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Interest Convergence in Australian Education

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This paper utilises the late Derrick Bell's (1980) theory of interest convergence as an explanatory tool to understand Queensland secondary schools' lack of consultation with Indigenous communities. Past education initiatives are analysed through a lens of interest convergence theory in order to provide an alternative reading of some moments in policy history, particularly those related to community consultation. These analyses also provide the conceptual context in which the findings of a recent research project can be understood. This recent study explored the capacity of teachers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies to engage in consultation. These analyses suggest that Bell's theory warrants further investigation as to its relevance in an Australian education context, and its usefulness to critical scholars in this field.

Introduction

Research conducted into the consultative relationships between Indigenous communities and schools has tended to be critical of a perceived lack of effort on the part of either community members or school staff – specifically teachers and principals (Ngarritjan-Kessarlis 1997; Sarra 2006). The literature that acknowledges the role that school-related structures might play in the frequent failure of consultation is negligible, limited to a few sentences in a handful of publications (Department of Education, Training & the Arts (DETA) 2006; Irving 2005; Schwab & Sutherland 2001). Scholars have instead been inclined to investigate the issue through a lens of cultural relativism – identifying cultural differences between Indigenous communities and predominantly non-Indigenous school staff as key barriers to consultation (McConaghy 2000). Such a narrow focus is problematic as the structures that give meaning to cultural differences tend to remain unexamined. It is not,

however, an aim of this paper to dismiss or attempt to discredit such studies, but rather to utilise critical race theory so that we may gain another insight into the experiences of teachers within a broader context.

Curricula in Australian schools have been overwhelmingly mono-cultural since their introduction in New South Wales in the late 1790s (Bubacz 2007; Patterson 2007). In the past few decades, however, governments have expressed an increasing desire for teachers to engage in consultation with Indigenous community members (Board of Studies NSW 2008; Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development 2000; Department of Education, Training and the Arts (DETA) 2006; Queensland Indigenous Education Consultative Body (QIECB) 2008; Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) 2010). Governments have developed a greater awareness of the need for consultation within the broader school community (QSA 2010). Consultation between communities and schools is, however, yet to become a common practice. The late Derrick Bell (1980: 518-533) maintained that such phenomena can be explained by his theory of interest convergence. This paper explores several historical Australian educative initiatives with through a lens of interest convergence, and then employs the theory as an 'explanatory tool' (Alemán & Alemán 2010: 5) to understand the phenomenon of under-consultation.

Consultation is a complex term; here consultation refers to a process that extends beyond "one-way communication in 'meetings' in which talking heads drone on, poorly explaining complex information and concluding by asking: 'Everyone agree?'" (Bauman 2007: 13). Consultation involves extensive, ongoing discussions between school staff and community members, may involve joint planning of curricula, co-teaching, and the seeking of advice and feedback at the conclusion of programs (QSA 2009). Heslop (1997) offers four models of consultation or "school-community partnerships" which range from assimilation, through integration and delegation, to autonomy. Anecdotal data suggest that some school staff continue to work within an assimilation model (Bond 2004; Sarra 2006), where non-Indigenous people pay no attention to the needs of Indigenous communities, believe that they "know what is best for Indigenous people" and subsequently make decisions for Indigenous people (Heslop 1997: 275). Subject handbooks and guidelines suggest an official invitation to move into an integration model "where Indigenous community advisory committees are established, but control is still exercised by and from within the non-Indigenous community" (Heslop 1997: 275). Much of the government literature has been produced by Indigenous consultative groups and most champion the development of similar groups to advise school staff on educational matters. Although teachers are increasingly being required to incorporate "Indigenous perspectives" into their teaching (National Curriculum Board 2009; QSA 2008), there is no enforceable requirement to consult with Indigenous people during any stage of curriculum development. It is quite possible, therefore, for school staff to have a consultation guidebook and still work from an assimilation standpoint. Examples of Heslop's delegation and autonomous models are few, and limited

to small, independent schools (see for example Blackman 2009; Aboriginal Independent Community Schools 2009). Although government departments use the language of self determination and empowerment, the literature around the reality of practice in schools suggests that schools and communities are encountering barriers to consultation that tether education to outdated models. 'Community' is used in this context to refer to a group of Aboriginal people or Torres Strait Islanders who have links to a particular area. Community members may reside in the area or have cultural, spiritual or historic links to that place (Peters-Little 2000).

