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Section A: Schools

The Injinoo Home Language Program: A Positive Community Response to Marginalisation and Institutional Racism

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Teaching in and of itself is a difficult task fraught with obstacles to classroom success. For those who teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students these obstacles are compounded by a political atmosphere that colours every decision made within the school and indeed within education departments.

As classroom teachers it is easy to say that politics has nothing to do with teaching and pretend that it is not an issue. As convenient as this attitude may be, it is denying the facts. Indeed all teachers involved in Indigenous education must accept that their role is political. They must see that part of their task is to overcome years of institutional policy and attitude that have contributed significantly to poor educational performances for Indigenous students in Australia.

In a small Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the extreme north of Cape York, a program is being trialed which is one community's response to departmental failure to service its educational needs.

The story so far ...

In April 1995, the Injinoo school began a trial bilingual program; teaching literacy and making the transition to school through the use of Torres Strait Creole, the Home Language of the community. The Injinoo Home Language Program was a community initiative, which evolved as a result of School/Departmental/Community liaison.

This was actually the second step in the process of Injinoo gaining access to better education for their children; in 1994 the school was opened in the community after being closed for over twenty years. The community themselves campaigned and funded this step as recognition that their children were not succeeding in the school provided in the nearby community of Bamaga.

The Injinoo community was the original Aboriginal 'mission' at the tip of Cape York. Through years of government intervention and management four other communities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People were established in the area as part of a government decision to centralise management of Aborigines. Injinoo has been the loser in this centralisation, losing most services to the centre nominated by the government — the Torres Strait Island community of Bamaga. This is a classic example of disempowerment and marginalisation at the hands of government. However, the community is now taking advantage of current government policies of self-determination and turning the tide in their favour.

Over the years the community has retained its Aboriginal identity but through settlement and marriage a large number of Torres Strait Islanders have also become accepted community members; consequently the community identifies with both minority groups and the challenges facing them.

As a teacher with a philosophical commitment to bilingual education for children in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities, I gave my support to the bilingual education initiative and was nominated to teach the trial class.

Much has been written and said about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children not succeeding within the school system. An entire discourse has evolved with which to discuss the issue. It is important that this discourse be analysed in relation to the Injinoo school community with attention being given to how Torres Strait Island and Aboriginal identity has been constructed and maintained as 'other'. Specific attention will be given to how Torres Strait Island and Aboriginal students are marginalised by virtue of negative stereotypes, and how education policy makers are acting upon this construct to the disadvantage of Indigenous students.

At the outset I must stress that I am mindful of my 'whiteness' and my authority to write about, or on behalf of Aborigines, Torres Strait Islander people and Injinoo people in particular. I am wary of becoming one of the 'experts' damningly referred to by Nakata (1993:3). However, I am heavily involved in the planning, implementation, and community liaison concerning the program and will be responsible for the assessment and recommendations for the future. As such, the social forces impacting on students, community and thereby the program need to be made clear for future reference. In my own defence (as situated within the dominant white, academic realm) this work is being carried out in close communication with the people of Injinoo and the Home Language Program itself is constantly under scrutiny with regard to community approval, awareness and input. It is my hope that this co-operation will result in a community voice rather than just another white (supposed) expert voice.

The 'Construction' of 'Aborigines' and Aboriginal Students

Torres Strait Island and Aboriginal students are a construct of society and have been marginalised according to that construct. This marginalisation has been effected through the treatment of these

students as 'other' or different, and the labelling of them according to stereotypes developed by society with the help of academics. The schools' societal responsibility to reproduce the *status quo* is also a major factor in the continued marginalisation of these students.

... 'marginalisation', that complex and disputatious process by means of which certain people and ideas are privileged over others at any given time ... any given group can be ignored, trivialised, rendered invisible and unheard, perceived as inconsequential, de-authorised, 'other', or threatening, while others are valorised (Tucker, 1990: 7).

