This paper sets out to examine the role of Western Australian state secondary schooling in linking the ideas of 'race' and ability in such a way as to justify very different educational experiences for Aboriginal students. The primary purpose is to unearth the ideological nature of school knowledge and how it operated to perpetuate the myth that Aboriginal students were intellectually, socially and culturally inferior compared to white students. Specifically, it examines the nature of the manual and domestic curriculum deemed suitable for the 'needs' of Aboriginal boys and girls. The final part of the paper argues that Aboriginal students actively resisted European educational ideologies and practices by not turning up to school.

Introduction

Supposedly, the extension of state secondary schooling to all children testified to the egalitarian role of education in realising the goal of equality of opportunity for all citizens. No matter whether children were black or white schools offered everyone the same opportunity to succeed or fail on the basis of individual merit and ability. In reality, the story was very different. This paper argues that European schooling, rather than creating greater equality between blacks and whites, served to perpetuate existing racial inequality. After white settlement began in 1829, the Aboriginal people of Western Australia experienced state educational policies and practices that forged the social category of 'being Aboriginal'. This paper examines the role of Western Australian state secondary schools in constructing a set of racist assumptions and beliefs about 'being Aboriginal'. It focuses on the sorts of educational processes that produced the category of the 'native' child and the discriminatory educational practices that seemed to flow naturally from it. Importantly, the paper emphasises that the process of identity formation is never passive or neutral but actively contested and resisted in everyday life. In the case of Aboriginal children this usually meant absenteeism from school.
Central to this paper is the view that European colonisation robbed the Australian Aborigines of their land and constructed the myth of white superiority. European landowners believed that Aboriginal people hindered their aspirations to control and exploit the land. As a result, white interests in the colony of Western Australia directly opposed Aboriginal interests. From the beginning, exploitation, oppression and the forceful appropriation of Aboriginal land characterised the history of Western Australian society.

The first part of the paper attempts to explain how Western Australian state secondary schools constituted the unique and discriminatory category of the ‘native’ child. The second part examines some of the discriminatory educational practices that resulted from ‘being Aboriginal’ and the sorts of educational knowledge and experience offered to Aboriginal students. The final part considers the nature of the cultural differences between blacks and whites and the resultant forms of Aboriginal resistance to European schooling.

Theoretical considerations

Theoretically, the paper takes as its starting point a critical understanding of the idea of the state. Drawing on Antonio Gramsci’s original contribution to hegemony theory and Michel Foucault’s insight into power/knowledge relations and its implications for social institutions such as the school, it will be argued that Western Australian state secondary schooling played a major role in constituting individual identities and social relations through which subjectivity is constituted. One of the major limitations of neo-Marxist state theories has been the failure to account for different male/female and white/black life experiences. Much of the theorising on the state has not only been deterministic but sexist and racist. Unfortunately, both gender and race have been theoretically non-existent or at best explained as a conjunct of class analysis.

The lack of theorising on the idea of ‘race’ is partly explained by the theoretical complexities that remain unresolved and are only just beginning to receive attention. Barrett and McIntosh highlighted some of these theoretical problems:

...the question of race as an independent social division is an extremely pressing one. Do we take the view that the introduction of a third system must necessarily fragment the analysis that was already creaking at the seams over feminism? Or should we regard race as easier to incorporate into a classic Marxist analysis than feminism proved to be? Or should we concentrate on the relations between race and gender and ignore for the moment the consequences of this for a class analysis? Or should we apparently back down from these academic debates and adopt a more pragmatic political approach by identifying areas of common and progressive struggle? Can we argue that racism, like women’s oppression, had independent origins but is now irrevocably embedded in capitalist social relations?

An underlying premise of this paper is that individuals are not only class subjects, but more correctly a ‘pluralism of subjects’. This position acknowledges that race and gender are constitutive of the personal and social being of persons and not secondary inessential matters. In short, subjects are constituted by many complex and variable politico-discursive articulations including class, race and gender.

In this paper it is argued that social categories like ‘race’ and ‘Aboriginal’ have nothing to do with biological or ‘natural’ differences but are ideological constructs with discriminatory consequences. Miles succinctly summarised the nature of the theoretical and empirical task confronting researchers:
The problem is, therefore, to deconstruct the idea of 'race' and to reconstruct, historically and with due regard to the limitations placed upon social processes by production relations, the way in which racial categorisation has become a significant feature of not only political and ideological relations but also economic relations.

This means that racial oppression cannot be explained in isolation from material conditions, but neither can political and ideological social processes be solely determined by the economic level. Thus, a dialectic approach that develops a better understanding of the relationship between material conditions and the genealogical construction of social identities becomes a more valuable form of analysis. Pettman elaborated this way of thinking about the idea of 'being Aboriginal':

Aboriginal is not only a racial or cultural identity category, nor is it only constructed by, or in resistance to racism. Being Aboriginal also means being part of an indigenous people, where dispossession and colonisation were the necessary prerequisite for white national foundation and development. Further, Aboriginal exclusion and management, legally and politically, and their unequal incorporation into the economy, meant that Aborigines have experienced the Australian state and labour market differently from other Australians.

One way of developing a dialectic perspective is by supplementing Marx's materialist premise with a sense of what Foucault called 'genealogy' or 'a form of history that can account for the constitution of knowledge, discourses, domains of objects'. The important thing to note about genealogy is that it accounts for the imaginary ordering of the symbolic. So the way we come to see ourselves as subjects is not 'preordained' or 'natural', but socially constructed. Foucault's major contribution was his ability to show how cultural practices are instrumental in shaping the modern individual as both an object and subject. He used the concept of 'disciplinary technology' to explain how the body is approached as an object to be 'subjected, used, transformed and improved'. Foucault described this process of subjectification in the following passage:

...the body is...directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs...this subjection is not only obtained by the instruments of violence and ideology;...it may be calculated, organised, technically thought out...this knowledge and this mastery constitute what might be called the political technology of the body.

