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AROUND in CIRCLES or EXPANDING SPIRALS?: a RETROSPECTIVE LOOK at EDUCATION in TORRES STRAIT, 1964-2003

BARRY OSBORNE

School of Education, James Cook University, PO Box 6811, Cairns, Queensland, 4870, Australia

Abstract

From the early 1900s, education in the Torres Strait was dominated by protectionism and segregation. In 1964 on Thursday Island the segregated state school system was abolished: "coloured children" could attend the high top from 1964 and thus secondary schooling became available to all as far as year 10. Since then there have been considerable changes. This paper describes and analyses some of these within a framework of relational justice and social access. Themes discussed include written texts about the people of Torres Strait and about education in Torres Strait; the growth of Torres Strait Islander voice in educational research; educational governance, facilities and staffing; teaching in Torres Strait classrooms; curriculum and language; preparing teachers to teach in Torres Strait; supporting teachers in Torres Strait; school-community relationships; and some recent initiatives.

Introduction

Forty years ago the educational scene in Torres Strait was beginning to undergo a metamorphosis out of an era from the early 1900s dominated by protectionism and segregation. Although the 14 outer island schools were still being run by the Department of Native Affairs, employing six qualified head teachers and unqualified Islander "community teachers" on very low wages, for the first time primary school students could study beyond "the mark", that is a grade four level (E. Osborne, 1995, p. 239). Likewise, on Thursday Island at both the state school for "coloured children", set up in 1913 and the Catholic convent school, Torres Strait Islander students could not progress beyond year four standard and were not eligible to sit for scholarship - the examination that permitted progress to high school (E. Osborne, 1990, p. 16). From 1964, the segregated state school system on Thursday Island was abolished (E. Osborne, 1995, p. 255): "coloured children" could attend the high top (a primary school with years 8-10 attached) and thus secondary schooling became available to all as far as Year 10. Since then many changes have occurred; partly because Torres Strait Islanders demanded a better deal for students and staff, partly because governments responded to such demands and partly because of the work of researchers and practitioners in the field.

This paper describes and analyses some of the many changes, and covers 10 themes: from rags to riches in print knowledge about the people of Torres Strait; print knowledge about education in Torres Strait; the growth of Torres Strait Islander voice in educational research; educational governance, facilities and staffing in Torres Strait; teaching in Torres Strait classrooms; curriculum and language in Torres Strait education; preparing teachers to teach in Torres Strait; supporting teachers in Torres Strait; school-community relationships; and some recent initiatives. I consider what gains have been made - are we going around in circles or through spirals of improvement? I then conclude my discussion with some implications for the future.

My Place and Positioning

After three years of teaching in rural South Australia, I began teaching at Thursday Island State High School in 1968, the year after the referendum that gave the Commonwealth responsibility for Indigenous affairs

throughout Australia. The high school was then only three years old. I stayed until the end of 1972. During those years, at least five factors weighed heavily on me as a newcomer. The first was their poverty and their pervading sense of hopelessness. There were only a few poorly paid jobs for Islanders and they had no voice in policy-making or indeed in any sphere. The second was the isolation - those from the outer islands had access to Thursday Island only by boat, the *Melbidir* run by the Department of Native Affairs and the *Stephen Davies* run by the Anglican church gave access to the people from St Paul's on Moa Island. Thursday Island had two plane flights a week from Cairns and a fortnightly cargo boat. No television or radio stations operated in Torres Strait, although Radio Australia from Port Moresby was received. The third factor was the completely inadequate preparation provided for teachers who were sent to teach in Torres Strait. The fourth was the impossibility of obtaining print information about Torres Strait Islanders, their culture or customs and a concurrent difficulty in obtaining oral information from students or parents. The fifth was the poor success of our predominantly assimilationist teaching. This meant that we, as teachers, found it difficult to inspire students, to work with them effectively to achieve academic success, or to break the cycle of poverty through educative processes. Although we were keen to do our best, we were poorly equipped to relate to the students or to understand their daily lives. Accordingly, although some teachers and some students worked hard, we achieved limited results in terms of school success and even less in terms of subsequent employment.

From my current perspective, three Islander-driven initiatives seem to have helped break their sense of hopelessness. The first had its origins before World War II when Islander leaders formally sought "full Citizen Rights ... full European wages for all employment ... and to have a higher standard of University education" (E. Osborne, 1993, p. 62) and their own qualified teachers, doctors and nurses (E. Osborne, 1995, p. 281). The second was the intense political lobbying that prevented Gough Whitlam from ceding approximately half of Torres Strait to Papua New Guinea as it gained independence from Australia in 1975. The third was the Murray Island Land Rights case led and won by Koiki Mabo in 1992. The results of the first initiative took decades to achieve because governments failed to begin to deliver until the mid-1970s. The second saw powerlessness and hopelessness challenged by clever political activity (Beckett, 1987) and a unified voice across the diverse interests in Torres Strait. The third initiative fostered a pan-Torres Strait identity and is helping change the Torres Strait economic base.

These initiatives are important to an analysis of education, because whereas education occurs within both a local and a societal context, sometimes it is easy to forget the contexts of previous eras. Of course, this is my reading of the local context from 1967-1972 when I resided on Thursday Island and came to understand with my mind, body and spirit aspects of that context with its barriers to the forlorn but rarely articulated (to outsiders) hopes of many Islanders. Therefore, I do not and cannot present Torres Strait Islander or others' interpretations. I merely document my interpretations of what teachers, students and parents faced as a means of examining, against a template of social justice, what has happened in education since the watershed days of the opening up of secondary (and ultimately tertiary) education for all Torres Strait Islanders.

Constructing a Social Justice Template from which to Analyse 10 Themes in Torres Strait Education

When I began teaching in Torres Strait, social justice was unarticulated by teachers and largely under-theorised by academics. However, in seeking a better deal for our students we were implicitly supporting rudimentary social justice probably in terms like "a fair go for all". Three key insights into social justice have been articulated by Kalantzis, Cope, Noble and Poynting (1990), Connell (1996) and Gewirtz (2001), and together these insights provide a template for analysing the substantial changes that have occurred.

In the late 1980s, Kalantzis et al. (1990, pp. 216-247) identified three phases of dealing with diversity after World War II and linked them to general changes occurring in education independent of dealing with increasing diversity. Initially, from 1940s-1960s, schooling was assimilationist/traditional with regard to cultural and linguistic incorporation, community participation, pedagogy, and assessment. I believe this phase continued to flourish in Torres Strait when I left in 1972. Assimilationist/traditional education slowly gave way during the 1970s and 1980s to both a culturally pluralist and progressive education. From the late 1980s, the movement was towards what Kalantzis et al. refer to as "equitably multiculturalist" and "post-progressive". I doubt that it developed as fully as they had anticipated in 1990 - many teachers still persist with traditionalist or cultural pluralist framings of their teaching.

