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**Twenty years of policy
recommendations for indigenous
education: overview and research
implications**

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SERIES NOTE

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Abstract

This discussion paper presents an exploratory overview of Australia's indigenous education policy spanning the years 1975-95. The paper provides a brief description of the political evolution of that policy and focuses on the three major national indigenous education reviews of the past 20 years: the Report to the Schools Commission by the Aboriginal Consultative Group, the Report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force and the National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. The paper traces trends and patterns in national policy through analysis of the recommendations of these three reviews. The 140 recommendations are clustered according to five prominent topic areas: consultation, responsibility and decision making; curriculum; support structures and instructional approaches; educational staffing; and future research. The analysis reveals that while the recommendations have become sharper and more specific over time, they are striking for their continuity. Though new and important themes have emerged over the past 20 years, none of the earlier policy issues have been fully resolved or are now absent from policy considerations. Indigenous access, participation and equity remain the central themes. The paper concludes with a discussion of future directions for indigenous education policy research and identifies some critical questions and possible research approaches related to: the evaluation of existing programs and policies; definitions of 'quality' and outcomes in indigenous education; the roles of schools in indigenous communities; the processes of educational consultation and funding; and the complex issues surrounding mainstream versus indigenous community controlled schools.

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Foreword

Early in 1995, Dr R.G. (Jerry) Schwab was appointed as a Research Fellow at CAEPR. Dr Schwab is a social anthropologist who in recent years has undertaken research, both in Australia and the United States, on evaluating educational outcomes. Most recently, he has worked with the Centre for Educational Development and Academic Methods (CEDAM) at the ANU.

Dr Schwab's appointment allows CAEPR to strategically broaden its economic policy research agenda to incorporate a broader focus on education policy. This extension into the new area of education policy is a natural progression of CAEPR's existing research focus on two counts. First, many of the key issues in indigenous education are structurally similar to those being debated with respect to indigenous economic policy, including the potential merits of decentralisation of policy formulation and funding, the relative benefits of mainstream versus special policies and programs for indigenous Australians, and the complexities of Commonwealth/State relations in indigenous policy. Second, there are undeniable links, established in earlier CAEPR research, between education and training on the one hand, and labour market and income status outcomes for indigenous Australians on the other hand.

Two over-arching issues loom large to me in this analytical overview of twenty years of Commonwealth indigenous education policy. First, given that so much has been written in this area, why is it that educational progress appears to be fairly slow? Second, and of more substantive concern, is the issue of policy goals of attaining equality in educational status between indigenous and other Australians. As Dr Schwab rightly notes, this is not just an issue of indigenous quantitative catch-up which in itself represents a crucial policy challenge. It is also an issue of closing the qualitative 'formal skills' gap between indigenous and other Australians at a time when fundamental changes in the global economy are demanding a rapid upskilling of the entire Australian population and workforce.

As an initial foray into this policy area, Dr Schwab is undertaking a thorough analysis of a number of key published reports of reviews of indigenous education policy. This is a baseline, exploratory discussion paper, but it will be of use to a variety of interests, including policy makers, as a timely overview of national education policy for indigenous Australians over the past twenty years. It raises some important new questions about current assumptions and directions in indigenous education policy which lay the groundwork for further research.

Jon Altman
Series Editor
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Introduction

Indigenous education has been a prominent issue on the Australian national policy scene for over 20 years and a great deal of money and energy has been expended in attempting to identify and address areas of need. Access to and participation in educational programs by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been major concerns during this period, and significant gains have been made. Yet in many ways these issues have proven to be the easiest to address. Educational equity, on the other hand, remains more elusive and, as discussed below, begs deeper and more complex questions of policy makers.

Over the past 20 years, new and innovative approaches to indigenous education and training have proceeded in many forms at the local, State/Territory and national levels. Major shifts in national indigenous education policy, however, do not appear to have come about as a result of breakthroughs in local educational 'practice' or evaluations of programs in 'the field'. Rather, they are more often propelled by that unique literary genre, the national 'Review'.

National policy reviews are both political and practical affairs. Decisions about appointments to review committees require careful surveys of political landscapes and public and constituent perceptions. In this way, the establishment and appointment of members of national reviews are unavoidably political exercises. Reviews provide opportunities to stop and evaluate progress and problems in a particular area or on a particular topic. In this sense they 'take the pulse' of policies, and provide an opportunity for an assessment of how well particular approaches are identifying and meeting the needs of particular constituents. Cynically, it is sometimes argued that as political phenomena, reviews provide a convenient showcase for displays of official concern and evidence of action through consultation rather than through substantive change. In the case of national reviews of indigenous education, that argument is difficult to sustain. Though the results have not always pleased everyone concerned, the reviews have been significant and powerful tools for steering indigenous education policy in Australia. The outcomes (for example, the recommendations) of the various national education reviews provide a useful road map for understanding where policies stand, where they came from and where they might be going.

This paper begins with an overview of the development of Australia's national indigenous education policy, followed by an analysis and discussion of the various policy recommendations contained in the 1975, 1988, and 1995 national reviews of indigenous education. The paper concludes with a discussion of future directions for indigenous education policy research.

The development of a national indigenous education policy

Over the past two decades there has been a string of national reports, reviews and policy documents focussing directly on indigenous education. There has also been a series of national reports arising from a variety of special initiatives and commissions indirectly related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education but yielding important analyses and recommendations (M. Dodson 1995; P. Dodson 1995; O'Donoghue 1995). The sheer volume of relevant material appears to have increased dramatically in recent times as a result of new initiatives in the national political scene (for example, recognition of native title, moves toward reconciliation, and increased promotion of social justice). Among the more prominent national reviews with relevance to indigenous education over the past 20 years are the following (in chronological order) :

- *Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission* (Aboriginal Consultative Group 1975).
- *Access to Education: An Evaluation of the Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme* (Watts 1976).
- *Aboriginal Futures: A Review of Research and Developments and Related Policies in the Education of Aborigines* (Watts 1981).
- *Aboriginal Education* (House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education 1985).
- *Report of the Committee of Review of Aboriginal Employment and Training Programs* (Miller 1985).
- *Report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force* (Hughes 1988).
- *A Chance for the Future: Training in Skills for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Community Management and Development* (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs 1989).
- *National Report: Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (Commonwealth of Australia 1991).
- *Review of the Training for Aborigines Program* (Johnston 1991).
- *Review of the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy* (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission 1994).
- *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* (Yunupingu 1995).

