1.9: The importance of Indigenous cultural perspectives in education
(The danger of the single story)

Why teachers must embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' perspectives in all educational contexts as the first step in acknowledging and catering for diversity in the classroom?

Key Learnings

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have experienced dispossession and trauma through historical and modern colonisation.
- Educators can be agents of change, by ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are embedded in the curriculum and implementing an inclusive pedagogy.

**USQ acknowledges the Giabal and Jarowair peoples of the Toowoomba area, the Jagera, Yuggera and Ugarapul peoples of Ipswich and Springfield, the Kambuwal peoples of Stanthorpe and the Gadigal peoples of the Eora nation, Sydney as the keepers of ancient knowledge where USQ campuses and hubs have been built and whose cultures and customs continue to nurture this land. USQ also pays respect to Elders – past, present and future.**

Further, we acknowledge the cultural diversity of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and pay respect to Elders past, present and future.

Finally, we celebrate the continuous living cultures of First Australians and acknowledge the important contributions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have and continue to make in Australian society.

Take a moment to listen to why all those who do not come from the land on which they are living, learning and working need to acknowledge its traditional custodians.
introduction

The danger of viewing a narrative from a single lens is that a story is painted from one viewpoint and therefore conclusions are drawn from one perspective. Kathryn Gilbey (2018) gave a talk that inspired chapter 9 and she said “when we continue as an institution to teach courses and only ever present one perspective or world view, we remain complicit in the staggering statistics that surround Aboriginal people in out of home care and detention”. In Australia, statistics alone, show that Western Colonisation has led to dispossession, trauma, high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being taken from their homes into foster care, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in prison without legal cause, and laws inflicted in communities that pertain to only to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. However, there are personal stories that lie behind these statistics.

This chapter examines the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the impact of attitudes of Australian society. It looks at the impact of these attitudes within the Education system and the importance of pedagogy in establishing a critical anti-racism approach to cultural diversity within all educational contexts. It investigates the conceptual understandings of race, colonisation and Western viewpoints and proposes considerations to ensure all students receive a culturally sensitive education.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education literature discusses the importance of not characterising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the problem or having the problem. Issues are created by systemic racism inherent within the systems that interact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The issues (e.g., child removals) may arise because of the different understandings around concepts such as parenting. It is when these issues are used to frame Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities as being the problem that the contentions arise. In looking at what could be termed as problems or issues, it is clear that there are differing perspectives as to how events, actions and lives are viewed. The challenge in reading this chapter is to consider a strength-based approach to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people rather than a deficit discourse.

Learning Objectives

It is anticipated that upon completion of the chapter you will have:

- An overview of the impact of cultural subjectivity in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- An understanding of the effects of historical and contemporary colonialism for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- A range of considerations to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ perspectives are embedded within Australian educational contexts.

background

Life histories continually shape who we are and how we view and interact with the world. Our life histories, and futures, are partly shaped by our interactions with others and experiences shared with us, particularly when they are shared by significant others such as family and close friends. When events are particularly traumatic and far reaching, and touch whole families and indeed peoples, then ongoing repercussions last for generations. If not acknowledged and addressed the trauma continues unabated (Fossey, Holborn, Abawi & Cooper, 2017).

https://socialsci.libertexts.org/Bookshelves/Education_and_Professional_Development/Book%3A_Opening_Eyes_onto_Inclus…
Updated: Fri, 05 Feb 2021 08:31:41 GMT
Powered by
The lives of Indigenous Australians today are affected by what has happened to us and our ancestors over the past 230 years since Europeans arrived. This can be hard for non-Indigenous people to understand, particularly if you haven’t learned much about Australian history at school. When people have some knowledge of Aboriginal… culture and the history of our contact with non-Indigenous Australians since 1788, they have a much better feel for our achievements and our persistent problems. They are more likely to share our pride and to want to improve relationships between us as fellow Australians. Professor M. Dodson AM, Australian of the Year 2009. (Reconciliation Australia, 2015)

Australian society is tainted by a history of longstanding colonial occupation imposed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Samson & Gigoux, 2016). Australians have been taught in many classrooms, that Australia was ‘discovered’ by Captain James Cook in 1770. This European perspective of ‘history’ erases Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who had previously inhabited Australia for close to 70,000 years (Roberts, 1994), from Australian history and identity. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples had been living with sustainable use of land and resources, hunting and gathering for food, building shelter and creating culture within expanding communities (Clark, 1994) and this is still occurring in places today.

