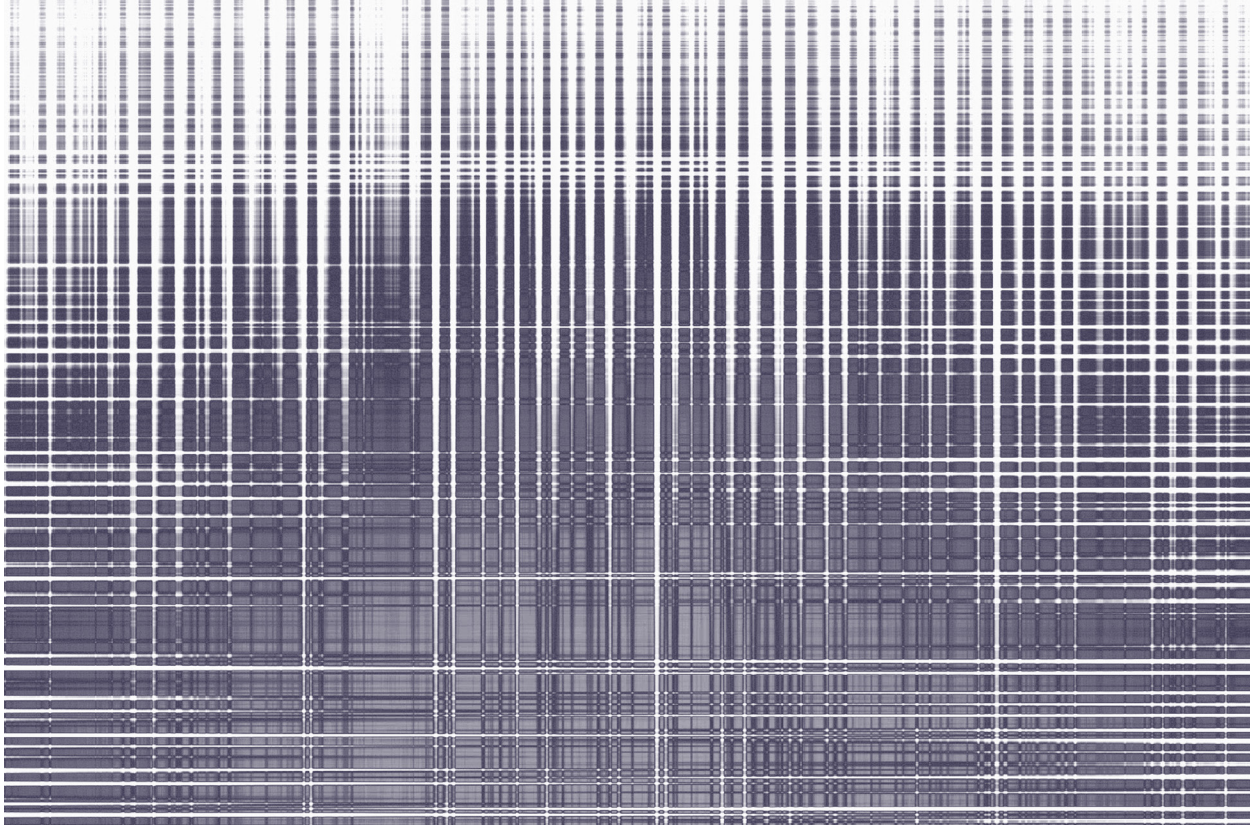




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The importance of reconciliation in education

N Biddle and N Priest

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ANU Centre for Social Research & Methods

Research School of Social Sciences
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The importance of reconciliation in education

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to summarise existing evidence and new analyses that shed light on the role of reconciliation in schools and early learning services in particular, and in education more broadly. We present the first analysis in Australia of the relationship between racism/discrimination and cognitive development among the Indigenous

Australian population, showing a negative and statistically significant longitudinal relationship. We discuss the policy implications of these findings, as well as the implication of the broader literature on reconciliation in schools and early learning services.

Acknowledgments

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of Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education, any conclusions should be attributed to the authors only and are not necessarily intended to represent the views of Reconciliation Australia.

Acronyms

ANU	Australian National University
CSRM	ANU Centre for Social Research & Methods
LSIC	Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children

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Executive summary

The aim of this paper is to summarise existing evidence and new analyses that shed light on the role of reconciliation in schools and early learning services in particular, and in education more broadly. The paper and this executive summary are structured around six guiding questions:

- What is reconciliation?
- Why is reconciliation in education important?
- What do the data say about the effects of racism on opportunities and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (Indigenous Australians)?¹
- How can a reconciliation program be delivered in the education context?
- What are some of the risks to be aware of when designing and delivering a reconciliation program in schools and early learning services?
- What don't we know about reconciliation in schools and early learning services?

What is reconciliation?

Reconciliation is a concept that has very broad support among the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population of Australia. The specific definition of the term, however, is quite contested, often meaning different things to different people and organisations. According to Reconciliation Australia, 'reconciliation has introduced a greater focus on the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians and opened up a national debate on prejudice, discrimination and racism'. Reconciliation Australia's *The state of reconciliation in Australia* report identifies five integral and interrelated dimensions of reconciliation:

- Race relations
 - All Australians understand and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous cultures, rights and

experiences, which results in stronger relationships based on trust and respect, and free from racism.