While by no means a complete listing of relevant national reports and reviews, the education-specific policy recommendations contained within these documents provide a detailed map of the terrain of national indigenous education policy over the past 20 years. Rather than sift through close to 1,000 recommendations arising from this sample of national reviews, commissions, and reports, this paper will focus on the three major national reviews of indigenous education: *Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission* (Aboriginal Consultative Group 1975), *Report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force* (Hughes 1988), and the *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* (Yunupingu 1995). These three reports were chosen for analysis because they mark the major assessment points in the development of recent national indigenous education policy in Australia.

A brief history of Australian national educational policy

At the time of Australian Federation, education was widely considered to be the responsibility of the States. In fact, the Australian Constitution defined it as such. Public schooling was instituted in the late nineteenth century, and individual States assumed responsibility for the provision of education. Beginning in the 1940s, there arose a view that the Federal government should play a more central role in determining and meeting the educational needs of the nation. This view was promoted by the hard economic realities of educational funding and the realisation that the problem of the allocation of scarce resources required a political solution (Musgrave 1975: 23).

In the build up to the Federal election of December 1972, the growing perception of a state of crisis in Australian schools and the role of the Federal government emerged as one of the key election issues. For the election, the education issue was cast by Labor as a cross-roads: down one path lay uniform provision of resources to States and individual educational advancement based on the principle of merit; down the other lay differential allocation based on need underlined by the principle of a 'fair go' for all (Musgrave 1975).

Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission: Following the electoral victory, one of the Whitlam government's first actions was to establish the Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission on 12 December 1972, chaired by Professor Peter Karmel. Working within a seemingly impossible time frame of five months, the Committee was charged with examining the position and relative needs of government and non-government primary and secondary schools, and with making recommendations to the Minister for Education for grants to meet those needs. The Committee kept to its tight schedule and produced a report which influenced and shaped the national educational agenda in profound and lasting ways. While the Committee's specific recommendations for grants and programs were the most visible manifestation of the Labor

government's new educational agenda, the values and assumptions underpinning those initiatives are significant for providing much of the shape of educational policy and practice we are familiar with today. According to Karmel (1973), seven principal values were instrumental in developing the Committee's recommendations:

- i. *Devolved responsibility* - a 'grass-roots' approach to the control of schools at all levels involving local administrators, teachers, parents, concerned citizens, and, in the case of continuing education, students.
- ii. *Equality* - schooling based on a compensatory model wherein disadvantaged children are considered to have the same rights to education as those whose parents are better able to contribute.
- iii. *Diversity* - resources allocated in a way which stimulates and encourages forms of learning appropriate to the social and individual needs of all Australians.
- iv. *Public funding of both public and private schools* - the rights of parents to seek education outside the government school system is respected and valued, but public funding should first target schools whose standards are below certain desirable levels.
- v. *Community involvement* - school as the nucleus of the community with links to other agencies (health, welfare, cultural, sport, etc).
- vi. *Core skills and community* - the purpose of a school was assumed to be the provision of a core of skills and knowledge but to also to build a sense of community.
- vii. *Recurrent education* - to build the expectation of lifelong learning and education as and aspect of the quality of life.

Over 20 years later, these broad principles and values remain central to Australian education and, as will be shown below, they have been significant in shaping national indigenous education policy.

The evolution of a national indigenous education policy

The 1967 Referendum raised hopes and expectations regarding dramatically increased Federal government support for the education of indigenous Australians. An Aboriginal Education Foundation along the lines of a similar institution in New Zealand was envisioned by many (Tatz 1969: 68). However, it was several years before there was an opportunity for significant indigenous input into discussions of national Australian educational policy. Though individual States and Territories enacted indigenous educational policies of varying shapes and focuses from the earliest days of Federation, with dramatically varying degrees of 'success', the first buds of a national policy are less than 20 years old. Three

consultative bodies were formed to conduct reviews of indigenous education over the course of the past 20 years, and it is in their reports and recommendations that the evolution of a national indigenous education policy can be seen.

National Aboriginal Consultative Group: In the introduction to its report, the Karmel Committee flagged an important issue it was unable to address as a result of constraints placed on it by its terms of reference. The Committee remarked on the enormous problems in Aboriginal education and recommended the Schools Commission undertake a separate investigation into the issue (Karmel 1973: 4). Recognising the wide variation in the needs of indigenous Australians from State to State and region to region, the Committee also identified an urgent need for the development of a coordinated policy in Aboriginal education (Karmel 1973: 106).

The Schools Commission took this advice to heart and the National Aboriginal Consultative Group (NACG) was appointed in 1974. According to the terms of reference, the Consultative Group was asked to present a viewpoint to the Commission on:

- present policies and educational provision in respect to Aborigines;
- present patterns of administering funds for the education of Aborigines;
- specific matters the Group feel are of importance in respect to the education of Aborigines (Aboriginal Consultative Group 1975: 2).

The establishment of this Consultative Group was a landmark in Australian educational policy. The report of the group provided a set of 37 policy recommendations which, for the first time, carried real weight and influence at the national level. Equally important, it was based on a model of consultation and investigation in indigenous education which continues today. As a baseline review, the NACG's final report identified areas of need which are still relevant today.

Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force: In 1977, the NACG was superseded by the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC). The new Committee was an official national body charged with advising the Commonwealth on the educational needs of indigenous Australians. The Committee comprised a full-time Chair and 18 part-time members. In addition to its advisory role, the NAEC monitored programs, developed policy and initiated its own research. This body commenced its work during the period that individual Aboriginal Education Committees were being formed in the various States and was responsible for much of the coordination of advice from the States to the Commonwealth. In this capacity, the NAEC was instrumental in setting the stage and contributing to the development of a national indigenous education policy.

In 1987 the Labor government announced a major policy to overcome inequality in income and employment, the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy (AEDP). It was soon clear, however, that equality in income and employment was inextricably linked to equality in education (Daly 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995). In April 1988 the Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force, replacing the NAEC, was appointed jointly by the Minister for Employment, Education and Training and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

Against the backdrop of the Government's desire to develop a comprehensive and long-term approach to indigenous education policy, the Task Force, chaired by Paul Hughes, was asked to 'advise the Ministers on all aspects of Aboriginal education in Australia, assess the findings of recent research and policy reports, and prepare priorities for the funding of existing programs and new initiatives' (Hughes 1988: 3). According to the terms of reference:

The Task Force was to make recommendations as a matter of urgency on Aboriginal education policy for inclusion in the 1988-89 Budget, based on the existing body of information already assembled in a number of recent reports.

In doing so, the Task Force was to have regard to:

- the Government's stated intention of achieving broad equity in Aboriginal participation and retention rates and educational outcomes by the year 2000;
- the commitments already made by the Government through the education and formal training component of the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy (AEDP) and the importance of education and training in raising Aboriginal employment profiles;
- the major funding responsibilities of State and Territory Governments for the provision of education at the schools and TAFE levels;
- the need to ensure that the already available views of relevant Aboriginal advisory bodies and the Aboriginal community are given full consideration;
- the Aboriginal education goals and programs of the Commonwealth, the States/Territories and non-government authorities to ensure as far as possible that they are complementary and contribute to the broad equity objective;
- the role of independent Aboriginal institutions;
- the need for adequate schooling and post-schooling provisions in rural and remote communities;
- the development of appropriate Aboriginal courses and curricula;
- the need to improve the quality of teaching in schools;
- the need to improve the career counselling capacity for Aboriginal students, particularly in rural and remote areas;
- the importance of improving the representation of Aboriginal students in the full range of tertiary fields of study (Hughes 1988: 4-5).

In the preface to its report the Task Force refers to the government's AEDP and reiterates the point that the policy's objectives of equality in income and employment can only be achieved through the elimination of educational inequality. The Task Force suggests its report form the basis of a federal Aboriginal Education Policy (AEP) aimed at achieving 'broad equity between Aboriginal people and other Australians in access, participation and outcomes in all forms of education by the turn of the century' (Hughes 1988: 2). The body of the report (commonly referred to as the Hughes Report) contains 59 recommendations directed at achieving that equity.

National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: The AEP took shape in 1989. Developed jointly by the Commonwealth and the States and Territories, the Policy set out 21 long-term goals under four themes: involvement, access, participation and outcomes (Yunupingu 1995: 11). In addition, the Policy was intended to coordinate with the AEDP and 'enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to pursue their own goals in community development, cultural maintenance, self-management and economic independence' (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1993: 5). The Policy was a crucial advance for several reasons: for the first time, the States and Territories were able to identify and unanimously support a series of national goals for indigenous education; the Policy facilitated many new initiatives that created a national focus on indigenous education and raised the profile of the issue; the Policy was based on a triennial funding model enabling, for the first time, longer term planning for programs; and the national Policy included a supplementary funding program, the Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Scheme, to fill the gaps in the programs of the States and Territories.

The National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples was announced in January of 1993 by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and a Reference Group was appointed by the Minister for Employment, Education and Training. Chaired by Mandawuy Yunupingu, the Reference Group undertook the review according to the following terms of reference:

Against the goals of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP), examine the effectiveness of the strategies developed through the first triennium of the Policy, the outcomes achieved and the extent of unmet need; and develop subsequent strategies in terms of:

- ensuring Aboriginal involvement in educational decision making;
- providing equality of access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to education services;
- raising the rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in education to those for all Australians;

- achieving equitable and appropriate educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people while acknowledging traditional and contemporary cultural differences, including gender issues;
- ensuring appropriate reporting, monitoring and evaluation procedures for the use of funds provided in support of the AEP, and
- examining allocations, distribution and management of resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and compatibility of these resource allocations with needs (Yunupingu 1995: 1).

Prior to the publication of the Committee's Final Report early in 1995, the Reference Group published a Discussion Paper (Yunupingu 1994a), a Statistical Annex (Yunupingu 1994b), and a Summary and Recommendations paper (Yunupingu 1994c). The Final Report includes 44 recommendations for improving education for indigenous Australians (Yunupingu 1995).

Twenty years of indigenous education policy recommendations: patterns and trends

Each of the three major reviews organised their recommendations according to particular issues. The 1975 review's 37 recommendations addressed four broad categories of issues with respect to the education of Aboriginal people:

- Involvement, appointment and training of Aboriginal administrators and decision makers;
- Strategies to increase the number of Aborigines in the education professions and technical trades;
- Educational needs of Aboriginal children;
- Needs of those who lack opportunities in education.

The 1988 review's 59 recommendations addressed the following issues:

- Achieving equity;
- Aboriginal community involvement;
- Increasing participation;
- Positive educational outcomes;
- Improving local provision;
- Strategies for schooling;
- Strategies for tertiary education;
- Development and implementation of a national policy.

The AEP review's 44 recommendations cluster around the following major issues:

- Involvement and self-determination;
- Information as a prerequisite for decision making;
- Equitable access;
- Raising participation;
- Equitable and appropriate outcomes;
- Reporting, monitoring and evaluation;
- Resources and needs.