Upon European settlement, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were immediately regarded as ‘Natives’. The land upon which they had been living was claimed by settlers (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012), and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who resisted dispossession were ‘controlled’ through Martial Law, with tens of thousands of men, women and children killed between 1770 and 1837. In addition to this, many others were forcibly settled in managed ‘reserves’ in appalling conditions. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were also believed incapable of citizenship and legally banned from giving evidence in court, serving in the armed forces, receiving pensions or having a right to vote. Worse still, was presence of a Western Supremacy view that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were unfit and incapable of caring for their own children. From 1893 – 1971 many children of Aboriginal descent were removed from their parents and the Director of Native Welfare became their legal guardian (MacFarlane & Hannah, 2007). The children lived in mass dormitories or were assigned to white Australian parents in order to attend educational institutions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

It was not until the United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were given the same status of citizenship and entitlements as other Australians. However many of these rights were still in limited, with many capabilities and laws taking up to ten years to process (MacFarlane & Hannah, 2007), with voting for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples first legalised in 1962. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were advised that they needed to assimilate to the “same responsibilities, observing the same customs and be influenced by the same beliefs, hopes and loyalties as other Australians” (Commonwealth of Australia, 1961). It wasn’t until 1972 that the Government removed the ‘White Australian Policy’ and introduced self-determination policies. This meant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were granted equal status and children were no longer removed from their parents (though many would argue that this is still taking place due to the way our social welfare system operates [removing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families at 10 times the rate of white children]. As a consequence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were able to attend Government schools and able to acquire land. However, it was not until 1992, that Native Title was acknowledged through the ‘Mabo’ decision and precedents for reclaiming land by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples was established. It was also in this year that the Government acknowledged the wrongs to the people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage.
The trauma, devastation, struggle and loss that was suffered through colonisation largely remains a hidden history from children in schools. The use of Western imperialistic language in the history curriculum, such as Captain Cook ‘discovered’ Australia, further serves to marginalise generations of Indigenous people, and does not acknowledge the dispossession of land and culture, and the removal of children enforced on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Grant, 2018). Language reinforced in the recorded history of Australia, perpetuates the hierarchical structure established by Western colonists and portrays Europeans as ‘superior’ and ‘civilised’ and Indigenous people as ‘natives’, a ‘dying breed’, ‘savages’, and ‘primitives’. Derogatory names are still used as a tool of insult which can mean that the colour of skin can attribute identity (Carlson, 2016). Further negative connotations are attributed to people who identify as part Indigenous, with words such as ‘half caste’ being used. This can add further confusion to identity as expressed by Carlson (2016, p. 6) “not being recognisably black meant I was not Aboriginal. This was an early source of anxiety about who I was and how I was to represent myself”.

Current CHALLENGES FACING Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Despite legislation now stating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples theoretically have equal access to health care, education, employment and to participate in society, in reality there is still only one side of the story being told. The “compounding effects of low income, poor education, poor health, unemployment, poor housing and a lack of essential services” (Guthridge et al. 2016, p.125) means that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples do not have equitable access to land, education, health and welfare. Harrison et al., (2017, p. 189) believes this is a direct “legacy of their dispossession [causing] ongoing socio-economic disadvantage and racial discrimination within the dominant non-Indigenous culture”.

Furthermore, as noted earlier, institutional racism is apparent through the continuing high levels of welfare intrusion in the lives of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the disproportionate numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. In order to move forward together toward a respectful and strong future it is important to understand the urgency of the current situation for many Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

This chapter challenges you to consider the strengths of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and then to also consider the complexities faced such as high numbers of children in out of home care, alcohol consumption, incarceration rates of Indigenous people, health concerns, educational inequities and raises hope in strengthening pride in Australian Indigeneity the oldest surviving culture in the world.

out of home care

Unresolved trauma and grief from marginalisation, dispossession and racism can account for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being over represented in out of home care (AIFS, 2017). In 2015-2016, 43.6 per 1000 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children were in out of home care (AIFS, 2017). In June 2016 36% (n=16,846) of children in care were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (AIFS, 2017). Bailey, Powell & Brichacher (2017) argue these figures can be incorrect and there is a fear and mistrust of the justice system by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Neglect is attributed for 40% of children in out of home care (AIFS, 2017). If a social worker, according to their
own subjective view, determines parenting as not sufficient, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child can be removed from their family. D'Souza et.al (1995) believed that this is a result of the paternalism of the white establishment that did not believe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were capable of making suitable decisions and carrying them out in their way.

