Rhetoric vs Reality: The Disconnect between Policy and Practice for Teachers Implementing Aboriginal Education in their Schools

Cathie Burgess
University of Sydney
Australia
&
Kevin Lowe
UNSW
Australia

Abstract: In Australia, pervasive deficit representations and positioning of Aboriginal peoples continue to impact on teachers' capacity to meaningfully embed Aboriginal curriculum and pedagogies into their teaching. This sits within a policy context driven by standardization, competition and market forces focused on closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student outcomes to address the statistical dissonance

caused by Aboriginal underachievement. Our analysis is informed by Bacchi's (2009) 'What's the 'problem' represented to be?' analytical tool. We reveal discourses that position Aboriginal peoples as the 'problem' and the effects of these on teacher practice. Using the 2019 Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration, which represents a national partisan vision of Australian education, we demonstrate how discourses of community engagement, Reconciliation and data-driven solutions continue to position Aboriginal peoples as incapable, and government as savior. This flags the silencing of Aboriginal peoples' key concerns of racism, social justice, truth-telling, sovereignty, and treaty, all of which are central to the ongoing fight for voice, reparative justice and recognition. Until these concerns are heard and accounted for in policies, the gap will remain, teachers will continue to struggle to meaningfully engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policies and curriculum content and consequently fail Aboriginal aspirations.
Keywords: Indigenous education; Aboriginal education policy; Bacchi WPR analysis; teaching practice; policy discourse

Retórica versus realidad: La desconexión entre la política y la práctica para los docentes que implementan la educación aborigen en sus escuelas

Resumen: En Australia, las representaciones deficitarias generalizadas y el posicionamiento de los pueblos aborígenes continúan afectando la capacidad de los docentes para incorporar de manera significativa el plan de estudios y las pedagogías aborígenes en su enseñanza. Esto se ubica dentro de un contexto de políticas impulsado por la estandarización, la competencia y las fuerzas del mercado enfocadas en cerrar la brecha entre los resultados de los estudiantes aborígenes y no aborígenes para abordar la disonancia estadística causada por el bajo rendimiento de los aborígenes. Nuestro análisis se basa en la herramienta analítica de Bacchi (2009) "¿Cuál es el 'problema' representado?' Revelamos discursos que posicionan a los pueblos aborígenes como el "problema" y los efectos de estos en la práctica docente. Usando la Declaración de Educación de Alice Springs (Mparntwe) de 2019, que representa una visión partidista nacional de la educación australiana, demostramos cómo los discursos de participación comunitaria, reconciliación y soluciones basadas en datos continúan posicionando a los pueblos aborígenes como incapaces y al gobierno como salvador. Esto marca el silenciamiento de las preocupaciones clave de los pueblos aborígenes sobre el racismo, la justicia social, la verdad, la soberanía y los tratados, todos los cuales son fundamentales para la lucha en curso por la voz, la justicia reparadora y el reconocimiento. Hasta que estas preocupaciones sean escuchadas y consideradas en las políticas, la brecha permanecerá, los maestros continuarán luchando para comprometerse de manera significativa con las políticas y el contenido del plan de estudios de los aborígenes e isleños del Estrecho de Torres y, en consecuencia, fracasarán en las aspiraciones aborígenes.
Keywords: educación indígena; política de educación aborigen; análisis Bacchi WPR; práctica docente; discurso politico

Retórica x realidade: A desconexão entre política e prática para professores que implementam a educação aborígene em suas escolas

Resumo: Na Austrália, representações e posicionamentos deficitários generalizados dos povos aborígenes continuam a impactar a capacidade dos professores de incorporar significativamente o currículo e as pedagogias aborígenes em seu ensino. Isso está dentro de um contexto de política impulsionado pela padronização, competição e forças de mercado focadas em fechar a lacuna entre os resultados dos alunos aborígenes e não

aborígenes para lidar com a dissonância estatística causada pelo insucesso dos aborígenes. Nossa análise é informada pela ferramenta analítica de Bacchi (2009) 'Qual é o 'problema' representado como sendo?'. Revelamos discursos que posicionam os povos indígenas como o 'problema' e os efeitos destes na prática docente. Usando a Declaração de Educação de Alice Springs (Mparntwe) de 2019, que representa uma visão partidária nacional da educação australiana, demonstramos como os discursos de engajamento comunitário, reconciliação e soluções baseadas em dados continuam a posicionar os povos aborígenes como incapazes e o governo como salvador. Isso sinaliza o silenciamento das principais preocupações dos povos aborígenes de racismo, justiça social, dizer a verdade, soberania e tratado, todos os quais são centrais para a luta contínua por voz, justiça reparadora e reconhecimento. Até que essas preocupações sejam ouvidas e contabilizadas nas políticas, a lacuna permanecerá, os professores continuarão a lutar para se envolver significativamente com as políticas e o conteúdo curricular dos aborígenes e das ilhas do Estreito de Torres e, consequentemente, falharem nas aspirações aborígenes.
Palavras-chave: educação indígena; política de educação indígena; análise Bacchi WPR; prática docente; discurso político

Rhetoric vs Reality: The Disconnect between Policy and Practice for Teachers Implementing Aboriginal Education in their Schools

Under Australia's dominant settler-colonial culture and politics, deficit representations and positioning of Aboriginal[1] students, their families and their cultures continue to permeate education through policies, curriculum, pedagogy and day-to-day practices of schooling (Buxton, 2017; Gillan et al., 2017; Lingard et al., 2012; Maxwell et al., 2018, 2018; Patrick & Moodie, 2016). Teachers continue to struggle to meaningfully engage with Aboriginal curriculum and pedagogies and often avoid this area unless it is a mandated component of the curriculum. Issues such as fear of doing the wrong thing and/or offending Aboriginal people, lack of understanding and skills, often as a result of little previous experience or education in the area, and feeling overwhelmed by an already overcrowded curriculum, consistently arise in the literature (Bishop & Durksen, 2020). For many teachers, Aboriginal content is not on their radar at all, especially if there are not clear links to their curriculum areas or if it is an option. This is compounded by a general lack of meaningful interactions with Aboriginal peoples and communities and few opportunities for professional learning, limiting teacher knowledge of culturally appropriate protocols and, therefore, limited capacity to engage in respectful and reciprocal relationships with Aboriginal families and communities (Moreton-Robinson et al., 2012).

