, former President of Tanzania. He found that for most urban and rural children in Africa school represents a means of entering the elite class of the civil service where they can have clean hands and a good income without hard work.

In other words education offers social mobility for the individual who can then forsake his or her underprivileged and impoverished community of origin. Dumont argues that such an education is of little use to that community. In a similar vein
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the Papua New Guinean educationalist, Paulias Matane, when referring to selective secondary enrolment said that the majority is classed as failures, instead of saying they have completed primary education. They feel inferior and resentful. Secondary and tertiary education creates a feeling of superiority among the ‘passed’. The number of anti-social, violent ‘rascals’ in Melanesian towns today is testimony to his concerns. As Katherine Lepani said in 2008, “The pervasiveness of sexual assaults and gang rapes has prompted allegations that PNG is one of the most violent countries in the world”. These pervasive, coercive, violent behaviours lead to high levels of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Any fostering of negative categorisation of those left behind is the antithesis of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy’s stated aim that academic and technological skills should be acquired in harmony with Indigenous cultural values and identity. However my research reveals a variety of responses to the education provided- from a sense of failure, defiance, to a sense of liberation, power and hope, and a desire to ‘better’ themselves. Few see it as a social climbing means of entering ‘the elite class of the civil service’.1 However, community members do often criticise those who have gone away for education and work, questioning their loyalty to their own people. And those left behind, in Melanesia and Australia, too often succumb to alcohol and drug abuse, petrol sniffing and other destructive and violent behaviours.

EDUCATION, COLONIAL CONTROL AND DECOLONIZATION

I argue that in Aboriginal Australia and Australian-controlled PNG, through a colonial social structure with a racial barrier between black and white, and an educational ideology and program of cultural colonialism, a social, political and economic condition of dependency has been incorporated cognitively in Indigenous children. The black child has thus been, in Paulo Freire’s sense, an object to be acted upon, to be oppressed.

To put it colloquially, if you have ‘a touch of the tar’ you are regarded by some [surveys indicate by many fewer than in earlier times], as not being a ‘true blue, equal Aussie’. In other words the most Australian of heritage can be rejected as ‘Aussies’. Western education has been a factor in undermining individual and group autonomy and repressing the ability to exercise agency, engage in independent action. Many studies, however, emphasise the physical and cultural resistance put up by Indigenous Australians.

One needs to pose the question: Is it the case that such an education blinds colonised people to the reality of their situation? Are they labouring under a system which not only does not enable them to gain economic and political autonomy, but also alienates them from their past life? The research reveals that most Indigenous people are starkly aware of the reality of their situation and have strong views concerning what needs to be done and the obstacles they face. A further bar to the development of decolonized, relevant, community-based and controlled Aboriginal education is the conservatism and hegemonic power of entrenched educational institutions in Australia.
It is necessary to understand traditional Indigenous education as well as the history of mission and government management regimes and educational policies and practices. That is, an appraisal of colonial, imperialist society and experience must be developed, and the colonial transformation from the educational and cultural practices of the past, to one of cultural, political and economic dependence, must be analysed. For Aboriginal Australians this was internal colonialism; as with Native Americans they failed to gain political and economic independence from their respective dominant societies. For Melanesians, economic and political decision-making is controlled by, often corrupt, Indigenous elites and by expatriates and foreign companies and governments. They teeter close to being ‘failed states’.

What part does education play in this ‘cultural colonialism’? It is fundamental. Emile Durkheim distinguished education as the systematic socialisation of the young generation by adults. If one looks at socialisation in its broadest sense, it is the process whereby adults transform a biological being (the infant) into their conception of a social being. The concept of education implies intent, deliberate instruction. In its widest sense we see that it is a process that lasts throughout life. Bronislaw Malinowski argued that every new status an individual acquires, such as parenthood, maturity and old age, has to be learned. The individual has to adjust to this learning gradually, by the acquisition of new attitudes, social duties and responsibilities.

We do not always remain within the same role: although we are members of a family all our lives, we are constantly changing our roles within it, adapting to new roles and modifying old. In the ‘battle grounds of our psyches’ we are constantly forging growth and change, wrestling with the attitudes and ideas implanted by our past experience. With each role new forms of behaviour must be learned and thus, throughout life, humans are involved in the socialisation process. In all traditional Indigenous societies learning continued well into adulthood. Not only did adults become specialists at carving or medicine only long after marriage, but also they would have to be in their forties to gain admittance to the inner rites of a society. Mature and married persons recognised the fact that the gradual assumption of responsibility and the acquisition of knowledge, sacred and temporal, could come only with old age. Behind the routine of everyday, with its cooperation and conflicts, was a higher authority, the sphere of the sacred. Mothers transmitted to their children the awe that surrounded this sphere, and above all, the sphere of the secret-sacred.