The unnecessary removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their kinship groups, causing excessive, and often multiple, trauma for families, is therefore often based on assumptions that are uncontested. If a critical lens is used, as Lohoar, Butera & Kennedy (2014) contend, these assumptions fail to take into account the concept that the structure of the child rearing is culturally different to European expectations, and many wonderful benefits stem from the family structure and kinship system of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinships. With these understandings, many agencies are working towards a better understanding of the culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to ensure children are kept with their families (SNAAIIC, 2016).

---

alcohol

The Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT) is the peak body overseeing primary health services in the Northern Territory and their work has been instrumental in advocating for the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to have adequate funding for health care services. In their Submission to the Alcohol Policies and Legislation Review in the NT it was highlighted that:

In the Northern Territory, 38.6% of people aged 12 years and older consume alcohol at rates that place them at risk of short-term harm, and 28.8% consume alcohol at levels that place them at risk of long-term harm, including chronic disease and illness. This is significantly more than the reported national consumption rates … While most Aboriginal people in the NT experience positive wellbeing and engagement with their families, communities and culture, it is also the case that many people’s lives are marked by profound disadvantage, including experience of intergenerational poverty and trauma, overcrowded housing, poor educational attainment and unemployment (AMSANT, 2017, p5).

The submission also acknowledged that

Aboriginal communities carry a high burden of intergenerational and ongoing trauma resulting from colonisation and historic and ongoing government policies, institutional racism, discrimination and the effects of entrenched disadvantage and disconnection from traditional lands, languages and cultural practices. Trauma has profound impacts on the physical and mental health and wellbeing of individuals as well as broader community wellbeing. Alcohol and substance misuse has been associated with intergenerational and other types of trauma, including childhood trauma. (AMSANT, 2017, p7).

In an attempt to minimise alcohol related misuse and harm, Governments have implemented Alcohol Management Plans (AMPs) in some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. AMPs provide special policing powers for designated ‘alcohol-protected areas’ which mostly cover Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Many people argue that this violates the Commonwealth Racial Discrimination Act (1975) which protects people from being unfairly victimised due to race. This was tested in Maloney versus The Queen 2012 when an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander woman appealed a sentence for possessing two bottles of alcohol in an AMP area (Gear, 2013). Her lawyers...
argued that alcohol was only being criminalised for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples but not other Australians and therefore violated the Discrimination Act and marginalised her for being Aboriginal. Maloney’s sentence was upheld as it was deemed that under Section 8(1) of the Racial Discrimination Act (1975) that ‘Special Measures’ can be cited to redress historical disadvantage. Activists were angry that the legislation created a lawful context for discriminatory treatment in the policing and sentencing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in regard to criminalised alcohol consumption. Governments are called to address the cause of alcoholism in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities “including poverty, racism and discrimination, access to health care, housing, education and employment” (AMSANT, 2017, p.3) rather than create and enforce laws to again, deliberately dispossess Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

What needs to be done differently?

As a society we need to have aspirations and enable children, youth, and older generations to be able to enact their aspirations. Consider then the disproportionately high level of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander juveniles (10-17) and young adults (18-24) who are incarcerated (Parliament of Australia, 2018). “The detention rate for Indigenous juveniles is 397 per 100,000, which is 28 times higher than the rate for non-Indigenous juveniles (14 per 100,000)... Indigenous juveniles accounted for 59 percent of the total juvenile detention population” (Parliament of Australia, 2018, p.1) while representing only 2.5% of the total Australian population. 22% of juveniles in detention were aged 14 years or younger (Parliament of Australia, 2018). Why has this occurred and what are we doing differently to change this story?