These issues sit within a settler-colonial policy context still imbued with stereotypes and misconceptions about Aboriginal peoples, cultures, and communities. In this context, the impacts of colonization, racism and unequal power relations are barely acknowledged, let alone addressed. Embedded in this is a largely unquestioned Eurocentric philosophy that ignores Indigenous world views of collectivity, reciprocity and community, therefore marginalizing attempts to redress and reposition Indigenous voice as relevant and central to these issues.

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[1] We use the term Aboriginal people as this paper was written on Aboriginal land in the political jurisdiction of New South Wales, on the continent now commonly referred to as Australia. As Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers we acknowledge this land as Aboriginal. 'Aboriginal people' is therefore appropriate in our local context. This term respectfully includes Torres Strait Islander peoples as per educational policy in our jurisdiction. We use broader terms in the overall Australian context such as Indigenous and 'First Nations' where appropriate or when referring to specific research policies, documents etc.

More recently, discourses of responsibilization deem Aboriginal peoples as largely responsible for their circumstances rather than the settler colonial system that continues to marginalize (Burgess et al., in press). The government is then conveniently positioned as the savior of infantilized and deficient Aboriginal communities. Moreover, in this colonizing policy context certain 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1977) have emerged, offering 'solutions' to the problems of Aboriginal education, despite an absence of empirical evidence to support their appropriateness. We identify three pervasive solutions discourses in Aboriginal education: Aboriginal community engagement; Reconciliation; and data-driven solutions. For teachers and schools, the paucity of rigorous policy articulation, evidence, structures and accompanying strategies to support these solutions further undermines attempts to make a difference for Aboriginal students and their families.

The disconnect between policy and practice impacts on teacher agency to effectively work in the Aboriginal education sphere. Given these contradictory and opaque messages, it is no wonder that teachers struggle to find the pedagogic means to engage meaningfully and ethically with Indigenous knowledges. This policy/practice disconnect can undermine teacher efforts to genuinely implement strategies to improve student learning in this area and in some cases, reinforce deficit discourses about Aboriginal students and their families (Williams & Bamblett, 2017) and the delegitimization of Indigenous knowledge (Rigney, 2011). This hinders attempts to address the structural incoherence of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cross Curriculum Priority (CCP) in the Australian curriculum and by design, the pedagogic strategies to implement this. The CCP is one of the key policy mechanisms for prioritizing Indigenous perspectives in the education system. Moreover, teachers' limited access to impactful and supportive professional learning and their difficulty in making sense of policy aims and implications for their practice further undermines their agency.

In the first section of the paper, we provide an overview of Aboriginal education policy within the Australian context and explain its impacts on Aboriginal students and families, as well as on the teachers and schools struggling to implement limited and narrow policies. Secondly, we explain our understanding and application of Bacchi's (2009), 'What is the problem represented to be' (WPR) analytical tool. We apply this tool to better understand how and why policies continue to position Aboriginal peoples in a particular way, why the effects of this have entrenched underachievement as an expected outcome for Aboriginal students and to alert us to what is missing. In the third section we analyze the Mparntwe Declaration (Education Council, 2019) as a policy document that provides an overarching vision for Australian education. The Mparntwe Declaration is the fourth iteration of a national agreement between all the state and territory governments and the Commonwealth setting out their shared vision for education in Australia. We view the Mparntwe Declaration as an overarching 'umbrella text' which covers and legitimizes the CCP and the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) standards. It is an appropriate policy document to begin unpacking the limitations of education policy, particularly for Aboriginal students and communities. Fourthly, we analyze how this policy contextualizes and positions the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Cross-Curriculum Priority (CCP) within the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2011) and the National Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2014). Our analysis reveals how this policy assemblage shapes Reconciliation efforts and educators' engagements with Aboriginal communities, with the consequence of leading to data-driven solutions that leave many schools and teachers uncertain, wary, and struggling to implement governmental policy prescriptions as they attempt to improve Aboriginal student educational outcomes at the local level.

Lastly, we signal the need for a new vision for Aboriginal education policy, one that embeds Aboriginal-led narratives and aspirations of schooling to fulfil goals of self-determination, local

governance and economic independence. Alan Reid's (2019) new narrative for Australian education that focusses on the purpose of schooling, values and principles, and processes provides an opportunity to articulate an Aboriginal led vision of education that includes all students.

Australian Education Context

Like most western education systems, neoliberal values built on capitalist ideals of individualism, competition and market-driven choice have infiltrated education in ways that have reconfigured policy directions, reshaped the purpose of schooling, and influenced public perceptions of schools and teachers as serving a specific client base (Lingard et al., 2012; Reid, 2019; Stacey, 2017). Standardization, regulation, and accountability have narrowed curriculum, creating new discourses about teachers and schools by redefining quality and success as client-driven satisfaction, and prioritizing statistical equality (Patrick & Moodie, 2016, p. 179). Moreover, critical and creative thinking and problem-solving skills, arguably, have been reimagined and repurposed as tools for the achievement of capitalist ends. These concepts, and the discourses that surround them, have increasingly permeated policy formulation and implementation while simultaneously excluding the voices of key stakeholders such as teachers, students, parents and local communities (Stacey, 2017). Despite lip service to consultation, educational policy construction is increasingly in the hands of non-educators thus aggravating the disconnect between policy and practice to the point where many overburdened schools (usually high-poverty populations) implement only what is immediately relevant and beneficial to their context. Ironically, rather than standardizing practice, this can lead to a plethora of 'ad hoc' approaches which these policies aim to mitigate against as schools reject the 'one size fits all' mantra (Guenther et al., 2019). On the other hand, there are a growing number of wealthy independent schools who benefit from neoliberal constructions of the 'good' school (Ball, 2015, p. 309), boosting their client base, market presence and profit (Connell, 2013).

A key tension impacting on policy development and implementation is that while education is the responsibility of the states, increasingly the federal government is exerting more control and accountability through nationalizing curriculum, assessment and teacher standards increasing their influence at state levels, further standardizing key education levers across the country. This has the deleterious effect of further removing local schools and communities from policy making infrastructure even though the resulting policies and the funding attached to these increasingly impact on daily educational practice at the local level.

Aboriginal Education

Aboriginal education has increasingly become a priority particularly since highly visible government failure is reported annually in Closing the Gap reports (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet [PM&C], 2020). Originally constructed on principles such as self-determination, rights to land and social justice, Aboriginal education policies have more recently (at least since the 1996 election of the conservative Howard government) been framed in terms of outcomes, such that educational success leading to employment is framed as the key purpose of education. This signposts a return to assimilationist intentions where responsibility is placed solely with Aboriginal people while government control is maintained, if not increased.