Interest Convergence

Derrick Bell's (1980: 518-33) theory of interest convergence is an important principal of critical race theory which arose out of critical legal scholarship. Interest convergence theory asserts that majority groups or institutions will "tolerate advances for racial justice and greater equity only when such advances suit the self-interests of the majority group" (Castagno & Lee 2007: 4). Bell (1992: 364) observes that courts "only *periodically and unpredictably* serv[e] as a refuge of oppressed people" (emphasis added). Thus, the provision of 'refuge', according to the principles of interest convergence, occurs not to meet the needs of minority groups, but only if the outcomes of a policy are politically beneficial for the dominant group. The outcome of this decision making process for non-white people will be either 'racial sacrifice' or 'racial fortuity' (Bell 2004). Racial sacrifice, the most commonly experienced outcome for non-white people, refers to the process of policy making whereby in order to "settle potentially costly differences between two opposing groups of whites, a compromise is effected that depends on the involuntary sacrifice of black rights or interests" (Bell 2004: 29). This principle also suggests that neither past policy decisions, nor the merits of a case for equality are indicators of likely success of a social justice initiative. Instead, the benefits Aboriginal people or Torres Strait Islanders might receive as the result of policy decisions are most likely to be the result of racial fortuity – positive outcomes for non-white people despite the intended benefits being primarily for white people. Bell (2004) refers to legal cases in which a person who is disadvantaged by the withdrawal of an object or a program may only seek compensation if they were the *intended* beneficiary; if they only happened to benefit fortuitously or incidentally, they have no recourse. Bell maintains that even when a policy results in benefits for non-white people, those benefits tend to be fortuitous rather than intended.

Bell has been criticised for his pessimism, because he maintained that racism is a permanent feature of US society and that the white power bloc will only allow minorities to gain political and legal successes if whites will benefit (Clark 1995). This view is considered by some to be counterproductive, with little to offer but an "undermining and destructive" critique of white actions (Clark 1995: 50). Clark (1995) proposes that charges such as those made by Bell can only result in their own fulfilment, namely that if white people are accused of being unalterably racist, then racist they will be. Bell's works raise

several issues that, while not necessarily rejecting the label of pessimism, assert that the acknowledgement of the permanency of racism is a vital step in the fight against it. While Bell (1991) acknowledges that there is a degree of pessimism in his work, he maintains that an acceptance of the reality of racism is necessary if anything more than token gains are to result from the labours of civil rights activists. Clark's (1995) critique of Bell's work as being pessimistic may be apt, but the conclusion he draws - that the effects of such pessimism are bound to be destructive - is disputable.

Bell's theories (1980; 1991; 1992; 2004) have been used as both analytical and strategic tools by those fighting for equitable treatment within racist institutions. Those who use interest convergence as a strategic tool attempt to avoid a race and racism focus, instead seeking instances when various groups can find common aspirations (Alemán & Alemán 2010). When interest convergence is employed in this manner, however, it is unable to undermine fundamentally flawed institutions because it relies on convincing the powerful that social change will not lead to any sacrifice on their part. When employed as an explanatory tool, by contrast, interest convergence theory provides analysts with opportunities to examine the race-based foundations of inequity and to develop new and innovative methods of bringing about change (Bell 1992).

With few exceptions (Bond 2004; Irving 2005; Schwab & Sutherland 2001) the existing literature related to school and community consultation lacks a focus on the role of institutional structures that may impede progress. Despite some discussions about adjustments that need to be made by schools - such as the extension of the role of schools to better facilitate community participation (Schwab & Sutherland 2001) and enabling Elders to play a greater role in decision making (Bond 2004) - changes to fundamental components of the institution remain largely unchallenged. Irving (2005: 2) does challenge all teachers to "interrogate any organisational structures that seem to block progress in the area of Indigenous education", but discussions do not go beyond this point. Research has often been conducted using atheoretical ethnographic and phenomenological methods, particularly interviews, observations and focus groups (Craven 2005). While these methods have been successful in collecting data about the experiences of stakeholders, no significant work has focussed on how these findings can be realistically applied within the context of contemporary teacher practice. The employment of critical race theory enables the school system to be critiqued as an institution, and requires that research outcomes be practical and applicable.

