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## **What We teach our Children: A Comparative Analysis of Indigenous Australians in Social Studies Curriculum, from the 1960s to the 1980s.**

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# **What We Teach our Children: A Comparative Analysis of Indigenous Australians in Social Studies Curriculum, from the 1960s to the 1980s**

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## **Abstract**

This article conducts a comparative analysis of topics connected to Indigenous Australians in the Social Studies curriculum taught in Queensland (Australia) schools in the 1960s and in the 1980s. Apple's (2000) 'mentioning' is applied to examine the representations of this group. 'Mentioning' is used as a way to explain information that is included in a minimal way and does not cover the focus topic in any real depth or with engaged substance. Compared with the significant political and social gains made by Indigenous Australians, and their supporters, in the 1960s, this article finds that the resulting effect on changes to school curriculum are minimal. Second, this article finds that the static nature of curriculum stands in stark contrast to the changing and changed discourses operating in the wider community. Third, this article asserts that the incorporation of important national history topics within an all-encompassing Social Studies curriculum, results in an a-historical, present-mindedness being taught to students in place of historical accuracy and rigour. Finally, the international importance of history/culture wars that many nations have experienced over the past ten to fifteen years is presented in this article, through direct links to school curriculum selection by governments and advisory boards.

**Keywords:** social studies, curriculum, history/culture wars, indigenous education, Australian education.

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# **Lo que Enseñamos a Nuestros Niños: un Análisis Comparativo de los Indígenas Australianos en el Curriculum de Ciencias Sociales, entre las Décadas de 1960 a 1980**

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## **Resumen**

En este artículo, se analiza comparativamente las temáticas relacionadas con los indígenas australianos, en el Curriculum de Ciencias Sociales, impartido en las escuelas de Queensland (Australia), en las décadas de 1960 y 1980. Apple's (2000) aplica el concepto "Mencionar" para examinar las representaciones de este grupo, como una manera de explicar la información incluida de una forma mínima, sin abarcarla en profundidad o de forma comprometida. Comparando los beneficios políticos y sociales alcanzados por los aborígenes australianos, y sus partidarios, en la década de 1960, concluimos que, no tuvieron un efecto resultante sobre los curriculums escolares. En segundo lugar, se señala la naturaleza estática de currículo, que contrasta con las transformaciones y cambios de discurso que se dan en la comunidad. En tercer lugar, se afirma que la incorporación de temas importantes de la historia nacional, abarcando todos los estudios sociales, tiene unos resultados a-históricos, dentro de una mentalidad presentista que no se centra en enseñar a los estudiantes con precisión y rigor histórico. Por último se muestra, la importancia internacional del debate historia/cultura del conflicto, que se ha dado en muchos países en los últimos diez o quince años, mediante enlaces directos al currículo escolar seleccionado por gobiernos y consejos asesores.

**Palabras clave:** estudios sociales, curriculum, historia/cultura conflictos, educación indígena, educación australiana

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**I**nfluenced in part by the civil rights movement in the United States (US), the period from around 1964 to 1975 in Australian society is characterised by the dramatic social and political changes affecting a range of social justice and civil rights issues, including Indigenous affairs. Globally, the 1960s to early 1970s saw an increase in profile of many social justice issues such as: second wave feminism; the emergence of an organised green movement; peace movements, especially those relating to anti-Vietnam war protests in the 1970s; youth and student issues; and a raise in profile of civil rights of racially subjugated groups such as African Americans in the US and Indigenous peoples of Australia. Elsewhere, otherwise quite disparate countries experienced spontaneous civil rights movements, revolution and/or civil unrest in the US, Chile, Czechoslovakia, France and Mexico which stand as key moments of this period. The influence of the US can also be found across many aspects of political and social cultures in Australia during this period. For example, in the post World War Two (WWII) era, Australia experienced a growing strategic connection and economic interdependence with the US, particularly in terms of military security and Australian export trade. In building closer ties with the US, Australia steadily moved away from the close relationship experienced with Great Britain in these same areas prior to WWII.

Increasingly, at the local level this period saw mass demonstrations as being a common way to exercise democratic freedoms. Despite, or as a result of, the Australian state of Queensland being governed at the time by the politically and socially conservative Bjelke-Peterson government the state became a site of protest for social and political change. This era is widely regarded by leading historians and social commentators as a period of massive and rapid social and political change with lasting impacts. For example, Curthoys and Docker (2006), particularly in their overview of second wave feminism; Burgmann (1993), who provides a thorough overview of the *The Black Movement*<sup>1</sup>; and Horne who coins this era as being that of a Time of hope the cusp years of "...the period between the end of the age of Menzies and the beginning of Gough Whitlam's season..." (1980, p. 2) note that civil unrest and protest stood as a key experiences of this era.

The rise in profile of Indigenous issues features as a significant site of change. This is reflected by historian Henry Reynolds, who addressed

an audience (and recorded by prominent anti left wing historian, Keith Windschuttle):

The sudden emergence of Aborigines on the national political stage came without warning or prior reflection from historians. All this provided strong motivation to research and write and explain. There was a sense of urgency. We were self-appointed missionaries who were required to enlighten the public. (Windschuttle 2003, p. 54)

Across Australia, this era saw a significant rise in profile of Indigenous issues and participation of Indigenous peoples in matters that would impact the wider community. Through targeted issues and events, such as land rights demonstrations and the 1967 referendum, the wider community, often for the first time, was drawn into debate about Australia's Indigenous population. Briefly, some of the key events of this era included the 1966 *Wave Hill Station Strike* in the Northern Territory where Aboriginal stockmen went on strike demanding a land rights claim over the area be recognised so that they could train and sell horses; the 1965 *Freedom Bus Rides* of outback New South Wales, highlighting systemic and institutionalised racism experienced by many Indigenous Australians; the 1967 Referendum which altered the Constitution to include Indigenous Australians in the census and to allow the Commonwealth to legislate on Indigenous issues; emergence of Land Rights issues, accompanied by public demonstrations and the setting up of the Tent Embassy<sup>2</sup> in 1972 when land rights across Australian States (with the Commonwealth Territories excepted) were not recognised by the Federal Government despite the 1967 Referendum enabling Federal Government jurisdiction in this area.