Foucault's writing demonstrated how a new set of operations or procedures (technologies) joining knowledge, power and truth came together in modern social institutions such as the school to shape individual identity. In his view schools forged a detailed system of micro-penalties of punishments and rewards not only for pupils' ability to master a set body of knowledge, but their time (lateness, absence, interruption), activity (inattention, zeal), behaviour (politeness, disobedience), speech (idle chatter, insolence), body (incorrect attitudes, cleanliness) and sexuality (impurity, indecency). Schools, in bringing together the exercise of power and the constitution of knowledge, are a significant apparatus in forging Aboriginal children as racial subjects and objects. Armed with these theoretical insights, it is now appropriate to examine some of the mechanisms through which Western Australian state secondary schools constructed the social category of the 'Aboriginal child' and the cultural conflict and resistance to schooling that followed.
Defining the 'Aboriginal child'

The Western Australian Native Welfare Department, as the major apparatus of surveillance and control of the Aboriginal population exerted a powerful influence in constructing the legal, social, economic and psychological meaning of 'being Aboriginal'. The department also played an instrumental role in shaping state secondary schools as major sites in regulating the personal and social development of Aboriginal children. According to the Native Welfare Department, the 'native' child was inferior in all respects compared to its white counterpart. In a special report prepared for a proposed experimental course at Pingelly Junior High School in 1967, the Native Welfare Department constructed the following social image of the 'Aboriginal child':

He is unable to achieve success with the conventional academic course for the Junior Certificate in the basic subjects.
He has little interest in books and study.
He tends to rebel against the more formal types of school work.
He has an inadequate set of basic skills, especially in reading and self expression.
He frequently has a poor social and economic background where there is little interest in education, or things of the mind.
He frequently lacks parental guidance and affection or any real parental ambition.
Speech is generally poor. Native children speak what is almost pidgin patois which is almost unintelligible.
He is frequently early maturing physically and takes a precocious interest in things adult (eg sex, smoking, drink).
Girls are much given to precocious sex activity.
There is usually a strong urge to an immediate goal (employment). He is intolerant of any schooling which he fails to see as associated with this goal. Few have any clear cut ambition.
He usually has a long record of scholastic failure. In fact, his being in this class presupposes failure somewhere else.
He is much given to acts of rebellion against society and to glaring forms of exhibitionism to attract attention and ease feelings of insecurity.
He is defiant of authority and contemptuous of rules.13

The picture that emerges is fairly consistent. 'Native' children came from a low social-economic background, lived in either the local reserve or traditional houses in town, had poor hygiene and cleanliness, had failed to grasp fundamental communication skills, continually experienced failure while at school and often left school early for some sort of low paid labouring job. In most cases, Aboriginal boys entered the pool of casual contract labour on the local farms, while girls had little or no prospect of employment. The best they could hope for was some kind of domestic work.

Evidence presented to the Western Australian Select Committee into Youth Affairs in 1991 dramatically portrayed the deprived material and social conditions of Aboriginal children. The Principal of Clontarf Aboriginal College in the Perth suburb of Manning painted a gloomy profile of the College's Aboriginal students. He claimed they were: 'illiterate, homeless, street kids, incarcerated, involved in the Juvenile Justice System, coming to terms with their Aboriginality, experiencing for the first time living away from home, alcoholics, caught up in the 'drug scene', experiencing substance abuse, traumatised by events in their life, regularly absent from school, lacking family or community role models, and trying to break a cycle of dependency'.14

Central to this paper is the argument that a person's identity is a social construct developed within particular material conditions. According to Jordan:
Identity is defined as the location of the self in a particular world of meaning, both by the self and others. It is a product of interactions between the individual and social structures, and the individual and others. Through this location of self, individuals recognise their self-sameness and continuity in time, and perceive that others recognise their self-sameness and continuity.\(^{15}\)

What is significant, according to Gale, McGill, McNamara and Scott, is not only the individual’s own perception of the self, but the way in which the dominant class located the self in society. Most research shows that non-Aboriginal people negatively stereotype Aborigines.\(^{16}\) A survey conducted by Makin and Ibbotson identified a number of negative images that prevented Aborigines from being accepted in Western Australian schools. These images included: lack of personal hygiene, unreliable work habits, laziness, excessive drinking, anti-social behaviour, permissiveness and immorality, reliance on handouts, lack of ambition, indifference to dress, inability to manage their own affairs, lack of interest, and shyness.\(^{17}\) As a result, the dominant white society constructed a boundary from without that initially segregated Aboriginal people by legislation and subsequently distanced them socially through negative stereotyping.\(^{18}\)

Intelligence testing was and still is a significant mechanism in constructing the identity of Aboriginal children. According to McConnochie, to the extent that Aboriginal children performed poorly in intelligence tests, they were described as having inferior intellectual, cognitive or psycho-linguistic abilities. In his view, this sort of research led to a cultural deficit interpretation of Aboriginal children’s performance and provided a rationale for a range of compensatory educational programs that reinforced a sense of ‘otherness’.\(^{19}\)

The educational and social implications of ‘being Aboriginal’ were far-reaching. Bourdieu’s work showed that the major determinant of success at school was the cultural capital of the family. A significant aspect of cultural capital is the family attitude to education. Bourdieu believed that family attitude was a function of the objective hopes of success at school that defined each social category.\(^{20}\) Despite the Western Australian Education Department’s official policy of equality of opportunity, the education system perpetuated the privileges of what Bourdieu called the ‘aristocratic culture’.\(^{21}\) As Bourdieu explained it:

In fact, to penalise the underprivileged and favour the most privileged, the school has only to neglect, in its teaching methods and techniques and its criteria when making academic judgements, to take into account the cultural inequalities between children of different social classes. In other words, by treating all pupils, however unequal they may be in reality, as equal in rights and duties, the educational system is led to give its de facto sanction to initial cultural inequalities.\(^{22}\)

Thus, assimilation policies tended to legitimate the myth of equality of opportunity by treating all students the same and distributing rewards according to merit. In reality, equal opportunity for Aboriginal students simply meant the right to compete in a school system designed to steer the individual towards a pattern of cultural conformity.\(^{23}\) For social groups with divergent world views, the chance of success was minimal.

