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Introduction

This paper is a critique of the history of Ernabella Mission School. It charts the dates and facts of various educational implementations, philosophies and policies of the school. However, this paper also attempts to elucidate the tensions, fractures, internal unwritten developments and sentiments that pervade Ernabella Mission School. The views of Anangu graduates and members of the Ernabella community are discussed, coupled with the views of teachers, missionaries and Anangu Education Workers (AEWs). The dichotomy that occurs between the colonised and the colonisers is discussed in order to illuminate the paradox of the good intentions of the missionaries and the final dissipation of Anangu culture as a result of the socializing practices of Christianity and education.

The ‘colonial homology between sexual and political dominance’ is discussed in relation to female AEWs, who have little bearing over the decisions and policies implemented by the government, the Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara Education Council (PYEC) which is largely controlled by men, and Anangu Education Services. This is addressed as it reveals the sentiments expressed by the AEWs regarding the educational situation in relation to Ernabella school and other remote Aboriginal schools on the Pitjantjatjara Lands. In the final section of the paper, these contentious issues are considered in conjunction with the contemporary problems associated with education practices.

The history of Ernabella Mission School and the nuances of colonial intervention, the positive and negative contributions by missionaries and of course, the voices and directions of Anangu people will be discussed in the following section.

Discussion

The Presbyterian Church established Ernabella Mission in the North West of South Australia in 1937. The mission school was founded three years later in 1940. Ernabella was established with the aim to Christianise the Aboriginal people but also to act as a ‘buffer’ for the impending clash with Western culture. Dr Duguid, a medical doctor and Presbyterian instrumental in the establishment of the Ernabella Mission, clarifies this in the following quote in 1943:

To keep the natives to themselves is impossible now, the best we can do at this late hour is to slow down the rate at which the two races are mixing, in the hope that the natives will learn enough of our ways in the time ahead to be ready for the clash when it comes.

This Cartesian world-view suggests a colonial solution of ‘education’ for the problems imposed by the impact of Western cultural imperialism. Ironically, the maxim of colonialism is held within the socializing practices of homogeneity, which are the central outcomes of education and religion. As Spivac points out there have been two traditions practised in school systems; the neo-classical tradition and the expressivist tradition. The neo-classical tradition seeks to encourage highly intelligent people with ‘aesthetic sensibilities’. To be educated, according to this view, ‘is to be initiated into those canons which define excellence, and to develop certain dispositions towards a shared set of signs, symbols and narratives’. The expressivist tradition, on the other hand, is less patent in its implementation of European cultural views, which are established through the transmission and elevation of the traditional Western canon.

Dr Duguid did see education as a solution for Anangu people; however, he rejected the neo-classical and expressivist traditions. Instead, his aim was to encourage Anangu people to maintain traditional cultural practices, which included the development of Pitjantjatjara literacy in the School. His approach to education was by and large fruitful during the embryonic stages of Ernabella Mission School. It is clear that Duguid also contributed enormously to the betterment of the Anangu people in general. Dr Duguid was in fact highly regarded by women like Nganyintja, who learnt to read and write in the 1930s at Ernabella Mission School:

A very long time and, men, women and children were going about naked and they learned from the spirits and listened to the invisible. And they were hungry. Then white people came - bad people, and they called the young girls and kept them and went about on camels. Lots of half-caste children appeared and the white men wanted more and more girls, and these men didn’t know the meaning of kindness.

Then a doctor came - Dr Duguid - and he had decided when a long way away to visit the west, so he came, with his friends on camels, and after much travelling reached some remote areas, where there were no wells. He saw where people had been drinking from rock pools and soaks and water holes and he went on and found those people and became a father to them. He saw them sick and pitied them, he saw children without a school, he saw old women and old men and truly Dr Duguid had great pity. And again, he saw the evil white men, treating young girls like their many wives, and sent them packing, back to their own country.

