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Barriers to Indigenous education and educational research reform in Australia

by

Margaret Scrimgeour M.Ed.

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

Deakin University April 2001
I certify that the thesis entitled: **Barriers to Indigenous education and educational research reform.**

submitted for the degree of: **Doctor of Education**

is the result of my own research, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this thesis in whole or in part has not been submitted for an award, including a higher degree, to any other university or institution.

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Abstract

Across all Indigenous education sectors in Australia there continues to be extensive debate about the appropriateness of proposed assessment criteria, curriculum content, language of instruction, pedagogical approaches, research practices and institutional structures. Until relatively recently, policy initiatives targeting these issues have been developed and implemented separately and without reference to the interrelated nature of the barriers that confront Indigenous peoples in their attempts to challenge mainstream educational and research practices that potentially marginalise their individual and collective interests. Increasingly, these issues are being linked under the banner of 'Indigenous education reform', and the potential for collective Indigenous community action is being realised. The current Indigenous education reform process in Australia is concerned with reversing the trend associated with patterns of academic underachievement by Indigenous students in the nation’s school systems. Concurrently, reforms in the area of Indigenous education research are concerned with achieving fundamental changes to the way Indigenous education research is initiated, constructed and practised.

Mainstream institutions, Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples have different interests in the outcome of the resolution processes associated with proposals to reform Indigenous education and research practices. It is through investigation of stakeholder positioning in relation to key issues, and through reference to stakeholder interests in the outcome of negotiated resolutions, that a critical approach to analysing Indigenous education and research reform initiatives can be achieved. The three case studies contained within this portfolio represent an attempt to investigate the patterns of contestation associated with the delivery of primary school education for Aboriginal students in the Northern Territory and the problems associated with implementing reformed Indigenous education research guidelines. This research has revealed pervasive mainstream community and institutional support for assimilatory policies and a related lack of support for policies of Indigenous community ‘self-determination’. This implies insufficient support within the Nation-State for Indigenous proposals for education and research reforms that legitimise the incorporation of Indigenous languages and cultural knowledge and that aim to re-position Indigenous peoples as central to the construction and delivery of education and educational research within their own communities. Common barriers to the implementation of reformed institutional structures and educational and research practices have been identified across each of the three case studies. The analysis of these common barriers points to a generalised statement about the nature of the resistance by mainstream Australians and their institutions to Indigenous community proposals for educational and research reforms.

This research identifies key barriers to Indigenous Australian education and research reforms as being:

- Resurgent mainstream community and institutional support for assimilatory policies implies a lack of support for increasing the level of Indigenous community involvement in the construction and delivery of education and educational research;
Mainstream institutional commitment to the principles of economic rationalism and the incorporation of corporate managerialist approaches reduces the potential for Indigenous community involvement in the setting of educational and research objectives;

The education and social policy agendas of recent Australian governments are geared toward the achievement of national economic growth and the strengthening of Australia’s position in the global economy. As a direct result, the unique cultural identities and linguistic heritages of Indigenous peoples in Australia are marginalised;

Identified ‘disempowering’ attitudes and practices of educators, researchers and institutional representatives continue to impact negatively upon the educational outcomes of Indigenous students;

Insufficient institutional support for the development of mechanisms to ensure Indigenous community control over all aspects of the research project continues to impede the successful negotiation of research in Indigenous community contexts;

The promotion of ‘deficit’ educational approaches for Indigenous students reinforces the marginalisation of their existing linguistic and cultural knowledge bases;

The relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Australia continues to be constrained by the philanthropically based ‘donor-recipient’ model of service delivery. The framing of Indigenous peoples as recipients of mainstream community benevolence has ongoing disempowering and negative consequences;

Currently proposed national Indigenous education policies and programmes for the implementation of these polices do not adequately take into account the diversity in linguistic, political, cultural and social interests of Indigenous peoples in Australia;

Widespread ‘institutional racism’ within mainstream educational institutions perpetuates the disadvantage experienced by Indigenous students and Indigenous community members who aim to derive benefit from education and educational research.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the many Aboriginal people who have been my teachers; particularly my first teacher and friend, Carmel Bellotti. I would also like to thank my supervisor, Dr. John Henry, for his encouragement and contribution to the development of this portfolio. Thanks also to my family and friends who have supported me throughout.
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## Abbreviations

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<tr>
<td>ABSTUDY</td>
<td>Aboriginal Student Assistance Scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AESIP</td>
<td>Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIATSIS</td>
<td>Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARC</td>
<td>Australian Research Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARI</td>
<td>Aboriginal Research Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSPA</td>
<td>Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATSIC</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAAC</td>
<td>Central Australian Aboriginal Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CINCRM</td>
<td>Centre for Indigenous Natural and Cultural Resource Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLE</td>
<td>Concentrated Language Encounters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEET</td>
<td>Department of Employment, Education and Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEETYA</td>
<td>Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>DSP</td>
<td>Disadvantaged Schools Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feppi</td>
<td>(not an abbreviation) Northern Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>IECNT</td>
<td>Indigenous Education Council of the Northern Territory</td>
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<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>First language</td>
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<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>Second language</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAP</td>
<td>Multilevel Assessment Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAEP</td>
<td>National Aboriginal Education Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATSIEP</td>
<td>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBEET</td>
<td>National Board of Employment, Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NTU</td>
<td>Northern Territory University</td>
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<tr>
<td>NTDE</td>
<td>Northern Territory Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAC</td>
<td>Public Accounts Committee</td>
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<td>VET</td>
<td>Vocational Education and Training</td>
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Portfolio structure

This portfolio is divided into five main sections. The research findings and associated analyses are prefaced by an introductory section that outlines the purpose for the research, background to the research and an overview of the three case studies. The three case studies are then presented. The concluding dissertation essay will locate the research findings within related Indigenous education and general policy development discourses, and will discuss identified barriers to reform in the Indigenous education field.

Please note that to comply with current convention, the term ‘Indigenous’ will be applied in reference to all Aboriginal Nations in Australia. When issues and events specific to Aboriginal peoples in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia are concerned, then the terms ‘Aboriginal’ or Aboriginal peoples will apply.
Introduction

The history associated with attempts to reform the Indigenous education process in Australia is reflected in the changing nature of relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. In recent years there has been a tendency to focus on the rights and responsibilities of Indigenous peoples and mainstream Australians, and sharp distinctions between the ideological positioning of various stakeholders have emerged. Rizvi and Kemmis (1987) suggest that contestation between advocates of different ideological positions is central to the educational reform process. They also suggest that much of the debate that leads to change is not rational and coherent but rather it is 'the result of conflict between groups over status, resources and territory' (Rizvi & Kemmis 1987, p.24). The following research is an attempt to investigate the patterns of contestation associated with recent Indigenous education reform initiatives and to speculate on reasons why these initiatives have been generally unsuccessful in reversing patterns of academic underachievement by Indigenous students.

Formal education for Indigenous peoples in Australia was instituted by missionaries soon after the invasion of this country by European colonists in 1788, and since federation in 1901 various combinations of Commonwealth, State and Territory involvement in education have developed. Although missionaries shared a 'Christianising' agenda in relation to the purpose for the education of Indigenous peoples, their educational approaches differed. While some missionaries supported the classic colonial approach to the education of Indigenous peoples, which gave high priority to the 'civilising' agenda associated with the imposition of European language and cultural norms, others adopted a more 'integrative' approach. German Lutheran missionaries in South Australia, for example, adopted a vernacular literacy programme in 1839, and did not insist that their students adopt European dress codes (Schurmann 1987, p.98). It was Presbyterian missionaries who in the 1940s in the north of South Australia developed a vernacular literacy approach which led eventually to the
establishment of bilingual education programmes in schools on the Pitjantjatjara homelands (Edwards 1969).

The Independent Aboriginal School movement in Australia has constituted a significant site of Indigenous community resistance to the imposition of mainstream languages and cultural norms through the education process. Independent schools such as the Strelley group of schools in the north of Western Australia (also known as the Nomads group of schools) and the Yipirinya School in Alice Springs have been regarded by many as the vanguard for innovation in the Indigenous education field. There has been considerable opposition to the establishment and continued operation of these schools. Butler (1985) considers the extent of State Government and Federal Government opposition to education programmes for Indigenous students that operate outside their direct control. In this account Butler outlines the history of conflict between the Nomads group of Aboriginal peoples in the North-West of Western Australia and the State over education and a wide range of other issues. Butler suggests that a key problem for the Aboriginal peoples who formed the Nomads group of independent schools has always been a reluctance by government agencies to accept educational philosophies that did not advance assimilationist and ‘civilising’ agendas. He argues that it is their reliance on government funding that has been most problematic for the Aboriginal peoples in question. To this end Butler (1985) proposes an alternative funding structure where the State would provide funds for legitimate beneficiaries through an independent board or tribunal.

Until relatively recently, educational approaches that recognised the educational value of Indigenous languages and that promoted respect for Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous cultural orientations represented a radical departure from mainstream community supported policies of assimilation. While official policies of ‘assimilation’ were replaced by policies of ‘self-determination’ and ‘self-management’ during the 1970s, residual assimilationist attitudes and practices are still evident in the way educators and government education service providers approach the Indigenous education and Indigenous research processes. Tension between the competing objectives of assimilation and Indigenous community ‘self-determination’ continues to be at the centre of contestation surrounding a range of Indigenous education
interventions and Indigenous community proposals for educational and research reform.

Current proposals for education reform emanate from both Indigenous community and mainstream institutional sources, and extend from pre-school education to tertiary education. In the 1980s the Indigenous education reform process gained momentum from the formalisation of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP). Each State and Territory was subsequently expected to enter into the process of developing triennial strategic plans and operational plans which detailed their commitment to operationalising agreed NATSIEP objectives. An initial focus of NATSIEP was to increase the participation and retention rates of Indigenous students within mainstream education, and identifiable (if insufficient) improvements in both these areas have been achieved. Bin Sallick et al. (1994) in a review of the literature related to the development of NATSIEP objectives, suggest that commentators are divided about the extent to which NATSIEP framework can assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to choose the terms of their participation in mainstream education. While some argue that the NATSIEP is oriented toward the achievement of assimilationist objectives (Harrison 1992; Coombs 1989; Snow 1993), there is general acknowledgement by analysts that the policy has provided the impetus for increased levels of funding for Indigenous education and increased levels of coordination across the various education sectors. It is also acknowledged that NATSIEP is the first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education policy that has been endorsed by both the Commonwealth Government and the State Governments. Luke et al. (1993) suggest that a problem of NATSIEP lies in its lack of specificity in terms of establishing a 'realizable future' for Indigenous education, and that as a policy document it remains unfinished. They argue that NATSIEP has been successful in establishing a 'field of possibilities' for sites where power will be redistributed, and that it has effectively 'tabled issues for debate and contestation' (Luke et al. 1993, p.149). It is within this realm of 'debate and contestation' that the three case-study sites included in this portfolio are located. According to Bin Sallick et al. (1994), the current literature relating to NATSIEP reveals a noticeable absence of analysis of how to 'get things done'. While the following research does not suggest programmes for
action, it does aim to investigate impediments to the insertion of some key NATSIEP objectives within the Indigenous education and research processes. In other words, this research represents an attempt to explain why things are not being done to improve the quality of education provided for Indigenous students in Australia.

RATIONALE

Central to the purpose for proposed Indigenous education and research reforms is widespread concern about identified patterns of academic underachievement by Indigenous students. An hypothesis is proposed that mainstream governments have not adequately supported Indigenous community conceptions for educational reforms which are aimed at reversing this situation. It is further hypothesised that a key reason for this lack of government support is that Indigenous community conceptions of reform do not always support assimilation as the preferred social policy option for Indigenous peoples in Australia, nor do they support the ‘civilising’ agenda associated with education for Indigenous peoples which continues to be a cornerstone of the colonial education system. A purpose for the research contained within this portfolio is to investigate this set of hypotheses. If the escalating patterns of contestation between Indigenous community representatives and mainstream education representatives do have a common base, as hypothesised, then what are the contested issues and what are the barriers to their resolution? By building up a profile of recent Indigenous education initiatives and detailing the nature of contestation associated with their implementation, it is proposed that a greater degree of transparency in the associated resolution processes may be achieved.

Public disclosure of ‘barriers to reform’ and the interests some stakeholders have in maintaining the status quo may assist in the unmasking of agendas which have more to do with maintaining mainstream control over the Indigenous education and research processes than improving the education situations for Indigenous peoples. Future programmes of action that take into account these identified barriers may have an increased chance of ultimately succeeding. The three case study analyses contained within this portfolio are inclusive of a range of issues identified as impacting on the
nature of Indigenous education service delivery and educational research in Australia. The case study sites have been chosen because they provide opportunities for investigating the positioning of a range of stakeholders involved in the Indigenous education and educational research processes, and for identifying sources of tension between them. It is the expressed public positioning of stakeholders, current policy documents and the discourses that have developed around contested Indigenous education interventions that constitute the database for the research and associated analyses of this doctoral study. The discussions will be located within broader theoretical and historical frameworks, but the intention throughout will be to demonstrate the practical realities associated with resolution of site-specific educational and research issues.

A central consideration throughout the research and associated discussions will be: if concerns about current patterns of academic underachievement by Indigenous students are guiding the Indigenous education reform process, then what is there to indicate that Indigenous community interests are central to the construction of proposed education solutions?

The Cummins (1986) framework for theorising minority education interventions, 'Empowering Minority students: A framework for intervention', has guided the approach adopted by the researcher throughout. The framework is considered in detail within the Traeger Park case study where it is applied in its entirety, but the methodological approach proposed by Cummins has also influenced the design of the other two case study analyses. Cummins (1986, 1996) proposes that minority community 'empowerment' within the education sphere is central to improving the academic attainment levels of minority group students. He details a range of 'enabling' and 'disabling' attitudes and practices which he argues ultimately determine the extent to which minority group students will succeed academically. As a way of identifying the issues, engaging with the positioning of stakeholders and proposing a way forward in the resolution process, the following steps are suggested:

- Identification of stakeholder interests in the resolution process;
- Disjunctions in stakeholder positioning;
➢ Suggested changes to stakeholder positioning;
➢ Barriers to reform.

Projects aimed at achieving minority community ‘empowerment’ in education contexts do not take place in a vacuum. That is why Cummins places great emphasis on the nature of power relationships between minority group communities and mainstream communities. He suggests that it is at the level of ‘power sharing’ that real advances can be made and it is also where patterns of resistance on the part of mainstream institutional representatives are most apparent. The strength of the Cummins (1986) framework lies in its capacity to incorporate site-specific issues relevant to the provision of education for minority group members in a range of international settings. More recently Cummins (1996) has resiled from the use of the term ‘minority’ because he argues that it has increasingly assumed pejorative connotations. Instead he prefers terms such as ‘bilingual’, ‘culturally diverse’, and ‘English Language Learning’, depending on the context. In the case of Indigenous students in Australia I would argue that while application of the ‘minority’ descriptor is insufficient, it is adequate if their Indigenous status and the attendant rights and history attached to that status are routinely incorporated as central to any discussion. The essential meaning attached to the descriptor ‘minority’ of power imbalance in relation to a dominant and dominating mainstream culture, with clear connotations of ‘power over’ the smaller party, however, is still highly relevant to this study.

In recent years the Indigenous education reform process has been associated with increasing the levels of Indigenous community participation in education decision-making and service delivery. Adapted pedagogical practices and alternative institutional structures have also been proposed. Increasingly, the incorporation of Indigenous cultural knowledge and Indigenous languages is being promoted as a central plank within ‘bi-cultural’ programmes. While these initiatives have chipped away at the mainstream hegemonic hold over the education process, they have still not delivered the predicted improvements in academic outcomes for Indigenous students.

There is a point of view which suggests that Western models of education are not consistent with Indigenous ways of doing things, and that this dissonance could indicate reasons for the reported unsatisfactory academic outcomes of Indigenous
students. The *Desert Schools Report* (1996) suggests that a consistent theme in recent literature about Aboriginal education in Australia is that models and systems of schooling which 'were forcibly and continuously imposed on Indigenous peoples by colonising forces inexorably destroyed their own community-based education and that Western models have always operated in ways that are out of tune with crucial aspects of Aboriginal cultures, beliefs and values (*Desert Schools Report* 1996, p.12).

If this is true, then it seems logical that those involved in the Indigenous education process should be concerning themselves with developing approaches to education which locate Indigenous peoples as central to the construction of education service delivery structures. A range of education initiatives has been proposed with this aim in mind. Some of these initiatives have enjoyed mainstream community support and others have been met with persistent and widespread opposition. Accounts of these initiatives, and mainstream community responses to them, are important because they constitute the public face of the 'indigenous education reform process'. Behind the scenes and on broader political fronts ideological battles are being waged over the rights and responsibilities of Indigenous peoples and mainstream Australian community members. So, while it is important to attend to the realities associated with site-specific Indigenous education interventions, it is equally important to locate these experiences within broader national trends in social, economic and education policy development and to consider the impact of these policies on the current direction of the reform process in the Indigenous education field.

**BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH**

I entered the EdD programme at Deakin University as a mid-career teacher. Although my early training and first ten years of teaching were in the primary school area, in the last ten years I have worked mainly with tertiary students. In 1979 I began my teaching career at a regional primary school in the north of Western Australia where Aboriginal students constituted fifty per cent of the school population. Since that time I have worked primarily with Aboriginal students in rural and remote communities in Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory. My current
participation in this course has been determined by my ongoing interest in the Indigenous education field and a desire to locate my own professional experiences within a broader framework which might explain my personal successes and failures as a teacher of Aboriginal students.

I remember the early 1980s as a time of optimism, when there was a general feeling among educators that through our collective goodwill and attention to reformed pedagogical practices that improved academic outcomes could be achieved for Indigenous students in the short term. This optimism was significantly owing to the emergence of ‘The Aboriginal Learning Styles Theory’, developed by Stephen Harris (1979). This theory outlined a series of culturally mediated learning styles specific to Australian Aboriginal children. It was argued that if this theory was translated into modified teaching practices, then improved educational outcomes would follow. This approach was embraced by teachers as a concrete guide to teaching practice at a time when guidance for teachers of Aboriginal students was almost non-existent. Nicholls, Crowley and Watt (1996) suggest that at the time, Harris’s theoretical work breathed new life into Aboriginal education. ‘Not only were Aborigines viewed as just as educable as the next person, but also Aboriginal cultural mores and practices were legitimated, indeed, for the first time since colonisation, they were conscripted into the service of education (Nicholls, Crowley & Watt 1996, p.6).

During this time I worked both in mainstream government schools and in an independent Aboriginal school. It was in this independent school that I was introduced to bilingual education and saw Aboriginal community control over education in action. I became convinced of the merits of bilingual education approaches and Aboriginal community control over the education process. On returning to the mainstream education system I began to recognise policies and practices affecting Aboriginal students which in my opinion were having a negative impact on educational outcomes. Mainstream educators and mainstream education service providers apparently resisted reform initiatives that involved a shift in power from the mainstream to the Indigenous community sector. I also recognised that the Aboriginal Learning Styles Theory, which by this time was being broadly applied, had lost something in the translation from theory to practice. Instead of resulting in affirmative
pedagogical approaches, the theory was instead being used to defend lowered teacher expectations of the academic abilities of Aboriginal students and the implementation of 'deficit' educational approaches. This issue was taken up by Malin (1997), who defended the Aboriginal Learning Styles Theory but agreed that it had been used by teachers in some circumstances to defend 'shoddy classroom practices'. Parkin (1997) also suggested that in interpreting the theory, some teachers had 'restricted Aboriginal children to informal learning rather than encourage their abilities to decontextualise and verbalise'. Henry and Brabham (1994) were more overt in their criticism of the Aboriginal Learning Styles Theory by suggesting that it emanated from the tradition of 'cultural determinism', which has inherently racist overtones and which has been responsible for the proliferation of 'deficit' approaches within the Indigenous education field. They suggest that 'the theory of Aboriginal learning styles is fast becoming the new dogma of Koorie Education and, as with earlier dogmas, used in practice to limit rather than to extend the achievements of Koorie children (Henry & Brabham 1994, p.1).

Nicholls, Crowley and Watt (1996) identified a problem associated with the application of the Aboriginal Learning Styles Theory as being the resultant diversion of attention away from other more relevant issues when considering reasons for ongoing patterns of Indigenous academic underachievement. Instead, they argued that structures of subordination and domination which are deeply embedded in the relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Australia are deserving of closer attention when attempting to explain the current unsatisfactory education situation for Aboriginal peoples.

Stephen Harris (1990) was also responsible for the development of an education model which has impacted significantly on the way Aboriginal education programmes have been structured and delivered in Australia. The Two-Way Schooling model proposes a type of school structure which claims to reflect a shift in power, resulting in increased control by Aboriginal peoples over the education process. The extent to which this model has been successful in achieving fundamental shifts in power at local sites has been a source of contention. In my experience, although the principles of the model are soundly based in concerns about power sharing and the insertion of
Indigenous cultural perspectives and Indigenous community education agendas, in some situations the intent of the model has been subverted by mainstream education service providers. The application of the Two-Way Schooling model has sometimes resulted in only superficial structural changes which have not delivered the expected improvements in academic outcomes, or the expected transference of power from mainstream educators to local Aboriginal community members. Many schools officially identified as Two-Way schools apparently continue to operate from bases which are determined by mainstream cultural and linguistic imperatives.

As a teacher of Aboriginal students during the 1980s and 1990s I engaged optimistically with both the Aboriginal Learning Styles Theory and the Two-way schooling model. As I perceived shortfalls in these approaches from a classroom teaching perspective, I was also concerned by the emergence of what I thought were regressive education policy decisions. Along with many of my colleagues, I was concerned about the decision to withdraw bilingual education programmes from Aboriginal schools on the Pitjantjatjara Lands in the north of South Australia in 1989. The subsequent closure of the Traeger Park School in Alice Springs in 1991 was yet another indication that the tide was turning, and that education interventions that were substantially driven by interests outside mainstream concerns for economic development, 'social justice' and 'equity' for Aboriginal peoples were under threat. This situation was confirmed more recently when the Northern Territory Government withdrew support for bilingual education programmes in twenty-one Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory at the end of 1998. Despite widespread opposition from the Indigenous community and from a range of educators and academics, English as a Second Language (ESL) programmes were subsequently introduced in these schools and Aboriginal language programmes were withdrawn.

My initial area of research interest when I enrolled in the EdD programme in 1997 was related to the Aboriginal Learning Styles Theory and the Two-Way Schooling model of education. I wanted to investigate the impact of these models on the professional practice of teachers and to discover if there were aspects that were being successfully applied. At the end of 1998, however, when the Northern Territory Government decision to withdraw funding for bilingual education programmes in
Aboriginal schools was announced, I turned my attention to investigating the history of contestation associated with the application of bilingual education in Indigenous Australian communities. At this time I was also exposed to the Cummins (1986) theoretical framework for analysing minority education interventions. I was attracted by Cummins's proposition that minority education interventions fail to deliver expected improvements in educational outcomes, not always because of inherent problems associated with the nature of the intervention, but because of unyielding institutional structures and the unchanging attitudes and practices of educators. Cummins's arguments had apparent resonance for the Indigenous education situation in Australia. So, instead of focussing specifically on the Aboriginal Learning Styles Theory and the Two-Way Schooling model, I decided to locate the patterns of contestation associated with the institution of reformed Indigenous education structures and practices within comparable international minority education discourses. The Traeger Park School closure and the Bilingual Education issue in the Northern Territory provided forums for investigations of site-specific issues associated with education provision for Indigenous students. The investigation of current approaches to Indigenous education research was undertaken to demonstrate the complexities associated with the institution of proposed reforms in the Indigenous education field. My interest in issues associated with the conduct of research developed out of my own experience in attempting to frame the research projects necessary to the completion of the EdD course. The ideological and ethical issues, as well as the practical difficulties I encountered in attempting to frame a research proposal, brought into sharp relief the substantial discontinuities between the interests of higher education institutions, student researchers like myself and Indigenous community members. In my opinion, these and other discontinuities between policy rhetoric and practice constitute the basis for current widespread contestation between Indigenous peoples and mainstream education service providers. Whether or not the Cummins (1986) framework is capable of incorporating the range of issues impacting upon the successful resolution of contested issues in the Indigenous education field in Australia remains to be seen. By engaging with these issues, however, I hope to gain some insights into my role as an education professional in the associated resolution.
processes, and also some insights into the current direction of the Indigenous education reform process in Australia.

CASE STUDY OVERVIEWS

The Traeger Park School closure

The Traeger Park Primary School was one of four government primary schools in the town of Alice Springs (a rural town in Central Australia with a population of 26,000). The school was comprised of a predominantly Aboriginal population and a unique educational programme had been developed to meet their educational needs. A proposal by the Northern Territory Government to close the Traeger Park School in 1991, and to transfer the Aboriginal students to the other government primary schools in Alice Springs, was met by sustained community resistance. This resistance culminated in an official Human Rights Commission hearing to determine if the rights of the Aboriginal students to have adequate access to educational and training opportunities had been breached. Mainstream government representatives argued for the closure of the school, while Indigenous community members and educational experts argued for the retention of the school and its educational programmes. The public discourse these arguments generated has been used as the basis for a trial retrospective application of the Cummins (1986) qualitative evaluation framework in an Australian Indigenous context. The framework ‘Empowering Minority students: A framework for intervention’ was developed by Cummins (1986), and focuses on the ‘empowerment’ of minority communities and minority group students as a key factor in improving educational outcomes. The Cummins (1986) framework provided a vehicle for the systematic analysis of competing stakeholder positions that relate to education provision for Aboriginal students in the Northern Territory.

A main objective of the framework is to clarify why some minority education interventions do not achieve predicted improvements in academic outcomes. The applicability of this framework to Indigenous education sites in Australia was investigated through this Traeger Park case study. Particular attention was given to the
four key 'predictors of success' within minority education interventions which are nominated by Cummins (1986) as critical to improving educational outcomes. These 'predictors of success' are inclusive of issues associated with the extent of 'disabling' and 'enabling' attitudes and practices as these relate to the involvement of minority group members in the following four key aspects of the education process:

- Cultural and linguistic incorporation;
- Community participation;
- Pedagogy;
- Assessment.

The extent of marginalisation of Indigenous interests within the construction of education interventions is highlighted within the Cummins (1986) framework. Through identification of 'system constraints' it is intended that barriers to reformed educational practices might be recognised and their effects ameliorated. The framework represents a potential for arriving at agreed parameters for future negotiations between minority group representatives and mainstream education representatives about the appropriateness and potential effectiveness of proposed educational reforms. Application of the Cummins (1986) framework as a professional development tool was also considered.

While the intent of the case study is not to arbitrate on the decision to close the Traeger Park School, the overt marginalisation of Aboriginal community interests in the process leading up to the school closure cannot be ignored. From the way the recommendation was constructed, the nature of the alternative mainstream education options offered and from the publicly expressed justification for the school closure by government representatives, it is clear that there was more than just the educational future of the Traeger Park students at stake. The NATSIEP agenda for educational reform was being put to the test and the regressive Northern Territory Government social policy agenda was being publicly defended.
Bilingual Education in the Northern Territory

The withdrawal of support by the Northern Territory Government for the continued operation of bilingual education programmes in twenty-one schools in 1998 has been met with an unprecedented level of opposition from Aboriginal community members, educators, politicians and academics. The ensuing public debate has centred extensively (although not exclusively) around issues associated with the right of Indigenous peoples to maintain distinct cultural and linguistic identities within Australian society. The proposal to replace the existing bilingual programmes with ESL programmes has been questioned on both educational and social justice grounds. The bilingual education issue has also brought into focus the role of Indigenous peoples in the construction and delivery of education, and stark ideological differences between stakeholders over the direction of social policy in Australian society have emerged. Coupled with government justification for the decision and sustained Indigenous community opposition, the discourse also reflects increased mainstream community participation. An aim of the case study is to locate the current discussions about bilingual education in the Northern Territory within an historical perspective which brings into focus competing stakeholder positioning about the purpose for bilingual education and, by association, the more general purpose for education in Indigenous Australian communities.

The Indigenous education research reform process

Indications are that contradictions between policy guidelines and current Indigenous education research practices are resulting in less than optimum research outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

A recent ARC (1999) report into Indigenous research issues, Research of Interest to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, suggests that although Indigenous research policies have been formulated by most higher education institutions in Australia, there is concerning evidence that the practices of researchers have not
changed substantially. Indigenous peoples are still being framed as ‘research subjects’ and researchers continue to be defined by their ‘expert’ status. The association between this situation and the problems being encountered within school-based education interventions relate to competing conceptions of what constitutes effective and legitimate Indigenous community participation and control within the education and educational research spheres. The case study investigates how the Indigenous research guidelines of three higher education institutions propose to ensure that Indigenous community interests substantially determine the educational research agenda. If Indigenous community interests are being marginalised within the research process then what are the responsibilities of higher education institutions in reversing this situation?

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INTRODUCTION

A purpose for the following case study is to investigate the applicability of a qualitative evaluation framework to an Aboriginal education intervention in Australia. The framework, ‘Empowering minority students: A framework for intervention’, was developed by Cummins (1986). As the title suggests, the framework focuses on the ‘empowerment’ of minority students as a key factor in improving educational outcomes, and, to this end, it is also concerned with identifying positive directions for educational change. Cummins proposes that there are important similarities between the education situations of minority group students in a range of international settings, and that these similarities are bound up in issues to do with power, status and control.

The main objective of the Cummins (1986) framework is to clarify reasons why some education interventions do not achieve the predicted improved academic outcomes by minority group students. He claims that costly reforms instituted in the United States of America and Canada, aimed at reducing the pattern of school failure among minority students, have been largely unsuccessful. He suggests that a major reason for this situation is that relationships between teachers and minority students and between schools and minority communities have remained essentially unchanged. Cummins calls for those involved in minority education interventions to involve themselves in a process of personal and institutional role redefinitions as a primary means of reversing existing patterns of academic underachievement by minority group students. He argues that without these role re-definitions, schools will continue to reproduce the power relations evident in the wider society. These power relations regularly serve to ‘disempower’ or ‘disable’ minority group members in their dealings with mainstream institutions and their representatives. Within education contexts, Cummins argues that identified ‘disabling’ attitudes, practices and institutional structures contribute toward the academic underachievement of minority group
students.

Cummins (1986) has compiled four key 'predictors of success' for minority education interventions. The extent of their incorporation within the structures and practices associated with minority education provision provides an indicator of the likely success of these interventions in terms of improved academic outcomes. The analytical focus is on the role definitions assumed by educators and education service providers in relation to minority group students and the broader minority communities in question. There is also a focus on identifying institutional structures that represent potential barriers to the achievement of reformed minority education practices.

The site chosen to trial the Cummins (1986) evaluative framework is represented by the disputed closure of the Traeger Park School in the Northern Territory of Australia in 1990. Two key factors influenced the choice of this site as the basis for the proposed research:

- The discourse generated by the disputed school closure provides a publicly available database for investigating a range of stakeholder positions in relation to the provision of education for a group of Indigenous students in Australia;

- A retrospective analysis that relies on a publicly available database avoids disruption to an operational education programme. This was an important consideration given that the usefulness of the Cummins (1986) framework as a tool for analysis of Indigenous education interventions in Australia is yet to be determined. The researcher accepts that research that intrudes unnecessarily into the lives of Indigenous peoples should be avoided.

The contested nature of the Traeger Park School closure has generated a discourse which includes detailed stakeholder justification for a range of educational practices and institutional structures relating to education provision for a group of Aboriginal students. On the one hand, those who supported the closure of the school argued that the educational needs of the Aboriginal students could be adequately met within mainstream primary schools in Alice Springs. Those who argued against the school closure pointed to the educational advantages of the Traeger Park School model for Aboriginal students. Within the associated discourse, both of these positions are
supported by representative stakeholders and by expert evidence.

Part one of this paper will include a trial application of the Cummins (1986) framework to the site defined by the disputed closure of the Traeger Park School. The analysis will be organised into four main sections, determined by the ‘institutional characteristics’ of schools, outlined by Cummins (1986). These sections will include:

- Cultural and linguistic incorporation;
- Community involvement;
- Pedagogy;
- Assessment.

The database for the proposed analysis will draw from the Transcript of the Human Rights Commission hearing into the closure of the Traeger Park School and from academic and media discourses surrounding the school closure. The positioning of key stakeholders will also be contextualised within broader academic discussions relating to education provision for Indigenous students in Australia.

Part two of this paper will include a commentary on the potential usefulness of the Cummins (1986) framework as a qualitative evaluation tool within Australian Aboriginal education contexts. Consideration will be given to the applicability of the framework parameters and methodological issues arising from the trial application of the framework.

OVERVIEW OF THE CUMMINS THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Cummins (1986) suggests that some minority education interventions produce unsatisfactory outcomes because the entrenched attitudes and practices of education service providers and unyielding institutional structures reduce the effectiveness of their effectiveness. A central tenet of the Cummins (1986) framework is that students from dominated societal groups are ‘empowered’ or ‘disabled’ as a direct result of their interactions with educators and institutional frameworks. These interactions are mediated by the implicit or explicit role definitions that educators assume in relation to four ‘institutional characteristics’ of schools (Cummins 1986, p.21).
Table 1: Framework overview—Empowerment of minority students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional characteristics of schools</th>
<th>Educator role definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural and linguistic incorporation</td>
<td>Additive — Subtractive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community participation</td>
<td>Collaborative — Exclusionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
<td>Reciprocal Interaction -Transmission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Advocacy—Legitimisation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Cummins (1986, p.24)

Clarification of the positioning of stakeholders in relation to the ‘Institutional characteristics of schools’ (along the ‘disabling’ and ‘enabling’ continuum) is the first step in the analytical process. Stakeholder orientations or ‘educator role definitions’ represented in the table above are conceptualised along a continuum as follows:

Table 2: Stakeholder orientations in relation to minority students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enabling</th>
<th>Disabling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Additive orientation toward cultural and linguistic incorporation</td>
<td>Subtractive orientation toward cultural and linguistic incorporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative orientation toward community participation</td>
<td>Exclusionary orientation toward community participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocal Interaction approach toward pedagogy</td>
<td>Transmission approach toward pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy approach to assessment</td>
<td>Legitimisation approach to assessment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Cummins (1986, p.25)

The Cummins framework assigns a central role to three inclusive sets of interactions or power relations. Investigation of these power relations constitute the basis of the approach described by Cummins (1986, p.21).
Intergroup power relations

A framing of the intergroup power relations between minority group participants in education interventions and majority group stakeholders in the education process is an important precursor to analyses of specific minority education interventions. A description of this relationship sets the scene for the ensuing analysis of the relationships between schools and minority group communities and between educators and minority group communities.

School/minority community relations

Cummins (1986) suggests that minority group students are ‘disabled’ or ‘disempowered’ by schools in very much the same way as their parents are ‘disabled’ or ‘disempowered’ in their interactions with dominant institutions and majority group members in society. It is important to consider the nature of the interactions between minority group students and their parents with the institutional structures established to facilitate education. The extent to which these structures ‘enable’ minority group members to engage effectively with the education process provides a subjective predictor of improved academic outcomes by minority group students.

Educator/minority student relations

Subjective location of educator positioning along an ‘enabling’—‘disabling’ continuum provides opportunities for predicting the success of minority education interventions. Cummins argues that interactions between students from dominated societal groups and the education system are mediated by the implicit or explicit role definitions that educators assume in relation to the four dimensions of schooling. (These four dimensions of schooling are outlined in detail in a following section and are hereafter referred to as ‘institutional characteristics of schools’.)

Cummins (1986) argues that successful minority education interventions are underpinned by a commitment to a bicultural approach to education, which has
minority community participation as an important cornerstone. The Cummins framework provides an opportunity to apply specific benchmarks against which educational practices, attitudes and institutional structures can be measured. Central to the bicultural approach to minority education initiatives advocated by Cummins are the following characteristics:

- minority community involvement in education decision-making;
- minority community participation in the operation of schools;
- minority cultural and linguistic incorporation within pedagogic practices and institutional frameworks;
- the application of assessment regimes which have the capacity to adequately measure a broad range of student knowledge and advocate for the specific educational needs of minority group students.

Cummins (1986) claims that both personal and institutional role re-definitions are necessary if patterns of minority student failure are to be reversed. By considering the extent to which prevailing stakeholder positioning in relation to the ‘institutional characteristics of schools’ represent ‘enabling’ or ‘disabling’ orientations, a prediction about the likely success of a minority education intervention can be made. Suggested adjustments to stakeholder positioning and to prevailing institutional structures are recommended on the basis that these adjustments are likely to impact positively on student academic outcomes.

*Example (a)*

A minority education intervention which:

- incorporates the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students;
- demonstrates a collaborative approach to community participation;
- is based on a pedagogical model which values student interaction; and
- uses the assessment process to advocate for the needs of minority students

is likely to lead to the ‘empowerment’ of students. On this basis, positive academic
outcomes for participating minority students can be predicted.

Example (b)
A minority education intervention which:

- does not incorporate the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students;
- demonstrates an exclusionary approach to community participation;
- is based on a ‘transmission’ oriented pedagogical model; and
- uses assessment as a means of ‘legitimising’ the underachievement of minority students

is likely to have ‘disabling’ or ‘disempowering’ consequences for minority group students. On this basis, a negative prediction in terms of student academic outcomes can be made.

Analysis of stakeholder positioning in relation to the ‘institutional characteristics of schools’ is likely to reveal disjunctions. It is necessary to outline the nature of these disjunctions before progressing to a stage where suggestions for stakeholder re-positioning can be considered. Within the context of contested proposals for education provision, the tendency for stakeholders to adopt and defend entrenched positions mitigates against the potential to achieve positive changes to education structures and practices. In other words, when stakeholders are pitted against each other within the context of a ‘win’ or ‘lose’ situation, the potential for positive educational change is likely to be diminished. The Traeger Park School closure represents a contested issue and so the associated discourse is likely to be characterised by dualistic representations of stakeholder positioning. It is important to keep this in perspective when considering the arguments represented in the following analysis and to realise that the nature of the discourse in any given situation is largely determined by site-specific conditions. In this case, the purpose of the analysis is to highlight disjunctive stakeholder positioning and to arrive at a subjective assessment of the likely success of the proposed educational interventions (the maintenance of the Traeger Park School model or the transfer of Aboriginal students to mainstream primary school programmes).
Recommended changes to personal role definitions are referred to by Cummins as 'necessary directions for change'. Within the following case study, this section of the analysis is referred to as 'suggested changes in stakeholder positioning'. This aspect of the framework raises complex problems associated with how to negotiate these proposed changes and how to objectify issues that are largely determined by subjective stakeholder positioning. A potential benefit in identifying the existing disjunctions in stakeholder positioning and pointing to 'necessary directions for change', is the recognition of problematic issues. Once these issues have been entered into the public domain by virtue of their identification through the framework application, the capacity of mainstream interests to override or marginalise the concerns raised by minority group representatives is reduced.

Institutional barriers that are predicted to hinder the achievement of 'necessary directions for change' are referred to by Cummins as 'system constraints'. The existence of 'system constraints' is linked by Cummins to a broader project of Institutional Racism in some minority education contexts. The Cummins (1986) conceptualisation of 'institutional racism' has some things in common with the 'structuralist Marxist' approach to the identification of 'institutional racism' described by Mason (1982). Both these approaches promote the identification of 'institutional barriers' or 'constraints' that result in differential outcomes for some groups within a society. The Cummins framework provides a space for including subjective measurement of the negative effects these constraints have on the educational outcomes of minority group students. The identification of 'system constraints' represents the first step toward the achievement of institutional role re-definitions, which Cummins argues are necessary if minority student academic outcomes are to improve. What should be recognised from the outset, however, is the unyielding nature of some institutional structures and the extent to which they are reinforced by a range of powerful mainstream interests.
INTERGROUP POWER RELATIONS BETWEEN INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

The contemporary relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Australia are framed by a history of European colonisation and a pattern of successive attempts by governments to assimilate Indigenous peoples into mainstream Australian society. The educational outcomes being achieved by Indigenous peoples in Australia are significantly below that of their mainstream counterparts. Walton (1995), cites the following statistics in support of this:

The *National Policy on Languages* (1987, p.115) states that Aboriginal and Islander children were 'without question the most seriously disadvantaged group in Australian education on virtually every available indicator'.

—On a National scale it has been estimated that 'at least one half of the Aboriginal population is illiterate or functionally illiterate' (DEET 1988, p.33).

—the Year 12 retention rates for Aboriginal students are (17%) compared to non-Aboriginal students (49%) (DEET 1988, p.7).

The health statistics for Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples demonstrate similar inequities, and indicate low levels of health according to standard measurements on a number of scales. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (cited in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Clearinghouse 1999), the expectation of life at birth is 56.9 years for Indigenous males and 65.2 for Indigenous females. This compares to 75.9 years for non-Indigenous males and 81.2 years for non-Indigenous females. The ABS statistics also report the death rates for Indigenous peoples as being more than three times that of non-Indigenous peoples. The most striking aspect of Indigenous mortality statistics is the higher death rate experienced by young and middle-aged adults. In 1994–96 Indigenous death rates were 5–8 times that of non-Indigenous people in age groups between 25 and 54 years.

The *Status Report on Indigenous Education in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand* (1995) emphasises the importance of recognising the historical role education
has played in the lives of Indigenous peoples. The report suggests that statements about the status of Indigenous education must emphasise the ideologies that underpin education decision-making and the role education has played as an agent of colonisation. The report points to the close connection between education and other ‘repressive institutional controls’ in the lives of Indigenous peoples and suggests that therefore it should be expected that Indigenous peoples will distrust educators. The authors suggest that it is important to take into account the historical reasons for this situation and to recognise that the perception of education institutions as ‘agents of European colonisation’ is common.

Luke et al. comment on the irony of current attempts to charge schools with the responsibility for redressing or reversing broader societal trends that include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural ‘erosion’. They claim that there is no consideration given to the well documented historical and contemporary structures and functions of these same education systems for colonization and enculturation (Luke et al. 1993, p.146).

Current theorising in the field of Australian Indigenous education challenges approaches which focus on instrumental aspects of education service delivery without also taking into account the contemporary social and political relationships between Indigenous peoples and dominant group members. Nicholls, Crowley and Watt (1996) are critical of educational theories which look to specific pedagogical practices as a means of improving the unacceptably low academic outcomes for Indigenous peoples. Instead, they call for closer scrutiny of the complex interrelationships between history, politics and power in relation to Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Australia. Nakata (1995) also warns against the tendency of current Indigenous education policies and theories to focus on ‘culture’ as a key element in determining future directions. He claims that ‘the acceptance of a universal term such as culture is problematic because it stands to omit the array of other factors that contribute to “the most educationally disadvantaged group in Australia”’ (Nakata 1995, p.50).

The Australian Government promoted an official policy of assimilating Indigenous peoples into mainstream Australian society up until the 1970s. Harker and McConnachie (1985) note that the official Federal Government policy of assimilation
resulted in an education system in which the main task of schools in relation to Indigenous peoples was the 'minimisation of differences' between Indigenous children and their non-Indigenous peers. The official assimilation policy was gradually replaced by policies that promoted the development of Indigenous self-determination in a range of areas. This change in policy direction provided official support for initiatives which promoted a higher degree of Indigenous involvement in service delivery and policy development in areas such as health, education, social welfare and economic development. It is argued, however, that policies of 'self determination' and 'Indigenous control' have failed to be translated into any real changes in power sharing, and that patterns of Indigenous disadvantage in the health, education and economic spheres in Australia persist.

The issue of 'power' is considered by Cummins (1986) as central to any discussion about the relative merits of education interventions designed to meet the needs of minority groups. He focuses on the extent of power sharing between minority and majority groups in society, and suggests that unless there is a shift in real power from dominant to minority group members in relation to all aspects of education provision, then improvements in academic outcomes cannot be predicted. Bucknall (1995, cited in Desert Schools Report 1996, p.15) concurs with Cummins on this point. He suggests that vital issues centred on relationships of power are contained within 'teaching and learning' in Indigenous education contexts. He argues that the Western world's 'hegemonic hold over Indigenous education' should be recognised, and he advocates a process of negotiation that 'builds on the equal status and legitimacy of knowledge by both sides' as a positive future direction for Indigenous education in Australia.
PART ONE: TRAEGER PARK SCHOOL CLOSURE

Background

Traeger Park School was a Northern Territory Department of Education school located in Alice Springs, a small central Australian town. The school had an unusual profile because it was classified as an urban school and yet the population was predominantly Aboriginal. A more usual situation in the Northern Territory is for Aboriginal students to comprise a relatively small percentage of urban school populations. Immediately prior to the school closure in 1991, the Traeger Park School population consisted of 144 Aboriginal students and two non-Aboriginal students.

In 1990, on the recommendation of an Estimates Review Committee Task Force report on Territory-wide rationalisation of education services, the Traeger Park School was designated for closure. The Traeger Park School was ultimately closed, the buildings were transferred freehold to the Catholic Education Office, the staff were re-deployed and the Aboriginal students were dispersed to mainstream government primary schools in the town of Alice Springs. Before Traeger Park School was officially closed, however, there was sustained public resistance by the teaching staff, the parents of the Aboriginal students and educators with a professional interest in the special programmes operating at the school. This resistance culminated in a Human Rights Commission hearing that heard evidence from a range of stakeholders. The plaintiffs for the hearing were The Aboriginal Students Support and Parent Awareness Committee (Traeger Park) and the defendant was The Northern Territory Minister for Education (hereafter referred to as ASSPA v. NT Minister for Education 1991). The basis of the complaint was that the Northern Territory Department of Education (NTDDE) had discriminated against the Aboriginal pupils at Traeger Park School on the basis of race, and that their action in closing the school violated their right to appropriate education and training.