Knight’s discussion of the ‘structural determinants’ of educational success sheds light on the mechanisms via which state secondary schools constituted the social identity of Aboriginal children. He believed that student reputation, labelling, streaming and teacher expectations interacted to produce educational inequalities.\(^{24}\) Much has been written about the negative effects of labelling students. Once labelled, a student’s reputation
usually followed them through their school career. Tannock and Punch's 1975 survey of Western Australian teachers and principals showed that a majority of them had a negative image of Aboriginal students. Aboriginal students were usually identified with poor attitudes, inadequate language skills, poor concentration, inadequate hygiene, unresponsive behaviour and poor parental encouragement. Stigmatisation had an even more telling effect when local communities labelled the whole school. While many of Perth's elite private secondary schools established a reputation for academic achievement, state secondary schools located in Perth's northern working class suburbs of Balga and Girrawheen developed a reputation for poor academic performance, student alienation and discipline problems.

Besides student reputation, the practice of streaming individuals into either 'academic' or 'non-academic' streams greatly affected Aboriginal students. According to Knight, once streamed the student was 'locked in' to either success or failure. According to Henry, Knight, Lingard and Taylor, all the research showed unequivocally that working-class students, girls, migrants and Aborigines were 'cooled out' and discouraged from succeeding. As a consequence, streaming guaranteed that students already suffering from socio-economic disadvantage continued to do so.

Finally, negative teacher expectations of Aboriginal children produced a momentum of its own. In 1990, a Report to the Australian Research Council claimed that teachers had unduly critical attitudes that blamed Aboriginal children for failing to respond to standard teaching approaches. The report claimed that this attitude was a reflection of Euro-centric school policy that ignored Aboriginal needs. The Western Australian Select Committee into Youth Affairs (1991) heard that in some communities teachers came under enormous pressure to fall in with prevailing social attitudes:

...and if it is racist then in order to survive they tend to fall in with some of the thinking. Green's research supported the view that teachers tended to attribute Aboriginal students' poor performance to factors outside the control of schools. Green asked a group of fifteen rural teachers to list the major difficulties that they came across in teaching Aboriginal children. He found that nearly all teachers blamed the child, family or environment. Only eleven of the eighty responses attributed Aboriginal children's learning problems to the school or classroom. The common responses in the school and classroom deficit category included:

- Aboriginal children are ignored
- Reading materials are inappropriate
- Prejudice by teachers and non-Aboriginal children
- Teachers do not have special training to teach Aborigines
- A lack of Aboriginal support staff
- Inadequate extra curricular activities

Tannock and Punch's research led them to conclude that:

...teachers do not expect Aboriginal children to do well in school... Aboriginal children, they have accepted, just cannot do well in school.

Rist's study of black children attending an American ghetto school supported the view that teachers had preconceived expectations about potentially successful academic performance. Her study concluded that teachers' preconception about children's performance related to the social status of the student. Rist's work demonstrated that when teachers base their expectations of performance on the social status of the student and
assume that the higher the social status, the higher the potential of the child, black children of low social status inevitably suffer a stigmatisation outside their own choice or will. Rist found that black children were usually treated as low achievers. According to Rist, the consequences for black children included:

...differential amounts of control-oriented behaviour, the lack of interaction with the teacher, the ridicule from one’s peers, and the caste aspects of being placed in lower reading groups...33

In short, Western Australian state secondary schools were an important apparatus in constituting the social identity of Aboriginal children. In producing a particular image of the ‘native’ child as culturally and intellectually inferior, state secondary schools continued to legitimate already established social, economic and educational inequalities.

Linking ‘race’, ability and the curriculum

On the 8 November 1945, the Western Australian Minister for Education John T. Tonkin outlined to the parliament special educational provisions for ‘native children’:

The district inspectors have given special consideration to the provision of a curriculum specially adapted to the needs of native children. The following objectives are envisaged: (i) To provide the rudiments of our civilisation. (ii) To attain literacy (a) to provide a working knowledge of English, so that they may speak correctly, correspond with friends or on elementary business affairs, read for recreation or of current news; (b) to provide a working knowledge of our money, weights and measures systems. (iii) To inculcate desirable habits of hygiene and living. (iv) To secure a training in rural pursuits. (v) To promote desirable moral and spiritual attitudes.34

The Minister’s statement is an interesting example of what Sharp called ‘practical ideology’, or the ‘way the school curriculum managed to secure the conditions of capital accumulation and the reproduction of capitalist class relations’.35 Sharp explained the operation of ‘practical ideology’ in the following way:

The manner in which schools, classrooms and knowledge are socially organised, the material practices and routines through which learning and teaching takes place provide the socially significant context which mediates any explicit transmission of formal knowledge, concepts and theories...Through its workings a social imagery and a series of conscious and unconscious messages are transmitted which prepare students for the material practices and routines necessary for capitalist work processes in their various manifestations and in the habits and rituals of ‘decent law-abiding citizens’.36

Central to this part of the paper is the view that school knowledge is never neutral but reflects the broader distribution of power in society. As Apple argued:

The study of educational knowledge is a study in ideology, the investigation of what is considered legitimate knowledge...by specific social groups and classes, in specific institutions, at specific historical moments.37

The issue of determining what knowledge is worth studying in the school curriculum is a perennial question that clearly demonstrates the contested nature of school knowledge. Just as important as what schools teach, is what they fail to teach. Disempowered groups
such as Aborigines, generally find themselves marginalised in relation to curriculum construction. For example, Cherryholmes explained how ‘regimes of truth’ in social studies are subject to the constraints of the broader social matrix:

A social studies teacher is one who makes statements that are valid in terms of social studies practice.... Forget about claims that social studies teaches the social sciences and humanities in any broad sense, because that simply is not the case. What is found are selective descriptive and explanatory accounts of social phenomena - historical and current, about our society and that of others - that are appropriate in terms of dominant views of society. Labor, minority and feminist history and politics...are excluded.