- Equality and equity
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participate equally in a range of life opportunities, and the unique rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are recognised and upheld.
- Institutional integrity
 - The nation's political, business and community structures actively support reconciliation.
- Historical acceptance
 - All Australians understand and accept the wrongs of the past and the impact of these wrongs. Australia makes amends for the wrongs of the past and ensures that they are never repeated.
- Unity
 - Australian society values and recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage as a proud part of a shared national identity.

Why is reconciliation in education important?

The potential positive effects of reconciliation are numerous and diverse. They include greater social interaction, reduced stress, improved productivity in the workplace and more positive views about the society in which a person lives. Rather than making people feel worse about their national identity or history (the so-called black armband view of history), reconciliation, if done well, can create positive views about the future.

According to the 2018 Australian Reconciliation Barometer, there is majority, but not complete, support among the Australian population for

promoting the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for Australia as a whole. However, only a minority of Australians (around a quarter) know what they can do in practice to advance reconciliation. This demonstrates a very important role for the education system in giving young Australians the skills and insight to make a direct and informed contribution to the reconciliation process, while also encouraging teachers and educators to critically engage in their own ongoing learning, ‘un-learning’ and ‘re-learning’ with regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.

One aspect of the race relations dimension of reconciliation is trust. A growing body of evidence suggests that high levels of trust between populations can reduce transaction costs and the need for costly regulatory approaches to improve the functioning of markets. Given the importance placed by government and Indigenous organisations on Indigenous businesses as a way to improve the circumstances and economic wellbeing of the Indigenous population, one mechanism that schools and the wider education system can contribute to is increasing trust between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

There is also a general acceptance among the Australian population that some of the socioeconomic disparities and relatively poor health outcomes of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population are due to intergenerational impacts of past actions of the Australian Government. Legitimate debates take place about the long-term consequences of specific past government policies. Some policies specifically targeted towards Indigenous Australians are likely to have had positive impacts, and some are likely to have been neutral or improved the lives of some people, but not others. However, the general consensus within the academic literature is that many policies (in particular, the practice of forcibly removing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families) have had very large negative consequences. Drawing on the power of the education system to support learning about these historical policies and the long-term consequences will give the Australian population

a more accurate picture of the history of their own country, and more insight into how to engage with complex policy debates and policy impacts in the future. In general, most Australians support policies to improve the opportunities and outcomes of Indigenous Australians (touching on institutional integrity and historical acceptance).

Although there is very little literature in Australia on the effects of racism, a growing body of literature overseas shows that racism has direct (negative) effects not only on minority groups but also on the dominant group in a society. Potential direct negative effects include a lack of trust between groups, and the costs of lost opportunity and a lower-skilled workforce as a result of the negatively affected group disengaging from education, the labour market and the market economy.

Consistent findings in Australia and internationally demonstrate that exposure to racism and discrimination negatively affects health outcomes for groups with high exposure, both physically and socio-emotionally. This is particularly likely for the relatively young, highlighting the need for an evidence-based reconciliation process to be focused on children and young adults. Exposure to negative experiences in childhood can have repercussions for the rest of a person’s life as it shapes their engagement and attitudes towards institutions; the direct negative consequences for health also affect future health outcomes directly.

Empirical findings on the relationship between discrimination or racism and education outcomes

Based on the review of the literature in this paper, a particularly important gap to be filled in the literature is the relationship between an Indigenous child’s education outcomes and their exposure to racism and/or discrimination. Although race relations are just one of the five dimensions of reconciliation, it can directly affect all others. For example, the positive benefits of education for other aspects of reconciliation in education are unlikely to materialise if students are discouraged from participating in education.

One of the dimensions of reconciliation on which we have underutilised data is race relations. Until the analysis undertaken for this paper, empirical estimates had not been made of the impact of racism or discrimination on the education opportunities and outcomes of Indigenous children. Our analysis, however, has shown that there is a clear empirical link between experiences of racism and discrimination and a number of poor education outcomes, reinforcing many of the assumptions that have driven policy development within the education sector. A particularly clear finding was the apparent effect on numeracy and self-perception. With regard to self-perception, a child whose family is treated differently or who themselves are treated differently because of their Indigenous status is much less likely to feel that their actions lead to improved outcomes (the essence of self-perception).

The finding of a very strong association between experiences of discrimination and maths test scores is more surprising, but highly problematic for policy. Numeracy levels are one of the key targets of Indigenous education policy in Australia. The large difference between those who did and did not experience discrimination suggests that the targets are unlikely to be met unless significant gains are made in learning about, and attitudes and behaviour towards, Indigenous Australians.

How can a reconciliation program be delivered in the education context, and what are the risks?