The first national Aboriginal education policy was introduced in 1989. It identified four key areas: involvement of Aboriginal people in educational decision making, quality of access to educational services, equity of educational participation, and equitable and appropriate educational outcomes (Department of Education, Employment and Training [DEET], 1989). At the same time, the first of the national declarations on education, The Hobart Declaration (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 1989), included Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander peoples with ethnic groups in terms of understanding and respecting our (all Australians) cultural heritage (p. 2). In this way, multiculturalism and First Nations education can both be viewed as assimilationist. They discursively position all 'non-whites' together, reinforcing deep-seated binary thinking such as 'us' (White Australia) and 'them' (everyone else), while simultaneously assimilating 'them' into 'our' cultural heritage. This fundamental contradiction continues through subsequent policies and declarations where engaging and partnering with Aboriginal communities is articulated as a key lever to ensure Aboriginal people are educated well enough to contribute to the nation's economy through employment and entrepreneurism.

Policy

Carol Bacchi (2009) takes a Foucauldian approach to policy analysis that considers how policies produce "particular kinds of problems" (Bacchi & Goodwin 2016, p. 14), based on how the problem is represented. This critical and discursive understanding of policy challenges the conventional view that policy processes are responses to problems waiting to be solved. Bacchi urges us to analyze how the assumptions underlying the problem represent the problem in a particular way, so that on the surface, the solutions presented 'make sense' (Bacchi, 2009) and become a 'regime of truth' (Foucault, 1977). Importantly, the 'What's the problem represented to be' (WPR) method gives researchers the tools to reveal the silences, omissions, and power relations underpinning policies. WPR applies the following questions of policy texts (from Bacchi, 2009, p. 2; Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 20)

1. What is the 'problem' represented to be?

2. What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem' (problem representation)?

3. How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?

4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?

5. What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?

6. How and where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defended? And how can it be questioned, disputed and disrupted?

Rather than revealing the presumptions and opinions of policy actors, this approach considers the cultural premises, contexts and values that enable statements made in policy documents to 'make sense' and so justify their implementation. Bacchi (2009, p. 1) notes that "the way in which the 'problem' is represented carries all sorts of implications for how the issue is thought about and for how the people involved are treated and are evoked to think about themselves". This approach is therefore useful in considering how government policies have problematized Indigenous peoples as needing to change and assimilate into western ideals of progress as 'making sense'.

Several researchers (cf. Burgess et al., in press; Maxwell et al., 2018; Patrick & Moodie, 2016; Shay & Lampert, 2020) have applied Bacchi's approach to reveal how Aboriginal peoples, cultures and communities have come to be represented as a problem to be 'fixed' to divert thinking from how the government itself has created the conditions for the disadvantaged circumstances many

Indigenous Australians are positioned in. For example, Goodwin (2011) argues that the way in which problems were represented in the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) policy, produced a new category in Australian policy: "prescribed communities" (that is, those communities subject to the wide-ranging set of new policies) based on the assumption that Aboriginal people and communities are irresponsible, unable to govern themselves and therefore needing extensive government intervention.

Burgess et al. (in press) apply the WPR framework to analyze how, in the Australian state of New South Wales, Aboriginal education policies continue to represent Aboriginal peoples and their cultures as problems to be fixed without acknowledging that it is the policies and the governments that continue to position Aboriginal people in problematic ways. The persistent messaging across these policies positions education as the panacea for economic prosperity (often toggled with responsible citizenship), formulating western constructs of success as the only, unquestionable option.

While Shay and Lampert 's (2020) WPR analysis on the Through Growth to Achievement Report (2018) on equity in education is not a specific Indigenous policy, their focus on problematizing the notion of community engagement is appropriate to Aboriginal education as this concept is prevalent through most policies, often presented as a solution to improving Aboriginal student outcomes. Their analysis uncovers:

> White or privileged ways of interpreting community engagement … to examine how the problem/solution of community engagement is constructed (p. 5) (and) the ways in which it produces 'truth' about communities and how their relationships with schools can be imagined. (p. 6)

They conclude that this policy reinforces neoliberal constructs of student outcomes and subsequent employability and economic growth. Further, they contend that this needs to be disrupted to include and prioritize Indigenous knowledges and voices to open opportunities to impact on the outcomes of all students.

Maxwell et al (2018) integrated Bacchi's (2009) WPR policy analysis with critical race theory to interrogate the positioning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures as a cross curriculum priority (CCP) in the Australian Curriculum. Here they were interested in investigating the 'problem' for which the CCP was offered as a solution. They describe the utility of the WPR approach in the following way:

> Above all, this approach facilitates recognition of the 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education problem' as an analytic one; that is, it does not exist as a problem independent of education policy, but rather is represented as problematic by policy authors who simultaneously present an intersection of policies purporting to offer solutions to priority problems. (Maxwell et al., 2018, p. 163)

They conclude that problematizations of Aboriginal peoples, histories and cultures deliberately divert from government failure to recognize Aboriginal voice, sovereignty and legitimacy and serve these ends well by advancing race-based deficit discourses (p. 173).

Patrick and Moodie (2016) deployed WPR to explicate "the problematic, dominant, enduring representations of Aboriginal learners and education in policy over the past 50 years; identify the effects of these policy discourses and present a case for a shift in thinking" (p. 170). Their analysis makes visible the representations of Indigenous peoples contained in the goals of the three national education declarations that preceded the Mparntwe Declaration, i.e. the Hobart (1989), Adelaide (1999) and Melbourne (2009) Declarations (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment,

Training and Youth Affairs, 1989, 1999, 2009). Patrick and Moodie note that, over time, the Declarations, increasingly represent Indigenous peoples as different, disadvantaged, and deficient, underpinning the fundamental ways in which policy makers frame the 'problem' (Bacchi, 2009; Vass, 2014). Moreover, without explicit recognition of the ongoing effects of colonization and acknowledgement of First Nation sovereignty and the right to self-determination, these declarations fail to include Aboriginal concerns and aspirations or hold the system accountable for the context in which these conditions exist. Furthermore, the growing influence of neoliberal discourses since the Hobart Declaration further entrenches western epistemologies and ontologies which advance individual success in market economies, moving further away from Indigenous world views of collectivity, reciprocity, and community. Patrick and Moodie (2016) conclude by noting that Indigenous education policies "have now been reimagined wholly within a discourse defined by narratives of failure, the pursuit of statistical equality, the dominance of ideology over evidence, and the incorporation of Indigenous people into the market economy" (p. 179).