This explanation of marginalisation is directly applicable to Torres Strait Island and Aboriginal people. Through a history of colonisation and white control Aboriginal people have been designated 'other'. King and McHoul (1986) analysed the 'discursive production of the Queensland Aborigine', based on historical papers of the late nineteenth century. This study clearly outlined how Aborigines were denied membership in (the dominant) white society. King and McHoul explained how government agencies took responsibility for and categorised people according to their own classifications rather than those of the people they were administering. Government control and paternalism were effective in denying the rights of Aborigines and disenfranchising them in their otherness (Pettman, 1992: 7). Race became a major player in determining who had access to society in Australia. It is a most common determinant of otherness for those whose ethnicity is different to the majority within society:

Thus race become(s) something only minority groups have. The race and ethnicity of the dominant groups is [sic] normalised and naturalised, as if they are something outside culture and politics, and simply represent 'society' (Pettman, 1992: 13).

This construction allows society's justification of the positioning of people of difference (Foucault, 1977: 184). Certainly in Australia it is justification for the positioning of Aboriginal people, but what of Torres Strait Island people? It is a telling fact that throughout King and McHoul's (1986) exposé of government policy regarding Queensland Aborigines there is no mention of Torres Strait Islanders, even though they were categorised and 'managed' under the same policies. It is just as

telling that Pettman's (1992) book *Living in the Margins* uses the term Aborigines to include Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. In a series of essays aimed at exposing marginalisation, Torres Strait Islanders are further marginalised by their inclusion within another 'category'. What makes this especially obvious is that Pettman (1992: 93) at one point quotes Torres Strait Islander people vocalising their desire for recognition as being distinct from Aborigines. By placing Torres Strait Islanders so far into the margins, policy makers and academics alike disenfranchise them further.

So it is evident that Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders are marginalised in society. This is mirrored in educational discourse.

The Royal Commission found that school based education systems have been either unable or unwilling to accommodate many of the values, attitudes, codes and institutions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation and achievement in education, as defined by the wider Australian society, has been limited and this has in turn limited the real choices available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australian society ('Aboriginal deaths in custody: overview of the response by government to the Royal Commission', cited in DEET, 1994a: 5).

This statement is supportive of the need to improve educational achievement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, pointing out that their options in life may be severely limited by (lack of) school support. However, the language of this statement immediately places Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in a different category to Australian students in the main: they have not been 'accommodated'; special treatment or favours have not been given these 'different' students. This term is also used by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NAEP) (another document which uses the term Aboriginal to 'include Torres Strait Islanders'):

The education arrangements and procedures established from non-Aboriginal traditions have not adequately recognised and accommodated the particular needs and circumstances of Aboriginal people (Australian Ministry for Education, 1991: 5).

The Queensland Department of Education uses a similar approach in rationalising the need for the

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Education Policy:

... values and expectations are different from those of the non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, and when formulating policy, this should be taken into account (Queensland Dept. of Education, 1992: 5).

Thus through policy, institutions are rendering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students different, it is positioning them in the margins as other. Nakata (1993: 6), in discussing the NAEP, explains that by 'expressing the various problems in terms of the other, the national policy creates a specific demand for intervention...', the dominant group must act to solve the 'problems'.

This is in keeping with Dwyer's opinion as cited in the DEET (1994a) document:

If, as teachers, we see these differences as a 'problem', then our response will be to remediate and compensate ... (DEET, 1994a: 7).

Policies at a regional level reflect the NAEP, not only in their references to the document but also in their interpretations and explanations. The Peninsula Regional Office of Education publishes a document introducing teachers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community schools; it positions students in these communities as 'different'. In outlining the development of Language and Mathematics programs for community schools it explains that there are 'fundamental differences between Aboriginal cultures and other Australian cultures'. These are outlined as language differences, heritage differences, and 'students' prior experiences are vastly different from the teachers' (Peninsula Regional Office of Education, 1992: ix). This is an example of how, by placing people outside of the 'norm', it is possible (probable) to 'naturalise the role and power of the dominant groups by representing their race as the norm, and others as deviant' (Pettman, 1992: 3).

Common to many policies concerning Torres Strait Island and Aboriginal education is the globalising or stereotyping of student characteristics. Many academics have researched and written about, for and 'on behalf of' Aboriginal people regarding Aboriginal education. Christie (1985), Harris (1984), Harris and Sandefur (1994), Coombs *et al.* (1983) and many others have written as authorities

on Aboriginal education. In so doing they have constructed another set of identities with which to discuss Aboriginality. They have been generalised and appropriated and used as a means of overlooking individuality and excluding difference.