With the extension of state secondary schooling after the Second World War, the wealthy could no longer guarantee their social privilege by excluding the poor. Instead, social inequalities based on class, race and gender were the result of individual merit and effort. Aboriginal students because of their well known intellectual and cultural inferiority were confined to a ‘different and more practical’ form of schooling. As a result, students were increasingly differentiated on the basis of individual needs, tastes and abilities in order to maintain existing social inequalities. The policy of state secondary schooling for all simply replaced hereditary privilege with promotion by talent and merit. According to Cohen and Lazeron, structural inequalities became matters of individual ability and effort in schools and the market place.

As a result, Western Australian state secondary schools differentiated students on the basis of whether they studied high status ‘academic’ or low status ‘practical’ subjects. In this way, the secondary school curriculum reinforced the hierarchical division of capitalist social relations. In Sharp’s words:

Those pupils defined as bright or able are initiated into a pure, abstract, specialised academic curriculum whereas those designated less able are relegated to receive an applied, concrete, explicitly vocational education.

Generally, Western Australian teachers accepted the view that Aboriginal students, for a variety of cultural reasons lacked the necessary desire, interest and ability to perform well at school. As noted, the testing movement provided a powerful corollary to this point of view. One teacher with many years experience in the Kimberley region claimed that:

Mentally, native children are not as advanced as white children. They are at least two years retarded. This is not a subjective observation. Tests (Otis Intermediate, Schonell’s Reading Test and Daniel and Diack’s Reading Test) have been carried out which place the native children in the I.Q. range of 67 minus to 92 and with reading ages at least two years retarded.

Given the ideological and racist nature of intelligence testing it was inevitable that Aboriginal students would be seriously discriminated against in the education system. Despite the rhetoric of equality of opportunity state secondary schools streamed Aboriginal students into less socially valued curriculum areas. In this way, the social constructs of ‘race’ and ‘ability’ produced unequal educational outcomes for Aboriginal students.

In establishing an experimental course at Pingelly Junior High School in 1967, the Native Welfare Department recommended channelling Aboriginal students into low status practically orientated courses because of their ‘well-known’ intellectual inferiority. In determining the type of student best suited for these courses the Education Department
They [students] will have been selected on the basis of their well known academic weakness which will have been well established over the years. Hence, there will be a need to offer them a different, more practical type of course. The biggest bulk of those ex Grade 6 or 7 will be native children.\textsuperscript{43}

The Education Department moved to match the ability of Aboriginal students with a course of study appropriate to their limited future employment prospects. A major concern of the Native Affairs Department and Education Department was to make sure that 'half-caste' and 'quarter-caste' children did not become a 'half-caste' problem in the towns. The consensus was that systematic training and job placement was the only solution. At its 1966 national conference, the racist Australian Natives' Association urged the Director-General of Education, Dr. Robertson to encourage Aboriginal children to take domestic and technical training courses.\textsuperscript{44} In response, the Director of Secondary Education, A. Boylen claimed that all Aboriginal children received either domestic or technical training according to individual capacities. However, Aboriginal students who found difficulty in following the normal high school course received additional domestic and technical training to prepare them for employment opportunities in the areas in which they lived.\textsuperscript{45}

To this end, vocational guidance played an important part in persuading Aboriginal students to be realistic about their future prospects. For this reason, in 1967 the Commissioner of Native Welfare F. E. Gare instructed the superintendent of Native Welfare for the Southern Division to pay particular attention to the ability of Aboriginal students when giving guidance and counselling advice. He wanted to ensure that the ability of Aboriginal school leavers was commensurate with their employment. In Gare's words:

It is requested that Superintendents arrange to interview each student and discuss his or her future ambitions and aspirations. The interviewing officer should endeavour to counsel the student if necessary but regard must be made to advice given. Obviously a student aged 15 years completing Grade VII would find it impossible to obtain an apprenticeship in a trade requiring above moderate skill and should be counselled to consider alternatives.\textsuperscript{46}

In 1961 the Director of Primary Education S. Wallace, claimed that theoretically the aim of Native Education should be identical with the aim of the normal school curriculum. However, given the 'partial or complete non-acceptance by different sections of the community', he believed that the 'full range of employment possibilities was not open to all Aborigines'. Wallace argued that it was necessary to compromise the department's long range ideals by adopting interim planning to provide courses to fit early school leavers into limited vocational fields. During 1960, the Education Department and the Native Welfare Department agreed on a scheme to develop effective practical courses for the older native children. These courses had a strong practical bias aimed at training Aboriginal children in either manual or home science projects. The rest of the curriculum concentrated on basic educational skills and the development of good citizenship.\textsuperscript{47}

Upon leaving school most 'native' boys entered a pool of casual contract labour on local farms, while girls lucky enough to find work usually performed some kind of domestic duties. In 1958, the head teacher at Warburton Range School highlighted the limited range of occupational choices available to Aboriginal students. In a letter to the Assistant Commissioner of the Department of Native Welfare he recommended the
following list of occupations for boys: stockman, carrier, gardener, carpenter, baker, farm-hand, railway worker, shearer, factory-worker, fireman, teacher, cycle-repairer, sports store worker (repairing), artist. For girls, the list included: typist, teacher, shop-assistant, factory-worker, domestic aid, nurse and dress maker. Given the limited range of career options available to Aboriginal children, the Education Department set about designing a curriculum relevant to their abilities and needs.