To ignore these concurrent developments (culture-specific and general) is both simplistic and unhelpful. Besides, the criticisms sometimes aimed at the move towards pluralism (like lowering of standards via teacher made tests rather than public examinations and the rise of assessing processes rather than products) often derive from progressivism quite independent of dealing with diversity. Table 1 provides some key elements of the transitions from assimilationist/traditional through cultural pluralist/progressivist to equitable multiculturalism/post-progressivism.

Connell (1996) contributes to my construction of a social justice template by explaining that distributive social justice is supported during times of economic prosperity - to ensure improved conditions for the most disadvantaged it is merely then a matter of enlarging the

Table 1. Some key shifts since World War II dealing with diversity in schools (adapted from Kalantzis et al., 1990, pp. 237-247).

	Assimilationist/ traditional 1940s - 1960s	Cultural pluralist/ progressivist 1970s - 1980s	Equitable multiculturalist/ post-progressivist 1990s+
Linguistic & cultural incorporation	Minority culture subsumed by assimilation to dominant culture	Respect and service cultural difference; access to dominant culture which remains unchanged	Social fabric being transformed by cultural & linguistic diversity
	Minority languages and culture marginalised by neglect	Self esteem & cultural maintenance programs for cultural/linguistic minorities - tokenism on the margins of curriculum	Equitable access to Australian society through education
	Comprehensive, fixed & centralised curriculum	Diversified and choice-based on ethnic relevance	Reconstructed core curriculum to include LOTE & understanding cultures
	Welfare/charity for immigrant minorities	Ethnic specific servicing	Core culture & institutions transformed via multiculturalism
Community participation	Authoritarian relations with community	Community participation but differential ability to participate	Mutually educative dialogue between school and community
	Traditional structures of schooling and curriculum not negotiable	Hidden agenda of liberal-democratic society; populist conception of democratic participation	Negotiation between culture of schooling and community expectations
Pedagogy	Core subjects and overt streaming	Diversified curriculum and covert streaming	Core and diversified curriculum of equal status
	Authoritarian methodology	Pedagogy based on individual motivation	Authority in structure of task and mastery
	Product or content orientation	Process orientation	Process plus explicit product
	Fixed content-centred learning	Student-centred learning	Students actively inquire about socially powerful knowledge
	Centralised curriculum	School-based curriculum	Return of skills, rigour, structure with creativity
	Inflexible standards	Anything goes; relativism based on "needs", "relevance"	Linguistic/cognitive core; cultural literacy
	Failure of minority students through boredom and irrelevance	Failure through pseudo-democratic streaming and relativising socially powerful knowledge	Hard, core skills plus specialist areas of interest and knowledge
	Insensitivity to match of teaching/learning styles	Insensitivity to match of teaching/learning styles	Match/mismatch of teaching/ learning styles critical
Assessment	IQ and standardised tests blind to linguistic/cultural backgrounds	Critique of standardised testing - subjective, descriptive behaviour-based assessment	National assessment frameworks to finetune curriculum: quality control & to measure success with equal outcomes

cake to be distributed so all who need support get more (pp. 48-49). However, this generally accepted strategy was overturned in Australia when the economy began to decline and a "group of businessmen and economists who are rather ignorant of education - and did little to learn about it" intervened (Connell, 1996, p. 49). They established an "educational market" discourse: "education is a private [not a public] good, for which individuals should pay" (Connell, 1996, p. 49); and further, "commodification of education ... [and a concomitant] narrowing of the curriculum: an attack on school-based curricula [and] a rhetoric of 'back to the basics'" (Connell, 1996, p. 51). But for Connell, such "market 'reforms' in education do not tend towards social justice" (1996, p. 51) - markets have no conscience. He very briefly suggests an alternative, one that takes into account "quality of relationships, not just their statistical effects" (Connell, 1996, p. 52). This entails, for those who are least advantaged: recognition; dealing with oppression; and what he calls "curricular justice" (Connell, 1993). Connell explains, "This is not a modest agenda. It involves rethinking teaching methods, the organization of knowledge, and educational assessment from new points of view" (1996, p. 52), including the points of view of the least advantaged.

Gewirtz (2001) also argues for distributive justice and relational justice as key components of social justice. She elaborates on relational justice more completely than Connell in three ways. First, attitudes to difference can take four forms: "artefacts of oppression"; "manifestations of cultural superiority of the oppressed over the oppressor"; "variations which should be affirmed and valued", and combinations of these three. Because of these different attitudes to difference, we can avoid a wholesale and melded politics of difference and engage in one that is differentiated (Gewirtz, 2001, p. 62 citing Fraser, 1997). Second, she contends that relational justice includes freedom from the five faces of oppression: exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence (Gewirtz, 2001, pp. 61-62). Third, Gewirtz argues against communitarian mutuality, which is "neither possible nor desirable" because it is universalising and so can be "dangerous and oppressive" (Gewirtz, 2001, p. 56). Rather she builds a case for mutuality around attempting to "resolve the tension between solidarity and difference" by establishing Leonard's "discourse of interdependence" (Gewirtz, 2001, p. 57), which is very similar to mutually educative dialogue in Kalantzis et al.'s (1990) equitable multiculturalism/post-progressivism phase (see Table 1 - community participation theme).

From Kalantzis et al. (1990) come three important themes: (1) changes to the way diversity has been dealt with in education across four foci: linguistic and cultural incorporation, pedagogy, community involvement and assessment; (2) concurrent changes from traditional to progressive then to post-progressive teaching; and, (3) their notion of mutually educative dialogue as a crucial component of equitable multiculturalism. Connell (1996) explains the shift from distributive justice to education as a commodity driven by market forces, which he points out, lacks social justice. His resolution is to counter the market forces agenda, not relying solely on distributive justice but also fostering relational justice and curricular justice. He contends that this is a tall order. Indeed it needs to tackle each of the four foci used by Kalantzis et al. (1990). Gewirtz (2001, pp. 57-63), while also arguing for distributive justice, extends my reading of Connell's relational justice by spelling it out in more detail in terms of both freedom from oppressive relationships and a "differentiated politics of difference" (p. 62). She argues also for postmodern mutuality: a "discourse of interdependence" (p. 57), which at a local school level is similar to Kalantzis et al.'s (p. 242) unelaborated "mutually educative dialogue". These notions provide a template to analyse the 10 themes. The early themes emerge from my original perspective as a classroom teacher and the latter from my perspectives as a researcher and teacher educator.

