

Exploring how Australia's national curriculum supports the aspirations of Aboriginal people

Chloe Elizabeth Parkinson
MEd (Charles Darwin University), BA/BEd (University of Queensland)

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Abstract

A culturally inclusive curriculum has long been considered beneficial to all students. The national Australian Curriculum set out to be so, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures as a cross-curriculum priority. There is an assumption however that inclusion is an unproblematic good, and is a true representation of the ‘reality’ of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ lived experiences and aspirations. Drawing on a Critical Discourse Analysis of the Australian Curriculum policy corpus and key informant interviews with members of an Aboriginal community, this dissertation explores how the aspirations of Aboriginal people are supported in dominant education discourses mobilised within the Australian Curriculum.

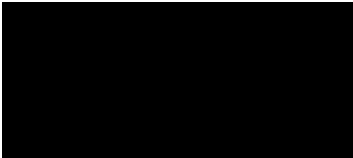
The study identified a critical gap between the Australian Curriculum’s positioning of Aboriginal knowledges, histories and cultures and the Aboriginal community’s aspirations for their children’s education. Within the Australian Curriculum policy corpus, ‘Liberal Multicultural’ and ‘Inclusive’ Discourses were dominant. Such discourses framed Aboriginal students as being vulnerable to marginalisation and in need of support to ensure equality in education. In contrast, community informants advocated for more critical discourses whereby Aboriginal students are seen as empowered, able to actively participate in mainstream society to engage in a process of community revitalisation. In drawing upon different and at times contradictory discourses to articulate their aspirations within a broader ‘Community Revitalisation’ Discourse, community members engaged in a creative act of bricolage in a highly contextually-dependent way.

In conclusion, this thesis reflects on the divisions and confluences found between the discourses mobilised within the Australian Curriculum and in informant articulations of their vision of schooling for the community’s children. It reflects on the implications of the research and provides recommendations for stakeholders. It particularly argues that the Australian Curriculum must offer critical-oriented learning opportunities whilst remaining flexible in order to support localised aspirations and approaches. This will allow further work to be undertaken at multiple systemic levels, to ensure curriculum policy is responsive to local context and the needs, wants and values of each community.

Certification

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis and all sources used have been acknowledged in this thesis.



Chloe Parkinson

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Symbols and Abbreviations

ABS

Australian Bureau of Statistics

ACARA

Australian Curriculum, Reporting and Assessment Authority

AEC

Australian Education Council

AHRC

Australian Human Rights Commission

AIATSIS

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

AT

Assistant Teacher

ATSIC

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission

CDA

Critical Discourse Analysis

COAG

Council of Australian Governments

EAL/D

English is an Additional Language or Dialect

ESL

English as a Second Language

EU

European Union

FCAATSI

Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders

GERM

Global Education Reform Movement

HASS

Humanities and Social Sciences

ICSEA

Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage

LoTL

Languages of Teaching and Learning

MCEECDYA/MCEETYA

Ministerial Council on Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs
(MCEECDYA as of 2009, formerly MCEETYA)

MR

Member Resources

NAEC

National Aboriginal Education Committee

NAPLAN

National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy

NCLB

No Child Left Behind Act

NSDC

National Sorry Day Committee Inc.

NTER

Northern Territory Emergency Response

OECD

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PISA

Programme for International Student Assessment

RSAS

Remote School Attendance Strategy

SAE

Standard Australian English

TODA

Textually-Oriented Discourse Analysis

UK

United Kingdom

USA

United States of America

List of Publications

The following peer-reviewed publications include components which stem from work completed towards this thesis:

Jones, T., Takayama, K., Posthausen, G., Carter, K., Landrigan, B., Bennell, D., Ahoy, C., Parkinson, C., & Wallace, C. (2016). *Improving Services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students: A Critical Study*. Nova: New York.

Parkinson, C. (2015). Australian Curriculum implementation in a remote Aboriginal school: A curriculum leader's search for a transformational compromise. *The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, 14(3), 94-105.

Conference Papers

Parkinson, C. (2016). *Indigenous Peoples in national curriculum policy: An Australian Curriculum example*. Paper presented at the XVI World Congress of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES), 22-26 August 2016, Beijing, China.

Parkinson, C. (2016). *An Indigenous education discourse taxonomy for policy analysis*. Paper presented at the UNE Postgraduate Conference: Intersections of Knowledge, 19-20 January 2016, Armidale, New South Wales.

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