### **Social change and the curriculum**

In consideration of the rapid social and political changes of the mid 1960s to mid 1970s, and in the lead up to Australia's 1988 Bicentenary, this article seeks to identify representations of Indigenous Australians in Queensland primary school<sup>3</sup> *Social Studies* curriculum. In doing so, comparative analyses will be made that identify any changes in the curriculum that reflect the significant political and social changes of the

era. This is achieved by applying Wodak's historical-discursive approach (Wodak 2004; Wodak et al. 1999). This approach is defined as an interdisciplinary methodology, that "...entails different dimensions of interdisciplinarity: the theories draw on neighbouring disciplines and try to integrate these theories...the methodologies are adapted to the data under investigation" (Wodak 2004, p. 199). The comparative work of this article is of interest to educators and curriculum writers as it identifies the pace at which curriculum changes (or, does not change) over a specific time period, and how societal values influence or are reflected in the education of school children.

As stated in the introduction, during the time period that this article covers, Queensland was widely known as a politically, socially and morally conservative jurisdiction, governed by Premier Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen leader of the conservative National Party. The repressive policies, and their enactment, by this government are widely reported in Queensland's political and public history (see, for example, Wear, 2002). However, while it might be assumed that the school curriculum would reflect this conservatism, this was not necessarily the case. Hence, this article engages a comparative analysis of curriculum materials across two distinct time periods. The first analysis of the school curriculum covers the time just prior to the late 1960s and the second time period covers the 1980s. This provides sufficient time for changes that occurred and became generally accepted in society to be reflected in the curriculum materials of the 1980s.

### **Activating the curriculum: Official knowledge and curriculum**

The concept of official knowledge is an important contributor to the analysis of curriculum documents in this article. Official knowledge is taken from Apple's work on education to mean school or education department approved curriculum and support materials for delivery and instruction in schools (Apple, 2000). That is, curriculum content that is officially sanctioned by curriculum decision makers to be taught in schools (for example, Department of Education officials or syllabus committees). Official knowledge theorises the way dominant values are communicated to students as a type of non-overt way of inculcating students to view the world in particular ways. It is argued that dominant

values are those usually viewed in society as being "normal", "just" or "right" and broadly accepted to be "true". In a sense they have been repeated so many times, and with significance to this article, as they become naturalized as a way of understanding the way the world is, becoming part of the hegemonic practice of institutions such as schools (see, for example, [Luke's 1995-1996](#) understanding of hegemony). Curriculum, especially as represented through the syllabus and textbooks, is the translation of this official knowledge into institutional doctrine, with this framed as "...what counts as valid knowledge..." ([Bernstein, 1974, p. 203](#)).

Sometimes in textbooks, subject matter that does not fit into the pre-existing agenda of the curriculum, which then informs textbook content, is included as a way to pacify others. This is especially the case for those who are on the fringe of society or who belong to minority groups, but have made (explicit and noticed) moves to have their perspectives and experiences included as part of the official knowledge in the school curriculum. This information is often included as a tokenistic gesture, and does not usually cover topics with any real substance or encourage depth of understanding. This is what Apple refers to as *mentioning*, writing:

Dominance is partly maintained here through compromise and the process of 'mentioning'. Here, limited and isolated elements of the history and culture of less powerful groups are included in the texts. Thus, for example, a small and often separate section is included on 'the contribution of women' and 'minority groups', but without any substantive elaboration of the view of the world as seen from their perspectives. ([2000, p. 53](#))

In the textbooks analysed for the larger project that this article is drawn from, this has occurred a number of times; most noticeably for the exemplar topic Indigenous representations. There are numerous examples of Indigenous Australians represented on the periphery of history. Indigenous Australians are sometimes included in narratives of Australia's history as add-ons to the 'real' history taking place, for example, as companions to explorers; or at the end of a chapter so that the topic of Indigenous Australians is at least included in some way, even if not part of the main content (see, for example, [Sparkes et al. 1964](#)). Doing so maintains the practice of seeing Indigenous Australians



as outside of the mainstream, relegated to the peripheral, included for classroom learning *if there is time or teacher inclination*.

### **Pre-1968 representations of Indigenous Australians in Social Studies textbooks**

Textbooks selected for analysis in this article are the government published and sanctioned textbooks, *Social Studies for Queensland schools* series covering primary school grades 4 to 8. Due to the wide distribution and recorded use of the government authorised, published and printed textbooks, that matched exactly the curriculum content for each school year level, it is accurate to use these texts as the key source for Social Studies based content. This information has been gathered from school library catalogues and through discussions with people who were school students and teachers during the 1960s and early 1970s. In fact, the ‘Recommended centres of interest and division of work’ (Department of Education 1964, p. 9) from the Syllabus acts as the outline to the content in the government published Social Studies for Queensland schools textbook series. The *Social Studies for Queensland schools* series was written to reflect the 1952 syllabus, they were then used throughout the period the 1964 Syllabus was in place, with no adjustments to content made. For approximately 25 years primary-age school students in Queensland used the same textbooks, demonstrating a static curriculum.