The 'cultural learning styles' of Aboriginal and Islander students are set out in point form in the Peninsula community teaching (Peninsula Regional Office of Education, 1992) document and in the Bamaga Primary School (1994a), *English, Language, Arts (ELA) Policy* document¹. These offer remedies for teachers to use when teaching these culturally 'different' students. In fact the Bamaga ELA policy is fairly archetypal of the format of such identity construction. Under the heading 'Cultural Differences', the NSW Aboriginal Education policy (1982 — significantly 12 years before the development of this document) is quoted:

It is important for the school to realise that Aboriginal children have unique needs which are influenced by the attitudes, values and beliefs of Aboriginal society.

It then goes on to explain that 'Christie (1985) had identified two fundamental differences between Aboriginal cultures and other Australian cultures: 1) world view; and 2) language difference' (Bamaga State Primary School, 1994a: 4-5). The following two pages of the document expand on these two **fundamental** differences. This exact format is also followed in the Peninsula Region's document, except that their citing of Christie continues for five pages. Further to pointing out these 'differences' both documents go on to outline 'appropriate strategies' for teachers to better suit the needs of Aboriginal students. Thus the identity of an Aboriginal student as having an external locus of control, field dependency, informal learning styles and so on, is constructed via discourse.

Both documents give a proviso that information referred to has been gathered in remote, traditionally oriented, Aboriginal schools, and that they have not been proven to apply to less traditionally based people. They do not mention that the community referred to is actually a Northern Territory community which could also

affect applicability to Gulf and Cape schools. The Peninsula document (1992: xii) goes on to stress the need to treat all students as individuals rather than a homogeneous community group, but tellingly this takes two paragraphs out of five pages. The Bamaga document (1994a: 4) does not even go that far in conceding its building of a stereotypic identity, its only proviso being that 'there is a strong Aboriginal bias, however many aspects may be applicable to the Torres Strait Islanders'. There is not even the allowance that these supposed characteristics should be questioned by teachers.

The 1995-1998 Northern Peninsula Area (NPA) (Bamaga) *School Development Plan* (1994b) is even more homogenising in its value-laden statements:

ATSI students learn best by tactile, visual and oral methods, not by the use of written English normal to most schools. Most do not work well in large groups and prefer to work individually in practical, hands on ways ... in general, students place little value on the personal material possessions of schooling, e.g. books, pens ... (Bamaga Primary School, 1994b: 11).

This policy is supposed to inform the basis of teaching in this area; in so doing it perpetuates stereotypes, stresses otherness, and constructs a very negative identity of NPA students.

Thus the 'experts' define what an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander student is and how teachers can help them overcome these 'problems' in their education. This highlights how an identity can be constructed; otherness a signifier of not just differences, but 'specialness' or problems.

What of the Torres Strait Islander?

Having established Aboriginal marginalisation and construction at the hands of society, it is important to look at how Torres Strait Islanders have been further marginalised within that construct.

... Torres Strait Islanders still have to resist outsiders' attempts to tag Torres Strait Islanders after Aborigines or even relegate them to an * [footnote] that reads something like 'we include Torres Strait Islanders under the generic term

¹ This article quotes the *Bamaga Primary School ELA Policy* (1994a) and the *Bamaga School Development Plan* (1994b). Both are in the process of being rewritten in more appropriate forms.

Aborigines'. We continue to assert our right to be treated and named as a distinctive group of indigenous Australians. We continue to assert our right to our proper name and not an abbreviated form of it like ATSI (Torres Strait Islander Regional Education Consultative Committee, 1992: iv).

That the Torres Strait Islander Regional Education Consultative Council needed to make a statement such as this in their educational policy for the Torres Straits in 1992 is testimony to the disempowerment felt by this group. Not only have they been marginalised from the majority but marginalised within the minority. The need for autonomy is exemplified in the Northern Peninsula Region (Bamaga) School Development plan. This document frequently cites the 1992 Torres Strait Islanders Regional Education Consultative Committee (TSIRECC) policy in which the above declaration is made, yet refers to 'ATSI students' (1994b: 11).

