

The Power of Words: Bias and Assumptions in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan

Melitta Hogarth

School of Curriculum, Faculty of Education, Queensland University of Technology, Victoria Park Road, Kelvin Grove, Brisbane, Queensland 4059, Australia

This paper argues that genuine engagement and consultation is required where Indigenous voice is prevalent within the policy development process for true progress to be achieved in the educational attainments of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It is important to note that there has been little critical analysis of policy discourses. More specifically, analysis of how language is used to maintain societal constructs. By providing an Indigenous standpoint, it is anticipated that this paper makes explicit to policymakers the bias and taken for granted assumptions held by those who produced it. This paper is derived from a larger project, namely my Masters of Education (Research) thesis (Hogarth, 2015). The major findings that emerged from the data included (a) the homogenous grouping of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, (b) the maintenance of the prevalent dominant ideology of a deficit view within policy and finally (c) the expectation of government of increased engagement and connections with and by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in education without consideration of the detrimental effects of past policies and reforms. The potential implications of making explicit how language positions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' educational attainment can inform future policymaking and contribute to the struggle for self-determination.

■ **Keywords:** Indigenous education, Critical Discourse Analysis, Indigenist Research Principles, policy, deficit discourses

Concern about the educational attainment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students came to the political and societal forefront after the election of the then Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, and the formation of the Schools Commission as evidenced in the consequential reports in 1975 by the Schools Commission and the Aboriginal Consultative Group (Aboriginal Consultative Group, 1975a, 1975b; Schools Commission, 1975). Prior to 1972, various policy acted to exclude and/or minimise Indigenous young people access to education, including the policy of assimilation (Hasluck, 1950, 1961), or more explicitly, policies such as the 'Clean, Clad and Courteous' Acts (Reynolds, 2009). In the past three and a half decades, there has been a plethora of policy, review and evaluation to address the disparity between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their non-Indigenous counterparts. Policy such as the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Council of Australian Governments, 2008), and the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (Ministerial Council on Education

Employment Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2008) informed the production of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–2014 (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011), from here on referred to as 'the Plan'.

Central to this paper is how policy discourses maintain social and institutional constructs in regards to the positioning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their educational attainments. In other words, how bias and taken for granted assumptions become evident within policy through critical analysis of language use. First, the paper establishes the purpose of policy analysis and its contribution to the literature. Second, an overview

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: Melitta Hogarth, School of Curriculum, Faculty of Education, Queensland University of Technology, Victoria Park Road, Kelvin Grove, Brisbane, Queensland 4059, Australia.
Email: m.hogarth@qut.edu.au.

of the methodological approach and the theoretical framework that informed the research is provided. Third, an example of how these contrasting approaches—one being based within Western academia and the other within the tenets of Indigenous methodologies—demonstrate the tensions at the cultural interface (Nakata, 2007). Finally, a synopsis of the major findings inclusive of the bias and taken for granted assumptions is identified in a critical analysis of the Plan (Hogarth, 2015).

Policy Analysis

Henry, Lingard, Rizvi, and Taylor (2013, p. 35) define policy analysis as ‘the study of what governments do, why and with what effects’. Ozga (2000) asserts that there is a need for policy analysis to hold policymakers accountable. Therefore, empirical research critically analysing Indigenous education policy is beneficial for stakeholders. Analysis ensures that alternative perspectives are provided to encourage change and reform to the educational agenda.

Henry et al. (2013) imply government produce policy to address some economic, social or political factor. In other words, the ‘problem’ needs a ‘solution’, that there is a vested interest in addressing the issue that will benefit the wider Australian society. By addressing the educational attainment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, government indicates its desire for equity, to achieve parity between the potential life outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia.

Policy itself according to Henry et al. (2013) can be incremental and/or intertextual in nature. That is, the production of policy may be due to the policy cycle, where policy is developed to build on previous policy (incremental) or complementing and developed from other broader policies (intertextual). The Plan (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011) is both incremental and intertextual. It builds on recommendations as provided within the Review of Australian directions in Indigenous Education 2005–2008 for the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research, 2009) hence being incremental. Further to this,

The Plan seeks to progress the goals of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy and the Melbourne Declaration on the Educational Goals of Young Australians and is part of a broader COAG reform agenda for school education that will contribute to closing the gap between the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their peers (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011, p. 4),

indicating the intertextual properties.