During this time period, *History* as a distinct curriculum area did not exist for primary school students. Instead History was placed within a broad integrated subject called Social Studies, with the distinct subjects of History, Geography and other Social Sciences like Citizenship not explicitly delineated. In consideration of this, content from textbooks has been selected for analysis that encompasses historical topics and approaches, rather than geographic content. The 1952 and 1964 syllabuses firmly locate representations of Indigenous people, their culture (rather than cultures, as it was a very monocultural view presented) and events within geography, rather than history. Within a geography disciplinary framework, Indigenous representations were formed around notions of being connected to the natural world—flora and fauna—rather than the social or cultural worlds. Accordingly and

repeating the 1952 syllabus, significant gaps and outright omissions in the presentation of Indigenous histories and cultures are now, almost five decades hence, glaringly apparent. In the whole of both syllabuses, for example, no specific Indigenous Australian is mentioned, despite many non-Indigenous Australians and Europeans being specifically named and singled out for study in school. Additionally, a (then) contemporary understanding of Indigenous Australians is missing, resulting in an a-historical, frozen-in-time exotica image presented to students. For example, in the 1964 syllabus for Grade 4 Term 1, the first mention of Indigenous Australians occurs within the section titled, “Recommended Centre of Interest and Division of Work”, where teachers are advised to cover the following two topics: "(a) Australia's Living Wonders. Birds, Trees, Animals. (b) Australian Aborigines" (Department of Education, 1964, p. 9).

Although arguably individual teachers could decide to focus on a specific Indigenous Australian, group or cultural event, this is not the way it is presented in the Syllabus. For this generation of Queensland pupils, Indigenous Australians were, it would seem, far removed from mainstream society, instead positioned as part of the natural world.

The second time the Syllabus discusses Indigenous Australians is for Grade 4, Term 2 where teachers are required to teach about “...the life of the original inhabitants of Tasmania's Aborigines” (Department of Education, 1964, p. 10). Whilst this is not an example of viewing Indigenous Australians as part of the natural environment, it does place Indigenous Australians firmly within *The Past*, an ambiguous prior era with no reference to any specific time frame except *not* in contemporary times. No mention of Indigenous Australians within a contemporary context is made. Nor is any specific historical or cultural event included as a mandated or even suggested area for study, unlike other aspects of the curriculum. A stark contrast can be drawn with legitimised representations of early explorers whose names, personalities and personal histories are all presented by way of basing accounts of their exploits in discovering and opening up a land purportedly unknown to and by the original inhabitants. From this Syllabus, it can be inferred that an overarching view of Indigenous Australians was located in a period prior to European contact. Additionally, such a monocultural representation of Indigenous Australians does not consider differences

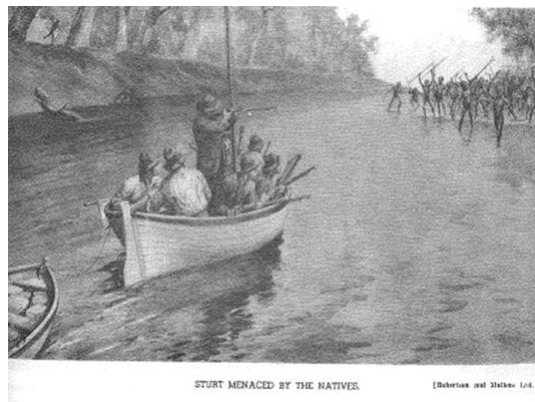
between Indigenous groups and cultures in different parts of the continent and effectively constructs an undifferentiated "Other". This is a standard or at least, common, colonialist revisioning of history that finds its ways into mandated curricula and supporting materials across the colonised world. For example, critical pedagogue, bell hooks recalls learning history in primary grades that positioned marginalised groups in the following way:

In truth, I can close my eyes and vividly call to mind those images of Columbus and his men sketched in history books. I can see the crazed and savage looks that were on the faces of indigenous men, just as I remember the drawings of sparsely clothed, shackled African slaves. I want to forget them even as they linger against my will in memory...When I recall the shame I felt seeing those images, of the Indian and the 'great' white men, I recognize that there is also a rage there. I was not only angry at these images, which did not feel right in my heart, I felt that being forced to look at them was like being forced to witness the symbolic re-enactment of a colonizing ritual, a drama of white supremacy. The shame was feeling powerless to protest or intervene (1994, p. 205).

The third and final inclusion of Indigenous Australians in this Syllabus, and the first mention of specific action by Indigenous Australians, is within a unit that looks at explorers and significant agricultural developments, such as the introduction of wheat and Merino sheep to the Australian continent. The specific mention of Indigenous Australians is in relation to assistance given to explorers, under the heading and accompanying comment: "Saved by Friendly Aborigines — with Sturt down the Murray" (Department of Education 1964, p. 11). Again, Indigenous Australians are represented as unnamed and undifferentiated groups with no specific mention of individuals; thus reinforcing the passivity attributed to this group in the retelling or reporting of historical events. Demonstrating the exclusion of Indigenous Australians from national history, in the Grade 6, Term 1, 2 and 3 unit of work titled 'Australia' (Department of Education, 1964, pp. 20-22), Indigenous Australians are not included at all. What clearly stands out in the textbooks is the lack of content related to this group, which is a clear reflection of the intention of the Syllabus.

### **Specific examples of representations of Indigenous Australians in the Social Studies curriculum**

A number of examples illustrate the representations of Indigenous Australians. The first is a visual representation positioned within the category of interactions with explorers and demonstrates a discourse of violence; the second includes a representation of Tasmanian Aboriginals from the Grade 4 sourcebook; and the third follows up on the same content area of Tasmanian Aboriginals, but from the Grade 7 sourcebook.