This leads me to the, often vexed, issue of women’s traditional roles. The following is a very brief overview. The following chapters develop this somewhat more.

In traditional, Indigenous Australia, women also had wide-ranging traditional responsibilities outside their immediate families. They were involved in gift-exchange and trading relationships, betrothal and marriage transactions. ‘Women’s business’ covered an immense variety of ritual, economic and social activities. While men were responsible for most of the large-scale rites the contribution by women was equally significant. They were an integral part of the Dreaming. They also played important economic roles. In the Jigalong community, Pilbara region, Western Australia, women assert a role in determining marriage arrangements and play an
important role as peacemakers. The anthropologist, Diane Bell, supports this view, stating that:

Male and female... have sacred boards; both know songs and paint designs which encode the knowledge of the Dreamtime. How each sex then fleshes out this common core of beliefs and knowledge is dependent on their perceptions of their role and the contribution to their society. ... women’s rituals ... focus on the maintenance of social harmony, link the ritual world of men and women. Under the Law, men and women have distinctive roles to play but each has recourse to certain checks and balances, which ensure that neither sex can enjoy unrivalled supremacy over the other.

Men and women had to learn the responsibilities and complementary roles of the spiritual heritage belonging to their culture. It was an intense focus and concentration of organised energy and planning.

ETHICS AND METHODS

My research is mostly participant observation in communities, schools and organisations, surveys, and extensive review of relevant literature and reports. Observation takes the form of residence in or visiting communities, assisting, contributing and observing in classrooms and on excursions, and participation in daily life. Most interviews are informal, but focus on the research themes. All informants, Indigenous or non-Indigenous, are told that the research is for possible publication. University ethics requirements are met. Critical ethical questions are: Who owns this research? Whose interests does it serve and who benefits from it? How are the findings shared? Answers are found mostly in the final chapter and my related publications. I joint-author with Indigenous scholars, draft copies of the *Socialization, Land and Citizenship among Aboriginal Australians* book were distributed in the Murrin Bridge and Lake Cargelligo communities for comment and advice. I provided them with copies of the published book.

The people questioned, Aboriginal or not, were often acutely aware of the personal nature of much of the information divulged and discussed, and some stressed that they did not want me to use their names. Accordingly, titles or general descriptions, such as ‘the chairman’, ‘a young man’, ‘a teacher’ or ‘a principal’, are used for the crediting of comments or information.

THE EDUCATION THEMES

The first of these interrelated themes is the search for *relevance*—the search for an Indigenous education that is relevant to the Indigenous community; that is, one that is neither too academic, nor inadequate academically, nor too alien. *Relevance* depends on the perception of the observer, and what is considered to be appropriate in one instance may not be in another. Education has a dual function in that it initiates and stimulates by expanding the physical and intellectual capabilities of the pupils as well as being adaptive. Thus it creates and accommodates change.
This is education considered in its positive sense. Modern educational structures also operate so as to establish and sustain systems of inequality. People may begin to question the relevance of their schooling when it fails to foster the capabilities of pupils - even more so where economic and political inequalities are crude, glaring and turn around racial discriminations. To explore the theme of relevance I participated in school and university activities in Murrin Bridge, Lake Cargelligo, NSW, Victoria, South Australia and the Northern Territory, observing and interviewing students, parents and teachers and examining school policies and curriculum documents.

The second theme is that of culture. In traditional Indigenous societies the initiated exerted social pressures. Tribal or clan elders exerted ultimate authority, acting in accord with structures laid down by the ancestors or in The Dreaming. The process of education was continuous and linked to a growing awareness of the importance of tribal and personal identity, environment and welfare.

We have seen that the Murrin Bridge people saw traditional tribal organisation primarily in terms of groups of people ‘owning’ or ‘belonging to’ tracts of land in their ngurrampaa or homeland. This traditional ownership and their shared experiences on government stations provided a focus for their group identity. Similarly, the other groups I worked with stressed the importance of ‘country’ and tribal or village life, many having moved back to their traditional lands.

Some of the specific issues and concepts related to culture and education which are dealt with include destruction, exploitation, assimilation, integration, inclusion and exclusion, identity, citizenship, Indigenous studies in the schools and management skills. The formation of an Indigenous elite through the process of formal education is also touched upon. At Murrin Bridge, by participating in daily activities, including administration of the community, family activities, recreational pursuits, researching in the schools, perusal of documents and interviewing a wide range of persons, I was able to explore the above. This book draws from analysis of this research.