The Don Dale facility in Northern Territory; a former maximum security prison, is a juvenile detention centre in which 100% of occupants are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children under 18 years. In 2014 Four Corners aired a program “Australia’s Shame” which found children subject to verbal, physical and sexual abuse, being forced to commit acts of violence and denied, food, water and toilets. It was also alleged that 80% of the children in detention were remanded in custody without sentencing. The program launched an investigation by the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory. Despite the report finding the conditions of the jail not suitable for the custody or rehabilitation of children and recommending closure, the facility is still being used, putting the safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people at risk (The Australian Human Rights Commission, 2018). Why has this occurred and what are we doing differently to change this story?

Also concerning, is the high number of women in custody with the rate rapidly rising. Between 2000 and 2010, there was a 45% increase in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women incarcerated (Parliament of Australia, 2018). Women in jail account for 2% of Australia’s population yet 34% of the women behind bars. Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are incarcerated as they are unable to pay the set bail or fines (Whitburn, 2014). 80% of these women are mothers, which creates a disequilibrium in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, intergenerational disconnection and increases the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care (Human rights Law Centre, 2017).

Many of these women in jail are survivors of the Stolen Generations, victims of violence, suffer from poverty, low education and low income (Human Rights Law Centre, 2017). Weatherburn (2014) found that poverty, poor school performance, unemployment and drug and alcohol abuse were the most common risk factors for incarceration. As authors we repeat the question, why has this occurred and what are we doing differently to change this story?
A strength-based approach to health

In looking at the health of our Australian population analysis of data revealed that systemic change needs to occur in ensuring the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. While the poor state of health can be attributed to the colonial occupation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, ongoing racism, discrimination, forced removal of children and loss of identity, language, culture and land (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2016), our challenge as a society is what do we do to improve it.

Reflection

How might the devastating result of colonisation on Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples be raised and discussed within your educational context in a manner that builds on strengths and focuses on improvements? One way is to explore the messages presented by John Marsden and Shaun Tan in the book The Rabbits: An allegory of colonisation. Ideas of how to unpack the messages within are available from the 3Rs website.

For many years Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples enjoyed a semi-nomadic lifestyle, living in community groups and eating food that was hunted and gathered (Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, 2018). Upon arrival of European colonisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were subject to the introduction of many new diseases and illnesses. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples died from disease, or dispossession of land, were killed or kept in managed reserves, or schools for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples lost the ability to use traditional medical practices as white Colonisers made decisions about the health and public policy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (www.naccho.org.au). It wasn't until 1967, that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples ‘were granted’ access to Commonwealth Health care services, but by then poor health was widespread due to lack of education, lack of adequate nutrition, poor sanitation and inadequate housing.

Health, especially mental health is a world-wide concern. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, health is a holistic term, consisting of the mental, physical, cultural and spiritual wellness of a person (Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet, 2017). According to the 2016 census (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017) there are 649,171 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Australian population. In 2016, there is an estimated 8 year gap in life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians in metropolitan areas and a 13 year gap in life expectancy in rural and remote areas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Infant mortality rates are twice as high for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies, with 6.2 per 1000 compared to 3.2 per 1000 for non-Indigenous babies (Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, 2018). 15% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples mothers are teenagers, compared to 2.4% in total population (Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, 2018). The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ death rate is 9.6 deaths per 1000 people as opposed to 5.7 deaths per 1000 non Indigenous people. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples people are 3.3 times more likely to die of avoidable diseases. The median age of death is 58.8, compared with the non-Indigenous rate of 70+, and the top three causes of death are heart disease, diabetes and suicide (Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, 2018). A pressing concern is the high mortality rates in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adolescents, with about 60% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth deaths due to suicide and road traffic injury (Cunningham, 2018).

The effect of the physical environment also influences health and wellbeing; housing issues, sewerage, water and electricity and sanitation (Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, 2018). The introduction of Western food and a mostly
inactive lifestyle has impacted health (Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, 2018). Smoking is the leading preventative risk factor for illness, causes early death and ongoing medical concerns in the next generation (Boulton, 2016).