In terms of targeting, one of the main ways in which negative attitudes directed towards other groups might be reduced, and trust between groups increased, is through increased contact between those in the dominant population (the likely perpetrators of racism and discrimination) and those in a minority group (in this case, Indigenous Australians). Any program related to reconciliation, including those in a school and early learning setting, should include, if feasible and appropriate, an increased rate of contact between non-Indigenous students and Indigenous people – both students and

community members. Apart from developing welcoming environments that better attract Indigenous students and families, schools have relatively little control over student enrolment numbers. What they can control, however, is concerted efforts towards building relationships with the local community.

Although reductions in negative attitudes held by current non-Indigenous students are likely to benefit current Indigenous students, the finding that much of the discrimination experienced by Indigenous adults comes from the general public highlights the need to target young non-Indigenous Australians to benefit future adult Indigenous Australians.

Unfortunately, the current Australian school system and the different geographic distributions of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations make regular or incidental contact between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students difficult. With regard to geographic distribution, Indigenous students are more likely to live in rural or remote parts of the country (despite having, in absolute terms, an urban population distribution) and relatively disadvantaged suburbs in our major cities. However, a large driver of the geographic sorting is the very different rates of participation in nongovernment and/or selective schools. The vast majority of Indigenous students attend comprehensive government schools, whereas a large and increasing proportion of the non-Indigenous population attends fee-paying private schools or academically selective government schools.

An evidence-based reconciliation policy would look for other ways to increase intergroup contact. This could be through student-to-student contact across schools and early learning services through exchanges, or other formal or informal avenues. It should also involve contact between non-Indigenous students and the broader Indigenous community in the area in which they live, contact between Indigenous students and the broader non-Indigenous community, and of course contact between Indigenous students and the Indigenous community. Importantly, this should be done in partnership with the Indigenous community, rather than something that is imposed on them.

An additional avenue that is being increasingly researched for increasing intergroup understanding is 'imagined contact'.

In addition to peers, teacher attitudes and experiences are an important lever for an evidence-based reconciliation policy. Importantly, implicit prejudice, rather than explicit or self-reported attitudes, have been shown to be more predictive of negative outcomes for children from minority groups.

Although important, reducing experiences of racism and discrimination is not the only focus of a reconciliation program. There are intrinsic benefits in increasing knowledge and understanding of Indigenous cultures, languages and histories, as demonstrated by the large proportion of adults who reported, in the 2018 Australian Reconciliation Barometer report, that they would like to learn more about these and related topics.

One of the biggest risks to a school-based or early learning service-based intervention is that it might divert scarce resources away from other, potentially more worthwhile interventions. This is why cost-effectiveness or cost-benefit analyses are so important (although relatively infrequent). Furthermore, any intervention, no matter how well intentioned, has the potential to create negative unintended consequences.

A policy related to reconciliation needs to be careful to not artificially inflate differences between groups (including differences within the Indigenous population). This is important when interventions in schools have a focus on Indigenous students or Indigenous topics. The research and evidence highlight the care needed to avoid making a student's Indigenous status salient when discussing the need for interventions related to low attendance, achievement or attainment. This is related to, but somewhat distinct from, the literature on 'deficit discourse'.

A final risk from the literature that needs to be kept in mind relates to moral licensing. According to a review by Irene Blanken and colleagues, this 'refers to the effect that when people initially behave in a moral way, they are later more likely to display behaviors that are immoral, unethical, or otherwise problematic'.

What don't we know?

There is much in the existing literature that can support an evidence-based intervention related to reconciliation in schools and early learning services. Some important studies in areas that we do not know enough about include:

- studies of the causal impacts of interventions related to reconciliation (or Indigenous education more broadly), using a carefully designed intervention, a treatment group that receives the program and an otherwise identical comparison group that does not
- longitudinal analysis at the individual student level that carefully measures change through time in attitudes and behaviours, rather than the things that correlate cross-sectionally with such attitudes and behaviours
- detailed studies of the implicit and explicit prejudices held by Australian in-service and pre-service teachers, particularly (but not exclusively) with regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, communities, cultures and histories
- careful, causal evaluation of whether specific key resources used by teachers change their attitudes and behaviours in a positive way
- monitoring of the community's response to, and acceptance of, reconciliation programs (including, and arguably particularly, the Indigenous community)
- analysis of the cost-effectiveness of interventions, rather than just whether an intervention had a positive effect (or, even worse, whether those who were involved in the program perceived it to have a positive effect).



1 Introduction and overview

Indigenous Australians start school with fewer years of early childhood education than their non-Indigenous counterparts, attend schools with fewer resources and are less likely to attend school on a given day. We should not assume that this is the fault of Indigenous children, or their families or communities. Rather, education outcomes should be seen as a consequence of the structural circumstances that children are exposed to, and the response to a school system that has not historically been welcoming of Indigenous children, their families or their cultures. As this paper will show, these barriers remain in the current school system.