There are some interesting patterns in the organisational structures of the three reviews, but it is impossible to discern much detail at this level. For example, it is clear at a glance that the 1995 issues are more specific than those of the earlier period and are peppered with terms and concepts that suggest elements of the political debate of the 1990s: self-determination, outcomes, evaluation. The issues of 1975 on the other hand represent, at this level of comparison, more specific areas of need. Yet attempting to distil shifts in need and policy at this level is difficult. To better understand the development of policy in the past and into the future, it is necessary to look beyond the clusters of issues to the specific recommendations of the three reviews.

Together, the three reviews comprise 140 specific recommendations for action, but identifying patterns among these recommendations is more difficult than it may at first appear. Each review arises from a particular historical and political context and while there are certainly broad themes common to all three, they are not always readily apparent. In an attempt to overcome this problem and to distil the varied recommendations, a model was developed to classify the 140 recommendations. The model is derived from a textual analysis of the recommendations and is intended to be used as a tool for mapping and identifying patterns, gaps and overlaps, not for assessing the relative weights of recommendations. There is no claim made that this is the only or best model, it is simply a heuristic device to assist in understanding the emergence of issues and shifts in attention over time.

Each of the 140 recommendations was examined and classified according to content and theme. Eventually, 27 discrete themes were identified within which all 140 recommendations fall. The themes were then clustered according to topic area. Through this process five broad topic areas were identified: consultation, responsibility and decision making; curriculum; support structures and instruction approaches; educational staffing; and future research.

The 140 recommendations clustered according to topic area are presented in Tables 1 to 5. The numbers within the various cells refer to the original recommendation numbers. Note that in a few cases, individual recommendations are quite broad and touch on more than one topic and thus appear in more than one cell. In addition, where a recommendation calls specifically for additional funding or sets a particular target, the recommendation number is marked with a superscript code of '\$' (funding) or 't' (target).

The five tables and accompanying analysis provides an overview of the development of indigenous education policy during the past 20 years. Most striking is the continuity of themes. While there are certainly new themes which have arisen over the course of 20 years, none have been fully resolved and are now absent from the policy agenda. In the next five

sections, patterns within and among the five topics and 27 themes are explored, though no attempt is made to comment on every issue relevant to every theme.

Table 1. Recommendations relating to consultation, responsibility and decision making in three national reviews of indigenous education, 1975-95.

Recommendation	National Aboriginal Consultative Group (1975)	Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force (1988)	National Review of Education (1995)
National Aboriginal education body	1, 2	2	4, 43, 44
Increased Aboriginal representation and participation in education	3, 4, 5, 6 ^{\$} , 7	3 ^t , 4 ^t , 5, 10 ^{\$} , 19 ^t , 20, 23 ^{\$} , 28, 30, 32, 34, 35, 36 ^{\$} , 40, 44 ^t , 45 ^t , 47, 49 ^t , 50 ^{\$} , 52	3, 6, 21
Communication between education authorities and Aboriginal communities	37	56	21, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42
National Aboriginal Education Policy		54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59	1, 2
Coordination of State and Territory governments	14, 15	6, 39, 41, 54	28
Appropriate funding mechanisms			7, 8, 13 ^{\$} , 35 ^{\$} , 37
Baseline data on indigenous education			30, 32, 33

^{\$} Specific call for funding.

^t Specific targets.

Education - 'why?': consultation, responsibility and decision making

The first broad topic area includes the recommendations related to indigenous consultation, responsibility and decision making in education. Recommendations falling into this topic area address the 'why' of Aboriginal education (that is, indigenous views as to the very purpose of education). Many of the recommendations relate to central questions of responsibility and control.

It is interesting to note that the call for a national Aboriginal education body is as pertinent today as it was in 1975. As envisaged in the 1975 review, that body would act as the national advisory body, formulate policy and administer all Australian government expenditure related to indigenous

education. Interestingly, in 1995 calls for a national body are still being made but the insistence on indigenous control of expenditure has disappeared.

Increased indigenous representation and participation in education is a major theme of the 1975 review, but the call for self-determination is relatively subdued. The emphasis in the specific recommendations is on 'realistic control', a qualification related to the NACGs recognition that there was in 1975 a shortage of appropriately skilled indigenous people in high-level administrative positions. The 1988 review again emphasises this area but provides targets for improving participation and representation. Twenty of the review's 59 recommendations address this theme. The 1995 recommendations include a call for formal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory structures and call for a revitalisation of State and Territory education consultative groups.

The need for more effective communication between educational authorities and indigenous communities in terms of publicity about the existence of programs was noted in single recommendations in both 1975 and 1988. In 1995, there were several specific recommendations about how to make Aboriginal people more aware and more involved with particular educational programs and resources.

Though the 1975 review lacks an explicit call for a National Aboriginal Education Policy, that recommendation was at the core of the 1988 review. In the words of the 1988 Task Force members, 'this report ... is intended to provide a basis for the eventual development of a National Aboriginal Education Policy, and should be seen as stage one of the Government's program to achieve that goal' (Hughes 1988: 41). That policy came into effect in 1989. The AEP review (essentially a review of the national policy) reaffirms the need for such a policy and articulates a series of principles to underpin national and local policies: self-determination, diversity, subsidiarity, affiliation and efficiency.

While the coordination of State and Territory government programs related to indigenous education was a theme given significant attention in the 1988 review, it was apparently far less an issue in 1975. Both of the relevant recommendations in 1975 pertained to dissatisfaction with the administration of Torres Strait Island schools by the Queensland government (at that time the Torres Strait Islands were the only place in the country where government schools were not administered by a government educational authority, but by the State Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs).

Recommendations related to appropriate funding mechanisms appear for the first time in 1995 and relate to the direct payment of grants in aid to State and Territory Education Consultative Groups, assorted capital funds

for refurbishing schools, money to develop residential facilities for students and accommodation for teachers in remote areas, funds for innovative education projects and per capita recurrent grants to education providers. These recommendations reflect carefully targeted and highly specific advice related to capital investment in communities and local control of educational facilities.

