Lessons from the Past: Education and Racism in Australia

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The history of racism in Australia is inextricably linked with prevailing ideologies of rural Australia, supported strongly by educational discourses of deficit and disadvantage. A challenge for the Reconciliation Movement will be to make an effective contribution to the development of anti-racist and non-racist practices n rural schooling.

The history of racism and education in relation to indigenous people in Australia is one which was, in earlier times, largely enacted in rural areas. Many Aboriginal people still living and bringing up young families in rural areas have been and still are directly affected by the educational policies and practices of the past. Further, whilst the majority of indigenous people in Australia live in urban areas their origins are, in the main, rural. This article provides a historical synthesis of the most important empirical and conceptual research in education and racism in Australia. It contains information in summary form, which rural and isolated teachers should be familiar with as part of their professional preparation to teach in country areas. It also sets the scene for further developments in Aboriginal education in rural areas setting down and analysing past events, describing some of the complex situations which are the direct results of past practices and relating these to present issues.

Racial prejudice is a particular kind of prejudice. Jackson's (Hollinsworth 1998, p.3) generic definition of racism says:

> *Racism.... involves the attempt by a dominant group to exclude a subordinate group from the material and symbolic rewards of status and power.*

But racism also involves the possession of prejudiced attitudes and the expression of these attitudes as some form of behaviour. The power to affect the object of prejudice via active expression of negative attitudes is an integral part of racism.

McConnochie (1973) points out that this active expression of negative attitudes may be manifested through individual racism, institutional racism and structural violence (Eckermann, Dowd, Martin, Nixon, Grey & Chong 1995).

Individual Racism

Individual racism is racism perpetrated by individuals. It can be expressed overtly by direct acts of discrimination perpetrated by individuals or groups of individuals, such as refusal to serve Aborigines in cafes and hotels or racist namecalling in school playgrounds or on the football field. Other common Aboriginal experiences include: being refused rental accommodation and employment on the basis of overgeneralised notions of race. Individual racist acts towards Aborigines are committed by those who have particular kinds of racist attitudes such as having negative stereotypes about Aborigines, assimilationist attitudes or paternalistic attitudes. This kind of racism occurs across the broad spectrum of Australian society. It must be acknowledged however, that whilst individual racism is still very active in Australia the Reconciliation Movement in recent years has made public inroads into the unremitting face of racism in Australian society.

Negative Stereotyping

Lippmann (Stevens 1973), reporting on her Country Towns Survey, says that although her respondents were not asked to comment on features they considered characteristic of Aborigines in general, 52% spontaneously volunteered information. Further, all of the attributes they name are based on negative stereotypes. Thus Aborigines were described (in order of frequency) as dirty, drunken, irresponsible and inferior.

Taft (1970) in his survey of three communities in Western Australia (Perth, Bigtown, Smalltown), found that in all three communities, Aborigines were considered to be wasteful with money, unambitious, lazy, dirty and slovenly, drunken, unreliable and superstitious. In all three places attitudes towards Aborigines were less favourable than attitudes towards other ethnic groups. Western (1973) in Western Australia and Eckermann (1977) and Larsen, et al. (1977) in Queensland also identify similar majority stereotypes about Aborigines.

Some of the above studies were conducted over thirty years ago yet similar attitudes are confirmed by Hollinsworth (1998) and Mickler (1997), Sercombe (1995) Nugent, Loncar & Aisbett (1993) and others whose studies were conducted in the nineties. In addition both older studies and the more contemporary ones showed higher levels of prejudice in rural areas.

Assimilationist Attitudes

Assimilationist attitudes are based on the assumption that the dominant Anglo-Celtic culture and lifestyle are the best and that all people from other cultures should change to fit into the majority's way of life.