Manual and domestic training

Project education was a particular method of education designed to assist students who were unable to cope with the traditional classroom situation. According to the Education Department, the aim of project education was to improve communication skills through practical activities conducted outside the classroom. In 1972, the Minister for Education T. D. Evans praised project education as a practical solution to the Aboriginal education problem.

Derby High School introduced the first project course in the early 1960s. In this scheme, classroom instruction included oral expression and basic English courses (simple appreciation of literature, reading, spelling, simple grammar and written exercises), elementary maths, specially planned social studies, art, music and scripture. Aboriginal girls spent 20 periods per week doing practical work relevant to domestic life. They studied cooking, laundry, housework, dressmaking, mending and home crafts. By contrast, Aboriginal boys learnt the skills of fencing, concrete work, shed building, painting, metal-work, carpentry, leather work, saddlery maintenance, machinery maintenance, windmill repairs and pantry management.

Aboriginal boys’ education centred on the project workshop. The purpose of the workshop was to inculcate Aboriginal students with the right attitudes toward work and what it entailed. In deliberately creating a factory-like workshop that was distinct from the rest of the school it encouraged Aboriginal students to acquire knowledge that would help them to be good workers and consumers.

At Derby High School, Aboriginal student activities included cement and concrete work, the construction of water tanks, installing water pipes, ploughing, plant nursery, fencing, painting, welding, car mechanics and driver training. Project education for girls centred on a small model cottage where the girls received instruction in home management techniques such as receiving visitors, cooking, and cleaning. The girls also helped to run the school canteen at recess and lunch breaks. They provided children with fruits, drinks and other items, making pies, pasties and sandwiches and keeping a record of monies received. Even though a sharp differentiation of curriculum existed between Aboriginal boys and girls, there was some sharing of roles in the area of poultry keeping and market gardening.

Agricultural Schools supplemented the project courses at selected day schools like Derby and Gnowangerup. Agricultural Schools taught skills relevant to employment in the pastoral and farming sectors. Mission authorities and the Native Welfare Department conjointly operated the Agricultural schools. The Methodist Church opened the first Agricultural School at Mogumber in 1964 followed by the Pallotine Mission at Tardun in 1968. The Education Department also established an agricultural course at Gnowangerup in 1965.

Each course covered two years and provided full time residential accommodation for the academic year. Boys 14 or 15 years of age gained entry on a competitive basis with a pass in Grade 5 and good health being the minimum entry requirements. During the course,
students received practical and theoretical instruction in many subjects including vehicle driving and maintenance, farming practice, carpentry, welding and metal work, stock management and animal husbandry. At Tardun Agricultural School, students studied practical farming jobs such as scrub raking, burning, ploughing and root picking, all of which provided a valuable introduction to the preparation of farming land.54

The Agricultural Schools found it difficult to attract enough interested Aboriginal boys of the 'right calibre'. Most Aboriginal students were reluctant to attend any school let alone Agricultural Schools located hundreds of miles away from their family home. As more high schools established project courses, most Aboriginal boys preferred to enrol in them and thereby remain closer to their families rather than travel to far-flung Agricultural Schools.55

In 1974, the Education Department established an Aboriginal Education Section under the supervision of superintendent Mounsey. He was assisted by two advisory teachers and two education officers. The aim of the Aboriginal Section was to assist teachers and schools in developing programs attuned to the needs of Aboriginal children, particularly in the areas of language and early reading development. For instance, the Warburton Ranges settlement established the first bilingual program in Western Australia using the Nyaanyatjarra language as the medium of instruction. At Gnowangerup District High School, a Secondary Noongar Alternative Education Course was established in 1977 to teach Aboriginal students 'practical' things commensurate with their abilities and interests. This meant substituting core-subject areas with a more practical program supplemented with some functional numeracy and literacy skills.56 Special government funds assisted in operating these programs with the stated aim of training Aboriginal people to improve their employment prospects and providing job opportunities for Aborigines who would otherwise be unemployed.57 In line with the Karmel Report policy of equality based on need, additional funds helped to expand educational facilities and services in the Kimberley region. Kununurra District High School, Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek schools received new project centres, classrooms and sheds.58

Despite the Federal Government's injection of funds into Aboriginal education and the shift toward the rhetoric of self-determination, Western Australian educational policy under Mounsey continued to operate on a compensatory deficit model. As a result, educational policy focused on compensatory programs and curriculum innovations that perpetuated an inferior and practical education for Aboriginal children.

Cultural conflict and resistance to schooling

As major disciplinary sites inculcating knowledge and values in young children, Western Australian state secondary schools attempted to render as natural the cultural forms of bourgeois hegemony. In practice, this meant the subordination of a minority culture to the dominant social force. In 1960, one commentator to the W. A. Teachers' Journal reflected the regulatory role of public schooling:

> With guidance and direction these mission natives proved themselves capable of changing their way of living to new conditions. At the same time some resemblance of our type of family living developed. Tree planting, lawns, cleanliness of the huts, regular washing of clothes and improved personal hygiene proved the scheme a success.59

Children from Aboriginal families experienced significant alienation from the white system of formal schooling. This was hardly surprising given their different cultural world
view. It is not within the scope of this paper to discuss in detail the Aboriginal world view. Other people more qualified to speak on the subject have already done so. However, before continuing to examine the nature of Aboriginal resistance to white schooling, it is important to contrast the world view of white and black people.

Christie defined world-view as:

...a set of concepts which relate individuals within any culture to the natural universe and to other humans in their social reality.

In Harris' view, the degree of difference between Aboriginal and European culture was so great that the two cultures were antithetic. Harris believed the two cultures were so fundamentally incompatible that they are warring against each other. Harris identified a number of key divergences to emphasise the irreconcilable differences: religious versus positivistic thinking; relatedness versus compartmentalisation; cyclic versus linear ideas of time; being versus doing; closed versus open society; contrasting views of work and economics; contrasting views of authority; culturally distinctive styles; and continuity in change.