In his evidence to the Human Rights Commission hearing (ASSPA v. NT Minister
for Education 1991, p.249) Mr Geoff Spring, secretary to the NTDE, explained that the recommendation to close the Traeger Park School was made by members of a task force especially set up to advise the Northern Territory Government Estimates Review Committee. The task of the committee was to recommend reductions in expenditure within the Department of Education. Mr Spring claimed that the Education Department had no direct input into the Estimates Review Task Force recommendation to close Traeger Park School. On further questioning by the commissioner, Mr Spring did, however, concede that the NTDE recommended, in its own submission to the Estimates Review Committee, that the Traeger Park School should be closed (ASSPA v. NT Minister for Education 1991, p.249). Mr Spring stated that the Education Department recommendation was made on the basis of declining student enrolments.

At the time of the school closure, the formal avenue for Aboriginal community representation on issues relating to education in the Northern Territory was through the ‘Feppi’ structure (Northern Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Group). Walton (1991) reports that ‘Feppi’ was actually in limbo at this critical time. The term of the council expired in December 1990 and the Northern Territory Minister for Education announced in March 1991 a major restructuring of ‘Feppi’. Walton was critical of this move and argued that ‘while these cuts are going on, the voice of “Feppi” has been silent. In a community where one quarter of the school population is Aboriginal this is a national disgrace’ (Walton 1991, p.30).

The inadequate level of consultation between NTDE representatives and Aboriginal community members, prior to the Traeger Park School closure, was cited by Traeger Park stakeholders as evidence of a lack of government commitment to the principles of Aboriginal community participation in education decision-making. NTDE guidelines, which outline a process of community consultation before the closure of any school in the Northern Territory, were not adhered to in this case. After the Traeger Park School closure was announced, it was argued that the NTDE was effectively denying Aboriginal parents the right to choose an appropriate model of education for their children. Walton (1995) points to the decision to close Traeger Park School as an example of ‘the gulf between federal rhetoric and state/territory
educational practice on the issue of community participation in decision—making.

Cultural and linguistic incorporation (subtractive or additive)

Introduction

Cummins suggests that in the education of dominated minorities, the extent to which the languages and cultures of students are incorporated into the school programme constitutes a significant predictor of academic success. ‘Educators who see their role as adding a second language and cultural affiliation to their students’ repertoire are likely to empower students more than those who see their role as replacing or subtracting students’ primary language and culture’ (Cummins 1986, p.25).

Cummins (1986, p.25) argues that the incorporation within mainstream education systems of linguistic and cultural features specific to dominated minorities has political implications. For example, bilingual education programmes represent a significant attempt on the part of educators to take account of the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of minority students. These programmes are often vehemently opposed by majority members within societies, and Cummins suggests that a major reason for this opposition relates to the conferral of status and power that comes with the incorporation of minority group languages and cultures within school programmes. This conferral of status contravenes the established pattern of dominant/dominated group relations.

The following section outlines the extent to which the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of Aboriginal students were incorporated within the Traeger Park School programme and within mainstream primary school programmes.

Cultural and linguistic incorporation within mainstream primary schools in Alice Springs

In evidence provided to the Human Rights Commission hearing (ASSPA v. NT Minister for Education 1991), Mr Ken Davies (a mainstream primary school principal
in Alice Springs and representative for the NTDE) described broad-based interventions designed to deal with student 'diversity' in mainstream primary schools. He gave an account of a recent Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) committee programme which included a bush trip where Aboriginal parents accompanied a group of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. The Aboriginal parents demonstrated skills in native food collection, and, according to Mr Davies, the excursion had a positive effect on the self-esteem of participating Aboriginal students. At the Braitling Primary School there was also a programme especially designed for students with identified self-esteem problems. The aim of the programme was to assist both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students to feel a part of the school community through participation in special projects such as painting murals and organising school assemblies. Mr Davies pointed out that many schools in Alice Springs are staffed by ex- 'bush teachers' who have a strong commitment to those Aboriginal communities they have worked in. He argued that those teachers had a strong affinity and knowledge of the sorts of customs and mores that Aboriginal peoples deal with:

... if you're saying to me: could—-are these students going to be accepted into classrooms and are the teachers going to have a damned good professional go at helping those students to (a) learn, and also helping them to retain and reinforce their Aboriginality, yes; the answer is yes.

(ASSPA v. NT Minister for Education 1991, p.323)

Cultural and linguistic incorporation within Traeger Park School

Traeger Park School stakeholders put forward an argument to the Human Rights Commission (ASSPA v. NT Minister for Education 1991) that the Traeger Park School programme had a proven commitment to incorporating the distinct cultural and linguistic backgrounds of Aboriginal students and their families. To support this contention, Mrs Peggy Webb, the Traeger Park School principal, outlined the development of a model of language instruction at the school which integrated typical patterns of Aboriginal social interaction and which took into account the varied linguistic backgrounds of students. In conjunction with Traeger Park School teachers,
Brian Gray, a specialist language teacher, developed a language programme that became known as Concentrated Language Encounters (CLE) in the early 1980s. According to Gray (1985), this approach to language teaching recognised that Aboriginal children responded positively to language teaching:

- which was highly contextualised;
- which involved negotiation of texts based on shared experiences;
- which developed language and classroom interaction skills through a gradual scaffolding process;
- which was based on a thematic approach; and
- which adhered to the principles of ‘visible pedagogy’.

According to Mrs Webb, some Traeger Park School students came to school with the ability to speak a traditional Aboriginal language, some spoke a form of Aboriginal English and some students spoke standard English. Within the CLE approach to language teaching at Traeger Park School, considerable emphasis was placed on incorporating the home experiences of students within the formal language programme.

Mrs Webb also referred to the proposed Traeger Park ‘school improvement plan’ as evidence of the school’s commitment to responding to the differing needs of the Aboriginal school community. This plan included the development of a parent drop-in centre that would include a large room with outdoor access. An aim of the proposed parent drop-in centre was to encourage Aboriginal parents to bring their younger children to the school so that they could be gradually integrated into the school environment. Mrs Webb commented that she believed that this ‘would have encouraged better attendance among the older brothers and sisters and cousins, and it would have brought about greater parent participation within the school’ (ASSPA v. NT Minister for Education 1991, p.18).

Mrs Webb also outlined the flexible approach the Traeger Park School administration adopted in relation to school entry age. Children usually attend preschool before entering a formal transition programme. Mrs Webb explained that at
Traeger Park School they accepted five-year-old children at any time during the transition year. She suggested that to insist that children attend a pre-school programme at designated government pre-school centres prior to school entry would have resulted in those children not participating in any formal education programmes. This was not standard practice in other primary schools in the town, but Mrs Webb suggested that to encourage children to enter the transition programmes whenever they ‘walked through the door’ was an important concession.

Mrs Webb cited the Traeger Park School enrolment statistics as evidence to support her claim that the school was accustomed to accommodating Aboriginal children whose families adopted a transient lifestyle. Mrs Webb pointed out that student enrolment at the time of the Human Rights Commission hearing was 141 students, although the total number of enrolments during 1991 had totalled 250: ‘I was trying to indicate that we provided education for the transient Aboriginal children who, if we weren’t there, would probably not attend any other school’ (ASSPA v. NT Minister for Education 1991).

The reality for some Aboriginal children whose family life is transient is that they enter a cycle of failure within mainstream schools from a very young age. Teachers find it difficult to adjust their programmes of work to cater to the needs of students who have lengthy periods of absence. The ten-week thematic programme that operated at Traeger Park School was designed with this problem in mind. Because the theme was taught over a comparatively long time period, students who had been absent for a period of time were able to re-join the programme with at least some knowledge of the concepts under discussion. While educators are always frustrated by absenteeism in terms of achieving projected outcomes, the fluidity of the thematic programme offered at Traeger Park and the realistic expectation of the teachers that some of students would have periods of absence assisted in the difficult process of re-integration by students. This approach promoted a degree of consistency in work patterns otherwise unavailable in classroom organisational patterns that include short-term blocks of work.

Mr Merv Franey, a parent spokesperson for Traeger Park School, suggested that teacher sensitivity to social and cultural issues was a positive aspect of the Traeger
Park School programme: ‘Teachers understand the social and environmental conditions the kids are brought up in. Many of the kids have health and nutrition problems and the school has addressed these problems by setting up a nutrition programme and monitoring the kids’ health to ensure they will be able to concentrate’ (Sunday Territorian 1991).

Mrs McLoughlin, a Traeger Park School teacher, gave evidence to the Human Rights Commission that illustrates Mr Franey’s point. When discussing the home situations of some Traeger Park students, Mrs McLoughlin said:

If they are living in an extended family with a number of people in the house they might be sharing a bed with a couple of other kids. It’s very hard for them at times to get a good night’s sleep . . . They may get to school late and they are accepted as soon as they walk in the door and there’s no question of where have you been . . . They slot straight into whatever task we’re doing and are accepted then and there, whatever time it may be that they arrive, because we believe that it is better to be there than not there at all. (ASSPA v. NT Minister for Education 1991)

Overview—Cultural and linguistic incorporation (subtractive or additive)

A major difference between the mainstream school and Traeger Park School approaches to the issue of cultural and linguistic incorporation is that incorporation of culture and language within mainstream schools is considered in terms of ‘recognition’ but not intrinsic ‘incorporation’. Mr Davies omitted any mention of pedagogic interventions designed to incorporate the particular cultural or linguistic orientations of the Aboriginal students. He did not describe significant administrative adjustments that would encourage Aboriginal parents to interact more effectively with the school administration. What these omissions suggest is that administrative structures and pedagogic practices which take into account the specific cultural and linguistic orientations of many Aboriginal students and their families are not considered central to the educational success of Aboriginal students within mainstream schools. Cultural awareness programmes and special self-esteem programmes were identified by Mr Davies as key ways of addressing cultural
difference issues in mainstream primary schools. The cultural awareness programme at Braitling Primary School was also identified as an opportunity to build bridges between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures. These interventions could best be described as ‘add-ons to unchanged mainstream practices in education’ (Nakata 1995, p.48). In other words, structural organisation and pedagogic practices in mainstream schools remain the same for all students, and ‘cultural awareness’ and ‘self esteem’ development initiatives, although well intentioned, do not significantly alter mainstream educational practices. It is interesting to note that Traeger Park School representatives did not raise poor student self-esteem as an issue. The question then arises: ‘Are the reported low self-esteem levels of Aboriginal students within mainstream primary schools related to their minority status within those schools, or to the nature of the educational programmes on offer?’

The initiatives referred to by Mr Davies do not represent substantial attempts to incorporate the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of Aboriginal students in the design of school-based teaching programmes, curriculum content or administrative structures. Mainstream language and cultural norms dominate, and attempts to ameliorate the effects of discontinuities between the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the Aboriginal students and the mainstream norms appear insufficient. The linguistic and cultural knowledge of Aboriginal students is not viewed as a resource on which to build English language and mainstream cultural knowledge. On this basis, the approach to linguistic and cultural incorporation within mainstream primary school programmes in Alice Springs is assessed as ‘subtractive’.

The Traeger Park School programme demonstrated a responsiveness to the linguistic, social and cultural backgrounds of the predominantly Aboriginal student population at both the administrative and pedagogic levels. School-based interventions included:

- programme adaptations to cater for regular patterns of student absence;
- a flexible approach to school entry age;
- structural changes to promote parent participation in the school;
- facilitation of linkages between the school and the wider Aboriginal community;
the adoption of pedagogical approaches which build onto the existing cultural and linguistic knowledge of Aboriginal students.

These administrative and pedagogic interventions demonstrate an ‘inclusive’ orientation toward the Aboriginal students and their parents, and contribute toward an assessment of the Traeger Park School programme as ‘additive’ in terms of incorporating the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students. The associated potential of these interventions to ‘empower’ students and their parents in their dealings with the school is acknowledged.

Disjunctions

Traeger Park School stakeholders argue that there are distinct educational advantages in approaches to education where Aboriginal students are grouped in significant numbers. Maintenance of group cohesion, self-esteem and feelings of inclusiveness are cited as some of the advantages. Mainstream education stakeholders propose that the mainstream model of education provides opportunities for Aboriginal students to learn to compete with majority group students and they do not privilege the importance of ‘group cohesion’ or ‘inclusivity’ as a primary way of maintaining the self-esteem of Aboriginal students.

NTDE stakeholders promote the teaching and learning of Aboriginal cultural knowledge as ‘subjects of instruction’ within the school curriculum. They do not privilege the importance of including the specific cultural and linguistic orientations of Aboriginal students as a basis for effective teaching and learning. Traeger Park stakeholders argue for administrative and pedagogical adaptations to incorporate the cultural and linguistic orientations of Aboriginal students and their parents within school programmes.

Suggested changes in stakeholder positioning

The NTDE supports the position that to ‘mainstream’ Aboriginal students into schools with majority group members will result in successful integration of
Aboriginal students into mainstream society. This standpoint assumes a ‘level playing field’ in terms of social positioning and cultural and linguistic experiences. The NTDE does not support the position that different cultural and linguistic backgrounds should be mediated by alternative approaches to education as a means of achieving the goal of ‘equality’ of educational outcomes. A change in stakeholder positioning by government education stakeholders to include support for alternative models of education which more adequately reflect an ‘additive’ orientation toward the specific cultural and linguistic backgrounds of Aboriginal students is recommended.

➢ The demonstrated approach to cultural and linguistic incorporation by mainstream school representatives is one of ‘recognition of difference’ and ‘celebration of difference’ through cultural awareness programmes and self-esteem programmes. These attempts at cultural incorporation do not reflect a serious attempt to embed the cultural and linguistic orientations of Aboriginal students and their parents within school-based pedagogic practices or administrative systems. A change in stakeholder positioning which reflects increased commitment to incorporation of the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of Aboriginal students within mainstream pedagogical practices and institutional structures is recommended.

System constraints

➢ While supporting the ‘mainstreaming’ of Aboriginal students into urban primary schools, the NTDE does not propose specific structural, pedagogic or administrative interventions to ensure recognition of their different cultural and linguistic knowledge backgrounds.

➢ Insufficient NTDE support for the development of alternative Aboriginal education initiatives denies Aboriginal peoples the right to choose a model of education which adequately reflects community aspirations and which takes adequate account of Aboriginal ways of approaching the education project.

Community participation (exclusion or collaboration)
Introduction

According to Cummins (1986, p.27) the teacher’s role in facilitating the relationship between parents and schools can be characterised along a collaborative-exclusionary dimension. Teachers who adopt a collaborative approach are willing to work closely with mother-tongue teachers or assistants in order to communicate effectively with parents. Teachers with an exclusionary orientation tend to regard teaching as their job and are likely to view collaboration with parents as irrelevant. Cummins suggests that dramatic changes in children’s academic progress can be realised when educators take the initiative to change exclusionary patterns of interaction between parents and schools: ‘When educators involve minority parents as partners in their children’s education, parents appear to develop a sense of efficacy that communicates itself to children, with positive academic consequences’ (Cummins 1986, p.26).

Cummins argues for the involvement of minority group community members in school programmes on the following grounds:

Students from dominated communities will be empowered in the school context to the extent that the communities themselves are empowered through their interactions with the school. When educators involve minority parents as partners in their children’s education, parents appear to develop a sense of efficacy that communicates itself to children, with positive academic consequences. (Cummins 1986, p.26)

The following section is concerned with identifying ways Aboriginal community members were encouraged to participate in the education of their children at Traeger Park School and in mainstream primary schools in Alice Springs. The extent to which the approach adopted within these two school models represents a ‘collaborative’ or ‘exclusionary’ or orientation will be considered.

Aboriginal community involvement in decision-making at Traeger Park School

The Traeger Park School did not operate a formal school council which in other
schools is made up of staff members and community members and is a forum for parent input into school-based decision-making. In 1990 the school administrators advised the NTDE that the formation of a school council was not viable at Trager Park School (ASSPA v. NT Minister for Education 1991, p.53). Aboriginal parent participation in the operation of Trager Park School was, however, achieved through parent participation in the ASSPA Committee. ASSPA committees are Commonwealth funded and comprised of Aboriginal parents and teacher representatives. The role of ASSPA committees is to make decisions on how special Commonwealth funds are allocated, and in some schools the committee has a general advisory role on issues affecting Aboriginal students. The ASSPA committee at Trager Park School operated as an informal parent representative group. In her evidence to the Human Rights commission (ASSPA v. NT Minister for Education 1991) Mrs Webb explained that the ASSPA group which operated at the school consisted of approximately four regular members and other parents attended meetings when they were available. The informality of this arrangement is distinct from how mainstream school ASSPA committees operate, and yet Mrs Webb did not suggest that the informality of the arrangement was problematic. She explained that after social functions at the school, parents often participated in ASSPA meetings where issues related to disbursement of funds and organisation of future programmes were discussed.

Aboriginal community involvement in decision-making in mainstream primary schools

The ASSPA structure provides the main point of contact between Aboriginal parents, educators and administrators in mainstream NTDE schools. The degree of collaboration, trust and support between ASSPA committees and educators is dependent upon the prevailing attitudes of educators and administrators in mainstream schools and also upon their ability to successfully involve Aboriginal parents. This factor has been cited as a deficiency of the ASSPA model because the reality for some ASSPA committees is that they operate on the margins of mainstream school parent
councils. In these situations, Aboriginal parents are not actively supported to achieve a degree of participation that is likely to have positive effects on the educational outcomes of their children. Cummins (1986) claims that ‘lip service’ is often paid to community involvement through parent advisory committees. He cites research conducted by Curtis (1984) who suggests that these committees are frequently manipulated through misinformation and intimidation. The result is that minority group parents maintain their powerless status within the school structure and their internalised inferiority is reinforced. When teachers and administrators in mainstream schools adopt a collaborative approach, ASSPA committees are considered central to the construction of appropriate programme development for Aboriginal students. It is this potential for variation between schools which makes it impossible to arrive at a comparative analysis between mainstream and non-mainstream schools. It is the potential for the marginalisation of Aboriginal interests within the current application of the ASSPA model in some mainstream schools which should be of concern.

A criticism of the Northern Territory Government’s handling of the recommendation to close the Traeger Park School was that Aboriginal peoples were not adequately consulted. The Council of Government School Organisations (COGSO) and the Teachers Federation of the Northern Territory issued a press release (14/6/91) which outlined their reasons for opposing the Traeger Park School closure by the Northern Territory Government. They claimed that there had been no demonstrated educational reason for closing the school and that NTDHE guidelines relating to school closures, which allow for a long period of consultation before any decision is made, were not followed. According to evidence provided to the Human Rights Commission hearing by Mrs Webb, the only form of consultation before the recommendation to close the school was made occurred at a meeting between the acting principal of Traeger Park and the Public Accounts Estimates Review Task Force. At this stage it was not made clear that the school was being considered for closure.

Community involvement in the delivery of Traeger Park School programmes
Within the Traeger Park School programme, Aboriginal community involvement was facilitated through informal interventions which actively encouraged Aboriginal peoples from the broader community to be involved in the social welfare of students. Two specific interventions which relied on Aboriginal community participation and which addressed the social and physical welfare of students were outlined by Mrs. Peggy Web in her evidence to the Human Rights Commission:

➢ The Traeger Park School operated breakfast and lunch programmes that provided meals on a 'needs basis' to students. In her evidence to the Human Rights Commission, Mrs. Webb explained that the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (CAAC) provided lunches for children who lived in town camps and that the ASSPA committee funded meals for other children on a needs basis. A parent from the school was employed by the ASSPA committee to run the school breakfast programme and Aboriginal CAAC staff came to the school daily to organise lunches for children from town camps.

➢ The Traeger Park School students regularly accessed the health services provided by the CAAC during school hours. Access to the service by students was facilitated by Traeger Park School staff who initially assessed the children and made the necessary arrangements for them to attend a Congress health clinic. In their dealings with the CAAC it was common for students to interact with adult relatives. This provided opportunities for the development of links between families and the school and increased opportunities for incidental communication between the school and the wider Aboriginal community.

In her evidence to the Human Rights Commission hearing, Mrs. Liddle, an Aboriginal Home Liaison officer employed by the NTDE, outlined some of the difficulties her own children had encountered as students in mainstream Alice Springs primary schools. She claimed that it was her professional knowledge of the education system which enabled her to negotiate with teachers and schools in order to maximise the educational potential of her own children, who subsequently gained a university education. In her evidence to the Human Rights Commission, Mrs. Liddle commented on what she considered a major benefit of a school such as Traeger Park, where there
was support for parents in their dealings with the school and with individual teachers:

That with a school like Traeger Park, that’s where I feel it’s really invaluable to have something like that where they can feel that it’s their school, they can trust those teachers and trust the system and how it works. So we nurture them through there as a group so that when they get to the high schools they accept the education system, they feel good about being in the system, they want to be there and that’s now they are just starting to achieve.

(*ASSPA v. NT Minister for Education* 1991, p.165)

Mrs Liddle suggested that she was able to help Aboriginal parents learn how the mainstream education system worked. She claimed that a school like Traeger Park assisted parents and students because there was a feeling of ‘trust’ and ‘community’ between teachers and the Aboriginal community.

Mr Haycs, a former student and currently a parent of a student at Traeger Park School, commented on the atmosphere of ‘inclusiveness’ at Traeger Park School. In his evidence to the Human Rights Commission hearing, he made the following observation:

All this year I’ve been attending family gatherings at the school and meetings, and the school itself is treated as a family because, you know, the people who are there are related in some way, so it holds strong family ties and even just—just strong ties in calling one another family.

(*ASSPA v. NT Minister for Education* 1991, p.87)

Mrs Pearly Armstrong, a parent witness to the Human Rights Commission hearing described an aspect of the Traeger Park School that was important to her:

It is more family like. You can go in whenever you can go in. You’re not interrupting the class, you just sort of go in and the teacher, sort of—give you something if you want to do something with the children, so it is not—you have to have a time frame to go in there.

(*ASSPA v. NT Minister for Education* 1991)
Community involvement in the delivery of mainstream school programmes

Aboriginal liaison officers are employed by the NTDE to assist Aboriginal students to access social welfare agencies and to assist teachers in liaison with Aboriginal parents. Mrs Liddle, an NTDE employed home liaison officer, gave evidence to the Human Rights Commission hearing about problems she had encountered in her role within mainstream schools. Mrs Liddle referred to the concept of ‘shame’ felt by Aboriginal children and described how they were sometimes embarrassed about attending school if they were inappropriately dressed or if they had head lice or suffered other health problems. Mrs Liddle described how these children were often reported to her by mainstream school administrators because of their frequent absenteeism or because they came to school late on a regular basis. In her opinion mainstream schools found it difficult to cope with these behaviours and were unsure of how to best deal with the underlying physical and social causes. Mrs Liddle noted that the ‘shame’ at being singled out for special attention made it difficult for some Aboriginal children to re-integrate into the school system after intervention by community-based individuals and organisations. Mrs Liddle made the point that in a setting where Aboriginal children constituted a majority, social welfare interventions involving hygiene, health, food and clothing issues are less likely to be associated with feelings of ‘shame’ because those interventions are normalised as part of the school routine.

Mr Geoff Spring commended the Traeger Park School staff for the programmes they had developed to assist communication with families, and to attend to the physical welfare of the students. He did, however, point out that similar assistance programmes were offered in mainstream primary schools in the Northern Territory. Mr Spring acknowledged the testimony of Aboriginal parents who claimed that there was a strong feeling of ‘family’ at Traeger Park School but suggested that an over-emphasis on social and welfare issues had resulted in an under-emphasis on ‘teaching and learning’:

The purpose of school is teaching and learning. Welfare considerations are important... but at the end of the day schools—the prime purpose is the curriculum; schools are about teaching and learning; they are about
achievement and unequivocally Aboriginal parents say that.

(ASSPA v. NT Minister for Education 1991, p.265)

By questioning the educational advantages associated with the social and welfare programmes at Traeger Park School, Mr Spring attempted to downplay their relevance to improved education outcomes. While arguing that mainstream schools also offered similarly effective social and welfare programmes, he did not tender evidence from Aboriginal community members that attested to the effectiveness of these programmes. Mr Spring based his argument for increased emphasis on ‘teaching and learning’ in schools on the assertion that these were fundamental aspects of education which Aboriginal parents demanded.

Overview—Community Participation (exclusion or collaboration)

Consideration of community participation in education brings into focus issues related to ‘the purpose of schooling’. Important differences between the positions adopted by representative stakeholders became apparent during the Human Rights Commission hearing into the closure of the Traeger Park School. Mr Spring claims that overemphasis on the social welfare of students at Traeger Park School resulted in a lack of attention to ‘teaching and learning’. Mrs Webb and Mrs Liddle, on the other hand, argued that the social welfare of students is an important pre-requisite for learning. They also suggested that regular visits from employees of local Aboriginal organisations, in their capacities as service providers, provided an important point of informal contact between the Traeger Park School and the local Aboriginal community. It was largely through this community-based approach to the provision of social welfare for students at the Traeger Park School that a collaborative relationship between the school and the community had developed.

Traeger Park School representatives described established patterns of formal and informal communication between the school and the wider Aboriginal community. The absence of a formal parent council at Traeger Park School meant that the ASSPA committee represented the only formal avenue of contact between Aboriginal parents and school staff members. As such, the ASSPA committee role was very important.
The flexibility associated with ASSPA group membership and the timing of ASSPA group meetings demonstrated a willingness to include as many parents as possible in decisions affecting the operation of the school. While Aboriginal witnesses corroborated the view that informal patterns of communication were in place at the school, there was no evidence to suggest that the Traeger Park School ASSPA committee was operating effectively. However, when the flexible nature of the ASSPA structure is considered along with the Traeger Park School’s ‘open-door’ policy and the regular interaction between students and Aboriginal community organisation representatives, a positive assessment about the extent of collaboration between the school and the wider community can be made.

Within mainstream schools, the ASSPA framework is a forum for Aboriginal parent representation. More information on the operational realities for ASSPA groups within mainstream schools, however, is required in order to assess their impact on the actual level of Aboriginal community participation in school-based decision-making. For example, there was a lack of information provided to the Human Rights Commission hearing about how the school-based ASSPA groups were integrated with mainstream parent school councils and about the extent to which ASSPA groups were consulted on issues relating to the education of Aboriginal students. Anecdotal evidence suggests, however, that many ASSPA groups operate on the margins of mainstream parent representative groups within mainstream schools in Alice Springs. On the basis of the available evidence (that is, the existence of ASSPA committees in mainstream primary schools), it is possible to suggest that mainstream schools demonstrate a capacity for adopting a ‘collaborative’ orientation toward Aboriginal community participation in education programmes. It is, however, necessary to qualify this assessment by pointing out that active involvement of ASSPA representatives in education decision-making relies on the cooperation of individual school communities and education administrators.

**Disjunctions**

- Supporters of the Traeger Park School model call for primary consideration of social welfare initiatives in order that the academic potential of Aboriginal
students can be maximised. The involvement of the local Aboriginal community, and the creation of a supportive social milieu within education institutions, is viewed as essential to improving the academic outcomes of Aboriginal students. NTDE stakeholders claim that over-emphasis on social welfare initiatives at Traeger Park School has resulted in inadequate attention to academic outcomes.

Traeger Park School stakeholders consider Aboriginal parent involvement in the operation of school programmes essential. The NTDE also supports this view, and refer to the existence of ASSPA groups and the ‘Feppi’ Aboriginal Consultative Group to demonstrate its commitment to Aboriginal community involvement in education. Some Aboriginal parents and educators argue that the involvement of Aboriginal parents in decision making is not mandated for within mainstream schools. They also claim that NTDE representatives have control over the nature of Aboriginal community consultation at local levels, resulting in the under-representation of Aboriginal community perspectives in some circumstances.

The existence of a supportive social milieu is considered by Traeger Park stakeholders to be an important pre-requisite for active engagement by Aboriginal parents in the education process. Traeger Park stakeholders argue that the effective involvement of Aboriginal parents in school programmes and decision-making processes is more likely to occur in an environment in which people feel a sense of ‘community’ and ‘family’. These are not attitudes which can be mandated for, especially within mainstream school programmes where the Aboriginal parent community is in the minority and where the prevailing attitudes of teachers and senior staff dictate the nature of interactions between Aboriginal community members and schools.

**Suggested changes in stakeholder positioning**

Aboriginal community participation in decisions directly affecting Aboriginal students (for example, school closures) should be mandatory. In this way, a pattern of ‘inclusiveness’ in relation to Aboriginal community input into education decision-making processes could be established and maintained.
Increased levels of Aboriginal community participation in mainstream school welfare and student support programmes should be encouraged as a primary way of ensuring the development of school cultures which promote feelings of ‘belonging’ and ‘community’ for Aboriginal students and their families. In this way an ‘inclusive’ approach toward Aboriginal community involvement in the education process would be promoted.

Aboriginal education service providers should be more responsive to calls for broad-based community consultation about the ‘purpose of schooling’. Through this process, the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal parents could be included in the framing of institutional structures, pedagogic approaches and curriculum content.

**System constraints**

- Systems to facilitate immediate and discrete access to social welfare services by Aboriginal students within NTDE mainstream schools are not always available or appropriately implemented.

- It is currently possible for government officials to disregard advice provided by existing Aboriginal advisory groups on issues relating to the provision of education for Aboriginal students. A lack of commitment by the NTDE for a structure of Aboriginal representation which facilitates broad-based consultation with Aboriginal community members on issues affecting Aboriginal students effectively ‘disempowers’ Aboriginal communities in their interactions with the mainstream education system.

- Lack of financial commitment by the NTDE to maintain a range of educational options for Aboriginal students effectively denies Aboriginal peoples the opportunity to participate in school communities that encourage feelings of ‘inclusiveness’ and a sense of ‘family’.
Centralisation of bureaucratic structures and promotion of a ‘corporate’ approach to management within the NTDE reduces opportunities for local community input into the education decision-making processes.

Pedagogy (transmission or interactive)

Introduction

Two major pedagogical orientations are distinguished by Cummins (1986, p.28). The transmission model relies on teachers imparting knowledge and skills to students who do not yet have those skills. In these situations, teachers initiate and control the interaction, constantly orienting it toward instructional objectives. In contrast, the reciprocal-interaction model emphasises the development of higher level cognitive skills rather than factual recall by students. Cummins supports reciprocal-interaction approaches to teaching in minority education contexts because these approaches encourage minority group students to assume greater control over setting their own goals in collaborative activity with each other.

A range of pedagogical innovations that are aligned with the reciprocal-interaction model have been proposed and developed within Australian Aboriginal education contexts. Two examples of these approaches include the explicit pedagogies and critical pedagogies. Walton and Christie (1994) suggest that critical pedagogies are searching for ways in which teachers can help Aboriginal students make better sense of the different claims to truth and authenticity they are confronted with. The development of critical pedagogies within classrooms includes emphasis on constructing and answering questions which aim to clarify issues related to knowledge, curriculum content, history and language of instruction. Explicit pedagogies include pedagogical approaches that privilege the importance of demystifying the learning process for students. Walton (1996, p.139) suggests that pedagogical approaches which are driven by concerns with achieving ‘equal outcomes’ do not necessarily ‘critique the culture of the school into which the students are being apprenticed’. Nor do these approaches ‘bring into question the gate-keeping
function (inclusion/exclusion) of accepted mainstream educational outcomes'. Pedagogies which can be broadly described as 'implicit' or 'invisible' rely on the assumption that students bring to school a body of cultural and factual knowledge which can be readily tapped into as a learning–teaching resource. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977, p. 72, cited in Walton 1993, p.61) argue that 'the more implicit the school's pedagogy, presupposing prior understandings and attainments, the more locked out will be the outsiders'.

**Pedagogical practices at Traeger Park School**

The core curriculum at Traeger Park School was determined and monitored by the NTDE. In the 1970s the core curriculum was delivered in a standard ‘transmission-oriented’ way, but as the Aboriginal student population steadily increased during the 1980s, the staff (in conjunction with Brian Gray) developed an innovative method of language instruction that relied on a high level of peer interaction in small group situations. The CLE approach to language teaching (described in more detail in the previous section, cultural and linguistic incorporation) is identified as an ‘explicit’ and ‘interactive’ pedagogical model. This model relies on low pupil–teacher ratios as a primary means of effecting overt instruction related to the second language learning process. The CLE approach incorporates the life experiences of the students within a thematic framework. The thematic framework involves negotiation of curriculum content within the broad outline of themes developed over ten-week time periods.

Walton noted that one of the key elements of the Traeger Park approach to language teaching was the emphasis placed on ‘visible pedagogy’:

Overt knowledge about language was built into teachers’ and students’ meta-knowledge about language. This allowed teachers to positively respond to the cultural and linguistic resources the students brought with them to the school. For instance, teachers without an overt knowledge of linguistic issues often misinterpret dialect or second language ‘interference’ inappropriately. With that kind of knowledge, teachers could respond positively to linguistic diversity. (Walton 1995, p.5)
The Traeger Park School education programme represents an 'additive' approach to language education because the programme is designed to 'add to' the students' existing linguistic knowledge base. English language and cultural knowledge is introduced through a scaffolded process, where the basis of the teaching and learning is clearly located in the life experiences and language backgrounds of the Aboriginal students. Validation of those experiences and the scaffolding of new skills by teachers was facilitated within small groups where communication was child-centred. Interaction between students, and between teachers and students in small group situations, also allowed for the development of peer tutoring and peer support.

In his capacity as expert witness at the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (1991) hearing, Brian Gray suggested that the CLE approach to language learning was a successful innovation at Traeger Park School. After he left the programme in 1988, Gray (1985) noted the lack of commitment by the NTDE to maintaining the necessarily low pupil–teacher ratios and to providing necessary ongoing teacher in-service training compromised the development of the programme. The CLE approach was, however, still in operation at the school when it was recommended for closure in 1990.

**Pedagogical practices within mainstream primary schools**

During the Human Rights Commission hearing into the closure of Traeger Park School, it was the intent of the counsel for the plaintiffs to investigate whether or not the learning environments available to Aboriginal students in mainstream schools could maximise their academic potential. Mrs Brahams outlined the type of educational programmes operating at Bradshaw Primary School, where she had been the principal.

Mrs Brahams explained that Bradshaw Primary School operated a 'streaming' model where children were grouped according to ability in mathematics and language. Mrs Brahams outlined the advantages of this model as:

- opportunities for peer tutoring; and
ease of organisation for teachers who, instead of dealing with a range of abilities, were able to concentrate on teaching a whole group with similar levels of ability.

Mr Davies, in his evidence to the Human Rights Commission, corroborated the position of Mrs Brahmns regarding the type of education programmes available to Aboriginal students in mainstream primary schools. He also described the ‘streaming’ model as the preferred organisational model but did not comment upon the nature of pedagogical practices that were adopted by teachers in mainstream schools. From this evidence it is assumed that on entering a mainstream primary school, Aboriginal students would be graded or ‘streamed’ according to their comparative abilities in language and mathematics and be subjected to the same pedagogical approaches as their mainstream peers.

Lack of familiarity with the cultural norms which underpin the content of most literacy and numeracy activities conducted within mainstream schools, can result in a pattern of poor academic performance by some Aboriginal students. Classroom support for students whose cultural and linguistic backgrounds vary substantially from the mainstream population varies between schools in the Northern Territory. A common pattern of support or consideration at the classroom level is to provide specialist teachers who withdraw underachieving children from mainstream classes for additional help in skills areas. This practice often results in a pattern whereby many Aboriginal students are located in ‘remedial’ or ‘withdrawal’ classes. Walton (1993) warns that urban Aboriginal students who speak English as a second language may be disadvantaged if they are placed in special withdrawal classrooms where they have limited access to English-speaking peers, and where the teachers are often not adequately trained. Walton (1993, p.62) suggests that withdrawal of Aboriginal students into special classes increases the risk of those classes becoming ‘dumping grounds’, reminiscent of those described by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977, p.174).

In their evidence to the Human Rights Commission hearing, NTDE representatives did not suggest that mainstream schools adopted pedagogical approaches designed to incorporate the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of Aboriginal students. It is assumed that the ‘streaming’ model represents the overriding mainstream institutional approach to dealing with differences in student ability and differences in the
knowledge bases students bring to the classroom.

**Overview—Pedagogy (transmission / interactive)**

The cited lack of NTDE support for the maintenance of low pupil–teacher ratios and inadequate provision for in-service training which were necessary to the ongoing success of *interactive* pedagogical practices (such as the CLE approach to language teaching at Traeger Park School) point to lack of support for *interactional* pedagogical approaches at the structural level within the NTDE bureaucracy. Economic imperatives may underscore the decision by NTDE representatives not to provide ongoing support for the CLE approach at Traeger Park School because it represented a more expensive option than traditional *transmission*-oriented approaches to classroom teaching.

On the evidence presented to the Human Rights Commission by the two mainstream primary school principals, it is possible to speculate on the importance they place on the adoption of *interactional* pedagogic practices with Aboriginal students. Both principals referred to an organisational structure to deal with differing levels of academic ability, namely the ‘streaming’ model, but neither of them described adapted pedagogical practices which were likely to be adopted with Aboriginal students. Insufficient evidence from stakeholders representing mainstream schools makes it difficult to arrive at a definitive assessment of the orientation of mainstream educators and administrators. Yet it is clear that NTDE representatives do not consider the adoption of *interactional* pedagogies as an important way of improving academic outcomes by Aboriginal students. It is reasonable to expect that some teachers within the mainstream system utilise the flexibility of the ‘streaming’ approach to incorporate *interactional* pedagogic practices. In other situations, however, it is possible that Aboriginal students are exposed to only *transmission*-oriented pedagogic practices. Walton (1995) argues that the ‘streaming’ model adopted in mainstream primary schools in the Northern Territory as the primary organisational response to the needs of Aboriginal students, represents a ‘sink or swim’ approach. Aboriginal students are exposed to a curriculum, pedagogical
practices and assessment procedures which are essentially the same as that provided for their mainstream peers. Aboriginal students either adapt to these mainstream practices and procedures or their educational outcomes are compromised. The ‘streaming’ model serves to normalise the perception that Aboriginal students are academically inferior to their mainstream counterparts. This situation is likely to have ‘dismempowering’ consequences for Aboriginal students. Insufficient incorporation of the linguistic and cultural knowledge Aboriginal students bring to mainstream schools actively diminishes the status of experiences and knowledge gained outside the school environment. On the evidence available, the mainstream school approach to the incorporation of the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of Aboriginal students is assessed as ‘subtractive’.

The key difference between the CLE approach to language education practiced at Traeger Park School and the ‘streaming’ approach practiced within mainstream schools is that the CLE approach incorporates an adapted pedagogical methodology, whereas the ‘streaming’ model represents an organisational approach which does not recognise differences in the linguistic and cultural orientations of students. In contrast to the mainstream approach to pedagogy, the CLE approach to language teaching at Traeger Park School represents a ‘whole of school’ commitment to interactional classroom teaching practices. The CLE programme is specifically designed to provide opportunities for high levels of peer interaction while providing a framework where students have access to a ‘scaffolded’ teaching approach. The design of the CLE programme also privileges the importance of integrating existing student cultural and linguistic knowledge into the teaching of new concepts and skills. A commitment to interactional pedagogical approaches was a feature within Traeger Park School programmes. Given that interactional approaches to instruction rely on a high degree of interchange between students and teachers, then it is predicted that the Aboriginal students would have been provided with opportunities to incorporate their existing linguistic and cultural knowledge with the new knowledge and skills introduced by teachers. On this basis the pedagogical approach at Traeger Park School is assessed as having likely ‘enabling’ consequences for the Aboriginal students.
Disjunctions

- Traeger Park School stakeholders argue for the development of pedagogic practices which privilege a student-centred, collaborative approach to teaching and learning. NTDE stakeholders argue that the implementation of the ‘streaming’ model within primary schools provides enough scope for dealing with individual student differences.

Suggested changes in stakeholder positioning

- The promotion of ‘deficit’ education models by the NTDE constrains the implementation of pedagogical practices that aim to ‘add to’ the existing linguistic and cultural knowledge bases of Indigenous students. The ‘streaming’ model is most commonly applied in mainstream primary schools, and under this model Indigenous students are framed as ‘lacking’ in areas determined through the application of norm-based tests. The implementation of interactive pedagogic models is suggested on the basis that these models provide more scope for building onto the existing knowledge and skills of all students.

System constraints

- Insufficient financial commitment to reducing pupil–teacher ratios by government education service providers makes interactive pedagogic practices difficult to implement.

- Insufficient financial commitment from the NTDE for adequate teacher in-service training dedicated to the development of interactive and collaborative pedagogical practices.

Assessment (legitimising/advocating)

Introduction
Cummins suggests that assessment has historically been used to legitimise the ‘disabling’ of minority students. Underachievement by minority students in standardised tests of literacy and numeracy skill development has led to a conclusion by psychologists and educators that the source of the problem could be located within the student. When this occurs, the following issues are screened from public scrutiny: ‘the subtractive nature of the school program, the exclusionary orientation of teachers towards minority communities, and transmission models of teaching that inhibit students from active participation in learning’ (Cummins 1986, p.29).

Cummins is asking educators to shift the focus away from the student when looking for reasons why they achieve comparatively low results on standard tests. He suggests that psychologists and others involved in the assessment of minority students should turn their attention to a critical scrutiny of the societal and educational context within which the child has developed. In other words, ‘what is wrong with current education models and pedagogical practices that so many minority students are assessed as “failing”?’ Cummins (1986, p.3) claims that locating the ‘pathology’ within societal power relations which are reflected in the relations between school and community, and in the mental and cultural ‘disabling’ of minority students in classrooms, is a necessary change in orientation for those involved in the project of assessment. Role re-definitions of psychologists and educators in relation to assessment requires that they move from a position of recording the failure of minority students to that of advocating on their behalf and effectively de-legitimising the position that the ‘problem’ can be located within the student.

Luke et al. are critical of the contradictions represented in the National Aboriginal and Islander Education Policy in relation to assessment. They claim that the policy advocates for ‘the responsiveness of provided educational services to the differing needs and circumstances of Aboriginal communities’ (Luke et al. 1993, p.148), and yet the policy also supports the application of ‘performance indicators’ and ‘national aggregate data’. The authors claim that statistically constructed norms provide no sensitivity to ‘diversity’ that is celebrated as an important feature of the National Aboriginal and Islander Policy document. Factors such as class, gender and cultural differences do not figure in the statistical reportage, and, so, there is no way of
measuring performance relative to the type of education programme in operation. Luke et al. make the point that the use of performance indicators to describe to Aboriginal peoples the relationships between knowledge and achievement and to describe the benefits of schooling are not useful. Instead, performance indicators ‘may just signal increased participation in a systematically disempowering education’ (Luke et al. 1993, p.148).

This argument points to a central problem with the application of national benchmarks for comparison of intergroup educational outcomes. If national benchmarks do in fact provide us with skewed parameters at the outset, then arguments containing reference to the poor performance of Aboriginal students in comparison to these benchmarks should be critically interpreted.

The Desert Schools Report (1996, p.13) points to a resistance by teachers to use alternative assessment models designed to assess the performance of students from non-mainstream cultural and linguistic backgrounds in Australia. The report identifies commentary by Heath (1992) which point to alternative assessment models such as the cross-cultural and bilingual portfolios for ESL students. The Desert Schools Report outlines the position of some commentators in relation to assessment:

the means by which we place students in learning levels, determine learning pathways and assess learning outcomes are culturally biased so that they inevitably create a deficit image of the Aboriginal student and therefore create a remedial rather than developmental purpose for education for so many ESL and Aboriginal students. (Desert Schools Report 1996, p.12)
Mainstream assessment approach

The position of the Northern Territory Government in relation to the issue of assessment is reflected in a recent government-commissioned report, Public Accounts Committee (PAC), Report on the provision of school education services for remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory (1996). The report refers to the problems associated with Evaluation of Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives (AESIP) in the Northern Territory. The report authors argue that while improved outcomes in areas such as student attendance, stronger parent support or teaching ability may be indicated as a result of an AESIP programme, these factors are not as important as evaluation of student learning outcomes (PAC1996, p.88). The report suggests that lack of evaluation of learning outcomes represents a weakness in the evaluation of AESIP programmes in the Northern Territory. Recommendation 27 of the report outlines the position of the authors in relation to the issue of evaluation of Aboriginal education initiatives:

27.1 That the Ministerial Council on Education, Training and Youth Affairs agrees to gather baseline data which clearly identifies Aboriginal student learning outcomes in English and mathematics, and in a manner which allows Australia-wide decisions to be made; and

27.2 That appropriate, achievable short and long term goals with complementary performance indicators be developed so that trends in student learning outcomes in Aboriginal schools across Australia can be evaluated.

(PAC 1996, p.89)

The issue of assessment was central to the case mounted by the NTDE in defence of the decision to close Traeger Park School. Mr Spring, on behalf of the NTDE, presented information to the Human Rights Commission hearing, which indicated that the Traeger Park School students performed poorly on recently administered standardised tests in literacy and numeracy. The tests referred to by Mr Spring are the Multilevel Assessment Program (MAP) tests that are interpreted using national...
mainstream aggregates. His position in relation to the use of assessment in this case can be located in the imperative to describe the success or otherwise of an educational intervention in terms of ‘outcomes’ or ‘outputs’. In his evidence, he suggested that the academic ‘outcomes’ demonstrated at Traeger Park School were unsatisfactory.