Thus Aborigines are expected to conform to the dominant majority's notions of civilised behaviour, and, for example, all Aborigines are thought to require guidance in personal hygiene and how to look after their houses and their children (Lippmann 1992). Closely aligned to assimilationist attitudes are paternalistic attitudes which view Aborigines as if they were not human, as if they were some sort of animal to be tamed, to become safe and profitable for use by white society.

Attitudes of this kind may easily be traced back to the 'instinct' theories of the Nineteenth Century. Eckermann (1977), documenting prejudice in rural Queensland, cites a speech published in the Toowoomba Chronicle in 1957 which commemorated a clash between whites and Aborigines in 1857. The speech mentions the uncivilised, savage state of Aborigines in 1857 and how *today* they are 'quite domesticated and trustworthy' further confirming that Aboriginal people were not considered able or intelligent enough to be responsible for their own lives.

It is clear that many studies confirm the fact that individual racism is very active in contemporary Australian society (Hollinsworth 1998; McGrath 1995; Lippmann 1992; Edwards & Read 1989). Aboriginal people experience individual racism on a regular basis wherever they live in Australia and whatever they attempt to achieve as Eckermann et al's (1995) schematic diagram clearly illustrates (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Cycle of Dispossession, Discrimination and Disadvantage

(Eckermann *et al.* 1995, Appendix K)
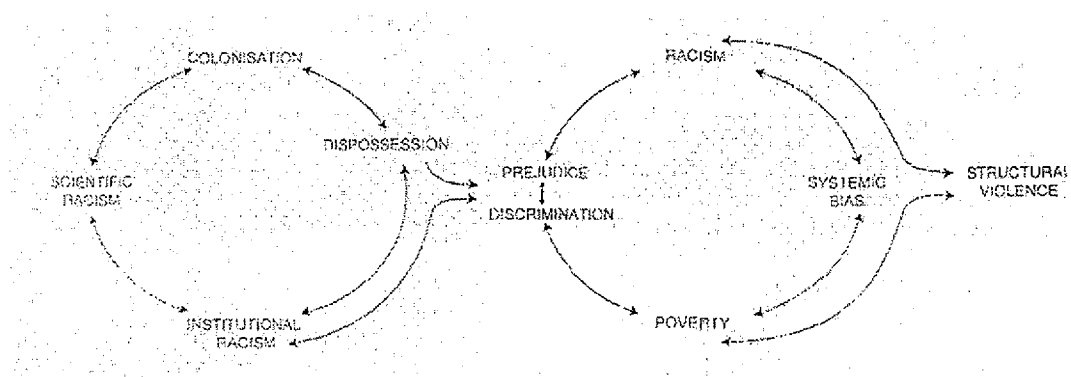
Institutional Racism

Institutional racism is racism perpetrated through institutions which, by their nature and methods of functioning, exclude various ethnic groups. It is covert in nature, enshrined in the nation's legal, political, economic and social systems and is frequently accepted by the victims themselves (Eckermann 1994).

Government Policy and Aborigines

Between 1788 and the 1840s Aborigines were gradually dispossessed of their land in NSW. Eckermann et al (1992) and Reynolds (1987) call this the "uncontrolled frontier" when Aboriginal people fought a sustained guerilla war against invasion and the European government was able to maintain only loose control over Aboriginal people.

After the 1850s, however, Aborigines came under full state control and were made wards of the state (Eckermann 1992). Their hunting grounds were fenced off and they were excluded from them. Many were massacred or killed. Very quickly, the numbers of Aboriginal people were also decimated by such diseases as smallpox, the common cold, measles and whooping cough to which they had never before been exposed (Rowley 1978).

By the early Twentieth Century numbers of Aboriginal people had been so decimated it was thought they were "dying out" (Eckermann 1992). This fitted conveniently with Social Darwinist notions of scientific racism and the survival of what was considered to be the fittest society (European) as Lippmann describes:

> Aborigines, being 'primitives', were destined to die out before a superior 'civilisation', equally destined to supersede them. (Lippmann 1992, p. 13).