There is little research in the critical analysis of policy discourses (Taylor, 2004). In turn, critical analysis of the

Plan (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011) is further minimised. Investigation of Indigenous education policy has been predominantly focused on specific aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student educational attainment. Exemplification includes improving the attendance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and its influence on achievement (Dreise, Milgate, Perrett, & Meston, 2016; Ladwig & Luke, 2014), encouraging parental engagement (Higgins & Morley, 2014; Hunt, 2013), or more specifically, analysis of Indigenous policy itself from a non-Indigenous perspective (Altman, 2009; Altman, Biddle, & Hunter, 2009; Altman & Fogarty, 2010). This paper reveals the bias and taken for granted assumptions prevalent within the Plan that was produced to address the educational attainment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from an Indigenous perspective.

Description of the Plan

In 2011, the Plan (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011) was endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments and released for distribution and implementation. It provided six domains, including the Readiness for School; Engagement and Connections: Attendance; Numeracy and Literacy; Leadership, Quality Teaching and Workforce Development; and Pathways to Post-School Options. The *Report to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Group of the Education Council: Evaluation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–2014* (ACIL Allen Consulting, 2014) suggested the revision or replacement needed to occur sooner rather than later to maintain the momentum of and sustain the gains achieved in the implementation of the Plan.

The Plan (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011) was developed to address the recommendations within the *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005–2008* (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2006) and its consequent review conducted by the David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research (2009), where the perceived assumptions held by educationalists that disparity in educational attainment has been normalised and that ‘incremental gains are acceptable’ (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2006, p. 4). Further to this, the Plan was part of the response from Federal government to address the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Council of Australian Governments, 2008). Primarily, the Plan had 55 key actions that would provide the data necessary for tracking the *National Indigenous Reform*

Agreement, otherwise known as the Closing the Gap, targets pertaining to education. That is, the Plan is a ramification of other policies complementing and elaborating on broader, more generalised goals. An innovative approach to critically analyse the Plan was required.

Methods

To analyse the Plan (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011), I drew on Rigney's Indigenist Research Principles (1999) and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework (2001a). As a neophyte Aboriginal researcher and a classroom teacher for almost 20 years, there was a need to address the deficit view prevalent within the education paradigm (see David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research, 2009; Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2006). There was a need to personalise the methodology; to ensure that the research activity reflects the person I am (Gale, 1998 as cited in Henry et al., 2013). To analyse the policy discourses, I needed a methodological approach that focused not only on the textual features, but also drew on the social conditions and processes of production and interpretation of text. Further to this, an Indigenous methodological approach ensured that the research 'privileges the indigenous presence' (Smith, 1999, p. 6). Therefore, as Nakata (2007) asserts the Indigenous researcher is required to gain an understanding of the knowledge that positions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to speak back into the contested space.

I found strength in Rigney and his approach when I read how 'Indigenous Peoples must look to new anticolonial epistemologies and methodologies to construct, re-discover, and/or re-affirm their knowledge and cultures' (Rigney, 1999, p. 114), and in doing so, inform the struggle for self-determination by challenging the embedded Eurocentric context and colonial dominant power of educational institutions. Rigney's Indigenist Research Principles (1999) framework provided a means to include Indigenist principles by providing a strategy for research rather than a research process. In other words, the principles—Resistance as an emancipatory imperative; Political Integrity and Privileging Indigenous voice—provided a means to identify the key assumptions within the Plan by identifying the subtle issues of power and dominance maintained in policy discourses through the use of deficit discourses. Figure 1 demonstrates how each of these principles is separate and yet interrelated, supporting the other.

Rigney's Indigenist Research Principles (1999) were articulated with Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (2001a) framework. Critical Discourse Analysis brings attention on discourse, which is evident in all social activities. Discourse is represented within written or spoken

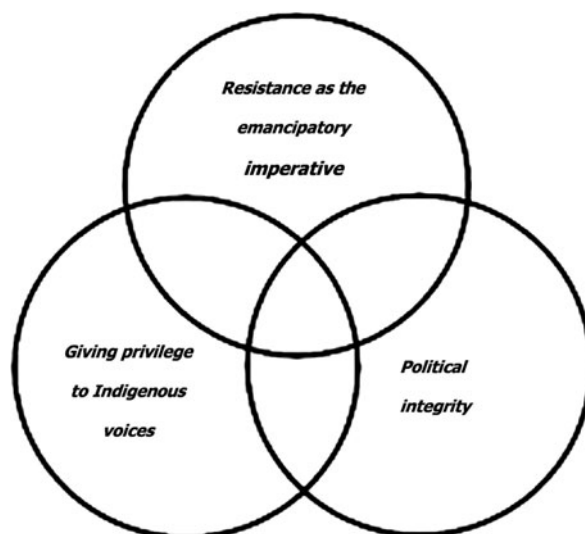


FIGURE 1

Rigney's three Indigenist Research Principles. Adapted from 'Internationalisation of an Indigenous anticolonial cultural critique of research methodologies: A guide to Indigenist Research Methodology and its principles', by Rigney (1999).