The 1995 review is also notable for the series of recommendations made which specifically identify the need to collect baseline data. Though there appears to have been an implicit assumption in the earlier reviews that some form of baseline was necessary, it was noted explicitly in the 1995 recommendations. This seems to suggest recognition by the 1995 reviewers of the need for specific information on which future evaluation and planning could be based. Clearly, the review has also been shaped by recent political pressures for broad 'accountability' (Sanders 1993).

Education - 'what?': curriculum

The second topic is curriculum and relates to the content and focus of education programs. Recommendations in this cluster address the 'what' of indigenous education.

Table 2. Recommendations relating to curriculum in three national reviews of indigenous education, 1975-95.

Recommendation	National Aboriginal Consultative Group (1975)	Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force (1988)	National Review of Education (1995)
Post-school education and training	10, 17 ^{\$} , 32, 33, 36 ^{\$}	29, 30 ^t ^{\$} , 32, 39, 43	19, 20 ^t , 21, 22 ^{\$} , 29 ^{\$}
Preschool education	18		17, 18 ^{\$}
Language programs	19 ^{\$} , 20, 21, 25	14	5, 17, 24, 25 ^t , 26 ^t ^{\$} , 35 ^{\$}
Aboriginal studies	24 ^{\$} , 34 ^{\$} , 36 ^{\$}	7 ^{\$} , 13, 41 ^{\$} , 42, 53	11 ^t 27, 28
Special curriculum	26, 27, 28	7 ^{\$} , 13, 25 ^{\$}	20
Literacy/numeracy		31	19, 25 ^t , 26 ^{\$t}

^{\$} Specific call for funding.

^t Specific targets.

There are several themes related to curriculum that appeared in the 1975 review which remain significant concerns in 1995. Though the 1975 review was constrained to some degree by the fact that it was carried out

for the Schools Commission, and thus focused in particular on issues such as the achievement of Aboriginal children in schools, the NACG stretched its terms of reference and paid significant attention to the issues of post-school education and training as well as preschool education. While many of the 1975 recommendations relate to the identification of particular curriculum areas where programs are needed, the later reviews extend their recommendations to include curriculum related issues such as program access, participation and equity.

The importance of Aboriginal languages was flagged in the 1975 report and remains prominent in both of the subsequent reviews. Interestingly, the 1975 recommendations focus on the need to systematically evaluate bilingual education and to develop suitable English as a Second Language programs for Aboriginal children in areas where English is not the primary language. By 1988, the focus of language related recommendations shifted to the need to increase access to bilingual programs, access to the study of Aboriginal languages for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, and acceptance of the validity of Aboriginal English. The third of these is manifest in the publication of the recent booklet *Langwij Comes to School: Promoting Literacy Among Speakers of Aboriginal English and Australian Creoles* (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1995). Recommendations in 1995 are strikingly similar to those of the earlier reviews.

Aboriginal Studies was a prominent theme in the 1975 review. Focused particularly on raising the level of understanding of and respect for indigenous culture in the wider Australian society, the recommendations promoted appropriate and accurate textbooks and films and the incorporation of cultural activities in schools. The theme is more sharply focused by 1988 with calls for the establishment of Aboriginal Education Centres in higher education and the 'Aboriginalisation' of the then Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (now Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies) both in terms of management and in terms of 'community-based' rather than 'academically-based' research. The 1995 review is even more specific in recommending employers provide in-service training in cultural awareness and counter-racism (mandatory for career advancement), and the development and delivery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies courses by indigenous Australians.

It is interesting that the 1975 review called for the development of a special curriculum for schools with high percentages of Aboriginal children, yet failed to suggest why or what that curriculum might include. The theme is picked up in the 1988 review, but again, except for some references to Aboriginal Studies, there is no detail provided. In 1995, the only reference to a special curriculum relates to training rather than education.

Recommendations regarding literacy and numeracy are absent from the 1975 review, and they are only mentioned once in the 1988 review in the context of the lack of educational opportunity in the past. The specific recommendation calls for a national Aboriginal literacy strategy. The theme reemerges in 1995 with calls for waivers of fees for basic literacy and numeracy courses for adult learners. Literacy is also mentioned in regard to the potential disadvantages of students whose first language is other than English. Interestingly, Aboriginal English is included as one such language.

Education - 'how?': support structures and instructional approaches

The third topic, support structures and instructional approaches, refers to the recommendations related to social, educational and infrastructure support for learning among indigenous Australians. These recommendations address the 'how' questions of teaching and learning in indigenous communities.

Table 3. Recommendations relating to support structures and instructional approaches in three national reviews of indigenous education, 1975-95.

Recommendation	National Aboriginal Consultative Group (1975)	Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force (1988)	National Review of Education (1995)
Community involvement	8, 9, 31\$, 35\$, 37	27	13\$, 15\$, 17, 18\$
Independent education	30	16, 37	36\$
Aboriginal student assistance schemes		1, 18, 24\$	22, 23, 29\$, 35\$, 38, 39, 40
Appropriate pedagogy	19\$	12	5
Alternative structures in existing institutions		11\$, 17, 18, 21, 22\$, 24\$, 30, 33, 40, 41\$, 43, 48\$	31, 35\$
Remote/rural needs and services	16	8, 24\$, 26, 30, 51\$	5, 13\$, 15\$, 16\$
Health and welfare services		15	17
Education clearing house			5
Open learning/Information technology			14, 15\$

\$ Specific call for funding.

The importance of parental support and community involvement in supporting education are recognised in the 1975 review. To facilitate community involvement, the NACG recommended funding special education seminars designed to make communities familiar with current educational issues and approaches. An important extension of this theme appears in the 1988 review with the recommendation for the development of programs to assist community school councils to gain skills in teacher selection. The 1995 AEP review takes the theme of support structures even further in recommending that capital items purchased to enhance or develop educational infrastructure be vested in the local organisations. It also raises the issue of indigenous cultural programs within communities, arguing both for the validity of such programs and the need to remunerate community members for their involvement. Returning to the theme of preschools, recommendations in the 1995 review again emphasise the importance of parental involvement with preschools.