Governments then began to introduce policies of protection designed to 'smooth the dying pillow' and in addition, to establish total control over the lives of remaining Aboriginal people by systematically excluding them from the rights of ordinary citizens (Eckermann et al 1992). Thus Aborigines were institutionalised in Australian society as an 'outgroup' (Allport 1982), and the scene was set for institutionalised oppression on a scale rarely seen in global history.

Protection

During the late Nineteenth Century 'Protection' policies were established in various states (Australia was until 1901, a collection of separate British colonies). Aboriginal policies were under the control of individual states and remained so until the 1967 referendum. Aboriginal education policies still are state controlled. During the Protection era, many Aboriginal people were rounded up, regardless of their traditional groupings and placed on government run reserves on the outskirts of country towns controlled by a white manager. There they became marginalised on the edge of Australian society and, it was claimed, they could be looked after until they died out (Markus 1990). Others lived on missions, fringe settlements or on stations in country areas. They lived in poverty with little prospect of employment, frequently dependent on the government or charity for food and with no rights of citizenship (Eckermann et al 1992).

Aborigines were believed to be low on the scale of humanity and so were not considered fit to raise children who were of mixed descent (since they were uncivilised and close to being animals) (Hollinsworth 1998). Between 1883 (the beginning of the Protection era) and 1934, 1500 children were removed from their families on this basis in New South Wales alone. People were compelled to stand by and watch as their children were removed from their homes often never to be seen again. By the end of the Protection era (late 1940s), more than 5000 had been taken, raised and educated in white families or at such institutions as the Cootamundra Girls Home or the Kinchela Boys Home (Edwards & Read 1989).

By the time of the Protection Era (1909 onwards in New South Wales), schooling was compulsory for the general population until the age of fourteen. All Aboriginal children became wards of the Aboriginal Protection Board and henceforth, most received their education in the reserves on the edges of country towns in which they now lived. They could be excluded from attendance at public schools if white parents objected to their presence. In 1937 for example, Miller (1985) documents cases in and near Armidale NSW where Aboriginal children were excluded from public schools. The then Minister for Education, D. Drummond stated clearly accepted policy in these cases:

> It is desirable that where a number of aboriginal children are attending the school they should be segregated from the ordinary school pupils and provided with education in a school set apart for the purpose preferably at an aboriginal settlement. I am of the opinion that the policy of this department should at all times have due regard to the underlying theory that because the children of marked **aboriginal characteristics** and **parents of aboriginal blood belong to a child race**, their exclusion from any school should be authorized not because they are an offence

*to white people or to white children, but that in their own interests they might receive a **suitable training** under conditions which are conducive to their highest welfare.* (Drummond quoted in Miller 1985, p. 178. My emphases.)

Thus in many country areas, Aboriginal children were actively excluded from receiving the same education as their non-Aboriginal counterparts. The influence of scientific racism can clearly be seen in the kind of education provided for Aboriginal children on rural reserves as late as the 1940s and 50s. In the reserve schools untrained teachers taught Aboriginal children. Schooling did not go beyond Grade Three since Aborigines, being a "child race" (see above quote), were not considered intelligent enough to cope with higher level learning and children often finished their schooling illiterate or, at best, semi-literate (Hollinsworth 1998; Lippmann 1992). Indeed curricula in Aboriginal reserve schools were confined to preparing children for menial jobs such as manual labour for the boys and domestic work for the girls (Reynolds 1990). Thus "a suitable training" (see above quote) meant that Aboriginal people were destined to receive an education inferior to those who belonged to the "superior" race.

In the 1930s, in response to pressure from more concerned social attitudes and in the knowledge that Aborigines were not a "dying race", governments began to introduce 'assimilationist' social policies (McGrath 1995) which were supposed to assist Aboriginal people to live in the same way as other Australians (Lippmann 1992) but which in fact, continued the process of oppression.