Further testimony to that disenfranchisement is evident in TSIRECC's request to be given autonomy from their umbrella body the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Consultative Committee. This request has been made as the committee feels that their voice cannot be heard powerfully enough when they are forced to speak through Aboriginal representation. The chairperson of TSIRECC, James Thaiday expresses his concern that Torres Strait Islanders are outnumbered and under-represented by the current structure of incorporation with QUATSIECC (Turner, personal communication, August 1995). This sentiment was also echoed in petitions to the Prime Minister on Thursday Island. Speakers called for Torres Strait Islanders to be given autonomy separate to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission so as to ensure the needs of Torres Strait Islanders are given adequate consideration, and are able to 'deal directly with the federal government for funding'. The people of the Torres Strait also asked for self-government in order to address the needs seen as important for Torres Strait Islanders. Obviously there is a strongly felt need for autonomy. Mr George Mye MBE OAM, Chairman of Darnley Island, said that a separate commission would

'divert the trend of Torres Strait Islanders becoming a minority consumed by Aboriginal culture' (*Torres News*, 15.09.1995: 7).

It is therefore evident that the Indigenous people of Australia have been marginalised by the process of colonisation. This process of disenfranchisement and stereotyping continues through the workings of society and through institutional racism, and in particular through education. It is therefore significant that the Injinoo community has initiated a program that they hope will enhance education for their children.

The 'Construction' of Non-achievers

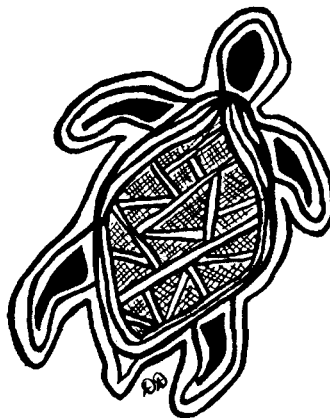
Education policy documents repeatedly affirm the lack of school success being achieved by Aboriginal and Islander students. The Queensland Department of Education's NAEP policy (1992: 6)

refers to 'persisting low levels of participation and attainment of Aboriginal people'. The National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People refers to the 'gaps in educational outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians' (DEET, 1994b: 5). This paper actually cites a number of statistics concerning educational issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and reports that 'on average,

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have lower levels of achievement in literacy and numeracy than other Australian students' (DEET, 1994b: 13). Another DEET document concerned with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education is explicit:

On almost all indicators Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, as groups, get less out of formal schooling than any other group in Australian... Clearly Australia's European based educational systems are not serving indigenous [sic] students well enough (DEET, 1994a: 6).

It is interesting that these aspects of school performance are not articulated as policy documents become localised. Is it that regional and local policy makers do not want to make seemingly negative statements about their



students' performance in school? This would seem very superficial considering other negative points raised. Or is it that they do not want to admit that their own institutions may be responsible for students' lack of success? Is this why the Bamaga School Development Plan (1994b: 11) cites non-English speaking backgrounds, learning styles, hearing impairment and poor health and attendance rates in profiles of their student body? Could this be an example of blaming the victim?

Such discourse may have been effective in perpetuating these school results. Pettman (1992) and Nakata (1993) explain that in the construction of 'Aboriginality' a complex relationship develops from discursive constructions, a 'technology of the self' (Nakata, 1993: 14) which results in Torres Strait Islanders and Aborigines 'making' themselves fit within society:

Aborigines made and continue to make themselves, but within structures, relations and discourse not of their making. The imposition of boundaries, the criteria and the consequences of exclusion or inclusion are still largely beyond their control (Pettman, 1992: 20).

Torres Strait Island and Aboriginal students therefore, can only construct themselves within this discourse that says that they are disadvantaged and not succeeding. Certainly teachers respond by having lower expectations and program according to those expectations. Just as in high schools in communities the number of board subjects are fewer than in 'mainstream' schools under the premise that students may not achieve in some board subjects or that the subjects would not be applicable to 'community life', so they are limiting future choices for students.

This limiting of choices is explained further in terms of the types of literacy taught in schools:

Who gets what kinds of competence — and the relative equality or inequality of access — has a significant impact on students' life trajectories. Their eventual career paths, their participation, status and ultimate 'power' as citizens and workers are influenced by the distribution of cultural capital in the school (Luke, 1992: 6).