Understanding the diverse determinants influencing the significant inequities experienced by Indigenous Australians compared with their non-Indigenous counterparts in education is critical for policy makers, program developers and researchers. In both the 2014 and 2015 Prime Minister's Closing the Gap reports, it was noted that getting children to school was one of the Australian Government's three highest priorities for Indigenous affairs. The other two priorities were with getting adults into work and making Indigenous communities safer, both of which are likely to be supported by an evidence-based education policy. The 2015 Closing the Gap report (Australian Government 2015) also noted that 'any work in these priority areas must be underpinned by improving the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities'. In 2015, the government committed to developing an Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023, which acknowledged racism as a 'key social determinant of health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people'.

Improving the education opportunities and outcomes of Indigenous children is a key component of reconciliation in Australia. But it is not the only component. Although reconciliation is a concept that has very broad support among the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations

of Australia, the specific definition of the term is quite contested; reconciliation can mean different things to different people and organisations.

Patrick Dodson, current Senator for the Labor Party in Western Australia and founding Chairperson of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, highlights the importance of recognising difference. He stated in a recent Australian National University (ANU) Reconciliation Lecture that 'reconciliation will come when governments stop trying to make us the same as everyone else'.

Will Sanders, an academic researcher at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at the ANU, has argued that reconciliation 'will be a journey without end, that each generation of Indigenous and settler Australians will have to come to their own understanding of the relationship of each to the other, in both its historical and contemporary socio-economic dimensions'.

In contrast, the former prime minister John Howard focused on improvements in socioeconomic status under his (and his government's) definition of 'practical reconciliation'. In the 'Motion of Reconciliation' on 26 August 1999, the government stated that it 'reaffirms the central importance of practical measures leading to practical results that address the profound economic and social disadvantage which continues to be experienced by many indigenous [sic] Australians'.²

In contrast, according to Reconciliation Australia (2016):

In the 25 years since the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation was established, the concept of reconciliation has taken a holistic approach that encompasses rights, as well as so-called symbolic and practical actions. Over this time, reconciliation has introduced a greater focus on the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

peoples and non-Indigenous Australians and opened up a national debate on prejudice, discrimination and racism.

Reconciliation Australia's *The state of reconciliation in Australia* report (Reconciliation Australia 2016) identifies five integral and interrelated dimensions of reconciliation:

- Race relations
 - All Australians understand and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous cultures, rights and experiences, which results in stronger relationships based on trust and respect, and free from racism.
- Equality and equity
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participate equally in a range of life opportunities, and the unique rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are recognised and upheld.
- Institutional integrity
 - The nation's political, business and community structures actively support reconciliation.
- Historical acceptance
 - All Australians understand and accept the wrongs of the past and the impact of these wrongs. Australia makes amends for the wrongs of the past and ensures that they are never repeated.
- Unity
 - Australian society values and recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage as a proud part of a shared national identity.

Reconciliation Australia argues that these dimensions are affected by wider structural and policy processes, and that they are inherently interrelated, stating that 'Australia can only achieve full reconciliation if we progress in all five dimensions, weaving them together to become a whole'.

The first of these dimensions, race relations, is a complex construct that is important for understanding some of the enablers and barriers to improved education and wider outcomes

for Indigenous children. Racism in this context can be defined as 'the definitive attribution of inferiority to a particular racial/ethnic group and the use of this principle to propagate and justify the unequal treatment of this group' (Essed 1990). Berman and Paradies (2010) define racism as 'that which maintains or exacerbates inequality of opportunity among ethnoracial groups'. Racism can be expressed through stereotypes (racist beliefs), prejudice (racist emotions/affect) or discrimination (racist behaviours and practices).

However, racism is not only the explicit, overt expressions of one group towards another (Hardin & Banaji 2013) – it can also be implicit or covert. These less overt forms of racism have been variously described as new, everyday or unintentional racism, although these all have slightly different connotations.

Berman and Paradies (2010) define direct racism as unequal treatment that results in unequal opportunity; in contrast, indirect racism is equal treatment that results in unequal opportunity. Further to this binary model of explicit/direct and implicit/indirect racism, racism can exist at the personal (internalised), interpersonal, and institutional or systemic levels. Internalised racism is the incorporation of racist attitudes, beliefs or ideologies into one's worldview; interpersonal racism represents the interactions between individuals; and institutional or systemic racism relates to the production of, control of, and access to, resources in a society.

There is strong and consistent evidence that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including children, experience racism, prejudice and discrimination at levels that are higher than for most, if not all, other groups in Australia. In the Challenging Racism Project (Dunn et al. 2011), 63% of Indigenous Australians reported that they had experienced explicit forms of racist talk. In the 2008 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, close to 28% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over reported that they had experienced some form of discrimination in the previous year (Biddle et al. 2013).

More recent estimates, albeit on a smaller population, are available from the most recent (2018) Australian Reconciliation Barometer.

According to this survey, 33% of the Indigenous sample experienced at least one form of verbal racial abuse in the past 6 months, 51% of the Indigenous sample believe that Australia is a racist country, and 49% of Indigenous people consider racial and cultural differences as the biggest cause of social divisions in Australia. People among both the general community and Indigenous people who cite personal experience or education sources (such as school or other research) as their main source of information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are most likely to view the relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as very important.

A growing body of national and international empirical evidence demonstrates the negative effects of racism and racial discrimination on children's and young people's health, education and wellbeing outcomes (Priest et al. 2014).