Implicit in Mr Spring’s position is the suggestion that by changing the focus away from social welfare considerations, and on to the real purpose of school which is ‘teaching and learning’, then academic performance would be improved. He did not, however, provide evidence which suggested that the assessment results of Aboriginal students in mainstream schools in Alice Springs were significantly better than those being achieved by Traeger Park students. While Mr Spring did not locate the blame for poor assessment results within the Aboriginal students in terms of their social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, he did clearly suggest that over-emphasis on these factors at Traeger Park School were in part responsible. He argued that this situation could be reversed if the students were exposed to a more rigorous academic regime that had a clear focus on skill development in the areas of literacy and numeracy.

Mr Spring’s position reflects an attitude toward educational outcomes which is based in the ‘equity of access and outcomes’ argument. Luke et al. cite a Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) discussion paper to illustrate official policy direction in relation to equity of access and outcomes by Aboriginal peoples. The discussion paper argues for ‘equity between Aboriginal peoples and other Australians in access, participation and outcomes in all forms of education by the turn of the century’ (DEET 1989, cited in Luke et al. 1993, p.44). According to Luke et al., this translates into a view of ‘outcomes’ which is described in terms of ‘attainment of skills’, ‘successful completion of year 12’ and achievement of the ‘same standard as other Australian students’. Luke et al. (1993, p.44) also argue that the end point of effective policy is seen as ‘the addressing of a series of socioeconomic and educational “lacks”, which in turn call out for equity with mainstream White Australians’. The authors propose a broadening of the discussion about the ‘purpose of schooling’ and related methods of assessing educational programmes.

The position adopted by The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (1992) (cited in PAC 1996, p.89)
demonstrates a broader consideration of the issues relating to interpretation of Standardised Assessment Results than that adopted by Mr Spring. The report does not directly criticise current approaches to assessment involving Aboriginal students but does call for a longer term perspective to be taken on the overall process of educational change and achievement:

4.4. The Committee acknowledges, as does the Schools Council, in a recent report, that because of the deep-rooted nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage, change in education is a slow process. ‘Success in education can only be measured on a generational basis’.

(House of Representatives 1992, p.57)

The Traeger Park School assessment approach

Mr Brown, Director of the Centre for Aboriginal and Islander Studies at the Northern Territory University, provided expert testimony to the Human Rights Commission hearing. Mr Brown was asked if he would be concerned if Aboriginal students who enrolled in an ‘enclave type’ school such as Traeger Park scored results in core subjects which were significantly worse than Aboriginal ‘non-enclave’ learners in Alice Springs. In reply, Mr Brown stated: ‘Well naturally as an educator that would concern me, but not to the extent that I would say these people are failing. Again what I would look at is the learning curve from the point of entry to the point at which we have made this particular assessment’ (ASSPA v. NT Minister for Education 1991, p.177).

Mr Brown was asked about his reaction to test results that demonstrated comparatively low performance levels in core subjects by Traeger Park School students. Mr Brown suggested that as an educator he would be concerned to discover how those results were obtained and the conditions under which the students were being placed in a learning context. He pointed out that the learning context does not confine itself to the classroom environment alone but extends to the home environment from which those children come. Mr Brown suggested that although the assessment statistic itself was critical, it was unreasonable to react to that without
acknowledging that the children were already disadvantaged because of certain other issues. Mr Brown made the point that it was important to consider alternative interpretations of the standardised assessment results. He argued that the individual performance of students in tests should be examined in terms of their relative levels of improvement; that is, measuring the gains children have made in relation to the point at which they entered a particular programme. Mr Brown suggested that to use the results for broad range comparisons between students in different locations was not useful and that to engage in this type of comparison, without factoring in the level of disadvantage encountered by individual children, amounted to "an abuse of the assessment system".

Mrs Webb, in her evidence to the Human Rights Commission, acknowledged that the results for Traeger Park Students in the Northern Territory Government-sponsored standardised tests in English and Maths, were "not good" (ASSPA v. NT Minister for Education 1991, p.79). Mrs Webb contextualised the test results by citing background information relating to the attendance status of students at Traeger Park. She pointed out that of thirteen Year 7 students who completed the test in 1991, only three of them had completed all their primary education at Traeger Park School. Out of fifteen Year 5 students who completed the test, only four of them had attended Traeger Park School since transition. Mrs Webb adopted the position that Traeger Park School should not be held entirely accountable for the results being cited by government representatives as evidence of an unsatisfactory teaching programme. She pointed to the need to develop the "whole" child and argued that it was unsatisfactory to focus on academic outcomes when the basic needs of students were not being met and when individual rates of progress were not being considered. Mrs Webb referred to the Traeger Park 'School Improvement Plan' for 1991 that included an aim to improve the "general standard of Aboriginal education" (ASSPA v. NT Minister for Education 1991, p.80). She pointed out that it was the aim of the plan to improve academic standards and that increased attention to meeting student's basic physical and emotional needs was an important aspect.
Overview—Assessment (legitimising/advocating)

The results of government-administered, standardised MAP tests were tendered by NTDE representatives during the contested closure of the Traeger Park School. The comparatively poor results achieved by Traeger Park students was cited by Mr Spring as evidence of an inadequate academic programme at Traeger Park School. Traeger Park stakeholders questioned this interpretation on the grounds that the MAP tests were culturally biased and that the results did not meaningfully represent individual rates of academic progress. When external assessment results are considered in isolation, without attention to the educational history of the students, differences in cultural and linguistic orientation, the degree of social disadvantage experienced by students and relative rates of individual student progress, then a narrow framework for future educational programmes is reinforced. The MAP assessment results were used to support the contention that the NTDE policy aim of ‘equality of outcomes’ for all students was not being achieved at the Traeger Park School. The approach to assessment adopted by the NTDE in this case includes potentially ‘disempowering’ consequences for Aboriginal students and is assessed as ‘legitimising’ their deficit status within the mainstream school system in the Northern Territory. The positions of Traeger Park representatives in relation to the issue of assessment can be located within the ‘advocacy’ realm of the Cummins (1986) framework. While they admit that the performance of Traeger Park students in recent government-sponsored tests were low in comparison to mainstream constructed norms, they argued that social, cultural, linguistic and historical factors impacting upon individual student performance should be taken into account when interpreting those assessment results. On this basis, affirmative action initiatives that aimed to reduce the educational and social disadvantages experienced by Traeger Park students were proposed.

Disjunctions

- Traeger Park School stakeholders advocate for an assessment model which takes into account the specific cultural and linguistic backgrounds of Indigenous students and which is capable of measuring individual rates of academic progress.
The NTDE promotes a model of normative, standardised testing in the areas of English literacy and numeracy that allows for direct comparison between the academic performance of Aboriginal students and their mainstream counterparts and which consequently emphasises the ‘deficit’ status of Aboriginal students.

Suggested changes in stakeholder positioning

➢ NTDE support for the use of normative assessment models to determine the viability of Aboriginal education programmes legitimises the official government policy position that ‘equality of outcomes’ is the main aim of education for Aboriginal students. This position leads to subsequent support for a ‘deficit’ model of education and remedial pedagogical approaches that serve to ‘disable’ minority students. An alternative assessment approach that demonstrates individual rates of student progress and that reflects existing cultural and linguistic knowledge is suggested.

System constraints

➢ There is a lack of financial commitment by the NTDE for the development and trial of tools to measure the academic performance of Aboriginal students whose linguistic and cultural backgrounds differ significantly from their mainstream counterparts.

➢ The application of national benchmarks for comparison of academic achievement between all students potentially discriminates against some Aboriginal students whose linguistic and cultural knowledge is not factored into the assessment norms.

➢ Lack of agreement between education service providers and Aboriginal community members about the ‘purpose of schooling’ leads to ongoing contestation about appropriate models of assessment. The ‘purpose of schooling’ issue needs to be locally mediated and negotiated between Aboriginal peoples and education service providers before agreement on assessment parameters and assessment tools can be reached.
Traeger Park case study—Overview

It has not been the aim of this case study analysis to adjudicate on the decision to close the Traeger Park School. The closure of the school remains an historical fact. The data generated from the discourse surrounding the school closure has instead been used to arrive at an assessment of the capacities of both the Traeger Park School model and the proposed alternative mainstream school model to assist a group of Aboriginal students to achieve their academic potential. The analysis has been framed by the criteria identified by Cummins (1986) as being critical to educational success for minority group students. These criteria are referred to as ‘predictors of success’ and relate to four specific ‘institutional characteristics of schools’. The case study analysis has identified some significant differences between the positioning of representative stakeholders in relation to these key ‘institutional characteristics of schools’.

The analysis of events surrounding the Traeger Park School closure has identified a series of ‘system constraints’ that have the potential to impede proposals for changed Aboriginal education practices in the Northern Territory. Mason (1982, p.40) argues that service providers who persistently deny the extent to which some structures and practices deliver ‘systematically unequal effects on the lives of groups socially defined by race’, are complicit in a project of ‘institutional racism’. The ‘systems constraints’ identified within the Traeger Park School case study can be divided into three broad categories:

**Financial constraints**

A common constraint identified within the Traeger Park case study was related to insufficient financial commitment by the NTDE to investigate, trial and adequately fund alternative:

- support structures;
- school organisational models;
pedagogical approaches;
and assessment models

that have been identified as having the potential to impact positively on the academic attainment levels of Indigenous students. A persistent argument put forward by NTDE representatives for the maintenance of the status quo in each of these areas related to the 'access and equity' policy imperative. Regular reference by NTDE representatives to the necessity for 'fiscal restructuring' and to the realities of 'budgetary constraints' also indicate that the 'cost-effectiveness' of proposals for Indigenous education reform initiatives was an overriding consideration.

**Bureaucratic constraints**

The NTDE bureaucracy is centralised and relies on an 'outcomes' based model of education service delivery that privileges cost efficiency and effectively narrows consideration of a broad range of 'purposes for education' to those that can be effectively quantified. Within the Traeger Park case study, these indicators were regularly identified by mainstream education service providers as English literacy and numeracy outcomes. Initiatives designed to increase levels of community participation in education decision-making and to broaden the parameters of the accepted purposes for education are less likely to be successfully implemented when bureaucracies are detached from the sites of educational practice.

**Ideological constraints**

The 'back to basics' approach to education proposed by NTDE representatives privileges 'deficit' educational models because the focus of attention is placed on what students do not know. This approach leaves little space for valuing cultural and linguistic diversity or for building onto the existing knowledge bases of students. According to NTDE representatives, the purpose of schooling is 'for teaching and learning'. Some Traeger Park School stakeholders disagree and argue for an extension of the role of schools from a narrow focus on 'teaching and learning' to a broader
range of purposes. They suggest that the development of a culture of ‘community’ and ‘belonging’ within schools is important to Aboriginal parents and students and that health and welfare considerations are important pre-requisites for future academic success.

Each category of ‘system constraints’ identified throughout the Traeger Park case study poses limitations on the incorporation of key principles or ‘predictors of success’ within minority education initiatives. These predictors have been identified in the Cummins (1986) framework as being critical to improving the academic outcomes of minority group students. When these predictors are in place within minority education programmes, Cummins argues that students are more likely to reach their academic potential. When existing mainstream institutions and bureaucracies do not allow for the incorporation of these key ‘predictors of success’ then a case for the existence of a project of institutional racism may be argued. Arriving at definitive assessments about the potentially ‘enabling’ or ‘disabling’ consequences of alternative and mainstream proposals for educational practice and institutional organisation has not been straightforward within the Traeger Park case study. In addition to the Human Rights Commission hearing transcripts, the data source included academic discourses and mainstream media accounts of the contested closure of the Traeger Park School. While some of these discourses provided opportunities for direct comparison of stakeholder positioning, relevant issues were sometimes excluded or marginalised. For example, in evidence to the Human Rights Commission hearing, Aboriginal parents described the importance of a school culture that affirmed the importance of ‘family’ and ‘belonging’. In contrast, mainstream education representatives did not address these issues and, so, there was insufficient basis for directly comparing stakeholder positioning. Mismatches between Traeger Park School and mainstream school perspectives on issues related to ‘community participation’ and ‘cultural and linguistic incorporation’ were a common feature within the case study analysis. Issues relating to ‘assessment’ and ‘pedagogy’ were more clearly outlined and, so, direct comparisons of competing stakeholder positioning was possible.

Although the data source for the Traeger Park case study posed limitations on the application of the Cummins (1986) evaluative framework, ‘Empowering minority
students: A framework for intervention', the following summary assessment of both the Traeger Park School and mainstream school models is proposed.
Table 3: Summary assessment based on trial application of the Cummins (1986) evaluative framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional characteristics of schools</th>
<th>Traeger Park School</th>
<th>Mainstream Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural and linguistic incorporation</td>
<td>Additive (enabling)</td>
<td>Subtractive (disabling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community participation</td>
<td>Collaborative (enabling)</td>
<td>Collaborative (enabling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
<td>Interactive (enabling)</td>
<td>Transmission (disabling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Advocacy (enabling)</td>
<td>Legitimisation (disabling)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Cummins (1986)

A comparative analysis of the Traeger Park School model and the mainstream school model in the Northern Territory has revealed a significant discrepancy in their predicted capacity to deliver successful education programmes for Aboriginal students. Within each of the ‘institutional characteristics of schools’, defined by Cummins (1986), the Traeger Park School model demonstrates ‘enabling’ characteristics. In comparison, the mainstream school model has been assessed as demonstrating a ‘disabling’ orientation in three of the four areas defined by the ‘institutional characteristics of schools’. On this basis, it is predicted that Aboriginal students attending mainstream schools would not be ‘empowered’ to achieve their academic potential whereas Aboriginal students attending Traeger Park School would have significantly increased opportunities for academic success.

PART TWO: CUMMINS (1986) FRAMEWORK—COMMENTARY

Methodological issues

One researcher conducted the Traeger Park case study, and this represents a problem in terms of justifying the assessments of stakeholder positioning in key areas. On this
basis, it is suggested that the design of the Cummins (1986) framework is more suited to a collaborative research approach. This approach would provide increased opportunities for stakeholder positioning to be viewed from a range of perspectives, and for ‘suggested changes to stakeholder positioning’ to derive from joint discussions between a range of stakeholders at local sites.

If a collaborative approach to analyses of minority education interventions is assumed, then stakeholders should ideally be involved in initial discussions about the prospective outcomes of the analysis. Key aspects to be considered include:

- the purpose for the analysis;
- the key issues of local concern;
- the focus of the analysis, for example stakeholder positioning, student outcomes, institutional frameworks (or a combination of these).

The ‘purpose of the analysis’ will determine how the Cummins (1986) framework is applied. If the analysis is to be used as a tool for internal evaluation within education institutions, then it is likely that a greater emphasis will be placed on site specific relationships between educators, students and community members. In the case of the retrospective Traeger Park case study, the framework was used to determine the relative capacities of two competing models of education to provide an appropriate education programme for Aboriginal students. In this situation, emphasis was placed on the positioning of key institutional representatives in relation to the ‘institutional characteristics of schools’.

Establishing agreement about the ‘enabling’ and ‘disabling’ consequences of educator attitudes, practices and institutional structures represents the first step in the application of the Cummins (1986) framework. It is predicted that this process will inevitably lead to contestation between stakeholders. Dualistic descriptions of important orientations relating to the ‘institutional characteristics of schools’ have the potential to promote entrenched stakeholder positions. For example, stakeholder positioning in relation to:

- Community participation is described as ‘inclusive’ (enabling) or ‘exclusive’ (disabling);
Cultural and linguistic incorporation is described as ‘additive’ (enabling) or ‘subtractive’ (disabling);

Pedagogy is described as ‘interactive’ (enabling) or ‘transmission’ (disabling);

Assessment is described as ‘advocating’ (enabling) or ‘legitimising’ (disabling).

It is predicted that education service providers will not respond positively to descriptions of the practices and institutional structures they support, which include terms such as ‘disabling’ and ‘dismantling’. The way in which these evaluative terms are mediated within the context of specific analyses will directly affect the extent to which suggested changes in stakeholder positioning can be achieved. This issue provides a substantial argument for the adoption of a collaborative research approach.

The systematic incorporation of key minority education issues within the ‘institutional characteristics of schools’ provides a clear guide to the format of proposed analyses of education interventions. The apparent simplicity of the framework is, however, deceptive. It became apparent in the early stages of the Traeger Park School analysis, that there was a high level of crossover between issues relevant to the four ‘institutional characteristics of schools’. For example, data that was relevant to the discussion of ‘cultural incorporation’ was also relevant to the discussion of ‘community participation’ and ‘pedagogy’. Given the complex interrelationships between these factors, the difficulty in locating data within discrete sections of an analytical framework should not be surprising. The approach adopted by the researcher was to locate relevant data in more than one section if necessary.

The retrospective nature of the Traeger Park case study posed some methodological problems. These problems included:

- insufficient data, which resulted in inconclusive findings in some areas; and
- lack of opportunity to corroborate the testimony of stakeholders.

It is predicted that there would be significant advantages in applying the Cummins (1986) framework to an operational education intervention. These predicted advantages include increased opportunity:
to conduct interviews with stakeholders as a means of generating data relevant to the Cummins framework evaluation criteria;

to incorporate data generated from objective, school-based observations;

to actively engage stakeholders in the process of analysis as a primary means of achieving mutually agreed changes to educational practices.

The positioning of participants in the discourse surrounding the closure of the Traeger Park School was substantially framed by their stance toward the school closure. Expert opinion was represented in the associated discourse, but the entrenchment of stakeholder positioning was exacerbated by the legal–adversarial imperative within the formal Human Rights Commission hearing. Stakeholders were aware that there were going to be short-term winners and losers, and this added a degree of emotiveness and defensiveness to their publicly expressed arguments. Objective interpretation of the data therefore presented a significant research challenge. By overlaying an internationally tested framework for analysing the likely success of proposed minority education interventions, it was intended that the problems associated with the subjective nature of the qualitative evaluation process might be partially addressed.

**Potential applications of the Cummins (1986) framework**

The Cummins framework has potential evaluative, diagnostic and professional development applications within minority education contexts.

**Evaluation and diagnosis**

Application of the Cummins (1986) framework as an evaluative tool would involve a process that relies on comparison of institutional structures and educator practices based on the ‘predictors of success’ or ‘institutional characteristics of schools’. Evaluative applications of the framework would involve local minority community members and teachers as key participants. Independent researchers or facilitators would ideally provide expert advice about the format of the evaluation process and
assist in the interpretation of findings. The issue of researcher objectivity is especially relevant in situations where the site for analysis includes substantial contestation between stakeholder groups.

As a diagnostic tool, the Cummins framework has potential to be applied by a researcher or facilitator in collaboration with local stakeholders. Educators or minority group representatives may be concerned about patterns of student academic underachievement or education service providers might wish to target future budget expenditure to maximise student academic potential. In both these cases an education intervention could be evaluated in terms of how well it is incorporating the ‘predictors of success’ for minority education interventions (contained within the Cummins 1986 framework). Identification of major disjunctions in stakeholder positioning, recommended changes to stakeholder positioning and consideration of ‘systems constraints’ should then guide the diagnostic process.

**Professional development**

Cummins (1986) argues that there are fundamental similarities between the education situations for minority group students in a wide range of international settings. These similarities relate to comparative levels of ‘dismemberment’ and ‘disenfranchisement’, and form the basis for the development of a conceptual framework through which educators can analyse the extent of their agency in perpetuating the marginalisation of minority group interests. Cummins’s subjective descriptions of minority education practices and institutional structures in terms of their ‘empowering’ and ‘dismembering’ consequences constitutes a starting point for teachers to clarify these terms and relate them to their professional roles within educational institutions. The establishment of a shared language between participants is cited as an important first step in any action research project. Henry (1980) suggests that ‘this language defines the group’s problem and articulates possible solutions in terminology that is made meaningful through classroom practice’.

The Cummins (1986) framework has the potential to be adapted as a framework for assisting educators to deconstruct minority education situations and to assess
current and future education programme applications. It is anticipated that the professional development applications of the Cummins framework will vary according to the level of experience of teachers.

*Pre-service teacher training*

It is proposed that by exposing pre-service teachers to the theoretical underpinnings of the Cummins (1986) framework, they will develop a broad understanding of key factors impacting upon the academic attainment of minority group students. The Cummins framework provides a forum for assisting educators to engage with issues relating to the agency of institutional structures and teacher role definitions in determining student academic attainment levels. By applying the Cummins framework to a range of case study scenarios, it is anticipated that pre-service teachers may develop a critical awareness of ‘empowering’ and ‘dism empowering’ attitudes and practices adopted by education service providers in relation to minority group students and their supporting communities. Unless pre-service teachers can draw on first hand experience of working with minority group students, a theoretical approach to familiarising them with the key concepts contained within the Cummins framework must be relied on.

The *Desert Schools Report* (1996, p.17) argues that there are two main impediments to teacher preparedness to engage with key issues associated with appropriate education provision for Aboriginal students. First, the current nature of professional preparation does not provide adequate opportunities for teachers to engage with the many issues relevant to teaching in cross-cultural contexts. Second, the cultural experiences of teachers may also limit their potential to develop important understandings and pedagogic skills in preparation for working in cross-cultural contexts. Research conducted by McInerney (1991) and Malin (1990) supports this contention. The *Desert Schools Report* states the following:

while many teachers . . . are now more conscious of the way in which our schools fail to adequately meet the needs and aspirations of ‘minority’ group children in the ‘mainstream’ most are unable to ‘deconstruct’ the situation in
order to seek a way forward. This is inevitable because teachers themselves mostly come out of the ‘mainstream’ as successful and well socialised products of its processes. This points to the critical importance of cross cultural models and cultural challenge as essential elements of teacher education.

(Desert Schools Report 1996, p.17)

If pre-service teachers are assisted to recognise the impact of ‘empowering’ and ‘disempowering’ institutional structures and educational practices on minority student academic outcomes, they may be better prepared to ‘deconstruct’ education situations and promote practices which might impact positively on the educational outcomes of minority students.

In-service teacher education and action research

The Cummins (1986) framework represents a potential for demonstrating the futility of approaches to minority education that ignore the agency of educators and institutional structures in determining academic outcomes. The concept of ‘predictors of success’ is introduced by Cummins to focus attention on the interrelatedness of key issues impacting upon outcomes within minority education interventions. Within the context of professional development, the Cummins framework may provide opportunities for teachers to critically reflect on their own professional practices and on structural features within their professional workplaces that have the potential to impact upon minority student academic outcomes.

Cummins proposes that through a process of stakeholder re-positioning in relation to ‘key predictors of success’ within minority education interventions that improved academic outcomes by minority students can be achieved. Cummins provides a sound theoretical argument to support his claim that the positioning of educators in relation to key minority education issues is important; however, he is less clear about how his theoretical arguments should be translated into practice. The task at hand then is to develop professional development applications that will convince educators of the validity and practical applications of the framework within the context of their professional workplaces. Henry (1980) refers to the difficulties associated with
projects designed to convince teachers of a need to change their classroom practices, even if those suggested changes are based on sound educational theories. He suggests that teachers are naturally suspicious of theoretical proposals which have no obvious relationship to the realities associated with their own classrooms, or which do not appear to offer ‘practical’ solutions. I would argue that the Cummins framework provides both a sound theoretical basis for proposed changes to both educator practices and institutional structures in minority education contexts. In addition, the proposals for action are not generally reliant on significant financial input from service providers.

A participatory action research approach to professional development within the context of in-service teacher training is proposed as the most effective way of achieving an immediate connection between theory and practice in this situation. It is accepted at the outset that a single approach will not adequately encompass all aspects of the Cummins theory for analysing minority education interventions, but the proposal to apply participatory action research principles represents an attempt to focus on those aspects of the framework which have direct implications for classroom teachers. Foster (1974) differentiates between different forms of action research and describes ‘participative research’ as research which ‘characteristically commits the client to action’. Foster also states that an important difference between action research and other kinds of applied research is that action research implies that the participating parties are prepared to commit to changing the system under scrutiny. Given that the application of the Cummins (1986) framework for analysing minority education interventions is based on the premise that suggested changes to stakeholder positioning will result in improved academic outcomes for minority students, a research approach which emphasises ‘action’ or a commitment to change, seems appropriate. Within the context of education, Hodgkinson (1957) describes some common characteristics of action research:

- action research is based on concrete problems in actual school situations;
- the main reason for action research is the improvement of practice and this can only be achieved if teachers are able to change their behaviour and attitudes;
Action research is a cooperative enterprise involving many or all of the teachers in the school.

Winter (1987) points out that the professional context from which most examples of action research are drawn is that of education. He suggests that a primary reason for the successful application of action research principles with the context of education is because the concept of education is deeply involved with ‘the resolution of the theory-practice issue’ (p.viii). According to Winter:

education refers always to a theoretically conceived ideal . . . education always requires some form of interpersonal effectiveness . . . Education is thus always both theoretical practice and practical theory. In this way ‘education’ corresponds directly to action-research’s aspiration to link the enlightenment of research with the effectiveness of action. (Winter 1987, p.viii)

Assessment of the Cummins (1986) framework as a qualitative evaluation tool in Aboriginal education contexts

The preceding trial application of the Cummins (1986) ‘Empowering minority students: A framework for intervention’, has led to a positive assessment of its applicability within Australian Aboriginal education contexts. This positive assessment is, however, made with the proviso that a generalised statement of support is difficult to commit to until the Cummins (1986) framework has been trialed in a representative range of Aboriginal education situations. Cummins (1983) refers to the issue of generalising research findings across contexts. He argues that although research findings cannot be generalised across contexts, this does not mean that those findings have no relevance to other situations. Cummins (1983) suggests that the validity of any theoretical principle is assessed by how well it is capable of accounting for data from a wide variety of contexts. The findings can ‘become relevant to other contexts when they are integrated into a coherent theory from which predictions about program outcomes under different conditions can be generated’ (Cummins 1983, p.2). The Cummins (1986) theoretical framework represents an attempt to provide such a
‘coherent theory’ that aims to account for findings about minority student academic experiences in a range of social, political and geographical contexts.

A reason for supporting applications of the Cummins (1986) theoretical framework within Australian Aboriginal education contexts, is that the framework addresses key issues contained within the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP) (1996). These policy objectives relate to:

- an ongoing commitment to increasing the levels of Indigenous community participation in education decision-making and education programme delivery;

and

- an ongoing commitment to ensuring Indigenous linguistic and cultural incorporation within pedagogical practices and institutional structures.

One area of discord between the stated NATSIEP (1996) objectives and the Cummins (1986) framework, relates to the issue of assessment. Goal number 14, cited within the NATSIEP (1996), refers to the importance of developing national assessment frameworks and tools for improving the comparability of academic outcomes by Aboriginal students. Cummins (1986) argues that the application of ‘norm based’ assessment regimes and the setting of broad-based performance indicators represent a ‘disabling’ attitude toward the assessment of minority student academic performance. Assessment approaches that do not reflect the particular social, cultural and linguistic circumstances of minority group students, have been traditionally used to support the argument that those students are ‘deficient’ in specified areas and that compensatory educational approaches are justified. This difference in orientation between the Cummins (1986) framework and NATSIEP (1996) does not necessarily render the framework unworkable within the Australian Aboriginal education context. The issue of assessment has been the subject of long-standing debate between educators, Aboriginal community members and policy makers. Application of the Cummins framework represents an opportunity to promote discussion about the most appropriate assessment approaches in Aboriginal education contexts.

Although some Aboriginal education stakeholders agree in principle with the objective to increase the level of Aboriginal community participation in the education
process, in practice, they support policies, pedagogical practices and institutional structures that actively diminish the role of the wider Aboriginal community in the education of Aboriginal students. Cummins argues that the promotion of ‘disempowering’ policies and practices is a key cause of minority student underachievement. He challenges minority education stakeholders to recognise opportunities for changing their personal attitudes and practices in ways that lead to the ‘empowerment’ of the wider minority community and, by association, the ‘empowerment’ of minority group students. Cummins argues that personal educator role re-definitions are unachievable if ‘system constraints’ that mitigate against key changes to institutional structures and educator practices are not also identified and changed. If the Cummins (1986) ‘predictors of success’ guide assessments of Aboriginal education programmes, then education service providers may find it increasingly difficult to argue for the institution or maintenance of practices and organisational structures that have proven ‘disempowering’ consequences for Aboriginal students.

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Case Study Two: Evolution of the Bilingual Education Debate in Australia (With particular reference to the Northern Territory)

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I argue that the current bilingual education debate in the Northern Territory marks a significant shift in the bilingual education debate which has been ongoing in Australia for the past forty years. Although ideological and political differences have always been a factor in discussions about the merits of bilingual education, these differences are increasingly being articulated in public forums. There is an apparent connection between the issues associated with the provision of bilingual programmes for Indigenous students and issues that relate to the nature of self-determination and assimilation policies, Indigenous language rights, Indigenous land rights, cultural pluralism and national unity. What appears to draw these issues together is a broad-based interest in re-determining the groundrules for Indigenous and mainstream community co-existence. Tension is high on a number of fronts, as unresolved issues are publicly debated. It is within this highly charged political environment that the current bilingual education debate is taking place.

Although the current situation for bilingual education programmes in the Northern Territory constitutes the main subject of this paper, an historical overview of Indigenous bilingual education initiatives and the associated discourses in other Australian States and Territories is included as background to the discussion. Consideration of international bilingual education perspectives also provides opportunities for extending the boundaries of the discussion to include issues and perspectives that remain substantially unrepresented in the current Australian bilingual education debate. If there are similarities between the identified ideological and political positioning of bilingual education stakeholders in Australia and in other
countries, it might be possible to learn something from how the resolution process is unfolding in these different contexts.

**Bilingual education theory**

According to Skutnabb-Kangas (1988), it is important when discussing bilingual education to define the particular bilingual approach in question, because the anticipated social and educational outcomes of bilingual education approaches vary considerably. A literature review conducted by Cummins (1983) considers the available international research data related to the effects of incorporating the heritage languages of minority students into the regular school curriculum, either as a subject or as a medium of instruction. He distinguishes between the main bilingual education approaches in this way:

> Transitional programs involve the use of the children’s home language as a temporary bridge to help them keep up with academic content while they are acquiring proficiency in the regular school language. Enrichment programs (Fishman 1976), on the other hand involve the use of the minority language on a longer-term basis in order to develop bilingual skills. (Cummins 1983, p.1)

Cummins applies the term ‘minority language program’ to include both bilingual programmes, where the minority language is used as the medium of instruction, and ‘heritage language programmes’, where the minority language is taught as a subject of instruction. Cummins prefers the term ‘enrichment’ programmes to the term ‘maintenance’ programmes because he argues that the latter term is narrower and does not appropriately describe heritage language programmes. The following discussion about bilingual education in Australian Indigenous education contexts, however, will not include specific reference to heritage language programmes and, so, the term ‘maintenance’ programmes will be applied throughout. The term ‘first language’ (abbreviated as L1 but also referred to as the mother tongue) is used when the minority language is the child’s first learned language. Cummins (1983) points out that ‘immersion’ programmes are intended primarily (but not exclusively) for students
from English-speaking backgrounds and, so, constitute a distinct field of study separate from the consideration of ‘transitional’ or ‘enrichment’ bilingual programmes.

Devlin outlines the political implications of adopting either a ‘transfer’ or ‘maintenance’ model of bilingual education: ‘At the level of school-based bilingual programming, the arguments for cultural pluralism are translated into support for vernacular language maintenance, whereas the assimilationist position has its counterpart in an emphasis on the transitional nature of bilingual education’ (Devlin 1990, p.60).

Maintenance models of bilingual education include a commitment to the maintenance of first language (L1 or mother tongue) literacy skills following on from the acquisition of L2 (language two, the second or foreign language) literacy skills. Transition models of bilingual education do not incorporate a programmed commitment to maintenance of the L1 after transition to L2 literacy skills has been achieved. These transition models of bilingual education are assessed by reference to second language proficiency. Government-supported bilingual programmes for Indigenous students in Australia have almost exclusively adopted ‘transition’ or ‘transfer’ models, although there have been isolated attempts to institute ‘maintenance’ models within mission-controlled schools and Independent Aboriginal community schools. There have, however, been intermittent calls to adopt ‘maintenance’ models of bilingual education within a broader range of Australian Indigenous education situations, and this position has generally been related to concerns about the maintenance of L1 language skills and the maintenance of minority language status. For example, a House of Representatives Standing Committee Report, Report of the Inquiry into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Language Maintenance. Language and Culture: A Matter of Survival (1992), recommended the following: ‘ensure that bilingual education is clearly based on the maintenance model rather than the “transfer-to English” model’ (House of Representatives 1992, para. 6.53).

Hakuta, a commentator on the bilingual debate in the United States, draws our attention to the importance of clarifying the specific objectives of bilingual

A similar lack of distinction between the goals of these two quite distinct rationales for bilingual education has remained a consistent feature of the bilingual education debate in Australia. Consequently, confusion and disagreement about the purpose for bilingual education persists and serves to marginalise issues relating to the broader social and educational implications of bilingual education approaches with minority group students.

The theoretical argument most commonly cited in support of bilingual education approaches is based on the ‘threshold hypothesis’ proposed by Cummins (1979). The threshold hypothesis supports the position that children (especially linguistic minority children whose first language is threatened by the acquisition of a second language) who learn to read and write in their native language will transfer those skills to the second language literacy acquisition process. In order for this transference to take place the children must first achieve a base level of L1 literacy competency. It is on this basis that government education service providers in Australia have supported ‘transfer’ models of bilingual education. While the ‘transfer’ of language acquisition skills from L1 to L2 has been considered a plausible justification for the adoption of bilingual education approaches, reference to the ‘maintenance’ of L1 literacy skills after the transference to L2 has been achieved has been generally marginalised within the local discourse. Skutnabb-Kangas (1988) points out that when bilingual education is discussed in international forums, there is a central focus on majority language acquisition skills: ‘Bilingualism/ multilingualism is seldom declared as a goal for the education system. If it is, then the language learning emphasis is put on the learning of the majority language (L2= language two, the second or foreign language) by the minority children’ (Skutnabb-Kangas 1988, p.15).

The reality for bilingual programmes in Australian Aboriginal schools has been a gradual withdrawal of government support for their continuation. Bilingual education programmes were discontinued in Aboriginal schools on the Pitjantjatjara lands in 1990, and a 1999 recommendation to withdraw financial support for twenty-one bilingual education programmes in seventeen Northern Territory Aboriginal schools is
currently being enacted by the NTDE. In both these situations the aim of education service providers has been to replace bilingual education programmes with ESL programmes. There is no place within ESL approaches for the acquisition of literacy skills in Indigenous languages.

Indigenous representatives at local community, State and Federal levels are expected to represent the interests of Indigenous peoples, and to do this they rely on expert advice about education service delivery models and language planning issues. This puts Indigenous representatives in the difficult position of having to make education decisions based on conflicting expert advice, forcefully argued by a range of interest groups. This advice does not always accord with the perspectives argued by Indigenous community members. Tosi comments on the effects of this situation for the interests of minority group members in England: ‘Hopelessly, when the dilemma about bilingualism in education is discussed at the level of theory, rather than practice, there are equally convincing arguments, put forward by expert linguists, who support totally opposite solutions’ (Tosi 1988, p.94).

Tosi suggests that Antonio Gramsci, the Italian philosopher and historian, would say that ‘as long as this theoretical dilemma persists, and as long as the professionals are not in agreement about educational solutions, the system maintains the control of the ideological dispute and neutralizes its political opposition’ (Tosi 1988, p.95).

Tosi argues that this is certainly one way in which the hegemonic majority control of education in England succeeds in preserving the privileges of the monolingual majority. By constantly reviewing the arguments that explain why only the language competence available to the English majority is worthwhile educational knowledge, the system secures the consent of large sectors of society, including some people from the minority community and others from the circle of educationalists. The practice of ‘securing consent’ from large sectors of society for the position that bilingual education approaches have doubtful positive impact on the ultimate acquisition of English language skills by minority group members is a recognisable feature of the current bilingual education debate in Australia. This practice serves to mask the potential of bilingual education approaches to promote second language acquisition skills, and it also successfully negates consideration of issues related to Indigenous
language maintenance and Indigenous community control over education. Proponents of bilingual education in Australia have taken up the challenge to counteract the ‘English only’ argument by publicly identifying the positive educational and social impacts of bilingual approaches in minority education contexts.

The representation of bilingual education theory and nomination of the objectives for bilingual programmes varies according to whose interests are being represented in the associated discourses. When majority group interests are represented, then it is more likely that English language competency will be emphasised. Proponents of bilingual approaches within Indigenous education contexts tend to incorporate a broader range of educational knowledge as part of their justification for the maintenance of bilingual education programmes. The task of gauging the merit of these arguments is dependent upon an understanding of second language acquisition theory and upon a critical approach to determining stakeholder motivation. An understanding of the historical basis of language education for minority group language speakers and attendance to the evidence base for the positions argued by stakeholders are also important.

**Evolution of the bilingual education debates in Australia and the United States**

Cummins (1996) suggests that the merits or otherwise of bilingual education has preoccupied politicians, the media and occasionally the general public in the United States for almost thirty years. According to Cummins, some commentators have warned that bilingual education is not only ‘educationally ill-advised, it also threatens the political stability of the nation by fueling separatist tendencies, resulting ultimately in the destruction of the United States’. Hakuta (1986) notes that although the budget for bilingual education in the United States is relatively small (comprising less than 1% of the total federal education budget of 15.4 billion dollars in 1984), the bilingual education issue has received a disproportionate amount of public ‘horn-locking’ by politicians, educators and ordinary citizens. ‘The mismatch between the funding level
and amount of controversy generated is not surprising however, for at stake are issues that strike at the heart of American identity' (Hakuta 1986, p.206).

The bilingual education debate in Australia has not historically generated the same degree of public interest and expressions of hostility. It is only recently that 'ordinary citizens' have entered into the discourse about the relative merits of bilingual approaches with Indigenous students. O'Grady and Hall (1974), in a Commonwealth Government-commissioned report, 'Recommendations concerning Bilingual Education in the Northern Territory', speculated on reasons for the lack of public interest in bilingual education at the time bilingual programmes were being introduced in Northern Territory Aboriginal schools.

On a number of occasions in Darwin and elsewhere, we took the opportunity to solicit non-Aboriginal reactions to Bilingual Education. All too often, we were unable to generate a discussion with members of the public on Bilingual Education because of a strong negative reaction to Aboriginal people per se. It seems to us that attitudes towards, or ignorance of, Bilingual Education are largely a function of attitudes towards, or ignorance concerning, Aboriginal people themselves. (O'Grady & Hale, 1974, p.12)

O'Grady and Hale implied that the interest and support of non-Aboriginal Australians was important to the success of bilingual education programmes in the Northern Territory and suggested that a pro-active approach to countering prejudice toward Indigenous peoples was required. To this end, they recommended initiatives including the production of a feature length film depicting bilingual education programmes in operation and the dissemination of information on bilingual education through the news media. There is no evidence that either of these recommendations were acted upon.

Although the bilingual education discourse in Australia has at times been intense and controversial, participants have mainly included interested educators, linguists, academics, Indigenous peoples, politicians and education service providers. Gale speculates on reasons for the ongoing bilingual debate: 'Perhaps the reason the bilingual versus monolingual debate continues to rage both overseas and in Australia,
is because it is not just an education issue. It is also a political, social, economic and highly emotional issue" (Gale 1990, p.53).

Situated discourse participants as either ‘pro bilingual’ or ‘pro monolingual’ has interesting implications for the nature of the ongoing bilingual debate. Whether or not Gale is correct in her assertion that the debate is divided along these lines, it is possible that such a dichotomy effectively reduces the possibility of achieving a middle ground, where the educational objectives of bilingual proponents and ESL proponents can be simultaneously achieved. Consideration of complex issues associated with the second language acquisition process and the maintenance of minority group cultural and linguistic identity are potentially marginalised when the discourse is reduced to a ‘debate’ about the relative merits of monolingual or bilingual policy objectives.

A recent NTDE recommendation to withdraw support for existing bilingual education programmes in Aboriginal schools and to replace these with ESL programmes has sparked an unprecedented public debate that has gained momentum in Australia over the past two years. Journalists, State and Federal politicians, Indigenous representatives, educators and the general public have expressed their own interpretations of the issues in forums provided by the Northern Territory Parliament and Federal Parliament, academic journals, the radio and print media and the internet. The introduction of the internet as a vehicle for the promotion of stakeholder positions has impacted significantly on the nature of the current bilingual education debate in Australia. An effect has been the proliferation of a vast amount of information, immediate contact between discourse participants and rapid responses from stakeholders to the public statements made by others. For example, the internet was used to transmit a petition by opponents to the withdrawal of bilingual education programmes in Northern Territory schools. The petition, containing 6,000 signatures, was presented to the Northern Territory Minister for Education only one month after the announcement that government support for bilingual education programmes was to be withdrawn.

The issue of bilingual education has joined the ranks of other issues of significance to Indigenous peoples that have also captured the interest of mainstream Australia in
recent years. These issues include the process of national reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, Aboriginal deaths in custody, mandatory sentencing laws, the stolen generations, Indigenous land rights and human rights. By virtue of their inclusion within the mainstream media as ‘issues of public interest’, the general public are offered an opportunity to form and express opinions about the merits, or otherwise, of the arguments proposed by Indigenous peoples and other stakeholders. The implication for the bilingual education debate is that it is no longer bounded by educational issues but, instead, has been extended to incorporate a range of social and political issues that reflect different group interests. For example, the bilingual education issue in the Northern Territory has been incorporated in debates about cultural pluralism, the legitimacy of self-determination policies for Indigenous communities and the human rights of Indigenous peoples.

Cummins (1996) claims that the roots of the current ‘bilingual paranoia’ in the United States can be seen in the evolution of the policy debate during the past thirty years. Cummins identifies three distinct phases, which I will attempt to show are paralleled in the Australian situation but which have been framed by different events, official government policies, public opinion and different time periods. The theoretical bases of bilingual education approaches in Australian Indigenous education contexts have been substantially informed by bilingual education theories emanating from research conducted in the United States and Canada over the past thirty years. While this remains an important junction between the two discourses, it is clear that the political and ideological arguments proposed by proponents and detractors of bilingual education in these countries are differently based.

**PHASE ONE: (UNITED STATES—1967–74; AUSTRALIA—1940–72)**

Cummins (1996) suggests that bilingual education approaches were instituted in the United States in the late 1960s on the basis of what appeared to be a self-evident rationale, namely that ‘the best medium for teaching a child is his or her mother tongue’. Cummins points out that at this time there was relatively little hard evidence
to back up this rationale and yet many press commentators adopted a ‘wait and see’ approach. Although they didn’t particularly like the idea, they were willing to give it a chance to prove its potential for reducing educational inequities: ‘in general, this first phase of the modern bilingual education debate was marked by a tolerance for the educational potential of bilingual education and, although doubts were certainly raised, its rationale was not disputed in any sustained or systemic way’ (Cummins 1996, p. 36).

Similarly, the introduction of bilingual programmes in Indigenous education contexts in Australia was not opposed in any sustained way. Kim Beazley (Snr.), the Federal Labor Minister for Education (1972–75), in a recent letter to the editor of a national newspaper, reflected on reasons for Federal Government support for bilingual education in the Northern Territory in the early 1970s: ‘It was universal experience that if literacy were established in the mother tongue, the language of the heart, it was easier to switch to another language—for Australian Aborigines, English’ (Beazley 1998).

The potential within bilingual education approaches for transference of L1 literacy skills to the acquisition of English literacy skills appears to have been a key factor in Australian Government acceptance of the approach. At this stage the evidence base for this assumption was not well developed and the social implications of bilingual education had not been extensively considered.

The earliest Indigenous education interventions in Australia that promoted initial literacy in the mother tongue (also referred to as L1 or first language) can be traced to the activity of missionaries. Gale (1990) describes the ‘vernacular literacy’ approach of Lutheran missionaries who taught literacy skills using local Aboriginal languages in coastal areas of South Australia as early as 1838. These education initiatives also involved a substantial Christian education component. Jordan argues that missionary interest in the preservation of Indigenous languages in Canada, Norway and Australia was related to their Christianising agenda (a position supported by Gale 1990): ‘It was missionaries who brought literacy to the Indigenous people. Intent on saving souls, they studied the vernacular in order to translate the bible’ (Jordan 1988, p. 190).

Edwards (1969), in an article entitled ‘Experience in the use of the vernacular as
an introductory medium of instruction’, describes how the Presbyterian church established a school at Ernabella, a community of Pitjantjatjara language speakers located in the north of South Australia in 1940. The missionaries achieved significant success in terms of Pitjantjatjara literacy acquisition. The education approach adopted by the missionaries was tacitly supported by a State Government that maintained a ‘segregationist’ approach to ‘tribal’ Aboriginal peoples. It was generally accepted that Aboriginal peoples in isolated communities were destined to live ‘semi-tribal’ lives and that the approach to education in mission schools, which privileged first languages as the initial medium of instruction, would have benign social consequences.

According to Edwards, the period prior to 1961 in the north of South Australia was characterised by education approaches for Aboriginal students which emphasised the importance of facilitating ‘slow progress based on solid foundations rather than on rapid assimilation . . . The policy in education was to provide experiences which would help to make this life more satisfying and to broaden the range of experiences in preparation for future changes’ (Edwards 1969, p.280).