Dr Duguid saw motherless children, and half-caste children disowned by their white fathers and he constantly spoke on their behalf, and helped them while others simply deplored the situation. He suggested making work available for the Aborigines and because of him we are where we are today. From Dr Duguid new life came into us in a way that has not happened from any other white person.
Nganyintja’s statement reveals a compassionate and empathetic stance by Dr Duguid, who maintained positive educational and social practices. This was further exemplified by his statement that, ‘the most basic (contribution the missionaries must establish) as the conception of freedom... There was to be no compulsion nor implementation of our way of life on the Aborigines, no deliberate interference with tribal customs’. Instead, the missionaries juxtaposed voluntary educational and Christian practices with Anangu cultural practices. R.M. Trudinger, the first teacher at Ernabella, stressed the voluntary nature of the education there:

......Attendance at school is voluntary.....(The students) are allowed and encouraged to live a normal myall life in his (sic) own camp with his own family; there is no attempt to domicile him or to segregate him from any in the tribal life normally associated with him. Trudinger’s underlying principles of autonomy as well as teaching in the vernacular were antithetical to nearly every other missionary school in Australia. Retta Dixon Home in Darwin, on the other hand, represents an example of the colonial cultural carnage that occurred throughout Australia. In this case Aboriginal children of mixed descent ‘were herded onto the back of (a) truck and driven 700 km away’. Lorna Cubillo, who spent time at Retta Dixon, recounts her experience of being ‘flogged with a strip’ for speaking her mother tongue and being brutally physically beaten and mentally bullied for participating in traditional ceremonies.

Ernabella missionaries did not practice such heartless violations. According to Bill Edwards, who was the superintendent at Ernabella between 1958-72, the missionaries respected Anangu ‘ceremonies, beliefs and disciplines.’ Trudinger supported the Presbyterian philosophy of cultural maintenance and self-empowerment at the school, which was exemplified by his encouragement of students to teach each other and take responsibility for their own learning:

(T)he children also share in the teaching, sums are written up, demonstrated, and marked, numbers taught, dictation given out, transcription supervised by children themselves, an attempt being made to distribute these tasks as evenly and widely as possible.

This type of practice was unheard of in Australia, as any form of autonomy and self-empowerment granted was seen as counter to the political and ideological aims of assimilation of the time. Ernabella Mission School during the 1940s and 1950s was unlike any other in Australia, as it did not reflect the government’s assimilationist policy. The policy that was in place during the early Ernabella Mission years stipulated that Aboriginal people learn English only in the schools. Ernabella Mission School continued teaching in the vernacular despite the policy. As Trudinger states: ‘A feature of greatest significance, and one that strangely enough is almost unique in Australia where the Aborigine is concerned, is the medium used in all the instruction - the native’s own tongue.’

Lucy Lester discussed the effect of the Ernabella missionaries’ approach of combining Anangu cultural practices with Christian education. At the Aboriginal Women’s Arts Festival in 1985 she stated:

I grew up at Ernabella. I lived with my people and went out hunting with them and learned their ways. It gives me a great honour to be between two worlds. I chose to be in the middle. I chose not to leave my people, to live my life as two-way person. Ernabella was a Presbyterian mission and I learned two ways from the missionaries. The missionaries made a program for us every day - go to school in the morning, go to church on Sunday. But we could still go out hunting and speak our own language. That was the place I was brought up and I learned a lot of things from my tribal people.

Despite her admiration of the missionaries at Ernabella, Lucy Lester recognized that Aboriginal religious beliefs were broken down to some degree by Christianity. However, language was written and maintained at the Mission School, which is laudable considering that more than three-quarters of Australia’s two hundred and fifty indigenous languages have already been extinguished by processes of colonisation. Other Aboriginal schools adhered to the policy of English only as the language of instruction, despite the 1953 UNESCO recommendations, that ‘the best medium for teaching is the mother-tongue of the pupil’. The Education Department, in ordaining the practice of teaching in English only, facilitated the rapid linguistic and cultural genocide caused when the mother-tongue is omitted from education. This represents a prima facie abuse of a human right.