In a recent systematic review of studies examining the relationship between reported racism and health and wellbeing for children and young people, Priest et al. (2013) found that, in 121 studies examining the connection between racism and child health, 63% indicated an association between racism and a negative general health outcome, and 69% indicated an association with a negative mental health outcome. Of particular note were the higher rates and risk of anxiety, depression, psychological distress, behaviour problems such as 'delinquent behaviours' and poorer physical wellbeing, including cardiovascular and metabolic disease in children. Other studies have identified a negative relationship with socioeconomic wellbeing and cognitive development; children whose parents or caregivers are affected by racism are also at an increased risk of less supportive parenting (Sanders-Phillips 2009). However, it is important to note that Priest et al. (2013) also found statistically significant associations (in a negative direction) between racial discrimination and positive mental health characteristics, such as self-esteem and resilience.

In the Australian Indigenous context, only four of the studies identified in the review by Priest et al. (2013) focused on Indigenous children. The four studies were consistent with the more general findings, and indicated that racism experienced by Indigenous Australians is associated with poor health outcomes, including anxiety, depression, suicide risk/thoughts, overall poorer mental health, drinking to excess, frequent marijuana use, low self-esteem, physical illnesses and poorer general health (Priest et al. 2011). In a separate study on children in remote communities, Priest also identified a correlation between racism, housing conditions and childhood illnesses (Davis et al. 2010).

In the empirical component of this paper, we examine the association between self-identified or parent-identified experiences of racism and racial discrimination as a result of identifying as Indigenous and a range of other characteristics from the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC). The paper first elaborates on why reconciliation in education is important, building on the existing literature on education outcomes, the prevalence and impact of racism towards Indigenous Australian children and young people in schools, academic self-concept, cultural socialisation and preparation for bias. Next, the method, data and analysis from the LSIC are presented.

In the final part of the paper, we reflect on the implications for policy and further research. In particular, we consider the importance of understanding this work and analysis for programs that focus on reconciliation or similar concepts in schools and early learning services, as well as for reconciliation programs more broadly. We consider three main questions: How can a reconciliation in education program be delivered? What are some of the risks to be aware of when designing and delivering a reconciliation program in schools and early learning services? What don't we know about reconciliation in schools and early learning services?



2 Existing literature and why reconciliation in education is important

2.1 Effects of education on outcomes

Education is recognised as a key determinant of both health and wellbeing – an outcome that has its own inherent value – and productivity at the national level. With regard to the latter, individuals' own education levels have been shown to have considerable positive externalities through the effect on the outcomes of those around them, and through the contribution to increased taxation and reduced welfare expenditure. Education is internationally recognised as key to improving social and economic disadvantage. Education outcomes tend to be measured by attendance, participation, attainment and achievement.

In Australia, Biddle and Cameron (2012) found substantially better outcomes across a range of wellbeing measures for Indigenous adults who had higher attainment levels of education than for those who had left school earlier and/or had not undertaken post-school education. Despite this, discrepancies between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians persist (SCRGSP 2014). Indigenous Australians are less likely to undertake and complete early childhood education (Biddle & Bath 2013), high school (Biddle 2013a) and higher education (Biddle & Crawford 2015). In the 2014 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results, 74.7% of Indigenous year 3 students met the minimum standard for reading, compared with 94.7% for non-Indigenous students. Similarly, 78.2% of Indigenous year 3 students met the minimum standard for numeracy levels, compared with 95.7% for non-Indigenous students.

Since 2004, Australia's Indigenous affairs policy platform has been driven by the Closing the Gap

agenda, in which four of the eight targets are education focused:

- Ensure that all Indigenous 4-year-olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within 5 years (by 2013).
- Close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance within 5 years (new target, baseline 2014).
- Halve the gap for Indigenous children in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade (by 2018).
- Halve the gap for Indigenous people aged 20–24 in year 12 or equivalent attainment rates (by 2020).

In addition, the revised Indigenous Advancement Strategy, which began in mid-2014, highlights education as a priority. The focus is on an 'increased school attendance and improved educational outcomes which lead to employment and aims to improve pathways to prosperity and wellbeing'.³ Equity and parity in education outcomes for First Australians were also noted in the 2014 Forrest review (Forrest 2014).⁴

A range of government-funded programs have been implemented to achieve these targets and realise the Indigenous Advancement Strategy. They include the School Enrolment and Attendance Measure, the Indigenous Higher Education Units and the Remote School Attendance Strategy. The teaching of Indigenous histories and cultures is a cross-curriculum priority under the Australian curriculum. Australian Professional Standards for Teachers require teachers to implement strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Professional Standard 1.4), and to understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (Professional Standard 2.4).

Despite all these investments, according to the Prime Minister's Closing the Gap report for 2015, the access to early childhood education measure was not met in 2013: only 85% rather than 95% of children were enrolled. However, according to the most recent (2019) report, the revised target of 95% of Indigenous 4-year-olds enrolled in early childhood education by 2025 is on track. However, this needs to be interpreted with caution because previous estimates of early childhood participation between censuses have been affected by numerator–denominator biases – that is, the population estimates used to convert administrative estimates of the number of children attending early childhood education into rates are too low, leading to rates that are too high. We may need to wait until the 2021 Census to know for sure.