This is particularly relevant to this analysis which focuses on the most recent declaration, (Education Council, 2019) where the opening statement includes, "Education plays a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians, and in ensuring the nation's ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion" (p. 3). The clear referencing to neoliberal concerns of employability and economic progress further entrenches these principles as 'making sense'. This can be juxtaposed against the Uluru Statement of the Heart (2017), which has a broad representation of First Nation peoples, in that justice must come first through vehicles such as a voice in parliament and a makarrata[2] and so, until this occurs, prosperity and social cohesion are largely unattainable.

In each of these examples, the WPR approach shifts analyses of education policies to the acts of governing (through these policies), rather than 'the governed', and to their racialized (and racializing) acts of governing. This means the context that produces policy representations, and their texts are scrutinized rather than the subjects of the policies in this case, Aboriginal peoples, and their cultures.

Understanding policy as discourse is critical to understanding how Aboriginal peoples and their cultures are represented by others, through what is said, how it is said and by whose authority. Foucault (1974) explores how discourses are constructed, change and shape everyday lives, and how they "form the objects of which they speak" (p. 49). Power relations manifest in policies which are the "instruments and effects" of discourse (Ball, 2015 p. 307) and therefore restructure and redistribute power.

Policy as Discourse: Analysis

In this section we take the Mparntwe Declaration as the primary policy document for analysis. We apply Bacchi's approach to reveal the assumptions and discourses that underpin this policy area. Key discourses emerging from the neoliberal turn (particularly under the conservative Howard government) move from self-determination, empowerment, and rights to 'blame the victim', where Aboriginal people are the 'problem' to be 'fixed' and their cultures are hindering their economic contribution (Burgess et al., in press; Buxton, 2017; Fforde et.al, 2013; Lingard et al., 2012). This deficit discourse includes notions that Aboriginal people have brought these problems

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[2] Makarrata – from the Uluru Statement from the Heart: "Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: *the coming together after a struggle*. It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination."

on themselves, that it is beyond help from non-Aboriginal people and that governments therefore need to determine and control how this problem is articulated and solved. Beneficiaries of this stance are governments as the gaze shifts from institutional structures that continue to colonize, exclude, and oppress, and from business interests in the resource, pastoral and real estate industries who profit from land acquisition.

The deficit positioning of Aboriginal peoples and communities and their 'responsibilization' prepares the groundwork for accepting the government as the 'saviour' (Burgess et al., in press) of Aboriginal people, thereby controlling the solutions that favor institutional and business interests. These solutions are assimilatory, aimed at Aboriginal people 'fitting in to' and contributing to the economy. This is often repeated in the Mparntwe Declaration (Education Council, 2019) such as "Education has the power to transform lives. It supports young people to realize their potential by providing skills they need to participate in the economy and in society" (p. 3), and "Parents, carers and families … instill attitudes and values that support young people to access and participate in education and training and contribute to local and global communities" (p. 6). Here, our WPR-informed analysis of the Mparntwe Declaration reveals the assumptions and discourses that inform Australian education polices; the Declaration represents the purpose of schooling as to provide skills for economic participation, it characterizes as irresponsible any parents who do not teach their children the values and attitudes required to achieve this and measures educational success via capacity and willingness to contribute economically. This consequently leaves unproblematic, notions of participation, education, success, and compliance, silencing alternative views and dismissing the overarching goals of equity, confidence, and creativity.

Solution Discourses

As savior, the government posits a range of solutions that it believes will solve the Aboriginal 'problem'. The three key discourses identified in our analysis are community engagement / partnerships, Reconciliation, and data-driven solutions. In deriving these discursive themes, we concentrated on Bacchi's (2009) 2nd, 3rd, and 4th methodological questions. Accordingly, our analysis focuses on the problem representations contained in education policy documents, the presuppositions that underly them, and what is left unproblematic in these representations.

Community Engagement / Partnerships

A solution identified in most Indigenous government policies is that of engaging and/or partnering with Aboriginal communities to improve outcomes and that these partnerships benefit everyone (cf DEET, 1989; PM&C, 2020; Shay & Lampert, 2020). In the Mparntwe Declaration (Education Council, 2019), developing stronger partnerships is a key commitment to action, stating that "the development of partnerships and connections with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities will greatly improve learning outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and benefit all young Australians" (p. 6). The intent of this is undermined by unproblematic understandings of notions such as community, engagement, and partnerships, let alone the lack of any evidence-base that this solution will in fact improve outcomes (Shay & Lampert, 2020).

Varying understandings and perceptions of community, and its purpose in society further render this statement as problematic. The broader non-Aboriginal understanding of community refers to a group of people living in the same place, or neighborhood with a particular common feature of interest such as a school community, and is vastly different from Aboriginal understandings. Here, the notion of 'community' transcends 'normative' understandings due largely to the historical, cultural, social and political experiences of Aboriginal peoples as the colonized 'other' resulting in localized and nuanced interpretations (Welsh & Burgess, 2021). Dudgeon and Ugle (2014) note that initially the term 'community' was imposed to control and assimilate

Aboriginal communities as this construction of the term did not recognize the role of language, spirituality, identity, or the diversity of these across Aboriginal communities (p. 258). Moreover, Shay and Lampert (2020) note that "Australia's colonial histories are intertwined with how Indigenous identities are defined" (p. 3) and so this affects how Aboriginal people, and the broader Australian public perceives Aboriginal peoples and communities.

Aboriginal community structures revolve around kinship, Country and localized identities as well as their economic, social and geographical diversity while in urban centers, communities are seen to include political, work-related, cultural and sporting networks as well as family and Country connections. The latter two networks may be located elsewhere because of dispossession as well as Aboriginal families moving from rural areas (their Country) to urban centers to access employment, education, and health services. Here, community membership involves individual and collective responsibilities and obligations such as active commitment to and support for others to become involved in community activities, to share skills and resources, and be accountable to each other for personal actions (Dudgeon et.al, 2014, p. 258). Consequently, Aboriginal communities are unique, complex, and nuanced sites of survivance, resistance, resilience and belonging.