*Figure n°1. Sturt menaced by the natives, a half page picture from Social studies for Queensland schools grade 4 featured in the narrative about Sturt's exploration (Department of Education, 1954/1963/1966, p. 113).*

Although an expedition headed by the 19th century explorer Sturt ended peacefully, throughout the narrative there are distinctive discourses of violence prevalent. The image accompanying the narrative in *Social Studies for Queensland schools grade 4* (see Figure 1, which is a typical representation of interactions between Indigenous Australians and explorers used throughout the textbooks) is presented as black and white, likely reproduced from a colour oil painting. The overall scene is of the junction of two of Australia's largest rivers, the Murray and Darling Rivers. In the foreground are seven explorers in a small rowing boat. One man is standing and pointing a gun, and the others have their

guns with them, ready to engage. The background shows a crowd of Indigenous men dressed in traditional clothes adorned with face paint and waving spears above their heads. Some are in the water, as though they are approaching the boat.

The two groups in the picture, the explorers and the Indigenous men, are in conflict, as enemies, positioned on opposite extremes of the image, with the explorers in the front left of the image (immediate foreground) and group of Indigenous men in the back right of the image (far background). The perspective of this image is from an explorer's view, watching the violent clash begin. By having the image painted from this perspective, it is as if the student 'observer' is with the party of explorers, creating sympathy for them in meeting the aggression of the attacking Indigenous men. As a result, the actions of the explorers in using gun powder to protect themselves, is legitimized. The caption of the image indicates that it is the Indigenous men who are the perpetrators of violence, reading: "Sturt Menaced by the Natives" (Department of Education, 1954/1963/1966, p. 113).

This image is typical of those found throughout this textbook, with the only visual representations of Indigenous Australians portrayed as either perpetrator of violence or in their traditional tribal<sup>4</sup> lifestyles. School students were provided with a clear message that the only *visual* representations of Indigenous people are as formidable, physically imposing, weapon carrying perpetrators or actors of violence and as belonging to a world separate from their own. In the images, Indigenous Australians are dressed in traditional clothes with face paint and traditional weapons, or in a traditional lifestyle environment. This image, like many of the written and visual narratives included in textbooks during this era, represents Indigenous Australians as belonging to another world (from that of the school students). Although it is not disputed that this is how Indigenous Australia looked, especially in the era of early exploration, what is clearly being communicated to students is that this is the only way Indigenous Australians are to be seen. The only exception to visual representations of Indigenous Australians in traditional clothes, poses and cultural artefacts are when contemporary representations of Indigenous people in the Northern Territory are included on one page of the sourcebook, *Social Studies for Queensland schools grade 7* (Department of Education, 1960/1963, p.

83). Other than this anomaly, the message that is clearly communicated to students is that Indigenous Australians belong to the past or to an exotic present, far removed from the daily lives of the students and from mainstream society in general.

The second example covered in this article analyses the representations of Tasmanian Indigenous Australians during the Frontier Conflicts<sup>5</sup> from the Grade 4 Social Studies textbook. The three discourses that will be explored in this section include discourses of: government policies and control; criminality; and of a ‘dying race’. The textbook *Social Studies for Queensland schools grade 4* (Department of Education, 1954/1963/1966) describes conflicts involving Tasmanian Indigenous Australians in a very vague way, leaving out significant details that led to the decimation of Tasmania’s Aboriginals. Whilst it is important to acknowledge that this textbook is for grade 4 students, therefore age-appropriate content needs to be included—the glossing over of significant historical details, such as the perpetrators of violence that led to the Governor’s decision to create a compulsory encampment for the Indigenous population, the failures of the first attempt to group all of the aboriginals together, and reasons for the successes of the second attempt—means that significant historical information is omitted. This potentially leaves students with a fragmented knowledge base of causes and consequences of the government’s actions, which then could lead to a lack of understanding of Indigenous issues in contemporary environs.

The narrative in this textbook acknowledges, “many of the whites were guilty of cruel deeds...” and that as a result “...the natives sought revenge...Many lonely settlers were murdered by the natives who had learned to fear and hate all white men” (Department of Education, 1954/1963/1966, p. 94). However, there is no mention of justice served to the perpetrators of violence. Instead, it is seen as a definite *aboriginal problem*, with instead of the original perpetrators brought to justice, “...the Governor of Tasmania had all the remaining natives collected and sent to an island in Bass Strait” (Department of Education, 1954/1963/1966, p. 94), as though the Tasmanian Indigenous population was collectively guilty of any wrong doing. Some emotion is attributed to this historical event, but not from the people or primary source documents of the time. Instead, the narrative that is written as a letter



(see Figure 2) to “David” from a school friend “Tom” who had moved to Tasmania from Queensland concludes the section on the genocide of Tasmanian Aborigines with a detached, “It is a sad story, don’t you think?” (Department of Education, 1954/1963/1966, p. 94).

When white men first came to the island, the natives were friendly. But this friendship did not last and some natives were killed. Many of the whites were guilty of cruel deeds and the natives sought revenge. In time, most of them retreated to the forests and the mountains. Many lonely settlers were murdered by the natives who had learned to fear and hate all white men. At last, the Governor of Tasmania had all the remaining natives collected and sent to an island in Bass Strait. They were very unhappy in their new surroundings and many of them died. The few survivors were later brought back to the mainland and, less than eighty years after the white men had come to live in the island, the last Tasmanian aboriginal died.

It had at first seemed strange to me never to see an aboriginal somewhere on the island but now I know the reason for this. It is a sad story, don’t you think?

Figure n°2. Extract of letter between Tom and David from *Social Studies for Queensland schools grade 4* (Department of Education, 1954/1963/ 1966, p. 94).