The reading, writing and literacy measure is not on track, and the added target to close the gap in school attendance by 2018 is also not on track. The most recent Closing the Gap report states that attendance rates for Indigenous students did not improve between 2014 and 2018. However, on a positive note, the measure of 'halving the gap for Indigenous Australians aged 20–24 in year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates' is on track to be achieved by its target year of 2020.

A country and a society that has not reduced, or is not making significant progress towards reducing, disparities in education outcomes between its Indigenous and non-Indigenous population cannot conceivably be seen as making significant progress towards reconciliation. Australia is not the only country that has followed (explicitly or implicitly) a process of reconciliation. Other settler–colonial societies with significant Indigenous populations (Canada, New Zealand, the United States and many countries in Latin America) have engaged extensively with at least some of the five dimensions of reconciliation identified by Reconciliation Australia, as have countries that have experienced other forms of intergroup conflict (including South Africa, Germany, Israel and Northern Ireland).

All countries that are going through, or have gone through, an explicit process of reconciliation have stressed the benefits to both the Indigenous population and the non-Indigenous population, or the descendants of perpetrators of ethnic-related violence. These positive effects are

numerous and diverse; they include greater social interaction, reduced stress, improved productivity in the workplace, and more positive views about the society in which the person lives. Rather than making people feel worse about their national identity or history (the so-called black armband view of history), the process of reconciliation, if done well, can create positive views about the future. In the recent Truth Telling Symposium, co-convened by Reconciliation Australia and the Healing Foundation, 3 of the 10 principles touched on this:

- [6] Inclusivity and reciprocity – non-Indigenous Australians, including recent migrants, have an important role to play in truth telling.
- [9] Healing, justice and nation building – truth telling is an uncomfortable process, which is not about shame or guilt but about driving positive change and acceptance.
- [10] Truth telling is a gift – truth telling benefits the whole nation, and communities must be supported to tell the stories they want to tell in the ways they want to tell them.

2.2 Race relations, trust and historical acceptance

With regard to race relations (one of the five dimensions of reconciliation outlined above), there is majority, but not complete support for the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for Australia as a whole. According to the most recent (2018) Australian Reconciliation Barometer, for example, most Australians have pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, agree that these cultures are important for Australia's national identity, would like to increase their interaction with Indigenous Australians or knowledge of Indigenous histories and cultures, and would like to do something to help improve reconciliation.

Only a minority of Australians (29%) know what they can do to help improve reconciliation, and less than half of the Indigenous sample (44%) know what they can do. Similarly, with regard to the important role of the education system, more than half (58%) of Australians said they have low or no knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, and more than half

(67%) said they have low or no knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures (even though 95% of the Indigenous sample and 85% of the general Australian community said they believed it is important to know about these histories and cultures).

These findings demonstrate a very important role for the education system in encouraging teachers and educators to critically engage in their own ongoing learning, 'un-learning' and 're-learning' with regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, while giving young Australians the skills and insight to make an informed and direct contribution to the reconciliation process.

One aspect of the race relations dimension of reconciliation is trust. According to the 2018 Australian Reconciliation Barometer, 46% of the Indigenous sample have high trust in Australians in the general community, compared with 40% who think Australians in the general community have high trust in them. More worryingly, 27% of Australians in the general community have high trust in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, compared with 21% who think Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have high trust in them (19% in 2016).

A growing body of evidence suggests that high levels of trust between populations can reduce transaction costs and the need for costly regulatory approaches to improve the functioning of markets. For example, Dyer and Chu (2003) show that 'perceived trustworthiness reduces transaction costs and is correlated with greater information sharing in supplier-buyer relationships [and] ... the findings suggest that the value created for transactors, in terms of lower transaction costs, may be substantial'.

Given the importance placed by government and Indigenous organisations on Indigenous businesses as a way to improve the circumstances and economic wellbeing of the Indigenous population, one mechanism that the school and education system can contribute to is increasing trust between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. According to a review by Lewicki and Wiethoff (2006), trust 'is often the first casualty in conflict' but 'is enhanced if the parties spend time sharing personal values, perceptions, motives, and goals'. Furthermore, according to

Lewicki and Wiethoff (2006), if groups who are attempting to build trust 'perceive themselves as having strong common goals, values, and identities, they are motivated to sustain the relationship and find productive ways to resolve the conflict so that it does not damage the relationship'.

Trust between groups that are involved in a reconciliation process is likely to substantially enhance other opportunities and outcomes for both groups. There is very strong evidence – including from laboratory experiments, field experiments and observational data – that aggregate outcomes are higher for individuals who trust each other, avoiding 'zero-sum game' situations. Trust reduces the need for complex (and distorting) legal infrastructure to manage contracts, encourages people to plan for the future, and encourages mediation or discussion rather than litigation when disagreements do arise.