The notion of independent schools was raised in the 1975 review though the report appears somewhat equivocal. While calling for the promotion of government funded primary and secondary schools, the authors of the report indicate that the idea of independent schools requires further study. By the time of the 1988 review, however, such independent schools had been established and the review calls for continued government support of such institutions as well as movement toward similar support for Aboriginal controlled tertiary colleges. Independent educational institutions are, by 1995, well established and they draw little attention in the review. The idea of an indigenous university, however, is raised and a feasibility study is recommended.

While absent from the 1975 recommendations, equity and the importance of financial and other assistance schemes for indigenous students is a prominent theme in the recommendations of the 1988 review. Specific recommendations relate to the need for direct educational support payments (such as ABSTUDY, introduced a year later) to overcome the financial disincentives to participation in post-primary education programs. The theme is given even more attention in the 1995 review in which a variety of support programs are endorsed and/or revision or expansion recommended such as ABSTUDY, Vocational and Educational Guidance for Aborigines Scheme, Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Program (ASSPA), and the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS). In addition, new programs were proposed, including new scholarship/wage subsidy schemes to support work/study programs, internship, and a new internship scheme to enhance indigenous peoples' understanding of and participation in mainstream political institutions.

In the context of a discussion of under-achievement of Aborigines in education, the 1975 review suggests funding for action research on alternative forms of education. Though there is little detail in the report, it

appears the emphasis of this recommendation is on developing an appropriate pedagogy for Aboriginal learners. That theme is addressed explicitly in the Hughes Report in 1988 and the 1995 review. A related issue appears initially in the 1988 report, the provision of alternative structures within existing educational structures which better meet the needs of Aboriginal learners. Eleven different recommendations in the 1988 report relate to various alternative structures. Among the new structures are co-location of primary and secondary classes, student support services in schools, enclave programs, skills training programs leading to employment outcomes and higher education orientation and bridging courses. As with many of the other themes, the 1995 review reflects a sharpening of recommendations related to some of the obstacles to effective indigenous education. One such recommendation relates to the need to establish school organisation practices (such as separation of the sexes for particular subjects or during particular times) which afford appropriate respect to the status of young indigenous males in their communities. A call for trials of 'both ways' (bi-cultural) education models also appears in the 1995 review.

The need for appropriate structures to support students in remote and rural areas is discussed tangentially in the 1975 recommendations related to the provision of post-primary facilities in the Torres Strait. That theme becomes much more prominent in the 1988 review in which explicit recommendations are made regarding strategies to overcome the disadvantage of access to educational resources in remote and rural areas. For example, the Hughes Report recommends off-campus teacher training programs in which courses are taken to the students' communities. It also suggests programs to address the extra costs of secondary education in remote areas. The idea of TAFE annexes in remote areas is also raised. The rural/remote theme in the 1995 review appears in several recommendations, many of which relate to practical, 'on the ground' obstacles. For example, aware that not all educational needs can readily be met in remote areas and that some students must leave their communities to receive aspects of a desired education, the AEP review recommends residential facilities for students from remote areas and accommodation for teachers.

The importance of providing health and welfare services to students is emphasised in both 1988 and 1995. While the 1995 review's recommendation is fairly general, relating to health and nutrition education programs for preschoolers, the 1988 review refers to all students and specifically targets hearing and sight difficulties, drug and substance abuse, nutrition and child protection.

Two new themes appear in the 1995 review: an education clearing house, and the deployment of open learning approaches to indigenous education. The recommended Clearing House for Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander Education would collect, evaluate and disseminate materials and resources on a wide range of topics relevant to the provision of appropriate support structures and instructional approaches for facilitating learning among indigenous Australians and promoting cultural awareness among all Australians. Included would be material on effective teaching, health and student welfare, counter-racism courses, institutional organisation and the like. The effective use of information technology such as video-conferencing and computer-based teaching and learning is suggested as an important new tool to reach remote communities and improve educational access. The AEP review recommends priority be given to the deployment of information technology tools to deliver secondary and post compulsory education to remote areas.

Education - 'who?': educational staffing

The fourth topic, educational staffing, brings together the various recommendations concerning 'who' should be responsible for facilitating learning among indigenous Australians. These recommendations involve strategies for identifying, training and supporting such individuals.

Table 4. Recommendations relating to educational staffing in three national reviews of indigenous education, 1975-95.

Recommendation	National Aboriginal Consultative Group (1975)	Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force (1988)	National Review of Education (1995)
Aboriginal teachers	11, 15, 29	8, 26, 38, 46 ^t , 51 ^{\$}	12 ^t , 31
Aboriginal liaison officers in schools	12 ^{\$}		12 ^t
Training of Aboriginal teacher-aides	13	9	12 ^t
Equity for indigenous teachers/administrators			10 ^t , 11 ^t , 12 ^t , 17
Aboriginal culture component in teacher education programs	22, 23	53	9, 17

\$ Specific call for funding.

t Specific targets.

Not surprisingly, the themes related to this topic have remained relatively constant over the course of the past 20 years. While there are several interpretations one could draw on to explain this constancy, there is one that appears most likely. Teachers and other school staff are the face of education in Australia; while curriculum and pedagogy are critically

important, they underpin the experience of students and are thus far less visible. It is the teachers, liaison officers, and school principals who represent and deliver the educational experience not only to students but to parents and the wider community. Thus it is not surprising that when needs are not being adequately served, the focus of attention is the local school staff. Though major progress has been made in indigenous education, the role of teachers and school staff remains the most prominent feature on the often rough terrain.

The recommendations of all three major educational reviews of the past 20 years have called for more, better distributed, better trained, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and administrators, liaison officers and teacher-aides. Where indigenous staff are not available, the three reviews recommend culturally sensitive education workers under community control. In 1988, the recommendations begin to suggest ways to move towards that idea. For example, the extension of teacher training to remote areas is recommended as a mechanism to increase the number of indigenous teachers in regions where qualified Aboriginal teachers are in short supply, but individuals who might otherwise participate in such programs are sometimes hesitant to leave their communities for the required training. The 1988 recommendations are also more specific about the types of teachers, preschool and TAFE, necessary beyond the traditional primary and secondary schools.