The third representation of Indigenous Australians covered in this paper builds on the Grade 4 example just analysed. The grade 7 book in this same series, *Social studies for Queensland schools grade 7* (Department of Education, 1960/1963), complements the grade 4 textbook by including significantly more information and at a deeper cognitive level, and still within a discourse of government policies and control (as well as the introduction of other discourses, being: remorse and regret for violent actions against Indigenous Australians; discourses

of criminality; and discourses of a "dying race"). Unlike the grade 4 textbook, Indigenous representations in the grade 7 textbook form a central focus of the section on Tasmania's early colonial history. This demonstrates the sequential planning undertaken when constructing the Social studies for *Queensland schools* series of textbooks. After setting up an initial discussion of violent interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, this textbook then moves to a discussion of the general built environment, progress and increasing economic activity of the early Van Diemen's Land (as the state of Tasmania was then named). After four paragraphs, the textbook then goes back to discuss the Frontier Conflicts, which it calls a 'Black War' (Department of Education, 1960/1963, p. 21), a provocative and educationally progressive term for a textbook of this era. In the year 7 textbook, clear government sanctions are recorded as the impetus for sustained acts of violence against Indigenous Australians; who are also placed in the same category as criminals, with terms such as "subduing" and "unfortunate people" (Department of Education, 1960/1963, p. 21) used to describe Indigenous Australians in the *present tense*, not as a record or quote from a primary source document, for example in the following extract:

Subduing the natives proved to be an equally hard task. These unfortunate people, guilty of some terrible crimes against the settlers, had merely been imitating the harsh treatment they themselves had suffered at the hands of bushrangers, whalers, and sealers... (Department of Education, 1960/1963, p. 21)

A clear contradiction of Indigenous representations is evidenced throughout this text. From one perspective, Indigenous Australians are seen as perpetrators of violence, for example, "The natives retaliated and, considering all white people to be their enemies, often took revenge upon peaceful, lonely settlers" (Department of Education, 1960/1963, p. 20). From a second perspective, Indigenous Australians are seen as victims of violence, "These unfortunate people, guilty of some terrible crimes against the settlers, had merely been imitating the harsh treatment they themselves had suffered" (Department of Education, 1960/ 1963, p. 21). A third perspective similar to the first, positions all Indigenous Australians as criminals, grouped together with bushrangers (as seen in



the extract above). So, a variety of mixed messages are communicated to school students, without any intervention or mediation of meaning. The contradictory messages do little to equip students with the knowledge and understanding to consider the issues at hand in the Tasmanian Frontier Conflicts with any real depth or insight.

### **Post-1968 representations of Indigenous Australians in Social Studies textbooks**

This paper now moves to analyse representations of Indigenous Australians in official school curriculum documents, implemented more than a decade after the social justice movements, particularly those related to Indigenous peoples, had reached their peak in Australia. Here, a comparative analysis between the 1960s and the 1980s era can be formed as a way to investigate changes in school curriculum in light of changed dominant public discourses.

The 1982 Syllabus saw the first major revision of the Social Studies curriculum in the years post the mid 1970s, and this was followed on up by the 1987 *Primary Social Studies Syllabus and Guidelines* (Department of Education, 1987). The 1987 Syllabus provides an up-to-date representation of the Social Studies curriculum for this era, covering grades one to seven (by this stage, grade 8 had become the first year of high school, therefore no longer included in the primary curriculum) and complemented by a series of sourcebooks designed for teachers to use in the classroom as complete units of work. As textbooks such as the *Social Studies for Queensland schools* series were no longer published the sourcebooks can be seen as taking their place, with anecdotal evidence (from teachers who taught during the 1980s) suggesting that the sourcebooks were widely used and, in effect, replaced the previously issued textbooks. As in the previous era, History was not a standalone subject for the primary grades, with an all-encompassing Social Studies instead taught in the classroom. Compared with previous eras, an increased move away from even identifying History, Geography and Civics/Citizenship is obvious, with the Syllabus not acknowledging these discipline areas separately. Instead, Social

Studies is positioned as its own discipline-specific curriculum, integrating various approaches, evident through the following key statement from the Syllabus: statement from the Syllabus:

Social studies is about people and the societies in which they live. It focuses on people as intellectual, spiritual, emotional and social beings, and on how they relate to each other and their environments in local, national and global settings. Social studies also involves learning from the past, investigating the present and considering the future of people and their societies.

...

Social studies provides a structure through which children can organise and build on their experiences of the world. To achieve this, social studies draws upon a range of disciplines and areas of knowledge for its mode of inquiry and content. (Department of Education, 1987, p. 2)

The 1988 Australian Bicentennial era provides the sharpest contrast in the representations of Indigenous Australians in Social Studies curriculum. The curriculum in 1988 has as its prevailing representation of Indigenous Australians one of an inclusion of values, beliefs and systems. This occurs strongly across curriculum materials, for example, kinship and moiety systems are covered from year 5 (see, for example, Department of Education, 1988) through to senior high school (see, for example, Cowie 1981). However the inclusion of this type of content is not done to challenge or critique student's perceptions, nor is it provided as a way to engage deeply with other aspects of Indigenous cultures (from Australia or elsewhere). Instead, a consistent a-historical approach is taken towards such topics despite units they reside within being very date-specific (see, for example, Department of Education 1988). Here, the "mentioning" that Apple (2000) discusses is evident, because although increasingly part of the core curriculum, residing less on the fringe, but often still as bridging topics within a larger unit of work, knowledge of Indigenous Australians in the primary years of schooling is presented in an of *general interest* inclusion, rather than as a meaningful way to engage with histories, beliefs, values and systems that may differ from those of the dominant culture.