Official support for the ‘vernacular literacy’ approach adopted by the Presbyterian missionaries waned as Federal Government assimilationist policies gained favour. Hasluck (1953), Federal Minister for the Interior (with responsibility for Aboriginal affairs), described the policy of assimilation in this way: ‘Assimilation means, in practical terms, that, in the course of time, it is expected that all persons of Aboriginal blood or mixed blood in Australia will live like white Australians do’ (Hasluck 1953, cited in Jordan 1988, p.198).

Edwards (1998) reports that the language education approach adopted in South Australian Presbyterian mission schools was the object of ongoing criticism from educators and other government officials who saw the policy as ‘inimical to progress toward assimilation. The effectiveness of the programmes were limited because the rhetoric of policy was not matched by the provision of adequate resources to ensure its success’ (Edwards 1998).

To indicate the extent of Federal Government commitment to assimilation during this period, Edwards (1969, p.278) points out that Commonwealth funding was not
made available to mission schools in the Northern Territory in the period leading up to 1964 unless the medium of instruction was English.

According to Jordan, in the mid 1960s, the newly elected Labor Government in South Australia repudiated official policies of assimilation and, instead, actively promoted land rights laws for Aboriginal peoples and adopted anti-discrimination laws. ‘For the first time there was a move away from policies aimed at containment of the Aboriginal people toward policies requiring consultation and negotiation’ (Jordan 1988, p.198).

Assimilation was to give way to an official policy of ‘integration’ in South Australia. The South Australian Minister for Aboriginal Affairs described the aim of ‘integration’ policies as: ‘the right of the Aboriginal people to live in our community on fully equal terms but retaining, if they so desire, a separate and identifiable Aboriginal heritage and culture’ (King 1971, cited in Jordan 1988, p.199).

King also argued that any government policy direction must be consistent with the restoration to the Aboriginal peoples of their self-respect, which had declined as a result of negative contact experiences with ‘white man’: ‘There is no better means of restoring the self respect of any depressed group than to encourage an authentic sense of pride in that group’s heritage and culture’ (King 1971, cited in Stone 1974. p.232).

After 1961, increased emphasis on the development of English literacy skills by Aboriginal students in the Presbyterian mission schools was in response to expansion of mission activity into the sheep, cattle and handicraft industries. Although the aims of mission schooling still incorporated an emphasis on the importance of maintaining Aboriginal pride in culture and heritage and initial literacy acquisition in the student’s first language, there was a general acceptance that increased employment opportunities required greater proficiency in English language skills. A new school was opened at Fregon community in 1961, and an additional three non-Aboriginal teachers were employed. A language education model was adopted which included instruction in the L1 for the first three years of schooling that was accompanied by an oral English programme. In the senior school, English reading and writing were introduced, and by the sixth year, all instruction was in English (Edwards 1969). This approach conformed to a ‘transfer’ model of bilingual education.
Jordan (1988) suggests that it was the newly defined policy of ‘integration’ in South Australia, which made it possible for Aboriginal peoples to locate themselves in the white world within a positive Aboriginal identity for the first time. She also suggests that unlike Canada and Norway, where government action in response to aboriginal demands was the way in which change was brought about for indigenous people, the situation for Indigenous peoples in South Australia changed as a result of ‘a new social awareness on the part of legislators’. It was within this political and policy climate that the bilingual education programmes, initiated by missionaries in South Australian Aboriginal schools, gained official government sanction. This situation was not reflected in other States of Australia during the same period, when the establishment of residential schools and the active discouragement of Indigenous languages were commonplace. The rationale for these practices was located in the ‘civilising’ mandate adopted by some missionaries who viewed Indigenous languages as a threat to the adoption of Christian beliefs and Christian ways of living and by a Federal Government commitment to the process of assimilation.

Jordan (1988) describes how a range of policies which had been developed in South Australia concerning Aboriginal affairs became official Labor party policy after the election of a new Federal Labor Government in 1973. The integrationist policies developed by the South Australian Labor Government during the 1960s were now conceptualised in Federal Government policy terms as ‘self-determination’. Federal Labor Government policies maintained an emphasis on anti-discrimination and the promotion of the rights of Aboriginal peoples with regard to social services, land rights and health. The subsequent Liberal/ Country Party Coalition Government which followed in 1975, modified the self-determination policy of the previous government to reduce official government commitment to the politicisation of Aboriginal groups. Jordan (1988) claims that there was, however, ongoing official government recognition of the differences in the life styles between groups of Aboriginal peoples, and that during this period Aboriginal peoples did take up the challenge of self-determination to ‘build a new, positive world of meaning for themselves’ (Jordan 1988, p.200). This increase in Aboriginal participation extended to active involvement in a range of service provision spheres through the development of independent
Aboriginal schools, health services and legal services. Jordan, however, points to a fundamental problem associated with self-determination policies as these relate to the projected advantages for minority group members: 'Self-determination, even when it appears real, rests on a fragile base when communities remain dependent on funding from the dominant group, whether for preparing documentation for legal battles, appointing consultants for curriculum development, or hiring teachers' (Jordan 1988, p.213).

Bilingual education approaches in Australian Aboriginal schools evolved substantially during the policy period officially described as 'integration' and later as 'self-determination'. While government support for Aboriginal self-determination provided opportunities for Aboriginal peoples to assert a degree of control over decisions relating to service delivery structures in the education, health and the law fields, some commentators suggest that inadequate resourcing made it difficult to achieve projected outcomes. Edwards (1998) and Harris (1993b), for example, argue that the success of bilingual education programmes in South Australian Aboriginal schools was frustrated by a lack of government commitment to adequate resourcing.

It was during the early period after the election of the Federal Labor Government in 1973 that bilingual education programmes were introduced into Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory. The linkage between the tolerance contained within integrationist policies and subsequent self-determination policies for expressions of 'cultural difference' by Indigenous peoples and the proliferation of bilingual education programmes is clear. But what is not clear is the extent to which governments and mainstream community members understood the extent to which bilingual education would act as a catalyst for a resurgence of Indigenous community solidarity and increased political commitment to increasing the level of Indigenous community control over the education process.
PHASE TWO: (UNITED STATES—1970–86; AUSTRALIA—1972–98)

The second phase of the bilingual education debates in both the United States and Australia were characterised by identification of contested issues between detractors and proponents of bilingual education approaches. 'The battle lines were drawn' in both these situations, but the issues and the nature of the contested issues varied.

Cummins (1996) suggests that the bilingual education debate became considerably more volatile in the United States after a 1974 United States Supreme Court judgement in the *Lau v. Nichols* case ruled that schools had a legal responsibility to take effective measures to overcome the educational disadvantages resulting from a 'home-school language mismatch'. The Office of Civil Rights interpreted the Supreme Court's decision as effectively mandating transitional bilingual education unless a school district could provide another approach that would be equally or more effective. Cummins claims that this interpretation sparked outrage among media commentators and educators who were totally unprepared to offer any form of bilingual instruction.

Unlike the situation in the United States, the introduction of bilingual education programmes in some Northern Territory Government schools and in a small number of Independent Aboriginal schools during the 1970s was not met by sustained public opposition. Interested stakeholders were restricted to those who had a direct involvement in Indigenous education, and there was no significant event that galvanised the positioning of stakeholders or precipitated significant mainstream community interest in the bilingual education issue.

Rationale for the institution of bilingual education approaches with Indigenous Australian students during this period varied. Independent schools that introduced bilingual education programmes (such as the Strelley Community School in Western Australia and Yipirinya School in the Northern Territory) claimed a strong community mandate for the preservation of local languages and cultures. These schools also recognised the potential within bilingual programmes for the acquisition of English
literacy skills. Government-supported bilingual education interventions in the Northern Territory were underpinned by an official commitment to the use of Indigenous languages as a vehicle for the attainment of English literacy skills. Australian Government education service providers were influenced during this period by research evidence emerging from the United States and Canada which showed that ‘transfer’ models of bilingual education had the potential for producing acceptable English literacy outcomes.

During the late 1980s, there was a decline in official government support for bilingual education programmes in South Australian Aboriginal schools. In 1990 the programmes were withdrawn and replaced by an ‘English only’ model of education in all Aboriginal schools on the Pitjantjatjara homelands. The decision to withdraw bilingual programmes did not generate significant public comment, but some educators, linguists and Indigenous community members privately expressed concerns about the social and educational consequences. The assertion that the decision was based on Aboriginal community concerns about inadequate English literacy outcomes within bilingual programmes seems to have quelled an extended public discussion of the issues. Persistent concerns (based on anecdotal evidence), however, have been raised over the past ten years. Some of these issues include:

- The nature of the consultation process with Aboriginal peoples preceding the decision to withdraw the bilingual programmes;
- Insufficient opportunities for Aboriginal community consideration of the consequences of instituting an ‘English only’ model of school education (including the effects on the status and viability of the two main local languages and the role of Aboriginal educators in schools);
- The lack of evidence to substantiate the position of the South Australian Department of Education that there was widespread Aboriginal community dissatisfaction with the bilingual programmes; and
- The lack of evidence to support the contention that an ‘English only’ model of education would deliver superior English literacy outcomes.
Harris (1993b) questions the extent of government commitment to bilingual education programmes in South Australian Aboriginal schools and claims that generous Commonwealth Government funding was received by Aboriginal schools in the north of South Australia for the first time in 1985. According to Harris, the money was used to establish ‘respectable’ publishing facilities at Ernabella community and the appointment of a full-time teacher–linguist. Given the relatively short time between the institution of adequate resourcing for bilingual programmes in this region and the termination of bilingual programmes in 1990, Harris poses the question: ‘Did bilingual education fail in South Australia or never really had a chance?’ Harris argues that ‘according to my definition of what can reasonably be called a well resourced bilingual program, South Australia never had one in its Pitjantjatjara lands, ever’ (Harris 1993b, p.13).

Official South Australian Government reasons for withdrawal of support for bilingual programmes related to concerns about the English literacy outcomes being achieved by students and from a reported lack of Aboriginal community support for the programmes. The South Australian Department of Education did not, however, engage in any public discussion about the research evidence on which these assertions were based. Prior to the withdrawal of bilingual education programmes, there were indications of mounting opposition from within some sections of the South Australian Department of Education. A Tri-State Project Report (1989) (South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory) Report on Literacy Production Centres, Bilingual Education, describes negative Aboriginal community and education professional sentiment toward bilingual education in these terms:

The Aboriginal people of the Tri-State area have overwhelmingly indicated that the acquisition of much higher English Literacy levels for their children (and themselves) is the greatest current educational concern . . . Furthermore this is a concern that has been consistently expressed over many years and is a matter of documented record . . . Teachers have also expressed concern over the level of English proficiency being attained by their students. Similarly, they too have mixed reactions on the effectiveness of this bilingual approach, with no reliable data to support their argument. (Tri-State Project Report 1989)
The Tri-State Report (1989) refers to two other reports, *The Anangu Schools Assessment programme Report* (1987) and the *Anangu Pitjantjatjara Education Subcommittee Report* (1989) which it suggests also represent negative Aboriginal community attitudes to bilingual education in South Australia at this time. In a brochure produced by the Teacher–Linguist group of the Anangu Schools (*Bilingual education. Better in theory and better in practice* 1989), an attempt was made by a group of teachers and linguists, who were supportive of bilingual education programmes, to provide an alternative point of view. The authors aimed to engage Aboriginal community members and other educators in a discussion of the issues associated with second language acquisition through a series of questions and answers which included:

We can teach our children our own language and culture. Shouldn’t the school get on with teaching English?

The best way to teach children how to read and write well in English is to make sure that they have these skills in their own language first. This is good teaching practice—to move from the known to the unknown.

Doesn’t bilingual education make it harder for Anangu children, by delaying their need to learn English?

Children don’t have to put aside their own language to learn English. Using the child’s first language in the school actually helps in learning English, because the kind of mental skills involved are better developed in a familiar language and then transferred to the new language. (*Bilingual Education* 1989)

In accounting for the perception that current bilingual programmes were delivering unsatisfactory English literacy outcomes, the authors of the brochure pointed to the reasons as being ‘the irregular attendance of many students, insufficient resources, the high turnover of teachers, and also the relative lack of successful role-models for the children and poorly developed secondary education provision’. The authors also argued that ‘[b]ilingual students around the world are typically gradual starters, but fast finishers. At present, Anangu students simply don’t have the opportunity to finish fast’ (*Bilingual Education* 1990).
The publication of the brochure was an attempt by the authors to influence the bilingual education discussion taking place at the local community level. By advancing an argument based on the ‘transfer theory’ of bilingual education and by pointing to structural shortcomings within currently operating bilingual programmes, they aimed to counter the argument that it was bilingual education approaches which were to blame for poor English literacy outcomes.

Folds (1989) presents an alternative explanation for the demise of bilingual education programmes in South Australian Aboriginal schools. He argues that lack of Aboriginal community support for bilingual programmes was related to dissatisfaction with the way in which the Pitjantjatjara language was being appropriated and misrepresented by non-Aboriginal educators for education purposes. He also suggests that structural problems related to the way in which the L1 and L2 instruction ratios were being implemented in schools. He argues that the high incidence of ‘code switching’ among non-Aboriginal teachers seriously compromised the capacity of students to transfer L1 literacy skills to the task of English literacy acquisition. Folds also suggests that Aboriginal community confidence in their own ability to transmit language and cultural knowledge outside the realms of educational institutions was a factor in their support for the adoption of an ‘English only’ model of education in schools. This argument relates to the proposition that ‘domain separation’, where language and cultural knowledge is transmitted in socially determined and separate contexts, is an important factor in ensuring traditional language and cultural maintenance. In referring to his own research, Folds states the following:

Research in central Australian Pitjantjatjara communities found that the Bilingual programs run in the schools paid little or no regard to the socio-linguistic domains associated with Aboriginal and ‘whitefella’ business in the communities... Alternative bilingual programs that may be more appropriate to the Pitjantjatjara communities could be based on a co-operative decision making or domain specific model. (Folds 1989, p.33)

Previously divided along ‘anti-bilingual’ and ‘pro-bilingual’ lines, the bilingual education debate now included internal disagreement between bilingual education proponents. Educators disagreed about the relative merits of ‘domain separation’ as a
viable organisational approach within Aboriginal education programmes and the importance of Aboriginal community control over the education process. Neither of these propositions actively mitigated against the incorporation of bilingual approaches with Aboriginal students. The focus of the bilingual education debate swung away from consideration of the relative merits of bilingual education approaches to a broader consideration of issues associated with Aboriginal community control over the education process.

During the 1990s, support grew for the development of educational models which took into account 'cultural difference', to the extent that government and community sanctioned approaches to education which had a 'bicultural' foundation in Australian Indigenous communities flourished. An important vehicle for official incorporation of the philosophy of 'biculturalism' within Aboriginal education interventions was the adoption of the 'two way' schooling model. In 1990, Stephen Harris, a long time supporter of bilingual education, introduced the concept of 'two way' or 'both ways' schooling. In his book *Two Way Aboriginal Schooling, Education and cultural survival*, Harris outlines the essential criteria for 'two way' schooling:

1. It is initiated by Aboriginal peoples with them 'owning' the idea.

2. It will be controlled by Aboriginal peoples, esp. local Aboriginal peoples.

3. The reproduction of Aboriginal culture, maintenance of Aboriginal languages (inside and outside the school) and an insistence on doing things in Aboriginal ways will be with the conscious, planned and deliberate purpose of changing the school. This will be true regardless of the model used and regardless of whether or not Aboriginal languages (either an old Aboriginal language or Kriol or Aboriginal English) play a central role in the school.

(Harris 1990. p.5)

Harris (1993b, p.14) noted that where 'both ways' schooling exists in various forms in the Northern Territory, it has been an evolution from bilingual schooling. Harris points
out that the involvement of Aboriginal staff working with community members in the complex process of curriculum development is a crucial element of ‘both way’ schooling. Bilingual schools have historically fostered the training of Aboriginal staff members and thus provided a foundation for the development of ‘both way’ schooling. Harris also makes an important connection between the role of Aboriginal languages in schools and ‘two way’ or ‘both ways’ schooling by pointing out that ‘(apart from the Lutheran approach to outstation schooling at Hermannsburg, now ended) no one has yet tried to devise an approach to two way schooling which does not have work in Aboriginal languages in both oral and written forms, taking a high profile in the school program’ (Harris 1993b, p.14).

Although ‘English only’ programmes still constitute the official approach within Aboriginal schools in South Australia, the issue of Indigenous language use in schools has not been resolved. Reported dissatisfaction with the outcomes of these programmes is of interest now when the Northern Territory Government is preparing to go down the same ‘English only’ road. Recent anecdotal evidence suggests that there is unease among older Aboriginal community members about the status and usage patterns of the two main local languages among the younger generation. The extent to which this situation is linked to the language policy within schools remains an issue of contention. In arguing against the recent Northern Territory Government decision to withdraw existing bilingual education programmes, Hester (a linguist at the University of Adelaide), in a letter to the editor of a national newspaper, made reference to the issue of bilingual education in South Australian Aboriginal schools:

Experience in South Australia has shown that the replacement of the Bilingual Program in the Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara lands by an English-only program has not resulted in improved educational outcomes... There is a growing dissatisfaction with the English-only program and increasingly calls are heard for the return of bilingual education’ (Hester 1998).

There has been no public disclosure of the academic outcomes being achieved by Aboriginal students in currently operating ‘English only’ programmes in Pitjantjatjara schools. The extent of Aboriginal community dissatisfaction with these programmes
also remains unclear. There is evidence, however, of a divide between educators who either support bilingual education or ‘English only’ models of education. Rose claims that there is an ongoing struggle for control of bilingual education and language maintenance programs at a national level:

not by Aboriginal people, but by the groups of linguists who have made Aboriginal languages their field of study, and the industry of non-Aboriginal educators which has grown up around bilingual education since the mid-seventies. The continuing insistence by non-Aboriginal linguists and teachers that ‘Children should learn to read and write in their own language before learning in English’, after its proven failure to deliver success, can only be viewed with suspicion, since its vocal, highly organised advocates are themselves beneficiaries of resources devoted to such programs, in terms of income, career security and academic prestige. (Rose 1992, p.53)

Rose proposes that support for Indigenous bilingual education programmes in Australia is fuelled by the vested interests of non-Aboriginal educational professionals. By singling out non-Indigenous educators in this way, Rose added a significantly new and personal dimension to the bilingual education debate. Harris (1993b) took issue with Rose’s statement by defending non-Indigenous educators:

That may be true for a few, but in general I believe these people have been motivated by deep ideological convictions and a sense of justice, and that on many occasions the work has had so many bureaucratic and other frustrations that only fools would stay in the ‘industry’ for long. (Harris 1993b, p.14)

The issue of vested educator interests in the maintenance of bilingual programmes is not specific to the Australian situation. Hakuta (1986) reports that in New Haven, Connecticut, the local newspaper was unsympathetic to bilingual education in the local school area, and it published editorials claiming that children in those programs did not learn English and that ‘the principal beneficiaries of bilingual education were its teachers and administrators’.

During the 1990s the bilingual education debate also centred around alternative interpretations of bilingual education theory and the implications of these
interpretations for policy development in the Indigenous education field. Rose (1992) speculates on the reasons for apparent contradictions between the policy positions adopted by Commonwealth agencies in relation to the issue of language education for Indigenous students. He points to what he claims are conflicting objectives between two major education reports and uses this as evidence of a developing ‘policy divide’. Rose points out that the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Report (1992) *Report of the Inquiry into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Language Maintenance*. *Language and Culture: A Matter of Survival* attributes the loss of traditional Indigenous languages to the practice of teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children using English as the medium of instruction: ‘Schools have played a big part in the loss of language in the past. This must change so schools teach children in their own language. Children must learn to read and write in their own language before learning in English’ (House of Representatives 1992, cited in Rose 1992, p.52).

Rose contrasts this with the following major objectives for the early years of schooling from The Schools Council, National Board of Employment, Education and Training Report (NBEET) (1992):

— that by the end of year 5, they should be competent in English literacy, at least to the level of their non-Indigenous peers and,

— that increasing proportions of students should be able to develop to advanced level of competence in English literacy to improve chances of success in higher education. (The Schools Council, NBEET 1992, cited in Rose 1992, p.52)

Rose claims that the objectives of first language maintenance and second language acquisition are incompatible.

If Aboriginal children spend the first years of schooling learning to ‘read and write in their own language before learning English’, it is a fact that they will not only ‘not be competent in English literacy, at least to the level of their non-Indigenous peers’ but they will be years behind their non-indigenous peers in English literacy and educational achievement. (Rose 1992, p.52)
According to Rose 'this has been the experience of every Aboriginal community with a vernacular literacy program in early childhood education but particularly of the Pitjantjatjara people of central Australia'. Without reference to research data which supports this position, Rose also suggests that after a ten year struggle to gain control over the curriculum in their schools, Aboriginal peoples in South Australia have rejected the vernacular literacy model of bilingual education. The basis of Rose's argument is that the objectives of The Schools Council, NBEET Report (1992) can only be achieved if vernacular literacy bilingual education models are rejected in favour of an 'English only' model.

Harris (1993b) refutes Rosc's assertion that the two reports contain contradictory objectives and argues that the objectives of improved English language proficiency and initial instruction in the L1 can, in fact, both be accommodated through a bilingual education approach. The basis of his argument is that English literacy proficiency can most efficiently be achieved through an approach in which students gain initial literacy in their first language. Harris also refutes the suggestion that low English literacy attainment levels in bilingual programmes in South Australia can be related to inherent shortcomings of bilingual education theory. Instead, he points to inadequate government resourcing as a key factor in the reported low English literacy attainment levels being achieved by participating Indigenous students.

At the same time as stakeholders were continuing to disagree about the educational merits associated with withdrawing bilingual education programmes from South Australian Aboriginal schools, there was increasing unease about the future of bilingual education programmes in the Northern Territory. As far back as 1990, Devlin reported that Northern Territory Aboriginal community members were expressing concern that the programmes would be discontinued. A Northern Territory Public Accounts Committee (PAC) Report (1996) foreshadowed the decision to withdraw funding for the twenty-one bilingual education programmes operating in Northern Territory Aboriginal schools in 1998. Within the context of investigations into fiscal restructuring within the NTDE, bilingual education programmes were targeted for special consideration. In relation to future directions for bilingual programmes, Recommendation 26 of the PAC (1996) report stated that 'future
appraisals in bilingual schools set goals for increased English literacy and numeracy levels and that an independent review be established to assess the role of bilingual education' (PAC, 1996).

The Minority Report within the official PAC Report (1996) records a dissenting position in response to what it considered a veiled attack on bilingual education. Opposition members Dee and Bailey suggest that the call for further reports into bilingual education served only to misdirect attention away from the important issue of Aboriginal community commitment to whatever programs are adopted in Aboriginal schools. The Minority Report stated that:

The fact is that neither ESL or Bilingual school systems have delivered over any period results which can be described as anything but disgraceful . . . The only hope for the future is in programs which enjoy the support of and have the commitment from the community. The Education department will only further damage its meager stock of credibility if it is to engage in a battle over that part of the system which does enjoy high levels of support within the community.

(PAC 1996, p.102)

To support the call for evaluation of currently operating bilingual programmes in the Northern Territory, the PAC Report noted that the Northern Territory Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) Advisory Committee advised officers of the PAC that ‘bilingual education must take second place to teaching English’ (PAC 1996, p.87)

The veracity of this ‘advice’ was subsequently questioned, but the names of the informants and the context in which the ‘advice’ was reported to members of the PAC were not disclosed.

Graham (1999) suggests that evidence of dwindling support for the maintenance of bilingual education programmes in Northern Territory Aboriginal schools was evidenced by a significant reduction in bilingual education resources in the period leading up to their eventual withdrawal. She points out that there were ‘massive cut backs’ in all staffing areas in the NTDE in the mid 1980s, and she suggests that the focus for advisers was increasingly on the core subject areas. Graham describes the situation at the time: ‘As I moved around the territory it became obvious that the in-
servicing of the skills and knowledge required to develop and maintain teaching teams, which were the lifeblood of bilingual schools (and really of all Aboriginal schools), was no longer any particular person's responsibility' (Graham 1999, p.65).

The narrowing of education focus to the core subject areas within the English language domain is indicative of a government policy position which did not frame bilingual education programmes as a priority area. The extent to which reduced NTDE resource commitment to bilingual education programmes was a factor in the reported decline in English literacy outcomes by Aboriginal students, remains a matter of speculation.

PHASE THREE: (UNITED STATES—1987 ONWARDS; AUSTRALIA—1998 ONWARDS)

The discontinuation of bilingual education programmes in Northern Territory Aboriginal schools has been the catalyst for a controversial public discourse about the merits of bilingual education in Australia. Many of the issues contested during phase two of the bilingual debate are now being resurrected in the third phase, but the debate is now also inclusive of a broader range of social and political issues. These issues are being publicly identified and contested in a range of forums which extend beyond Indigenous education contexts. Similarly, the parameters of the bilingual education debate in the United States are being extended in the third phase of the debate. According to Cummins, 'in this phase the relatively narrow concern with bilingual education has joined forces with a broader set of concerns in relation to the more general infiltration of cultural diversity into American institutions' (1996, p.41).

Cummins (1996) suggests that during the 1980s and 1990s in the United States, much of the opposition to bilingual education was coordinated by the U.S. English organisation. This organisation initiated referenda in more than twenty States to make English the official language in the United States. He claims that during this period a number of neo-conservative academics also warned about the dangers cultural diversity posed to the American way of life. The writing of E.D Hirsch is used to illustrate this point: 'In fact, multilingualism enormously increases cultural

Unlike the United States situation, it is not possible to identify a particular organisation that has openly canvassed support for the discontinuation of bilingual education in Australia, and neo-conservative arguments about the dangers of cultural diversity have not impacted significantly on the debate. In Australia, critics of Indigenous bilingual education approaches include academics, educators, parents and government institutional representatives. In the face of such wide ranging differences of opinion, both between and within groups of stakeholders, especially as this relates to expert educational and research evidence, it seems important to look more closely at the ideological and political differences which underlie the positions they adopt.

In December 1998, an NTDE Review (Education Review—Making Schools Our Focus) recommended that specific-purpose funding for twenty-one bilingual education programmes in seventeen Aboriginal schools be phased out. It was proposed that existing bilingual programmes be replaced by ESL programmes. The recommendation prompted immediate negative responses from a wide range of Indigenous peoples, politicians, educators and academics. These responses were met with claim and counter-claim about the legitimacy of bilingual education approaches from a range of Indigenous education stakeholders. National interest in the issue has increased as these arguments have been taken up in the mainstream media. The public discussions have extended to issues of Indigenous self-determination, Indigenous linguistic and cultural maintenance, Indigenous language rights and the academic attainment levels of Indigenous students.

Cummins (1996) suggests that the third phase of the bilingual education debate in the United States is characterised by 'escalating academic and media rhetoric'. A similar situation is developing in Australia where there has been a significant increase in media references to bilingual and ESL programmes in Aboriginal schools and a proliferation of articles in academic journals. An example of the extent to which the issues associated with bilingual education in Northern Territory Aboriginal schools have infiltrated the mainstream media is contained within a recent article in a national newspaper. Frank Devine (2000, p.15) argued that the English literacy standards of
Indigenous students in the Northern Territory were so poor that immediate action was required. Devine was supportive of recommendations to adopt ‘English only’ approaches as a primary way of redressing this situation. Devine’s ‘alert to the nation’ about the extent of the ‘indigenous illiteracy problem’ provided an opportunity for him to endorse the recommendations of a recent review into Indigenous education in the Northern Territory *Learning Lessons: An Independent Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory* (Collins 1999) and to support the ‘English only’ position of the Northern Territory Minister for Education. As a means of disclosing his motivation, Devine poses the following question:

Why should I—or you—get het up about education for Aborigines in the Northern Territory?

The Collins review is revolutionary and confrontational, and its challenge is to the nation . . . We would benefit from an annual report to the nation by the Prime Minister on the progress of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory. When we are on top of its vast problems, we may be ready for reconciliation. (Devine 2000, p.15)

This attempt by Devine to align the problem of Indigenous ‘illiteracy’ with the ‘national interest’ and to link its successful resolution to the adoption of ‘English only’ education approaches has interesting implications for the nature of the bilingual debate. By advancing the ‘English only’ option as a primary way of improving the literacy levels of Indigenous peoples, he is effectively promoting anti-bilingual sentiment. His proposition that the issue warrants an ‘annual report to the nation by the Prime Minister’ is an attempt to engage the interest of the wider Australian public.

Even though bilingual education supporters point to the central importance of the English literacy component within bilingual programmes, the representation of ‘English only’ approaches and bilingual approaches as being in competition for limited resources still persists. Media commentators and some mainstream education representatives suggest that unsatisfactorily low Indigenous literacy levels would be improved if Indigenous students had access to ‘English only’ programmes.
The intensity of stakeholder positioning within the current bilingual education debate is reflected in the following public statements made by supporters of bilingual education in the Northern Territory. These statements were made after the announcement that official government support for bilingual education programmes in Northern Territory Aboriginal schools would be withdrawn:

The decision to scrap bilingual education programs represents a return to White Australia. It predates even the 1950s Frankenstein-type dream of assimilation for Indigenous Australians and migrants. (Nicholls 1999, p.13)

‘We won’t let you cut off our tongues. Our language is our life.’

(A banner displayed at Yirrkala Aboriginal School after the announcement that bilingual education programmes were to be withdrawn from Northern Territory Aboriginal schools.) (Ceresa 1998a, p.11)

It appears that, in terms of linguistic genocide, on the home front the N.T. Government, in collusion with the Howard Government, is quite happily presiding over the ‘final solution’. (Nicholls 1999, p.13.)

The Indigenous peoples of the Northern Territory have the right to choose Bilingual education as the only acceptable defined educational process of maintaining cultural well being. (IECNT 1999)
In a parliamentary statement, Peter Adamson, a former Northern Territory Minister for Education, commented directly on the nature of the public discourse surrounding the withdrawal of official support for bilingual education programmes in Northern Territory Aboriginal schools.

It's a decision which has generated a great deal of confusion, rumour mongering and misconceptions. We have seen communities, groups and individuals who have supported this decision being subjected to threats and outright intimidation. It says a lot for how difficult it is to have an informed debate on an issue like this when one school community, which personally lobbied me last year to assist them in dropping their bilingual programs, is now criticizing my decision to do so. The very same groups that claim they are fighting for tolerance are themselves intolerant to any opinion that differs from their own. (Adamson 1999)

A local Northern Territory newspaper subsequently ran a story entitled, Adamson's foot is stuck in his mouth (Alice Springs News 1999, p.3), in which the editor challenged Adamson's allegations of 'threats' and 'intimidation' in relation to the bilingual education issue. The Minister apparently claimed that the former chairperson of the peak Indigenous education advisory group in the Northern Territory, the Indigenous Education Council Northern Territory (IECNT), had authorised a press release that supported the government decision to withdraw bilingual education programmes in Northern Territory schools but was subsequently intimidated into retracting it. The editor, however, suggested that the Minister could not substantiate this allegation because the former chairperson could not be contacted to either confirm or deny it. Instead, the editor cites the IECNT charter on bilingual language (to which the former chairperson was a signatory) to demonstrate the extent of Indigenous community support: 'It is a basic human right for Indigenous groups to choose their first language as the medium in teaching, particularly where that first language is the first language in that community' (IECNT 1999, cited in Alice Springs News 1999, p.3).
The following section identifies some publicly debated issues that have emerged during phase three of the bilingual education debate in Australia. The issues remain substantially informed by current events surrounding the future of bilingual education programmes in the Northern Territory.

**ESL programmes or bilingual programmes (A false choice?)**

Detractors of bilingual education argue that it is necessary to make a choice between bilingual education and inadequate English literacy proficiency, on the one hand, and ESL approaches and successful acquisition of English literacy skills, on the other. Bilingual education proponents argue that this is a misrepresentation and question the evidence base for such an assertion. Nicholls describes this commonly represented dichotomy as a ‘myth’ and argues that:

Bilingual education is premised on the idea that it is imperative that Aboriginal kids, like all other Australian children, acquire fluency in English. English is the language of power, business, and upward mobility in this country. However, Bilingual Education programs encapsulate an implicit acknowledgement that acquisition of literacy in one’s second or third language doesn’t need to be at the expense of one’s first language, a finding backed by a mountain of research . . .

English-as-a-second language programs are therefore a critically important component of any bilingual program in Aboriginal Australia.

(Nicholls 1999a, p.78)

The strength of the pro-bilingual argument, however, rests on research evidence that is substantially based on experiences in other countries, and those who oppose bilingual education argue that the Australian-based evidence is inconclusive. Bilingual education proponents suggest that the research evidence to support ESL approaches with Indigenous Australian students is not conclusive either, and yet the ESL argument seems persuasive when concern about English literacy levels is generated. A commonly represented Aboriginal point of view, based on concerns related to low
English literacy outcomes, is argued by Yami Lester, a former Aboriginal chairperson of the Anangu Pitjantjahara Education Committee in South Australia. In the following extract he explains his personal decision to support the replacement of bilingual education programmes in Pitjantjahara schools in South Australia with a model of 'two way' schooling which incorporated an 'English only' approach:

I'm just worried about Anangu learning English because reading is so important. If they read and write and speak the English they can work in offices, they can go to college or University. They can learn to be accountants, mechanics, electricians, plumbers, builders. If we don't get a good education for them, we're always going to have to depend on white advisers in the communities. (Lester 1993, p.171)

The linkage between poor English literacy outcomes and bilingual education approaches remains a cornerstone of the publicly argued positioning of anti-bilingual stakeholders. Throughout the bilingual education debate in Australia there has been a general acceptance by bilingual education proponents that there is room for improvement in English literacy outcomes within bilingual programmes. These stakeholders, however, also make regular reference to the inadequacy of funding levels to adequately support the English literacy component of bilingual programmes in Aboriginal schools.

Bilingual supporters in the Northern Territory counter the concerns of bilingual education critics by pointing to the fact that the English literacy outcomes in non-bilingual Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory are not demonstrably better than those recorded in schools which operate bilingual programmes. In a discussion of comparative assessment results between bilingual and non-bilingual schools (obtained during the NTDE accreditation process during the 1980s) Devlin made the following observation: 'What the accreditation team found when they analyzed the test results at Yirrkala Community School was that bilingually educated year 5 pupils had performed as well on the English and Maths tests as pupils in the non-bilingual schools and in some cases they had performed better' (1995, p.31).

Arbitrating on the relative effectiveness of bilingual and non-bilingual programmes in Northern Territory schools in terms of English literacy and numeracy...
outcomes is complicated by a lack of comparative longitudinal research data and a lack of conformity in previously adopted assessment regimes. Official justification for the replacement of bilingual programmes with ESL programmes rests on the superior capacity of ESL approaches to produce acceptable English literacy and numeracy outcomes by Indigenous students, and yet the evidence base for this assertion is not strong. Proponents of bilingual education approaches cite isolated examples of English literacy outcomes by Indigenous Australian students which compare favourably with cohorts in ‘English only’ programmes. In addition, bilingual education proponents refer to successful bilingual programmes involving Indigenous students in other countries and to the numerous non-academic advantages to Indigenous peoples of bilingual programmes. A central difference between the positioning of pro English-only and pro bilingual education stakeholders is that the former rely on the denigration of bilingual approaches as a means of gaining mainstream support, whereas the latter emphasise the importance of combining the achievement of English literacy outcomes with other objectives such as Indigenous language maintenance and Indigenous community involvement in the delivery of education.

Assessment

A common justification for the withdrawal of government support for bilingual education programmes in Northern Territory Aboriginal schools is based on reference to the poor English literacy attainment levels of students within these programmes. The Northern Territory Government decision to withdraw support for bilingual education programmes in Aboriginal schools was defended by the Minister for Education, Mr Adamson, in these terms:

There is no evidence to show that children in these schools are performing better in English literacy than children in other schools which do not have the additional resources. In fact, on the contrary, children in schools with funded bilingual education are performing slightly worse in English Literacy and numeracy. (Adamson 1999)
Brian Devlin, an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at Northern Territory University, referred to his own research (Devlin 1995) to refute this argument. He claims that some bilingual schools which were monitored between 1979 and 1987 demonstrated better English literacy outcomes than reference group, non-bilingual schools. Devlin points to shortcomings in evaluation processes in the Northern Territory after 1987 which relied on a process of community-based appraisal in bilingual schools. Community-based appraisals (or moderated self-appraisals), according to Devlin, did not include student-based performance data, making it difficult to judge whether student-learning outcomes were improving or not: ‘Despite the valuable qualitative information contained in these short reports, their usefulness as evaluation documents was limited by the lack of detail about students’ academic progress’ (Devlin 1999, p.3).

Collins (1999) also referred to the lack of quantitative data to support the argument that bilingual schools were capable of producing acceptable English literacy outcomes. His report criticised bilingual schools for not adhering to a 1990 agreement which included the incorporation of MAP results in the assessment regime of bilingual schools. He argues that this omission has left bilingual programs vulnerable because they are unable to demonstrate superior performance compared to non-bilingual schools, even when this may have been the case. It is interesting to note that Collins also identified inadequate assessment procedures as being endemic in all Northern Territory Aboriginal schools: ‘The lack of a reliable system-wide database to measure outcomes is by no means a problem confined to bilingual schools. In fact bilingual schools are the only Indigenous schools that have had systemic assessment at all, albeit flawed’ (1999, p.123).

Devlin (1999) describes the risks associated with assessment approaches that directly compare the performance of students in bilingual and non-bilingual schools. He claims that the MAP tests applied by the NTDE differentially assessed student performance in urban and non-urban schools; a situation which Devlin claims makes direct comparison of results invalid. In addition he claims that comparisons should be made on trend analysis rather than on cross sectional data.

We might worry, for example if the decision to axe bilingual programs was
just based only on comparative data for one year. It would be timely therefore for the Department of Education to make available the relevant student assessment data so that independent appraisals of the data can be made. (Devlin 1999, p.10)

Harper (1999) argues for a delay in testing the English literacy competency of students in bilingual schools. She suggests that it is generally expected that improved education outcomes would derive from increased Aboriginal control of the education process. If an important aspect of increased Aboriginal control over education includes respect for Aboriginal curricula proposals, then it should follow that ‘they must also respect the fact that some educational outcomes will necessarily be achieved at a different pace from those of the non-Aboriginal children . . . The great achievement of bilingual education is that it has allowed the real development of Indigenous curricula in Aboriginal schools’ (Harper 1999, p.12).

Devlin (1999) advances a similar argument in relation to the timing of tests to measure the English literacy attainment levels of Aboriginal students. He claims that a more accurate picture of student achievement would be gained if these tests were administered to participants in bilingual programmes in Year 7 instead of Year 5. This delay in testing would allow students time to consolidate English literacy skills after transferring from instruction in the L1.

It is also argued that the exclusion of Aboriginal knowledge and languages from assessment criteria in Northern Territory schools has effectively marginalised these aspects of ‘inclusive curricula’ within the ‘two way’ schooling model. Harper (1999) suggests that evaluation is one area in which lack of a ‘tried-and-tested’ model has been most keenly felt and that currently there is no consideration given to the fact that in some bilingual schools, students are learning about two knowledge systems. This situation has resulted in a lost opportunity for bilingual schools to demonstrate student performance which is not related to English language proficiency. Marika, an Aboriginal teacher-linguist at Yirkala school in the Northern Territory had this to say about current evaluation processes: ‘I question whether current trends in Australia regarding curriculum and assessment, particularly the national profiles and
benchmarking process are inclusive of other knowledge systems and languages and find them lacking' (Marika 1999, p.110).

Lack of agreement over assessment criteria within bilingual education programmes has also been a consistent feature of the bilingual education debate in the United States. Hakuta (1986) describes the reactions of bilingual education proponents to research findings which demonstrated that federally funded bilingual programmes (under the Title VII initiative) had not had 'a consistent significant impact in meeting its goals as set out in the Legislation' (Hakuta 1986, p.220). Critics of the findings suggested that the methodological basis of the study was flawed because it was insensitive to the heterogeneous nature of the programmes under consideration. They also suggested that the study was insensitive to the broader goals of bilingual education by restricting the criteria for a program's success. According to Hakuta, this argument includes the perspective that 'achievement in English and maths is important, but not all-important'. By pointing to other social indicators of success within education programmes, some stakeholders aim to demonstrate the narrowness of official evaluation criteria: 'It makes a lot more sense also to look at employment figures upon leaving school, figures on drug addiction and alcoholism, suicide rates, and personality disorders, i.e., Indicators which measure the social pathology which accompanies social injustice rather than in terms of language skills' (Paulston 1980, p.41, cited in Hakuta 1986, p.221).

It appears that consensus on assessment criteria has not been reached in the United States and that disagreement over similar issues in Australia continues to constitute a significant barrier to a resolution of the bilingual education issue. Negotiation about the validity of a broad range of educational knowledge is necessary before the parameters for assessment can be set. Given the extent of marginalisation of Indigenous knowledge systems and languages within current assessment regimes, and the proven inability of the NTDE to administer a reliable assessment programme in Aboriginal schools, it seems that the assessment deadlock is likely to continue for some time.
Assimilation or 'cultural pluralism' as the purpose for education

The current bilingual education debate provides a forum for advocates of 'Anglo-conformity' and assimilation to engage with advocates of 'cultural pluralism' and Indigenous self-determination. Devlin (1990) claims that the debate between those who advocate these opposing policy positions has created a politically hazardous climate for bilingual education because the extent to which the sociopolitical goals of schools reflect the aims of the society as a whole is questionable. The publicly expressed positioning of stakeholders in the current bilingual education debate in the Northern Territory debate supports this contention. Some stakeholders argue that bilingual programmes should be abolished because they have not achieved government and societal expectations. These expectations are most often identified as the achievement of acceptable levels of English literacy and the related potential for Aboriginal peoples to participate equally in mainstream society. Some bilingual education proponents argue that bilingual education approaches support a societal goal of 'cultural pluralism'. To this end they argue for the parameters of assessment to extend beyond a narrow focus on English literacy outcomes. Lack of agreement about broader societal goals is thus translated into fundamental differences between stakeholders about the 'purpose of schooling'.

Lack of agreement about the purpose of bilingual education programmes has also been a feature of the American bilingual education debate. Hakuta (1986) suggests that current American bilingual education is primarily concerned with assimilating non-English speaking children into mainstream society. He argues that one of the original concerns that led to bilingual education in the United States was the alarmingly high dropout rate among minority students: 'By retaining these students in the school system for as long as possible, we can better hope to achieve the goal of drawing them into the mainstream of American society' (Hakuta 1986, p.211).

Parish (1990) suggests that a key influence in the development of education provision for Indigenous students in the Northern Territory has been a government-sanctioned policy of assimilation. Harker and McConnochic (1985) concur with this
viewpoint and suggest that a pattern of assimilation throughout the Indigenous education process has also been a common feature in other States and Territories in Australia. They describe the task of schools as historically one of ‘minimisation of differences’ between Aboriginal children and their non-Aboriginal peers. The current proposal, to replace bilingual programmes in the Northern Territory with ESL programmes, is being interpreted by some stakeholders as promotion of the assimilationist or mainstreaming agenda. Mandawuy Yunupingu, a former principal of Yirrkala Aboriginal School and lead singer in a renowned Aboriginal band, expressed this viewpoint in a recent interview conducted by a national newspaper: ‘We have gone backwards into times of white assimilationist policies... It should be priority number one for Australia in the lead up to the new millennium to proudly show the world its commitment to protecting Indigenous languages’ (Ceresa 1998b, p.3).

Similarly, Raymattja Marika, an Aboriginal teacher-linguist at Yirrkala Aboriginal school, argues for the retention of Northern Territory bilingual education programmes and points to the importance of recognising the value of Indigenous knowledge within schools. Marika describes the task of non-Indigenous educators in these terms: ‘Our job as educators is to convince the people who control mainstream education that we wish to be included. Until this happens assimilation is still the name of the game, and reconciliation is an empty word, an intellectual “terra nullius”’ (Marika 1999, p.119).

Peter Howson, Liberal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs in Australia (1971–72), in a newspaper article entitled ‘Assimilation the only way forward’ (2000, p.15) claims that separatist policies have created serious problems ‘among the minority still living in traditional circumstances’. This reference is made within the context of an argument that violence in Aboriginal communities can be attributed to encouragement of cultural recognition, land rights and self-determination. He cites the Collins Report (1999) (Learning Lessons: An Independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory) to support this claim: ‘former senator Bob Collins’s report on Aboriginal education in the territory revealed that against the backdrop of encouragement given to Aboriginal languages and the shocking failure to enforce school attendance, some 8 per cent of Aboriginal children are illiterate’ (Howson 2000, p.15).
Howson implies that the encouragement given to Aboriginal languages can be directly related to social dysfunction in Aboriginal communities where there is virtually 'no civil society'. Howson unashamedly promotes an assimilationist agenda and, so, his position relating to a rejection of 'separatist' policies is predictable. What is interesting, however, is his interpretation of the Collins (1999) review recommendations. Collins’s lack of support for bilingual education programmes is construed as evidence that incorporation of Aboriginal languages in education interventions has had negative social and educational consequences.