Besides universities (Coram 2009), Australian educational institutions have received little attention from scholars fitted with the lenses of interest convergence theory. As a result, the power relationships that dominate the processes within the systems remain largely unchallenged within the literature. Indigenous parents and community members, on the other hand have been analysed, critiqued, criticised and had judgement passed on them

for centuries. There is a body of academic work exploring the influences of gender and class on teachers' work (Connell 1977). The 'race' of teachers has been investigated on and off according to various theoretical frameworks, but only when those teachers are teaching students who are racial others (Hickey & Austin 2006). And while the foreignness of the Australian education system has frequently been raised, the possibility that it retains elements of white supremacy to this day remains largely uninterrogated by researchers.

Interest Convergence and Indigenous Education after 1788

Early 'Experiments': Bennelong and Colbey and the Native Institution

Those involved in the early colonial education of Aboriginal people demonstrated a lack of concern for Indigenous peoples' interests, and made little attempt to disguise the selfish nature of these early endeavours. The education of Bennelong and Colbey are obvious examples of the fulfilment of a colonial desire to learn about local peoples by way of English-speaking informants (Fullagar 2009). That Bennelong and Colbey were "taken by force" at the behest of Governor Phillip after initial invitations to come into the colonial fold were rebuffed suggests that these early attempts at education were not prompted by a convergence of Indigenous and British interests, but rather the unashamed self-interest of the invaders (Macarthur 1971 as cited in Fullagar 2009: 33). However, as many colonists held the view that Indigenous people would benefit from exposure to 'civilisation', an argument could be made that the kidnappers and educators of Aboriginal people considered their actions to be mutually advantageous. Either way there is no evidence that early colonial education was attempted selflessly. The interests of the invaders clearly outweighed those of the people indigenous to that place.

The reluctance of many Indigenous adults to embrace the values and ideals of this new culture was widely reported, and the British thus considered Aboriginal children to be the most likely means of disseminating desirable elements of British culture within their communities. It was expected that, upon receiving a British education, children would return to their homes and have a 'civilising' influence (Cleverley 1971). Samuel Butler, schoolmaster of the Parramatta Native Institution, maintained that it was vital that the student body include

some Children of the principal Chiefs at Parramatta. Those who have been there for any length of time, do not seem like the same persons when they return. They lose much of the wildness and ferocity of their manners, and become more strongly attached to the English people. (Church Missionary Society 1821: 79)

As evidenced in the above statement, from the document that enabled the founding of the school, the interests of the white community around Parramatta were paramount and the interests of the students and their families appeared as somewhat of an afterthought:

With a view therefore to effect the Civilization of the Aborigines of New South Wales and to render their habits more domesticated and industrious, His Excellency the Governor as well from motives of humanity as of that policy which affords a reasonable hope of producing such an improvement in their condition as may eventually contribute to render them not only more happy in themselves, but also in some degree useful to the community (Campbell 1814: 1).

The education of Aboriginal children at Parramatta was to serve several purposes, most of which were beneficial to the non-Indigenous population. From the school would come a civilising force made up of Aboriginal children who could "carry to the homes of their families the germs of civilization, which cannot fail to produce good results" (de Freycinet 1819, as cited in Brook & Kohen 1991). It was also expected that the boys would be less likely to engage in acts of warfare, which were becoming more common, and consequently be of benefit to the wider community when trained as "Labourers in Agricultural Employ or among the lower Class of Mechanics" (Macquarie 1814, as cited in Brook & Kohen 1991).

It is difficult to determine the interests of local Indigenous people during this period, although the meagre number of children sent to the school may be some indication of the lack of confidence in this new mode of education. Considering the escalation of violence in the previous years, it is possible that some people, however, sought the protection of the Native Institution, in both a physical and social sense. It could be expected that the students would be somewhat safer from explicit settler violence and that they would likely be more accepted by the invaders if they learnt to adapt to the new culture. There were opportunities to discuss the expectations and desires of dozens of local Aboriginal families who attended the first Parramatta Conference. Governor Macquarie, however, appeared content to spend the meeting outlining his plan for the town and school, which included his suggestions for the reconfiguration of 'Tribes' into 'District Tribes', the introduction of chiefs, and a ban on the removal of students from the school once enrolled (Brook & Kohen 1991: 65).

These early colonial experiments in Indigenous education illustrate Bell's notion of interest convergence theory as a "two-sided coin" of racial fortuity and sacrifice (Bell 2004: 9). While some interests of Bennelong, Colbey and Native Institute students may have been met as a result of the provision of colonial education, this was not the primary aim of the British. The main concern for those instigating these programs was the benefits that could flow to the white community; Aboriginal people may have gained from them but they were not intended to be the primary beneficiaries of the new policies. When such educational forays became uneconomical or unpopular in white society, they could be abandoned without much ado.