Contrary to this approach, the Anangu people and Ernabella missionaries developed a written form of Pitjantjatjara and this development coincided with the employment of Anangu Teaching Assistants. R.M. Trudinger taught alongside an Anangu man who enforced ‘strict discipline in the Ernabella School’ The male assistant (whose name is not mentioned) taught the vernacular and ‘incorporated Aboriginal songs and the relating and reading of stories’ These educating and socializing practices were not greatly different from Anangu traditional practices.

McConnochie and Harker raised this point in their generalised synopsis of traditional educational practices, which revealed the informal and formal processes of propagating culture to the next generation:

Within traditional Aboriginal societies, for example, it is certainly possible to identify both a formal ‘education’ system, and an informal process of socialisation. The informal system was based on the close social life of the group However, there was also a formal instructional system. This was most formalised in the initiation of young people into the ceremonial and mythical aspects of Aboriginal belief - the initiation process. The teaching of sacred knowledge, and of the songs and dances accompanying ceremonies, were occasions of extreme formality.

Yami Lester, who experienced a traditional education, alluded to certain aspects such as story telling being part of the learning and socializing practices:
When you travelled along with your fathers or mothers they’d be teaching you......They’ll tell stories not only to do with the land, but also stories about how people should behave .......When there was no European school the adults had the children with them all the time, and they’d teach them how to talk and how to behave.  

These practices were different from the non-Indigenous framework at Ernabella Mission School, in terms of the intensity and continuum of education, as well as the subject matter that was actually taught. Yet, the fact that Anangu assistants still managed to maintain the story telling and discipline in Pitjantjatjara illustrates in part, a congenial integration of educational practices. 

During its inception, Ernabella Mission’s approach to education was the most ‘successful’ in terms of positive outcomes in both the acquisition of Pitjantjatjara literacy as well as low truancy rates. This was due to the inclusion of Anangu people from the community who were traditionally involved in education, as well as the use of the vernacular, which linked ‘traditional oral instruction and the entrance into literacy.’ This was represented in the original planning of the Ernabella School: 

With the setting up of a school the acceptance of the native tongue would be vital and all teaching for the first years should be in Pitjantjatjara. 

Teaching in the vernacular continued not only throughout the first years of the school but continued into the latter years as the written vernacular developed. By 1952, the Ernabella Newsletters referred to three women; Watulya, Nganyintja and Tjuwilya. These women had passed through the Ernabella Mission School and were noted for their outstanding abilities as Assistant Teachers, which indicated a broadening of knowledge in Pitjantjatjara literacy as well as in teaching practices. Furthermore in the 1957 Ernabella Newsletters several girls are mentioned in relation to their: ability to handle and control new children and infants, taking classes of (sic) up to 20 weeks on end, devising new numbers and letter games, doing their own blackboard work, preparation and marking books. 

As Edwards stated, the assistants were more than capable of educating Anangu children. Non-Anangu educators were not required as such, evidenced by the fact that there was only one non-Indigenous staff member until 1959. The graduates from Ernabella School were not only School Assistants but also utilised newly acquired skills to run the mission sheep station and the handcraft shop. 

The School had assisted students to obtain practical, as well as academic skills that were beneficial and useful to the wider community. The use of Pitjantjatjara as the medium of instruction was one of the key elements in the attainment of such skills. A few important words in English were taught but it was not the main outcome for students graduating from the school. Yet, by 1960 there was increasing pressure to instruct in English only. During this year a review was conducted on the progress of Ernabella Mission School which subsequently redefined its aims. Hence, a second phase began at Ernabella Mission School, which involved a move away from teaching Pitjantjatjara towards the acquisition of English. 