According to Christie, the white world-view is the product of ten thousand years of agriculture and urbanisation characterised by people exerting their will and control over the physical environment. He argued, that the European mentality of controlling the environment transferred to the social world where individuals are objects of the disciplinary power of state instrumentalities. In contrast, Aboriginal people had in the past emphasised an intelligent responsiveness to environmental features, rather than control over them. The Aboriginal world-view was one of harmony and co-existence rather than manipulation of the environment.

Christie drew on the anthropological work of Bain to explain the cultural difference between black and white people. Bain claimed that:

...the difference between Aboriginal and white is not so much one of attitude and value or of a preference between conceptually valid alternatives but, instead, is rooted in contrasting world-view and ontology.... The essential element of this is the interactional/transactional dichotomy.

Briefly, Bain drew four conclusions from the transactional/interactional dichotomy. First, Aboriginal people know their world by the entities that surround them such as trees, rocks, people and animals. Second, social activity involves interaction between interrelated elements that are not bound by historic time or quantification. Third, Aborigines see the world through the qualities and relationships that are apparent. Finally, Aboriginal people enact the principle of interactional cause or the interrelatedness of spiritual and human beings through rituals.

European education has largely ignored the cultural background of Aboriginal students. The imposition of white middle-class values on Aboriginal children denigrated their language and learning style. Often, white teachers assumed that there was something wrong about the way Aboriginal children spoke English. For instance, Malcolm asked more than one hundred teachers of Aboriginal pupils to describe their communication problems with Aboriginal children and found that 57 per cent of the problems related to speech use. In his words:

Pupils did not want to talk with the teacher; they would not initiate speech with him even when needing his help; they would not reply, or even show any recognition, when
addressed by the teacher. On occasions when they did speak to the teacher they would not elaborate or repeat. They would frequently move out of their place, often coming out to the teacher to address him privately rather than communicating from the class. This inhibited speech behaviour was matched, even in the same pupils, with a set of other behaviours which, by contrast, seemed to display a lack of restraint and decorum. Aboriginal children might ‘call out’ answers or comments instead of waiting to be nominated; they may talk a great deal to each other at inappropriate times; when one child participated in the discourse, others might tease him.67

According to Christie, teachers interpreted this sort of behaviour as rude, insolent, lazy, stupid, emotionally disturbed, or withdrawn. In Christie’s view, it was more likely that these children were simply following the Aboriginal system of sociolinguistic rules of interpersonal behaviour.68 The point is, that Aboriginal English or Creole was a unique language with its own history, patterns and structures.69

Malcolm’s work described in detail the communication dysfunction evident in many Aboriginal classrooms.70 His research showed that Aboriginal children usually spoke one of two sorts of language. First, there are those children who are bilingual and use Aboriginal language extensively outside the classroom. Concerning English, bilingual children are ‘second phase learners’ with inferior control over the English language. Bilingual speakers usually live in the Gascoyne-Murchison, Pilbara, Goldfields and Kimberley regions. The second type of language used by Aboriginal children was a form of non-standard English or what Malcolm described as Western Australian Aboriginal Children’s English (WAACE). WAACE differed significantly from the standard English spoken by teachers in the classroom. It was spoken mainly in the Murchison and South West areas of the state. Malcolm’s research showed that both bilingual and WAACE speakers faced major communication problems in the classroom. These problems, he argued, occurred at three levels: the communication system where linguistics (languages, dialects) and sociolinguistics (conventions for the use of speech) created communication dysfunctions; the speech event, in which the domain (schools) and the situation (classrooms) constrained the way in which the communication system could be realised; and the individual level, where communication strategies depended upon the attitude each person adopted.71 Malcolm’s work on Aboriginal communication patterns in the classroom served to illustrate the cultural gap between blacks and whites.

Cultural difference also influences learning style and provided yet another reason for the clash of cultures in the classroom. Different groups of individuals developed functional learning systems that were appropriate to their social and economic context. Traditionally, Aboriginal learning occurred incidentally during the socialisation of children into adult roles. Aboriginal children learnt skills and knowledge by modelling adults in the context of everyday life largely through non-verbal methods. By contrast, according to Christie, the formal education of white people was “decontextualised, heavily verbal and consciously mediated between teacher and pupil.”72 As a consequence, Aboriginal children had great difficulty in coping with institutionalised and irrelevant learning. White schools, Christie concluded were quite foreign and even antithetical to the Aboriginal way of life.73

Nonetheless, Aboriginal people were acutely aware of the value of western oriented education. Thies’ study of Aboriginal people in the East Kimberley Region showed that Aborigines were conscious of the need for their children to acquire the same competencies as other children in mainstream society. The elders in the East Kimberley believed that schools should teach Gadiya (white) things and the Gadiya way. They believed it was important that Aboriginal children learn to read and write so they could deal with the wider society and take control over their lives in negotiating with white people.74
At the 1951 Commonwealth and States Conference on Native Welfare it was agreed that education should be available to all irrespective of race. However, given white racist attitudes toward Aboriginal people, the conference opted for a ‘Claytons’ segregation policy. This meant that officially segregation did not exist, but in reality Aboriginal children for a variety of reasons did not attend school. The conference declaration on the use of state schools by Aborigines attempted to cover all eventualities:

To the extent to which the place of living and general standard of aboriginal children will permit, they should be taken into, and receive their education in, the same institutions as are provided for white children. Prejudices and social conditions which operate against this policy should be actively combated.

But,

Where, by reason of isolation, temporary segregation in communities, or the present degree of social and cultural development, education in normal institutions is not practicable, special schools should be provided on Government, Mission and privately owned stations.