The vehicle of the culture, the language, is the third of these inter-connected themes. Its effect on school performance and past and current language policies is examined. Some of the significant questions examined are: Are traditional ‘place tok’ languages, creoles, pidgins and Aboriginal English, understood, recognised and catered for in language programs? What is the relationship between language and academic achievement? Is the traditional language being taught to the children and interested adults? If so, how effective is the instruction?

A combination of participant observation in community and school, interviews with students, parents and teachers, and examination of curriculum documents (in this case language policies and programs), was used to deal with these questions. The fourth theme, perhaps for the educator, the most important, is that of pedagogy and curriculum. Pedagogy is seen as equating to styles of learning and methods of transmission, far broader than just the classroom. Teachers often debate the weight that should be given respectively to content (information) and methodology (practice). I am conscious of the valid criticism of ‘tips for teachers’ and the dangers of stereotyping Indigenous students. For example, if I were to assert, “Indigenous students can only learn effectively and well if you do it this way...” then I would be
misleading my audience. Educators who turn to social science research in order to
discover the ‘best’ pedagogy are, in a way, victims of the neo-positivist paradigm
of quantification, hypothesis testing, and over-generalisation, claiming to arrive
at generalisations applicable in almost every context. Another possible pit-fall is
non-Indigenous researchers examining ‘traditional knowledge’ in a taxonomic
manner, suggesting old data is handed down virtually unchanged from generation
to generation. This can be criticized as being Eurocentric, implying professional or
cultural superiority, and lacking dynamism. And yet the specialist is turned to for
advice. The approach taken with the findings is to recommend, but to qualify.

One assumption that is evaluated is that the curriculum and how it is imparted
estranges the school and alienates the pupil from the Indigenous community, and that
the syllabuses and the methods of teaching and testing are culturally inappropriate.
Hence, should the curriculum prepare an Indigenous student for life in his or her
community, for an urban environment, or both? Is there a form of citizenship educa-
tion that can accommodate these seemingly irreconcilable, polar opposites? This is
a political question because cultural forms like syllabuses and methodologies are
expressions of domination. Particular versions of Western ideology and culture are
presented to the public as though these versions were the only relevant perceptions
and truths.

The final theme is that of the school type- the form and function of the school
and the nature of the teaching force. The research included examining various
schools and other training agencies, in terms of their policies and practices. It also
draws from examples of contemporary schools specifically designed for Indigenous
students, such as the Victorian Koorie Open Door Education (KODE) schools or,
more recently, Koorie Education Colleges.

In regard to the nature of the teaching force it had become a truism from the 1970s
that teachers needed to enable Indigenous students to both achieve academically
and at same time retain pride in Aboriginality. Education should be provided in
a community context which built on traditional ways of learning. This raises a
number of significant questions that require investigation. Are Indigenous students
achieving success in the schools and other educational agencies? Can the imparters of
‘traditional ways of learning’ and ‘pride in identity’ be non-Indigenous? In Australia,
given the small number of teachers of Indigenous descent it could be argued that
some non-Indigenous teachers must assist in achieving the above and to do so all
need appropriate preparation. In 2010 less than 0.8 percent of Australian teachers
are of Indigenous descent, when they are 2.5 percent of the total population.

Many Aboriginal people have a clear understanding of what constitutes the
Aboriginal way of learning. Can non-Indigenous teachers impart this method of
teaching? Is it a contradiction in terms for pride in Aboriginality and a sense of
belonging, partnership and inclusive citizenship, to be imparted by others? Methods
of research into the pedagogy, curriculum and school type were as described for the
themes of relevance, culture and language. The themes and their interrelationships
inform the research and writing of this book.

Some educators assert that the promotion of community schools is particularly
appropriate in the Indigenous context. Such schools may break down the distance
between the educated young and the old who received little western education; a community school can provide a learning situation in which individuals of all ages acquire skills, learn from others, and develop personally. However, are they successful and do the Indigenous communities in the region want such a system of education?  

The research indicates that Indigenous communities express a profound desire that the educative process enable their children to first, regain and retain Aboriginal culture, and second, be equipped so as to cope with the rigours, challenge and opportunities of contemporary society.  

The provision of education for the Murrin Bridge community has improved from the days of segregated schooling and the mission regimes but it still often fails the people. For example, at the Convent and Central schools there are Aboriginal staff, but they are, in the main, at the bottom of the decision-making and authority structure. Both schools attempt special Aboriginal education strategies to increase the cultural relevance of the curriculum and improve cultural relations and academic performance. However, they are piecemeal and hampered by rapid turnover of teachers and the pressures of a common curriculum to which all students and teachers are expected to conform. In 2007 a senior teacher at the Central School explained that he sees these pressures to conform to State-wide guidelines as being a constant issue affecting the relevance and value of what is taught.  