The second phase at Ernabella Mission School 

By 1963, Ernabella School began a comprehensive bilingual program. A working definition for bilingual education is as follows: Bilingual education is the use of two languages, one of which is English, as mediums of instruction for the same pupil population in a well-organised program which encompasses part or the entire curriculum and includes the study of the history and culture associated with the mother tongue. A complete program develops and maintains the children’s self esteem and a legitimate pride in both cultures. 

Children in the early primary years at Ernabella were taught in Pitjantjatjara and oral English was introduced during this period. ‘Children in junior primary studied 80% of their subject in their mother-tongue and 20% in English. By the time children were in upper primary, the balance was progressively reversed.’ There were positive outcomes for the Ernabella Mission School which were exemplified by the number of reports commenting on the success of the acquisition of English by Anangu. This, of course, was a stipulation of educators of the time, as is indicated by the Commonwealth Office of Education statement, that ‘the language of instruction should be English except where local conditions made it necessary for the teacher to have some knowledge of the Aboriginal language’. This statement indicates that the advisors were ill-informed, because firstly, few non-Indigenous teachers stayed long enough to learn the language and secondly, it devalues the importance of Anangu educators’ contributions to Anangu education. These types of politically constructed comments pervaded the ongoing objectification of Aboriginal education. 

Political Changes 

Aboriginal education became increasingly a political game in the arena of the House of Representatives. Paul Hasluck (when Minister of State for Territories) commissioned Betty Watts and Jim Gallacher in 1963 to investigate the curriculum and teaching methods used in Aboriginal schools in the NT. This was an influential report on Aboriginal education throughout Australia, but did not have direct ramifications on Ernabella School until later. The report concluded: in spite, however, of the educational and psychological advantages, the circumstances in the Northern Territory preclude the use of the mother tongue as the language of instruction
are, therefore, forced to the only practical conclusion. English be the language of instruction in 
the schools. 36

In such statements, relations of powers 37 are revealed through Watts’ and Gallacher’s audacious assumption that 
they are cognizant of Aboriginal needs. What is denied is the fundamental human right for Aboriginal people themselves 
to decide what they need. Such statements also sacrifice Aboriginal human dignity and autonomy at the cost of non-
Aboriginal individuals’ political elevation. This dynamic has pervaded Aboriginal education since its inception, yet 
Ernabella Mission School has struggled against this erosion of autonomy.

However, politicians such as Kim Beazley (senior) attempted to address the prejudices surrounding remote area 
Aboriginal schools. In the House of Representatives on 16 April 1964, Beazley asked whether ‘Commonwealth 
assistance is not given in mission schools in the Northern Territory unless the medium of instruction is English?’ 38 The 
Northern Territory Administration and South Australian Governments adhered to this policy except in the case of 
Ernabella and sister school Fregon, where the government subsidised the non-Aboriginal teachers’ income to the extent 
of some $5,200 per annum. 39 Yet, the Anangu ‘monitors’ were denied housing and adequate income, and this still 
remains an issue today.

In 1965, Don Dunstan, who was the then South Australian Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, acknowledged the use 
of oral instruction by Aboriginal ‘monitors’. It was clear that few politicians had entered a Community, let alone an 
Aboriginal school, because they would have observed that most ‘Aboriginal monitors’ used the vernacular for oral 
instruction as it was the mother-tongue. Further government changes occurred, which led by the later 1960s to the use of 
the vernacular in Anangu schools being seen as a ‘bridge’ to English. Unfortunately, the acquisition of Pitjantjatjara 
literacy was never prioritised as it had been at Ernabella in the 1940s and 1950s. The utilisation of the vernacular as a 
bridge to English correlated with the Federal and State Government’s new ‘Integration’ policy.’ 40 These political shifts 
developed as a result of intensive academic research on Aboriginal education.