texts, it could be verbal or nonverbal or a combination of any means of communication. As a result, discourse is also a form of social practice. In other words, rather than being an external component to society, language is a fundamental part of society and its means to communicate.

Furthermore, language is used to establish and organise the ways people interact demonstrating the influence of discourse as a social practice but also social process (Fairclough, 1989). This is demonstrated by the orders of discourse. A term originally used by Foucault (1971), orders of discourse is defined by Fairclough as 'a particular social ordering of relationships amongst different ways of making meaning' (Fairclough, 2001a, p. 232). In other words, the internal relations demonstrated within a text, being the semiotic and linguistic factors, are combined with the external factors, being the social positioning of the individual as well as their knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, which in turn influences the interpretation and enactment (Taylor, 2004). Therefore, Critical Discourse Analysis provides opportunities for the discourses of the Plan (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011) to be analysed as to how it positions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and to what extent it is arguing for or against the people.

Critical Discourse Analysis was deemed as the most appropriate approach for analysis of data. Fairclough (2013) began developing an analytical framework in the 1980s that investigated language use and its ability to maintain and sustain deficit views and power. This methodology differed from the work of linguists and sociolinguists as it sought to understand how characteristics of discourse influenced societal conditions (Fairclough,

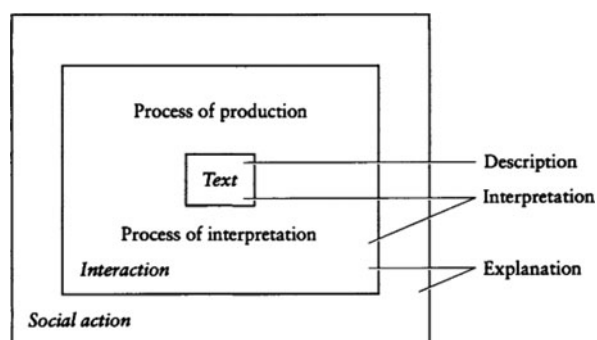


FIGURE 2

Fairclough's three-dimensional framework for Critical Discourse Analysis. Taken from Fairclough (2014).

2012). Figure 2 depicts a broad three-stage framework when analysing text: that is, Stage 1: description of the text; Stage 2: interpretation of the relationship between the text and interaction and Stage 3: explanation of the relationship between interaction and social context (Fairclough, 1989). The articulation of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2001a) and Indigenist Research Principles (Rigney, 1999) enabled the critical analysis of the Plan (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011), and how discourse positions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' educational attainment (see Hogarth, 2015).

The Articulation of Indigenist Research Principles and Critical Discourse Analysis

Specific textual features of discourse are identified within a text to assist in the analysis. In particular, declarative statements, euphemistic expressions, classification schemes and expressive modality provided focus and guided the project. In doing so, the experiential value of the word choices used within the Plan (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011) was analysed to determine the privilege assumed by the producers of the text. In turn, the text is interpreted from an Aboriginal standpoint making explicit the bias and taken for granted assumptions prevalent within the Plan that may hinder or challenge the interpretation of the text.

Declarative statements are used to establish a position of authority or trustworthiness (Fairclough, 1989). Within a policy text, the use of declarative statements further demonstrates the power of government; of their position. Critical Discourse Analysis provides a means to challenge the societal and institutional constructs; to question the political integrity of the Plan (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011). In turn, the use of Rigney's Indigenist Research Principles confirms the taken for granted assumptions that Wodak and Meyer (2009, p. 3) assert

are normalised through 'the effects of power and ideology in the production of meaning'. That is, the authoritative positioning of government ensures the maintenance of the dominant social structures, and therefore, the positioning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This, in turn, can be used to marginalise Indigenous voice. Rigney's principles (1999) therefore provide a mean to privilege Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their voice and their position.