Christine Nicholls, a senior lecturer in Australian Studies at Flinders University and a former school principal and bilingual education officer in the Northern Territory, interprets the Collins (1999) review findings differently.

The Review does not portray bilingual education and bilingual schools as the bogeyman they were thought to be by some of the programs detractors. Indeed, the review cites some very positive outcomes, both academically and socially, in terms of Indigenous identity and participation, but fails to state that these programs should be supported or even retained. (Nicholls 2000)

Howson represents the Collins review findings as evidence that incorporation of Indigenous languages in education directly impedes the 'civilising' or 'assimilation' agendas of government. Nicholls, however, points out that the Collins review, while not directly supporting bilingual approaches, did concede that bilingual programmes have produced some positive educational and social outcomes for Indigenous peoples living in remote communities.

Differences in ideology between proponents of assimilation and ‘cultural pluralism’ impact significantly on the current bilingual education debate in Australia. Stakeholders with disclosed or undisclosed assimilationist agendas regularly point to the failure of bilingual education programmes to substantially improve English literacy outcomes. Stakeholders who support ‘cultural pluralism’ as a societal goal argue for the retention of bilingual programmes on the grounds that these programmes represent a legitimate vehicle for the preservation of Indigenous knowledge systems and languages. These opposing positions were once couched mainly in terms of
criteria for assessment, but increasingly stakeholders are being more explicit about what they consider to be the social purposes for education.

**Monolingualism and the national interest**

Indigenous participants in Australian bilingual programmes are characterised by their significant minority status in society and by their location in dispersed, small community and language groups. The relatively large number of distinctly different Aboriginal languages represented in bilingual education programmes mitigate against notions of the development of a unified ‘separate nation’, based on the separate development of a potentially dominant, shared language such as Spanish in the United States. References to the importance for ‘national unity’ of a monolingual English approach to education are, however, made by detractors of bilingual education in Australia. These arguments are supported by reference to English as the ‘language of opportunity’ in terms of access to equitable education, economic, health and related social outcomes by Indigenous peoples. McMahon and Murray suggest that lack of mainstream community support for bilingual education programmes in Australia can be related to a general lack of understanding about the nature of bilingualism and multilingualism:

> We are one of the few countries in the world, which still regards speaking only one language, that is, English (monolingualism) as the preferred norm. We are therefore very poorly informed about speaking two languages (bilingualism) and multilingualism (speaking many languages) despite the fact that many of our citizens are bi or multi-lingual. (McMahon & Murray 1999, p.26)

In a discussion about the effects of monolingual ideologies on national unity, Skutnabb-Kangas (1988) reflects on the responsibilities of government to minority language group members. He poses the question ‘Is state monolingualism a stupid and irrational state of affairs or a rational necessity?’, and goes on to suggest that:

those individuals whose mother tongues do not happen to be official languages in the countries where they live, have to become bilingual (or multilingual). If
they want to be able to speak to their parents, know about their history and culture, know who they are, they have to know their mother tongue. If they want to get a good education and if they want to participate in the social, economic and political life of their country, they have to know the official language. It should be the duty of the educational systems to help them become bilingual, since bilingualism is a necessity for them and not something that they themselves have chosen. (Skutnabb-Kangas 1988, p.10)

While accepting the necessity for minority language group speakers to learn the dominant language of the broader society, Skutnabb-Kangas maintains that bilingualism is necessary for the transfer of inter generational cultural knowledge, self-esteem and the maintenance of inter-group relationships. Some bilingual education critics argue that education programmes based on the majority language do not inhibit this goal, and that it is the role of communities to teach and promote minority group languages outside of the formal education system. Others, however, point to the negative effects on the status of minority languages if these are excluded from mainstream education processes. D. Hester, a linguist at the University of Adelaide, in a letter to the editor of a national newspaper, suggests that bilingual education approaches offer considerable support to Indigenous languages and their associated cultures: ‘They are a fundamental means of maintaining and raising the status of Indigenous languages within an English speaking country. Withdrawal of the Bilingual Education program further adds to the marginalisation of Indigenous languages’ (Hester 1998, p.12).

The positioning of the current Northern Territory Minister for Education on the incorporation of Indigenous languages and cultures in Aboriginal schools is disclosed by Frank Devine, a regular columnist in a national newspaper. In a discussion of the Collins (1999) review (Learning Lessons. An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory), he suggests that the Minister for Education in the Northern Territory, Mr Lugg, is adamant in supporting Indigenous education reform which supports ‘the abandonment of attempts to teach community languages and customs along with English in schools’. The conceptualisation of the Indigenous education ‘reform’ process as being inclusive of policies which support the
‘abandonment’ of Indigenous languages provides an interesting insight into the positioning of the Northern Territory Education Minister. Devine argues that an ‘English only’ approach is supported by the Minister, and he uses this extract from a speech to illustrate his point:

He told in last week’s speech of encountering a non-urban school principal who said that he had thrown the curriculum out the window and taught only community language and customs. Lugg told him he was a disgrace, and that his surrender of responsibility denied his students the ability to choose the direction of their lives. (Devine 2000)

The positioning of Mr Lugg is reflected in a similar argument put forward by Ronald Reagan, a former president of the United States: ‘It is absolutely wrong and against American concepts to have a bilingual education program that is now openly, admittedly dedicated to preserving students native language and never getting them adequate English so they can go out and get into the job market and participate’ (Reagan, cited in Cummins 1996, p.40).

Cummins suggests that the president’s remarks imply an incompatibility between the preservation of the native languages of bilingual students and the learning of English; the achievement of the second aim being fundamental to participation in mainstream society. In this way the English language is framed as ‘the language of opportunity and choice’ and bilingual education is framed as an obstacle to ‘equitable’ minority group participation in mainstream society.

Disagreement over what constitutes the ‘national interest’ is ongoing. Proponents of bilingual education approaches with minority group students argue that the national interest is well served by acceptance of cultural pluralism as a social policy objective. Aligned with this argument is the position that Indigenous languages are deserving of preservation because they facilitate the transfer of inter-generational cultural knowledge. Detractors of bilingual education approaches argue, however, that the ‘national interest’ is compromised when languages other than the majority language are used as a means of communication and transfer of knowledge. A related argument is that minority group access to employment opportunities is compromised if adequate levels of majority language proficiency are not attained. This argument is based on the
false premise that the goals of majority language acquisition and Indigenous language maintenance are mutually exclusive. In fact, bilingual education supporters consistently argue that majority language acquisition is important but point out that the best means of achieving this goal is through the adoption of bilingual education approaches.

**Language rights and ‘linguicism’**

Commentators on the bilingual education debate in Europe and in America have aligned monolingual ideologies with a form of racism specific to consideration of language issues. Linguistic racism is conceptualised by Skutnabb-Kangas (1988) and Philipson (1988) as ‘linguicism’ and is defined in these terms: ‘ideologies and structures which are used to legitimate, effectuate and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and non-material) between groups that are defined on the basis of language’ (Skutnabb-Kangas 1988, p.13).

Philipson claims that Indigenous and immigrant minority groups have been the victims of *linguicism*, especially in colonised countries such as Canada and Australia. Linguistic dominance has historically constituted a defining characteristic of the colonising project especially as this relates to the domination of English over Indigenous minority group languages. Philipson also suggests that ‘linguicist’ practices remain a common feature within colonised countries and that an ongoing analysis of how *linguicism* operates has the potential to assist in the struggle for increased justice for dominated languages. He develops an argument that ‘linguicist’ ideology can be related to ‘racism’: ‘Linguicist ideology has affinities with the way racism is affirmed (Preiswerk, 1980): it essentially involves the dominant group/language presenting an idealized image of itself, stigmatizing the dominated group/language, and rationalizing the relationship between the two, always to the advantage of the dominant group/language’ (Philipson 1988, p.341).

Skutnabb-Kangas draws a connection between monolingualism, racist ideologies and *linguicism*: ‘Is monolingualism in fact a reflection of an ideology, akin to racism, namely *linguicism*, the domination of one language at the expense of others, or is it a
sign of a mature state that has reached far in an inevitable but at the same time desirable development?" (Skutnabb-Kangas 1988, p.10).

Although the concept of *linguicism* has not been commonly applied within the Australian bilingual education debate, the language rights of Indigenous peoples are frequently referred to.

In an article in a national newspaper entitled ‘Stilling the voices of Koori culture; Native tongues refuse to be silenced’, Maria Ceresa made this observation about the decision to withdraw funding for bilingual programmes in Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory:

> In the week Adamson was defending the decision, Article 14 of the draft declaration of the United Nations Rights of Indigenous Peoples, proclaiming their right to be educated in their own languages, was being debated in Geneva. An initiative of the Whitlam Government, the program has failed to find support under the Howard Government. (Ceresa 1998a)

Arguments put forward by bilingual education proponents about the responsibility of government to uphold the language rights of Indigenous peoples are clearly supported by a ‘linguicist’ framework for identifying ideologies and institutional structures which marginalise minority languages, and which result in considerable advantage to the dominant language.

The Federal Minister for Education (during 1975–76) expressed an attitude toward language diversity after the introduction of bilingual programmes in Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory. This attitude represents the antithesis of ‘linguicist’ ideology: ‘When we allowed for education in Aboriginal languages we stopped using education as an expression of conquest. When we allow for education in other foreign languages we will stop manifesting our insularity’ (Brandl 1976, p.22).

The positioning of the Federal Minister for Education is in stark contrast to a more recent pronouncement by the Northern Territory Chief Minister, Dennis Burke, on an Indigenous language-related issue. In response to calls for adequate interpreter services for Aboriginal patients at the Royal Darwin Hospital, Burke said that it was “‘a disgrace that Aborigines still needed them’, and that “‘it was like giving a wheelchair to someone who should be walking’” (Toohey 1999).
The inconsistency in Mr Burke’s argument was referred to in a subsequent letter to the editor of the same newspaper. The writer pointed out that a total of 74.5 per cent of all Aboriginal peoples living in the Northern Territory speak Indigenous languages and that many have a limited understanding of English:

Both the Commonwealth and N.T. governments recognise that not speaking English is a barrier to proper medical and legal care. They provide non-English speaking people with a free interpreter service to help overcome this barrier. Unless you are Aboriginal, if you are Aboriginal you do not get an interpreter service. You get blamed for not speaking English. This situation should shame all Australians. (Blundell 1999)

While the Northern Territory Government recognises the language rights of non-English-speaking migrants in Australia, it does not afford the same privileges to speakers of Indigenous Australian languages. Implicit in the positioning of the Northern Territory Chief Minister is the belief that Indigenous peoples should learn to speak English as a means of gaining access to public services, and that the time has long passed when they should have learned to do so. ‘Linguistic’ ideology underpins this positioning and an unequal distribution of resources is effectuated by an institutional structure that does not provide adequate interpreter services for speakers of Australian Indigenous languages. Indigenous Australian languages are effectively de-legitimised as a bonafide means of communication in the public service delivery sphere.

Structural determination of linguistic inequality in Australia is also an identifiable feature within education settings. Where the language rights of minority group members are officially recognised, then it is likely that their languages will be incorporated as an intrinsic part of the education process. Where there is a lack of recognition of minority group language rights, then the reverse is true. The pervasive domination of English as the language and subject of instruction within the education system has led to a gradual erosion of the status of Aboriginal languages within schools. The current proposal to replace bilingual programmes in Northern Territory schools with ESL programmes is a further step toward the ultimate domination of the English language in Australia. This process of language domination is legitimated
through arguments which present English as the ‘language of opportunity’ and which equate equality of English language proficiency with ‘equality of opportunity’ in Australian society. ‘Linguistic’ ideologies succeed in convincing mainstream members of society that there is no inherent value in the development bilingualism. By imposing structural sanctions against the use of minority languages, governments also coerce compliance from large sectors of minority group communities. If compliance is not a possibility because of inadequate educational opportunities, then unequal distribution of resources becomes a reality for minority group language speakers.

The relationship between bilingual education approaches & cultural & linguistic maintenance

Supporters of Indigenous bilingual education programmes argue that these programmes provide a vehicle for achieving community driven Indigenous language and cultural maintenance objectives. Black (1982) suggests that bilingual programmes have an important role to play in the maintenance of Indigenous languages and describes their benefit in terms of ensuring that Indigenous languages maintain a useful purpose in the lives of Indigenous children:

If Australian languages are going to stay in use, people have to keep speaking them so that their children can learn them properly. This is why proper bilingual education is so important—if children only speak English in the school, and learn to write only in English, they have that much less use for their traditional languages. (Black 1982, p.20)

Bilingual education proponents argue that it is a fundamental right for Indigenous peoples to have opportunities for expressing their unique cultural identities in the Western-dominated education system is. The *Aboriginal Education Policy Taskforce Report* (1988) concluded that it was important to ensure the maintenance and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages through the development of bi-lingual and bi-cultural programs. The report also stressed the need to ensure the right of Indigenous communities to pursue cultural maintenance
objectives. Indigenous community involvement in the education process was identified as a primary way of achieving this goal. More recently, NATSIEP has reaffirmed this position: ‘Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people seek “two-ways” education of a bi-lingual and bi-cultural nature, in order for them to maintain or restore their cultural identity and acquire useful skills for their participation in Australian social and economic life’ (NATSIEP 1993, p.7).

While recent associations between bilingual and bi-cultural educational initiatives and the achievement of Indigenous language and cultural maintenance objectives have been recorded, early conceptions of the purpose for bilingual education in Northern Territory schools differ. A report commissioned by the Commonwealth Government, *Bilingual education in Schools in Aboriginal Communities in the Northern Territory*, Watts, McGrath and Tandy (1973) reveal official recognition of the language and cultural maintenance potential contained within bilingual education approaches in Australian Aboriginal communities. While recognising the potential bilingual education programmes represented for the ultimate acquisition of English literacy skills by Aboriginal children, the report authors argued that ‘[t]he school should be the agent of cultural continuity rather than of cultural discontinuity, with the non-Aboriginal Australian culture being introduced in a manner acceptable to the people’ (Watts, McGrath & Tandy 1973, p.7).

Watts, McGrath and Tandy (1973) suggest that this goal can only be achieved when the language of the community is an integral part of the school programme. Their report also proposes a ‘maintenance’ model of bilingual education, where continued development of first language literacy skills would be supported through the application of Aboriginal languages as the main language of instruction in designated subject areas. It was envisaged that this process would be continued after students had achieved ‘transfer’ of literacy skills from L1 to L2 in the middle years of primary school.

Keeffe suggests that the institution of bilingual education programmes in the Northern Territory resulted from official rejection of former assimilationist policies and that these programmes had a specific social and cultural rationale, as well as a mandate for language learning and language maintenance. He cites the following
statement by the Prime Minister as an example of the progressive position adopted by the Federal Government in relation to the purpose for bilingual education: 'When bilingual education funding was announced in 1972, the Prime Minister, E.G. Whitlam, stated that “tribal cultures should be preserved not crushed”' (Keeffe 1992, p.11).

Kim Beazley Sr., Labor Federal Minister for Education (1972–75), suggests a different rationale for government initiated bilingual education programmes in the Northern Territory. In a letter written to a national newspaper in response to the withdrawal of bilingual education programmes in Northern Territory schools, he disputes the position of commentators who argue that Northern Territory bilingual education programmes originally included a mandate for Indigenous culture and language maintenance. He argues that '[a]rticles announcing that in the Northern Territory the decision to abolish education in Aboriginal languages abolishes a policy aimed at preserving Aboriginal culture are erroneous . . . it might have preserved an aspect of Aboriginal culture but that was not the purpose' (Beazley 1998).

Harris (1991) suggests that teachers had a different conceptualisation of the purpose for bilingual education programmes. He argues that teachers believed 'the aim of Western academic gains and the aim of Aboriginal language maintenance could be achieved simultaneously, and much of the time through the same teaching methodology' (Harris 1991, p.134).

Harris, however, seemed to be under no delusion that the introduction of bilingual education programmes in Northern Territory Aboriginal schools was related to anything other than an official concern with English literacy acquisition: '[W]hen bilingual programs began it was clearly recognized that what was a politically highly vulnerable innovation would, regardless of other stated aims, survive or die on whether or not it demonstrated academic gains in English' (Harris 1991, p.134).

Collins (1999) in a recent report into Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory (Learning Lessons; An Independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory) commented directly on the extent of confusion about the objectives for bilingual education programmes in the Northern Territory:

Government and bureaucratic proponents of the program at the time cited
improved school attendance and better outcomes in English literacy and numeracy among the primary aims and anticipated benefits. Indigenous support always centred on what was seen as the first real recognition by Government of the value of Indigenous language, culture and law. In other words, while there was common support for the program, it came from different perspectives. In many quarters these different perspectives have not changed in more than twenty-five years. (Collins 1999, p.121)

Disagreement over bilingual education programme objectives still represents an important disjunction between the positioning of current participants in the bilingual education debate in Australia. Devlin describes these differences in terms of the ‘implicit or explicit social purposes which bilingual education is systematically organised to fulfill’, and he suggests that one of the dimensions of this question relates to whether the goal of a society is cultural pluralism or assimilation (Devlin 1990, p.59).

Devlin also describes how the lack of clarity in the federal mandate for bilingual education in the United States has led to confusion in terms of developing performance commitments by education administrators. He points to a lack of unanimity within the bilingual education literature on issues to do with the purpose of bilingual education. The main viewpoints are represented by those who view bilingual education as a vehicle for achieving transference of L1 skills to English, those who see it as an opportunity to achieve native language maintenance and those who view bilingual education as an opportunity to achieve both these goals. Devlin (1990) cites Drake (1979) who outlined the dilemma associated with sorting out these differences and the consequences of misreading prevailing societal attitudes toward the acceptance of cultural pluralism as a legitimate policy objective:

... in as much as the bilingual education movement is built on the assumption of a major value shift, it is built on shifting sand. The assumption flows from a serious misreading of social developments. Furthermore in this misreading are the seeds for the failure of the bilingual education movement as it is now conceived. (Drake 1979, p.24, cited in Devlin 1990)
Supporters of bilingual education in the Northern Territory are currently arguing that pursuance of language and cultural maintenance objectives represents a legitimate reason for the continuation of bilingual programmes within Aboriginal schools. ESL proponents consistently refer to the superior English literacy acquisition potential within ESL programmes, but have not yet outlined how Indigenous language and cultural maintenance objectives can be simultaneously achieved. Proponents of exclusively ESL programmes in Indigenous communities have not engaged with the argument that a reduction in Indigenous community control over the education process will have negative consequences for the academic outcomes of Indigenous students. Evidence of government and mainstream community support for the exclusive delivery of ESL programmes in Indigenous education contexts brings into question the assumption that a 'major values shift' has occurred in Australian society. The notion that support for assimilation has given way to increased support for 'cultural pluralism' as an agreed societal goal may indeed be misplaced.

**Non-English literacy-related advantages of bilingual education approaches**

By pointing to advantages of bilingual education approaches which are not directly related to demonstrable improvement in English literacy attainment levels, bilingual education supporters aim to ensure that these advantages are not excluded from consideration within the current bilingual education debate. (For a comprehensive description of advantages of bilingual programmes for Aboriginal students in the Northern Territory and South Australia see Lasora 1990, p.15 and Gale 1990).

The extent to which the non-English literacy-related advantages of bilingual approaches to education continue to be marginalised by government education service providers is evidenced by the exclusion of the bilingual education issue from the terms of reference of a recent Northern Territory Government-commissioned report into Indigenous education (*Learning Lessons, An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*, Collins 1999). Nicholls commented upon this omission:
The report was commissioned, and I quote, ‘to establish the views and educational aspirations of Aboriginal parents and community members in relation to their children’s schooling; with particular reference to English literacy and numeracy’. The Review was given no mandate to canvass aspirations regarding Indigenous literacy and numeracy in the context of schooling. (Nicholls 2000)

Nicholls (2000) goes on to suggest that this omission directly contravened the spirit of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination which upholds Indigenous rights including Indigenous linguistic rights in schools. The Collins review was established in the same time frame as the Northern Territory Government’s announcement to phase out specific purpose funding for bilingual education. In his final report, Collins commented on the effects of this announcement on the review process: ‘Not surprisingly, the controversy impacted severely on the review, as many people in the communities affected, and those supporting them, wanted to talk about nothing else. The announcement quite simply polarised what may otherwise have been more equivocal positions’ (Collins 1999, p.119).

Collins presented this polarisation of views and the desire of Aboriginal peoples to talk about the bilingual education issue as a diversion from the main objectives of his review. He seemed annoyed that the chances of a rational discussion about the importance of English literacy and numeracy were diminished as a result of the currency of the bilingual issue. If the bilingual issue had been framed instead as central to the review terms of reference, then it seems likely that Collins would have looked more favourably on the opportunity to engage with people about the issues associated with Indigenous language maintenance and vernacular literacy.

Folds (1989) cites the 1985 House of representatives Standing committee report, *Aboriginal Education* to demonstrate official recognition of bilingual education outcomes which are not related to the acquisition of English literacy skills by Aboriginal children: ‘Bilingual programs thus contain significant educational advantages for Aboriginal children whose first language is not English. A bilingual
program implicitly recognizes and respect's the child's culture and language' (House of Representatives 1985, p.109, cited in Folds 1989, p.35).

Harris also refers to the broader positive consequences of bilingual education:

In the N.T. the bilingual program has (apart from its significant but insufficient academic gains) provided the leverage for some watershed Aboriginal gains, especially along the northern coast. It has created space for Aboriginal people to begin to influence curriculum design in Aboriginal schools . . . It has also fostered both formal and informal Aboriginal teacher training on a scale proportionately higher than other states . . . In the long-term these gains will have positive academic effects through whatever language policy particular communities decide to adopt for their schools. (Harris 1993b, p.14)

Although not generally favourable to bilingual education approaches in the Northern Territory, the PAC report (1996) cites Fowler (1996) who describes some broad advantages of bilingual education programmes:

. . . arguments for bilingual education would, I think, generally now days go beyond considering only academic achievement to encompass issues such as cultural identity, self-esteem, language maintenance, self-determination, community wishes, national reconciliation and so on. So there is, in addition to the argument for academic achievement an argument can be put forward that bilingual programs do support the concepts I have just mentioned.

(Fowler, 1996, p.4, in PAC 1996, p.87)

There are clearly two perspectives about the Non-English literacy related advantages of bilingual education which are currently being represented in the bilingual education debate in the Northern Territory. The prevailing government attitude is that only the English literacy- and numeracy-related advantages of bilingual education warrant consideration. In opposition to this position, bilingual education proponents argue for consideration of a broader range of social and educational advantages deriving from bilingual programmes. This issue goes to the heart of the current bilingual debate and its resolution depends upon the establishment of agreed objectives for bilingual programmes.
Bilingual education as an expression of biculturalism

The importance of Indigenous community participation to the achievement of bilingual education objectives has been officially recognised in a range of policy documents. For example, the Western Australian Ministry of Education, Social Justice in Education Policy (1991) presents the view that Aboriginal education workers constitute an integral part of the learning process in ‘bicultural’ settings: ‘Aboriginal Education Workers are the teachers link with the culture and language of the community. The establishment of a team approach between the classroom teacher and the Aboriginal education worker provides a basis for ‘two way’ learning which supports the philosophy of bicultural education’ (Western Australian Ministry of Education 1991, p.10).

Some Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory have asserted control over the education process to the extent that their schools are staffed primarily by Aboriginal peoples and the schools are under the control of local community members. These schools have generally experienced a long history of bilingual education, although many of the educational programmes are now officially recognised as ‘two way’ (described in more detail in Phase Two of the bilingual education debate) or ‘bicultural’. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators, to reflect an inclusiveness of Indigenous languages and knowledge systems as well as mainstream knowledge and English literacy skills, have developed the curricula in these schools. Some stakeholders have expressed concern that the withdrawal of support for bilingual education programmes will result in a substantial rolling back of the gains associated with these initiatives, particularly as these relate to Indigenous involvement in education decision-making and Indigenous participation in education service delivery.

In the Northern Territory, the training of Indigenous teachers has been integral to the ‘Aboriginalisation’ process within schools. The growth in bilingual education programmes in the Northern Territory has been matched by a steady increase in the number of Indigenous education professionals. Team-teaching approaches, the
mentoring system and the development of ‘inclusive’ curricula are initiatives, which have facilitated increased participation by Aboriginal community members in the delivery of education and in education decision-making. Despite a commitment that current Aboriginal staffing levels would be maintained, the Northern Territory Government has not provided any projections about the roles of Aboriginal educators after bilingual programs are replaced by ESL programmes in Northern Territory Primary Schools.

Collins argues for the replacement of the term ‘bilingual education’ with the term ‘two-way learning’ in the Northern Territory. He asserts that the term ‘bilingual education’ has been ‘so divergently interpreted and misunderstood that it should no longer be used’ and that the whole question of ‘bilingual education’ has become a major ‘red herring’ in terms of determining the most effective pedagogy for teaching Indigenous students (Collins 1999, p.125). It seems that Collins is hoping that the ‘problem’ of bilingual education will go away if stakeholders will delete all reference to it. He proposes that the NTDE should instead support ‘two way learning’ programmes in schools where the local community wants such a program, but insists that the NTDE maintain control of assessment criteria within these ‘two way’ programmes. The assessment criteria specified by Collins include measurements of competency in Standard Australian English oracy, literacy and numeracy and he maintains that valid ESL and English as a Foreign Language MAP tests should be developed.

While apparently affirming the importance of ‘bicultural’ initiatives in Indigenous schools in the Northern Territory, the Collins (1999) report does not indicate how Indigenous languages should be systematically incorporated into school programmes. Confusion surrounding the determination of educational objectives and the recommendation that the NTDE maintain control over assessment criteria is likely to lead to a situation where Indigenous languages and Indigenous knowledge bases are marginalised as legitimate components of education programmes in Northern Territory schools.
Theoretical considerations: ‘Time on task’ argument and the ‘threshold hypothesis’

Some proponents of ‘English only’ approaches to education for ESL speakers argue that increased exposure to a second language equates to increased opportunities for second language acquisition. Bilingual education proponents counter this argument with reference to the ‘threshold hypothesis, which proposes that after L1 literacy skills have been established through the application of L1 as the language of instruction, these skills can be successfully transferred to the process of L2 literacy acquisition. Cummins describes the disjunction in stakeholder positioning in these terms:

The bilingual approach seems to imply a counter-intuitive ‘less equals more’ rationale in which less English instruction is assumed to lead to more English achievement. It appears more logical to many opponents of bilingual education to argue that if children are deficient in English then they need instruction in English and not their Native language. (Cummins 1996, p.40)

While the perception that increased exposure to English equates with increased potential for English language acquisition persists, bilingual education proponents must resort to complex theoretical explanations about the nature of second language learning. It is clearly an advantage to detractors of bilingual education that the ‘less equals more’ rationale is ‘counter intuitive’.

CONCLUSION

The current bilingual education debate in Australia centres around recent events in the Northern Territory, where the government has officially withdrawn support for operational bilingual education programmes in twenty-one Aboriginal schools. The controversial public discourse that has developed around these events has emerged out of a historical lack of agreement about the purpose for bilingual education and reflects a range of unresolved tensions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Australia. In the third and current phase of the bilingual education debate, the
contested issues constitute a blend of educational considerations and a range of broader social policy issues. Previously, when Indigenous bilingual education programmes have been contested, there has been a central focus on student academic outcomes, the veracity of assessment tools and the appropriateness of official performance indicators. A consequence of this focus on evaluation and student academic outcomes has been a marginalisation of issues related to the ‘purpose for education’. Now that the bilingual education issue is being included as part of the broader ideological debate taking place in Australian society about the terms of ‘co-existence’ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, it has become increasingly difficult for mainstream community constructions about the ‘purpose for education’ to remain undisclosed and unchallenged. Within the current debate, proponents of English-only educational approaches with Indigenous students have joined forces with supporters of monolingualism and assimilation, to argue for ‘Anglo-conformity’ as the preferred social policy direction in Australia. Bilingual education supporters are allied with proponents of ‘cultural pluralism’ as a preferred social policy aim, and their public positioning is supported by arguments that relate to the benefits to society of multilingualism, Indigenous self-determination, Indigenous community control over education and recognition of Indigenous language rights.

While arguing that properly resourced bilingual programmes can achieve satisfactory levels of English literacy attainment, bilingual education proponents also point to the role of bilingual education programmes in supporting socially determined goals. They suggest that bilingual education programmes represent a capacity to facilitate increased Indigenous control over education processes and to support the achievement of ‘bicultural’ education objectives. This position is supported by evidence that demonstrates the extent of Indigenous community support for bilingual education programmes, the development of ‘negotiated’ curricula in bilingual schools and the increased opportunities for Indigenous community involvement in the delivery of bilingual education programmes. The maintenance of Indigenous language status and support for the transfer of inter-generational cultural knowledge are also cited as important advantages which impact positively on Indigenous peoples and by association upon Indigenous education outcomes. Cummins (1996), a bilingual
education theorist and an international commentator on bilingual education initiatives, argues that the ‘empowerment’ of minority group members within the context of education impacts positively on the academic outcomes of minority group students. He argues that to focus on the nature of ‘inter-group power relationships’ between minority and majority group members is more important than focusing on the merits of a particular educational approach.

Interpretations of the objectives for bilingual education differ. Government support for Indigenous bilingual education programmes in Australia has consistently been related to a primary focus on the acquisition of English literacy skills. An alternative interpretation is that the introduction of bilingual education programmes represented official government support for the celebration of ‘cultural difference’ within society and promotion of Indigenous ‘self-determination’ objectives in the education sphere. A difficulty in the current bilingual education debate is an insufficient evidence base, either in policy terms or in the publicly expressed positioning of stakeholders, to support either of these contentions. Reasons for this lack of clarity about agreed objectives for bilingual education initiatives remain a matter of speculation. I would suggest, however, that the conceptualisation of bilingual education approaches as a potential vehicle for Indigenous self-determination and for the maintenance of Indigenous languages and cultures represented a radical political agenda in the early 1970s. At a time when government officials were still coming to terms with the changed policy direction from assimilation to ‘self-determination’, liberal educators and Indigenous peoples may have decided not to publicly disclose what was ostensibly a political agenda. Tacit acceptance of the ‘official’ government objectives for bilingual education approaches (that is, the effective acquisition of English literacy skills by Indigenous peoples) has made it easier for current government representatives to argue for their discontinuation on the grounds that these programmes have not achieved their officially stated objectives. But, as Collins (1999) points out, Indigenous support for bilingual programmes has always centred on the inherent capacity within bilingual programmes for valuing Indigenous languages, cultures and law. The extent to which this positioning was recognised by government
representatives at the time bilingual education programmes were introduced into
government operated schools remains unclear.

Drake (1979, cited in Devlin 1990) identified a problem associated with the
intended purposes of bilingual education approaches as being related to an assumption
that support for bilingual education programmes by governments represents ‘a major
value shift’. Drake argues that this assumption is based on a serious misreading of
social developments when government social policy objectives for minority group
members have not substantially progressed. The self-determination policy platform of
the Federal Labor Government in the early 1970s was foreshadowed by the
integrationist policies of the South Australian Labor Government. These policy
initiatives represented a radical departure from previous assimilationist policies and
were likely to have been interpreted by Indigenous peoples and other proponents of
bilingual education as indication of a ‘values shift’ within mainstream Australian
society. Assimilation objectives were seen to be overridden by more socially just
policy imperatives that framed Indigenous peoples as being central to the construction
of ‘a new and legitimate Indigenous Australian identity’ (Jordan 1988). The extent to
which this assumption was ill founded is now being publicly disclosed. Mainstream
media accounts of the bilingual education issue in the Northern Territory demonstrate
continued government and mainstream community support for assimilationist
objectives. Current support for the abolition of bilingual education programmes is
firmly grounded in the argument that bilingual approaches have not produced the
predicted gains in English literacy outcomes. This argument has lead to the
scapegoating of bilingual education initiatives as the cause of academic
underachievement and consequent social inequity between Indigenous and mainstream
Australians. ESL approaches are being promoted as a means of achieving ‘social
equity’ for Indigenous peoples, and Indigenous languages are being demonised as a
cause of Indigenous social dysfunction. The effective marginalisation of other issues
which impact negatively on the social positioning of Indigenous peoples has meant
that solutions to the Indigenous education ‘problem’ have been reduced in some
forums to a simple dichotomy between the relative educational merits of ESL
approaches and bilingual approaches.
The suggestion that bilingual education programmes are not capable of producing the level of English literacy acquisition necessary for Indigenous peoples to participate 'equally' in mainstream Australian society pervades current mainstream media accounts of the bilingual education issue. While not referring to research data which supports this contention, media commentators provide valuable support for the promotion of ESL approaches with Indigenous students. Bilingual education proponents counter this argument by referring to comparatively successful outcomes being achieved by minority group students within bilingual education programmes in the United States, Canada and Australia.

The future of bilingual programmes in Australian Indigenous education contexts

Historically, the Indigenous bilingual education issue has not generated a great deal of mainstream public interest in Australia. Now that it has been elevated to an issue of 'national interest' the social and educational implications of bilingual education are being publicly discussed. In the current political climate in Australia, where there are deep divisions about a broad range of Indigenous rights, the bilingual education debate is in danger of being hijacked. There is the possibility that the educational advantages of bilingual approaches will be marginalised if the social implications of bilingual education approaches take precedence in the public debate. Mainstream concerns with 'access' and 'equity' for Indigenous peoples which find voice in the 'English as the language of opportunity' argument have the potential to mask deeper issues associated with the potential for increased levels of Indigenous 'empowerment' and the value of 'cultural pluralism' as a preferred societal goal.

The future of bilingual education in Indigenous education contexts in Australia is precarious and rests to a large extent on the capacity of bilingual education proponents to convince government education service providers and mainstream Australians of the educational and social advantages of this approach. Reference to the role bilingual education plays in the reinforcement of Indigenous language status, Indigenous community solidarity and the inter-generational transfer of cultural knowledge is a
good place to start. Experience has shown, however, that in order to achieve mainstream community and government support, these arguments must also include reference to the proven capacity of properly organised and adequately resourced bilingual education programmes to deliver acceptable English literacy outcomes. This represents a difficult task, given the lack of quantitative data to support this position in Australian Indigenous education contexts. An education campaign to convince mainstream Australians and education service providers of the value of bilingual education was suggested by O'Grady and Hall in 1973. I would argue that this suggestion is still relevant and that a public campaign to secure mainstream public support for bilingual education is long overdue. In other words, bilingual education supporters need to go on the offensive to re-assert control over the direction of the bilingual debate.

What has not been sufficiently revealed so far in phase three of the bilingual education debate is the socio-political environment in which the debate is being conducted. The extent of regressive State and Territory Governments and Federal Government policies affecting the lives of Indigenous peoples and the upsurge in support for fledgling conservative political parties both warrant disclosure. These factors potentially account for inequitable resource allocation in the Indigenous education sphere and for negative mainstream community attitudes toward the pluralist social objectives associated with bilingual education approaches. For example, a debate over mandatory sentencing legislation in the Northern Territory has been raging at the same time as the bilingual education debate. The Northern Territory Government has received international condemnation for enforcing mandatory sentencing laws which, it is claimed, have resulted in escalating Indigenous incarceration rates. The issue has generated considerable national interest, and the positioning of stakeholders has polarised over the issues of ‘mainstream community rights’ and the human rights of Indigenous peoples. Doubts have been cast over the capacity of the Northern Territory Government to uphold the human rights of Indigenous peoples, and the government has responded defensively. It is against this controversial backdrop that the bilingual education issue is being discussed, and it seems reasonable to speculate that the positioning of stakeholders is being
substantially informed by wider issues relating to the rights and responsibilities of
governments and Indigenous peoples within Australian society. The re-framing of the
bilingual education issue as an ‘Indigenous rights’ issue may, however, have positive
consequences. International covenants to protect the land rights, human rights and
language rights of Indigenous peoples are increasingly being enacted, and
international pressure is being brought to bear on governments that do not cooperate.

International experience has shown that the practice of *linguicism* (structural and
ideological support for the systematic domination of one language over another) is an
effective agent of the assimilation process. Within the Australian context, denial of
adequate interpreter services for Indigenous peoples in the Northern Territory is
indicative of a government-supported objective to force Indigenous peoples to use
standard English when accessing public services. The enactment of this policy
infringes the language rights and human rights of Indigenous peoples and it effectively
supports the domination of the English language over local Indigenous languages.
Similarly, the withdrawal of bilingual programmes from government schools can be
interpreted as an attempt to elevate the status of the English language and mainstream
Australian cultural norms to the detriment of Indigenous languages and cultures in the
Northern Territory. The initiative to withdraw funding for bilingual education
programmes for Aboriginal students in Northern Territory schools has been publicly
framed as supporting the principles associated with ‘equal access’, ‘equality of
opportunity’ and ‘social justice’ for Indigenous peoples. The initiative, however, has
effectively reduced the opportunities for Indigenous peoples in the Northern Territory
to maintain their bilingual and bicultural status within Australian society.

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Case Study Three: Indigenous Education

Research Issues

INTRODUCTION

A resolution process aimed at renegotiating terms for the conduct of research involving Indigenous peoples has been under way in Australia in recent years. In order to achieve a fundamental shift away from exploitative research practices, currently proposed Indigenous research guidelines aim to re-position Indigenous peoples as 'research partners' instead of as 'research subjects' and to ensure that the research agenda is responsive to Indigenous community interests. An hypothesis is proposed that researchers and higher education institutions have been slow to adapt their institutional procedures and research practices to facilitate these changes. Recent research conducted by the Australian Research Council (ARC) (Research of Interest to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples) (1999) supports this position. The ARC investigated the extent of problems associated with the implementation of revised Indigenous research guidelines across a range of academic disciplines. This research concluded that there is a substantial mismatch between currently proposed Indigenous research guidelines and the way in which Indigenous issues continue to be researched. By investigating a range of Indigenous research guidelines and by considering the practical implications associated with their implementation, it is intended that this research will indicate some barriers to the achievement of fundamental reforms within the Indigenous education research field. Although this paper is concerned with issues specific to the conduct of Indigenous education research, the associated discussion will be located within the broader context of Indigenous research issues across a range of academic disciplines.

Student researchers and Indigenous peoples are at the forefront of attempts to put the principles of reformed research guidelines into practice, and yet they remain unclear about their newly defined roles. They are expected to negotiate a path through
the complex issues associated with academic power and control, a history of
exploitative Indigenous research practices, research ethics, social justice and
Indigenous rights. Rather than be immobilised and intimidated by these issues, I
would argue that research students and Indigenous peoples should be encouraged to
engage with them as a primary means of furthering the Indigenous research reform
process. Ongoing identification of unresolved issues and barriers to the institution of
proposed research reforms is important if changed researcher practices and reformed
institutional structures are to be achieved.

The following discussion will be framed by an identification of the major
stakeholders in the Indigenous education research process and speculation on their
interests in the outcome of current negotiations about how research should be
conducted. An overview of some higher education institution-sponsored Indigenous
education research guidelines and some structural initiatives designed to support their
implementation will provide an indication of trends in these areas. The relationship
between research-based higher degree courses and currently proposed Indigenous
education research guidelines will be discussed, and some structural barriers to the
successful implementation of proposed changes to Indigenous education research
practices will be considered.

**Framework for analysis**

The approach adopted within this analysis is substantially informed by the work of Jim
field has led to a more recent focus on reasons for the pattern of academic failure
experienced by minority or ‘culturally diverse’ students in the USA and Canada.
Cummins presents an argument for a re-orientation in focus when considering the
reasons for this pattern of failure, which persists despite the institution of expensive
education reforms. Cummins argues that students who have been failed by schools,
predominantly come from communities whose languages, cultures and identities have
been distorted and devalued in the wider society:

... if schools and society are genuinely committed to reversing this pattern of
school failure, with its massive social costs to the nation, the interactions between educators and students in schools must actively challenge historical patterns of disempowerment. This requires that schools respect students’ language and culture, encourage community participation, promote critical literacy and institute forms of assessment that contribute to the school as a learning community rather than pathologize culturally diverse students as scapegoats for the failure of schools and society. (Cummins 1996, p.v)

Cummins (1986, 1996) proposes a theoretical framework for analysing minority education interventions, which focuses on stakeholder positioning in relation to:

- cultural and linguistic incorporation;
- community participation;
- pedagogy; and
- assessment.

To the extent that educator interactions between minority students and communities reflect ‘enabling’ or ‘disabling’ orientations in these four areas, Cummins argues that it is possible to predict the likely success of education interventions. Within this framework, the educational failure of minority students is analysed as a function of the extent to which schools ‘reflect or counteract the power relations that exist within the broader society’ (Cummins 1986, p.32). He claims that the theoretical framework makes it possible to indicate positive directions for change within minority education interventions because the analytical focus is not obscured by costly reforms that leave unyielding ‘disabling’ structures essentially intact. A central tenet of the Cummins framework is that students from dominated societal groups are ‘empowered’ as a direct result of their interactions with educators in schools. Cummins claims that the extent to which minority students are ‘empowered’ within education interventions provides a key predictor of success in terms of improved academic outcomes. Cummins (1986, 1996) calls for minority education stakeholders to involve themselves in a process of personal and institutional role re-definations as a primary means of improving minority student academic outcomes. He predicts that without
these stakeholder role re-definitions, schools will continue to reproduce the power relations reflected in the wider society and that minority students will continue to fail academically.

Cummins (1989) points to an underlying pattern of institutional racism within minority education in the USA and Canada, which he argues is a factor in the ongoing pattern of minority student academic failure. He argues that racism in the minority education sphere is no longer overt but that a pattern of covert racism is recognisable. The Cummins (1986) theoretical framework for analysing minority education interventions, *Empowering minority students: A framework for intervention*, incorporates an approach that focuses on:

- identification of stakeholder interests in the outcome of proposed reforms;
- the role definitions adopted by key stakeholders in relation to the ‘empowerment’ of minority group members; and
- identification of structural barriers to reformed structures and practices.

While the Cummins framework for analysis is designed for application within school settings, I propose that key aspects of the framework might usefully inform an analysis of Indigenous education research practices. The extent to which currently proposed approaches to Indigenous education research ‘reflect or counteract the power relations that exist in the broader society’ (Cummins 1986) will provide a subjective measure of the likely success of proposed interventions in the research field. Identified disjunctions between stakeholder positioning on key issues and ‘system constraints’ that constitute barriers to changed practices will constitute the basis for the following analysis. The key issues for investigation include:

- negotiating research agreements;
- intellectual property rights of Indigenous peoples;
- Indigenous community control over the research process and over the research agenda; and
- Indigenous community participation in research activity.
The extent to which Indigenous peoples are ‘empowered’ or ‘disempowered’ as a result of their interactions with researchers and mainstream institutional structures within these dimensions of the research process will be considered. This approach has the potential to bring into focus the agency of institutional and individual stakeholders in the framing of Indigenous peoples as research ‘subjects’. Once barriers to reform have been identified, Cummins (1986) claims that positive directions for change become evident. In the minority education sphere, ‘positive change’ equates to improved academic outcomes. In the Indigenous education research field ‘positive change’ is indicated by a measurable increase in the benefit of research activity to Indigenous peoples.

**Indigenous education research stakeholders**

Indigenous education research stakeholders represent a range of interests in the research process and it is expected that those interests will sometimes conflict. Consideration of these interests brings into focus what individuals and institutions have to gain or lose from current attempts to reform Indigenous education research practices:

- **Higher education institutions**—must attract fee-paying students and so have an interest in ensuring that the research interests of students can be accommodated. The imperative to protect their good reputations as sponsors of high quality, ethically and politically acceptable research is also an important consideration.

- **Indigenous structures located within higher education institutions**—have an interest in ensuring that Indigenous education research is appropriately conducted and that it will have beneficial outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

- **Academic supervisors of Indigenous education research students**—are responsible for ensuring that the work of research students meets higher education institution academic standards and that students adhere to the appropriate ethical and protocol guidelines for the conduct of research.
➢ Indigenous community members—Indigenous peoples have different interests in the research process. Some people might not be interested in research activity, either as active participants or as ‘subjects’ of research. Others aim to derive benefit to their communities from research activity and are prepared to negotiate terms for the conduct of research to achieve this end.

➢ Student researchers—have the primary aim of gaining an academic qualification. In order to achieve this goal they need to comply with institutional research guidelines and academic guidelines. Their success is also dependent upon negotiating with Indigenous peoples to gain access to sites and subjects for their proposed research.

➢ National and State Governments—have an interest in ensuring that research activity reflects the social and economic agendas of government.

**Indigenous education research guidelines**

Higher education institutions in Australia are responsible for developing and enforcing research ethics and protocol guidelines for researchers operating under their auspices. Indigenous ethics committees have primary responsibility for determining the acceptability of proposed research projects involving Indigenous peoples. The decisions of these committees are guided by formalised ethical and protocol guidelines specific to Indigenous research, or by more general statements of Indigenous research principles. A common situation at present is that Indigenous research protocols specific to the conduct of education research are being either substantially revised or drafted.

The project to develop and refine ethical and protocol guidelines for Indigenous education research represents a dynamic field. Indigenous representatives within higher education institutions are aiming to re-define and formalise the rules of engagement between Indigenous peoples and researchers. This is in response to a generally accepted position that historically, Indigenous peoples have been exploited through the research process and that their interests have not always been adequately
represented. Attempts to reverse this situation include the promotion of approaches to research which are substantially guided by the expressed interests of Indigenous community members and which locate Indigenous participants as research ‘partners’ instead of as ‘objects’ of research. Indigenous representatives are attempting to extend the boundaries of the research discussion to include primary consideration of issues related to:

- consultation with Indigenous peoples as a primary means of inserting Indigenous research agendas;
- the potential benefits of research to Indigenous peoples;
- Indigenous control over the research process;
- ownership of intellectual property rights; and
- Indigenous community participation in research activity.