The area of literacy is another area of discursive construction of students. The Queensland education system demands that students operate in Standard Australian English (SAE), whether

this is the language of the community or not. Students who then have difficulty acquiring literacy, using the language of school, or understanding what is happening in school are then viewed as special — in need of intervention. An example of this is at present transpiring across Queensland. According to the Year 2 Diagnostic Net, all students in Year 2 are to be tested according to the same criteria across the State, to ascertain levels of numeracy and literacy. These literacy tests are designed to test SAE. Those children who have not reached designated levels, or who are 'caught in the net' receive intervention to lift their skills to reach the State level.

It is spelled out by most policies regarding Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal education that many children come to school with a home language other than English (Peninsula Regional Office of Education, 1992: x; Bamaga School, 1994a: 5, 1994b: 11; DEET, 1994a), yet within a space of two years these students are expected to compete in SAE literacy tests and be compared with English-speaking students across the State.

The Bamaga school had in 1995, not surprisingly, 95 per cent of Year 2 children 'caught in the net'. Has this meant smaller class sizes for this school? A team of ESL teachers? Instead they have consequent remedial teaching, which concentrates on 'back to the basics' reading programs at the expense of empowering literacy work (Luke, 1992: 20-24) and continued construction of the students.

The Bamaga NPASchool Development Plan (1994b: 11) states:

Students have a NESB and the communicating language is Creole. Most present at Preschool with no English or literacy/numeracy background. Children do not communicate in English unless encouraged. Recent testing confirms that reading ages are 2/3 years below chronological age at high school entrance.

Within this passage many constructions are at play. Beyond the stereotyping, negative connotations of not speaking Standard Australian English and a confirmation that students **all** have inferior reading abilities, there is no analysis of why except to blame it on language differences. This is in keeping with the theory that children succeed in school based on the competencies that are reflections of the dominant group. Luke cites

Bourdieu as arguing that:

... schools and teachers systematically tend to value and valorise those kinds of cultural capital/ linguistic competence which fit the values of dominant classes and cultures, and in effect 'punish' children for not having *priori* what schools are charged with delivering (Luke, 1992: 46).

This is definitely the case with the 'net' children who have not come to school with the 'cultural capital' (Luke, 1992: 19) to contend, not only with the language, but also with texts that are of unfamiliar genres and totally unfamiliar subjects.

Indeed the questions around the texts in these tests could be very confusing to children who have not had the practice of talking around texts (Heath, 1983; Luke, 1992). They are disadvantaged by not being privy to the rules of European schooling. Society is reproduced as another generation of Torres Strait Island and Aboriginal students begin the cycle of simplified literacy and 'soft option subjects'. Thus, as Luke (1992: 2) points out, the school fulfils its historical role of reproducing society with its stratified social systems and Indigenous Australians in the most marginal strata.

Injinoo 'Reconstruction'

In the case of Injinoo students, the community was so sure that the education being provided for their students was failing them, that they petitioned directly to the Education Department to assist them in improving the situation. Their request:

no more of this stuff, just move the school here and we'll talk about our own program, what sort of programs we think should be run in the school ... 'cos we know our kids wasn't getting the right learning (Turner, 1995: Interview with Robbie Salee, Injinoo Council Clerk, 22.7.1995).

This need was identified by Elders in the community because in their own assessment of their children, especially by people of Robbie's parents' generation: 'We more smarter than you guys,' they said, 'we more smarter than even this generation' (Turner, 1995: Salee, personal communication). They expressed that the children should be 'smarter' especially in terms of literacy because they are 'learning whiteman way' with European teachers and technology, which is a far cry from the educational experience remembered by the Injinoo

Elders (Turner, 1995: Salee, personal communication; Gallagher, 1993).

One of the obvious reasons for lack of school success for Injinoo students was absenteeism. Robbie recalls that after the school was closed in Injinoo students became distracted by fighting and competition with the children in Bamaga. The Injinoo students were not only marginalised within the system but within the school itself because they were seen to be 'different' from the other children in the school. Rivalry between the communities does exist and is heightened by children's beliefs. The Injinoo school children remain intimidated by Bamaga children and dislike having to attend that campus of the school when necessary. Students were also dependent on unreliable bus services to get to school, and factors like lunch or money for lunch often prevented especially the younger children from going into Bamaga to school. This is why the community focused attention and considerable amounts of money on having classrooms relocated and teachers allocated to teach up to Year 5 in Injinoo; they realised that school missed in the early years was contributing to 'failing'. They also recognised that the curriculum offered was not meeting their needs.