From Rags to Riches in Print Knowledge about the People of Torres Strait

Practising teachers of the 1960s rarely read educational research or even other research about the way of life of their students or local/regional history. This was partly because of their busyness, partly because they had qualified as teachers and partly because of the then current assimilationist traditional discourses. Rarely did they feel the need to update their basic understandings of what they were doing as teachers in the social and cultural contexts in which they were practising. However, we soon discovered that our teaching methods were no longer working very well in Torres Strait and print knowledge about the people or the region was almost non-existent. Furthermore, students and parents often did not know or did not want to share information about their culture with their teachers. Nor were we permitted to travel to the outer islands to observe first hand the daily lives and physical/social contexts of these students, who frequently struggled more at school than those from Thursday Island itself. Even the Haddon (1904-1935) Reports were not available on Thursday Island and could not be purchased in 1968.

Since the 1960s there has been much written by academics about the people of Torres Strait. One of the first students of contemporary Torres Strait Islanders was anthropologist and political historian Beckett (1963, 1972, 1982, 1987). Laade (1969, 1970, 1973) wrote on language and ethnography in outer Torres Strait. Sharp (1980a, 1980b, 1984, 1993) placed historical events in cultural perspective. Fuary (1991a, 1991b, 1993) investigated the social significance of fishing as well as identity formation and cultural history on Yam Island and throughout Torres Strait. Kennedy and Kennedy (1986) wrote about ways of relating to people of the top Western Islands of Torres Strait, and

Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann (1980, 1981) examined the cultural significance of dying and tombstone openings in Torres Strait.

Moore (1979) documented everyday life and the beliefs of the Kuarareg people of the Prince of Wales Island group as experienced from 1844-1849 by Barbara Thompson a shipwreck survivor and told to one of her rescuers. A teacher with many years of teaching at Thursday Island State High School, Singe (1979), documented popular history. Another teacher from the same school, Mullins (1995), wrote a history of colonial occupation of Torres Strait during the late eighteenth century. Elizabeth Osborne collected oral histories of the women of Torres Strait during World War II (1990, 1993, 1995, 1997). Kehoe-Forutan (1988) chronicled the events in the move towards independence in Torres Strait.

Lawrie (1970, 1972) published traditional stories of some of the storytellers of Torres Strait. York (1990a, 1998) studied the music of Torres Strait and produced a book and tapes for use in schools (1990b). Traditional and contemporary art of Torres Strait was documented and illustrated by Wilson (1988, 1993). St Augustine's College, Cairns, published a Torres Strait history curriculum (1994), which was vetted by Torres Strait Islander leaders (see also Osborne & Carpenter, 1993).

Hence, much print knowledge is now available about the people of Torres Strait, their languages, their ways and beliefs. While none of the literature I have mentioned is written by Islanders, it gives teachers new to Torres Strait considerable insights into the social, linguistic, historical, political and cultural context in which they teach. Nakata, a Torres Strait Islander academic, argues that Western writings about the people of Torres Strait seem unrelated to his "lived realities" (Nakata, 2001, p. 332). Even so, teachers could use them as a starting point for a counter hegemonic curriculum (Connell, 1993; Weiler, 1988) by having students seek out contrary interpretations to throw as much light as possible on issues being investigated from the late 1980s - not to reach single truths, but to exemplify how knowledge is contested and constructed to serve various needs over others. Islanders' own writings about their experiences should also be used as resources (Gaffney, 1989; Lowah, 1988; Thaiday, 1981). Discussions about land rights, independence, health and religion can be informed by the work of Mabo (1982), B. Mills (1982), P. Mills (1989) and D. Passi (1987), respectively (see also Shnukal, 2002).

Nakata (2001) has a contrary view on writings about Torres Strait Islanders, particularly from "experts" in the Western canon (p. 332). However, while much of the writing does come from outsiders - Westerners - some is emerging from insiders themselves, as just mentioned. But the Western experts, according to Nakata (2001, p. 340), rarely wrote about Islanders being pushed to the margins, rather positioning them as "lack[ing] in terms of intellect, language, education, finance, social skills ... as students" (2001, p. 341). He found it "distasteful" that Torres Strait Islanders were "the object of research" (Nakata, 2001, p. 342). Without discounting his claims or marginalising the importance of Islanders' research I want to suggest another line of argument.

As already indicated, many professionals and administrators going into Torres Strait during the late 1960s and early 1970s were ignorant of the cultures, languages, histories or politics of Torres Strait and had little access to print knowledge about them. What is more, they were trained in their various fields within frameworks that did not acknowledge or respect Torres Strait Islanders' ways. Then, many people started to find out and write about these ways and, for all their weaknesses, these writings provide not only some understanding but also stimulus for such professionals and administrators to seek Torres Strait Islander perspectives on crucial issues - to check the credibility of what has been written by outsider "experts". Nakata rightly highlights the inadequacies of the frameworks within which many of us operated, but as we grew in understanding over decades, at least some of us discarded frameworks that failed to help us understand the complex tasks we confronted (A. B. Osborne, 2001a, pp. 8-43). So, discussion turns to writings on education in Torres Strait.

Print Knowledge about Education in Torres Strait

Some of this writing is historical. Langbridge (1977) described early missionary teaching in Torres Strait until 1905 and Williamson (1994) extended this history of schooling in the region to 1941. A. B. Osborne (1993) extended it into the early 1990s.

In the early 1970s, Orr and Williamson (1973) were the first to research what was happening in schools and suggest improvements. They interviewed 74 people including principals, teachers, community teachers and parents on Thursday Island, Badu, Yorke and Murray. Their analysis, which they saw as "seem[ing] harsh", stressed "those who have worked among indigenous peoples of this country ... do so with grossly inadequate resources" (p. 2). They challenged the existing primary teaching system (pp. 5-8); curriculum (pp. 8-14); absence of bilingual education (pp. 16-24); secondary schooling (pp. 26-45); teacher preparation; the staffing of schools by both Torres Strait Islander and non-Islander teachers (pp. 46-57); and, the control of schooling (pp. 58-63). Their recommendations, framed as nine sets of optional "policies", were ahead of the times, particularly given that state education remained very assimilationist/traditionalist in Kalantzis et al.'s (1990) terms. Subsequently, many of the policy options were incorporated into Torres Strait Islander Regional Education Committee policies and indeed ultimately found their way into state policies and practices, as I will show later.

My first research in Torres Strait, conducted at Bamaga and Thursday Island (A. B. Osborne, 1982), examined the perceptual styles of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students using a quantitative measure from

cross-cultural psychology. I soon rejected this line of research because the presumed link between perceptual styles and learning styles had been poorly established and could not deal with the politics of schooling or classrooms, which increasingly concerned me. I then switched to ethnography - trying to establish insider meanings of schooling and classrooms (A. B. Osborne, 1987). Williamson (1974, 1975, 1987) investigated Islander students and teaching in the outer islands. Castley and Osborne (1988) investigated community expectations of a principal on Saibai. McDonald (1988) described how some Torres Strait Islander students were succeeding against the odds in tertiary education. Hence, there is considerable print knowledge about teaching in Torres Strait and teaching Torres Strait Islanders.