This section showcases examples that illustrate the representations of Indigenous Australians from the Social Studies curriculum. They have been selected as they demonstrate a representative selection of the way in which Indigenous Australians are included in the primary school curriculum. Furthermore, selections (as much as possible) have been made in order to complement those selected for the previous time period, so that effective comparison of the types of discourses used when covering Indigenous Australian content can be made. The first is a primary source representation of Indigenous Australians positioned within the category of interactions with explorers and demonstrates a discourse of primitive attributes used to describe Indigenous Australians. The second representation covers discourses that foreground oral histories; and the third representation of Indigenous Australians is concerned with the “Othering” that occurs with Indigenous Australians in the primary school Social Studies curriculum. Of note, images are used sparingly throughout the sourcebook, with written information privileged over other forms of communication. Therefore, the analysis of content in this section has necessarily been only of the written word.

Like in school texts from the previous era analysed, Indigenous Australians in *Primary Social Studies sourcebook year 5* are referred to as “natives” (Department of Education, 1988, p. 31) when interacting with explorers. In terms of the topic of early explorers, Indigenous Australians are represented as negatively interfering with explorers, generally being a nuisance to their activities. No attempt is made to consider the issues which arose out of exploration from the perspective of Indigenous Australians, despite a significant rise in general public awareness of Indigenous histories and contemporary issues. Viewing Indigenous Australians as savage or primitive is highlighted in Figure 3, being an extract taken from *Primary Social Studies sourcebook year 5* (Department of Education, 1988), arguably a disconnected use of the primary source this quote has been taken from. Despite the significant role this sourcebook plays in acknowledging and promoting Indigenous Australian histories, primary source documents are still used, unmediated, in a way that reinforces discourses that view Indigenous Australians as “savage” or “primitive”.

The first recorded sighting of Australia was in 1606 by the Dutch skipper of 'Duyfken', Willem Jansz, who described the natives as 'savage, cruel, black barbarians who slew some of our sailors'. In the same year the Spaniard, Luis Vaez de Torres, sailed through the Strait named after him, and described the natives of the same area as 'very corpulent and naked. Their arms were lances, arrows, and clubs of stone ill-fashioned'. Jan Carstenz in 1623 described several armed encounters with Aborigines, and judged the country 'the most arid and barren region that could be found anywhere on earth; the inhabitants, too, are the most wretched and poorest creatures that I have ever seen in my age of time'. As a result of such reports the Dutch Government decided the land was not suitable for colonisation.

In the late 18th century, despite the various visitors, Australia and the Aborigines were still unknown to much of the world. In 1697, the Englishman William Dampier had published his *New Voyage Round the World*, in which he described Aborigines on the Western Australian coast as 'the miserablist People in the World . . . They are tall, straight-bodied, and thin, with small long limbs. They have great Heads, round Foreheads and great Brows. Their Eyelids are always half closed, to keep the Flies out of their Eyes'. His observations remained the most detailed description of the Western Australian Aborigines for well over a century.

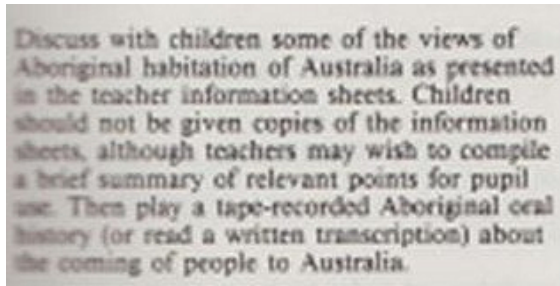
Figure n°3. Dampier extracts from a *Teacher information sheet in Primary Social Studies sourcebook year 5* (Department of Education, 1988, p. 19-20).

It is not disputed that these are the descriptions provided by the Dutch sailors and then by Dampier from Great Britain, nor does this article debate the appropriateness of including primary source documents to illustrate a point or to illuminate an historical narrative. What is questioned is the educational value of including a primary source

document that contains negative discourses about a group, already subjugated in schooling and wider society, without adequate mediation of the context of the original source and positioned within the dominant discourses operating at the time. By not sufficiently contextualizing the primary source discourses that although no longer dominant, still have some hold in school and wider communities, this negativity is reinforced to students as legitimate knowledge. As a point of interest, the quote above by Dampier from *Primary Social Studies sourcebook year 5* (Department of Education, 1988); was also included in a secondary school textbook during this time period, *Spanning time* (Power, Lingard and Itsikson, 1985, p. 179); and has been used in History and Social Studies textbooks in Queensland school across all eras of the 20th century, and as in its use here, never contextualized for a student audience. The example of it in the 1987 primary school curriculum has changed only that it is now directed at teachers, through the *Teacher Information Sheet*. However, as this information sheet is intended as in-service professional development material for teachers who are then encouraged to summarise it into a student worksheet, representing Indigenous Australians in this unmediated way potentially runs the risk of this discourse of primitive people being repeated to school students. Reinforcing the view of Indigenous Australians as "other", they are the *only* group in the Social Studies curriculum that has terms such as "savage, cruel...barbarians" (Department of Education, 1988, p. 19) attributed to them. Furthermore with no actions recorded that would attribute these adjectives to them, a decontextualised statement of a 17th century observation by sailors who had no meaningful contact, engagement or relationship with the people they are describing, is presented to students as "the Truth".

The second representation of Indigenous Australians covered in this section analyses discourses that foreground oral histories (a common way in Indigenous communities, of passing history from one generation to another). Students are introduced to oral histories as a mode of learning in *Activity B: Theories of Australian settlement in Primary Social Studies sourcebook year 5* (Department of Education, 1988). Respect for Indigenous knowledges and cultures through oral history is limited as it is not extended to content outside of that which is directly about histories of Indigenous Australians, with only Western, written

knowledge presented for all other topics. The main activity for students to engage with oral history as a legitimate historical methodology is through learning how Indigenous Australians first came to Australia (see Figure 4).