Salvaging a Nation's Pride

Gough Whitlam's Prime Ministership in the 1970's is generally characterised as a particularly progressive one, that implemented various policies directed at improving rights of and outcomes for Indigenous peoples. Several significant education policies were implemented during the time, including federal support for bilingual education in the Northern Territory and Aboriginal teacher aides in various states. At the same time, the Government was seeking to re-engage Australia with the world and cultivate the nation's image as a capable participant in international politics and trade (Whitlam 1985). This internationalist agenda affected Indigenous policy development due to the recognition that neglected domestic issues, such as education, negatively impacted on how Australia was regarded by international bodies such as the United Nations (Commonwealth of Australia, House of Representatives, March 1 1967):

What the world sees about Australia is that we have an Aboriginal population with the highest infant mortality rate on earth...the whole world believes that our immigration policy is based on colour...the combination of such policies leans heavily indeed on the world's goodwill and on Australia's credibility (Whitlam 1971, as cited in Whitlam 1985).

Whitlam regarded racism as the "ultimate violence" but rather than framing the end of racism as an inherently worthwhile task, he sought to convince the nation of the need to abolish it by repeatedly highlighting the trade and security benefits for a predominantly white country in an Asian region (Commonwealth of Australia, House of Representatives April 20 1972).

Whitlam's policy statements and speeches demonstrate the use of interest convergence as a strategic tool, "a tactic for swaying majority opinion to support racial remedies" (Alemán & Alemán 2010: 6). While this has been the modus operandi for liberal politicians and law makers for decades, it generally has detrimental outcomes for non-whites – in this case, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Alemán & Alemán 2010; Bell 1980; 2004). The negative implications of using interest convergence as a strategy stem from its reliance on the political expediency of policies to the white majority; there is consequently no impetus to disrupt white supremacy. The adoption of such a political strategy is almost counterproductive to the aim of anti-racism as it serves to legitimise a system that consistently undermines the rights of non-whites.

Mutual Responsibility

Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) were officially launched in 2005 after several years of trial agreements and provide another example of attempts to create convergences between the interests of Aboriginal communities and governments. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) had been abolished in 2004 due to a perception that it was unrepresentative of Indigenous people and because then Prime Minister,

John Howard, also believed that the organisation had focused too heavily on “symbolic issues” (Commonwealth of Australia, Senate, December 7, 2004). SRAs were promoted as providing a new, more representative, strategy for developing government partnerships with Indigenous communities (Strakosch 2009). In a policy shift towards mutual obligation, Indigenous communities received services and resources in return for behaviour modifications, for example the building of a pool with access linked to school attendance. SRAs were widely criticised at their inception, with claims that they harkened back to an outmoded paternalistic era and forced communities to “sit up and beg” for essential infrastructure (Martin quoted in Donald 2004: 1; Sullivan 2005).

SRAs devolve responsibility for educational outcomes to communities without requiring governments to provide the expertise or infrastructure required for success. In the Northern Territory community of Wadeye for example, 600 students went to school in the first term when an SRA resulted in a school pool, but there were not enough “desks, teachers or classrooms” provided (de Plevitz 2006: 17). Student enrolments dropped from close to 1000 to 100 by the end of the year. Policies in Indigenous affairs during the Howard Prime Ministership, such as SRAs, revolved around notions of ‘practical reconciliation’. Programs were required to have quantifiable outcomes if they were to be implemented (Strakosch 2009). The focus on attendance in Wadeye ensured blame would fall on students and their families for poor educational outcomes, despite the wealth of literature linking other factors - such as culturally appropriate education - to improved outcomes (de Plevitz 2006). SRAs effectively absolved the government of responsibility for making any meaningful adjustments to the education system in the target communities - they just had to ensure that pools and petrol bowsers were delivered. Bell’s two fundamental rules of interest convergence are clearly present here; governments gain political brownie points from a public “increasingly convinced of Aboriginal irresponsibility” as “the media celebrates the gift of yet another facility to the native population” (Sullivan 2005: 6). Not only are SRAs beneficial for governments, but they also remove any impetus to significantly adapt schools to suit their students.