The Growth of Torres Strait Islander Voice in Educational Research

Concurrent with the Western examination of the education of Torres Strait Islanders, some Islanders were beginning to have their say. While some of their early voices were presented as interviews with academics (Loos & Weightman, 1989; Lui, 1974; McDonald & AITEP Students, 1989) others went beyond this role. For example, Mills, Passi and Woosup (summarised in Torres Strait Islander Regional Education Committee, 1985, pp. 3-8) presented an important paper at an Indigenous education conference in Goulbourn in 1983. Foster co-wrote a chapter with Miller (Miller & Foster, 1989) analysing the educational needs of Torres Strait Islanders. Foster (2003) wrote a Master's dissertation and one chapter of G. Passi's (1986) Master of Arts is on traditional learning and transmission of knowledge. Nakata (1991, 1993) became the first Torres Strait Islander to obtain a PhD in education (1997). Prior to this, the Torres Strait Islander Regional Education Committee employed Nakata to report on education and schooling practice in the region (Nakata, 1994). His report focused on "educational attainment of Islander students" (Nakata, 1994, p. 19); "parent/community involvement in educational processes" (pp. 19-20); and "decision-making process for service delivery and funding" (pp. 20-21). The latter was to be based on community control using Aboriginal Educational Program (AEP) funding. Hence, there are now many sources of writing by Torres Strait Islanders about Torres Strait education. Some reflect on personal experiences. Others critique frameworks, spell out needs and recommend policies and this now leads me to an examination of the provision of education in Torres Strait.

Educational Governance, Facilities and Staffing in Torres Strait

Even before World War II, Torres Strait Islanders "had been keen to accept education to protect their economic interests ... [and to assist] Islander councillors to fulfil their council roles properly" (A. B. Osborne, 1993, p. 228). Nakata (2001, pp. 334-335) recalls his great grandfather's commitment to education in Torres Strait - indeed, he had paid personally for the school building, which opened in 1904 on Naghir. In 1975, Torres Strait Islander leaders, George Mye and the late Ted Loban, publicly proposed that:

> The Queensland Government consider transferring schools in the Torres Strait Islands from the administration of the Department of Aboriginal and Island Affairs to the Queensland Department of Education as quickly as possible. We would wish that those Islanders already employed in the schools in Torres Strait Islands be retained at the schools and receive an appropriate salary (Torres Strait Islander Regional Education Committee, 1985, p. 1).

I have already indicated that outer island education had been under the control of the Department of Native Affairs and its successors the Department of Aboriginal and Island Affairs and the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Advancement. Before Mye and Loban, Orr and Williamson (1973, p. 60) had suggested it should be taken over by an authority that understood education, i.e., by either the Queensland Department of Education (Policy 10.2) or by the Commonwealth Department of Education (Policy 10.3).

In 1984/1985, the Torres Strait Islander Regional Education Committee ran a series of workshops with teachers, community teachers, community members and elders to advise the Queensland Department of Education on directions for schooling in Torres Strait and the Northern Peninsula Area (Torres Strait Islander Regional Education Committee, 1985). Their policy was comprehensive (covering aims, staffing, information distribution, teacher training, accommodation and transport, allowances, technical and further education, and the Torres Strait Islander Regional Education Committee itself) and gave Torres Strait Islanders a formal voice where there had been none. Although the policy only gave advice, it influenced the push towards "proper education" on the outer islands. In 1985/1986, the Queensland Department of Education, partly funded by the federal government, took control of education in outer Torres Strait and appointed fully qualified principals to all schools (A. B. Osborne, 1989a, 1989b). Staff salaries increased immediately and a phased rebuilding of schools began. A process of upgrading the qualifications of community teachers, also requested by Torres Strait Islander Regional Education Committee (1985), began via James Cook University's Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP). Although Torres Strait Islander Regional Education Committee representatives did not educate local communities as much as they should have and although its policy had little direct impact on incoming principals or teachers,

community voice and power grew as their recommendations were implemented (A. B. Osborne, 1989b, pp. 3-6). They also commissioned reports into education and language teaching (Corden, 1997; Nakata, 1994). Subsequently, the Torres Strait Islander Regional Education Committee became a signatory to the Torres Strait Regional Authority's agreement with stakeholders on education across Torres Strait.

Torres Strait Islanders' reaction to takeover, as I found on two islands in 1986 about 16 months after the event (A. B. Osborne, 1989a), was generally very positive. "A lot better", "much better", "it is a good thing", "there is really strong support for takeover" and "kids are doing better" were common responses (A. B. Osborne, 1989a, p. 8) and related not only to physical plant and resources (p. 8), but also to curriculum (p. 9), and language and culture (p. 12). What is more, most wanted White principals to stay longer than one or two years (A. B. Osborne, 1989a, pp. 19-20). There were a few dissenting voices: one man wanted to see if takeover led to longer term effects (particularly in post-school employment) - "it's only a short time yet" (p. 8) and another was "still waiting for the products - language, black people's pictures in books ... better curriculum" as well as wanting "the schools ... run by fully qualified Islander teachers and Islander principals" (A. B. Osborne, 1989a, p. 8). One of these men thought two years for one White principal was "probably plenty. There might be someone better to come" (A. B. Osborne, 1989a, p. 20). Nevertheless, substantial change was underway and it was received very favourably overall. Subsequent upgrading of community teachers to full qualifications and informed staffing policies/practices soon followed.

Some years later, Nakata (1994) recommended direct AEP funding and that Torres Strait Islanders "manage the disbursement of funds themselves ... [and] set and control future directions for Torres Strait education themselves" (p. ii). By then there was an Education Queensland District Office in Torres Strait, but it was not until 2002 that a Torres Strait Islander was appointed District Director, the seventh (full-time or acting) since 1994. However, the management of funds and control of future directions today is not in the hands of Torres Strait Islanders themselves.

Teaching in Torres Strait Classrooms

Discussion now turns to the classroom where face-to-face interactions had, I believed as a classroom teacher, thwarted many of our efforts to teach our students well. In 1986 (A. B. Osborne, 1986) I described some learning and communication styles as reported to me by ex-students, teachers and community teachers. Working within a match/mismatch framework, the intent was for ill-equipped teachers to attempt to teach in ways congruent with students' preferred ways of learning. Subsequent research (A. B. Osborne, 1988; Osborne & Coombs, 1987) found that seven teachers new to Thursday Island State High School indeed had very little or no preparation to teach Torres Strait Islanders, despite Orr and Williamson's Policy (1973) 9.1 in favour of "secondary school staffing be[coming] a matter for special selection, orientation and remuneration".