Shay and Lampert (2020) suggest that the use of the term community, "takes for granted a common definition of community and assumes an equal balance of power" (p. 2) even though these documents suggest that partnerships can only be successful when initiated by government agencies. What is left unproblematic is recognition of the power imbalance between communities and governments, and therefore any commitment by governments to address this imbalance and resource communities to become power equal. The effects are that Aboriginal communities are expected to participate as partners, usually on a volunteer basis, and any resistance to doing so, reinforces discourses of the unreliable, unmotivated problem of their own making, revealing responsiblization in action (Lowe, 2011).

In education, 'truths' about the importance of Aboriginal community engagement and how relationships with schools should be imagined paradoxically place Aboriginal communities and schools under enormous pressures, especially as they are often not supported by human and/or financial resources. The issue of Aboriginal community engagement is therefore a key concern for many teachers who, upon becoming aware of the issues mentioned, struggle to envisage strategies where they can genuinely engage with their local Aboriginal community and subsequently embed this learning into their teaching practice. This is a clear example of the disconnect between policy and practice and how rhetoric bears little resemblance to reality.

Reconciliation

If there was one policy that held out the possibility of reconstituting a "new Australia" that was inclusive of First Nations peoples' histories cultures and aspirations, then this could have been the role of Reconciliation in its 30-year history. This national process of contemporary nation (re)-making where First Nations peoples were truly embraced, and the history of invasion, dispossession, exploitation, and marginalization was acknowledged signposting a reckoning with Australia's denial of its brutal and immoral colonial history (Hokari, 2002). This is clearly how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples understood the promise made in 1990, made to them and to the wider public by the Prime Minister of the day, Bob Hawke. Reconciliation promised to deliver "A united Australia which respects this land of ours; values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage; and provides justice and equity for all" (Reconciliation Australia, 2020). The winds of change that appeared so promisingly in the late 1980s with the talk of a treaty between Australia's First Nations and the Australian people, turned into a decade long debacle, with a change to Conservative government led by Prime Minister John Howard in 1996 signaling a rapid swing away from the language of reconciliation and constitutional change, to one that adopted the language of "practical

reconciliation". This refocused Reconciliation from a moral and ethical imperative to the provision of services that are the entitlement of all citizens (Burridge, 2007). These titanic shifts in policy direction were paralleled by the changes that were written into ACARA's policy documents, namely the Shape Paper (2012) and the web-based material that supported the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP.

In 2012, ACARA set out the broad framing of curriculum and its development. The rationale was taken almost verbatim from the earlier 2009 Melbourne Declaration; 'understand and acknowledge the value of Indigenous cultures and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians'. The clear focus of curriculum content was to provide schools with an opportunity to teach students about a broad range of socially significant issues in contemporary Australia as a means by which to situate themselves with the socio-historical movement of recognition of Australia's First people (Maxwell et al., 2018). The degree to which teachers could achieve this 'promise' of being able to develop teaching to support this aspiration, was vigorously challenged almost immediately after the first curriculum documents were published. Research by Salter and Maxwell (2016) and Maxwell et al. (2018), identified the largely perfunctory way the national curriculum dealt with their development, and how its structures had disabled teacher capacity to meaningfully teach material that could support quality learning for students. This last issue was taken up by Lowe and Yunkaporta (2013) in their analysis of the CCP revealing the betrayal of this promise by not providing the range, depth or academic rigor to explore Indigenous peoples' knowledges, cultures and histories, let alone engage in truth-telling, robust debates and relationship building which are foundational to genuine Reconciliation.

The dissonance between the promise and capacity of the national curriculum to deliver the promised outcome of an informed citizenry was noted in Elder's (2107) study on the work of Reconciliation itself. Elder (2017) identified that competing discourses of reconciliation were at play through this critical period of national curriculum making, and that by the time the ACARA Shape Paper was being written, the national focus for change had swung away from the transformation of the social and political landscape to one rooted on neo-liberal values of an inclusive Australian identity. In both the Melbourne and Mparntwe Declarations, the promise of genuine reconciliation that would underpin social, economic and political change was subverted to the task of building national cohesion around those 'national values' that have instrumentally identified Aboriginal students, their families and communities, as the problem to be fixed, and that this would occur through the national curriculum (Maxwell et al., 2018).

The promise of a future where genuine and transformative social and political change underpinned Reconciliation between First Nations people and the state. It can now be seen for what it was, namely, an illusion that schools were being provided with the epistemic tools and structures to facilitate learning in support of student achievement of this moral goal. ACARA has re-cast the primary policy focus away from Reconciliation to a particular sense of Indigenous identity that is bound to educational success as measured by economic engagement. In this rendition, there is little appetite for anything other than notions of inclusion through national cohesion and 'practical reconciliation'.

Data-driven Solutions

Another perceived 'common sense' solution to the 'problem' of Aboriginal underachievement is the generation of 'good quality' data to identify strategies to address the problem. The generation of data to produce an evidence-base is essential to neo-liberal discourses which rely on measurement to achieve aims such as standardization, uniformity, regulation and accountability. Individualism and competition drive a system based on comparing one set of results

to another to ascertain what does or doesn't work (Reid, 2019). This discourse is reinforced in the Mparntwe Declaration (Education Council, 2019) as follows:

> Good quality data and information is important for educators and their students, parents and families, the community and governments. Good data will provide information about educational experience and outcomes including pathways into further education and employment. This will be used to inform policy development and implementation as well as track progress against the goals of this declaration. (p. 11)

This centralization of and reliance on data as the key to the 'problem' of education including informing and monitoring policy development and implementation, is problematic in several ways.

Firstly, what must be problematized is the very notion of data, the assumption that not only are numbers neutral (Schultz, 2020), but so are the criterion used to determine what data are relevant and appropriate and how they are applied and interpreted. The underlying assumption here is that an objective, positivist, western view of data and the evidence they generate, will produce an accurate picture of what is being measured, and in doing so, identify 'common sense' strategies to produce statistical equality (Patrick & Moodie, 2018, p. 179). In terms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policies and the people that they are designed to serve, these assumptions are deleterious given the ongoing impact of positivist, western world views such as the inevitability of colonization, the assimilatory purpose of policy and the rejection of self-determination as a contribution to civil society (Burgess et al., in press). What is therefore left unrepresented or silenced are Aboriginal voices in determining what evidence accurately reflects their onto-epistemologies, perceptions and experiences (Lowe et al., 2021) such as collectivity, reciprocity and community and how this evidence will be interpreted and applied to serve Aboriginal peoples as 'clients'. As well, the persistent use of the descriptor 'good quality' is based on an unquestioned assumption of what both good and quality means (which is highly subjective) when neither is clearly articulated in government documents such as this declaration. The effect of this representation of the discourse 'good quality data' is that this becomes 'common sense' and the unquestioned standard by which all is measured.