Contemporary Initiatives: Community Consultation in High Schools

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies is a senior subject for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students that was introduced into the Queensland secondary curriculum in 2001. The subject seeks to enable students to develop an understanding of, and respect for, the diverse Indigenous cultures of Australia and a knowledge of the varied histories of Indigenous Australia (QSA 2009). Teachers of *senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies* are required to develop their curriculum in conjunction with Indigenous community members and to ensure that this relationship is maintained (QSA 2009). The syllabus writers acknowledge the importance of localised pedagogy, and adaptation of the syllabus in order to meet the needs of students, the school, and community is encouraged (QSA 2009). Similarly, there is an expectation that students will engage in learning that is grounded

in Indigenous epistemologies. Not only are students required to learn about topics ignored in previous syllabi, but the impacts of Eurocentric, colonial education on the knowledge of teachers are also recognised. Professional development is consequently recommended for all school staff in order to provide students with a supportive environment in which to conduct their studies. Although there is a strong push for extensive consultation in the syllabus and other supporting documents, there is little advice about how this might be carried out effectively within a busy teacher timetable and the many, competing demands of Indigenous communities. It is important to note the organisation whose staff authored the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies syllabus documents is the QSA, while Education Queensland (EQ) is the employer of state high school teachers.

I recently completed a study that explored current experiences of consultation of Queensland secondary teachers of *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies*. Teachers in state schools were invited to take part in the project, and participants completed an online survey that consisted primarily of open-ended questions. All respondents were then invited to participate in phone interviews which lasted between twenty and thirty minutes. Finally, all participants received a copy of the 'Findings' chapter via e-mail in order to ensure that their contributions were accurately represented in the study.

In 2010 there were 13 teachers of *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies* in Queensland state high schools. Four completed the survey and participated in interviews at the beginning of 2011. Although the total number of interviewees is small, almost a third of the pool of possible participants contributed to the research.

All teachers who were interviewed for the project asserted that consultation is an important part of their work and that the factors that enable the most effective consultation with community members are strong relationships between school staff, students, families and the broader community. These relationships help to facilitate more respectful and appropriate interactions as a result of the teachers having a clearer understanding of the appropriate people to talk to and the protocols related to various topics. The outcomes of consultation are generally more successful as a result as they are demonstrably supported by all stakeholders. The development of those relationships takes time, as participants acknowledged in the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Syllabus*. All cited a lack of time as a major impediment affecting their capacity to participate effectively in community consultation. 'Time' referred to a lack of guaranteed opportunities to meet with community members, timetable clashes, or the lengthy process of completing paperwork. Although one teacher suggested that consultation often occurs on project based work for her classes, all participants said that they would like to engage in consultation more often.

I don't do enough of it because I don't have time. But I believe that I wouldn't have even done as much as I've done if I didn't have that community link

myself. You know I think it's very hard for people that don't have Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander friends, or know local people. I mean, if I was teaching down in Brisbane and had to get to know the Indigenous peoples of the Brisbane area, I don't know where I'd start. (Shannon)

It is widely acknowledged that community members, teachers and other professionals need to devote considerable amounts of time to the establishment of community relationships if consultation is to be successful (Bauman 2007; Hendricks, et al 2008). The workload of teachers, however, is likely to negatively impact on the capacity of educators to engage in appropriate levels of community consultation (Gardner & Williamson 2006; Howe 2006). Full time high school teachers working in Queensland state schools are paid to work 25 hours per week. Of this time, 210 minutes are set aside for preparation and correction time (Queensland Industrial Relations Commission 2009). Research conducted in Australia over the past decade has reported that many teachers work more than twice the amount of time they are paid for (Howe 2005; Timms, et al 2007). Howe (2005: 257-74) invited teachers within the state school system to record their working hours in a time diary and participate in focus groups. He reported that "the majority of teachers in the sample worked either long [41-49] or very long [50+] hours" (Howe 2005: 260). A similar study of teachers employed in the Queensland independent sector found that *all* teachers worked more than 40 hours, with most working 50-60 hours per week (Timms, et al 2007: 575). A frequently cited reason for this high rate of unpaid overtime is an ever-increasing workload (Gardner & Williamson 2006; Howe 2005; Probert, et al 2000; Timms, et al 2007).