Most teachers over the years saw Aboriginal sullenness, withdrawal or avoidance of schooling as evidence of ‘shyness’ or ‘their inferiority complex’, when clearly they were, in the main, far more complex reactions, perhaps responding to stress, tiredness, ill-health, hunger, unfamiliar language and expectation, forms of resistance, even showing respect by averting their eyes (as do people in many Asian cultures). If the children were lacking in confidence or achievement at school then the cause was situational, historical, cultural, borne of economic and political inequity, not to be attributed to race. Any people or community subjected to such brutal, repressive, alienating treatment would turn away from symbols of that treatment.  

The Aboriginal parents are in a bind; they do not want their children to suffer the segregated, second-rate education so many endured and yet schooling is seen as part of the white town and society. Despite superior facilities, it is often seen as reflecting non-Aboriginal values and is therefore, for many, ultimately threatening. And underlying the schooling dilemma is the unpalatable fact that for all school-leavers, especially Aboriginal school-leavers, local employment is very limited. Provision of education for the Aboriginal community, as observed and evaluated by me in central-western NSW and elsewhere in Australia, despite the best efforts of some gifted and dedicated teachers and principals, often does not match the policy rhetoric of self-determination and self-management. When one examines the research material gathered concerning these schools one sees that, during and after the case study, despite the considerable efforts of a number of well-meaning principals, teachers and Aboriginal aides, the Indigenous communities were not well served by the education provided for their children. School relations were often uneasy and academic standards low. The non-standard dialect of English was either not recognized or not accepted and therefore was not adequately catered for. Teacher preparation
was usually inadequate. Indigenous identity and culture were rarely affirmed and transmitted to these children, notwithstanding some valiant efforts by dedicated staff.

Student responses to the research questions and from participant observation in many locations, are that they appreciate teachers who relate well to them and their community, are fair, firm, develop rapport, support their special interests, their talents, particularly in art, computer technology and sport, and build their self-esteem. Interestingly, nearly 50 per cent expressed keen interest in ‘academic’ subjects, such as mathematics, science and English. If the curriculum is relevant, interesting, involving, and links to real jobs and career opportunities, they will remain in education. Nearly all students appreciate having Indigenous teachers, aides, cultural presenters and resources, such as supportive units within a larger school. They also express anger at their treatment ‘in town’ and at the lack of ‘real job’ opportunities. The link between school and work is often not clear.

EDUCATION FOR INCLUSIVE CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship and citizenship education is relevant to all of the above themes, indeed to all contemporary Australian education. It is embedded in the ethnographic, historical and educational elements of this study. Research in this field is a priority for Australian scholarship. Since the 1960s Australia has undergone sweeping political, social, economic and educational changes in the fields of relations within the Asia-Pacific region, economic globalisation, economic rationalism, structural change in the economy, a post-modern information revolution, Indigenous rights, the High Court’s Mabo decision, multiculturalism, women’s rights, republicanism, and, central to this book, moves towards reconciliation of Indigenous and other Australians.

These fundamental changes lead Australians to ask themselves what sort of a society they wish to live in and how best they can prepare their children for that society. In response to change and to attempt to find some answers to these questions, there has been from the 1990s to 2010 a strong Australian and international interest in the concepts and practices of citizenship and education for citizenship. This revival links past and present interest in the citizen’s knowledge, rights and duties in social, economic, political and civic life. Should these rights and duties be enshrined in a charter, a revised national constitution, or national policy goals or standards?

What is this concept of citizenship? It is not simply explaining the historical and legal workings of government, politicians and elections. Nor is it just the traditional, paternalistic dictums of state conformity- virtue, loyalty, duty, responsibility and oaths of allegiance. It is positive rights as well as obligations; it is involvement, participation, decision-making and social action, in addition to knowledge of our political heritage and structures. There is, of course, a long tradition of Western philosophy concerning citizenship rights and obligations, from Aristotle to Cicero, Machiavelli, Burke, de Tocqueville, Mill, Hannah Arendt and T.H. Marshall. The starting point for citizenship is legal membership of a political community based on universal suffrage and membership of a state based on rule of law. This citizenship is a process with a social element. Marshall argues that citizenship requires a direct
sense of community membership based on loyalty to a common possession and civilisation. It is the loyalty of free people protected by a common law. Its growth is stimulated both by the struggle to win these rights and the enjoyment of them when won. Our rights can only be guaranteed for ourselves if we actively protect the rights of others in the practice of citizenship.