Secondly, if the data collected is based on incorrect assumptions as we suggest and is inaccurate or unreliable in any way, then the effects cascade through all aspects of education with serious implications including an enormous waste of resources. The Mparntwe Declaration (Education Council, 2019) shows the extent to which data is applied by governments as follows:

> Good quality data enables governments to:
> - analyze how well schools are performing against each other and internationally
> - identify schools with students with particular needs
> - understand outcomes in relation to educational disadvantage and target resources accordingly
> - determine where resources are most needed to support student learning needs and lift attainment
> - ensure equity of access to education
> - identify best practice and innovation
> - conduct national and international comparisons of approaches and performance
> - develop a substantive, evidence base on what works. (p. 12)

Again, while this list presents as a 'common sense' approach for the collection, interpretation, and application of data, it lacks in any identifiable evidence-base to justify the inclusion of the various elements which are broad strokes at best. This undermines the very accountability that data are meant to provide.

Thirdly, this unproblematic representation of what constitutes good data including what should be collected, positions alternative sources as irrelevant, unreliable, and potentially threatening the status quo. The voices silenced by this positioning are those of key stakeholders such as teachers, parents, students and Aboriginal communities in determining what educational achievement and success looks like and whose interests are served (Burgess & Lowe, 2020). The Closing the Gap refresh (The Lowitja Institute, 2020) which presents an Aboriginal community strength-based response to the ongoing failure of the government's namesake strategy, focuses on culture as the key to wellbeing contrasting the current approach of statistically generated solutions. Focusing on principles which are difficult to quantify and measure, highlights the importance of voice, who and what is silenced as well as lost opportunities to collect broad-based evidence that better reflects the uniqueness, complexity, and nuances of various perspectives.

Finally, the self-fulfilling prophecy of narrow data sets based on what is acceptable as evidence, is that this generates an increasingly limited evidence base that in turn, constrains the implementation of effective strategies to deal with complex issues. Therefore, it becomes convenient to problematize the subject of the policy so that the 'common sense' conclusion is that they are the cause of their own disadvantage. In this way, 'truths' about Aboriginal failure are reproduced and defended by an evidence base that remains limited and unquestioned.

Policy Effects on Teacher Practice

Here, we focus on the effects of the representation of the problem, in Bacchi's WPR analytic framework. Regarding the 'effects' produced by the above problem of representation, we find that the federalization of curriculum and teaching standards impacts directly on daily teaching practices in local contexts. This homogenizing process is based on the assumption that these elements of teaching were not sufficiently attended to by state education departments (Connell, 2013). Local schools and teachers are therefore seen as the 'problem' of declining national and international student results (Stacey, 2017). This problem has come about through government knee jerk reactions to media discourses blaming schools, teachers, teacher education for real and imagined declines. This reveals a superficial understanding of the complexity of schools and teaching/learning processes and the daily realities of an increasing number of families living in poverty (Burnett & Lampert, 2016). What is left unexamined and 'unproblematic' is the role of governments in exacerbating poverty and disadvantage, social exclusion and inequitable school resourcing regimes that allocate increasing amounts of state and federal funding to already wealthy independent schools (Connell, 2013). Occurring in a neo-liberal regime where competition, individualism, and market forces reign, it is little wonder that teachers in high poverty communities struggle to effect change and challenge cycles of disadvantage, disengagement and deficit discourses.

Curriculum

The introduction of an Australian curriculum (ACARA, 2011), guided by the principles laid out in the Mparntwe Declaration, provided the federal government with a way to standardize, direct and control what is taught in local schools across the country. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cross Curriculum Priority (CCP), which is one of three, covers Aboriginal cultures and

histories through organizing concepts of place, land and Country[3]. However, this structure presents Indigenous knowledges as atomized micro-elements of disconnected content instead of as highly complex, interconnected and holistic systems of epistemic knowledge (Lowe & Galstaun, 2020). Instead of curriculum coherence, what is produced is incoherence and cultural tension. Moreover, Indigenous knowledges are often 'bolted' onto 'legitimate' disciplines such as English, science etc., and so Indigenous epistemic legitimacy is limited by its framing by these discordant disciplines. Consequently, students only learn and experience Indigenous knowledges in relation to (and often compared with) western knowledge, not as legitimate knowledge or as a discipline in their own right.

While commendable in intent, the CCPs have been justifiably criticized for their precarious standing as being simultaneously embedded across all learning areas and optional electives for implementation by teachers (Salter & Maxwell, 2016). The positioning of the CCPs as "options, not orders" (McGaw, 2014) and "only where educationally relevant, in the mandatory content of the curriculum" (Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014, p. 247) marginalizes this CCP instead of prioritizing it as policy rhetoric would suggest.

Moreover, Salter and Maxwell (2016) note that in aligning the CCP with the Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008), where curriculum goals are linked to economic goals, the underlying intent of the CCP is then to 'fix' the problem of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disenfranchisement from education, and so offer of a 'solution' to the glaring gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student achievement (p. 298). This deficit positioning denies Aboriginal people agency in determining education levers such as curriculum to address these discourses (Fforde et.al, 2013).

What is left unproblematic in these declarations is the absence of a link between moral and ethical goals such as "imagination, discovery, innovation, empathy" so that students can "engage with complex ethical issues and concepts such as sustainability" (Education Council, 2020, p. 10), and "strong meaningful measures" (p. 11) of accountability and transparency. While it is not necessarily desirable or possible to measure such goals, the reduction of accountability and transparency to only what can be measured is problematic at best and renders these goals as tokenistic rhetoric that in reality, reduces teacher agency in implementing these in the curriculum. A key effect of representing policy as a conglomerate quantifiable measure is that it absolves governments of responsibility for ensuring ethical and moral goals are attended to and achieved.