Studies show that teachers view time as a finite and limited resource and one that is highly prized, often above all others (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2005). In a publication by the Australian Education Union's Federal Aboriginal Education Officer, the expectation that teachers should volunteer to do additional work outside of their regular hours is briefly alluded to (Moyle 2004). Moyle (2004: 6) also reports that when additional tasks are voluntary and the work is unpaid, teachers discern a lack of commitment to the project by their employers. One of the research participants in my project suggested that although an organisation may publish multiple documents in support of an initiative or implement changes at an administrative level, commitment to a policy is more readily recognised by teachers when changes impact their work, such as when the curriculum changes:

Um, I think QSA does [value consultation] and I say that because of everything that's coming through in all the syllabus materials. I mean, obviously, it's a great thing that they're running this as a senior subject and I know there aren't equivalent subjects in every state... But, in all of the subjects there are those specific references to embedding Indigenous perspectives, incorporating Indigenous history or Indigenous literature so I think the QSA is *trying* to do something. Ah, Ed[ucation]. Queensland as a whole, I mean we do have things like EATSIPs [Embedding Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander Perspectives], we do have people at District Offices and Regional Offices talking a lot of talk about, I know that the stuff that's been mentioned across District and Regional Offices about what they call the Principal's Report Card, where they expect the Principal to know every Indigenous student in the school and they're doing all these things, and keeping an eye on the Principals and so on. But, from my perspective on the ground, I see that as a lot of talk, I don't see a lot of follow through on those sort of things. And I think too often that's the case, that there's a lot of rhetoric that comes through from the Central and District Offices and nowhere near enough follow through. (Brian)

There are multiple benefits that result when teachers are supported, rather than directed, to implement policy changes. Praxis is likely to be more closely aligned with department-driven, best practice expectations if teachers feel supported by their school, which may be demonstrated by increasing the flexibility of timetables and/or the provision of paid overtime (Moyle 2004; Surdin 2007).

Several decades ago, Connell (1985) reported teachers' concerns about their capacity to implement school reforms successfully, despite a desire to do so. More recent studies suggest that increasing workloads are exacerbating this problem (Howe 2006; Timms, et al 2007). Time consuming activities that are optional are particularly vulnerable to marginalisation, particularly if teachers or schools do not understand or value them (Ingvarson, et al 2005). Although time should be quarantined for planning and marking, comments by participants in this study suggest that this is not always the case:

...it's hard to find time in schools you know, we've got our spare periods but when we've got super[vision]s as well it's often hard to book something into one of your spares because you don't necessarily know if you're going to get a supervision. (Brian)

Experiences of university staff involved in the provision of Aboriginal Studies in pre-service teacher training suggest similar challenges exist across all levels of education (Craven, et al 2005). Successful programs are those that benefit from wide-ranging support from governments, staff at all levels, and communities (Craven, et al 2005).

School deadlines can also impede the results of consultation, such as assessment tasks based on community events.

...we have our deadlines and we need to have stuff done by now but that's not always the way that communities work...You know, it's no use embarking on a local area study thinking maybe you can do it in a term because sometimes it takes longer than that to arrange a meeting with some of the people that you might want to talk to. (Kathy)

Timetables also pose problems once consultation has been engaged in and events planned. It can be difficult to take students into the community if it means that they will miss other classes. Similarly, major school events can

run aground if they are seen to impinge on regular classes, "...we used to do a big NAIDOC celebration at the school. We're lucky if you even hear the term 'NAIDOC' on NAIDOC week...People didn't want kids missing classes and being out all day" (Shannon). Decisions to abandon these kinds of events provide insight into an institution's values. Such moves hardly suggest that schools and communities both stand to benefit from consultative partnerships.

The Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts (DETA) has acknowledged that "timetable constraints can often impede the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within the school environment" (DETA 2006: 17) and "the issue of timetabling and workload of teachers...is well understood" (Education Queensland, personal communication, February 24 2011). Given that the education department is clearly aware of many of the barriers that teachers face, it seems curious that there remains little practical advice about how teachers' workloads or timetables should be adjusted to enable consultation to occur. The application of interest convergence suggests that the main reason why activities such as consultation are expected but not mandated, and are written into policy but not included in the development of teacher workloads, is that the provision of culturally sound, equitable education is not the main goal of these policies. The syllabus authors may have had such a goal in mind when the document was developed. However, when the syllabus is enacted and comes into contact with other aspects of the institution of schooling the original intent of the document is trumped by less time consuming factors with broader appeal. If equity and social justice were the goals of the enacted syllabus, the administrative barriers to that goal that teachers, community members, researchers and the education department itself have identified, would be addressed.