A series of papers identified ways that Torres Strait Islander school community teachers interacted with their students on the outer islands as potential models for Western teachers (Osborne & Bamford, 1987; Osborne & Francis, 1987; Osborne & Sellars, 1987). We found that Torres Strait Islander community teachers commonly provided subtle nonverbal cues, played down individualistic competition, and often avoided spotlighting children for behaviour or achievement.

Almost 10 years later I compared the findings of these studies with ethnographies of teaching Native American students in remote parts of the United States and Canada (A. B. Osborne, 1991a) and trialled the resultant "signposts" to "culturally responsive teaching" (A. B. Osborne, 1996) for a semester as a volunteer Year 8 geography teacher on Thursday Island (A. B. Osborne, 1991b, 2001b). My new skills and ways of relating to the students seemed to work well and students' test results improved substantially throughout semester.

The subsequent refinement of culturally relevant teaching involved nine signposts to achieve both academic performance and respect for ethnic origins. These included awareness of the socio-cultural history of the communities that is beyond the classroom (A. B. Osborne, 2001a, pp. 71-82), and building curriculum from the lived experiences of the students (pp. 83-94). The latter, originally proposed by Orr and Williamson (1973), seemed entirely logical and was recommended by educational psychologists well before the 1960s. It had been difficult to achieve locally in the 1960s for reasons already provided but much of its success required awareness of the socio-cultural history. For example, when I went back as a volunteer teacher for a semester in 1990, there were good Year 8 geography materials built around the local area. Nevertheless, when passive resistance was investigated in a Year 10 Study of Society class using case studies of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, the Torres Strait Island maritime strike of 1936 was ignored. To tap into local knowledge, students could have talked with elderly relatives and their parents about their understandings of that local event.

Other signposts are dealt with elsewhere (A. B. Osborne, 2001a, pp. 51-139, pp. 169-203), but several of Nakata's (2001) criticisms are germane to the current topic. For one thing he sees "liberal culture [as] simplistic" and I agree. Many of us necessarily went down the liberal culture path and cultural pluralism of the 1970s and 1980s (Kalantzis et al., 1990) to break away from assimilationist approaches to diversity and eventually found it wanting, hence the need for the signpost dealing with the socio-cultural history. This builds in the political and the notion of social access.

Nakata "often wondered why dominant groups couldn't understand my position by reflecting on their own actions" (2001, pp. 331-332). I believe that this real dilemma is a function of politics - the vast majority of teachers come from the oppressor group and Friere (1972) points out that the best way to understand oppression is via the oppressed. As teachers, even though we may see our role as neutral, objective and apolitical, we belong to a political system that pushed and pushes Torres Strait Islanders to the margins. We still carry that history. Often we lack awareness of our subjectivities - classed, gendered and raced values and beliefs (Weiler, 1988) - that leads to patronising interactions with our students (Gibson, 1998). The absence of such patronising was greatly appreciated by Nakata (2001, p. 340) when a university lecturer opened doors for him to enter research training. This move from the margins to centre avoids oppression and works to incorporate Gewirtz's relational justice referred to earlier in this paper (2001).

Two further criticisms by Nakata are important. He was taken aback by "hostility [towards his] comments about the cultural agenda in Australia ... [being] a regulatory device for disciplining the Islander" (2001, p. 345). Perhaps, because he sees his position as "political" he should have expected some backlash. Even so, his point about the uses to which culture can be put by educators unwilling to change the system in substantive ways and to use culture as a mere add-on to curriculum or to maintain control over Islanders is inappropriate - it is not displaying relational justice. Nevertheless, to fail to embrace cultural diversity appropriately is to return to what I see as the wholly unacceptable practices of assimilation - pushing Islanders even further to the margins. The solution suggested by Kalantzis et al. (1990) of equitable multiculturalism seems preferable and locally compatible with Gewirtz's (2001, p. 62) "differentiated politics of differences". Nakata's final critique is that "every body wants to change things for the better but nobody seems to want to spend the time" (2001, p. 346) properly analysing the constricting and repressive frameworks from within which they and the system operate. I agree, and current commodification of and technological approaches to education exacerbate the dilemma.

Language and Curriculum in Torres Strait Education

Key aspects of a "differentiated politics of difference" involve both curriculum and language. Nakata saw his 1960s/70s schooling thus:

> [We had an] unmodified state curriculum, taught by teachers who had no special preparation, who probably didn't know we existed until they found out they had a transfer to the region. There was no recognition that English was not our language. I think that in those days Torres Strait Creole was not considered to be a language. It was known simply as "bad English" (2001, p. 335).

Things have changed considerably and I will now address the important issues of language and curriculum in Torres Strait Education.

Language

Kennedy (1981, 1984, 1985a, 1985b, 1985c) as well as several Torres Strait Islanders (Babia, 1997a, 1997b; Bani, 1976, 1979, 1981, 1987; Bani & Klokeid, 1976; Ober, 1985; Passi & Piper, 1994) have studied the languages of Torres Strait extensively. Shnukal (1983a, 1983b, 1984a, 1984b, 1985a, 1985b, 1988, 1993, 1996) has studied Torres Strait Creole (Yumplatok) in great detail. In the last of these articles (Shnukal, 1996) she describes the implementation of English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching strategies at Thursday Island State High School. Kale (1987, 1995) and Turner (1997) have also examined issues of language in education for Torres Strait Islanders.

For primary schools, Murray (1988) coordinated the writing and implementation of the *Torres Strait English program*. The high school has had ESL teachers since the mid-1980s. There were simultaneous attempts to spread this expertise across teachers in all subject areas. Originally these ESL teachers were trained as migrant ESL teachers (A. B. Osborne, 1986) but migrant student needs, motivations, and contexts differ greatly from those of Torres Strait Islanders (Nakata, 1999; Osborne & Dawes, 1992) who can already communicate readily with a wide array of English speakers via Torres Strait Creole.

Curriculum

From the mid-1980s, the now defunct Far Northern Schools Development Unit, run by the Queensland Department of Education, set about writing a variety of curricula specifically for children and teachers in the outer island schools. They focused on English, Mathematics, and Science, Culture and Environmental Education, developing teaching materials and units of work, as well as providing in-service support for (unqualified) community teachers. The latter had been highlighted by Orr and Williamson (1973).

Preparing Teachers to Teach in Torres Strait

One of many Torres Strait Islander concerns identified by Nakata is:

> The practice of employing teachers who have had no exposure to Islander societies, systems, cultures and languages and allowing them to take charge of classrooms in the Torres Strait region, is viewed by the communities as unacceptable and needs to be ended right away (Nakata, 1994, p. 5).