This absence of a coherent and well supported Aboriginal curriculum narrative is of concern, compounded by the way in which it reinforces dominant western epistemologies, ontologies and axiology's. This leaves little room for diverse perspectives, worldviews and interpretations of reality. Recommendation 17 in the 2014 Review of the Australian Curriculum states:

> ACARA revise the Australian Curriculum to place more emphasis on morals, values and spirituality as outlined in the Melbourne Declaration, and to better recognise the contribution of Western civilisation, our Judeo-Christian heritage, the role of economic development and industry and the democratic underpinning of the British system of government to Australia's development (Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014, p. 246)

Donnelly &Wiltshire's myopic prioritization of western values and perspectives is in contrast to the goals outlined in the Mparntwe Declaration (Education Council, 2019), where education is

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[3] Country is an Aboriginal English (as different from Standard Australian English) term that describes land as a living entity, the essence of Aboriginality and includes the people, culture, spirituality, history, environment, ecologies etc.

advanced as essential to creating "a socially cohesive society that values, respects and appreciates *different points of view* and cultural, social, linguistic and religious *diversity*" (p. 4, emphasis added). This brings into sharp focus the fragility of such goals in the face of hegemonic western knowledges, values and practices, and of these declarations in influencing curriculum.

Given these contradictory messages from key government sources, it is no wonder that teachers struggle to engage meaningfully and ethically with Indigenous knowledges. They are more likely to experience a loss of agency when unable to address the structural incoherence of the CCP which contrasts with the holistic nature of Indigenous knowledges (Lowe & Gaulstram, 2020).

Professional Teaching Standards

In an area where many teachers have little confidence, poor knowledge and experience and a fear of offending Aboriginal people (Bishop & Durksen, 2020), the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2014) provide little support for growth, and even less for those teachers able to demonstrate extensive knowledge and skills in this area. Again, they are 'bolted on' rather than integrated into the overall approach, which delegitimizes Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies and axiology. The disjointed nature of these standards and their application undermines key statements in the Mparntwe Declaration (Education Council, 2019) such as:

> Across Australia, the education community needs to focus on imagining what is possible and promoting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, knowledge and learnings. All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young peoples must be empowered to achieve their full learning potential, shape their own futures, and embrace their cultures, languages and identities as Australia's First Nations peoples. (p. 10)

Teachers must demonstrate their ability to meet the required standards, raising critical questions such as how and by whom are these standards judged? This accreditation approach privileges written evidence over practical skills and contradicts the AITSL (2020) culturally competent teaching standards. While the standards note that "cultural competence goes beyond the acquisition of knowledge and awareness and is expressed through behaviors and attitudes" (p. 31), they fail to articulate what these might be. Moreover, they identify this as a systematic holistic approach for improving teacher effectiveness in Aboriginal education; "Cultural competence must exist at several levels—systemic (policies and procedures), organizational (skills and resources), professional (education and professional learning), and individual (knowledge, attitudes and behaviors)— enabled through four key inter-related dimensions (Universities Australia, 2011)" (p. 31). This presupposes an assumed understanding of what cultural competence looks like, how it will be enacted and evidenced. It also fails to examine this problematic terminology that has by and large been rejected in education research here and overseas (Perso, 2011).

There are seven AITSL professional standards, divided into 37 focus areas. Only two focus areas specifically relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students or content. Focus area 1.4 states: "Demonstrate broad knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture, cultural identity and linguistic background on the education of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds" (p. 9). Focus area 2.4 states: "Demonstrate broad knowledge of, understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and languages" (p. 11). Both these benchmarks are positioned within the 'professional knowledge' domain. The problematic absence of Indigenous focused standards in either 'professional practice' and 'professional engagement' is nothing short of alarming. This absence of Aboriginal focus in the two practice-specific standards implies that neither standard is important for lifting Aboriginal students'

outcomes. This is despite a contrary policy rhetoric about the importance of engagement and partnering with Aboriginal communities. Moreover, leadership descriptors in these two standards demonstrate how low expectations continually infiltrate Aboriginal education using terms such as 'develop and assist' rather than 'lead and evaluate', which are applied in other standards.

Reimagining a Different Path

Our analysis, informed by Bacchi's WPR approach, provides a sharpened awareness of the contestation surrounding the representation of the 'problem' (Bacchi, 2012) thus opening up space for disrupting these discourses and suggesting alternatives that give voice to the 'problematized. Here, we consider Reid's (2019) new narrative for Australian education because his articulation of the foundations of education aligns with the principles expressed in the National Education Declarations (1989, 1999, 2008, 2019). We further draw on an Indigenous standpoint to demonstrate how these educational foundations align with the framing of Indigenous epistemologies. Therefore, Reid's three key conceptual foundations of education—purpose; values and principles; and processes—provide a framework to consider an Indigenous vision as foundational to Australian education.

Purposes of Education

Reid (2019) articulates educational purposes as "the bedrock of the wider education narrative" (p. 290) and includes the importance of education in its own right, social and utilitarian workforce needs, democracy and accompanying citizenship and social, cultural and community membership. This provides space for Aboriginal people to ask questions about the purpose of education such as, does education meet our cultural, social, spiritual, and political needs, fulfil aspirations, and create opportunities for success on our own terms, support community, kinship, family and cultural responsibilities and obligations (Harrison et al., 2019)? How can genuine collaboration, agency, self-determination, and governance be achieved? While these questions are framed from an Indigenous standpoint, they are questions everyone can and should ask. As Reid (2019) notes, this creates a productive tension that mitigates against the dominance of economic goals, the narrowing of policy and practice, and the silencing of the 'other'.

Values and Principles

Clarifying the values and principles underpinning systems such as education are important for articulating the type of society we aspire to. They provide a reference point to identify strategies that support the broader education narrative as well as benchmarks against which policy and practice can be mediated. Reid (2019) notes the importance of the common good where community and collective needs are prioritized over individual interests and that individual and social actions are guided by responsibility, integrity, and empathy. That "these must be developed through wide-ranging professional and community discussion, and always open to review" (p. 291) speaks back to key neoliberal discourses of individualism, competition, and managerialism.

The values and principles outlined by Reid align closely with Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin, 2003) where community, reciprocity and collaboration provide the groundwork for the enactment of ethical protocols. Aboriginal authors Yunkaporta and Shillingsworth's (2020) relationally responsive standpoint inverts western privileging of epistemological expertise, insisting that the journey for working with Indigenous peoples and cultures must start with values and beliefs. This further supports the inclusion of Indigenous standpoints, agency and voice in the purposes of education, resulting in these being embedded in the foundation of schooling (Guenther et al., in press).