There is a general acceptance among the Australian population that some of the socioeconomic and health inequities experienced by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is due to intergenerational impacts of past actions of the Australian Government. In a 2015 ANUPoll (undertaken on a representative sample of the Australian population; Gray & Sanders 2015), it was shown that 51% of the population felt that 'the problems have been caused primarily by the attitudes of other citizens and government policies'. This is lower than the proportion in Canada (56%), and leaves 17% who felt that 'Aboriginal people have largely caused their own problems' and 32% who felt that Aboriginal people and others were equally responsible.

Legitimate debates take place about the long-term consequences of specific government policies in the past. Some policies specifically targeted towards Indigenous Australians are likely to have had positive impacts, and some are likely to have been neutral or improved the lives of some, but not others. However, the general consensus within the academic literature (Broome 2010) is that many policies (in particular, the practice of forcibly removing Indigenous children from their families) had very large negative consequences on wellbeing, the maintenance of

language and culture, and physical and mental health.

Although there is majority support for a number of historical statements, support is far from universal. According to the 2018 Australian Reconciliation Barometer:

- only 70% of Australians accept that government policy enabled Aboriginal children to be removed from their families without permission until the 1970s
- only 69% of Australians accept that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians were subject to mass killings, incarceration, forced removal from land and restricted movement throughout the 1800s
- only 71% of Australians accept that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people did not have full voting rights throughout Australia until the 1960s.

Although these percentages are low, it is important to note that only a small minority of respondents (7–12%) stated that they did not accept the statements. A much larger proportion (18–21%) stated that they were unsure. Those who are unsure might be the best target of information-based interventions: learning about these historical policies and their long-term consequences will give the Australian population a more accurate picture of the history of their own country, and more insight into how to engage with complex policy decisions and their impacts.

In general, most Australians support policies to improve the opportunities and outcomes of Indigenous Australians (touching on the institutional integrity and historical acceptance dimensions of reconciliation). Importantly, there is support for these policies even among those who feel that Indigenous people have contributed to their own negative outcomes. For example, according to the same ANUPoll, 69% of Australians agree or strongly agree that ‘Governments should provide extra help for Aboriginal people to gain employment’, and 66% agree or strongly agree that ‘The private sector should do more to employ Aboriginal people’. In a more recent (and yet to be published) ANUPoll from 2018, we found that 79% of people agreed that one role of the Australian Government is to ‘Reduce the gap in living standards between

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and the rest of the Australian population’.

There are obviously differences across the Australian population in terms of what people believe is the general role for government. For example, in the same 2018 ANUPoll, there was greater support for the roles relating to Indigenous people than for the following four roles: ‘Reduce income differences between the rich and the poor’, ‘Provide decent housing for those who can’t afford it’, ‘Provide a job for everyone who wants one’ and ‘Provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed’. Support was greater for the roles of government to ‘Provide health care for the sick’, ‘Provide a decent standard of living for the old’ and ‘Promote equality between men and women’.

In some ways, it is not the role of the education system to make a case for government’s role to intervene in different aspects of society. It is, however, the role of the education system to provide the future voting population with the skills and information to make an informed decision about what the most effective policies are likely to be. This includes the most effective policies related to improving the circumstances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

2.3 Race relations and racism

Although there is very little literature in Australia on the effects of racism, a growing body of literature overseas shows that racism has direct (negative) effects not only for minority groups within a society but also for the dominant group. One potential direct negative effect is a lack of trust between groups, and the costs of lost opportunity and a lower-skilled workforce as a result of the negatively affected group disengaging from education, the labour market and the market economy. A growing body of literature (Spanierman & Heppner 2004) focuses on the psychosocial costs of racism to whites – this is an important area of further study in the Australian context.

Few would suggest that dominant groups in society experience greater negative consequences from a system that perpetuates racism and discrimination than minority groups.

But there are likely to be some costs. In the United States context, Poteat and Spanierman (2008) argued that:

Scholars have identified conceptually and empirically that White individuals experience a number of privileges (i.e. unearned benefits) because of their dominant racial group status, such as greater access to resources and the power and position to define rules, norms, and worldviews [but] ... In addition to these privileges, Whites also experience a variety of negative consequences (i.e. costs) as a result of being in a dominant position within systems of racism in society ... Examples include feeling guilt and shame ... feeling powerless to fight against racism ... expressing irrational fear of or distorted beliefs regarding people of other races ... and limited exposure to or interaction with different cultures.

As well as providing benefits to the dominant group, a successful antiracism and wider reconciliation process would, of course, provide additional and potentially far larger benefits to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in Australia. In work with Howlett and others (Biddle et al. 2013), we showed using the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey that Indigenous Australians experience very high rates of racism, discrimination and unfair treatment as a result of their Indigenous status. The most common source of unfair treatment was members of the public (although there were also high rates of discrimination in the labour market and the criminal justice system). Similarly high rates of exposure to racism and discrimination were seen in the (smaller) sample in the Australian Reconciliation Barometer. In other work, one of us (Biddle 2013b) has also shown that racism and discrimination explain some of the difference in labour market outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Consistent findings in Australia and internationally are that exposure to racism and discrimination negatively affects health outcomes, both physically and socio-emotionally. This is particularly likely to be the case for the relatively young, given that exposure to negative experiences in childhood can have repercussions

for the rest of a person's life by shaping their engagement and attitudes towards institutions; direct negative consequences also affect future health outcomes directly. This highlights the need for an evidence-based reconciliation process to be focused on children and young adults.