The 1995 review moves the focus beyond considerations of teacher supply to issues of equity, recommending, for example, that local experts in indigenous culture be recognised and paid to teach, that procedures be put into place to allow Aboriginal educational staff to upgrade their qualifications and that priority be given to indigenous over non-indigenous education workers when opportunities for in-service professional development arise. These and other such recommendations, the review suggests, should be formalised as appropriate in awards. In addition, a wide variety of affirmative action recommendations are made in the 1995 AEP review that relate to hiring, promotion, secondments, special allowances and leave for cultural obligations relevant to indigenous education staff.

All three reviews address the need for an indigenous culture component in teacher education programs. The 1975 review is strong and clear in its recommendation that all teacher trainees should study courses relating to Aboriginal social organisation and culture. Similar in intent but more specific, the Hughes Report of 1988 prescribes compulsory Aboriginal studies including the study of Aboriginal education and learning styles. The 1995 AEP review sharpens the recommendations even more by suggesting that higher education institutions providing teacher education follow a specific set of principles and guidelines related to teacher education pre-service (Bourke et al. 1993).

Education: future research

The fifth and final topic includes recommendations identifying areas for future research. Though the reviews were intended to assess progress and suggest future directions for education policy makers, each of the reviews suggested areas in which future research was necessary.

Table 5. Recommendations relating to future research in three national reviews of indigenous education, 1975-95.

Recommendation	National Aboriginal Consultative Group (1975)	Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force (1988)	National Review of Education (1995)
Future research	17\$, 18, 19\$	10\$, 25\$	34\$, 36\$

\$ Specific call for funding.

Focused on the apparent under-achievement of indigenous students, it is not surprising that the 1975 review identifies research priorities relevant to that issue. Flagged for research are indigenous education needs in technical and further education associated with disadvantage, the needs of children of preschool age, and the analysis of existing research and action research on underachievement. The 1988 review's only explicit recommendation for additional research is for a feasibility and planning study on a national Aboriginal curriculum. The 1995 review, on the other hand, presents a broad span of proposals for future research, evaluation and the monitoring of indigenous education. Identified for priority funding (recommendation 34) are indigenous education issues related to the following:

- development of indicators of the quality of educational experiences;
- the causes of educational alienation, especially among boys and men;
- post education destinations;
- the assessment of language maintenance needs;
- local explorations of two-ways education models;
- development of best practice primary and secondary courses in indigenous languages;
- community level needs assessment of educational aspirations;
- development of counter-racism education.

In addition, several other important research questions are raised in the context of other recommendations:

- a feasibility study into an indigenous university;
- appropriate funding mechanisms for indigenous education;

- baseline data on indigenous education;
- literacy and numeracy;
- student assistance schemes;
- open learning and information technology;
- equity for indigenous teachers and administrators.

Addressing these issues will require objective, high quality, policy-oriented research, and there are several major research topics within the broad areas suggested by the review which should be undertaken immediately; some of these will be discussed below. Such research would serve a variety of purposes: assessment and evaluation of existing and new programs; examination and testing of assumptions underpinning existing policy; synthesis and analysis of existing data; and the collection of additional relevant primary data through field-based research.

Reflections on future directions for indigenous education policy research

One of the complex and difficult features of education policy in general is that it is too easy to proceed along a course of untested assumptions. This is no less true in the development of indigenous education policy. For example, figures on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational access, participation, and outcomes for urban and remote areas are often grouped without reference to what are sharply different contexts. In this sense, little attention is given to the very different lifestyle choices and beliefs about education of indigenous people which call into question simple blanket comparisons with other Australians. It cannot be assumed that choices, needs, and outcomes are constant either within or among indigenous communities or between indigenous and other Australian communities. A second difficulty is that principles and values such as 'consultation', 'involvement', and 'community control' permeate policy, planning, and implementation without careful consideration of what they actually mean in the context of indigenous Australian communities. Similarly, fundamental notions such as 'quality', 'literacy', 'retention', 'performance' and 'success' require examination.

Research approach

Questions and issues surrounding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education require a critical, multi-method research approach involving the collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data: the former to address the realm of perceptions and meaning, the latter to anchor the research in broad patterns of objective experience. There is already an enormous amount of quantitative information on indigenous education. At the same time, there is a need to collect and interpret additional qualitative field data to address particular questions. Such data could be collected through interviews, surveys, participant observation and the like. It is

through this fusion of qualitative and quantitative approaches that both the local specificities and broad generalities which influence the impact of educational programs and policies on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can best be understood and evaluated, and future policy informed.

Areas for research

The three major indigenous education reviews highlight a broad and diverse range of important research topics. What follows is an exploratory discussion of some of those topics which attempts to identify some of the critical questions and suggest possible research approaches.

Evaluation of existing programs and policies: There are several strands of the AEP and a number of programs which vary among the States and Territories; many of these would benefit from external evaluation. For example, each State and Territory has developed its own AEP strategic plan. It would be useful to conduct an evaluation of some, or all, of these plans to assess the processes through which they were developed, the means by which outcomes are evaluated, and patterns of success and failure. Similarly, evaluations should be undertaken of aspects or components of programs such as: ATAS, ASSPA, the Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Scheme (AESIP), and Higher Education Grants. For example, ASSPA could be evaluated to determine what the program actually accomplishes for Aboriginal students and for non-Aboriginal students.

One approach to such an evaluation would involve a consultative model as a mechanism to recommend ways to strengthen the program for communities. Using a case study approach, an evaluation might involve program participants and school staff in examining culturally appropriate approaches to learning in the context of their own school and community.