Processes

Processes are important for structuring knowledge, experience and practice in ways that develop individual and collective capacity to identify societal trends and shape, rather than unquestionably accept, change. At the system level, these processes include policy development, school structures and culture, curriculum, pedagogy, and teacher professional learning, guided by the values and principles that underscore the purposes of education (Reid, 2019). This provides ongoing coherence, stability and sustainability instead of the current climate of reactive, short-term responses to populist understandings of education and schools that support neoliberal ambitions for standardization, monitoring and surveillance.

Where the purposes, principles and values outlined by Reid (2019) include Aboriginal onto-epistemologies, axiologies, and methodologies (Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020), processes such as community engagement and collaboration will be understood at a deeper level, enacted from a power-equal position, and normalized in structures and processes. When sustainable, collaborative, and embedded processes ensure local Aboriginal versions of success are incorporated into the purposes, principles and values, the processes of identifying, building and producing evidence become accountable to the people rather than governments and policy actors.

Conclusion

Ongoing deficit discourses about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families, cultures and communities continue to plague educational discourses and therefore limit localized efforts to improve Aboriginal students' educational outcomes. The Bacchi (2009) WPR analytical tool is effective for revealing representations, problematizations, silences and understandings of the extent to which marginalized groups are sidelined in policy development. In this paper, we focused on how and why this occurs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, using the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration (Education Council, 2019) as representing the national vision of education for all students, including Aboriginal students. We found that deficit discourses, while not articulated directly within the document, are evident through privileging western values such as education for employment and economic prosperity and leaving unquestioned and unproblematized key educational levers such as curriculum, quality teaching, community engagement, Reconciliation, and good quality data. This impacts significantly on local schools and communities who must interpret and implement policies while simultaneously engaging Aboriginal students in their learning and building relationships with families and communities. It also undermines teacher agency in their efforts to genuinely implement authentic Aboriginal curriculum and pedagogies in their classrooms, through mixed messaging and lack of practical advice around commonly identified key drivers of community engagement, Reconciliation and data-driven solutions. This reinforces the gap between rhetoric and reality, amplifying the disconnection between policy and practice for those struggling to make a difference in their local school communities.

What is missing is an Aboriginal voice articulating success in terms of individual and community aspirations and the significant socio-cultural and political changes needed to advance these. By considering Alan Reid's (2019) new narrative for Australian education, we propose that embedding Indigenous ontologies, epistemologies, axiologies and methodologies into the purposes of schooling, values and principles, and process, opens up space for a potential power equal, collaborative and sustainable foundation for school policies, structures and culture, curriculum, pedagogy and teacher professional learning. When this occurs, deficit discourses will fade in favor of discourses of hope, empowerment, self-determination, and sovereignty.

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About the Authors

Cathie Burgess
University of Sydney
cathie.burgess@sydney.edu.au
https:// orcid.org/0000 0002 0580 7191
Associate Professor Cathie Burgess is a non-Indigenous teacher who has spent over 35 years working in Indigenous education in schools and universities. She is connected to the Redfern Aboriginal community through family, work and sports and centres local Aboriginal community voices in her teaching and research programs. Professor Burgess coordinates undergraduate and postgraduate Aboriginal studies, Aboriginal community engagement and leadership in Aboriginal education programs. Her current research includes the *Culturally Nourishing Schooling Project, Learning from Country in the City*, and *Sparking Imagination Education: Transforming Inequality in School.*

Kevin Lowe
UNSW
kevin.lowe@unsw.edu.au
https:// orcid.org/0000-0002-3982-6565
Associate Professor Kevin Lowe is a Gubbi Gubbi man from southeast Queensland. He is a Scientia Indigenous Fellow at UNSW, working on a community and school focused research project on developing a model of sustainable improvement in Aboriginal education. Kevin has had experience in education as a teacher, administrator and lecturer. He has expertise in working with Aboriginal community organisations on establishing Aboriginal language policy and school curriculum implementation. Recently Kevin has worked with colleagues to review research across key areas of schooling and established *Aboriginal Voices*, a broad-base, holistic project which is developing a new pedagogic framework for teachers.

About the Editors

Meghan Stacey
UNSW Sydney
m.stacey@unsw.edu.au
https:// orcid.org/0000-0003-2192-9030
Meghan Stacey is senior lecturer in the UNSW School of Education, researching in the fields of the sociology of education and education policy. Taking a particular interest in teachers, her research considers how teachers' work is framed by policy, as well as the effects of such policy for those who work with, within and against it.

Mihajla Gavin
University of Technology Sydney
mihajla.gavin@uts.edu.au
https:// orcid.org/0000-0001-6796-5198
Mihajla Gavin is lecturer at UTS Business School. Her PhD, completed in 2019, examined how teacher trade unions have responded to neoliberal education reform. Her current research focuses on the restructuring of teachers' work and conditions of work, worker voice, and women and employment relations.

Jessica Gerrard
University of Melbourne
jessica.gerrard@unimelb.edu.au
https:// orcid.org/0000-0001-9011-6055
Jessica Gerrard is associate professor at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education. Jessica researches the changing formations, and lived experiences, of social inequalities in relation to education, activism, work and unemployment. She works across the disciplines of sociology, history and policy studies with an interest in critical methodologies and theories.

Anna Hogan
Queensland University of Technology
ar.hogan@qut.edu.au
https:// orcid.org/0000-0003-1934-2548
Anna Hogan is senior research fellow in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership at the Queensland University of Technology. Her research focuses on education privatisation and commercialisation. She currently works on a number of research projects, including investigating philanthropy in Australian public schooling, the privatisation of global school provision, and the intensification of teachers' work.

Jessica Holloway
Australian Catholic University
jessica.holloway@acu.edu.au
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9267-3197
Jessica Holloway is senior research fellow and ARC DECRA fellow at the Australian Catholic University. Her research draws on political theory and policy sociology to investigate: (1) how metrics, data and digital tools produce new conditions, practices and subjectivities, especially as this relates to teachers and schools, and (2) how teachers and schools are positioned to respond to the evolving and emerging needs of their communities.

SPECIAL ISSUE
Teachers and Educational Policy: Markets, Populism, and Im/Possibilities for Resistance

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Please send errata notes to Audrey Amrein-Beardsley at audrey.beardsley@asu.edu

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