Discussion of appropriate teaching programs for this school nominated the children's 'own' language and then English and maths. While 'own' language is taken to incorporate the numerous traditional languages of the area, 'at the moment what we're trying to do is to understand the day-to-day language that we use and that's Creole' (Turner, 1995: Salee, personal communication). Consequently, Torres Strait Creole is being used in the classroom in Preschool and Years 1 and 2 on a trial basis; it is used in conjunction with English as a means of teaching English, literacy, and making a smoother transition to school. Torres Strait Creole was selected as it is 'the language we use at home' (Turner, 1995: Salee, personal communication).

It is important to look at the Injinoo Home Language Program in the context of power, identity and resistance; power in terms of the community taking control of education, and countering hegemonic control; identity and resistance being stated through the use of a language other than that of the majority. Shnukal (1988: 9) speaks of Islanders, particularly the young, 'beginning to

value the creole as a language of ethnicity and separateness from whites, very few of whom can speak or understand it'. She believes that this has led to its new name of 'Blaikman'. Shnukal goes on to explain that for Torres Strait Islanders this is an opportunity to exclude whites, which leads to a 'feeling of power to exclude groups of people who may be felt as hostile or threatening ... [this] has led to positive feelings about the language'. So cultural resistance ensues as this new-found power reconstructs Torres Strait Islander identity. The term 'Blaikman' in itself can be seen as a form of resistance. There is currently a move to have the language officially titled 'Yumplatok' which, by virtue of its difference to English, would even further reinforce exclusion of English speakers and further resistance.

Pettman (1992: 10) speaks of political mobilisation making 'black a political colour, signifying shared experiences of discrimination, exploitation and resistance among those who are labelled not-white'. This statement of identity through using Torres Strait Creole goes some of the way towards Torres Strait Islanders overcoming the 'invisibility and namelessness' of marginalisation. It gives an opportunity for Torres Strait Islanders to:

represent themselves to themselves and others as complex human beings, and thereby contest the bombardment of negative, degrading stereotypes put forward by White supremacist ideologies (West, 1990: 26).

High profile examples of using 'language' within white domains such as popular music, are especially significant in this resistance. Yothu Yindi and, more recently, Christine Anu recording and succeeding in the music industry singing in their own languages are clear statements of resistance. While there exists, as always, the opportunity for appropriation by the dominant group in society (Pettman, 1992: 11), the resistance is in place and the stereotypes threatened.

Robbie Salee, in his own explanation of why Injinoo wanted a Home Language Program, stressed the need for identity. He stressed that by using Torres Strait Creole in the classroom, the children will gain a better understanding of their own language, which will assist them in developing confidence and self-esteem. He referred to his own lack of confidence in school which he credits to not being able to understand English, and thereby the

teachers, until he was in Year 10 or 11. In reflecting on his own language use now, he refers to how often when he is talking to influential people such as government ministers 'mai Creole stili kam in'. He sees this, however, as a benefit because it assists him in knowing his own mind and where he stands. This enables him to be confident to question and stand his ground and not be a 'yes man'.

He explains how the younger generation refers to their forefathers as 'yes men' because they often agreed with the 'whitefella' because they could not understand what was being said. Robbie says that children of today have to 'state where they come from' and in doing so challenge authorities to develop better levels of understanding between the two (such as bilingual education). Injinoo can perhaps be termed as using difference (language) to mobilise in support of their own claims (Pettman, 1992: 3).

Conclusion

It is evident that through historical and social treatment the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Injinoo have been constructed and marginalised. This construction and disenfranchisement is carried on through institutional racism within the education system. The discourse of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education has resulted in the construct of failing, 'different' students.

Injinoo is taking the first steps towards resisting these stereotypes and reconstructing their 'students' on their own terms. Their adoption of bilingual education can be viewed in terms of resistance, reconstruction and empowerment. It is therefore vital that the Injinoo Home Language Program succeed not just in terms of literacy but also in these socio-political terms as well.

It is also vital that all teachers involved in Indigenous education take heed of the Injinoo experience, this need for resistance and empowerment. We can no longer say 'Oh we did NAIDOC' and feel that we have fulfilled our commitment of making education meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island students. We must look beyond the classroom to understand why students are performing as they are and why this has come to be so. To not take this step is to

perpetuate the institutional racism that has led to the present situation.

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