Assimilation and Integration

Assimilationist policies were designed to result in Aboriginal people assimilating European and Anglo-Celtic cultures and lifestyles to the point that their indigenous cultures and lifestyles would disappear (Lippmann 1992). Children continued to be taken from their families to be raised in 'homes' to speed the process of assimilation (Edwards & Read 1989; Cummings 1992).

In this policy period (1940s-1960s) schooling for Aboriginal children was (and still is), an agent of assimilation and control rather than one of self-development and improvement. Christie says:

Education for Aborigines, as for poor whites, was seen as a means of instilling obedience and compliance to the dictates of state and church. Through education, the Aborigines would be assimilated into mainstream white society and take their place on the lowest rung of the social order as obedient, well-mannered and effective workers. (Christie 1990, p.118)

When the policies of assimilation and integration were established, increasing numbers of Aboriginal children appeared in public schools, often in the face of determined opposition from white parents (Miller 1985). In accordance with the administration of government policies, school systems expected Aboriginal children to change their behaviours and lifestyles to those acceptable to white society. Retention rates were poor and under assimilation in 1964, for example, only 9% of Aboriginal students went beyond the second year of high school (Lippmann 1992). Thus a high rate of failure and a resistance to participation in schooling were established and still exist today.

In the 1960s government policies changed from assimilation to integration. Integrationist policy claimed to allow Aboriginal people to join the dominant community on equal terms and at the same time retain their own cultural identity. In retrospect, integration is frequently seen as merely an extension of the assimilationist period (Hollinsworth 1998) since the prevailing attitudes were the same. As in other parts of the world, perceptions of minority groups and policies directed towards them affected educational attitudes and policies.

Assimilationist policies fitted influential educational thinking of the Sixties very well. Research into the effects of disadvantage, cultural difference and low socio-economic status concerning children in schools was predicated on the idea that such children suffered from 'deficits' of one kind or another (Eckermann 1994). The solution to disadvantage was to establish compensatory educational programs which would bring those considered to be so stricken up to the levels of dominant middle-class white society (Eckermann 1994). During this period many Aboriginal people were moving from rural areas into towns and cities often with the purpose of finding work or a better life in the more urbanised areas. However most Aboriginal people remained in the country where conservative and racist attitudes remained prevalent.

Deficit Model Education

During the 1960s schooling systems' responses to cultural difference in classrooms were frequently dominated by deficit theory and children who were culturally different were perceived as disadvantaged. Explanations of unsatisfactory performance centred principally around the so-called inadequate environments of children (Eckermann 1994). The resultant compensatory education programs were based on perceptions of cognitive, linguistic and cultural poverty.

> *When groups, whether defined in terms of gender, race or class, are labelled as outsiders by those in power, a discourse is available that not only rationalises the process but proceeds to turn a difference into a deficit. The victims of unequal distribution of power in our society, rather than the structural features of the society itself can thus be blamed.* (Walton 1993, p. 59)

Such programs predicated on deficit model assumptions were embraced enthusiastically in rural areas and country towns. Teasdale and Whitelaw (1981) documented a number of programs for Aboriginal children based on deficit model thinking in Australia including a pre-school education project at Bourke in Western New South Wales. Such programs, predicated on the idea that children possessed "family or cultural values, traditions, beliefs and behaviours which inhibit later achievement" (Eckermann 1994, p. 15) were common (Lippmann 1992). Aboriginal people frequently saw compensatory education programs as essentially assimilationist in nature (Eckermann 1994).

Teachers in country areas assumed that Aboriginal children were deficient in a number of ways. Green's (1982) survey of attitudes in schools found that teachers were concerned with identifying child deficit, family deficit and environmental deficit as the major problems in teaching Aboriginal children. Such results "confirmed" the previous research of Makin and Ibbotson (1973) and Tannock and Punch (1975). Deficit theory and associated compensatory education programs persisted through the 1980s. Indeed both Lippmann (1992) and Eckermann (1994) found that many teachers were still influenced by deficit model thinking in relation to Aboriginal people in the 1990's.