The resolution of issues associated with implementing reformed ethical and protocol guidelines for the conduct of Indigenous research involves a complex re-negotiation of the positionings of a range of participating stakeholders. Within the national reconciliation process between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Australia, a similar process is taking place. Competing policies, attitudes, ideological positionings and interpretations of Australia’s colonial history remain unresolved as stakeholders attempt to re-define their relationships and re-negotiate their individual and collective rights and responsibilities. The following section outlines the currently proposed Indigenous ethical and research guidelines of four higher education and research institutions in Australia. Particular emphasis will be on issues relating to the conduct of Indigenous education research. A more extensive comparative analysis of cross-disciplinary Indigenous ethical and protocol guidelines is contained within the ARC (1999) report into Indigenous research issues. The primary focus of the following analysis will be the extent to which Indigenous education research guidelines are implicated in the resolution of issues associated with:

- negotiating research agreements;
- intellectual property rights of Indigenous peoples;
➢ Indigenous community control over the research agenda and over the research process; and

➢ Indigenous community participation within the research process.

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra

The current Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) (2000) ethical guidelines for research involving Indigenous peoples represent an important indication of current approaches to the conduct of Indigenous research in Australia. The AIATSIS guidelines currently constitute the basis of Indigenous research guidelines within a number of higher education institutions in Australia. The Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE 2000) recommends that the AIATSIS guidelines be used as a key reference point for those researchers intending to conduct educational research involving Indigenous peoples.

The AIATSIS ethical guidelines are framed to encompass Indigenous research in a range of disciplines and do not refer specifically to the conduct of educational research. The AIATSIS guidelines for Indigenous research are currently under review, and revised guidelines are expected to be available in September 2000 (Muir, K., Director of Educational Research, AIATSIS, Canberra, pers. com. 28 March 2000). In addition to complying with the requirements outlined in the AIATSIS guidelines, researchers are advised to consult the ethical guidelines or codes of ethics adopted by relevant professional bodies in the fields of archaeology, anthropology, social research, Aboriginal languages or national health and medical research. There is no additional direction suggested for researchers in the field of Indigenous education.

On the issue of Indigenous community support for proposed research, the AIATSIS guidelines refer to the necessity for research applicants to provide evidence of relevant Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander support for the proposed research project. It is suggested that the required evidence of support should be obtained from community councils, organisation or appropriate 'umbrella' organisations where they
exist. The guidelines require that evidence of this support be lodged with the AIATSIS research ethics committee at the time of submitting a research application for consideration. The AIATSIS guidelines add the proviso that potential researchers must be aware that people relevant to proposed projects may not always be equally represented on Indigenous community councils and that in these cases additional permission must be sought from the relevant individuals.

The use of the terms ‘support’, ‘consent’ and ‘permission’ throughout the AIATSIS guidelines emphasise that evidence of ‘compliance’ on the part of Indigenous participants is a requirement. There is, however, no prescription for providing evidence about the extent to which the research agenda of Indigenous peoples has been inserted into the research process, neither is there a requirement for researchers to demonstrate a commitment to the negotiation of ‘research partnerships’ with Indigenous peoples. Specific mention of Indigenous community involvement in the conduct of research is made under a sub-heading entitled ‘Involvement of and benefit to the community’, although it is framed to suggest that collaboration with, and inclusion of, Indigenous peoples in the conduct of research is not an essential prerequisite. The guidelines state that the ‘research project should actively include, as far as possible, members of a community where the research is being carried out as collaborators or co-researchers’ (AIATSIS 2000, p.15).

The term ‘active inclusion’ is suggestive of the importance of the involvement of Indigenous peoples in the research process. But the vagueness associated with the operational realities of such an aim provides little direction for those participants involved in the negotiation of the ground rules for the conduct of Indigenous research.

The AIATSIS Indigenous research guidelines outline comprehensive rules relating to cultural and intellectual property rights, the appropriate use of research results, the publication of research findings, access to restricted material, informed consent of research participants, the use of audio-visual materials and privacy issues. The guidelines do not specifically address operational issues relating to the negotiation and conduct of research which aims to re-position Indigenous stakeholders as the initiators and arbiters of local research issues. If the AIATSIS (2000) guidelines are used as the main point of reference by researchers intending to engage in Indigenous educational
research, then these researchers and their sponsoring higher education institutions should be alert to the lack of guidance in these areas.

**Deakin University Indigenous education research guidelines**

The Deakin University Institute of Koorie Education discussion paper *Koorie research Program, Ethics, Protocols and Methodologies* (1994) outlines the conditions under which Indigenous education research should be initiated and conducted by Deakin University students. The format of the discussion paper is different from the formalised guidelines and statements of research principles developed by other higher education institutions. The discussion paper clarifies the positioning of the Institute of Koorie Education in relation to the conduct of research and provides a detailed argument for changed research practices which aim to re-position Indigenous participants in the research process. The discussion paper also investigates mechanisms for instigating a research framework described as ‘negotiated research agreements’. As such, it provides a useful background for those interested in the reasons for proposed Indigenous education research reforms and suggests mechanisms for achieving these reform goals. A central position of the Deakin University discussion paper is that significant changes to Indigenous education research practices are required if the historically ‘disempowering’ effects of research for Indigenous peoples in Australia are to be mitigated. The ethical, protocol and methodological guidelines for research are framed to ensure that Indigenous participants are described by their role as research ‘partners’ instead of as passive objects of research. The establishment of ‘research partnerships’ between Indigenous peoples and researchers is proposed as the principal way of ensuring Indigenous community control over all aspects of the research process. The statement prefaces the discussion paper: ‘The Institute of Koorie Education is committed to research activities, which advance the processes of empowerment and self-determination for Indigenous people. This is a fundamental principle for research conducted under the auspices of the Institute of Koorie Education’ (Deakin University 1994).
The Deakin University discussion paper also points to the need for both Deakin University and the Deakin Institute of Koorie Education to work toward the resolution of important issues related to the establishment of research protocols, ethics and methodologies that support and contribute toward the self-determination agenda of Indigenous Australians. Protocols for Koorie research are described as ‘[s]tatements of the transactions between the researchers and the associated Koorie community. These transactions become the procedural guidelines for enacting research projects’ (Deakin University 1994, p.6).

The discussion paper argues that it is unacceptable for research proposals to be formulated independently from Indigenous community input and for Indigenous community representatives to be expected to merely ratify research proposals. In the research context, ‘disempowerment’ for Indigenous participants has historically stemmed from a lack of control over the research agenda and over the conduct of research which is framed from non-Indigenous cultural perspectives. The inappropriate interpretation and application of research findings have also had negative consequences for Indigenous peoples. The Institute of Koorie Education asserts that institutional support for research proposals, which have been established jointly between university representatives and Indigenous community groups, is a key way of ensuring that university-centred research agendas are not imposed on Indigenous communities.

Under the proposed framework the Institute of Koorie Education would act as a research ‘consultancy or broker’ between Indigenous communities and the affiliated Deakin University staff. The Koorie Research Committee adopts the view that consultation in Indigenous research projects is an ongoing process and entails a commitment to appropriate and full communication between research groups and Indigenous community groups throughout the life of research projects. A key feature of research projects designed to have ‘empowering’ consequences for Indigenous community members is identified as being the involvement of Indigenous community members in the conduct of research. The Koorie Research Committee suggests that Indigenous community involvement be formalised through the participation of existing Indigenous community organisations in local research projects. These
community organisations should ideally function as advisory and mentor groups to research teams involved in Indigenous research, and provide a key reference point for the resolution of issues to do with methodological and ethical issues, the publication of research findings and ownership of data.

The Deakin Institute of Koorie Education's proposed framework for the conduct of Indigenous education research represents a significant departure from previous approaches to Indigenous research. Instead of requiring research students to provide token evidence of Indigenous community support for proposed research, the Koorie Research Committee is currently looking for evidence of a negotiated agreement between researchers and Indigenous communities. Each contract or transaction is expected to be different and must demonstrate responsiveness on the part of researchers to issues of concern or importance to Indigenous peoples. Negotiated transactions between Indigenous community members and researchers are then expected to be translated into procedural guidelines that become the ground rules for the conduct of proposed research.

The Indigenous research framework proposed by the Deakin Institute of Koorie Education demands a substantial increase in control by Indigenous peoples over the education research process; a situation requiring research participants to be well advised of their rights and responsibilities in relation to any proposed research. My recent experience as a research student at Deakin University has led me to question some underlying assumptions of the framework. These assumptions include:

- **Student researchers and Indigenous community members understand how to enter into 'negotiated research agreements' and if successfully negotiated, know how to maintain those agreements in a way which has 'empowering' consequences for the Indigenous participants.**

Establishing and maintaining 'negotiated research agreements' is critical to the achievement of research outcomes which have 'empowering' consequences for Indigenous peoples. The capacity of student researchers and Indigenous peoples to formulate and maintain these agreements is currently over-stated within Indigenous research guidelines.
under the proposed Indigenous research protocol framework, the research interests or issues of concern to Indigenous peoples can be effectively inserted into the research process at the outset.

The research interests of students must be adjusted to facilitate the research agendas of Indigenous community groups. This requires fundamental changes to the way potential researchers approach the research project. The researcher is expected to demonstrate a high degree of flexibility when designing and conducting research projects and a commitment to ensuring that the research outcomes benefit the Indigenous community. Even if a student is committed to these principles, the realities associated with the academic requirements of higher education institutions, the costs associated with post-graduate study and the time it takes to complete mandatory research constrain the student's capacity to negotiate with Indigenous peoples to the extent required.

Stakeholders in the Indigenous education research process will be able to facilitate an approach to research which places Indigenous peoples in a position of power when negotiating the research agenda and terms of engagement for proposed research.

Researchers are not immune from the effects of their social positioning, education, exposure to the history of contact between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and current public discourses about the nature of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations. If these effects combine to support a 'superior' attitude on the part of researchers, then their capacity to negotiate on equal terms with Indigenous peoples will be compromised. To overcome barriers to the successful negotiation of research 'partnerships', Indigenous peoples and research students need expert guidance.

Existing community-based Indigenous organisations have the necessary resources to facilitate the negotiation and conduct of educational research by student researchers.

Indigenous community organisations are cited as an important point of contact between researchers and Indigenous community members. Many of these
organisations, however, are inadequately resourced to meet the immediate needs of Indigenous community members. The imposition on these organisations of additional responsibilities relating to the conduct of research is not always realistic.

I would argue that without the necessary structural support, implementation of the Deakin Institute of Koorie education research framework may lead to less than optimum research outcomes for Indigenous peoples. Direct negotiation of the rules of engagement for research between Indigenous peoples and researchers represents uncharted territory, and if mechanisms for supporting this approach to research are not in place, then there is a danger researcher practices will not significantly change.

**Aboriginal Research Institute, University of South Australia**

The human research ethics committee of the University of South Australia requires that proposed research involving significant participation of Indigenous peoples be reviewed by the Aboriginal Research Institute (ARI), and that approval of research proposals is dependent upon clearance by the Institute (University of South Australia 2000a). The ARI *Ethics in Aboriginal Research Policy* (1993) guides the decisions of ARI in relation to the appropriateness of proposed research. The ARI Indigenous research protocol document (1993) is currently under review and revised guidelines will be available in 2001. The current ARI policy foreword includes the following statement:

> The Aboriginal Research Institute seeks to establish processes through which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a say in the research conducted in relation to them or their communities. Issues of consultation, ownership, control and community involvement are of fundamental importance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. (ARI 1993)

The incorporation of Indigenous community research agendas and Indigenous community involvement in the research process are referred to in the following general principles of the ARI (1993) policy:
(1) To promote research which meets the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, particularly those participating in the research.

(2) To encourage research in which Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders as individuals, families, groups or communities determine and define the research project.

(3) To develop research procedures which facilitate the input of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders as individuals, families, groups and communities in research activities with academe.

(5) To promote the recognition and use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community expertise and resources.

(7) To ensure community benefits and promote the employment of local people in research activities.

(8) To facilitate research that is collaborative and which offers useful outcomes for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

The ARI guidelines distinguish between the responsibilities attached to the conduct of ‘contractual, sponsored and funded research’ and ‘supervised research within academic awards’. In relation to the first category the guidelines state: ‘In the preparation of the research proposal the researcher must identify an appropriate reference group of expert people, with an Aboriginal majority where possible to advise on the research project’ (ARI 1993).

The roles and responsibilities of Indigenous reference groups are not clarified, but the assumption is that the reference group will oversee all aspects of the research project. The issue of ‘appropriateness’ of reference group membership is another area over which the Indigenous ethics committee must arbitrate. Within the guidelines for the conduct of student research there is no mention of the necessity to identify an appropriate reference group of expert Aboriginal peoples. It is difficult to understand why student researchers should not be formally guided by the input of Indigenous experts in the same way as funded researchers. If Indigenous advisory or reference
groups are proposed as an important way of achieving Indigenous representation and control within the research process, then more guidance about the composition and expected role of the reference groups is required.

The ARI guidelines provide explicit guidance to academic supervisors of student researchers. Supervisors have overall responsibility for the ethics of any research required of undergraduate students and are required to discuss with each student the ethics of proposed research. The supervisor must also ensure that the community is not misused as a student resource and is expected to monitor and direct students on the ethical conduct of their research throughout.

The ARI (1993) general principles that make direct reference to the implementation of research activity include:

(11) To provide a mechanism to obtain advice on the conduct of ethical research and sound practice in academia.

(12) To provide a mechanism through which issues of ownership and control of research outcomes can be negotiated.

(13) To provide a research framework that encourages the implementation of the policy and guidelines by researchers throughout the University of South Australia.

The references to providing a ‘mechanism’ and a ‘research framework’ for the implementation of ARI policy and guidelines related to the conduct of Indigenous research are suggestive of a policy direction that aims to clarify these issues. ‘Mechanisms’ and ‘frameworks’ to facilitate the general principles of the ethical guidelines proposed by ARI are not outlined in the current document. Analysis of ethical and protocol guidelines for Indigenous research within other higher education institutions indicate a similar lack of specific detail in these areas. The general principles for Indigenous education research are in place, policy directions have been established, but prescriptions for practically achieving these ends are still emerging from current research.
Centre for Indigenous Natural and Cultural Resource Management, Northern Territory University

The Centre for Indigenous Natural and Cultural Resource Management (CINCRM) is a specialist Indigenous research institute located within the Northern Territory University. The CINCRM Indigenous ethics policy draws significantly on the AIATSIS research protocol document referred to in an earlier section of this paper. The introductory statement to the CINCRM ethics policy for the conduct of Indigenous research states: ‘CINCRM is committed to research activities which advance the processes of empowerment and self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and which promote reconciliation between Indigenous Australians and the wider community’ (CINCRM 2000).

The ethics policy outlines mandatory requirements for the conduct of research involving human subjects which are in accordance with the broader Northern Territory University (NTU) human ethics requirements. Specific mention is made of the importance attached to providing written permission from participating individuals or their representative organisations. The policy also suggests that the guidance of research advisory committees and supervision committees will be of assistance in this regard. The guidelines make reference to the existence of research and ethics policies within other higher education and Indigenous community organisations in the Northern Territory and suggest that intending researchers may be directed to these in particular circumstances. In addition to the requirement that researchers comply with the human ethics guidelines of the NTU, the CINCRM also outlines its own special ethical requirements. The first of these requirements relates to providing:

- a reasonable summary explanation of the proposed research, its purposes and procedures, an estimate of the total time required;
- a description of foreseeable risks to subjects; and
- a statement outlining the rights of the participants to withdraw from the research process at any time.
Procedural issues relating to an explanation of how the research results will be applied, availability of research results to Indigenous community members, privacy issues and who to contact with questions regarding the research are also incorporated. In relation to Indigenous community involvement in the conduct of research, the CINCRM ethics policy states: '5.1.3 The research proposal must address the issue of the involvement of the members of the Indigenous community where the research is being carried out, where they are acting as collaborators or co-researchers, in those cases where this is viable' (CINCRM 2000).

The policy position in relation to the expected degree and nature of Indigenous involvement and collaboration within proposed research projects is vague. It is unclear how the research proposal should 'address' these issues and if in fact the collaboration of the communities or individuals in question is considered an important feature of proposed research. Nowhere is there any indication that the researcher must demonstrate the extent to which a research proposal has been informed by the research agendas of Indigenous communities or individuals.

The CINCRM research protocol is prefaced by some fundamental principles for ethical research, these include:

➢ the necessity for informed consent by the individuals or community, with whom the research is to be carried out;

➢ that the research is of benefit to the local and broader Indigenous communities;

➢ acknowledgement of Indigenous ownership over intellectual and cultural property rights; and

➢ appropriate use of research results.

Researchers are required to submit research proposals for clearance by a CINCRM ethics committee or an ethics committee from a representative Indigenous organisation. There is a detailed statement about the importance of gaining the relevant 'support', 'permission' and 'consent' from prospective Indigenous participants. There is no specific mention, however, of the necessity for researchers to demonstrate that the research agendas of Indigenous communities or individuals have significantly informed the research proposal.
Indigenous research advisory committees and supervisory committees are mentioned within the context of providing support to researchers when securing written permission from potential research participants. There is no other detail about the makeup and function of Indigenous research advisory committees as these relate to the activities of researchers. Within other Indigenous research protocols and guidelines these committees are framed as an important point of reference between Indigenous peoples and researchers attempting to frame ‘negotiated research agreements’. Clarification of the expected roles and composition of these committees may assist prospective advisory group members and researchers to fulfill their respective obligations within the research project.

Unlike other ethical and protocol guidelines the CINCRM guidelines for Indigenous research specifically state that in some circumstances the researcher or student may be directed to the ethical and protocol guidelines of representative Indigenous community organisations. This position reflects a commitment to the rights of community-based Indigenous organisations to exercise local control over the terms of research agreements.

Under the heading ‘Ownership of cultural and intellectual property rights’, the CINCRM research protocol states that ‘A research project supported by CINCRM may be seen as a joint project, that is, one between the researcher and an Indigenous community’ (CINCRM 2000).

Within this context there are provisions for recognition of the intellectual property the researcher brings to the project, but it is made clear that the intellectual property rights in the material on which the research is based remain a matter to be negotiated between the researcher and the Indigenous participants. References within the CINCRM research guidelines to the establishment of ‘joint’ research projects established a strong position in relation to demonstrable Indigenous community involvement in the research process, and clarification of the intellectual property rights issue mandates for formal recognition of Indigenous knowledge and cultural perspectives within the research process.

**Higher education research-based courses**

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When higher education institutions offer research-based courses that allow for the investigation of Indigenous issues, then it is implied that Indigenous peoples are available as a research commodity. This situation raises important questions about stakeholder interests in the outcome of research agreements and the rights of Indigenous community representatives to assert control over the research agenda and over the conduct of research.

Consideration of the structure of research-based courses within higher education institutions is critical to interpreting the level of institutional support for proposed changes to Indigenous research practices contained within current Indigenous research guidelines. These courses represent the point at which research projects are conceptualised and where the rules of engagement between researchers and Indigenous peoples are negotiated. The extent to which the design of these courses reflect a responsiveness to calls for increasing levels of Indigenous community control over all aspects of the research process warrants investigation. For the purpose of this discussion, I propose to detail some issues arising out of my experience as a research student in the Education Doctorate Course at Deakin University.

**Education Doctorate (EdD) course**

The EdD course models of doctoral study represent a departure from the traditional PhD model. Instead of requiring students to engage in a long-term, single focus research project, the EdD model combines course work with the conduct of a number of discrete research projects. The professional doctorate courses are targeted at professionals currently working in the field of their proposed areas of investigation. It is expected that the research interests of students will be related to their current professional practice.

The EdD model requires students to spend approximately two years completing mandatory course work and investigating an area of research interest. This work culminates in the development of a general research proposal and literature review, commonly described as a ‘colloquium document’. The student defends this document
to an expert academic panel, and, on the basis of this presentation, it is decided whether or not the student is permitted to proceed to the next stage of the course. The second stage involves the conduct of approximately four research projects related to the main theme of the colloquium document. These discrete research projects can take the form of project evaluations, analyses, action research projects, academic papers or other formats agreed upon with academic supervisors. Students are required at this point to formalise the design of their research proposals, negotiate with potential subjects of research and make necessary application to the relevant ethics committee for permission to conduct research involving human subjects.

The design of the EdD course has particular implications for those student researchers intending to investigate issues relating to Indigenous peoples. If the student follows the standard EdD course processes, it is almost inevitable that they will find themselves in breach of the intent of the relevant Indigenous research ethical and protocol guidelines. The Deakin University (1994) discussion paper refers to the necessity for researchers to enter into ‘joint’ or ‘negotiated’ research partnerships with Indigenous peoples and yet the EdD student researcher is encouraged to formulate and propose research projects in isolation from Indigenous community input during the first stage of the course. This situation leads to the potential for three scenarios during stage two of the EdD course:

➤ The researcher is able to coopt the support of Indigenous peoples or Indigenous community organisations for the projects they propose. This would involve the formulation of an Indigenous advisory group to oversee the conduct of the research and the attainment of written consent from potential Indigenous participants. This situation precludes the insertion of Indigenous community research agendas into the research process and encourages exploitative research practices.

➤ The researcher substantially re-designs his or her proposed research projects based on negotiations with Indigenous community organisations and individuals. This may necessitate a total re-working of the colloquium proposal and negotiations with Indigenous peoples which might necessitate changes that compromise the
doctoral student's programme of research that is determined by time restrictions imposed by the sponsoring university.

- The researcher retreats from active engagement with Indigenous peoples and organisations as a means of achieving his or her research goals. This would involve re-designing the research proposals to include research that relies on existing data available in the public domain.

Each of these scenarios has distinct implications for the ethics, quality and usefulness of research. A change in course structure that mandates for actual negotiations with Indigenous peoples during the first stage of the course would go a long way toward mitigating the 'stalemate' situation which characterises the situation for some research students at the end of the first stage of the EdD course. This negotiation process could be facilitated through the insertion of a special unit of study that clarifies ground rules for the conduct of Indigenous education research. At this stage student researchers and Indigenous peoples could be expertly supported in their attempts to negotiate research agreements.

The Deakin University EdD course structure requires students to conduct approximately four separate research projects. This represents a potential for multiple intrusions into the lives of Indigenous peoples through direct research activity and the necessity for researchers to negotiate proposals for research with representative Indigenous organisations. Indigenous peoples in Australia have a history of being over-researched, and many under-funded Indigenous community organisations are already struggling to fulfill their contracted obligations to Indigenous community members. Requests for assistance in the brokerage of research projects is yet another burden on the time and resources of these organisations. This issue is referred to in the 'Ethics in Aboriginal Research Policy' developed by ARI at the University of South Australia (1993). The following statement was adopted with permission from Wadsworth (1991): 'Supervisors and teachers have a responsibility to ensure that the community is not misused as a student resource. They must take care not to exploit groups, or to place on them repetitive and burdensome demands' (ARI 1993).

The extent to which the demands associated with the conduct of EdD research projects represents an unnecessary burden on Indigenous individuals and community
organisations is unclear. Issues of research relevance, Indigenous community control over the research agenda and the nature of the negotiating process leading up to the brokerage of formal ‘research agreements’ remain unresolved. It is expected that research conducted by EdD students will be closely related to their practice within a professional field. This situation provides an ideal opportunity to frame research projects that have the potential to address issues of practical interest to Indigenous community members and that promote professional engagement with important structural and theoretical issues. It is possible, however, that these opportunities may be lost if student researchers and Indigenous peoples are not adept at negotiating viable research agreements. The development of alternative research-based courses for students with a professional interest in Indigenous issues may be necessary in order to ensure the required level of academic supervision and brokerage assistance.

In the current situation, EdD students at Deakin University need to fulfill course requirements which have been developed and informed by an institutional culture for which the inclusion of Indigenous interests has not been a central concern. Indigenous education reform proponents argue for re-positioning of Indigenous interests as central to the construction of research activity; a position which potentially challenges the dominance of higher education institutions in determining the construction of research approaches. In the current situation, student researchers are caught between the need to fulfill the academic and administrative requirements of higher education institutions and at the same time satisfy incompatible requirements of Indigenous research guidelines. The issue of incompatibility between the realities associated with negotiating with Indigenous peoples and the requirements of higher education institutions in terms of time allocation for course completion illustrates this point. On this issue, the ARC investigation into the conduct of Indigenous research in Australia reported the following: ‘An issue raised here was the incompatibility of notions of time in academic and community contexts, which leads to insufficient time being allowed for the execution of projects within communities’ (ARC 1999, p.64).

Approaches to the facilitation of Indigenous education research guidelines
A guiding aim of the project to reform the Indigenous education research process is to facilitate improved Indigenous academic outcomes. Indigenous 'community controlled' research that is framed by locally developed research agendas and that is guided by the cultural perspectives of Indigenous peoples seems a logical way to support this aim. Indigenous education research guidelines are generally moving toward a position that mandates for the insertion of Indigenous research agendas as a primary means of 'empowering' Indigenous participants in the research process. The changed rights and responsibilities of research participants have been outlined within higher education institution-sponsored Indigenous research guidelines, but researchers and research participants are struggling to come to terms with the implications of these sometimes significant changes. The project to re-educate Indigenous research participants is under way in a range of forums, but the reform process is in danger of stalling if the impetus for this project is not maintained and materially supported by all higher education institutions that sponsor Indigenous research activity.

A range of structures designed to represent the interests of Indigenous students and Indigenous community members currently operate within higher education institutions in Australia. The role of these structures vary from a specific focus on Indigenous research issues to the design and implementation of teaching programmes for Indigenous students. These structures represent a relatively new innovation within the higher education sector, and the programmes and guidelines currently being developed involve significant reforms. The dynamic nature of the issues involved in this process of reform means that conventional higher education approaches are regularly challenged. This situation requires that Indigenous representatives within higher education institutions simultaneously fulfill the roles of reformer, advocate and educator.

While the reform process in relation to the conduct of Indigenous education research continues, so too does the business of higher education institutions. Students enrolling in research-based courses expect that the rules of engagement for Indigenous education research have been negotiated. This is substantially true, but current projects to implement revised Indigenous research guidelines are incomplete. Student
researchers and Indigenous community members are currently located at the interface of this change process. In 1997, five major centres for Indigenous teaching and research were established at Australian higher education institutions. ‘The Centres are designed to build on existing excellence at Curtin University of Technology, The University of Newcastle, Northern Territory University, The University of South Australia, and the University of Western Australia. Each centre will be funded with between $1.7 and $2 million over the next three years’ (University of South Australia 2000b).

Different focus areas for research activity within each of these centres were proposed. In announcing the establishment of the Indigenous research centre at the University of South Australia, the Federal Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Senator Vanstone, described the purpose of the centres as follows: ‘The Centres will provide a focus for Indigenous Research and will directly contribute expertise and knowledge in their respective disciplines to benefit Indigenous communities. They will encourage the incorporation of Indigenous Australian perspectives into courses and teaching and help the general community understand Indigenous knowledge and learning’ (University of South Australia 2000c).

The establishment of these centres reinforces the capacity of Indigenous peoples to assert control over how research into Indigenous issues is conducted in Australia. In conjunction with other representative Indigenous structures within higher education institutions, Indigenous centres for teaching and research are well positioned to provide advocacy for the rights and interests of Indigenous peoples within both the higher education system and within the research process generally. In collaboration with other existing representative Indigenous institutes it should be possible for researchers and Indigenous community members to arrive at mutually beneficial research agreements which reflect a fundamental change to the historical positioning of Indigenous peoples as ‘subjects’ of research. It is important, however, for Indigenous education research stakeholders to be aware of barriers to reform which are both institutionally and personally based. An ongoing project to recognise the
nature and agency of these barriers to reform should be considered an important responsibility of all participating stakeholders.

The ARI at the University of South Australia focuses specifically on the conduct of research involving Indigenous peoples. The ARI was established in 1992, and, according to its’ own publicity, the ‘ARI has built a reputation as a Centre of Excellence in Indigenous research’ (ARI 2000a).

From the year 2000, the focus of the ARI at the University of South Australia will be Indigenous educational research, and the ultimate goal of the institute is to ‘[c]ontribute to the raising of educational outcomes of Indigenous students. Despite policy and program innovations over the last two decades, these outcomes continue to be lower for Indigenous students in comparison to other Australians and many Indigenous students continue to be disadvantaged and alienated by the formal education process’ (ARI 2000b).

It is expected that the ARI and other Indigenous research and teaching centres located within higher education institutions will have a significant impact on how research involving Indigenous peoples is conducted. The problem remains that specialist Indigenous research centres are not located at all higher education institutions in Australia, and yet many of these institutions are involved in Indigenous research activity. Within institutions which do not host specialist Indigenous research centres, existing Indigenous support structures are expected to take primary responsibility for framing Indigenous research guidelines, for assessing proposals for research and for providing support and advice to academic staff, students and Indigenous community members.

Institutional racism and barriers to reform

As a stakeholder group, higher education institutions exert a powerful influence over all aspects of Indigenous research activity. It is within higher education institutions that Indigenous research protocols and ethical guidelines are developed and monitored, and where student researchers are guided in their research practice. Within the context of the project to reform the Indigenous education research process, higher
education institutions are both the 'rule makers' and 'key players'; a situation which has the potential for conflicts of interest. Cummins (1996) proposes that the practice of 'institutional racism' represents a significant barrier to reform in a range of minority education situations. There is a general consensus that Indigenous education research practices need to change, but the agency of higher education institutions in the continuing 'dismemberment' of Indigenous research participants has not been disclosed. It remains to be seen whether stakeholder interests in the outcome of negotiations will compromise the resolution of issues associated with attempts to reform the Indigenous education reform process.

Mason (1982) proposes a version of institutional racism contained within a 'structuralist Marxist' framework as an effective way of conceptualising the agency of government stakeholders in relation to the achievement of differential outcomes by groups defined by 'race' within society. Mason argues that the blame for 'inadvertent' disadvantaging of individuals under State jurisdictions is often attributed to 'system constraints'. The capacity of State agents to deny the existence of, or conceal the level of, disadvantage resulting from identified 'system constraints' is diminished once they have been identified and entered into discourses in the public domain. Mason points out that the emphasis within a 'structuralist Marxist' framework is on the consequences of State policy. If these consequences of state policy deliver 'systematically unequal effects upon the lives of groups socially defined by race' then an argument for a project of 'institutional racism' can be made.

In line with the framework proposed by Mason (1982), Cowlishaw (1988, p.6) proposes that an argument for the existence of racism should not depend on evidence of overt hostility. Instead, she argues that it is more appropriate to consider the consequences of 'actions and beliefs'. The extent to which these consequences impact negatively upon the lives of groups of people 'socially defined by race' may provide subjective evidence of a project of racism. This conceptualisation of racism encourages a focus on the underlying ideologies that inform stakeholder positioning.

The hegemony of the higher education sector over the Indigenous education research process is promoted through practices that marginalise the interests of Indigenous peoples. The following section attempts to identify aspects of higher
education institution practices which impact negatively on attempts to increase the extent to which Indigenous peoples are 'empowered' through the education research process. These practices are described as 'system constraints'. The identification of 'system constraints' does not necessarily justify the attribution of a project of 'institutional racism'. A lack of commitment by higher education institutions and other key stakeholders to reduce the impact of these 'constraints' once they have been identified may, however, provide subjective evidence of a project of 'institutional racism'.

Philanthropy and Indigenous education research

Rowse (2000) argues that key nineteenth and twentieth century government policies relating to Indigenous land tenure and rationing systems were underpinned by a philanthropic ideology. I would argue that an ideology of philanthropy is also an identifiable feature of the Indigenous research project in Australia:

... both reserves and rations were understood by the colonists as acts of charity, of duty to the poor and hopeless ... Charity is an ideology of neither equality nor reciprocity; it is an ideology of superiority and hierarchy. Charity assumes authority to improve and look after. To the extent that colonists thought in terms of charity they were incapable of thinking of Indigenous rights. (Rowse 2000, p.34)

Relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians have historically been framed by the 'donor–recipient' relationship, which Rowse argues is a fundamental principle of the philanthropic project. Rowse claims that ration provision by colonists for Indigenous peoples depended upon the principles that the act of providing rations should be a morally improving exercise for the Indigenous recipients and that in return for these rations they were expected to adhere to rules associated with distribution of resources. These rules extended to attending church and completing assigned work, and they were routinely enforced as a means of providing a public display of Indigenous moral improvement and 'gratitude'. It is arguable that the missionary
conception of education provision was similarly based. Missionaries provided education to Indigenous peoples in exchange for their acceptance of Christian principles and of European codes of conduct. The legacy of this ‘charitable’ approach to education provision for Indigenous students is evident today. Education is ‘provided’ by governments to Indigenous students, and their ‘recipient’ responsibilities include regular school attendance and acceptance of English as the primary language of instruction.

The current positioning of some researchers and higher education institutions bears hallmarks of the philanthropic tradition. Indigenous peoples continue to be framed within the research project as ‘recipients’ by virtue of their positioning as research ‘subjects’. The ‘donors’ are evidently researchers and higher education institutions who generously donate their knowledge, skills and resources to the cause of Indigenous advancement in a range of areas. Non-Indigenous researchers have traditionally usurped the role of ‘problem identification’ and theorising possible solutions to these Indigenous ‘problems’; a situation which is changing rapidly as Indigenous peoples challenge these practices and reject their ‘recipient’ status. The pervasiveness of the belief that Western knowledge and academic frameworks are superior to Indigenous knowledge and cultural perspectives has served to legitimise the dominance of non-Indigenous researchers within the research context. Current attempts to turn this situation around are evident within reformed Indigenous research guidelines that argue for a re-framing of stakeholder roles within the research process. Not only do these guidelines aim to ascribe the role of ‘problem identification’ to Indigenous peoples, they also argue for the primacy of Indigenous knowledge and cultural perspectives within the framing of research approaches. Current Indigenous education research guidelines reject both the philanthropic basis of non-Indigenous researcher participation in the research process and the imposition of Western academic constructs as the basis for investigating Indigenous issues. Some researchers and institutional stakeholders are genuinely surprised at this turn of events, and an underlying reason for expressions of resentment might be that Indigenous peoples are not adhering to the rules associated with the distribution of resources within the philanthropic or charitable framework. Indigenous peoples should be more ‘grateful’.
Rowse's assertion that to 'the extent that colonists thought in terms of charity they were incapable of thinking about Indigenous rights' is equally applicable within the Indigenous education research field. As long as researchers and higher education institutions are positioned as benevolent providers of research expertise, there is little hope that they will also be advocates for Indigenous rights. Attitudes of 'superiority' and 'charity' that still underpin the positioning of many Indigenous education research stakeholders represent a barrier to Indigenous education research reform.

**Higher education institution Indigenous education research guidelines**

Although current Indigenous education research guidelines and protocols articulate general principles for reformed Indigenous research activity, there is a need for more prescription about how to facilitate the insertion of Indigenous community research agendas and how to implement 'collaborative' research approaches. The lack of direction in terms of 'mechanisms' and 'frameworks' for the achievement of fundamental changes to research practices potentially supports the continuation of Indigenous education research practices which are not substantially reformed and which perpetuate the 'recipient' positioning of Indigenous peoples.

**Higher education institution research-based courses**

The current structure of some higher education research-based courses contradicts the fundamental principles of reformed Indigenous education research guidelines. These courses provide ineffective mechanisms for the insertion of Indigenous research agendas and for the successful negotiation of research agreements between researchers and Indigenous peoples.

**Western knowledge and academic frameworks**
Western knowledge and academic frameworks for theorising Indigenous issues have historically guided the construction of Indigenous education research and the subsequent interpretation of research data. Under currently proposed Indigenous education research guidelines, Indigenous knowledge and perspectives are afforded special status to the extent that Indigenous participants can claim intellectual property rights. Until there is formal recognition of the validity of Indigenous knowledge and cultural perspectives within the academy, however, it is unlikely that researchers will seriously consider any alternative to Western knowledge and academic frameworks as the primary means of theorising Indigenous issues.

Issues associated with the ownership of knowledge within the research context are generally referred to as ‘intellectual property rights’. The CINCRM research protocol distinguishes between two types of intellectual property:

- **Background intellectual property**—what one party owns before going into the project;

- **Foreground intellectual property**—the results of the joint project. The parties concerned may jointly own this, or ownership allocated by prior agreement:

  This means that the cultural and intellectual property rights in the material on which the research is based remain with the Indigenous owners. The grantee is the owner of the copyright in the research results where these are used for research purposes and not for profit. This may be jointly with the Indigenous participants. (CINCRM 2000)

The CINCRM position on intellectual property rights supports the argument that Indigenous research participants have a legitimate claim over the knowledge or understandings created as a result of the intersection between non-Indigenous and Indigenous knowledge. If this claim becomes broadly accepted and legitimated within Indigenous research guidelines, then the academic activity of many researchers is likely to be significantly curtailed.

**Researcher resistance**
Reformed Indigenous education research guidelines present a case for a fundamental reduction in the power exercised by non-Indigenous researchers in relation to the formulation of research agendas, the construction of research projects, access to Indigenous research participants, interpretation of research findings and the assigning of intellectual property rights. In the past, researchers have successfully negotiated access to Indigenous research participants and have had relative freedom to engage in academic discourses about Indigenous issues. The fact that researchers have never had a mandate for this activity is a confronting truth; a situation that might explain negative researcher reactions to the implications of reformed Indigenous education research guidelines.

There is little doubt that the rights of researchers have been substantially eroded under currently proposed Indigenous research guidelines. In many ways researchers can be viewed as casualties of the Indigenous education research reform process. For obvious reasons, researchers are unlikely to publicly disclose their frustration at the limitations imposed on their research activities but, privately, charges of intellectual censorship are common. This privately expressed opposition has the potential to manifest in resistance by researchers to engage in research that is driven by Indigenous community interests. Researcher resistance to proposed Indigenous research reforms represents a significant potential barrier to the success of the Indigenous education research reform process.

**Indigenous research ethics committees and Indigenous community organisations**

The agenda for the Indigenous education research reform process in Australia has been substantially framed by the concerns of Indigenous representatives and educators within higher education institutions. The legitimacy of the advocacy role assumed by Indigenous representatives is linked to the extent of their independence from higher education bureaucracies and to the extent that they are advised by local Indigenous community representatives.
‘In principle’ acceptance of research proposals by higher education Indigenous ethics committees is currently dependent upon demonstrable Indigenous community support for proposed research. The requirement by these committees for proof of this support varies, but it is generally expected to be in written form. As noted in an earlier section of this paper, requirements associated with ‘proof of support’ by Indigenous peoples for research proposals do not necessarily address the fundamental issues associated with the insertion of Indigenous community interests within the construction of research agendas. The capacity of intending researchers to coerce Indigenous peoples into accepting proposals to conduct research remains unaddressed if transparent processes for proof of Indigenous community support are not adequately developed. The ARC (1999) report into Indigenous research noted the extent of the problem associated with the insertion of Indigenous community research agendas. The report writers canvassed researchers about their research practices and concluded that:

The responses to the questionnaire for researchers revealed that most research of interest to Indigenous people excludes Indigenous involvement from the planning process or other significant input into research projects. Most of the research projects were initiated from within the academic community and reflected the theoretical interests of the disciplines concerned. As a result only a small number aimed to meet identified community needs. (ARC 1999, p.65)

It is still a commonly held perception among intending researchers that acceptance of a research proposal by a higher education Indigenous ethics committee is in effect a ‘license to drive’. In situations where there is a lack of resources at the local Indigenous community level for the consideration of proposed research projects, this remains substantially true. Indigenous community organisations are identified within current Indigenous education research guidelines as being a key point of contact between researchers and Indigenous peoples. To over-state the capacity of many community-based Indigenous organisations to facilitate research agreements between Indigenous peoples and researchers is problematic. The capacity of many Indigenous organisations to fulfill the ascribed ‘brokerage’ function is compromised by the reality of their under-resourcing and their tenuous funding arrangements in adverse political environments. It is unfortunately sometimes ‘after the fact’ that Indigenous
community members realise the extent to which their interests are compromised by the activity of researchers. Mechanisms for representing the interests of Indigenous peoples within higher education forums are currently restricted to the 'gate-keeping' function adopted by Indigenous research ethics committees.

The development of more effective communication networks between higher education Indigenous research ethics committees and representative Indigenous organisations may increase the capacity of Indigenous research ethics committees to verify community support for proposed researcher activity. These networks may also provide an opportunity for higher education ethics committees to adopt a pro-active role toward facilitating 'negotiated research agreements' between researchers and Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous education research advocacy structures

Insufficient institutional support for the development of Indigenous research advocacy structures demonstrates a lack of commitment to the goal of Indigenous 'self-determination' within the research context. The development of specialist Indigenous research advocacy structures within all higher education institutions involved in Indigenous research activity, is considered a necessary innovation to provide a forum for mediating the research interests of higher education institutions and those of the broader Indigenous community.

The role of government in determining the research agenda

The ARC is the statutory body responsible for channelling government funds into research activity in a range of areas. Among areas included under the ARC mandate is the allocation of funds for the conduct of research into issues that affect the lives of Indigenous peoples in Australia. During a recent Senate inquiry into the new ARC bills, evidence that demonstrated high level government interference in the allocation of funding for Indigenous research was tabled. A national newspaper reported that the 'former Higher Education Minister Amanda Vanstone took the extraordinary step of
rejecting advice on a research grant from higher education’s peak research funding body . . . The revelations came during discussions about ministerial powers under existing and proposed ARC legislation’ (Illing 2000).

It was further revealed by Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) bureaucrat Michael Gallagher that the research proposal in question related to recommendations for Indigenous research funding. The specific nature of the research proposal was not revealed within the Senate enquiry but the former chair of the ARC, Professor Brennan, confirmed that rejection of an ARC research recommendation had occurred on one occasion and that the research proposal did in fact relate to an Indigenous issue. Professor Brennan also pointed out that the practice of requiring ministerial approval for individual research grants was unusual within Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (Illing 2000). The article also reveals that the rejection of the Indigenous research proposal by the federal minister responsible for higher education represents a precedent in terms of ministerial power over the ARC research agenda and that this situation is unlikely to change under currently proposed legislation: ‘In the Senate hearings last Tuesday, DEETYA’s Jennifer Gordon said the minister need not accept the advice of the ARC under present or new legislation’ (Illing 2000).

Under existing and proposed ARC legislation the minister responsible for higher education signs off on recommendations from the ARC on the $240 million annual grants allocation (Illing 2000). Given the recorded precedent relating to a Federal Government minister rejecting a specific research proposal, and given that the research proposal in this instance related to an Indigenous research issue, this raises serious questions about the independence of the ARC from political interference. It also raises questions about the reality associated with attempts to develop Indigenous research agendas that are driven by Indigenous community interests.

Suggested personal and institutional role re-definitions

Structural interventions designed to support an increase in Indigenous community control over the research process include the establishment of specialist Indigenous
research centres in higher education institutions and the development of Indigenous education research guidelines. These guidelines promote the re-positioning of Indigenous peoples as research ‘partners’ and the development of research agendas that directly reflect Indigenous community interests. It will take time to assess the extent to which these interventions are impacting upon research practices in ways which ‘empower’ Indigenous research participants. Research conducted by the ARC (1999) suggests, however, that Indigenous research practices have not significantly changed over the past six years. From this it is possible to speculate that Indigenous community ‘empowerment’ through engagement with researchers and with the research process has not eventuated. Stage two of the ARC research project was designed to discover any ‘significant gaps, discrepancies and anomalies in research of interest to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’, and as a part of this process researcher attitudes and practices were investigated. Researchers were interviewed and samples of recently conducted research of interest to Indigenous peoples were investigated. In areas of research practice related to consultation with Indigenous peoples, intellectual property rights, Indigenous control over research practices, Indigenous research agendas and Indigenous community participation the ARC report indicates a number of shortfalls in current practices. The ARC research findings provide scope for suggesting necessary changes to stakeholder positioning, and they demonstrate that researchers who are willing to adopt ‘empowering’ approaches to research involving Indigenous peoples are confronted with a range of problems. These problems are associated with a lack of researcher expertise in negotiating with Indigenous peoples and with the conflicting requirements contained within and between higher education institution-sponsored Indigenous research guidelines. The ARC is committed in principle to the devolution of control of research processes and of the research agenda to Indigenous community groups. Recent evidence about the interference of a Federal Government minister in the funding for an ARC-sponsored Indigenous research project suggests, however, that the ARC may in fact not have the statutory independence to honour this commitment (Ilting 2000).

In this paper I have argued that without significant stakeholder support for the institution of reformed Indigenous education research practices, it is difficult to predict
measurable advantages to Indigenous peoples in terms of increased benefit from research activity. Speculation on stakeholder commitment to reformed Indigenous research practices throughout this analysis has been informed by current policy directions, the ARC (1999) report *Research of Interest to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, and consideration of current institutional structures that impact upon the conduct of Indigenous education research. Some suggested changes to stakeholder positions arising out of this analysis include:

- A commitment to re-positioning Indigenous peoples as ‘equal partners’ in the research process. Under reformed Indigenous research guidelines, Indigenous peoples are positioned as key participants in research activity. Assuming Indigenous peoples accept this role definition, then significant changes to the practices of researchers and to the nature of institutional support structures are necessary.