*Figure n° 4. Activity B: Theories of Australian settlement extract from Primary Social Studies sourcebook year 5 (Department of Education, 1988, p. 15).*

The respect for oral histories as a legitimate tool to study Social Studies is mitigated through the non-articulated understanding that oral histories are relevant to Indigenous peoples only, and not to be used for any form of history outside of pre-history. The purpose and function of oral history is potentially missed if teachers decided to have students “read a written transcript” (Department of Education, 1988, p. 15) rather than engage authentically with this mode of learning. The activity outlined in the year 5 sourcebook (see Figure 5) encourages students to engage thoughtfully with historical processes. It is through Indigenous knowledges that oral histories are justified and considered as a legitimate approach to history. This mode of learning is excluded from all other content outside of that explicitly linked to pre-colonisation Indigenous cultures and histories.



Encourage children to discuss the difference between the style and information from the extracts, and the Aboriginal oral history.	<b>Thinking process: Comparing</b> Identifying the attributes, qualities or properties of two or more different entities
Ask the children why these differences would be so. They could consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the background of the writer/teller (e.g. archaeologist, story-teller);</li> <li>• the audience for whom the information was intended;</li> <li>• the purpose for which the information would be used.</li> </ul>	<b>Thinking process: Inferring</b> Generating logical inferences and identifying the evidence on which the inferences are based <b>Attitudes, feelings and sensitivities:</b> Developing and exploring attitudes
Encourage the children to realise that information is recorded in a variety of ways and styles.	<b>Academic skill: Communicating</b> Acquiring information from various sources by listening and observing to make comparisons

Figure n° 5. Learning through oral history extract from *Primary Social Studies sourcebook year 5* (Department of Education, 1988, P. 15).

The third, and final, representation of Indigenous Australians analysed for this time period, analyses the “Othering” that occurs with Indigenous Australians in the school curriculum. Although the *Primary Social Studies sourcebook year 5* (Department of Education, 1988) pays significant attention to acknowledging Indigenous Australians’ histories and cultures, as seen through the introductory topic for *Unit 1: Settlers of Australia*, once viewed in conjunction with non-Indigenous cultures and knowledges, student understanding then becomes mediated through the other culture, creating a dominant and subjugated culture. In the example that follows, this is not necessarily done to offend or diminish Indigenous peoples and cultures; but could be a reflection of the Syllabus as a product of its time and place, a silencing of race that the Syllabus and sourcebook writers are unconscious of, as it permeates so deeply through mainstream society. The extract reads:

Have the children compile a brief record of Macassan and European influences using the following criteria:

- time of contact;
- lengths of contact time;
- purpose of contact;
- interaction with Aborigines;
- type of culture;
- aspects of culture taken up by Aboriginal groups;

- short-term effect on Aboriginal groups;
- long-term effect on Aboriginal groups.  
(Department of Education, 1988, p. 17)

There is no reciprocity mentioned here, as though Aboriginals have no positive lasting impact on the groups they come into contact with. Instead, it is the Indigenous Australians who are expected to have “taken up” (Department of Education, 1988, p. 17) aspects of the coloniser’s culture, never around the other way. There is still the underlying perspective that represents Indigenous Australians as anonymous actors in, and on the peripheral of, history permeating through the school curriculum, disguised within a curriculum that, on the surface, appears to be culturally inclusive.

### Conclusion

Despite the many gains made through the Australian Black movement of the 1960s to 1970s, Indigenous Australians, in the 1980s, are still placed firmly on the fringe of school curriculum content. Across the two time periods this article focuses on, it has become apparent that the perspective attributed to historical events and people are presented in such a way that the history presented is not an accurate depiction of the ideologies, views and events *of the era in which they occurred*, rather they are mediated through the *ideologies of the present*. This has resulted in an inaccurate and at times a-historical narrative or reporting of events and this does not sufficiently acculturate students into historical thinking and literacy, never mind casting a critical lens on the information presented to them; nor does it provide an historically-contextualised curriculum. Instead, students are taught to view issues of the past with the eyes of the present, for example, in the case of the constructions of narratives of Indigenous Australians’ interactions with explorers. Through the representative examples analysed in this article, it is apparent that, as Pinsent (1997) points out, the ideological assumptions within these textbooks are implicit, subsumed within the dominant descriptive language of the relevant era.



Interactions between Indigenous Australians and explorers are presented in textbooks and curriculum materials throughout the early to mid 20th century. Although this is presented in a way that subjugates Indigenous Australians by describing them in words that denote primitive and savage imagery; this group is at least included in the historical narrative; including, importantly, some descriptions of resistance by Indigenous Australians (even though this is couched in terms that marginalise their contribution). At the very least, Indigenous Australians are not excluded from the narrative, although their inclusion is constructed based on a passive and subjugated identity. However, when curriculum materials from the latter part of the 20th century are analysed, interactions between explorers and Indigenous Australians are ignored. Here, stories of exploration are rarely accompanied with any information about Indigenous Australians. With little or no inclusions of Indigenous Australians' resistance or participation in the early exploration, students do not learn factual accounts of the nation's past. Instead, a *white wash* of history takes place that sees Indigenous Australians continue to be silenced and omitted from their own national history experiences.

Through analysis of the Social Studies curriculum, it is clear that school curriculum remains static over considerable periods of time and, except in rare cases, does not present knowledge as contentious. Contrarily, the public discourses operating in the same time periods, covering the same topics as analysed in the textbooks, are in a state of flux. Thus, community gains made through the social movements of the 1960-70s are not reflected in school curriculum materials of the late 1980s. In order to focus on specific topics from school curriculum materials and to frame them within the dominant socio-political discourses of the time, there has been a "...need to go outside the text, using academic and non-academic sources to get a sense of its social context. One's sense of what the major contemporary social problems are comes from a broad perspective on the social order" (Fairclough 2001, p. 129). The problem in this case is the naturalising of discourses related to Indigenous representations in Social Studies curriculum communicates an unproblematic, closed and authoritarian version of events.