White attitudes to Aboriginal children attending the same school were a source of much conflict in Western Australia. Headlines such as ‘Two White Pupils End Boycott’ and ‘Dispute Over Education of Young Natives’ were common throughout the 1950s and 1960’s. Racist attitudes were strongest in the smaller country towns where people came into regular contact with Aborigines. For example, the Roebourne Parent and Citizens Association objected to the Education Department’s decision to admit native children to the Roebourne school. On the 2 December 1953, they wrote to the Director-General of Education expressing their grievance:

Before admitting them to the local school however, surely it would be more beneficial to all concerned to give the native youngsters several years tuition in the elementary principles of hygiene and education. Why not a type of kindergarten, somewhere away from the school...we suggest the Native Reserve...and operated by perhaps some mission.

The Gnowangerup Parents and Citizens Association also expressed opposition to Aboriginal children attending the local school. A letter to the Director-General of Education written on the 5 March 1965 read in part:

The parents of children attending the Gnowangerup Junior High School have, for some time, been concerned about the effect of the number of native children enrolled there...the vast majority of the adult natives can only be considered third class citizens; and it is from such a tragic background that the children came to this school. They have no innate dignity, no sense of discipline and with very few exceptions, no wish to improve their lot by their own efforts.

Inspectorial reports reflected the same sort of racist thinking. After a visit to the Brookton school on the 14 February 1949, Inspector O’Neill wrote:

On the 10th February, I again visited Brookton and attended a meeting of the Local Road Board, the complaints by members of the Board are that the town is being over run with natives, they have been frequenting the Hotels including Lounges, their living
conditions are unsatisfactory and they are not industrious, and some members object to
the children attending school with white children and in some cases travelling in school
buses from outlying districts.78

Thus, Aboriginal people experienced a racist, alien and at best irrelevant education
system. Participation and retention rates provide a good indication of how Aboriginal
students perceived white schooling. While the number of Aboriginal students staying on
to Year 12 increased in the period 1982 to 1987 (2.8 per cent to 9.9 per cent) the actual
number of students completing Year 12 remained very low. Even more disturbing is the
fact that Western Australian retention rates are still significantly lower than is the case in
other Australian states:

ABORIGINAL STUDENTS IN ALL STAGES OF EDUCATION, 199129

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AUS</th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>VIC</th>
<th>QLD</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>TAS</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>ACT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SCHOOL</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5-7 years</td>
<td>80.9</td>
<td>89.1</td>
<td>84.5</td>
<td>79.4</td>
<td>87.7</td>
<td>76.4</td>
<td>87.8</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>94.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-15</td>
<td>83.1</td>
<td>84.5</td>
<td>82.8</td>
<td>84.8</td>
<td>82.5</td>
<td>80.2</td>
<td>90.6</td>
<td>78.4</td>
<td>91.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-17</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-17 years</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-20</td>
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<td>6.5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-24</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A community health worker in Perth informed the Select Committee into Youth
Affairs (1991) that the high drop out rate of Aborigines from mainstream schooling:

...is indicative of the problems they face at school and the lack of relevance they see in
the existing system.10

Kwinana Town Council also referred to a flood of Aboriginal students not coping with
primary and secondary education. One Aboriginal community health worker told the Select
Committee (1991) that most 'at risk' Aboriginal youth:

...did not have good experiences at school. Schools were horrific parts of the lives of
many of the kids we have spoken to.81

Aboriginal communities were anxious about the impact of compulsory European
schooling on their way of life. Many Aboriginal elders expressed concern about white
schools deliberately taking their children away and destroying traditional values. In 1965, Jacob Oberdoo protested against compulsory school attendance regulations. In a letter to the principal of Marble Bar school he argued:

...you were probably ignorant of the evil influences that have been active against our children and which has caused a constant erosion of parental control and the success in having them begin to look on their parents with contempt.... Because we have been silent and patient in the past this has not meant that we were ignorant of the effort that was being made not a novel situation for our folk to rob them of their children the surprise to us was that you have or may have joined this group. Until we are satisfied this is not so and unless this effort is halted it is our intention to withhold our children from attending your school for an indefinite period the Education Act notwithstanding.

Another person to express concern was Josephine Boyle, President of the Ngoonjuwah Aboriginal Committee. On the 16 January 1975, she wrote to the Minister for Education G. McKinnon complaining about the impact of white schooling on Aboriginal families and the 'non-academic' curriculum studied by Aboriginal children:

I would like to bring to your notice, that we the Aborigines of Halls Creek, are not satisfied with your system of schooling...the worst part is breaking up families, when children as young as 5 years, are sent away from their parents.... By the time they are 15 years old, many cannot still read and write, and they are in a class called Project, which mainly teaches them to weed people's gardens around town...I have no family ties as my mother is a stranger to me.

Despite Aboriginal concern about the impact of white schooling, the Western Australian Education Department stated that 'native' children were subject to the same attendance regulations as everyone else. In other words, Aboriginal children had to attend school if they lived within the statutory radius of an approved school or bus service. Education Department authorities expressed concern about the influence of white activists like Don McLeod, who had some success in radicalising the northern Aborigines. Don McLeod came to prominence when he organised a regional strike by Aboriginal pastoral workers on 1 May, 1946. In 1959, the 'McLeod mob' set up camp on the outskirts of Roebourne, where they refused to send their children to school until their living conditions improved. Despite McLeod's consciousness-raising work with the northern Aborigines, the general view of the authorities and white community was that the Australian Aborigines did not pose a serious threat to the status quo. A lead editorial in *The W. A. Teachers' Journal* in 1963 stated that Australian Aborigines were non-aggressive and isolated from any nationalist movement that might inspire a Sharpeville-type massacre. The editorial commented that 'none of the natives make too much fuss, their resistance is passive'. Nonetheless, the Director-General of Education H. Dettman sought legislative changes that would give the Minister greater power to compel a parent of Aboriginal children living outside the limits and not receiving 'efficient' education to send that child to an approved institution. So serious was the problem of Aboriginal absenteeism that the Premier, at the request of the State School Teachers' Union, approved the formation of an inter-departmental committee in 1970 to study the Aboriginal absenteeism problem. The following table dramatically illustrated the nature of the absenteeism problem in Western Australian state secondary schools in 1960: 62
A related issue of greater concern to authorities was the dramatic increase in the number of 'natives' convicted of offences:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NUMBER OF NATIVES CONVICTED OF OFFENCES⁹⁰</th>
<th>1956</th>
<th>1960-61</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offences against good order</td>
<td>1807</td>
<td>10187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offences against property</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>1597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stealing</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this situation, the Native Welfare Department's primary concern was to maintain social order. For this reason, the Native Welfare Department established institutions such as the Moola Bulla native station to control the spread of offences against property. In contrast, the mission schools attempted to evangelise the 'natives' and attend to their welfare and education.⁹¹
In portraying the story of an Aboriginal boy to a Country Women's Association meeting on the 6 April 1951, the Commissioner for Native Welfare S. G. Middleton explained the Aboriginal absentee problem in the following way:

In my opinion and experience young natives of secondary school age are seldom happy when completely isolated in the company of a large group of white children; recently a very promising lad who had reached 8th standard at the Tambellup State School was brought to Perth by this Department, clothed and otherwise completely fitted out, and accepted by the Education Department as a pupil at a metropolitan State School where such scholars are coached for the Junior standard examination. Within a few days he became lonely and nostalgic lost interest in his studies and absconded from school, and continued in this vein until it was finally realised the experiment was a failure and he was sent back to his former district.92

Conclusion

European colonisation forcefully appropriated Aboriginal land and created a life of exploitation and oppression for the majority of Aboriginal people. Despite some high-minded talk about the benefits of European civilisation, the Aboriginal people of Western Australia have been subjected to a series of unjust and discriminatory educational policies. Early attempts to civilise and evangelise the Aboriginal people into the European way of life proved ineffective. As a result, Europeans perceived Aborigines to be culturally, socially and intellectually inferior. Once established, the popular myth about Aborigines inferiority allowed the European settlers to introduce progressively more draconian measures to control the Aboriginal population. After the Second World War, the paternalistic policy of assimilation seemed to fit more comfortably with the sentiments of post-war reconstruction and democracy. However, it wasn't until the 1970s that Federal and State governments gradually repealed discriminatory legislation aimed at controlling and protecting the Aboriginal people. With the election of the Whitlam Labor Government in 1972 the rhetoric shifted to focus on the idea of self-determination. In the 1980s and 1990s social justice became the catch-cry, as Federal and State governments sought to give a sense of respectability to the treatment of Aboriginal people. However, as I have argued, there is a large gap between the myth and reality of equality of opportunity for all citizens.

This paper has argued that Western Australian state secondary schools constituted the 'native' child as culturally and intellectually inferior to other children. As a result, the Western Australian Education Department constructed alternative educational programs to prepare Aboriginal students for some sort of 'dead-end' job. Under the guise of equal opportunity and the ideology of meritocracy state secondary schools legitimated the belief that individuals failed because of personal weaknesses. In short, black children were suited to manual and domestic training courses because they were dumb. However, as Donald emphasised, subjectivity involves a degree of aggressivity, negotiation and contestation in everyday life93 and Aboriginal children refused to submit to dominant educational ideologies and practices by absenting themselves from school.94 Liberal democratic interpretations of the extension of state secondary schooling maintain that schooling offered greater equality of opportunity for all citizens. No matter whether children were black or white, schools offered everyone the same opportunity to succeed or fail on the basis of individual merit and ability. In reality, the story was very different. European education, rather than creating greater equality between blacks and whites, served to perpetuate existing racial inequalities.

64
NOTES

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Australian and New Zealand History of Education Society Annual Conference, 1-4 October, 1992, University of Adelaide, South Australia.


12. Ibid., p.178.

13. ACC 2817 Native Affairs FILE No. 11.24, Battye Archives, Perth.


16. Ibid., p.2743.

17. C. Makin and D. Ibbotson (1972), A survey of Aboriginal education in selected Western Australian schools, p.7.


22. Ibid., p.113.


43. ACC 2817 Native Welfare Department FILE No. 11.23, Battye Archives, Perth.
44. Australian Natives' Association, (Victoria) in a letter to the Director General of Education, Dr Robertson, 10 June, 1966. AN 45/13 ACC 1606 FILE No. 2291/1966, Battye Archives, Perth.
46. F. E. Gare to the Superintendent of Native Welfare Southern Division, 7 September, 1967. ACC 127 Native Welfare Department FILE No. 11.24, Battye Archives, Perth.
48. I. Mitchell, Head Teacher of Warburton Range School in a letter to the Assistant Commissioner Department of Native Welfare, Perth, 1 August, 1958. ACC 993 FILE No. 31/1958, Battye Archives, Perth.
52. ACC 2817 Native Welfare Department FILE No. 11.24, Battye Archives, Perth.

70. I. Malcolm (1982), 'Communication dysfunction in Aboriginal classrooms', in J. Sherwood (ed.).
75. Commonwealth and States Conference on Native Welfare, Canberra, 3-4 September, 1951. AN 45/1 ACC 1497 FILE No. 533/1947, Battye Archives, Perth.
82. Jacob Oberdoo in a letter to L. Barrett, Principal of Marble Bar School. AN 45/13 ACC 1606 Native Education FILE No. 1732/1964, Battye Archives, Perth.
89. ACC 1733 Native Affairs FILE No. 803/1945, Battye Archives, Perth.
90. Ibid.
91. Ibid., S. G. Middleton to the Hon. Minister for Native Affairs, 14 August, 1952, Battye Archives, Perth.
92. Ibid., S. G. Middleton in a letter to M. S. Niblock, State Secretary Country Women's Association, Perth, 6 April, 1951, Battye Archives, Perth.