- A commitment to re-positioning researchers as facilitators of Indigenous community research interests. Currently proposed Indigenous education research guidelines are premised on the assumption that non-Indigenous researcher objectives will be sublimated to the interests of Indigenous community members: a position which is difficult to argue against but equally difficult to institute. Potential barriers to changed researcher positioning in this area include:
  
  - the imperative for student researchers to attain academic qualifications;
  - the prevalence of philanthropic attitudes among researchers and within higher education institutions generally;
  - researcher resistance to changed research practices that substantially decrease the power they are able to exert within the research context; and
  - the lack of prescription within current Indigenous education research guidelines for changed researcher practices.

- Indigenous ethics committee members and academic supervisors within higher education institutions should adopt an advocacy role by facilitating effective ‘research partnerships’ between Indigenous peoples and researchers. In addition
to ensuring that researchers demonstrate a commitment to the insertion of
Indigenous community research agendas and Indigenous control over the research
process, both supervisors and members of ethics committees are in a good position
to advise research participants about how to negotiate research agreements. The
traditional ‘gatekeeping’ role of ethics committees needs to be extended to an
advocacy role for changed research practices.

➢ A commitment to re-positioning higher education institutions as facilitators of
reformed Indigenous education research practices. The ‘disempowering’ effects
of research practices that continue to frame Indigenous peoples as research
‘subjects’ are masked by higher education institution assertions that they are
committed to a policy of Indigenous community ‘self-determination’. This claim is
unsupportable if the required levels of advocacy and structural support for the
implementation of reformed Indigenous education research practices are not in
place. This support should extend to the re-education of Indigenous education
research stakeholders and to the development of frameworks for supporting local
Indigenous organisations to fulfill their brokerage function between researchers
and Indigenous community members. The design of higher education research
courses should promote the insertion of Indigenous research agendas and support
researchers and Indigenous peoples in their attempts to enter into ‘negotiated
research agreements’.

Positive directions for change

Changes or innovations within the Indigenous education research field are suggested
on the basis that they will promote the ‘empowerment’ of Indigenous peoples within
the research process. The following suggested changes are made on the basis of
identified inadequacies within some current Indigenous research guidelines and within
currently proposed higher education institution practices and structures. These
suggestions emanate from the analysis of current Indigenous education research
guidelines contained in earlier sections of this paper and from the analysis of
Indigenous research issues conducted by ARC (1999). Some of the recommendations are cited directly from the ARC (1999) report.

Indigenous research advocacy structure within higher education institutions

The following section outlines a proposal to insert a formalised Indigenous research advocacy structure into higher education institutions that do not currently incorporate a specialist Indigenous research centre. Institutional support for the re-education of stakeholders and for the implementation of collaborative research between researchers and Indigenous peoples is considered essential to achieving the objectives of reformed Indigenous research guidelines.

It is possible that Indigenous research advocacy units could be developed under the umbrella of existing Indigenous structures within higher education institutions. The objectives of the advocacy units will be substantially defined by the particular circumstances within each higher education institution. It is predicted that the initial work of the units will involve establishing communication networks between other Indigenous research units and with Indigenous community groups. The construction of a dedicated web-site may represent a useful means by which Indigenous advocacy units can establish and maintain communication with Indigenous stakeholders and prospective researchers. A key measure of the success of Indigenous research advocacy units will be their demonstrated capacity to facilitate research projects which include substantial Indigenous community participation and which locate Indigenous peoples as the primary beneficiaries of research activity.

Some possible functions of Indigenous research advocacy units include:

- establishing communication with community-based Indigenous organisations in key locations throughout Australia;
- providing information to Indigenous community groups about contact details of academic staff and representative Indigenous organisations within the higher education institution;
> facilitating contact between Indigenous community-based organisations and prospective research students and academic staff;

> advising Indigenous peoples about how to negotiate a research agreement with prospective researchers;

> advising Indigenous peoples and researchers about how to manage negotiated research projects;

> information sharing with Indigenous research advocacy units and Indigenous research centres located within other higher education institutions;

> educating non-Indigenous researchers on issues relating to cross-cultural research;

> assisting potential researchers to frame research projects that are in accordance with Indigenous research guidelines;

> developing Indigenous research protocols and guidelines.

In developing Indigenous research advocacy units within all higher education institutions, special provision for the employment of expert academic staff is suggested. Academic staff should have designated responsibilities for:

> providing advice to research students proposing to engage in negotiated research projects with Indigenous peoples;

> providing advice and practical support to Indigenous research advocacy unit staff;

> assisting in the compilation of examples of ‘best-practice’ research, which demonstrate successful ‘negotiated research agreements’ between Indigenous peoples and researchers.

Indigenous research advocacy units and specialist Indigenous research centres located within higher education institutions represent the best hope for the formalisation of procedures to ensure that Indigenous education research is inclusive of Indigenous community interests. The adoption of joint strategies to counter structural barriers to the institution of reforms within the Indigenous education research field is an important reason for these representative Indigenous structures to adopt and maintain a united position in their negotiations with other stakeholders.
Best practice models for negotiated research agreements

The compilation of ‘best practice models’ which describe successful negotiation of research agreements between researchers and Indigenous participants is a practical initiative which might guide researchers and Indigenous peoples in their attempts to frame their own research agreements.

Specialist research-based courses for Indigenous education research

Disjunctions between higher education academic and bureaucratic considerations, and current Indigenous education research guidelines, represent a barrier to the institution of changed Indigenous research practices. The development of specialist Indigenous education research-based courses that are synchronised with the aims of currently proposed Indigenous research guidelines may provide a site for the resolution of these disjunctions.

The development of a broad-based protocol for community consultation & approval of research proposals

The ARC report into Indigenous research issues noted a lack of cohesiveness in approaches to ensuring adequate levels of Indigenous community consultation within current Indigenous research guidelines. The report states:

Written agreements are not always appropriate; while an agreement with a peak body will normally be in written form, agreement at the local level may be less formal. Researchers should include an account of their negotiations and consultation with the community. Funding bodies and institutional ethics committees need to be made aware of these differences.  

(ARC 1999, p.82)

To address this issue the ARC proposes the following: ‘The Australian Research Council should adopt basic protocols to inform researchers, funding bodies and
institutional ethics committees about appropriate levels and kinds of community consultation and approval’ (ARC 1999, p.82).
Mechanisms for defining research agendas

The ARC (1999) report into Indigenous research issues proposes that the selection of research projects is an organic process that grows out of a changing framework of intellectual endeavour and changing ideas. The ARC argues for the development of a process for all stakeholders to have input into defining research gaps. To this end the ARC proposes the establishment of a database of current research and research needs and a regular summit of stakeholders, including Indigenous representatives, to review research and to identify research priorities.

Mechanisms for ensuring Indigenous community involvement in research

The ARC report into Indigenous research makes the following recommendation: ‘The Australian Research Council should encourage State or regional Indigenous organisations to adopt an advisory role for proposed research of interest to Indigenous peoples and advise researchers to consult such bodies where projects transcend local communities’ (ARC 1999, p.129).

Mechanisms for ensuring the development of an Indigenous education research agenda that is free from political interference

Under current legislation, ARC recommendations for research grants can be rejected by the federal minister responsible for higher education, (Illing 2000). The Minister recently rejected an ARC proposal for funding of an Indigenous research project. This precedent raises serious questions about the extent of influence being exercised by government over the Indigenous research agenda. A greater degree of transparency in the Indigenous research funding processes and legislative changes to ensure the future independence of the ARC from political interference are recommended.
SUMMARY

Proposals that aim to increase the level of Indigenous community authority over all aspects of the research process represent a common-sense reaction to the history of exploitation that has dominated Indigenous research practices in Australia. Current higher education institution-sponsored Indigenous research guidelines represent a consensus position that rejects token approaches to the involvement of Indigenous peoples within the research process. The Deakin University (1994) Indigenous research proposal, that promotes the establishment of “negotiated research agreements” between Indigenous peoples and researchers, represents the newly defined approach to Indigenous education research. This approach rejects the framing of Indigenous peoples as passive ‘objects’ of research and of non-Indigenous researchers as ‘experts’. A positive way of looking at the development of ‘research partnerships’ between Indigenous peoples and researchers is the capacity these partnerships represent for a convergence of the interests of participating stakeholders. If currently proposed guidelines for the conduct of Indigenous research are successfully translated into changed researcher practices, then it is predicted that Indigenous peoples will derive greater benefit from research activity. In addition, the reputation of higher education institutions will be enhanced because they can legitimately claim to support policies of Indigenous community self-determination and researchers are more likely to produce collaborative research that has potentially useful applications.

Cummins (1996) argues that minority education interventions that aim to ‘empower’ students and communities as a primary means of improving educational outcomes will not be successful if structural barriers are not recognised and if stakeholders are unwilling to re-define their roles within the education process. The same can be said for attempts to reform Indigenous education research practices.

Within this paper I have argued that Indigenous education research guidelines need to be more prescriptive in areas related to the insertion of Indigenous research agendas and in the development of “negotiated research agreements” between researchers and Indigenous peoples. I have also argued that existing institutional structures do not adequately support the proposal to reframe Indigenous peoples as research ‘partners’
and that the role positions adopted by some stakeholders represent significant barriers to research reform. The ARC (1999) report *Research of Interest to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* substantiates this argument by identifying difficulties associated with implementing currently proposed Indigenous research guidelines. The report recommends changes to current institutional structures and to Indigenous research guidelines as an important means of strengthening the position of Indigenous peoples in relation to the activity of researchers. While these ARC recommendations appear positive, the lack of ARC independence from government interference in determining the research agenda is problematic. A recent rejection of an ARC-supported Indigenous research proposal by the federal minister responsible for higher education suggests that the ARC does not have the authority to respond adequately to Indigenous community calls for increased control over the research agenda (Illing 2000).

It is important not to lose sight of the fact that structural innovations and policy initiatives are not enough to ensure the ‘empowerment’ of Indigenous peoples within the research context. Researchers also have a responsibility to engage in a process of re-defining their positioning in relation to the negotiation of research agreements, respecting the intellectual property rights and the cultural perspectives of Indigenous research participants. Attitudes of philanthropy, long associated with non-Indigenous involvement in research activity, need to be replaced by a commitment to collaboration with Indigenous peoples. Only when these fundamental changes have been achieved will research activity begin to deliver outcomes that can be usefully applied by Indigenous community members to advocate for changes to mainstream institutional structures and practices that impact upon their quality of life. The success of the Indigenous education research reform process is dependent upon an ongoing commitment to identifying ‘system constraints’ and stakeholder positioning that mitigate against the ‘empowerment’ of Indigenous peoples within the research context.
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INTRODUCTION

As Luke et al. (1993) predicted, the level of contestation and debate about the appropriateness of proposals for reform in the Indigenous education field has increased since the initial formulation of NATSIEP in the late 1980s. It is the nature of these contestations and the associated unresolved issues, which has been the main subject of the preceding case studies. If we consider the process of debate and contestation associated with various proposals for reform in the Indigenous education field as being an important part of the ongoing education reform process, then the purpose for attending to the nature of these contestations and the associated public debates is established. It is through analysis of stakeholder positioning within these discourses and through identification of unresolved issues and structural barriers to the achievement of proposed education reforms that the Indigenous education process will be continually re-formulated. The analyses contained within this portfolio have brought into focus the extent to which mainstream education, economic and social policy developments are implicated in this process of re-formulation.

Within the three case studies, disjunctions between the adopted positions of both Indigenous and mainstream education stakeholders were outlined and possible barriers to the institution of proposed reforms were indicated. Now I propose to extend these site-specific analyses into a broader discussion that will indicate patterns of mainstream resistance to Indigenous community proposals for educational reform. A commonly contested issue within the case studies relates to the rights of Indigenous peoples to determine the nature of their engagement with mainstream society and its institutions. In their insistence that the only way forward is a re-negotiation of the ground rules for their co-existence within mainstream Australian society, Indigenous representatives are currently attempting to extend the boundaries of current debates in a range of social policy areas. Instead of engaging primarily with the binary
propositions of assimilation and self-determination, these representatives are questioning the ideological underpinnings of a range of mainstream social policy approaches. For example, rhetorical reference to notions of ‘access’, ‘equity’ and ‘social justice’ is not being accepted as evidence of mainstream community commitment to a fairer and more just society. Instead, these policy objectives are being routinely interrogated and their inadequate contribution to improving a range of social outcomes for Indigenous peoples in Australia is being exposed.

For the purpose of analysis, I have differentiated between two types of barriers to the successful institution of education reform proposals that emanate from Indigenous community sources:

- Structural barriers that are identified as impacting negatively on the achievement of Indigenous community proposals for education and educational research reforms.

- Attitudes and practices of educators, education service providers, policy makers and researchers that impede the insertion of Indigenous community proposals for educational reform.

The discussion will be prefaced by an investigation of the problems associated with competing conceptions of ‘reform’ in the Indigenous education field in Australia. This section will also include consideration of the impact of increasing levels of mainstream participation in the discourse associated with the Indigenous education process. By then considering the impact of ‘colonialist’ positioning on the practices of some of educators and researchers, it is anticipated that an historical basis for recent patterns of contestation between Indigenous peoples and mainstream community representatives will be established.

The concept of ‘institutional racism’ has been introduced by some commentators in an attempt to explain the broad-based patterns of mainstream community resistance to changed practices which are aimed at redressing identified disadvantages to minority groups generally. The extent to which identified barriers to Indigenous education reform can be portrayed as part of a broader project of institutional racism in Australia will be investigated, and the usefulness of the institutional racism
framework to an analysis of Indigenous community proposals for educational reform will be considered. I then propose to locate the history of reform associated with Indigenous education within the context of other minority group educational reform developments, and within a consideration of broader mainstream education, economic and social policy trends in Australia. The extent to which the various education reform agendas of Indigenous peoples have been supported or hindered by these policy developments will be considered.

Finally, the discussion involves an overview of the analyses contained within this portfolio which have aimed to investigate the underlying reasons for escalating levels of contestation between Indigenous peoples and mainstream education service providers in Australia. I propose to return to the hypothesis that this increasing level of contestation can be related to an underlying tension between the competing objectives of assimilation and Indigenous community ‘self-determination’. While evidence for this assertion has been drawn specifically from the three case study sites, the extent of broad-based collusion between mainstream institutions in the ongoing marginalisation of Indigenous community interests within the construction of education and educational research warrants further consideration. I propose that currently identified barriers to reform at the site-specific level of Indigenous education service delivery and within the construction of educational research can be located within broad and entrenched patterns of subordination and domination of Indigenous peoples which has been a defining characteristic within Australia’s colonial history.

The Indigenous education reform process

Indigenous education reform proposals that aim to increase the level of Indigenous community control over the setting of education and educational research objectives continue to be met by mainstream community resistance in Australia. Increasingly, this resistance is resulting in public contestations between Indigenous representatives and representatives from mainstream education institutions. In addition to contesting reform proposals which it is argued marginalise their interests, Indigenous community representatives are also actively promoting their own education reform agendas. Luke
et al. (1993) predicted that increased levels of contestation and debate about the appropriateness of Indigenous education approaches was likely, given the lack of adequate prescription within NATSIEP (1989) for future programmes of action. Rather than criticise NATSIEP for this lack of prescription, Luke et al. suggest that the policy was responsible for establishing the parameters for future discussions:

Whether or not the NATSIEP represents, furthers, expresses or forms Islander and Aboriginal interests is thus a moot point. But like all policy discourse, its hierarchy of meanings opens for public scrutiny nodal points for political and institutional action. There can be little doubt that this policy tables issues for debate, contestation, and the development of institutional practice, which hitherto were hidden or omitted . . . Rather than setting the agenda for a realizable future, as per its stated intentions, it establishes a field of possibilities for sites where power will be redistributed.

(Luke et al. 1993, p.149)

It is at the site-specific level that contestation between Indigenous education stakeholders is currently most evident and where the resolution of ‘power sharing’ issues has very real implications for the nature and quality of education service delivery. So, while the NATSIEP objectives are important to the negotiating process, it is necessary to look closely at specific sites where stakeholders are grappling with the problems associated with their implementation. It is also within the construction and implementation of Indigenous education interventions that the ‘fields of possibility’ (which Luke et al. 1993, refer to) are continually being explored and extended.

For the purpose of this discussion, it might be useful to consider the Indigenous education reform process in Australia as being represented by three distinct phases. The first phase, which includes the period from the invasion of this country by European colonisers to the early 1970s, was characterised by educational approaches that were linked directly to the assimilatory social policy agendas of successive governments. Education was generally considered an effective vehicle for the assimilation of Indigenous peoples into mainstream Australian society. There were, however, isolated attempts by missionaries and some Indigenous community groups to
harness the education process in an attempt to ensure the maintenance of Indigenous languages and Indigenous cultural norms. These interventions, initiated separately from mainstream education structures, were met with varying degrees of resistance, and yet they persisted and provided fertile ground for later Indigenous education reform initiatives. An example is the vernacular literacy programmes adopted by missionaries in the north of South Australia during the 1940s, which later developed into government-supported bilingual education programmes (Edwards 1969).

The second phase of the reform process developed between 1970 and 1990. During the 1970s, official support for policies of assimilation declined and the Whitlam Labour Government formalised an official policy of Indigenous ‘self-determination’ in 1972. With this policy change came increasing recognition of the right of Indigenous peoples to assert a greater degree of control over their own lives. Along with the gradual development of policies broadly described as ‘self-determination’, there came an increased commitment to ensuring equal access to all levels of education for Indigenous peoples. It was during this time that increased levels of Commonwealth funding (through the Disadvantaged Schools Programme and later through the Participation and Equity Programmes) became available and provided encouragement to Indigenous community groups to be more involved in the construction and delivery of education. The establishment of independent Aboriginal schools during the 1970s provided an important vehicle for increased Aboriginal community involvement in education. In the north of Western Australia, for example, the Strelley group of independent Aboriginal schools were initiated by a small group of Aboriginal peoples in response to what they considered were the culturally destructive effects of mainstream education practices. These schools adopted a community-controlled education model which fostered the development of bilingual programmes (Butler 1985). Since this time a national coalition of independent Aboriginal schools has developed. It is their comparative independence from direct government control which has enabled independent Aboriginal schools to maintain a high degree of responsiveness to local Indigenous community proposals for education. It was also during this phase that bilingual education approaches flourished, that specialised Indigenous education programmes were developed within higher education.
institutions and when the first serious attempts to construct a dedicated national Indigenous education policy were supported.

The third and current phase of the Indigenous education reform process has been significantly determined by events in the late 1980s. After the drafting of the first National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP) in 1989, the reform agenda was initially directed toward ensuring increased levels of participation in mainstream education by Indigenous peoples, and increased levels of Indigenous community participation in education decision-making and education service delivery. Mainstream community concerns about the need for economic re-structuring, increased reference to the role of education in achieving mainstream economic goals and a re-orientation in the national social policy agenda also impacted significantly on the nature of Indigenous education programmes in the 1990s. Social democratic political concerns gave way to a market-oriented economic approach to policy formulation across a range of areas. (These policy developments will be considered in detail in a later section of this paper.)

A discussion about the Indigenous education reform process requires some initial consideration of the term ‘reform’. The way in which the ‘reform’ process is conceptualised has a direct influence on the outcomes deriving from the implementation of proposals for reform. The problem is that while stakeholders might share concerns about a central issue, which in this case relates to identified patterns of Indigenous student academic underachievement, there is no certainty that proposals for ‘change’ or ‘improvement’ will achieve positive outcomes from an Indigenous community perspective. Rizvi (1993) engages with this problem when he refers to contradictions within the multiculturalism discourse in Australia, and it is possible to draw some connections between this and the discourse which is developing around the concept of ‘reform’ in the Indigenous education and research fields. Rizvi suggests that the level of generality at which multiculturalism was formulated, and the liberalism that was an ideological hallmark of multiculturalism, posed problems later on when competing and often irreconcilable political perspectives emerged. Multiculturalism became a ‘slogan’ which allowed for interpretations that
accommodated contradictory visions of society. Rizvi describes the problem in this way:

Hence in discussing multiculturalism, and in accounting for funds made available through the central government, individuals and state agencies could attach different meanings to the same term. Indeed as Lingard (1982) showed, in Queensland the ‘all encompassing nature of the concept of multicultural education allowed for its easy subversion, particularly when it was refracted through state bureaucracies.’ (p.74) Inherently assimilatory and conservative practices readily masqueraded as multiculturalism. (Rizvi 1993, p.124)

Similarly, in the Indigenous education field, proposals for reform introduced by government education service providers and higher education institutions are justified on the grounds that these proposals are attempting to address the central problem associated with:

- patterns of Indigenous student academic underachievement; and
- patterns of Indigenous community under-representation within the education and educational research processes.

Many of these proposals, however, continue to marginalise the interests of Indigenous peoples by excluding reference to their right to maintain unique linguistic and cultural identities within Australian society and their right to make decisions about the construction of educational or research initiatives. The practice associated with constructing and implementing education and research policy reforms independent from broad-based Indigenous community input continues to exacerbate this situation. The cooption by mainstream representatives of the terminology associated with ‘community participation’ serves to confuse the issue when proposed educational reforms do not reflect a substantial commitment to increasing the level of Indigenous community control over educational approaches or over the research agenda. In the same way that multiculturalism became a ‘slogan’ which masked the true intent of some stakeholders in relation to ethnic groups in Australia, we need to be alert to the possibility that the ‘Indigenous education reform process’ can be similarly subverted.
by stakeholders with inherently conservative and assimilatory agendas. Unlike the
discourse surrounding multicultural education in Australia, the discussion about
Indigenous education and research reform proposals has not been generally
incorporated under one conceptual umbrella. A negative consequence has been that
reform proposals in a range of Indigenous education and Indigenous research areas
have been considered in relative isolation, and, so, the connectedness between the
adopted positions of stakeholders has not been adequately considered.

Even when the rhetoric associated with reform is matched by stakeholder
commitment to ensuring that Indigenous community interests are central to the
construction of changed educational and research practices, there is the problem of
implementing these proposed changes. As the case study about higher education
research practices revealed, despite constructive attempts to restructure Indigenous
Education Research Guidelines, there is still not much movement on the ground in
terms of changed researcher practices (ARC 1999). Non-Indigenous researchers are
having difficulties putting into practice the proposed ‘negotiated research agreements’
and surrendering their positioning as ‘experts’. As a result, Indigenous community
control over the educational research agenda and over the research processes has not
increased substantially. Identified barriers to the achievement of reform objectives in
the Indigenous education research field relate fundamentally to inadequate
institutional support for the actualisation of stated policy goals.

Political responsiveness to mainstream community opinion is manifest at both
State Government and Federal Government levels in Australia. Therefore, the role of
the media in determining the views of mainstream Australians to issues surrounding
Indigenous education initiatives is important to consider. There are some indications
that conservative, assimilatory perspectives on a range of Indigenous issues are
gaining increased mainstream media coverage. Jull (2000), for example, describes
newspaper columnists as ‘opinion leaders’ and is scathing in his comments about the
capacity of some of them to come to terms with the need to develop a ‘just, workable
and sustainable relationship’ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in
Australia.
One of the more notable features of the bilingual education debate that has recently been taking place in the Northern Territory is the way in which some media commentators have attempted to gain mainstream community support for the position that ‘English only’ models of education would solve the ‘Indigenous illiteracy crisis’. The ‘Indigenous illiteracy crisis’ was a mainstream media construction which conveniently narrowed consideration of the issues down to inadequate English literacy attainment levels by Indigenous students. Broader concerns about inadequate provision of basic education services for Indigenous students, questionable mainstream education assessment practices, inadequate consideration of Indigenous community conceptions of the purpose for education and inadequate resourcing of current Indigenous education initiatives were effectively marginalised within the subsequent media discourse. The extent to which the nature of the media representation of the issues impacted on the final outcome of the bilingual education situation in the Northern Territory remains a matter of speculation. Yet, what has emerged from this experience is that stakeholders involved in contested Indigenous education issues are increasingly relying on the mobilisation of mainstream media support for their adopted positions. This is a potentially positive situation for Indigenous community proponents of educational reform because within these public discourses it is possible that the assimilatory and conservative positioning of some stakeholders will be exposed and subsequently debated. A potential problem for Indigenous representatives is the extent to which mainstream media ‘opinion makers’ will be prepared to present their perspectives and, if presented, the lack of control they can exercise over the journalistic ‘spin’ which will inevitably be put on these perspectives.

Colonialism and the education project in Indigenous community contexts

Recognition of the ongoing agency of colonialist positioning in relation to education provision for Indigenous peoples is critical to understanding the reasons why mainstream community interests continue to dominate when the re-construction of
education processes and structures are considered. The domination of Indigenous minority groups is a recognisable feature of the colonising project (Altbach & Kelly 1978, p. 2) and, within this project, an effective agent for the ‘civilisation’ of colonised peoples has always been the education process. Commenting on the effects of colonisation on the educational outcomes of Indigenous minority students in a range of countries, Cummins suggests that students who experience the most persistent and severe educational difficulties tend to come from communities that over generations have been discriminated against and viewed as inherently inferior by the dominant societal group: ‘This pattern of relationships between dominant and subordinated groups in the wider society is typical of colonial situations in which the Indigenous population is widely disparaged by the colonial power’ (Cummins 1996, p.3).

This project of ‘disparagement’ and its connectedness to the education situations of Indigenous peoples in Australia was referred to by Patrick Dodson in a speech given as part of the Frank Archibald Memorial Lecture series ‘Cultural rights and educational responsibilities’ (1994). Dodson emphasised the agency of Western education institutions in the ongoing devaluation of Indigenous culture and knowledge in the following way:

If the currency of non-Indigenous societies has been a pervasive disrespect for, and abuse of Indigenous knowledge and cultures, then the central bank and mint have been educational and academic institutions . . . Our own unique way of knowing, teaching and learning are firmly grounded in the context of our ways of being. And yet we are thrust into the clothes of another system designed for different bodies and we are fed ideologies which serve the interests of other peoples. (Dodson 1994, p.12)

Attwood (1989) makes the similar point by constructing the problem in terms of mainstream community acceptance of the realities associated with the invasion of this continent by European colonists on the one hand, while at the same time being unable or unprepared to recognise the extent to which the ‘civilising’ project continues to impact negatively on the lives of Indigenous peoples through to the present. He argues that throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Indigenous peoples faced a
second onslaught from agents of European ‘civilisation’, who sought to ‘change and reshape them and make them anew’. Henry and Brabham (1991) also consider the extent to which the education process has been complicit in the ‘civilising’ agenda associated with the ongoing process of colonisation in Australia. In this account they suggest that the local colonial enterprise took the form of internal colonialism’, which was described by Altbach and Kelly (1978) in these terms: ‘The domination of a “nation” (defined geographically, linguistically, or culturally) within the national borders of another nation-state by another group or groups’ (Altbach & Kelly 1978, pp.20-1, cited in Henry & Brabham 1991, p.2).

Henry and Brabham (1991) identify a key objective of internal colonialism as being ‘obliteration of nationhood through assimilation’ (Altbach & Kelly 1978, p.23, cited in Henry & Brabham 1991, p.2). They also suggest that the end result for Indigenous peoples of the assimilatory process is ‘absorption into and complete dependence on the mainstream form of social reality as determined by the dominant society’s ideologies, values, organisational forms and practices’ (Henry & Brabham 1991, p.3).

The relationship between colonisation, assimilation and the education process in Australia has been well documented (Attwood 1989; Reynolds 1981, 1987). According to Lanhupuy (1987), the next stage is for Indigenous peoples to involve themselves in the struggle to ‘decolonise’ schools as part of a broader project to achieve Indigenous community self-determination: ‘Only when the cultural orientation of the school becomes Yolngu, will schools become integral to the movement of Aborigines toward self-determination’ (Lanhupuy 1987, cited in Henry & Brabham 1991, p.31).

The entrenchment of mainstream community attitudes and practices associated with the ‘colonial project’ constitutes a potential barrier to the institution of educational reforms which are not driven by a ‘civilising’ or ‘assimilationist’ agenda. This was evidenced in the positioning of mainstream education service providers during the disputed closure of the Traeger Park School in Alice Springs and during the contested withdrawal of bilingual programmes from Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory. While both these interventions represented important vehicles for
the ‘decolonisation’ of Aboriginal schools, and while they received strong Indigenous community support (which was reinforced by support from educators and academics), the Northern Territory Government ultimately rejected them. The withdrawal of these programmes was justified with primary reference to the inadequate educational outcomes being achieved by the Aboriginal students in question. The fact that assessment criteria were established without reference to the existing linguistic and knowledge bases of Indigenous students represented a serious flaw in the official government argument. By limiting their concerns to comparative levels of Indigenous student underachievement (with reference to mainstream established academic norms), government education service providers showed scant regard for the proposition that Indigenous students might operate from a different knowledge base. The official government position also rejected the argument that cultural and linguistic maintenance is a universal right of all Indigenous peoples. What became clear in both these situations was that as long as the establishment of criteria for assessment was in the hands of mainstream education service providers, then the academic achievements of Aboriginal students would continue to be represented as ‘lacking’. Despite detailed arguments about the potential of bilingual approaches to simultaneously achieve satisfactory English literacy levels and crucial levels of Indigenous community involvement in the education process, government support for bilingual education was withdrawn. In the Traeger Park School case the NTDE was not required to demonstrate how the pedagogical practices, curricula and institutional structures within mainstream schools would be significantly adapted to meet the needs of the Aboriginal student population. Instead, all they were required to demonstrate was that the education offered to Aboriginal students in mainstream schools would be the ‘same as’ that being provided for non-Indigenous students. This apparently was enough to convince the Human Rights Commissioner that the NTDE was fulfilling its responsibilities to the Aboriginal students from Traeger Park School.

In the wake of both these decisions, Aboriginal peoples, educators and academic commentators were left to wonder how these assaults on agreed NATSIEP objectives had succeeded and where the project to ‘decolonise’ Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory was going. The ‘mainstreaming’ option and the ‘English only’
option for Aboriginal students had won the day despite detailed Indigenous community and expert educational arguments which suggested that these approaches would have negative educational, linguistic, cultural and social consequences for Aboriginal students and their supporting communities. In the nature of their forced imposition, these mainstream education proposals reinforced the colonial tradition of marginalising Indigenous community languages and ways of teaching and learning. The ‘civilising’ or ‘assimilationist’ agenda associated with the education process was unashamedly promoted by government education service providers within the associated public debates. The ‘disparagement’ of Indigenous peoples and their cultures was ignored by the arbitrators and implicitly supported by the wider mainstream community. This indicates that Indigenous peoples and their supporters may have seriously overestimated the extent to which there has been a ‘values’ shift in the mainstream Australian community towards increased tolerance for a more heterogeneous, cultural life-force within the Australian nation-state. Support for assimilation as a preferred social policy direction remains apparently strong, despite rhetorical policy commitment to the process of Indigenous community ‘self-determination’.

System constraints and institutional racism

Mason (1982) proposes a version of ‘institutional racism’ contained within a ‘structuralist Marxist’ framework as an effective way of conceptualising the agency of government stakeholders in relation to the achievement of differential outcomes by groups defined by ‘race’ within society. Within this framework, racism is identified in the ‘consequences of state policies and not in the purposes nor the articulations of interested groups’. According to Mason, a common objection to the ‘structuralist Marxist’ approach is that State representatives would disavow the intention to deliver unequal outcomes for different groups within society. Instead, he claims that these stakeholders point to the fact that in carrying out its functions, the State may act against the interests of particular groups in the exercise of its obligations. The blame for the ‘inadvertent’ disadvantaging of individuals under state jurisdictions is often
attributed to ‘system constraints’ (Mason 1982, p.40). Mason argues, however, that the capacity of State agents to deny the existence of, or conceal the level of disadvantage resulting from, these ‘system constraints’ is diminished once they have been identified and entered into discourses in the public domain.

Acknowledgment of the existence of so-called ‘system constraints’ opens up the possibility for dialogue between stakeholders about the nature of the constraints and the extent to which the disadvantage flowing from these constraints can be ameliorated. According to Mason, the identification of ‘dysfunctional consequences’ of government policies within a ‘structuralist Marxist’ analysis of institutional racism is open to counter claims by government stakeholders that unintended consequences of actions and policies will eventuate regardless of the motives and intentions of government functionaries. This may be the case, but the emphasis within the ‘structuralist Marxist’ framework is on the consequences of State policies. If these consequences of State policy deliver ‘systematically unequal effects upon the lives of groups socially defined by race’ (Mason 1982, p.40), then an argument for the existence of ‘institutional racism’ may be justified.

An aim throughout the Traeger Park case study was to identify ‘systems constraints’ which impacted negatively on the project to achieve ‘equitable’ educational outcomes for the Aboriginal students at Traeger Park School. A range of ‘systems constraints’ was identified and the lack of action by the NTDE to ameliorate the negative effects of these constraints potentially constitutes grounds for arguing that an ongoing project of institutional racism within the NTDE exists. These constraints were identified as having the potential to impact negatively on attempts to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students. The key ‘system constraints’ identified within the Traeger Park case study were divided into three broad categories:

- Financial constraints which included:
  - insufficient financial commitment to trial and support the development of adequate assessment regimes, culturally appropriate student support structures and appropriate pedagogical approaches.
- Bureaucratic constraints which included:
• lack of commitment to the de-centralisation of education decision-making as a primary mechanism for increasing Aboriginal community participation in education processes;

• ongoing support for the promotion of an ‘outcomes’ based approach to education which narrowly defines appropriate outcomes and therefore effectively marginalises consideration of alternative purposes for education, and which leads ultimately to a narrowing of education options for Aboriginal students.

➢ Ideological constraints which included:

• support for ‘deficit’ models of education for Aboriginal students which effectively concentrates on what students do not know, and reduces opportunities for building onto existing linguistic and cultural knowledge bases;

• support for the position that it is in the ‘best interests’ of Aboriginal students to learn to compete with their mainstream peers in mainstream education institutions. This position obstructs the development of alternative education institutional structures for Aboriginal students and denies the importance to Aboriginal peoples of family and community relationships that are central to the construction of an ‘inclusive’ school culture.

Similarly, within the bilingual education and the Indigenous education research case studies ‘systems constraints’ were identified. These constraints or barriers impeded the implementation of reforms that had been identified by Indigenous peoples and their supporters as having the capacity to result in improved educational outcomes for Indigenous community members. The extent of collusion between mainstream education service providers in a project to marginalise the interests of Indigenous peoples, however, remains a matter of speculation. The grey area here relates to the issue of ‘intent’, which, as Mason (1982) points out, is very hard to prove anyway. But if we concentrate instead on the ‘negative impact of policies which have systematically unequal effects on the lives of people defined by “race” within a society’, then it is possible to show that institutionally racist practices continue to
restrict the successful implementation of Indigenous education and Indigenous research reform initiatives. In the bilingual education case study, identified system constraints relate to:

- the imposition of assessment regimes that take insufficient account of the existing knowledge and linguistic bases of Aboriginal students;
- lack of financial commitment to adequately support bilingual education approaches. (a situation which compromised the outcomes being achieved in bilingual programmes over the last few years). This includes material support for resource material production and in-service teacher education;
- the lack of commitment to the NATSIFP supported objectives of increased Indigenous community participation in education service delivery and education decision-making; and
- the imposition of ‘English only’ models of education in Aboriginal communities, when the evidence base to support the contention that these programmes will result in improved academic outcomes by Aboriginal students is non-existent.

In the case of higher education institution positioning on issues relating to the conduct of Indigenous education research, the ‘systems constraints’ are more related to acts of ‘omission’. So, although comprehensive Indigenous research guidelines have been developed, it is what higher education institutions are ‘not doing’ to ensure that these revised research guidelines are successfully implemented which is problematic. Key barriers to reform or ‘systems constraints’ were identified within the higher education case study as follows:

- Lack of financial support for the development of community-based agencies that are capable of advocating for the interests of Indigenous community members in the construction of ‘negotiated research agreements’;
- Lack of commitment to the establishment of research databases that would minimise the negative effects of unwarranted research intrusions into the lives of Indigenous peoples and which would assist in the more effective targeting of appropriate research;
Lack of support for training researchers to facilitate research that is driven by the interests of Indigenous communities; and

Implicit higher education institution support for ongoing academic constructions of ‘Aboriginality’, the promotion of philanthropic attitudes among researchers and allied support for the commodification of Indigenous peoples as ‘research subjects’.

Attempts to identify ‘systems constraints’ obviously leaves the way open for contestation about what constitutes a ‘constraint’, and contestation about the extent of institutional responsibility in ameliorating the negative effects of these constraints once they are identified. It seems that there has been more progress toward the identification and removal of barriers to Indigenous community proposals for research reform within higher education institutions than there has been in the area of school-based Indigenous education service delivery in the Northern Territory. Higher education institution commitment to the development of revised Indigenous research guidelines and support for the development of Indigenous research ethics committees has been demonstrated. There are clearly problems associated with the implementation of these guidelines and processes (ARC 1999), but there is at least some evidence of broad-based institutional commitment to change. In comparison, there is little indication that the NTDE is committed to the implementation of proposals for educational change which are underpinned by any ideology or educational strategy which threatens overt assimilationist agendas in relation to Indigenous peoples.

Mainstream policy development and Indigenous education reform

The following section aims to examine the broader education, social and economic policy contexts within which recent Indigenous education reform proposals have been proposed. The extent to which Indigenous community proposals for education and educational research reforms have been promoted or impeded by these mainstream policy trends will be considered.
Education policy

Johnston (1993) traces the history of educational reform in Australia and points to key milestones in official conceptualisations of the concept of ‘reform’. He suggests that the traditional responses to educational inequality in Australia, which relied on projects to redistribute educational resources throughout the community on ‘as equal a basis as possible’, did not achieve their objective. Severe inequalities of opportunity that characterised the school system were not diminished and so a new strategy based upon a notion of ‘compensatory justice’ and positive discrimination emerged in the early 1970s. Out of this process to re-define the reform agenda grew the Commonwealth Government-initiated Disadvantaged Schools Programme (DSP), whose aim it was to redress the ongoing identified inequalities in outcomes being achieved by representative minority social and racial groups within Australian society. Johnston suggests that in the early 1970s, the DSP was a powerful agent for school-level egalitarian reform (Johnston 1993, p111). He also suggested that the period of reform that gave rise to the DSP was characterised by a groundswell of popular movements which in various ways tried to redefine social and cultural boundaries:

Conventional gender boundaries came under the critical scrutiny of the women’s movement and gay organizations. Aborigines and migrants in their different ways questioned Anglo stereotypes of Australian nationalism and pointed to economic and social boundaries that excluded them from economic and political power. (Johnston 1993, p.107)

Although earlier educational innovations associated with the implementation of DSP developed in response to collective community and educator input at local sites, this process was frustrated after 1985 when a new agenda for broad-based educational reform was proposed by Professor Peter Karmel (Quality of Education in Australia) (1985). According to Johnston:

Karmel shifted the focus from education’s role in the reproduction of poverty to its contribution to the production of wealth. Quality of Education in
Australia argued that with the National economy under siege and the need for a more skilled, productive and competitive workforce, educational inequality must be placed on the backburner until such a time as the economy once more produced a surplus to redistribute to the poor. (Johnston 1993, p.112)

Marginson (1997) describes the emergence of the term ‘equity’ as a policy imperative in the 1980s, and suggests that this became a replacement for the term ‘equality’ which had always included ‘access’ as its main policy thrust. The main ‘equity’ goal of the 1980s and early 1990s was to expand school retention rates and access to tertiary education. Indigenous students were targeted along with others deemed marginal to the education process, and specific programmes were designed to increase their participation levels. Marginson argues that their ‘participation was one of the measures of “equity” at its outer limit. But policies on the “disadvantaged” were no longer based on a framework of equal economic and pedagogical conditions. The right to an equal start now became reduced simply to the right to enter the race’ (Marginson 1997, p.197).


The underlying assumption of this policy objective, that ‘equity’ for Indigenous students means the provision of education which is the ‘same as’ that provided for mainstream Australians, is objected to by Luke et al., who argue that ‘[h]ere the end point of effective policy is seen as the addressing of a series of socioeconomic and education ‘lacks; which in turn call out for equity with mainstream White Australians, the latter presented as a singular entity with intergroup equity’ (Luke et al. 1993, p.144).

Marginson suggests that the Federal Labor Government (1983–96) viewed equity policies in education and other sectors as unifying the nation behind the cause for economic mobilisation. This approach marked the end of a struggle to establish a pure set of conditions for scientific educational selection in which the ‘natural ability’ of
each child would be revealed, untainted by the effects of economic difference and other social factors (Marginson 1997, p.246).

The main educational focus in the first term of the Hawke Labor Government (1983–87) was the Participation and Equity Programme (PEP), which was underpinned by an ‘equality of outcomes’ thrust and which delivered some positive outcomes particularly within the area of gender equity (Henry & Taylor 1993, p.155). During the second Labor term of office there was a recognisable education policy shift to accommodate the ascendancy of economic rationalism as a driving policy force (Marginson 1993). Marginson later suggested that under economic rationalism, education ‘is now seen as a branch of economic policy rather than a mix of social, economic and cultural policy. To the extent that there is continuing concern about social policy in education, it is mostly understood as labour market policy’ (Marginson 1993, p.56).

Although social justice was promoted as a central plank of the Labor party’s newly formed education policies during the 1980s, some commentators have expressed concerns about the ideological underpinnings of these policies. Henry and Taylor (1993) suggest that the developing policy emphasis after 1987 was on the role of education in the proposed ‘skills-led’ economic recovery and that social and cultural goals within education were given only secondary attention. Macintyre (1988/9) argues that ‘social justice denotes the social policies that Labor arrange around their economic policies’. He also suggests that social justice policies have been ‘most successful in Australia when they have been presented as conducive to efficiency, and least effective when they have run up against powerful economic interests’ (Macintyre 1988/9, cited in Henry & Taylor 1993, p.160).

Connell (1991) differentiates between two common conceptions of social justice in education. He suggests that currently, public recognition of social justice in education takes the form of a discourse of ‘equal opportunity’ which relates to a simple distributive understanding of the issues, and where the ‘social good’ attached to the project of education is taken for granted. Instead, Connell proposes that social justice in education should be more concerned with considering ‘what’ the service of education offers, and that debates about this issue are already taking place in the
theatre of curriculum theory, teaching method and the psychology of learning. He suggests that alternative conceptions of the purpose for developing socially just educational practices is being driven by grassroots action in a number of settings and that this action relates importantly to curriculum reform and pedagogical reform. He argues against the production of curricula from a single socially dominant standpoint and argues instead for acceptance of the principle of the ‘inclusive curriculum’, which he describes as: ‘[c]urricula which include and validate the experiences of women as well as men, Aborigines as well as whites, workers as well as professionals’ (Connell 1991, p.9).

In commenting on the effects of currently proposed social justice policies on the lives of Aboriginal peoples in remote communities in Australia, Folds (1993) questions the assumption that social justice for Aboriginal peoples can be achieved by redressing statistical differences between majority and Aboriginal societies. Like Connell, he is critical of social justice proposals that concentrate on redistributive factors and which ignore the content and quality of services being provided. Folds also questions the assumption that beneficial aspects of the majority society can be grafted onto Aboriginal communities without any culturally destructive teaching of mainstream values into the fabric of Aboriginal society.

Knight, Lingard and Porter (1993) suggest that in the late 1980s in Australia, education policy development was characterised by the incorporation of a ‘corporate managerialism’ approach to structural organisation and that this approach was previously applied in the public sector administration to support the goals of economic rationalism. Bessant has identified the following features of corporate managerialism: strong central control associated with devolved responsibility for operations; separation of policy determination from the sphere of devolution; focus on outputs within input-output models of production; emphasis on selling the product (Bessant 1992, cited in Marginson 1993, p.57). Although corporate managerialism apparently supports the decentralisation of administration and decision-making, Knight, Lingard and Porter argue that it is an inherently centralist framework. McTaggart (1991) considers the incompatibility between the imperatives of centralist bureaucratic structures and the framing of alternative Aboriginal education approaches. In
commenting on the complexity of the problems encountered by Aboriginal peoples who he claims have struggled to develop forms of schooling which allow young people access to enough Western cultural capital while at the same time nurturing Aboriginality and Aboriginal culture, McTaggart argues that the ‘culture of an educational institution such as a school or a college is typically a direct reflection of the culture of the education system in which the institution functions . . . Efforts to develop communitarian schools in bureaucratic contexts fall on barren ground’ (McTaggart 1991, p.298).

Knite, Lingard and Porter (1993) also argue that the implementation of corporate manageralist approaches within the education sphere has increased the imperative to monitor results and that this process is most commonly effected by the application of ‘performance indicators’. They cite the Karmer Report (1985), *Quality of Education in Australia*, as providing an example of the emerging stress on output orientation during the 1980s in Australia. An effect of this developing stress on ‘outputs’ within the education process was commented on by Luke et al.: ‘The shift in focus from redistributive processes to product outcomes effectively deflects questions about the character and quality of teaching and learning, and the adequacy and appropriateness of curriculum, pedagogy and policy’ (Luke et al. 1993, p.148).