In 1968 the academic Kinslow Hams made practical suggestions as to how vernacular literacy programs could be 
implemented in the Northern Territory. Harris’ recommendations more or less reflected the bilingual program that had 
developed over the years at Ernabella School. Harris stated that ‘by the initial gaining of literacy in their own vernacular, 
Aboriginals can achieve a quicker and greater facility in English.’ 41 The preferred outcome for the Western ideologues, 
politicians and educators has been the acquisition of English rather than encouraging autonomous Aboriginal education 
practices. By this stage even Ernabella had changed to the government policy of teaching in English only in Aboriginal 
schools.

By the early 1970s, Aboriginal education became politically topical because truancy rates were increasing and the 
acquisition of English was decreasing. 42 As a result, governments were forced to develop new strategies. This led to 
Prime Minister Gough Whitlam’s decision on 14 December 1972 to:

....launch a campaign to have Aboriginal children living in distinctive Aboriginal communities given their primary education in Aboriginal languages. The government will also supplement education for Aboriginal children with teaching of traditional Aboriginal arts, crafts and skills mostly by Aboriginals themselves. 43

This was a decisive step towards ‘self-determination’, a policy Whitlam introduced. 44 There followed a significant amount of research conducted about Aboriginal communities and schools, the results of which eventualized in the establishment of bilingual education in the Northern Territory. 45 Many of the foundations of the Northern Territory bilingual program were based on the practices and experience of Ernabella.

In 1987, Anangu Schools Resource Centre (ASRC) at Ernabella was created to produce extensive vernacular material for bilingual programs on the Pitjantjatjara Lands. Specialist staff such as teacher-linguists were employed at Ernabella School and with the aid of computers and desktop publishing, produced a comprehensive range of vernacular and bilingual material. 46 However, further Government changes occurred which led to a decrease in production from ASRC. This was due to new policies of English only in South Australia and Northern Territory. 37

The Predicament of the 1990s

The South Australian Education Department and the South Australian Government deemed the bilingual program 
at Ernabella a failure because English literacy rates were low on Aboriginal communities. However, a number of 
important factors were ignored in the accumulation of statistical data. Firstly, for Anangu children, English is a second 
language; secondly, the academic tests completed by Aboriginal students were designed for white, urban and middle 
class students; thirdly, the bilingual program was not given time to reach its full potential. One of the most important 
benefits of the program was that Aboriginal children continued to go to school which is of course the most important 
component of any learning process. Government and educational bodies were not interested in the self-esteem or general 
morale of the students that were created through the acceptance of their vernacular legitimated in the school system, but 
rather they were concerned with the low literacy rates. Thus they decided that teaching in English only was the best 
solution. The tests were constructed in such a way that Aboriginal students were likely to fail. The Government could 
then legitimate its claim that bilingual programs were a failure, which freed them from funding such projects. In 1992. 
the Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara Education Council (PYEC) began on the Lands. Clever coercion ensued, whereby the 
statistics were presented to the new PYEC, who then naturally decided to follow suit in terms of English only in schools. 
By 1998 the Council had decided that they wanted English only programs for Anangu students. AEWs, Anangu teachers 
and non-Indigenous teachers were required to speak English only. 45 Nevertheless, AEWs were able to maintain the use
of Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara in the Child Parent Centre (CPC) as a form of instruction, as well as in the primary school if deemed absolutely necessary.

It was a wise choice to let the AEWs instruct in the vernacular in the CPC, as the students respond to their elders who use the mother-tongue. Yet, as the students pass through the primary school a number of issues arise as a result of the English only program. The non-Aboriginal teachers, by and large, tend to be ignored because many students cannot understand English. Some non-Indigenous teachers attempt to use Pitjantjatjara words mixed in with English sentence, such as ‘Tjitji wiya (child no!) come and sit down!’ Anangu consider this confusing and insulting. Many non-Indigenous teachers also maintain an elevated and authoritarian position in the classroom, which disempowers AEWs and negates the learning needs of the students. Many Western teachers resort to busy work’ which entails copying and drawing, as it maintains the veneer of ‘work’. It is clear that AEWs and Anangu teachers are generally the best educators on the lands because they live and teach there permanently and, more importantly, they know the language and understand family issues and kin relationships, as well as appropriate behaviour management and what is important for the students to learn. It is unfortunate that AEWs and Anangu teachers have not been given full autonomy. The schools on the Pitjantjatjara Lands are largely staffed by non-Indigenous teachers who stay there for only short periods of time. This has been a continuing problem which Purki Edwards, who grew up at Ernabella, was well aware of:

I remember seeing white people come to Ernabella. They’d go away, then some more would come. Then they’d go away, and some different ones would come. And I used to wonder and wonder where they were all coming from. 49

To overcome this problem of staff turnover, the Anangu Teacher Education Program (ANTEP) was developed in 1984 at Ernabella for Anangu to train Anangu to be teachers within a Western school system. The ANTEP students are trained largely in the vernacular. Unfortunately, the greatest skill ANTEP students develop - Pitjantjatjara literacy - is not utilised because English is the prevailing language of instruction. Ruth Williams, who was one of the ANTEP students stated:

It’s good the course is being run on our Lands and the people can see they will get something out of it. In the Pitjantjatjara schools we get new teachers coming all the time. Every time a new teacher comes, they have to start all over again. But Anangu teachers know how things go. They should do, they’ve been there all the time. For this reason Anangu teachers will be able to do a better job for the children. 50

As Williams claims, ‘Anangu teachers know how things go.’ It is therefore nonsensical not to utilize AEWs to their full potential. Instead, like most Aboriginal schools on the Lands, Ernabella adheres to the English only policy. AEWs are confined to the lower primary school and are allowed to speak Pitjantjatjara only if ‘deemed necessary’. Yet, many AEWs wish to continue a bilingual or a full vernacular program despite what the Council or Anangu Education Services want. The omission of a vernacular program disregards the longevity of a cultural heritage which has fractured as a result of an inadequate curriculum along with the overarching process of colonisation. Students read about blue tits and foxes of the English landscape rather than the eagles of the ranges around Ernabella. Pitjantjatjara is a language which reflects the land, the culture, and the world view of Anangu. Language is intrinsic within culture; one is an empty vessel without the other.

Unfortunately it is the AEWs who continue to see the cultural breakdown that is occurring in the community as the generation gap widens as a result of the socializing and educational practices of the school. This generation gap occurs because by late primary school and early secondary school, there are no AEWs teaching their own children. The AEWs observe with sadness the way in which female students, who are generally the only ones left at school by this stage, are seduced into the Western illusion of glamour magazines and adopt oven culture in home economics, while rejecting traditional methods of cooking and sacred information. 51 Ironically, many of the girls continue to speak in the vernacular and resist reading and writing in English, yet this is not always the case. Many of the boys, on the other hand, are led to petrol sniffing due to peer pressure and other social factors. These adolescents are left in a cultural vacuum. Nganyinjita, who lives on one of the Homelands called Angatja, west-northwest of Ernabella, stated:

Our laws have existed since ancient times. And we have been strong. But now there are many bosses, and much money, and many communities and vehicles, and, as though we had understanding of them, we have houses. But our children are destroying things, and sniffing petrol, and drinking wine. Families are no more - people live as individuals. The stories of the Dreamtime are lost, and young men no longer observe the taboos. I am greatly saddened by all this trouble, and am unable to find contentment. However. I still care for the children and look after the petrol sniffers - young men, women and children. When the parents despair I urge them to take their children away - away from the houses and vehicles. But they don’t listen and they tell me to take them. So I do. They live with us a long way away, without their parents, and are happy, out here in the bush. We take them foraging for witchetty grubs, and climb the hills for euros, and the children learn again about wild honey and bush foods. 52