According to Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, (2018, p.20) the factors that have a positive impact on the (health of) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples include:

- connection to country, spirituality and ancestry
- kinship (connection to family)
- self-rule, community authority and cultural continuity

Many factors have been identified as having a negative impact on a person’s (health) such as

- discrimination and racism
- grief and loss
- economic and social disadvantage
- child removal by care and protection orders
- violence, and
- substance use.

**educational challenges**

Education plays a significant role in reinforcing the positive factors listed above. Education is recognised as having a profound impact on quality of life standards in Western countries and plays in integral role in influencing the viewpoint of further generations (Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016). As educators we must challenge ourselves to go beyond trying to counteract the many inequities faced by people and begin looking at how we can support individuals building upon their strengths so they are a valued and recognised part of the community. We need to engage in changing community attitudes and reducing both personal and systematic racism. What role has past education policy and practice played in producing the following statistics?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have the highest non-attendance rates and the lowest literacy and numeracy levels of all student groups in Australia (Quicke & Biddle, 2016). Approximately 20% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are not enrolled in schools and a further 25% are not attending school regularly. According to Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (2018), the overall attendance rate in the Northern Territory declined from 70.2% (2014) to 66.2% (2017). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school attendance rates are lower in more remote areas and as the year level progresses (Australian Government, 2018). In 2014, 47% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieved Year 12 or equivalent (Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016).
In terms of literacy and numeracy attainment, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the most educationally disadvantaged student group within Australia (Mackie & MacLennan, 2015). Despite numerous State and Commonwealth Government initiatives, intergenerational educational disadvantage is proving difficult to curtail (Beresford, 2012). In some schools, up to 85% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are below the National Minimum Benchmarks in Reading set by the Australian Government (Slee, 2012). According to Slee (2012), educational disadvantage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can be linked to the lifelong inequalities that have been perpetuated through colonialism such as attendance, lack of fixed housing, poverty, home factors, and poor health, along with the Education system not supporting the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ ways of learning.

Educational systems and targets to measure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ educational performance have been created from a Western perspective (Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016). Further, tests of literacy and numeracy may not be culturally sensitive, or take into account Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s unique dialects. Attendance may not consider high geographic mobility of some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes (Quicke & Biddle, 2015).

Quicke and Biddle (2016), suggest that from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples perspective of “formal education has been a tool of colonialism: employed initially to physically exclude Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from schools, and later to attempt to remake them culturally and socio-economically into closer replications of their colonising counterparts” (p.58). “Generations of racist-inspired policies produced intergenerational underachievement and alienation” (Beresford 2012, p.119) which perpetuates poverty. As educators it is up to us to ensure culturally safe and supportive learning environments. A number of the chapters within this book will expand on this concept because inclusion and the celebration of diversity in all its guises, is fundamental to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s outcomes, as it is for other minority groups within Australian society.

Education curriculum and practice often through the busyness of daily agendas fail to adequately address the hidden curriculum of racism. This ‘hidden’ curriculum becomes part of the learning process, the practices conducted in the classroom and the wider school community can reflect subtle values and beliefs, like an informal code. These values and beliefs are pervasive and can exclude, rather than include students (Fossey, Holborn, Abawi & Cooper, 2017).
Listen

Listen to Priscilla who shares her educational journey. How does Priscilla’s story challenge your understandings of the role of educator in the fight to end racism?

strength in cultural identity

Identity lies at the heart of understanding the impacts of colonisation and marginalisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples. An individual’s identity is impacted by the attitudes and perceptions of society (Boulton, 2016). Identity and belief about oneself is “formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems around us” (Hall, 1992, 277).

Despite policies stating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can continue with their own cultures with pride, the contrasting reality is that practices are still judged by Western standards (Boulton, 2016). Many Government policies, school and health systems, criminal systems, still want to assimilate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples into one western-centric society. Programs such as ‘Closing the Gap’ (Australian Government, 2018), a ten year program aimed to ‘increase standards’ for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to ‘meet’ non–Indigenous Australians in education, employment, economic development, health and community living, are based in a deficit discourse that frames Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples and communities as ‘the problem’ that needs fixing instead of examining the assumptions the policy operates from.