The following discussion describes aspects of the teacher preparation programs I know personally.

Although other institutions run special programs for Indigenous students and deal with how to teach Indigenous students, I have not investigated the nature or extent of either.

Torres Strait Islander teachers

As part of national concerns to increase the number of Indigenous teachers in Australia, the Townsville College of Advanced Education began a program in 1977 for Indigenous students who had not achieved normal entry. It was known as the Aboriginal and Islander Teacher Education Program (AITEP) (Loos & Miller, 1989) and recruited many Torres Strait Islander students who subsequently graduated and are still heavily involved in education, some in Torres Strait. After amalgamation with James Cook University in 1983, AITEP continued until 1989 when it was phased out.

In 1990, in response to Torres Strait Islander Regional Education Committee and Queensland Department of Education suggestions it was decided to offer off-campus teacher education to diploma and later to degree level. This was the Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP), initially for community teachers on three Torres Strait islands, then others and then expanded to a range of Aboriginal communities. RATEP replaced AITEP and 93 Indigenous teachers had graduated by the end of 2002.

Non-Islander teachers

Since the early 1980s, the Bachelor of Education program at James Cook University has had a core subject dealing with teaching in culturally diverse, including Indigenous, settings. In addition, one of the RATEP subjects ("Education in Torres Strait") was included as an elective in the mainstream Bachelor of Education to assist student teachers to learn about teaching in that region. It has been running for many years now and, while popular, very few of its students have gone to teach in Torres Strait, partly because recruitment teams rarely ask students if they want to teach in Torres Strait. Education Queensland paid qualified teachers in batches of 10-15 between 1978 and 1989 to undertake a full-time, one-year Graduate Diploma in Aboriginal and Islander Education (GDAIE), initially at the Townsville College of Advanced Education, then James Cook University after amalgamation. It folded because Education Queensland reallocated GDAIE salaries to the community teachers (and their tutors) in RATEP. In 1999, a subject designed and created by ESL experts in Education Queensland called "Teaching English as a Second Language to Indigenous Students" was included in RATEP. In 2000, this subject became an elective in the mainstream Bachelor of Education and currently attracts more than 70 students. As well as these strategies to improve formal qualifications, there are now a variety of supports for teachers.

Supporting Teachers in Torres Strait

The Indigenous Education Training Alliance (IETA) was formed in Cairns in 2001 to provide state-wide support for teachers of Indigenous students (Taylor, 2002). IETA runs an orientation program as part of its Remote Area Incentive Scheme for teachers appointed to remote Indigenous schools including those in Torres Strait. This replaced Jumbunna, an induction to teaching in remote Indigenous communities, which had run since the early 1980s.

IETA has adapted the National Language and Literacy Institute of Australia (NLLIA) bandscales for migrants so they meet the needs of Indigenous students. It has also run ESL literacy workshops for 5,000 teachers state-wide and encourages networking between them. Some 260 teachers in Torres Strait have taken part in these workshops. According to other IETA staff (Ketchell, personal communication, 28 August, 2003), it has helped "heaps" in terms of "confidence, skills, and knowledge". These successes have been driven by teacher networking and the 30 RATEP students who are upgrading their Diplomas of Teaching into Bachelor of Education degrees. Shopen and Hickey (2003) also report on the content and effects on practising teachers, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, attending a series of workshops sponsored by IETA. The teachers learn to articulate grammar in context to improve literacy in English for Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal students.

School-Community Relationships

Discussion now moves beyond classroom teaching and teachers to examine issues of the relationships between school and community, critical in terms of the socio-political history of Torres Strait and of relational justice. In 2002, I investigated two of the 10 Torres Strait Island state schools' implementation of the IDEAS project. IDEAS is an acronym for: initiating, discovering, envisioning, actioning and sustaining. It uses a highly disciplined approach to whole-school revitalisation involving creating a vision and putting it into place with school staff and community support. During the first 18 months teams from co-sponsors the University of Southern Queensland and Education Queensland provided back-up support and then it became self-supporting.

The two schools investigated were at different stages with IDEAS. One had been involved for over 12 months and the other was only just beginning the process. The former had established its vision with all school staff, parents, P & C and the community council. It focused on improved student outcomes, which have long been a concern of Torres Strait Islanders, while stressing *gud pasin*, doing things in traditional ways that respect and care for others. Furthermore its school-wide pedagogy, brainstormed by teachers and teacher aides using their new vision, was in place. It was to be vetted against current research-based best practice. Then the teachers, teacher aides and principal would action it in the school

and community, building a "cohesive community" - all pulling together towards the vision. Administrators established various supports for the school-wide pedagogy - funding for in-service to support teachers learning new practices, budgeting for resources to implement school-wide pedagogy, making planning templates available on the school server to assist teachers to plan in line with the school-wide pedagogy, and devising reporting systems congruent with it. Since then both school settings have changed substantially. I found that some of the assumptions policy makers make may not relate well to specific sites; that developing school and community linkages is difficult and can easily become paralysed; that history is important for teachers and principals today; and the World's Indigenous Peoples Conference - Education (1993) motto "Listen Learn Understand Teach" - is critical to building linkages.

Education Queensland (1999, p. 13) opened the door for teachers to pull together with its notion that "schools must differentiate" to be responsive to community needs and expectations. Teachers can work together towards a differentiated form of schooling, towards a school's own vision. Those who do not subscribe to the vision might transfer to another school, which reflects their subjectivities. This differentiation seems to be very energising for staff and encourages sustainability of the innovation. The IDEAS project is committed to "sustainability" and this is very important in Torres Strait where staff often stay only a short time - minimising time to "Listen Learn Understand" (Osborne & Tait, 1998) local cultural ways and history. This in and of itself makes school-community partnerships and sustained teaching approaches very difficult to achieve.

Two aspects of sustainability are capacity building, via in-service support for teachers, teacher aides and community members, and "community cohesion". Capacity building is most appropriate, but cohesive community is probably a misnomer. What the IDEAS project wants is ownership by key community people (and most school personnel) of the vision and school-wide pedagogy. But "cohesive" implies more. A community is rarely cohesive; there are frictions, pledges of support unfulfilled, personal histories of disagreements, and channels of communication difficulties. Some communities suffer from Noel Pearson's (2002) "social inadaption" in that they are unable to envisage their futures. If a community struggles to envisage its future, it may have difficulty supporting the school's vision for students.