In other words, the modernisation of school practices, such as that which developed at Ernabella in the later half of the second phase, has in fact served to create divisions amongst Anangu. The first and most obvious is the division between adolescents and their rejection of ceremonies and traditional practices of food gathering, cooking and initiation. Whilst this rejection is not across-the-board, it is clearly apparent amongst most young Anangu at Ernabella and among the rest of the communities on the Lands.
A second division has occurred between the AEWs, who are largely women, and the governing body of the PYEC, which decides the education policies in conjunction with Anangu Education Services on the Lands. Whilst I do not wish to embark on a political crusade of ‘white sisterhood’ feminism or try to speak on behalf of female Anangu Education Workers, I believe, from my experience working on the Lands and the discussions I have had relating to this topic, that women’s voices are largely ignored. Whilst the PYEC policy mentioned above does state that AEWs working in the CPCs are allowed to speak Pitjantjatjara or Yankunytjatjara for basic oral instruction, it does not condone a comprehensive vernacular or bilingual program in the school.

Ernabella maintains an English only policy despite AEWs’ limited use of the vernacular, because the PYEC were informed that the bilingual program was a failure. Yet students on communities such as Ernabella are refusing to go to schools where English is the language of instruction, which they identify as ‘whitefella’ schools.

Government education policies have contributed to the final breakdown of a community that was reluctantly forced into a Reserve situation to begin with. The Western education system has failed Aboriginal people. Yet, the embryonic bilingual program and the autonomy granted by missionaries at Ernabella were fruitful in the early years. It is also clear that Ernabella was a school that not only provided education but prepared students for potential work in and outside the school. However, the effects of colonisation, which is led by and large by missionary and educational scouts, have always eroded traditional autonomous cultures. Yet, Ernabella in its formative years was one mission where principles and the will to do good outweighed the cultural destruction so apparent in most other missions in Australia.

Unfortunately, today the Europeanisation of Ernabella and other communities has become firmly entrenched, leaving a void that is filled by others. As Bill Edwards stated, one of the biggest problems on the Aboriginal Lands today is the fact that there are too many ‘whitefellas’. Non-Indigenous people take all of the employment positions that should be allocated to Anangu, such as teachers, TAFE workers, arts co-ordinators, store managers and other local services. All these positions are run by non-Aboriginal people and all the School provides is a socializing location for Anangu children. The students learn the ways of the West but never have even a remote opportunity to realise any aspirations which may have been triggered through this schooling. This problem is further compounded by the Wiltja program, which sends students from the Lands to Adelaide to have a taste of Western culture, further re-enforcing the lack of real opportunities available to them.

Ernabella School, like most schools in Australia, delivers the seven key competencies which include: collecting and analysing information, communicating ideas and information, planning and organising activities, working with others and teams, using mathematical ideas and techniques, solving problems and using technology. This is part of the national framework for schools that was developed by two industrialists, Finn and Mayer. Their program was devised for white middle-class students and was designed so that graduates from school would be ready for employment. Yet, at Ernabella, like most other government schools on the Lands, there are few Anangu who attempt year 12, let alone graduate. Anangu Education Services are in the process of implementing correspondence courses for secondary students over the internet, which may offer some improvement, although the language of the internet is English which further jeopardises Pitjantjatjara language. Despite these technological advances, any possibility of employment requires leaving the Lands, which is not appealing for those who struggle with English, let alone the Western patriarchal and xenophobic system at large. As Said argues, colonisation is a ‘fate with lasting, indeed grotesquely unfair results’.

Conclusion

The deleterious effects of the education policies of the dominant culture have fractured Anangu culture and created an ‘intimate enmity’, which has become the prevailing condition. Yet, during the developing years at Ernabella School these sentiments did not exist. Ernabella’s embryonic bilingual program was an example of a system that worked whilst it was controlled or at least taught by Anangu and with work available post-school. Whilst they utilized a Western framework, the Presbyterian missionaries were wise enough to permit the retention of cultural practices, despite their ultimate goal being the creation of Christian converts. Government pressures forced the Ernabella School to seek Western outcomes, that is the acquisition of English in order to satisfy the socialising practices of European homogeneity, or assimilation. Ernabella School thus became an institution that socialized Aboriginal people in the ways of non-Aboriginal culture, but without a network outside School to support that socialization.