There were exceptions to deficit model thinking in the 1960s and 70s, one of which was the institution of Aboriginal Family Education Centres which were modelled on Maori Family Education Centres. They were controlled by Aboriginal people and situated carefully in contexts deemed likely to be effective. There were, however, few of these in rural areas.

With a Labor government in power in the early 1970s and the mandate given by the 1967 referendum, the scene was set for major changes in policy and legislation concerning Aboriginal people.

Self-Determination and Self-Management

In 1973 the Labor (Whitlam) government in Canberra declared a new policy in relation to Aboriginal people in order to "restore ... their lost power of self-determination in economic, social and political affairs."(Hansard, House of Representatives, April 6 1973). Because of clearly expressed racial hostility towards Aborigines, refusal of some state governments to cooperate, and vested industrial/mining interests, self-determination policies and the growing Landrights movement were frustrated (McConnochie 1988). In 1976, with a change of government came the policy of "Self-Management". As existed under the Whitlam government, supposedly self-managing Aboriginal organisations were closely supervised and compelled to operate under government regulation (Lippmann 1992).

Contemporary Education

The Aboriginal experience of individual racism at school in rural areas and country towns is certainly widespread and well-documented in Australia over a long period of time (Eckermann 1994; Ngarritjan-Kessaris 1994). The racist and discriminatory nature of Australian school systems in relation to Aborigines is also well-documented. Organisation, methods of teaching, curricula, textbooks and other literature are commonly cited as evidence of institutional racism (Hollinsworth 1998; DEET 1995; Freebody & Welch 1993; Eckermann 1994; Lippmann 1992).

Since the 1970s Aboriginal participation in education in both rural and urban areas has continuously remained at lower levels than the rest of the population (DEET 1995, p. 69 and Lippmann 1992). Pre-school education for example, was available to only 50% of Aboriginal children in 1992 whilst it was available to 90% of the population as a whole (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and TSI Affairs 1992). It was available to even fewer Aboriginal children in isolated country areas. Government perceptions of delivery of education to Aboriginal people, however, were still limited to viewing the symptoms of the disease rather than its causes and there was no mention in this 1992 government report of the failure of school systems to provide suitable education for Aboriginal children.

By the 1970s changes in government policy from assimilation and integration to self-determination and self-management and changes in educational theory advocating bicultural education and empowerment, cleared the way for more involvement of Aboriginal people in the education process (Lippmann 1992). Social, political and ideological dimensions of schooling provided broader contexts for the rhetoric of developing theories of cultural difference as an explanation for educational disadvantage as Walton (1993) writing about Aboriginal education in the isolated Northern Territory regions explains. The explanations for failure, however, were still the same - children were disadvantaged because they were different. Very little of the rhetoric of failure was concerned with the failure of teachers, schools and school systems (especially those in isolated and rural areas) to determine what appropriate education for Aboriginal children or any other children who were different from the norm was (Walton 1993).

Whilst changes in thinking occurred during the 1970s and 80s, notions that cultural difference and disadvantage were closely connected persisted (see previous discussion on deficit model education) in rural schools despite important research evidence to the contrary. In a landmark study of literacy of the Vai of Liberia, Scribner and Cole (1981) found that it was not the possession of decontextualised literacy skills which supported cognitive development but the social context of schooling and the addition of urban living that explained superior performance in the test situations described. Thus Scribner and Cole (1981, pp. 251-252) maintain that "literacy is not a surrogate for schooling with respect to its intellectual consequences." The myth that literate cultures show more complex cognitive development than non-literate ones (such as Aboriginal ones) is also debunked by Gee (1990). Thus, because Aboriginal people as a group belong to oral cultures by and large, and the fact that many live in isolated and rural areas does not mean that their intellectual development is inferior to that of people from literate cultures although such assumptions were and are rife in education systems in Australia (Walton 1993).