In the first school there was alignment, capacity building and a concerted attempt to build community linkages with some success. Student outcomes began to improve. However, the pace of change had been rapid and a school-based incident unrelated to IDEAS began to undo much of the progress. Community support faltered. The project got back on track when the history of White paternalism was explained to a principal who did not know of it. Accordingly, greater attention was paid to Islander voices; the pace of change slowed and implementing the IDEAS vision now has a real chance. But there was plenty of suffering and soul searching by many along the way. The second school was struggling with internal leadership on a variety of fronts and although the community council had begun to make many improvements to the community's physical environment there was little unity or even thinking about the way forward. So IDEAS was only just beginning and had a very challenging road ahead if it were to succeed.

Other Recent Initiatives

IDEAS is not the only recent initiative in Torres Strait. I now discuss a few of them.

Thursday Island State High School

I asked the principal at Thursday Island State High School, Tony Considine (personal communication, 18 August, 2003) what were the major successes and challenges at the school now. He identified the major successes as improved retention rates to Year 12, from 41% three years ago to 80.5%, which puts it above the state average. Simultaneously, the new intake has grown from 60 to 90 (and would have been higher had more student accommodation been available). Three years ago only two of the Year 12 students were OP eligible; last year there were 13 students who made direct entry to tertiary education. Each of these improvements had its origins years before. Not only had the Torres Strait Islander Regional Education Committee pushed for improvements in staffing and standards, but also the community stressed improved language outcomes. Further, teachers with special skills and commitments had stayed on and worked to refine and sustain those programs that produced positive outcomes, which then became self-perpetuating.

However, it is not only students' academic success that is improving. The school is now forging ahead in vocational training: it is registered in 10 industry areas. It has 10 school-based apprenticeships and graduated 10 coxswains at Certificate 2 level last year. The Year 11 students do work experience with a wide variety of employers in Cairns with some being selected for subsequent full-time employment, thus breaking the nexus of potential employers stereotyping Torres Strait Islanders as a homogenous cohort. There are now seven Torres Strait Islander teachers on staff; most of them are graduates of RATEP. The school is undergoing a continual face-lift, with support from Thursday Island Council, to make the school "green and appealing". In 2001, the school won an award from *The Australian* for its programs (see also Pryor, 2001). In 2002, it won both a highly commended in the National Literacy Awards and a Premier's Award for Excellence in the Public Service - the only school to achieve such an award in 2002.

Even though Thursday Island State High School students are improving in English literacy, this remains a

major challenge. The principal would prefer to see a higher English literacy level among the students entering the school. Students are tested against NLLIA bandscales and placed in classes according to their level of competency. Within the middle school with its "Key Learning Area" structure, students stay with one teacher for English, Mathematics, Science and Study of Society and the Environment. Fifty percent are placed with Torres Strait Islander teachers, in smaller classes, and each of the subjects is taught from a literacy perspective.

Badu Island State School - Cultural Liaison Elder

Besides these developments, important initiatives have been implemented in outer island schools. Stephen Foster, a Torres Strait Islander graduate of James Cook University's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Program, was appointed principal at Badu Island State School in 1993. As part his Master of Education work, he reflected, with considerable evidence, on several aspects of what has happened at this school and in its community.

Torres Strait Islander Regional Education Committee's (1992) policy recommended close links between school and community. Education Queensland's (1999) *Partners for success* also argues strongly for such links or "compacts" and Badu Island State School has been quite successful in this regard. Foster sees it as largely resulting from the elder employed at the school. This elder, 81 year-old Mr Walter Nona, was President of the P & C for 30 years and a stalwart of the Torres Strait Islander Regional Education Committee since its inception. He is a respected elder in the community involved in education over a long time. In the school, Mr Nona has the title "Athe" (grandfather). He is employed for 20 hours per fortnight but often spends more time than that at the school (Foster, 2003). He is fluent in English, Yumplatok (Torres Strait Creole) and his natal language Kala Lagaw Ya. Athe Nona has helped to build strong links with the community and assisted incoming staff to interact effectively with students and parents. He has also helped with improved student attendance, behaviour management and subsequent improved academic outcomes, and he has raised parent concerns with teachers and vice versa.

Badu Island State School - Staffing and community relationships

Torres Strait Islander Regional Education Committee (1992) policies had sought, among others, three things of teachers of children in Torres Strait: "proper education, this means that it must be of the same standard that students in mainstream receive" (p. 1) and that "teachers be acquainted with, familiar with and able to understand the cultures and languages of Torres Strait Islanders; and preferably these would be Torres Strait Islanders, but there is a place for non-Islander teachers" (p. 4). Ambiguity exists about the latter, because "preferably Torres Strait Islanders" leaves little space for non-Islanders. Clearly Torres Strait Islanders are likely to have better knowledge than non-Islanders of the cultures and languages of Torres Strait, but the Torres Strait Islander Regional Education Committee has always wanted qualified teachers of a high standard. The Torres Strait Islander Regional Education Committee also wanted to see community teachers receive upgrading, teach to the highest standards, and receive a proper income (1992, pp. 8-9).

In 1993, Badu had 10 teachers - six fully qualified, two community teachers (not fully qualified) and two assistant teachers (unqualified). A non-Islander teacher and five recent RATEP graduates comprised the fully qualified staff. The Islander principal, Stephen Foster, was concerned that the Torres Strait Islanders and their students "were regularly speaking Torres Strait Creole or Kala Lagaw Ya in the classrooms and so Standard Australian English was not being as frequently modelled as it could have been" (Foster, 2003). By 1995, standardised tests were showing little literacy improvement from year to year. The community was concerned and they wanted better role modelling of English: all Year 2 students had been "caught in the net" that year, i.e., their English literacy skills were below standard. At the end of that year, there were three vacancies to fill and each happened to be filled by non-Islanders - the school would have accepted qualified "teachers from any racial background as long as their first language had been English" (Foster, 2003). So the community saw a response to their concerns - four teachers had English as their first language while more than half the teaching staff were Torres Strait Islanders. In 1998, another mainland teacher was appointed because "both the community and the school considered the trial of the three teachers successful" (Foster, 2003).

In 1999, as part of a consultant-led community workshop, parents listed these priorities:

> Preserve traditional culture; [initiate a] gifted and talented program; [teach] mother tongue ... at school; [have] qualified mainstream [fluent users of English] teachers in every class and [appoint] a Health and Physical Education teacher; create a Middle School with qualified High School teachers; [provide] more opportunities for parents to attend workshops and discussion groups; keep a strong focus on technology; and use role models (Foster, 2003).

Accordingly, a Health and Physical Education teacher was appointed and a full-time qualified Torres Strait Islander teacher with cultural expertise offered culture and language classes to all students. The school also appointed extra mainstream teachers, raising their numbers from four in 1998 to seven in 2000, when there were also seven Torres Strait Islanders and one Papuan

teacher. Although there was no Middle School, a Year 8 transition class commenced. Additional teacher accommodation was built in 2001 and the number of mainstream teachers rose to 10 (Foster, 2003).