Euphemistic expressions are used to substitute language used that have a negative connotation (Fairclough, 1989). More recently, when referring to the Indigenous peoples of Australia, the distinction of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples or First Nations peoples (Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC), 2013). The uses of euphemisms further define the positioning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within the wider Australian society. The terms of reference within a policy text are important therefore to be analysed as the euphemisms determine the orientation of the text and influence the interpretation. Further to this, euphemistic expressions demonstrate the achievement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in creating change and transformation in Australian society. The political integrity of the policy is then able to be questioned. In other words, Rigney's Indigenist Research Principles (1999) present a means to provide an alternative perspective of policy discourses.

Classification schemes enable government to validate an ideological stance and therefore, normalise taken for granted assumptions such as the deficit view of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' educational attainment (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2006). Through the identification of classification schemes and the use of synonyms, the ideological stance of addressing the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous students is established. This, in turn, provides a means to challenge the position of the policy and its discourses.

Modality, much like declarative statements, established 'the speaker's authority with respect to the truth or probability of a representation of reality' (Fairclough, 2001b, p. 105). Modal verbs such as *are*, *may*, *might* and *probably* therefore indicate a commitment to the truth or potential future. In doing so, the purpose and aim of the Plan (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011) is established. However, Critical Discourse Analysis enables internal colonialism to be identified further maintaining a deficit view (Welch, 1988).

The textual deconstruction into its textual features is then validated through the analysis of the societal and institutional constructs that inform the production and interpretation of policy. Within the mesolevels and macrolevels of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough,

2001a), the Indigenist Research Principles (Rigney, 1999) guide the analysis. In doing so, the articulation of Critical Discourse Analysis and the Indigenist Research Principles provide a means to ‘defend from the position of knowledge about knowledge’ (Nakata, 1998, p. 4) from an Aboriginal woman and educators standpoint. Explication of how Critical Discourse Analysis and the Indigenist Research Principles are used within analysis follows to further demonstrate how a Western methodology and Indigenous methodology are used to identify the bias and taken for granted assumptions held by the producers of the Plan (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011).

Discussion

The Plan (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011) is divided into four separate sections. The first section is an introduction that provides detail on the processes undertaken with the production process and its position within other education policy contexts. It highlights how consultation with Aboriginal Consultative Bodies and educators as well as non-Indigenous education providers occurred. Drawing on the strategies and recommendations of previous and current policy, the Plan is then situated within the current context of how government is and their expectations for stakeholders in education in addressing the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students’ educational attainment. It is important to note, that while I recognise the many and diverse key stakeholders involved and influential in the provision of education, the scope of this paper focuses on the governmental approaches as located within policy discourses only.

The second section further demonstrates the incremental and intertextual properties of the Plan (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011), where it describes the six domains in more detail. Here, the goals and targets are articulated as well as the performance indicators and outcomes that will inform the evaluation of implementation and progress in working towards the overarching goals as set within the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Council of Australian Governments, 2008).

Further to this, the interconnectivity of the strategies in the Plan and their alignment to the *National Education Agreement* (Council of Australian Governments, 2012) are provided. For example, the initial outcome for the domain—Engagement and Connections within the Plan, states ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are engaged in and benefiting from schooling’ (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011, p. 13). This declarative statement is clearly derived from the National Education Agreement, where it states as one of its outcomes

being that ‘All children are engaged in and benefiting from schooling’ (Council of Australian Governments, 2012, p. 4). Here, the all-encompassing reference to *all children* is exchanged with *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students* to ensure the Plan specifically addresses the educational attainment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Following this, section three provides the jurisdictional State properties, including the current approaches and strategies that further assist the implementation of the Plan (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011). That is, the endeavours of State-specific strategies that are already in place that may work towards addressing those within the Plan are articulated. Reference is also made to the Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies and their role and contribution to the national and systemic systems when producing and evaluating Indigenous education policy. It is interesting to note that with the change in funding in late 2014, the State Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies were no longer to be federally funded despite playing such a critical role in Indigenous education policy (Reconciliation Australia, 2016).

Finally, section four provides instruction on the reporting processes to evaluate the Plan’s implementation (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011). Yearly reports were required from schools and systems to maintain accountability and transparency. In doing so, government further established their position of authority, as ‘overseers’ of policy implementation.

The purpose outlined in the Plan (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011) identifies that school education contributes to closing the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their non-Indigenous counterparts. For example, the Plan states that

Governments have agreed to take urgent action to close the gap between the life outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011, p. 3).