Most educators would agree with Weatherill and various curriculum frameworks that citizenship, like anything else, has to be learned. Young people do not become good citizens by accident, anymore than they become good nurses, engineers, bus drivers or computer scientists. Democratic societies depend for their wellbeing and continuation on having citizens who are informed, competent and responsible participants. Citizens should be curious, informed, tolerant of diversity, able to weigh up alternative futures, willing to act upon one’s convictions and accept responsibility for one’s actions, realistic about what can be achieved, have the skills and confidence to approach appropriate agencies, a sense of social justice, an awareness of the environmental impact of their lifestyle, and a commitment to peaceful resolution of conflict.

The above is, in a sense, the ideal. There is a great deal of rhetoric about citizenship, but how successful is it in practice? Do Indigenous Australians, Melanesians, and other clan, tribal and village people, feel included or marginalized? It is difficult to practise positive citizenship if one is hungry, neglected, abused, and mistrustful of adults, the unfortunate state of many of the world’s Indigenous children.

SUMMARY

All of the above conceptual, ethical and methodological exploration informs teachers and community workers who seek more effective forms of learning, education and training for Indigenous Australians and Melanesians. In an action research sense, they assist us to provide SWOT analyses, asking what are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats regarding communities and effective Indigenous education? For example, strengths might be- Indigenous identity, local leadership and initiatives, cultural expression and survival, weaknesses- poverty, low self-confidence, ill-health, for example eye and ear infections affecting schooling, AIDS, high levels of violence and injuries, alcohol and substance abuse, warring, often Byzantine, internal factions, opportunities- native title, extra land, royalties, community controlled, or at least influenced, schools, economic initiatives, housing trusts, legal and child-care agencies, and threats- isolation, town-camps, fringe-dwelling existences, even in cities, racism, hegemonic curriculum and social injustice.

Education is the inculcation in each generation of particular kinds of knowledge, skills and attitudes, by the means of institutions, such as ceremonies and schools, deliberately created for this end. Every society has discovered that the transmission of its culture cannot be left to chance and supervises the education of its members, although not necessarily in a school. The leaders of traditional societies did not leave training in the culture to chance. Nor, since the occupation and conquest have the agents of the state relinquished control of their charges, although provision at the margins has been problematic.
CHAPTER 2

Soon after white invasion Indigenous education took place within a social system where the state dominated the lives of the original inhabitants. Education played a fundamental role in cultural colonialism. Later, I explore the potential role of Indigenous pedagogy in the development of an inclusive form of Australian and Melanesian citizenship. The focus is on Indigenous pedagogy and education, traditional and contemporary.

The conclusion focuses on both Indigenous pedagogy and the role western education has played in the lives of Indigenous people. It draws heavily from the many observations and comments gathered concerning effective and ineffective education. However, as stressed above, education cannot be understood outside its historical, social, legal and economic contexts and so it addresses briefly each of these contexts as well, drawing in particular upon identity, community involvement, citizenship and pedagogy.

The process of learning has a profound influence on human behaviour. The control, power and dominance inherent in education emanate from this profundity. Have changes in educational policy and practice, for example, more integrated schooling, increased recognition of the Indigenous heritage in school curriculums, and greater access to secondary and tertiary education, resulted in any real transformations in Indigenous communities? Are there any characteristics of Indigenous pedagogy that may be instructive for practitioners?

These key questions, the data the research has generated concerning them, particularly the responses of students, parents and teachers to them, underpin the final chapters. The following two chapters explore Indigenous culture and heritage, in Australia and Melanesia, asking: How can we better develop an understanding of traditional (classical) Indigenous socialisation and education? Crucial links are established for incorporating ‘traditional’ elements of Indigenous pedagogy into contemporary educational settings.

NOTES

1 Lowly paid teacher aides are understandably pleased when, on graduation as teachers, they receive professional recognition and much higher salaries. Also, qualified Indigenous teachers are often soon ‘poached’, to become managers in Indigenous organisations, with higher salaries, offices and cars provided.

2 In 2007 a comprehensive review of Koorie education found that “The Victorian College of Koorie Education [the umbrella body for KODE schools] has not provided acceptable education outcomes” (Koorie Education Strategy Branch, Department of Education, 2008). My personal observation is that outcomes were too patchy. They range from mostly successful in Gippsland to elsewhere meeting far fewer desired outcomes.

3 From 2011 National Curriculum guidelines will also have to be met. Indigenous perspectives and topics will be embedded in these, rather impressively and comprehensively, particularly for History.
Murrin Bridge Children at School, 1980s. The Photographer is John Morton.