Although public discourses are generally directed at an adult—rather than child—audience, it remains that in times of rapid social and political change the variety of perspectives for and against issues is significant in the public arena. Yet within the school curriculum, perspectives remain static. This creates something of a dilemma for educators. It would not be educationally sound, when taking into consideration cognitive developmental stages of children, for the world to be presented in a continual, constant state of flux; particularly in the primary and junior secondary year levels. However, on the other hand continuous unproblematic reproduction of dominant discourses (and at times *former* dominant discourses) serves to reinforce or create prejudices, continues the silencing of marginalised groups and tells only part of the story of the nation. In having a curriculum that presents knowledge as unproblematic, a view of the world as homogenous is presented to school students. The impact of this is that in a sense an "Other-ing" occurs for those who do not fit within this created homogenous view of the world, regardless of the ideology underpinning the construction of the curriculum. The far reaching consequences of this are that students then bring those static views of the world with them into adulthood. Therefore, it seems that a sense of curriculum balance needs to be struck, when teaching Social Studies or History, which enables students to view the world through a variety of lenses, in the safe learning environment of a classroom.

The way marginalised groups are represented in Social Studies and History curriculum is an important point for curriculum writers to be aware of when developing curriculum content to be taught to heterogeneous groups of students. The positioning of groups of citizens on the periphery of curriculum needs to be questioned and the resultant implied racism that occurs through ingrained schooling practices needs to be critiqued. In this post-history/culture wars context, and in consideration of the direction History curriculum is currently taking in Australia, especially regarding the proposed national curriculum, the role of textbooks as a curriculum and pedagogical tool, especially those officially sanctioned by governments, posits as an important topic and potential avenue to redress these concerns. Davis writes, "...increased knowledge about textbooks can and will facilitate understanding of the actual school curriculum in practice" (2006, xi). In view of this

statement, one of the many challenges for state-based Departments of Education writing a History Syllabus from the national curriculum documents, and for educators in teaching a national curriculum, will be the selection of textbooks across the school year levels and across state boundaries, as both pedagogical and economic considerations will undoubtedly be taken into account (see, for example, the United States context as discussed by Apple, 1988, 2000, 2004; Hamilton, 1990). This article then, offers a timely analysis of curriculum from past eras through representations of Indigenous Australians. What it offers pre-service teachers, teachers, curriculum decision makers and syllabus and textbook writers is an account of the power language has in articulating perspectives of a national history—an important consideration in shaping historical narratives for school students, particularly a subject which seeks to teach narratives of a nation's past.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The term *Black Movement in Australia 1965-1974* has been selected for this article as this is the aspect of the wider social justice and civil rights issues that experienced an increased public awareness during this time. Other areas such as second wave feminism, environmental and peace movements were also prominent during this time. *Power and protest: Movements for change in Australian society* (Burgman, 1993) can be consulted for in depth information about these issues.

<sup>2</sup> *The Tent Embassy*, which remains to this day in the same location, is a series of tents (now also a demountable building features) placed by Indigenous Australian activists as a way to protest inequities especially related to land rights. Called an embassy, those involved in setting it up felt that Indigenous Australians were being treated as foreigners in their own country, with no effective political representation, particularly in relation to Land Rights. Therefore, the *embassy* would act as that representation. Tents were selected as the form of shelter because at the time of its setting up, it was not illegal to have up to 12 tents in a public area in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). For more information, access <http://www.aboriginaltentembassy.net/>

<sup>3</sup> The term "primary school" is used in Australia to describe the schooling received by students aged approximately 5-12. For a United States context, this is the equivalent to elementary school.

<sup>4</sup> My use of the term *tribe* and *tribal* in this paper is not applied in the colonial sense of the term, described in part by Davidson as.

...since the dominant, evolutionist theory of the time placed 'tribal societies' low on the ladder of human development, it seemed inevitable, and right, that they should fall under the control of developed Western nations. The dominance of structural functionalism in the anthropology of the colonial period maintained the key importance of clearly bounded tribal groups as the unit of analysis. (2004, p. 209)

Instead, it is used as a convenient and not irregular term to group Indigenous Australians in common family (kins and moiety systems) and geographical areas in a "traditional" (meaning pre-colonial) environment and cultural way of living.).

<sup>5</sup> Arguably, one of the most controversial topics in Australian history is the conflict between former convicts, early squatters (farmers), government officers and Indigenous Australians in the period from the mid-19th century to the early-20th century. These acts of violence, although not generally connected with one another, are broadly classified under the term *Frontier Conflicts*, and have had a significant role to play in the history/culture wars, with various debates held about the accuracy of the conflicts reported in recent history publications and extent to which there were violent conflicts between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. It is now not uncommon to hear of the Frontier Conflicts between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in the early stages of Australia's colonial history both in school and public contexts. This rise in profile of past conflicts can be attributed to Australian historians such as Henry Reynolds (1987, 1995) whose research on Indigenous Australians has highlighted brutality and violence committed by the early colonists and has also examined examples of resistance by Indigenous Australians. His perspectives are counteracted by fellow-historian Keith Windschuttle (2002) whose research disputes that of Reynolds, claiming, in part, that deaths as a result of conflicts have been exaggerated and in some instances fabricated. So, whilst knowledge of these events is now widespread, and forms part of the current optional Queensland Senior School Modern History curriculum; during this era, it was uncommon for specific and collective terminology to be given to the violent clashes that form what is now referred to as the Frontier Conflicts.

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