This excerpt is indeed a declarative statement in which it emphasises the necessity for action. In doing so, the Plan declares that there are inconsistencies between the livelihoods of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their non-Indigenous counterparts.

Further to this, expressive modality is present. The use of the phrase *urgent action* works to emphasise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are in need of assistance. That is, they are to attain a certain undisclosed way of life determined by government. This excerpt demonstrates the assimilatory stance still held within modern Australian society. That is, despite the call for reconciliation and the recognition of the oppressive past

reforms of assimilation and dispossession, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their ways of living and being are still judged by the ideology of superiority and dominance (see Brady, 1997; Foley, 2003; Rigney, 2002). In doing so, the excerpt positions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as incapable by improving current conditions without assistance, minimising the opportunity for self-determination. Rigney's Indigenist Research Principle, Resistance as an emancipatory imperative, seeks to question the positioning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as 'oppressed victims in need of charity' (Foley, 2003, p. 48). The taken for granted assumptions demonstrate a binary where there is a definite distinction between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their non-Indigenous counterparts ways of living and livelihoods.

Further to this, the use of the adjective *urgent* determines the time frame in which this needs to be addressed. The excerpt implicitly exerts there is an obligation to address the current inequalities evident in Australian society in the imminent future. Here, the political agenda and integrity of government are made explicit. Hidden within the policy discourse is the 'functionalist assumptions about the way society works' (Henry, et al., 2013, p. 24). Key to the policy discourses is to 'close the gap'; to achieve parity and in turn, works to counter the potential costs in provision of welfare, and issues in health and wellbeing (Dreise & Thomson, 2014).

Results

The critical analysis of the Plan (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011) and the investigation of how policy discourses position Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples found that three major assumptions were prevalent. These included (a) the homogenous grouping of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, (b) the maintenance of a deficit view and (c) the disregard of the detrimental effects of past policies. Further to this, bias was also identified whereby (d) binary constructions within policy discourses continue to marginalise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Particular focus on the findings of the analysis of the Plan provides insight into how the macrolevel of the Critical Discourse Analysis framework, the social conditions of production and interpretation, are evident at the microlevel, the policy.

Homogenous Grouping of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Within the Plan (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011), a presupposition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as a homogenous collective group was identified. This is exemplified where the Plan states 'A curriculum and pedagogy that embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural perspec-

tives will support attendance and retention' (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011, p. 8). That is, while the factors that influence Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' educational attainment such as curriculum and culturally appropriate pedagogies were identified, the geolocation and cultural intricacies of individual groups were ignored. Instead, the onus of closing the gap is placed on schools at a local level. As Lowe (2011) asserts government is shifting blame for the lack of progress in achieving parity from policy failure to schools and their underachievement in addressing the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The attention on schools emphasises the crucial importance of engagement and connection with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It is within the implementation and interpretation of the Plan (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011) that the 'one-size-fits-all' agenda can be contextualised. However, the interpretation of policy is subject to the social conditions and processes of production as evidenced within the Critical Discourse Analysis framework (Fairclough, 2001a; see also Figure 2). That is, the attitudes, beliefs and values held in regards to the educational attainment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may influence the strategies and actions taken by the schools when addressing the key actions as provided within the Plan. Further influencing the processes of interpretation are the deficit view maintained within policy discourses.

Maintenance of a Deficit View

The Plan (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011) continues to maintain, sustain and uphold a deficit view of the educational attainment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This is exemplified within the targets set for the Engagement and Connections domain whereby the increased number of Personalised Learning Plans for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the development of School-Community Partnership Agreements limit the level of engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In doing so, this taken for granted assumption where low expectations are normalised discourages the engagement and connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and community in Indigenous education. This, in turn, indicates a form of resistance employed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by disengaging from the educational attainment.

Furthermore, by advocating the belief that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are in need of charity and assistance, the Plan (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011) indicates ideologies based within an assimilatory stance further marginalising Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander peoples. That is, while the Plan advocates for improving the potential achievements and life outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. It negatively positions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within the policy discourses. The Plan seeks for genuine partnerships to improve attendance and yet ignores the detrimental effects of past policies.