Quality and outcomes: As part of the broad-based drive toward quality and outcomes in education, there is a need to explore what 'quality' and 'outcomes' mean in the context of education and training programs for indigenous Australians. Performance, participation, retention, access, graduation patterns, and labour market outcomes are obvious traditional indicators, yet their blanket application to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is problematic and would benefit from closer analysis and research. Such research is critically important for making sense of the 'baseline data' called for by the AEP review. As part of this process, it would be important to look more closely and regionally at factors such as student motivations at every level from preschool to TAFE to university (particularly in light of cultural values), variations in program staffing and resources, and patterns of post-educational employment (and other income opportunities) and other such 'outcomes'. Indeed, issues of employment touch either directly or indirectly on nearly every facet of the AEP, yet

with the exception of the econometric research of Daly (1992, 1993, 1994, 1995) little work has been done to better understand the linkages between education and employment for indigenous Australians.

A major emphasis over the two decades has been the development of special enclave programs for Aboriginal students, particularly training programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and community workers. There is a great deal of research to be undertaken in this area. For example, a study of 'quality' in Aboriginal teacher training, a longitudinal study of outcomes focused on enclave program graduates, a study of Aboriginal teacher movement, promotion, and attrition, and a study of successful teacher training programs would each produce findings of enormous policy relevance.

Schools, communities and literacy: There is emerging interest in Australia in promoting the role of the school in the community as a means of enhancing educational outcomes. Case studies focused on patterns of retention, performance, and employment should be considered in an attempt to identify successful approaches to education within specific communities. Investigation of ways to strengthen the linkages between schools and communities could be a productive avenue for research.

In addition, as the 1988 and 1995 reviews suggest, literacy and numeracy are increasingly important issues and are receiving a great deal of attention both nationally and internationally; funding for a targeted Aboriginal Literacy Strategy is provided as part of the AESIP. While an overall evaluation of the strategy would be appropriate, it might also be useful to evaluate this program in light of questions such as: What does 'literacy' mean in various indigenous Australian communities? How does literacy relate to competence? What is competence? What role does literacy play in the local community? What types of literacies are there in various indigenous communities? Do existing approaches to literacy training 'fit' the various needs of a population as diverse as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders? What are the outcomes of the various approaches and programs?

Consultation and funding: The notion of consultation pervades many Commonwealth departments and programs, and Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups are said to be key channels of communication between the Department of Employment, Education and Training and indigenous communities. Yet little is known about the degree to which the consultative process is occurring or successful. Research into a variety of questions would be appropriate. For example: What does consultation actually mean? Do individuals in indigenous communities feel their views are being properly represented? Who are the individuals involved in the consultative process? How does consultation vary across the States and Territories? How do their strategic plans differ? How do their operational

plans differ? What are their targets? How are their funds expended? What impact do they have? Such questions are vitally important in considering options for appropriate indigenous education funding mechanisms and models.

Mainstream or community controlled schools?: Several submissions to the 1995 review were critical of a perceived shift from a Commonwealth commitment to self-determination in education for indigenous Australians to a watered-down emphasis on self-management and involvement (Yunupingu 1995: 24). At the same time, current policy was criticised for being primarily concerned with indigenous access, participation and equity in the mainstream educational system and silent about alternative and indigenous community-controlled education initiatives. Though the 1995 review recommendations appear to gloss over the issue of community-controlled schools, choices between these and mainstream options remain complex.

While community controlled and 'two way' schools would appear to provide the ideal solution to the racism and discrimination indigenous students often meet, the solution appears to be problematic to many indigenous parents. In 1994, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) conducted a national survey of indigenous Australians and one of the questions pertaining to education revealed that 48 per cent preferred not to send their children to an indigenous community-controlled school, with only 33 per cent preferring this option (ABS 1995). A 1995 study by the National Board of Employment, Education and Training which focused on the needs of Aboriginal adolescents found no support for alternative separate schooling among Aboriginal parents and children (Groome and Hamilton 1995: 64). These results have been surprising for many and seem to fly in the face of what is commonly assumed about indigenous education, that is, given the choice, indigenous people would prefer to send their children to their community-controlled schools. Research into this complex issue is urgently needed.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the evolution of 20 years of indigenous education policy, it appears at first glance that not much has changed. Policy issues are sharper and more specific, but the major themes remain the same: access, participation and equity. In fact, there have been significant changes and few would argue that no progress has been made. For example, census data from 1971-91 indicate an improvement in the educational status of indigenous Australians if measured by years of schooling or post-school qualifications. Yet, while there is evidence of gains in access and participation, equity remains far more problematic. It is clear that the indigenous education policy of the past 20 years has been shaped at least

are among the most visible of the themes when consultations are carried out and policy developed with representatives of indigenous communities, but there is another important assumption behind these policies. Clearly, government has developed educational policy based on a human capital model wherein education is seen to be an investment from which both the individual and ultimately the nation benefit. According to this model, increased education pays off in increased employment outcomes. Yet research has shown that the deployment of the model as regards employment and income outcomes is enormously problematic where indigenous Australians are concerned (Altman and Sanders 1991). Addressing the seemingly intractable problem of low employment, Altman and Sanders identify four factors which contribute to its persistence: historical exclusion and marginalisation, a demographic structure wherein the majority are relatively young (that is, proportionally larger numbers of indigenous people will be of workforce age than AEDP targets predicted), locational disadvantage, and the issue of cultural appropriateness of employment. As they argue, statistical equality by the year 2000 was always an impossible goal.

The same four factors which contribute to low employment are directly relevant to indigenous education policy and its continuing themes of access, participation and equity. History, demography, location and cultural appropriateness need to be taken into account when developing indigenous education policy. Ultimately, statistical equality in indigenous education in the immediate future may remain elusive for the same reasons that economic equality has. In this sense the critical issues are not the 'what', 'who' and 'how' questions of education policy, it is the 'why' questions that are at issue, questions related to what indigenous education is all about, what it promises, and what it ultimately can and cannot deliver to indigenous people. Research to both synthesise existing information and to address new and enduring questions and problems in new ways will be crucial in developing some of the answers.

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