One of the participants in the study emphasised the need to ensure teachers are enabled to develop *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies* in consultation with local community members, especially given the 'living' character of the subject:

...there is no textbook for this subject and there can't be because we're studying living cultures and living history and the resources are the people in the communities. And they're things that are constantly evolving and changing and we're not, yes we are looking at historical documents and historical policies, but a major focus has to be the contemporary stuff and because it's contemporary, it's constantly changing and constantly evolving and you can't just rely on going to a textbook or going to a handout booklet that someone did up five years ago and just be able to recycle that because even something that was done two years ago there'll be a lot of new information to add to it and a whole lot of stuff that now becomes obsolete. Yeah, I don't think you can survive in this subject without talking to people.

Conclusions

With the introduction of *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies* in Queensland, education appears to have come a long way since the kidnapping of Bennelong and Colbey. In particular, there is significant evidence in the literature that governments recognise the need for consultation around issues of education. However, little research has been published on the topic of how teachers and community members experience consultation. Government publications suggest a desire to move towards a model similar to Heslop's (1997) delegation or even self-determination. Existing literature suggests, however, that little is being done outside of policy rhetoric to enable movement away from the assimilation model.

There is some literature that investigates general relationships between communities and school staff, however the current works tend to lay the blame for a lack of community consultation between schools and Indigenous communities on teachers or community members, either as groups or as individuals. The impacts of structural deficits on consultation, however, have attracted less attention. There exists extensive academic support for the introduction (or continuation) of consultative relationships but a significant silence on the issue of how teachers are to scale the workload wall in order to engage successfully with communities. Despite the publication of research that clearly connects the high teacher workloads to a disinclination to integrate additional or optional work into everyday practice, teachers' workloads continue to increase.

The literature around the institutional racism present in Australia's education system is scant. There is an acknowledgement of the impact of colonial educative practices on Indigenous peoples, but little recognition of the maintenance of white privilege in today's school system. As a result, the research around consultation has focused on individuals and groups in school communities, and the proposed solutions have been piecemeal. Critical race theory offers an opportunity to investigate the issues of consultation within the broader scope of institutions and systems, which should enable solutions that are practical at all levels. There is a need for such research to occur if teachers and communities are to be enabled to develop solid, productive consultative relationships. Any investigation into relationships between Indigenous communities and a largely non-Indigenous institution must include a critique of the culture of that institution and not simply focus on the culture of individuals.

A foundational idea behind interest convergence is that social justice programs will only be implemented by policy makers if they do not adversely affect the status quo, regardless of the potential benefits to minority groups. This theory is borne out in current school practices related to community consultation. Notions of social justice and increased equity are professed goals of EQ and QSA, and the potential benefits for Indigenous peoples are apparent. The experiences of the participants in this project suggest,

however, that teachers of *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies* are being required by multiple education organisations to engage in consultation but are provided with insufficient support to do so effectively. Bell's theory is supported in this instance since policies requiring consultation are implemented without inconvenience to the Education Department, which does not provide extra time for consultation or pay teachers any extra money to engage in this work. Similarly, there is no requirement for schools to adjust timetables or deadlines in order to accommodate consultative processes. Refusal to adapt school timetables consequently requires community members to engage in non-Indigenous meeting procedures, undermining Indigenous models of consultation.

Bell's theory clearly applies to the teachers interviewed for this study (myself included). There is undoubtedly a desire to engage in consultation for all the reasons described by Shannon, Mark, Kathy and Brian, as well as those outlined by EQ and the QSA. However, this commitment does not extend so far as to compel these organisation restructure the school day or by paying teachers for engaging in consultation as part of their work in order to increase the extent to which Indigenous community members can participate in school business. Interest convergence theory is borne out in the limited time and resources made available for teachers to engage with communities. As research into teachers' work asserts, institutional support by way of provision of practical measures such as designated time to complete particular tasks, greatly increases the likelihood of an initiative's success. Ultimately, by failing to provide teachers with sufficient time and resources to complete the work it requires of them, the Department of Education is failing to provide practical measures by which the goals of consultation can be achieved. According to Bell, the likely outcome of such a situation will be racial sacrifice – Indigenous communities continue to be effectively excluded from most schools, or their input will be included in a manner that is not too epistemologically or politically challenging to educative institutions.

Author Note

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