The Detrimental Effects of Past Policies

The disregard of the underlying factors that influence Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' educational attainment is evident in the Plan (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011). The intergenerational trauma prevalent in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as the result of past policies and reforms effects the willingness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and communities in actively engaging and connecting with education (Atkinson, 2013). Reviews and evaluations of policy, such as the *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005–2008* (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2006, p. 16) highlight the detrimental effects of past policies on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples where it states 'Historically, the policies and practices of Australian governments were predicated on the supposed "inferiority" of Indigenous Australians'. However, regardless, the Plan positions itself as an authority on Indigenous education and upholds an expectation of engagement in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' educational attainment from all stakeholders, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Within the policy discourses, there is little recognition of the trust and reciprocity that would need to be established or the time needed to develop such relationships. Once again, the onus is placed on schools with little advice or guidance on how this is achieved.

Binary Constructions

Prior to presenting the intricate biases within the Plan (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011) itself, note that the Plan presents a binary construction. By being a specific policy in addressing the educational attainment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, it further develops the marginalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in need of assistance. While I acknowledge and value the Plan's contribution in addressing the inequalities prevalent in Australian education systems, as the *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005–2008* (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2006, p. 12) states 'Quality teaching pedagogies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are clearly quality teaching for any child'. Therefore, there is a need to artic-

ulate that implementation of the Plan could be beneficial for all low-achieving and disengaged students.

Further to this, the Plan (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011) constantly interchanges the terms of reference for non-Indigenous Australians while maintaining consistency when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. For example, the terms 'non-Indigenous' (p. 6), 'other students' (p. 7), 'other Australians' (p. 7) and 'their peers' (p. 29) were all used to refer to non-Indigenous peoples in the Plan. The binary here is noteworthy as the Plan highlights that 'In 2008, only one per cent of teaching staff in government schools were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians' (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011, p. 22), indicating that the dominant interpreters and implementers of the Plan were non-Indigenous themselves.

Conclusion

The analysis of the Plan (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011) demonstrated that there was indeed bias and taken for granted assumptions within policy discourses. The language used maintains a deficit view further hindering the struggle for self-determination. That is, that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are in need of assistance. Further to this, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice is being marginalised within the decision-making process of policy production.

Smith (2009) refers to new forms of colonisation that Indigenous peoples face. He highlights how colonialism has been absorbed within the education context and how we need to find new approaches to analyse and identify 'the new blockages [...] formed in the face of Indigenous aspirations' (Smith, 2009, p. 5). Within the critical analysis of the Plan (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011), the detrimental effects of past policies and their influence on the social constructs and processes of production and interpretation of policy become evident. Policy discourses also position Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in a deficit view albeit hidden within the textual features. By investigating the power of language, the new forms of colonisation become explicit and provide an alternative standpoint.

Further investigation of policy discourses is necessary to further understand the discursive constructions that position Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. One specific aspect of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework (2001a) is a certain stage of investigation that questions if those in power actually want to solve the 'problem'. This very question continues to taunt me and has become a focus within my PhD candidature where I am critically analysing the *National Aboriginal*

and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015 (Education Council, 2015), the policy that has superseded the Plan (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011).