In Australia, education lagged behind research evidence. The Disadvantaged Schools Commission in the 1970s targeted Aborigines and other groups in the lower socio-economic order (including rural and isolated groups) for special programs which were to lift levels of participation and success in the school system. Many rural schools saw the benefits of such funding initiatives.

During this period schools were able to develop curricula more responsive to local situations and philosophies concerning 'valuing difference' developed (Walton 1993). But valuing difference did not necessarily lead to appropriate action. This is clearly reflected in participation and retention figures (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and TSI Affairs 1992; DEET 1995). Thus institutional routines did not change in important ways, underlying structures remained the same, pedagogies did not change and expand in appropriate ways, methods of communication did not change and expand, teachers did not provide for a range of operational and learning styles in their classrooms and 'different' children were even more isolated in classrooms because of the attention focused on differences. The rhetoric of respect for cultural difference thus did not result in changes in fundamental systemic power structures (Walton 1993). Aboriginal children continue to fail at school in much higher proportions than Non-Aboriginal children and those proportions are worse in rural and isolated areas.

Consequently, such changes in policy and thought saw few changes in systemic structures and therefore in systemic bias and institutional racism generally in Australian education (Eckermann 1994; Lankshear 1991). Few structures were created in which self-determination could be exercised and education systems themselves basically have not changed (DEET 1995).

Since the mid 1960s much effort on the part of schools has been expended unsuccessfully on 'bridging the gap between home and school' (Catchpole 1982b). Bridging the gap activities have failed firstly, because the complex nature of institutional racism and the powerlessness of Aboriginal people in Australian society has not been recognised or understood by schools and teachers in general (Eckermann 1994). Secondly, schools

essentially perceived the task as parents and community moving to school rather than school moving to parents or school and parents moving together (Walton 1993). Thus bridging the gap activities have been essentially assimilationist in nature and an agent of systemic bias.

There have, however, been more sympathetic developments evident in education systems. Consultative structures have been established in New South Wales and other states in the form of Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups. There is also a network of regional advisory groups on Aboriginal education which allow country issues to be aired. The National Aboriginal Education Committee advised on a national basis. In New South Wales an Aboriginal Education Policy has been in existence since 1982 and Aboriginal Studies is now mandatory for all children in New South Wales. Where appropriate, Aboriginal perspectives are incorporated in course syllabi (see, for example, the Modern History Syllabus, the Year Ten History Syllabus and English Syllabi in New South Wales and many others). Many schools, rural and urban, ensure that Aboriginal children have the experience of being taught by elders of their local community and efforts are being made to ensure that schools reflect the cultures and lifestyles of their populations.

Other indications of progress are evident through attempts to empower Aboriginal communities via the ASSPA funding allocations in schools with high proportions of Aboriginal children. Ironically, increasing funding to private schools has also increased the viability of independent Aboriginal-controlled schools in rural and remote communities.

Previous discussion has examined developments in Aboriginal society using social constructs viewed through a predominantly historical perspective. The following discussion attempts to place these developments in the context of the concept of systemic bias as shown in Eckermann et al's (1995) model (See Figure 1).

Systemic Bias and Aspects of Education

Systemic bias is a direct result of institutional racism (Eckermann et al 1992). If systemic bias exists in a society and its institutions then certain groups in that society are excluded from power or from success because they do not have the skills and possessions necessary for membership of the power elite. The social system and its structures are thus biased in favour of that power elite. The skills and qualifications needed in Australian society include such things as being white and middle-class, understanding particular rules, regulations and practices, being aware of particular norms and values, possessing certain levels or kinds of education (such as high literacy levels), using 'correct' language or the language of power and access to high levels of income (Eckermann et al 1992).