Considine argues that the advent of corporate management in government and non-government institutions, such as universities, resulted in the privileging of quantifiable activities over more intangible activities such as staff training; ‘More generally, it became difficult “to discuss, plan or evaluate public sector action according to any non-economic and non-quantifiable criteria”’, including indicators of redistribution or other forms of equity, or to develop accountability to the “public”’ (Considine 1990, p.173 cited in Marginson 1997, p.89).

Centrally driven outcome identification then can be seen as setting the agenda for innovation or reform at local levels. This is problematic for all forms of education but particularly so in the area of Indigenous education, where diverse community needs and aspirations need to be taken into account, and where the imperative for increased local control of education initiatives has been clearly identified (see McTaggart 1991; Folds 1989; Harker & McConnachie 1985; Bucknell 1995). An implication of the
ongoing development of centrally controlled education bureaucracies is that opportunities for the incorporation of community-based decision-making is limited by the extent to which community-mediated decisions fall within the parameters set by centralist bureaucratic structures. This situation was illustrated in the Northern Territory when funding for the operation of staff development programmes for bilingual educators was gradually reduced during the early 1990s (Graham 1999). Staff development officers employed by the NTDE were directed to concentrate instead on areas nominated as ‘core curriculum’, and the justification for this reallocation of resources was related to a broad project of education-funding rationalisation. In effect, by starving the bilingual programmes of necessary funds, the centralised NTDE bureaucracy was limiting their capacity to achieve projected outcomes. By privileging the achievement of core curriculum outcomes (which related primarily to English literacy and numeracy) the NTDE bureaucracy was effectively setting the agenda for future programme development. When the decision to officially withdraw support for bilingual programmes was made public in 1998, the infrastructure to support bilingual education had already been severely depleted and the English literacy and numeracy agenda in relation to outcome identification was firmly entrenched within the education system. This meant that there was not much room for negotiation with the Aboriginal community about the retention of Indigenous languages within school programmes and the ongoing involvement of Aboriginal peoples in the delivery of education. It is instructive to note that concerns about the viability of bilingual education programmes in Northern Territory schools were flagged in the Northern Territory Government-commissioned PAC report, *Report on the provision of school education services for remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory* (1996), two years before the 1998 announcement that bilingual education programmes would no longer be funded by the NTDE. The PAC report called for an extension of data collection to assist in the development of baseline data relating to Aboriginal student learning outcomes in English and mathematics. The report also recommended a review of existing bilingual education programmes. The interplay between economic considerations, curriculum content and quality of education service delivery issues in this instance is undeniable. The fact that a report
of this nature included a brief to nominate the parameters for future evaluation of Aboriginal student learning outcomes is evidence of bureaucratic manipulation of the education agenda. In this case it resulted in the narrowing of the parameters for evaluation of education programmes for Aboriginal students and a reduction in their education options in the Northern Territory.

In their justification for closing the Traeger Park School in Alice Springs, NTDE played the ‘funding rationalisation’ card. Through reference to the reported reduction in student enrolments at Traeger Park School, NTDE representatives argued that it would be more cost-effective for the Aboriginal students to be incorporated within other mainstream school programmes. NTDE representatives also argued that Traeger Park School students had performed poorly in the government-administered MAP tests, and, so, the decision to close the school could be justified on the grounds of ‘poor performance’. The MAP-testing regime relies on the application of nationally derived mainstream aggregates which are insensitive to linguistic and cultural differences and which it is argued, disadvantage students from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Opposition to the school closure focused primarily on the unique character and quality of teaching and learning at Traeger Park School and the special characteristics of the school community that had evolved over the years. Unfortunately for the Traeger Park School community, these aspects of education are not readily translatable into quantifiable performance indicators or benchmarks, and thus have less currency when external arbitration by centralist education bureaucracies is involved.

A narrow focus on the re-distributive function of education leads to a situation where potentially valuable programme outcomes are not given the recognition or institutional support they deserve. Examples of non-quantifiable programme outcomes identified within the Traeger Park and bilingual education case studies include:

- the importance to Indigenous peoples of feelings of ‘inclusiveness’ and the role of ‘family relationships’ in establishing a sense of ‘belonging’ within mainstream institutional structures;

- the importance of linguistic maintenance to the transfer of inter-generational cultural knowledge; and
the importance to the self-esteem of students of programmes which recognise the value of their unique linguistic and cultural heritages.

Externally imposed outcome indicators have a marginalising influence on alternative constructions of the ‘purpose for education’. Indicators that are routinely constructed within mainstream bureaucracies for the purpose of quantifying the cost-effectiveness of various programme approaches rely on quantifiable statistics that ignore issues of programme ‘quality’. When outcome indicators fall outside the parameters set for quantifiable programme evaluation (as in the Traeger Park School case), they are disregarded. Therefore, qualitative programme evaluation which attends to what Connell (1991) refers to as the ‘quality of education’, has no place within corporate managerialist regimes. As long as responsibility for the setting of educational programme outcomes remains in the hands of mainstream institutional representatives, it is likely that non-quantifiable programme outcomes will continue to be marginalised and that the trend toward ‘mainstream education for all’ will be further entrenched.

The developments in mainstream education policy in Australia over the past thirty years have impacted variously on the education reform agendas of a range of minority and disadvantaged groups. It is within the developing emphasis on ‘outputs’ and the linkage between the actualisation of economic goals through education policy re-structuring that the marginalisation of minority and disadvantaged group interests has been most evident. Henry and Taylor (1993) suggest that in the late 1980s, economic rationalism had a ‘constraining and narrowing’ influence on the direction of the gender equity reform movement. Instead of maintaining an emphasis on the development of broad-based educational opportunities for girls, Henry and Taylor argue that there is now increasing emphasis on the development of labour skills that would most effectively contribute to national economic growth. Similarly, Rizvi (1993) suggests that immigration and ethnic affairs policies were re-articulated in the late 1980s within the framework of human capital theory. Rizvi argues that the new education reform agenda that is being driven by government policy in these areas effectively overshadows consideration of cultural objectives. Instead, initiatives that are designed to assist migrants and ethnic community members to ‘develop and use
their potential for Australia's economic benefit' are being promoted (Rizvi 1993, p.129). Consequently, improved migrant access to training and education provisions and measures to extend the teaching of ESL are being given priority over community-based bilingual education programmes and programmes that might confront racism. In the Indigenous education field, the reform agenda has also been substantially driven by the economic imperative in recent years. Increased government funding for Vocational Education and Training (VET) programmes in the post-schooling sector has resulted in a proliferation of programmes being provided by a range of institutions. Specific education programmes for tertiary-level Indigenous students rely to a large extent on VET funds, and, so, the 'purpose for education' in these situations is narrowed to a central concern with labour market requirements. Special purpose funds are currently directed to education interventions that demonstrate a capacity for furthering the economic objectives of government, and, so, reform proposals that are primarily aimed at improving the 'quality' of education offered to Indigenous students are less likely to gain support.

The entrenchment of economic rationalism within education bureaucracies has resulted in reduced opportunities for introducing educational initiatives that are guided by anything other than concerns about economic development. This trend has made it increasingly difficult for Indigenous education reform proponents to achieve basic changes to the way in which Indigenous education is constructed and delivered in Australia. Developments in mainstream education policies and managerial approaches have affected the Indigenous education reform process in the following ways:

- The high priority given to the 'inputs–outputs' model of service delivery under an economic rationalist framework results in the imposition of externally constructed benchmarks or performance indicators. In the education field these indicators are measured through assessment tools which are not responsive to diversity in either cultural or linguistic backgrounds. The end result is the representation of students from minority or disadvantaged groups as 'lacking' in nominated skill areas.

- When the application of performance indicators suggest that a student group is 'lacking' in certain knowledge or skills areas, then 'deficit' educational approaches are subsequently reinforced. These approaches are effected through 'remedial'
programmes and ‘streaming’ within mainstream schools, and indications are that these approaches impact negatively on the esteem of learners by emphasising their ‘deficit’ status in comparison to their mainstream peers.

➢ Projects to develop ‘negotiated curricula’ that aim to broaden the curriculum base within schools are constrained by the extent to which the associated content is represented within nationally constructed benchmarks for educational ‘success’. The current predominance of indicators that refer to English literacy and numeracy skill development illustrates this point.

➢ Corporate managerialist structures are inherently centralist because the centralised bureaucracy retains responsibility for policy development and funding, even when other responsibilities for programme implementation are devolved to local communities. When decisions about resource allocation and policy development are made within centralised bureaucracies, then the agenda for future programme development is taken out of the hands of local communities. Despite the existence of formal representative Indigenous education structures in all States and Territories in Australia, Indigenous community input into education decision-making at local levels continues to be routinely marginalised.

➢ Indigenous education reform proposals which fall outside the parameters set by the broader national project of ‘economic recovery’ are unlikely to win the support of government education service providers. Language and cultural maintenance objectives and objectives which relate to increasing the level of Indigenous community involvement in the education process have nothing to offer the ‘economic recovery’ agenda.

➢ The increased imperative under corporate managerialist structures for the monitoring of results leads to the marginalisation of educational programme outcomes that are difficult to quantify. Thus, attendance to the ‘culture of schools’, which includes such things as the promotion of family relationships as central to the construction of feelings of ‘inclusiveness’ by Indigenous community members, and the quality of interpersonal relationships between educators and students are inevitably located outside the parameters set for external monitoring.
The trend toward corporatisation and privatisation within higher education institutions, which developed during the late 1980s, has resulted in a central focus on income generation through research and the construction of marketable academic courses of study. As a result, minority group interests in the higher education sphere have been marginalised because there are few 'cost benefits' to higher education institutions resulting from their involvement in projects that advance minority group interests.

The trend toward 'user pays' in all areas of government service provision has resulted in the development of inequitable resource allocation. When the quality of service provision is linked to the capacity of community members to pay for services, then outcomes for economically disadvantaged groups within society are compromised. In the education sphere, this trend has resulted in reduced funding for affirmative education initiatives for a range of minority groups, including Indigenous students. A recent analysis of proposed changes to the Aboriginal Student Assistance Scheme (ABSTUDY) provisions for Indigenous students in Australia illustrates this point (ATSIC 1999, *Analysts of the proposed changes to ABSTUDY on Indigenous students*). The report demonstrated that under the Commonwealth Government proposal to align the existing system of ABSTUDY student support payments with mainstream Youth Allowance and Newstart programmes, Indigenous students were likely to be disadvantaged. The report authors concluded that the subsequent reduction in allowances for Indigenous students would result in annual savings to the Commonwealth Government of $18.1 million, and that the changes would result in a sharp decline in enrolments for Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and university courses by mature-age Indigenous students.

**Economic policy**

As the previous section indicated, economic considerations were central to the reconstruction of mainstream education policies in Australia during the 1990s.
Marginson (1997) suggests that when economic growth and full employment declined in Australia after 1975, social competition increased and solidarity between citizens diminished. Changes in economic policy after 1975 were generalised across all government programmes, and, according to Marginson:

The agenda of Government was reset. At the high point of the ‘anti-citizen’ in the second half of the 1980s greed was good, government was corporated, the public interest had become the global economic market and official support for the education programmes of the 1970s had begun to collapse.

(Marginson 1997, p.71)

Marginson argues that all strands of New Right politics agreed on the need to strengthen system-wide examinations and introduce standardised testing in government schooling to facilitate competition, accountability and control. The re-emergence of the ‘standards’ debate in Australia in the mid 1980s and the increasing calls by conservative policy makers and commentators for a ‘back-to-basics’ educational approach indicates the extent to which education policies were being steadily aligned with the economic imperative. The overriding impact of this trend has been the marginalisation of educational outcomes that do not contribute directly to the goal of economic development. As a result of increasing pressure from the business sector, Marginson (1997, p.143) suggests that government education was gradually pressed into conformity with the ‘market model’ in order to survive, and with this came increased emphasis on the adoption of uniform national standards for examinations and curricula.

During the 1980s, the Australian Labor Party support for market reforms which included deregulating the exchange rate and international currency transactions and licensing foreign banks effectively locked the Australian Government into the control systems of the global economy (Marginson 1997, p.83). The deregulation of finance led to the replacement of government control with control by a small number of private companies and international regulators. Marginson argues that the advent of globalism effectively weakened the capacity of national governments to determine the content of national policy agendas. ‘But an outcome has been the empowerment of
national authorities, who became the interpreters of global agencies and market requirements, and the arbiters of local reform' (Marginson 1997, p.84).

The extent to which education objectives have been subsequently sub-ordinated to the primary goal of economic competitiveness and to the interests of the 'global economy' constitutes the basis for much current debate in Australia and in other countries where the politics of the New Right have taken hold. Opponents of the globalisation of world economic markets argue that the interests of disadvantaged and minority groups have been marginalised as a result of policies and practices associated with the achievement of an advanced 'global economy' and that the gap between rich and poor members of society has increased. This argument is countered by supporters of the development of a global economy who suggest that this increasing gap between the economic status of rich and poor members of society is an inevitable consequence of generally increased levels of economic growth. Kreuger (2000), for example, suggests that while some segments of society have not benefited greatly from the 'economic boom', this has more to do with generally increased levels of economic growth. She argues that 'economic growth has always meant change, as old skills and ways of doing things are abandoned in favour of more productive alternatives'. On the positive side, Kreuger suggests that economic growth and trade liberalisation has delivered tremendous increases in living standards in poor countries and that those who can't recognise this phenomenon have 'global phobia' (Kreuger 2000).

The extent to which economic policies in Australia have developed in recent years in response to the realities of trade liberalisation, the expanding influence of international corporations and the globalisation of money markets is revealed when we consider the level of infiltration of economic rationalism across the policy spectrum. Nowhere has this been more evident than in the education sphere, where economic rationalism and corporate managerialist practices have flourished, and where there has been broad-based acceptance of the articulation between education and the economy. The resultant narrowing of the agenda for education in Australia since the 1970s has meant that minority and disadvantaged group interests that are not central to the achievement of economic growth have been routinely marginalised. It is possible to locate the current struggle for equitable resource distribution and the formulation of
appropriate educational goals for minority and disadvantaged groups in Australia within the context of the advance of globalism and the expansion of international corporate interests.

If, as Marginson (1997) suggests, education generally has received a raw deal from the advance of globalisation in world economic markets and the associated application of economic rationalist principles, then it should come as no surprise that educational enterprises involving minority groups and disadvantaged groups within market-driven economies have not fared very well in recent years. In addition to the decline in their comparative economic status, minority groups such as Indigenous peoples have had to battle to retain the affirmative educational programmes which were introduced in the 1970s and 1980s in Australia. Current reform proposals that are aimed at increasing the level of Indigenous community control over the setting of educational objectives, and increasing the representation of Indigenous community languages and cultures within education programmes, are clearly out of step with the current education and economic reform agendas of the Federal Government. The current Federal Liberal–National Party Coalition Government in Australia continues to attenuate a range of social, welfare, workplace, economic and education policies to the achievement of ‘free-market’ principles. Through reference to the ‘benefits to the nation’ of policies and practices that advance Australia’s economic interests, government representatives routinely omit consideration of the potential negative impact on the economic, educational and social well-being of community groups defined by their disadvantaged or minority status.

Social policy

Successive National, State and Territory Governments in Australia since 1788 have constructed social policies relating to Indigenous peoples. The superiority of attitudes and values that emanate from the European Christian tradition has been the accepted base from which these social policies have developed, and within their construction, Indigenous peoples have been consistently represented as the ‘other’. Henry and
Brabham (1991) represent the evolution of official government social policies relating to Indigenous peoples in Australia as follows:

(i) The period of Europeanisation and christianisation: 1788–1850s
(ii) The period of protection and segregation: 1860s–1930s
(iii) The period of assimilation: 1940s–1960s

While the initial aim during the period immediately after the invasion of this continent was to afford the Indigenous inhabitants ‘protection’ from the activity of colonisers, this imperative was soon overshadowed by more pressing concerns about the need to protect the economic interests of the colonisers. Escalating levels of contestation between colonists and Indigenous peoples over land ownership issues prompted a revised approach, and projects to ‘Christianise’ and ‘civilise’ Indigenous peoples soon gained official government and mainstream community support. So began a long period during which Indigenous peoples were subjected to orchestrated attempts to devalue their cultural and linguistic traditions, and during which official policies of protection and segregation were replaced by more overt policies of assimilation, followed by policies of self-determination and self-management. It is the period marked by the decline in support for official government policies of assimilation and the development of ‘self-determination’ and ‘self-management’ policies since 1960 which will be the main focus of the following discussion.

A national policy of assimilation emerged in Australia in the post-war era, and was aligned with a more general project of nation building. The concept of assimilation evolved over a thirty-year period from the early 1940s, and it became centrally concerned with how to effectively absorb the Aboriginal population into mainstream Australian society. At the joint Australian State–Federal conference in 1961, it was agreed that the policy of assimilation meant that:

all Aborigines and part-Aborigines are expected eventually to attain the same
manner of living as other Australians and to live as members of a single
Australian community enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the
same responsibilities, observing the same customs and influenced by the same
beliefs as other Australians.


Jordan (1988) suggests that as assimilation became official policy in Canada and
Australia, the attack on the culture of the Indigenous peoples was spearheaded in the
schools, and focused on language (p.191). Indigenous students were routinely
expected to understand the language of the colonisers and in many cases were
punished for use of their Indigenous languages. Jordan points to an inherent
contradiction contained within policies of assimilation and the construction of
education for Indigenous students in Australia. While the manifest aim of schooling
was assimilation, the organisation of schooling often assumed that the Indigenous
peoples were considered incapable of learning. On the long-term effects of schooling
that was underpinned by the assimilationist agenda, Jordan suggests that:

The destruction of the culture and identity of Indigenous peoples through the
structures of schooling, the low expectations of teachers and lack of
opportunity have left a legacy of memories of rejection, of internalization, of
negative stereotyping and the creation of a negative identity. It has also left a
legacy of distrust of the ‘white’ school system as an agency of assimilation,
and the conviction that the structures of ‘white’ schooling are ill adapted for
Indigenous peoples. (Jordan 1988, p.193)

The referendum of 1967 marked the start of a new era for Indigenous policy
development in Australia. The electorate voted overwhelmingly for the lifting of the
restriction that had prevented the Commonwealth from passing laws in relation to
Indigenous peoples (which had been in place since Federation in 1901), and for the
granting to Indigenous peoples of full citizenship rights. These changes marked a
decline in official government support for policies of assimilation and their subsequent
replacement by policies of ‘self-determination’ and ‘self-management’. Strategies to
improve the legal, economic, health and education status of Indigenous peoples were

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significantly implicated in the development and interpretation of these ‘self-management’ and ‘self-determination’ policies. The Labor Government, under Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, introduced an official policy of ‘self-determination’ for Indigenous peoples in 1972, and, according to Duke and Sommerlad, Indigenous peoples were subsequently encouraged to ‘decide the pace and nature of their future development as significant components within a diverse Australia’ (Duke & Sommerlad 1974, p.19, cited in Butler 1985, p.32).

After 1975, the newly elected Liberal–National Country Party coalition introduced a new policy described as ‘self-management’. This policy was essentially the same as the previous policy of ‘self-determination’ but contained an increased emphasis on Aboriginalisation within government departments responsible for Aboriginal Affairs. According to Butler, during this time support for the land rights movement, the homelands movement and bilingual education continued. With the election of the Hawke Labor Government in 1983, the official government policy again became one of ‘self-determination’, although the policy objectives were expanded to include increasing recognition of the civil and political rights of Indigenous peoples (Butler 1985, p.35). A purpose for supporting policies of Aboriginal ‘self-determination’ was outlined within the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991). The report noted the comparatively low level of educational attainment of Aboriginal inmates in Australia and suggested that it was imperative to address this issue if incarceration rates were to be reduced. The commission identified the need for increased self-determination by Aboriginal peoples in a range of areas as a way of addressing existing social inequality, and it presented the following argument: ‘the need to put behind us a history of dispossession, dependency and efforts at forced assimilation and move decisively into a new era of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander empowerment and self-determination’ (Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody 1992, p.3).

While the policy of ‘self-determination’ became the main device for strategic action in a range of Indigenous programme areas in the 1970s, there remained problematic issues to be resolved. The development of mechanisms for ensuring equitable Indigenous community representation and the development of appropriate
bureaucratic frameworks for the implementation of programmes in Indigenous community contexts, were, and still remain, difficult issues for those committed to implementing policies driven by the principles of ‘self-determination’. Rowse (2000a) describes how Coombs and Stanner, two key government bureaucrats involved in the implementation of Aboriginal Affairs policy in the 1970s, persistently warned against the development of a centralised Aboriginal Affairs bureaucracy because of difficulties associated with achieving equitable representation of varying Indigenous community interests. They argued instead for the regionalisation of bureaucratic functions in key areas, such as health and education, as a primary means of ensuring that local Indigenous community proposals for action were central to the construction and delivery of social programmes. With this emphasis on regionalisation, it was anticipated that Indigenous community members would be ‘empowered’ through increased opportunities to be involved in decision-making at local levels and through increased control over resource distribution. Support for the development of a centralised Indigenous affairs bureaucracy, however, resulted in the establishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) in 1989. ATSIC has developed as the principal statutory Commonwealth body responsible for the management and funding of a wide range of Indigenous programmes, and Indigenous peoples are formally represented in this bureaucracy by elected regional commissioners. According to Rowse (2000a, p.14), Coombs hoped that ATSIC regional councils could be the frameworks for regional coalitions of local Aboriginal organisations. Ongoing tension between the statutory responsibilities of ATSIC and its role as a representative of Indigenous community interests, however, persists. Rowse describes the problem in this way: ‘As ATSIC has evolved, however, the local Indigenous organisation is, for the most part, a client of government agencies, among which ATSIC is but one. Each council or association’s access to public money is by virtue of the alignment of its work with the various programmes of government’ (Rowse 2000a, p.222).

Roberts (1994) points out that while there is no commonly agreed definition in Australia of ‘self-determination’, there does appear to be general agreement that ‘central to self-determination is the right of Indigenous Australians to make decisions
on issues relating to them and to manage their own affairs' (Roberts 1994, p.212). He identifies a significant problem in the realisation of these goals as being related to the increasing levels of administrative control by governments over expenditure within Aboriginal organisations and the subsequent reduction in the autonomy of Aboriginal communities and organisations from direct government intervention. Similarly, Jordan points to a fundamental problem associated with self-determination policies as these relate to the projected advantages for minority group members: 'Self-determination, even when it appears real, rests on a fragile base when communities remain dependent on funding from the dominant group, whether preparing documentation for legal battles, appointing consultants for curriculum development, or hiring teachers' (Jordan 1988, p.213).

In developing workable models for the achievement of Indigenous community 'self-determination', it is the issues of financial dependence on the State and the lack of regional autonomy in the setting of programme objectives that are regularly contested by Indigenous peoples and their advocates. When the Northern Territory Government decided to withdraw the funding for bilingual programmes in twenty-one Aboriginal schools in 1998, and to close the Traeger Park School in 1991, Indigenous community members were powerless to stop them because they had no direct control over programme funding. In spite of demonstrated Aboriginal community support, and evidence from educational experts that these two programmes were capable of delivering valuable social and educational outcomes, Northern Territory Government representatives argued that they were not financially viable and that identified educational objectives were not being achieved. Bilingual education programmes in Northern Territory schools provided the catalyst for the training and employment of a substantial Indigenous workforce and for the achievement of significant bi-cultural education outcomes. These programmes also represented a key vehicle for the expression of Indigenous linguistic and cultural diversity across the Northern Territory. Aboriginal peoples in the Northern Territory vigorously defended the Traeger Park School and bilingual education programmes. This should have indicated to government education service providers that these programmes contained characteristics that were worth preserving. It appears, however, that as long as
governments are directly involved in the distribution of resources, then they are in a strong position to dictate the parameters for achievement of social, economic, educational and health outcomes within Indigenous communities. This effectively takes out of the hands of Indigenous community members any real control over the construction and direction of educational and other social programmes and puts into question the concept of ‘self-determination’ as a realistic policy initiative.

The right to ‘choose’ is nominated as a fundamental principle of ‘self-determination’ and it is through reference to this principle that support for alternative educational structures for Indigenous peoples in Australia has been consistently argued. Coombs (1994), a long-time supporter of Indigenous community ‘self-determination’ in a range of programme areas, suggests that maintenance of ‘educational choice’ is important. He is critical of the *National Aboriginal Education Policy* (NAEP) (1989) because he suggests that it wrongly supports a mainstream approach to education which ultimately results in reduced educational choices for Aboriginal peoples and reduced opportunities for Indigenous community ‘empowerment’. Coombs argues that within NAEP:

> There is no provision for the development of alternative programs designed to meet the needs of Aboriginal communities and equip their children for lives which are compatible with and which express their own culture. There is no provision for the control of the content of the curriculum by locally based Aborigines.  

(Coombs 1994, p.72)

Increasing levels of official government support for reform initiatives that align Indigenous education structures and programme outcomes with the ‘mainstream’ has resulted in a narrowing of the education options available to Indigenous students in Australia over the past ten years. When the ‘mainstreaming’ option is promoted in the name of achieving ‘equality’ or ‘equity’ for Indigenous peoples, this provides allied support for the achievement of assimilation objectives

**Contemporary trends in Indigenous policy development**
In recent years, successive Labor and Liberal Governments have colluded in a project to gain mainstream public support for an alignment between social, educational and economic objectives in Australia. Through reference to the importance of ‘national unity’, and by linking the ‘national interest’ with policies and practices that aim to increase the economic productivity and social responsibility of all Australian citizens, governments have introduced a broad range of policy initiatives. Within these policies, education has been framed as an integral aspect of the national project of ‘economic recovery’, and the development of a literate and numerate workforce is regularly cited as a key objective. The resultant narrowing of official conceptions about the purpose for education has had negative consequences for a number of minority groups within Australian society. Included among those whose interests have been progressively marginalised are migrants and Indigenous peoples. In the 1980s when a range of affirmative minority education initiatives flourished, there was a raised expectation that an alignment between the interests of these groups and the interests of the ‘mainstream’ could be achieved. However, opportunities for expressions of cultural and gender difference, and for the achievement of educational and social ‘equity’, have declined with the expansion in support for Australia’s participation in a globalised economy and for the related institution of economic rationalism within government bureaucracies.

When educational ‘success’ is linked ultimately to the achievement of economic ‘success’ then support for the development of competitive school cultures gains momentum. An example of a commonly articulated justification for this trend was provide by the Minister for Education in the Northern Territory when he explained why he thought the Aboriginal children from Traeger Park School should attend mainstream primary schools in Alice Springs:

The reality is that Traeger Park is an urban school where a very unsatisfactory situation has developed, where all children at that school except four were, in fact, Aboriginals. And I don’t think that is in the long-term interest of Aboriginal children who have to learn to take their place in the wider community. They have to learn how to compete, and they’re going to have to compete with white children and with white adults at the end of the day.
A key belief underlying the Minister's position is that acquisition of knowledge about the culture and language of mainstream society represents an important determinant of ultimate academic, economic and social 'success'. Policies that derive from this attitude effectively marginalise alternative parameters for considering the value of education ventures which are not implicated in the achievement of economic objectives. The trend toward increasing levels of government manipulation of the education reform agenda is evidenced by the extent to which benchmarks for educational 'success' are being increasingly determined from within centralised education bureaucracies. The institution of 'national standards' and standardised curricula has effectively narrowed the range of education options available to minority group members and has supported the devaluation of non-mainstream linguistic and cultural knowledge. So, while official policies of 'self-determination' still prevail in the Indigenous policy arena, the extent to which Indigenous peoples are supported in developing strategies and programs that further local community interests is questionable.

In recent years, mainstream community notions of 'access', 'equity' and 'social justice' have, importantly, framed the parameters for negotiation between Indigenous community representatives and mainstream education service providers in Australia. Yet, as Dodson points out, the ideological basis for these constructions has not necessarily served the interests of Indigenous peoples. In the following statement he also makes reference to the negative effects of entrenched philanthropic attitudes on the part of mainstream service providers and points to the importance to Indigenous peoples of the 'enabling' or 'empowering' effects of programme and policy development that is primarily driven by Indigenous community perspectives: 'No program to “give to us” will ever work for us because it is in our own heritage that we can find the source of our power and liberation' (Dodson 1994, p.7).

Dodson’s argument is aligned with the long-standing position of many other Indigenous peoples and commissions of inquiry into issues affecting the lives of Indigenous peoples, who suggest that the best way to proceed is in the development of processes whereby the level of Indigenous community involvement in decision-
making and service delivery is increased. On the issue of welfare reform, Pearson (2000) emphasises this point. He argues that the existing welfare system in Australia has colluded to entrench Indigenous peoples at the bottom of the social pile, and that as long as Indigenous peoples are framed as passive recipients of welfare, then the extreme social problems currently being experienced in Indigenous communities will persist. He argues that:

This country needs to develop a new consensus around our commitment to welfare. This consensus needs to be built on principles of personal and family empowerment and investment and the utilisation of resources to achieve lasting change. In other words our motivation to reform welfare must be based on the principle that dependency and passivity are a scourge and must be avoided at all costs. (Pearson 2000, p.10)

This message, however, continues to be ignored by government representatives who propose solutions to Indigenous ‘problems’ that are philanthropically based and that do not include Indigenous community perspectives as central to the resolution process. In a speech given in response to the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation’s final report (Howard 2000, ‘Perspectives on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Issues’), the Prime Minister of Australia, in referring to Indigenous peoples, suggested that ‘[a]mong them are Australians whose children are sick, whose lives are empty, and whose prospects are dim. Among them are Australians who need our help’ (Howard 2000, p.4).

This statement contains echoes of the philanthropy denounced by both Pearson (2000) and Dodson (1994) as counter-productive and denies the importance to Indigenous peoples of the empowerment which comes from determining future programme priorities. Additional evidence of the Prime Minister’s unwillingness to accept ‘self-determination’ as a preferred policy direction comes from his refusal last year to endorse the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation’s self-determination clause within The Australian Declaration Towards Reconciliation document (Saunders 2001).

Disjunctions between general policy commitments to the principles of Indigenous community ‘self-determination’ and the reality associated with continuing government
manipulation of the policy agenda in a range of areas emerges as a central problem for reformists who are arguing for a re-alignment of Indigenous community interests and mainstream community interests. Walton (1995) suggests that documents such as NATSIEP (1989), the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1992) and current State Indigenous Education Strategic Plans establish the extent of structural inequality which serves to disadvantage Aboriginal students. These documents suggest changes to existing practices that usually begin with increasing the level of Aboriginal involvement in decision-making. It appears, however, that persistent mainstream community resistance and insufficient institutional commitment to this proposition has meant that the goal of Indigenous community ‘self-determination’ remains unfulfilled. A fundamental principle of ‘self-determination’ for Indigenous peoples has been described as ‘the right to make decisions about issues affecting them or to manage their own affairs’ (Roberts 1994). But when high-ranking government representatives assume responsibility for determining the parameters for ‘success’ in a range of programme areas, they leave no room for Indigenous peoples to propose alternatives.

Currently in Australia, there is regular promotion of an attitude that suggests that improved Indigenous education outcomes cannot be achieved in the short term. Jull (2000) raised this issue in relation to a range of Indigenous programme outcomes in Australia, and he located his argument within a comparison of the situation for Indigenous peoples in Norway and Canada. He attributes the advances that have been achieved by Indigenous peoples in both Norway and Canada over the past twenty years to mainstream government support for the ‘total approach to community or regional problem-solving’. In comparison, he suggests that projected outcome improvements for Indigenous peoples in Australia across a range of areas have not eventuated during this same period. Jull argues that this situation can be related to the ‘policy mentality’ spawned by the three-year election cycle and to the pervasiveness of an attitude which suggests that Indigenous ‘problems’ will take generations to solve. He reports that the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, in a recent speech to the Young Liberals (in Adelaide in August 1999) responded to a question about Aboriginal health by suggesting that ‘the problem had been around for 200 years and
could take as long to solve’ (Jull 2000, p.49). Similarly, in relation to Indigenous education there is widespread acceptance of the proposition that the problem of academic underachievement by Indigenous students cannot be solved in the short term. This defeatist attitude is evidenced in a statement from the House of Representatives Standing committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (1992): ‘4.4. The Committee acknowledges, as does the Schools Council, in a recent report, that because of the deep-rooted nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage, change in education is a slow process. “Success in education can only be measured on a generational basis”’(House of Representatives 1992, p.57).

A recent proposition by the Federal Minister for Reconciliation, Mr Ruddock, which was publicised through the international media, and which sparked calls for his resignation as Reconciliation Minister, is similarly based. In accounting for the level of comparative social disadvantage experienced by Indigenous peoples in Australia, Mr Ruddock suggested that this was owing to the fact that they had not been familiar with the wheel when they met their first Europeans (Townsville Bulletin 2000), the inference being that their subsequent progress toward ‘civilisation’ had been naturally slow. This comment reflects an attitude of cultural and social determinism which effectively deflects blame for poor programme outcomes from the responsible government service providers onto a stereotypical and colonial construction of Aboriginality. Interestingly, the Prime Minister, John Howard, said that he backed Mr Ruddock ‘100 per cent’ and he suggested that ‘surely we can do better than nitpick over whether or not somebody has correctly or incorrectly expressed a view on a historical fact’ (Saunders 2000).

If mainstream Australian institutions continue to operate from a position which accepts that problems associated with unacceptably low Indigenous health and education outcomes require ‘generational’ solutions, and that problems of social disadvantage are racially and therefore genetically based, then it is unlikely that their representatives will accept responsibility for developing radical programme approaches that rely on Indigenous community or regional problem-solving. It is this situation which represents an over-arching impediment to reform proposals which aim
to substantially improve a range of outcomes for Indigenous peoples in Australia in the foreseeable future.

The current Australian Federal Government proposes an approach to Indigenous issues which amounts to a re-assertion of old propositions (namely assimilation) and which is underpinned by ideologies entrenched in our colonial past. The Federal Minister for Education, Dr Kemp, recently stated his commitment to ‘educational equality for Indigenous Australians’. He declared a personal commitment to ensuring that ‘education prepares all children for a satisfying life and for work in a challenging and competitive environment’ (Kemp 2000, ‘Educational equality for Indigenous Australians: Unfinished business, not special treatment’). This statement reflects two important assumptions that:

➢ there is a ‘level playing field’ in terms of educational opportunity in this country; and

➢ the Federal Minister for Education has a mandate to determine the ‘purpose for education’ and that there is agreement over what constitutes a ‘satisfying life’.

Educational ‘equality’ is represented by the Minister as ‘equality of outcomes’, and, so, the value of educational outcomes which fall outside mainstream concerns with employment, competition and economic rewards are ignored. Within his speech, the Minister represented the ‘richness of Australia’s cultural and linguistic diversity’ as a national resource to be preserved for future generations. In this way, minority languages and cultures are represented as artifact and not as intrinsic to the identities of contemporary Australians: a factor contributing toward the denial of Indigenous cultural and linguistic rights. By implicating the concept of affirmative education initiatives as part of a project of ‘special treatment’ (as is suggested in the title of the speech) the Minister for Education also effectively denies the extent of social disadvantage currently experienced by Indigenous peoples in Australia.

The Prime Minister has recently emphasised the importance of ‘practical reconciliation’ to the future of the broader process of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (Howard 2000). In his speech he identified improved Indigenous health, education and employment outcomes as
important. He also exhorted corporate Australia to commit to offering increased employment opportunities for Indigenous peoples as a means by which Indigenous disadvantage could be addressed: ‘True reconciliation is, in our view, to be best found within practical means to improve the well-being and happiness of Indigenous Australians and raising standards to levels enjoyed and expected by all of us’ (Howard 2000, p.6).

Like the Federal Minister for Education, the Prime Minister emphasises the importance of ensuring that Indigenous peoples enjoy the same standards of living as mainstream Australians, but he reserves the right of the government to define what these standards should be. Similarly, within the construction of the newly conceived ‘mutual obligation’ framework, government representatives reserve the right to nominate the ‘obligations’ of welfare recipients. By emphasising the ‘practical’ aspects of reconciliation, the Prime Minister effectively ignores all reference to the importance to Indigenous peoples of the ‘empowerment’ associated with increasing levels of control over decisions affecting their lives.

De-centralisation of bureaucratic functions associated with Indigenous programme management and resource distribution was proposed by Coombs and Stanner in the early 1970s as a primary way of ensuring that Indigenous peoples could exert significant control over how they interacted with mainstream society and its institutions (Rowse 2000a). Promises of bureaucratic de-centralisation and regionalisation of resource management have not eventuated, and, so, Indigenous peoples continue to have externally constructed policies, practices, and institutional structures inflicted upon them. The ATSIC structure and the various State and Territory Indigenous education advisory and consultative frameworks have failed to deliver to Indigenous peoples significantly increased opportunities for determining educational outcomes, or for determining the most effective educational and research approaches within their own communities.

Even though practices associated with the project of assimilation have had disastrous consequences for Indigenous peoples in the past, this historical reality seems to be ignored by current Australian Government representatives who are promoting a return to assimilatory policies. A reluctance to align these proposed
policies with an official project of assimilation may, however, reflect awareness that such an alignment would result in increased levels of Indigenous community opposition to mainstream government proposals for education ‘reform’. When Indigenous community access to ESL programmes is presented as a social justice issue, and when it is argued that the ‘national interest’ will be served by the development of a competitive, monolingual workforce, it is likely that some people will be convinced that governments are acting responsibly to protect both Indigenous and mainstream community interests. The interests of Indigenous peoples are not being served, however, when these proposals are forcibly imposed and when their implementation is dependent upon the withdrawal of existing programmes and non-mainstream education models. If governments were serious about assisting Indigenous peoples to achieve their life potential, then the maintenance of a range of educational programme approaches and institutional structures would be high on their reform agendas.

CONCLUSION

The three case studies presented within this portfolio investigate the patterns of contestation associated with Indigenous education service delivery and the construction of Indigenous education research in Australia. Mainstream community and institutional responses to the academic underachievement of Indigenous students and to the historical patterns of marginalisation of Indigenous community interests within the construction of educational research have emerged as areas of key interest. The purpose for constructing an analysis around publicly contested issues has been to engage with the positioning of a range of stakeholders. This process has provided an important means of identifying contested and unresolved issues that have the potential to impede future reform initiatives in the Indigenous education and educational research areas. These issues are at various stages of resolution and are not confined to the Indigenous education sphere. Similar patterns of contestation and issue resolution are currently taking place in areas related to Indigenous health, welfare, law and land rights. Forums for current debate about these issues in Australia include:
the formal national reconciliation process;

- public interrogation of the history associated with the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families;

- recognition of the dispossession associated with loss of connection to traditional land; and

- increased international focus on the rights of Indigenous peoples.

Within this paper I have argued that there has been insufficient attention paid to Indigenous ways of approaching education and educational research in Australia and that this situation is continuing to contribute to patterns of academic underachievement by Indigenous peoples. Central to the construction of my argument has been the proposition that currently identified barriers to Indigenous education reform can be located within broader patterns of domination and subordination that emanate from the Australian colonial tradition. Tension has arisen because colonisers have been traditionally concerned with ‘reshaping Indigenous peoples and making them anew’ (Attwood 1989), while Indigenous peoples have been concerned with re-defining their patterns of existence in a radically changed world. The enormity of the impact of colonisation on Indigenous peoples cannot be over-estimated, neither can the arrogance associated with the project to impose an alternative world view and pattern of social organisation on already highly organised cultures. Nevertheless, a disregard for the history associated with the invasion and subsequent colonisation of this continent persists and contributes to the pervasiveness of ideologies which justify the means by which mainstream Australia continues in its quest to ‘civilise’ Indigenous peoples.

Advocates for increased levels of Indigenous community autonomy and for flexibility within the framing of Indigenous education initiatives are currently pitted against mainstream government and institutional representatives who are promoting centralised education service delivery structures and a return to assimilatory policies. The patterns of contestation associated with current Indigenous education and research reform initiatives also reflect the long-standing tension between those who support the
development of a pluralist society and those who support the development of a monocultural, monolingual nation.

Within the preceding research, the following unresolved issues have been identified as constituting barriers to Indigenous education and educational research reforms in Australia:

- Despite rhetorical policy commitment to the development of Indigenous community ‘self-determination’ in the education and educational research spheres, significant barriers to the achievement of this objective can be identified. While official assimilationist policies were rejected by mainstream Australian governments in the early 1970s, we are still witnessing persistent rejection of the notion that Indigenous peoples can and should have direct input into education decision-making, and into the construction of educational research and education service delivery programmes. There is evidence of a resurgence in support for the assimilationist agenda on the broader social policy front, and this situation is impacting significantly upon the nature of currently proposed Indigenous education service delivery structures and educational and research approaches.

- Mainstream institutional commitment to the principles of economic rationalism and the incorporation of corporate managerialist approaches has resulted in a trend toward the setting of outcome indicators or benchmarks from within increasingly centralised bureaucratic structures. Subsequent lack of support for the adoption of regional approaches to Indigenous community programme development and resource distribution indicates a lack of mainstream community and institutional support for policies of Indigenous community ‘self-determination’. The effect of this trend has been to reduce opportunities for Indigenous community members to input significantly into educational decision-making processes or into the setting of educational and research objectives. While this situation persists, the notion of ‘self-determination’ within the context of Indigenous education remains as nothing more than a policy myth.

- The current social and education policy agendas of the Australian Federal Government have become overtly geared toward the achievement of national
economic growth and the strengthening of Australia's position in the global economy. High on the agenda associated with these developments is support for the construction of a monolingual, monocultural workforce that is responsive to the labour market requirements of an increasingly globalised economy. If this trend continues, then social and educational outcomes which fall outside the parameters set by the overriding economic agenda are likely to be disregarded. Excluded from consideration will be the negative consequences for Indigenous peoples of policies and practices which devalue their unique identities within society and which attempt to frame them as 'recipients' of mainstream community benevolence.

- Identified 'disempowering' attitudes and practices of educators, researchers and institutional representatives impact negatively upon the educational outcomes for minority students generally. In Australia, these attitudes and practices can be located within a culture which continues (not always consciously) to construct non-Indigenous knowledge bases and non-Indigenous approaches to the education project as 'superior'. These 'disempowering' attitudes and practices are identified by Cummins (1986) as being related to:

  - the imposition of assessment regimes which take insufficient account of existing student knowledge bases and which aim to identify minority student 'deficits' in comparison to mainstream constructed academic norms;
  - the exclusion of minority group linguistic and cultural knowledge from education curricula;
  - insufficient minority group participation in education decision-making and education service delivery; and
  - pedagogical practices that ignore the benefits of interactive learning and teaching to minority group students.

When the Cummins (1986) framework (Empowering minority group students: A framework for intervention) was applied to two contested Indigenous education initiatives in the Northern Territory (the closure of the Traeger Park School and the withdrawal of bilingual education programmes from twenty-one Aboriginal
school), marginalisation of Indigenous student interests was demonstrated. Within the proposals to force Aboriginal students into mainstream schools and to participate in ‘English only’ education programmes, key predictors for academic success by minority group students were breached. In particular, the existing knowledge bases of Indigenous students were ignored and mainstream education stakeholders routinely excluded the importance of Indigenous community participation in education decision-making and service delivery from consideration.

- Indigenous education research guidelines (that aim to protect the interests of Indigenous peoples) are well established within Australian higher education institutions. The problem is that there has been insufficient institutional support for the development of mechanisms within Indigenous communities to ensure that the principles of Indigenous community control over the research project are upheld. So, despite rhetorical institutional commitment to the reversal of past research practices that marginalised the interests of Indigenous peoples, the lack of support for changing and monitoring researcher practices and for assisting Indigenous peoples to assert control over the research agenda means that Euro-centric research practices and academic perspectives still dominate.

- Support for theories of cultural and social determinism within mainstream Australian society results in the proliferation of policies and programmes that promote ‘deficit’ educational approaches for minority group members and which routinely marginalise alternative knowledge bases and alternative ways of approaching the education project.

- The ongoing relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Australia continues to be constrained by the ‘donor-recipient’ model of service delivery, which has philanthropy as its ideological base (Rowse 2000b). Persistent mainstream community acceptance of the validity of this model, continues to impact negatively on attempts by Indigenous peoples to bring about fundamental changes to the way in which education and educational research is constructed and practiced. The ‘disempowerment’ associated with the imposed ‘recipient’ status of
Indigenous peoples is implicated in the unsatisfactory Indigenous health, education and social outcomes currently being achieved.

- National policies and programmes for implementing proposed Indigenous education reforms are not closely attenuated to varying regional and Indigenous community circumstances. Within the construction of a national Indigenous education policy, for example, the cultural, linguistic, political and social differences between Indigenous community groups throughout Australia have been inadequately represented. The establishment of locally mediated educational objectives and educational and research approaches may reduce the extent to which local Indigenous community interests are marginalised in the future.

- By locating the cause of the ‘problem’ associated with patterns of Indigenous student underachievement within the Indigenous communities in question, mainstream institutional representatives regularly attempt to deflect attention away from shortcomings in mainstream education service delivery approaches. When policies and practices within mainstream institutions result in subsequent disadvantage to minority group members, then an argument for the existence of a project of ‘institutional racism’ can be made (Mason 1982). The marginalisation of Indigenous student interests is commonplace within the construction of education across all education sectors in Australia. This is exemplified by the extent of disadvantage experienced by tertiary Indigenous students since the introduction of changes to the ABSTUDY formula in 2000 (ATSIC 1999) and by promotion of the ‘mainstreaming’ option for all primary and secondary school students when appropriate support structures for Indigenous students are not in place.

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