References

- Aboriginal Consultative Group. (1975a). Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group – June 1975. *Aboriginal Child at School*, 3(5), 3–26. Retrieved September 7, 2015 from <http://search.informit.com.au.ezp01.library.qut.edu.au/fullText;dn=016448209044877;res=IELAPA>
- Aboriginal Consultative Group. (1975b). Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group – June 1975. *Aboriginal Child at School*, 3(4), 60–64. Retrieved September 7, 2015 from <http://search.informit.com.au.ezp01.library.qut.edu.au/documentSummary;dn=016131448533487;res=IELAPA>
- ACIL Allen Consulting. (2014). Report to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Group of the Education Council: Evaluation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–2014. Retrieved January 25, 2016 from http://www.acilallen.com.au/cms_files/ACILAllen_ATSI_Education2014.pdf
- Altman, J., Biddle, N., & Hunter, B.H. (2009). Prospects for closing the gap in socioeconomic outcomes for Indigenous Australians?. *Australian Economic History Review*, 49(3), 225–251. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8446.2009.00264.x.
- Altman, J.C. (2009). *Beyond closing the gap: Valuing diversity in Indigenous Australia* (vol. 54). Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, ANU. Retrieved April 14, 2015 from <http://caep.r.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/Publications/WP/CAEPRWP54.pdf>
- Altman, J.C., & Fogarty, W. (2010). Indigenous Australians as 'No Gaps' subjects: Education and development in remote Indigenous Australia. Retrieved April 14, 2016 from https://digitalcollections.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/9738/1/Altman_IndigenousAustraliansNoGaps2010.pdf
- Atkinson, J. (2013). Trauma-informed services and trauma-specific care for Indigenous Australian children. Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Retrieved April 25, 2014 from <http://www.aihw.gov.au/closingthegap/publications/>
- Brady, W. (1997). Indigenous Australian education and globalisation. *International Review of Education*, 43(5–6), 413–422.
- Council of Australian Governments. (2008). National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap). Retrieved March 5, 2014 from http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/health_indigenous/indigenous-reform/national-agreement_sept_12.pdf
- Council of Australian Governments. (2012). National Education Agreement. Retrieved March 5, 2014 from <http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/education/national-agreement.pdf>
- David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research. (2009). Review of Australian directions in Indigenous education 2005–2008 for the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs. Retrieved April 6, 2014 from http://scseec.edu.au/site/DefaultSite/filesystem/documents/ATSI%20documents/review_of_aust_directions_in_indigenous_ed_2005-2008.pdf
- Dreise, T., Milgate, G., Perrett, B., & Meston, T. (2016). Indigenous school attendance: Creating expectations that are 'really high' and 'highly real'. Retrieved May 1, 2016 from <http://research.acer.edu.au/policyinsights/4/>
- Dreise, T., & Thomson, S. (2014). Unfinished business: PISA shows Indigenous youth are being left behind. Retrieved March 3, 2014 from http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1037&context=indigenous_education
- Education Council (2015). National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015. Retrieved January 25, 2016 from http://www.scseec.edu.au/site/DefaultSite/filesystem/documents/ATSI%20documents/DECD__NATSI_EducationStrategy.pdf
- Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. New York, London: Longman.
- Fairclough, N. (2001a). The discourse of new labour: Critical Discourse Analysis. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor & S. Yates (Eds.), *Discourse as data: A guide for analysis* (pp. 229–266). London, UK; Thousand Oaks, California, USA; New Delhi, India: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Fairclough, N. (2001b). *Language and power* (2nd ed.). Harlow, U.K: Pearson Education.
- Fairclough, N. (2012). Critical Discourse Analysis. *International Advances in Engineering and Technology*, 7, 452–487. Retrieved April 24, 2016 from <http://scholarism.net/FullText/2012071.pdf>
- Fairclough, N. (2013). Critical Discourse Analysis and critical policy studies. *Critical Policy Studies*, 7(2), 177–197. Retrieved April 24, 2015 from <http://www.tandfonline-com.ezp01.library.qut.edu.au/doi/pdf/10.1080/19460171.2013.798239> doi:10.1080/19460171.2013.798239.
- Fairclough, N. (2014). Critical Language Awareness. Retrieved April 14, 2015 from <http://QUT.eblib.com.au/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=1713369>
- Foley, D. (2003). Indigenous epistemology and Indigenous standpoint theory. *Social Alternatives*, 22(1), 44–52. Retrieved July 7, 2014 from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Dennis_Foley/publication/256702869_Indigenous_Standpoint_Theory_An_Indigenous_Epistemology/links/02e7e523a517289f60000000.pdf
- Foucault, M. (1971). Orders of discourse. *Social Science Information*, 10, 7–30.
- Hasluck, P. (1950). Commonwealth of Australia – Parliamentary Debates: Session 1950 (Hansard), House of Representatives. Retrieved May 25, 2015 from http://indigenousrights.net.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/382591/f89.pdf
- Hasluck, P. (1961). *The policy of assimilation: Decisions of commonwealth and state ministers at the native welfare*