Those in power are able to maintain it because they have access to the range of necessary and desirable qualifications and the ability to use those skills in controlling others (Lankshear 1991). It is not difficult to demonstrate that Aboriginal people in contemporary Australia have very limited access to that power because of the history of exclusion and oppression over the past two hundred years.

Studies in pedagogy in relation to the literacy education of Aboriginal children completed by Walton (1986), Christie (1987), Malin (1994), Trouw (1994) and Eckermann (1994) have revealed that pedagogical practices of teachers and their use of language systematically exclude Aboriginal children from participation in classroom activity and the life of the school. For example, Walton's (1986) rural study found that the social construction of the writing process was ignored because of the emphasis on structure in implementing process and model in writing lessons. Consequently, assumptions were made about the writing/literacy background of country children (who were from an oral cultural tradition) which prevented effective participation in process writing. Walton (1993) also raised questions of broader concern about the applicability of progressivist pedagogy based on models developed from literate traditions to cross-cultural contexts. Luke, Baty and Stehbens (1989) raise this point in their critique of Cambourne's (1988) "Natural Learning" model.

Malin's (1990) urban study documents the process of exclusion of Aboriginal children from reading knowledge. The language of teachers in her study is illuminating in terms of the exercise of power to exclude through language. It is evident that such use of language to exert and maintain power and to exclude Aboriginal children from literacy knowledge occurs frequently. Other studies on the use of classroom questioning techniques and cultural appropriateness show clearly the operations of systemic bias (Trouw 1994). Harris (1985) has identified differences in personal interaction styles, learning styles and orientations towards verbal learning as factors in systemic bias. Malin (1990) identified reticence on the part of Aboriginal children to take expected public risks in the classroom as a factor in systemic bias. Malin's (1990) study also found that the

independent decision-making expected of Aboriginal children at home was inappropriate in schooling systems which do not value such independence. In addition, whilst some Aboriginal groups allow their children independent decision-making from an early age, it may be wrong to ask direct questions or draw attention to oneself as an individual especially in the more traditionally-oriented cultures found in isolated and rural areas of Australia (Harris 1984). Christie's (1987) study based in an isolated rural area of the Northern Territory found that Aboriginal children frequently treated school as a ritualistic endeavour where participation and attendance are seen as ends in themselves rather than learning. Thus their perceptions of schooling and its purposes were very different from the way education systems view themselves. It should be noted here, however, that perceptions of schooling vary widely between Aboriginal groups as Day (1994) clearly shows in his account of student and parental attitudes towards schooling in Darwin.

The findings of the studies detailed above are often not generalisable to all Aboriginal populations in Australia, given the diverse nature of their cultures and lifestyles in both rural and urban areas. However, the array of areas of dysfunction between Aboriginal children's home cultures and the school culture they encounter, identified in rural research, provides good evidence of the prevalence of systemic bias in Australian education systems. Schools operating in conservative rural and isolated areas, operating in harsh climatic and geographical conditions with high proportions of inexperienced staff and few Aboriginal teachers have a difficult job overcoming the exigencies of a history of racism in school systems and delivering quality education to Aboriginal people.

Teachers in isolated and rural areas who are able to free themselves from the limitations imposed by past practices and attitudes, who are skilled in cross-cultural teaching, who know understand the effects of the historical/social/political background of oppression experienced by the indigenous people of this country and who are able to incorporate community concerns effectively in the education of Aboriginal children are sorely needed. In addition, it is clear that systemic reform which establishes and supports anti-racist educational practice and administration has to accompany the efforts of such teachers so that best practice may be scaffolded by education systems.

As yet, it is unclear how the Reconciliation Movement which has been gathering momentum in recent years may contribute to a process of developing effective anti-racist and non-racist practices in education. How to capitalise on the benefits Reconciliation has brought to Australian society, build reserves of teachers who have the necessary identified skills, and who have the support of a system designed to support the delivery of education to indigenous Australians in rural and isolated areas in particular must be the subject of further sustained discussion.

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