The total Torres Strait Islander staff complement has risen to 26. Apart from the principal, three teachers and 12 teacher aides, there were three cleaners, two administration officers, two grounds workers, and three tuckshop operators. Increased staffing was funded as a result of partnerships developed locally with the Badu Island Community Council, which is proactive with its Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) funds, and regionally with the Department of Education, Science and Employment. In 1993, Badu had a population of about 800 with approximately 40 full-time positions and Torres Strait Islanders held 80% of these. Now the population is about 1000, with 430 in the employable age range of 17-60. Of these, 242 (56.3%) are on CDEP, whereas in 1993 it was 75%. This growth in local employment, across education, administration, construction, health and private business, provides a good role model for the children, quite apart from the positive impacts on the local economy. The Baduans are breaking out, not only from welfare dependency but also from the poverty that is CDEP in its weak form (working a few days per fortnight for the dole).

Since 1993 the council has built 133 houses. It now wins contracts to build houses, including teacher accommodation. This ensures that salaries stay on the island rather than disappear with southern crews as they take leave or finish their projects (Foster, 2003). Hence, local economics and politics are being used to build reasons for children to work hard at school, quality teaching is improving outcomes and poverty is being tackled, in part by the employment created at the school. Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go to eradicate poverty. The school is responsive to community input - educators now listen rather than marginalise.

Mabiuag Island State School - "Drama into Literacy": Diabetes and multiliteracies

In 2001, I went to Mabuiag Island State School to evaluate a "Drama into Literacy" project. The principal, Tom Tyndall, who has substantial experience in Torres Strait and Northern Territory schools, wanted to use "new" technologies to encourage frequently shy (in English) speakers to speak up. He also wanted to base the unit on a local issue of relevance. He and the teachers opted for diabetes as the topic and to have the Years 5-7 students involved in two major tasks.

The first was to design and create a radio commercial. This was to be recorded on quality audio-recording equipment with which the students had no prior experience. Nor had they submitted material for the local radio (Torres Strait Island Media Association) before, although some schools send greetings and record traditional songs for broadcast. The second was to create a drama collage about diabetes to be performed in front of parents. The Mabuiag students were joined by their peers from nearby Saibai and produced the radio commercials and drama collages within three days, working on nothing else from about 8:30am until about 4pm, with normal recess and lunch breaks. There were three groups of about seven each working with a teacher and a teacher aide. All three of the radio commercials were excellent and one of them was analysed in Osborne and Wilson (2003). We chose it because we happened to get access to a final draft of only one group's commercial (there was no requirement to write anything, but the students all found writing a good way to rehearse and coordinate what to say, chant or sing). Our analysis discusses critical issues like the use of English/ Yumplatok, spelling, brilliant incorporation of popular culture and skilful but intuitive use of the "Four Resources" model (Freebody & Luke, 1990).

Conclusion

Looking back on nearly 40 years of Torres Strait Islander education, I consider that there have been some substantive gains. The expansion into first secondary then tertiary education has done much to respond to the call of leaders during World War II for full university education and qualified professionals, although the training of more Torres Strait Islander doctors is required. The recent successes of Year 12 students at Thursday Island State High School have further opened up such possibilities. The takeover of outer island education by Education Queensland has done much to improve primary education standards, although more needs to be done here too. The upgrading of the qualifications from community teachers to fully qualified teachers is also a positive step, not only in terms of teaching standards - which probably still need improvement in a few cases - but also in providing improved salaries. The increased staffing of outer island schools also tackles community poverty in a small way. The increased number of school-based workers expands the positive role models for children and adolescents of people working for a salary. The physical upgrading of the school buildings, teacher accommodation and council-based building programs also improve the physical appearance and sense of a future to counter what I called earlier "poverty and sense of hopelessness".

I think we have moved beyond Kalantzis et al.'s (1990) assimilationist/traditional form of education and are moving towards equitable multiculturalism with inclusivity of culture, history and struggle alongside social access via high academic achievement. Academics are certainly conceptualising the importance of this inclusivity and academic performance. However, I suspect that there is a slippage between educational research into best practice and what is happening in classrooms. Some teachers and some schools are making major gains. Others are lagging behind. And some of the

blame for this originates in teacher education programs which do not differentiate the specific, remote Indigenous (and urban multicultural) contexts in which future graduates are likely to teach (A. B. Osborne, 2001b). What is more, some schools are well advanced in building strong links and even "compacts" with their Torres Strait Islander communities, while others are still wanting in this respect. Furthermore, some remote schools in Torres Strait are embracing recent initiatives found elsewhere in Queensland (including multiliteracies, New Basics, preparatory year of schooling, middle schooling and multiple pathways) and adapting them to their contexts.

Hence, there are expanding spirals of improvement in education and in research about education in Torres Strait. Moreover, Torres Strait Islanders are speaking loudly on their own behalf and they are being heeded – this "coming to voice" is fundamental to Connell's (1996) and Gewirtz's (2001) notions of "relational justice". There are some aspects of going around in circles though: lack of special preparation for pre-service teachers (including skilling in ESL, culturally relevant pedagogy, mutually educative dialogue, maximising and valuing the strengths of Torres Strait Islander staff, and the regional history of race relations in particular), transferring teachers and principals, curriculum (including, IDEAS, Productive Pedagogies or counter hegemony as a basis for Connell's (1993) curricular justice) and school-community links could all be foci of further attention. The more these modifications are met, the greater the chances of relational justice. However, I believe that from a very rudimentary start and a hopelessly inadequate base 40 years ago, impressive gains are being made, frequently in ways suggested by Orr and Williamson (1973), even if the delivery of education is not yet in Torres Strait Islanders' own hands (Nakata, 1994).

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About the author

After three years teaching in rural South Australia, Barry Osborne sailed by catamaran to Torres Strait during 1967 (the year of the referendum which gave the federal government responsibility for Indigenous affairs throughout Australia). He taught on Thursday Island from 1968 until 1972 and at Townsville State High School for the next three years before starting an academic career at Townsville College of Advanced Education and James Cook University. His PhD was on the teaching of Zuni students by both Zuni and Anglo teachers in New Mexico. From then nearly all his research has been conducted into the teaching of Torres Strait Islanders who face many of the same challenges that marginalised groups in Western countries face in their struggle for quality education. From his research in Torres Strait (where he trialed his emerging notions of good teaching as a volunteer in 1990) and others' research into teaching similarly marginalised groups in North America he published *Teaching, diversity and democracy* in 2001. His current research interests are teaching effectively in culturally diverse settings, school reform and e-learning/teaching with preservice teachers.