- conference. Canberra, Australia: AJ Arthur, Commonwealth Government Printer.
- Henry, M., Lingard, B., Rizvi, F., & Taylor, S. (2013). *Educational policy and the politics of change*. Taylor & Francis. Retrieved April 21, 2015 from <http://www.ebilib.com>
- Higgins, D., & Morley, S. (2014). *Engaging Indigenous parents in their children's education - Resource Sheet no. 32*. Canberra: Closing the Gap Clearinghouse – Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.
- Hogarth, M. (2015). A critical analysis of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan Masters of Education (Research). Queensland University of Technology. Retrieved March 30, 2016 from <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/89754>
- Hunt, J. (2013). *Engaging with Indigenous Australia – exploring the conditions for effective relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities: Issues paper no. 5*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.
- Ladwig, J.G., & Luke, A. (2014). Does improving school level attendance lead to improved school level achievement? An empirical study of Indigenous educational policy in Australia. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 41(2), 171–194. Retrieved April 14, 2016 from <http://link.springer.com.ezp01.library.qut.edu.au/article/10.1007%2Fs13384-013-0131-y> doi:10.1007/s13384-013-0131-y.
- Lowe, K. (2011). A critique of school and Aboriginal community partnerships. In G.N. Purdie, G. Milgate & H.R. Bell (Eds.), *Two way teacher and learning* (pp. 13–32). Camberwell, Victoria: ACER.
- Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA]. (2011). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (2010–2014). Retrieved March 3, 2014 from http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/verve/_resources/A10-0945_IEAP_web_version_final2.pdf
- Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA]. (2006). Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005–2008. Retrieved March 30, 2014 from http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/Australian_Directions_in_Indigenous_Education_2005-2008.pdf.
- Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA]. (2008). Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians. Retrieved March 6, 2014 from http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf.
- Nakata, M. (1998). Anthropological texts and Indigenous standpoints. *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 1998(2), 3–12. Retrieved April 13, 2016 from <http://search.informit.com.au.ezp01.library.qut.edu.au/fullText;dn=151991702568013;res=IELAPA>.
- Nakata, M. (2007). *Disciplining the savages: Savaging the disciplines*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.
- Ozga, J. (2000). *Policy research in educational settings: contested terrain*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Reconciliation Australia. (2016). *The state of reconciliation in Australia: Our history, our story, our future*. Kingston, ACT, Australia: Reconciliation Australia Retrieved April 30, 2016 from http://iaha.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/The-State-of-Reconciliation-report_FULL_WR.pdf.
- Reynolds, R.J. (2009). “Clean, clad and courteous” revisited: A review history of 200 years of Aboriginal Education in New South Wales. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 78(1), 83–94. Retrieved June 5, 2016 from <http://search.proquest.com.ezp01.library.qut.edu.au/docview/222069067/fulltextPDF/45C2F90BEE2744AEPQ/1?accountid=13380>
- Rigney, L. (1999). Internationalization of an Indigenous anti-colonial cultural critique of research methodologies: A guide to indigenist research methodology and its principles. *Wicazo Sa Review*, 14, 109–121.
- Rigney, L.I. (2002). Indigenous education and treaty: building Indigenous management capacity. *Balayi: Culture, Law and Colonialism*, 4, 73–82. Retrieved April 28, 2016 from <http://search.informit.com.au.ezp01.library.qut.edu.au/fullText;res=AGISPT;dn=20030434>.
- Schools Commission. (1975). Schools Commission report for the Triennium 1976–1978: Chapter 9 – Education for Aborigines. *Aboriginal Child at School*, 3(3), 42–54. Retrieved April 28, 2016 from <http://search.informit.com.au.ezp01.library.qut.edu.au/fullText;dn=011268243035097;res=IELIND>.
- Smith, G.H. (2009). Transforming Leadership: A Discussion Paper. Paper presented at 2009 SFU Summer Institute – Leading Change in Education, Vancouver. Retrieved November 8, 2015 from <https://www2.viu.ca/integratedplanning/documents/DrGrahamSmith.pdf>
- Smith, L.T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. Dunedin: University of Otago Press.
- Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC). (2013). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan: 2012 Annual Report. Retrieved March 29, 2015 from <http://www.scseec.edu.au/site/DefaultSite/filesystem/documents/ATSI%20documents/2012%20ATSI%20Report/ATSIEAP%202012%20Report.pdf>
- Taylor, S. (2004). Researching educational policy and change in ‘new times’: Using Critical Discourse Analysis. *Journal of Education Policy*, 19(4), 433–451.
- Welch, A.R. (1988). Aboriginal education as internal colonialism: The schooling of an Indigenous minority in Australia. *Comparative Education*, 24(2), 203–215. Retrieved May 19, 2016 from <http://www.jstor.org.ezp01.library.qut.edu.au/stable/3099076>.
- Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2009). Critical Discourse Analysis: History, agenda, theory and methodology. *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, 2, 1–33.

About the Author

Melitta Hogarth is a Kamilaroi woman who is an Associate Lecturer at the Queensland University of Technology within the Faculty of Education/School of Curriculum. Prior to taking this position, Melitta taught for almost 20 years in all three sectors of the Queensland education system specifically in Secondary education. Melitta's interests are in education, equity and social justice. She is a PhD candidate and her research seeks to analyse how policy discourse positions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.