Anangu people continue to resist and protest against this destruction of their own education and socialization processes. However, with all of the non-Indigenous people claiming authority over Anangu people, their decisions and their life ways are increasingly fractured which makes autonomy more difficult to obtain. The current generation gaps and the subsequent cultural breakdown are due to Western cultural propagation which is filtered through the education system. Whilst the Western system enables some to have access to ‘wealth and ‘success’, the Indigenous people by and large are left in a vacuum of perpetual poverty and hence dependency.

The plethora of programs and policies implemented in Aboriginal schools illuminates the practices of governmental hegemony within Aboriginal education which by and large are heedless of the underlying effects of colonisation. In fact, they continue to play such games as illustrated by the recent axing of bilingual education in the Northern Territory. As Christine Nicholls states:

It appears that in terms of linguistic genocide, on the home front the Northern Territory Government, in collusion with the Howard Government, is quite happily presiding over the ‘final solution’. Ernabella School maintained its independence within the rest of Australia during its formative years, but today it has become another agent of government policy. The only possible solution to the problems inherent in Anangu
education today is if Anangu people gain full autonomy of their own educational programs and create outcomes more suitable for Anangu people. This needs to occur without direct coercion or influence by Western educators or government bodies, and indeed, should be facilitated by such institutions as a matter of urgency.

ENDNOTES

3. Ernabella was set up as a “buffer state” between the Reserve, the Home of the Aborigines, and the outside world.’ Ernabella After Eight Years (1946) p.7.
5. See L. Gandhi, op.cit., pp. 34-35 for an excellent discussion on Cartesian philosophy and the underlying principles of Western dualism and the notion of the subject as the centre by which everything else or the ‘other’ is defined.
8. ibid., p.256.
15. Trudinger, (1942) op.cit., p.2.
17. Planning for Bilingual Education in South Australia, Education Department within the Department of Education and Training (Adelaide, 1993) p.42.
22. ibid.
28. ibid.
29. ibid., pp. 279,281.
32. Planning for Bilingual Education in South Australia, op.cit., p.42.
40. Gale, op.cit., p.103.
Further political action was implemented by Kim Beasley (the then Minister of Education), who made a decision in 1973 to set up an advisory group on the development of bilingual education for the Northern Territory.

As Beasley stated, the research was conducted in order to ‘examine the nature and extent of the resources available and in the light of its findings to make recommendations for the implementation and development of a program involving teaching in Aboriginal languages and the incorporation in the school of further elements of traditional Aboriginal arts, crafts and skills.’ In March 1973, bilingual education began in five pilot communities in the Northern Territory: Milingimbi, Goulbourn Island, Areyonga, Angurugu, Hermannsburg. Gale, op.cit., p.111.


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49. Mattingly & Hampton, op.cit., p.10.

50. Mattingly & Hampton, op.cit., p.108.


52. Mattingly & Hampton, op.cit., p.258-259.

53. T. Minh-Ha represents the problem of people speaking for others in the following quote: ‘You who understand the dehumanisation of forced removal-relocation- reeducation-redefinition, the humiliation of having to falsify your own reality, your voice-you know. And often cannot say it. You try and keep on trying to unsay it, for if you don’t, they will not fail to fill in the blanks on your behalf, and you will be said’. ‘Difference: A special Third World Women Issue’. In Woman, Native, Other. Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism (Bloomington, 1989) p. 80.

54. Many letters were written by AEW staff (with some of which I collaborated in 1997) on the Lands requesting a bilingual program, yet their voices were ignored. ~ See National Report on Schooling in Australia for statistics on decrease of attendance rates and lower numeracy and literacy skills on Aboriginal communities in South Australia (Melbourne, 1997) pp. 69-71.