It is a misconception to believe that this approach will work (Mankiller, 2009). This structural inequality fails to listen to the voices of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and adequately reflect peoples’ identity and culture. “Aboriginal identity is a dynamic and interactive process of self-recognition firmly rooted in tradition, culture and community values” (Samson & Gigoux, 2016. p18).
Along with globalisation, new technologies and ways of living, such as iPhones, gaming, computers, internet and drugs, as well as housing and transport have been introduced, all of which were not originally a part of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people’s culture. In some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities it has become more difficult to pass on traditional elements of culture, language and ceremonies to the next generations (Mankiller, 2009), resulting in, “a loss of cultural knowledge in many Indigenous communities … being transferred from one generation to the next” (Parliament of Australia, 2018, p1). The dichotomy between traditional culture and globalised society has resulted in great tension within multiple Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural groups, and is a major cause for concern in the identity of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Boulton, 2016; Mankiller, 2009).

Moreton-Robinson (2015) believes that within the current socio-political climate, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are being represented as needing saving. Articles in the media, Government reports and systemic priorities, such as ‘Closing the Gap’ are portraying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as drunk, uneducated, criminals (Moreton-Robinson, 2015). This colonialist view paints the picture to other Australians and indeed the world, that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are inferior.

There is a need for every Australian to develop an understanding and pride for the cultures, traditions, connections and kinships of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and recognise these identities as legitimate, equal and powerful. “We should have pride in our culture, our families, our ancestors and knowledge systems. In knowing the land and the sky and the waterways in beautiful innate detail. In knowing how to go slow and silent” (Gilbey, 2018).

Presenting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ Perspectives in Education

Education is recognised as having a profound impact on quality of life standards in Western countries and plays an integral role in influencing the viewpoint of future generations (Bodkin-Andrew, & Carlson, 2016, p.785). However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s perspectives have not been valued or fore fronted in Australian education. Best practice to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are ingrained systemically in Education, is still being debated between theorists. Whilst some argue that studies about the history and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be included as subjects in all schools to ensure there is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective and understanding, others believe the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives need to be embedded throughout the Australian Curriculum. This chapter portrays the need for explicit teaching of subjects containing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and embedding culturally specific perspectives throughout the curriculum to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are given a “fair go” (Moreton-Robinson, 2015).

Reflection

“If you have come to help me you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together” (n.d., retrieved from https://happyuniverseman.wordpress.com/2014/10/19/if-you-have-come-to-help-me/).

This quote is often attributed to an Indigenous Australian visual artist, Lilla Watson, who was a founding member in the Aboriginal activists group in Queensland in the 1970s. What does this quote mean to you, in terms of ensuring Indigenous perspectives within the curriculum?
The authors agree with Bodkin-Andrews and Carlson (2016, p. 786) who stated that “as a multicultural country the future of Indigenous students are tied to the future of all Australians and their acceptance of the importance of Indigenous cultures”. The perspective inherently in education systems up until recently, and still in existence in many schools, has been based on a white colonised viewpoint of Captain Cook ‘discovering’ Australia. It is therefore follows that many Australians are not aware of the dispossession of land, livelihood and family that occurred upon colonisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. However Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are still experiencing modern systemic colonisation defining experiences with education, health and well-being. As educators, we need to rise to the challenge of understanding our own cultural bias and exposing deficit ways of working, to conscientiously and collaboratively explore and proactively enact ways of ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are valued as active and informed citizens.

The most effective approach we can use is to remove the systematic barriers institutional racism places in peoples’ paths. When we embrace the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective within Education systems, we become change agents. We paint the whole picture for future generations to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is respected and celebrated with the pride it deserves within the Australian community.

Reflection

• What were you taught about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in your schooling?
• Have the views taught then informed your current attitudes about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?
• How will you approach these issues introduced in this chapter in your own teaching?

references


Gear, R. (2013). *Commentary: Alcohol restrictions and Indigenous Australians: The social and policy implications of*


Happy Universe Man. (2014). If you have come to help me. Retrieved from https://happyuniverseman.wordpress.com/2014/10/19/if-you-have-come-to-help-me/


**Media Attributions**

- Figure 9.1 Photograph of Banner on flickr by Takver © CC BY-SA (Attribution ShareAlike)
- Figure 9.2 Photograph of Priscilla (2018) by Photo supplied by University of Southern Queensland Photography © All Rights Reserved