A systematic review undertaken by one of us and colleagues (Priest et al. 2013) showed that 'among 121 studies [reviewed], results were significant in 76% of associations between racial discrimination and negative mental health'. In the most recent analysis on this issue, Shepherd et al. (2017) found using longitudinal data that 'direct and persistent vicarious racial discrimination are detrimental to the physical and mental health of Indigenous children in Australia, and suggest that prolonged and more frequent exposure to racial discrimination that starts in the early lifecourse can impact on multiple domains of health in later life'. Until the analysis undertaken later in this paper, no empirical estimates had been made of the impact of racism or discrimination on the education outcomes of Indigenous children.

Although the costs of racism and discrimination have been well documented (albeit with some uncertainty and limitations), there is less research, at least in an Australian context, on what predicts the attitudes and behaviours that lead to negative outcomes for the Indigenous population. One important point is that behavioural research has shown that most prejudice is implicit and, perhaps more surprisingly, that implicit prejudice can have a more damaging effect on those who experience it than deliberate prejudice. Specifically, Hardin and Banaji (2013) define implicit prejudice as that which is 'unwitting, unintentional and uncontrollable'. The authors also make it clear that 'implicit prejudice is not limited to judgement of others, however, but also affects self-judgement and behavior, especially with regard to intellectual performance'.

This is not to say that explicit prejudice is not important. However, only a small minority of the general population (in the 2012 Australian Reconciliation Barometer) reported that they themselves had negative attitudes towards the Indigenous population, and only around 14% of the general community either disagreed or strongly disagreed that 'I would feel fine if I had a child who decided to marry an Indigenous

person'. Only 10% agreed or strongly agreed that non-Indigenous Australians are superior to Indigenous Australians. Finally, 9% of respondents reported that they wanted to have no contact with Indigenous people.⁵

It is possible that those who hold such negative views are the main perpetrators of the high rates of prejudice and discrimination reported by both Indigenous Australians and the rest of the community. However, given the levels of racism and discrimination experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (mentioned above) and the variety of contexts in which these occur, this is unlikely to be the case. Rather, much discrimination is likely to be implicit or unintentional. This is supported by data from the 2012 Australian Reconciliation Barometer, which showed that only a small minority of the community reported favourable attitudes to Indigenous Australians in domains related to the labour market and education. That is, only 20% of the general community thought that Indigenous Australians were hardworking, compared with 71% of who thought that Australians in general are hardworking. Furthermore, only 15% thought that Indigenous Australians were disciplined, compared with 41% for Australians in general.

According to Bodkin-Andrews and Carlson (2016), institutionalised racism and lifelong inequalities that exist for Indigenous Australians 'can often be perpetuated within the very education systems that should act as one of the strongest tools to redress such inequalities'. Mansouri and Jenkins (2010) suggest that, for children, school itself is the most common place children experience racism and racial discrimination. In a 2009 survey of 698 secondary students from four Australian states, researchers found that 70% of those from non-Anglo backgrounds reported experiences of racism during their lifetime, and 67% of these experiences occurred in school (Mansouri & Jenkins 2010). In Victorian schools, a study by one of us revealed that one in five children experience racism daily, and that primary school

children are 26% more likely to experience racism than high-school students (Priest et al. 2014).

At the individual level, Bodkin-Andrews et al. (2010) found that the perception of racism had a range of negative associations with student outcomes. These included a 5–8 percentage disadvantage in standardised spelling and mathematics tests; lower teachers' grades across English, maths and science; and increased patterns of academic disengagement. In a separate study, using data from the LSIC on preschool participation, Biddle and Bath (2013) revealed that 'children whose carers felt they were discriminated against because of their Indigenous status [were] significantly less likely to be attending preschool' than those who did not report such discrimination. This is important data, given that access to, and attendance at, early childhood education brings potential positive effects on future academic achievement and broader cognitive developments, as well as improving a child's school readiness (Biddle & Bath 2013).

Racism and its accompanying negative stereotypes can also have self-perpetuating reactions in which Indigenous students accept and 'own' the negative stereotypes, internalising and then ultimately externalising them (Sarra 2005). Sarra (2005) found that this prevents both engagement in and attainment of education outcomes. Some studies suggest that the lack of participation, engagement, achievement and attainment is related to Indigenous students' active rejection of an oppressive system. For example, Munns and McFadden's (2000) ethnographic study of the Indigenous population in an inner-city area suggests that rejection of school and accompanying education outcomes may be attributed to resistance of oppression, a personal rejection of success as part of the broader system, and avoidance of shame involved in failing. Another significant effect of negative stereotypes on education outcomes is the impact on a student's academic self-concept – that is, belief in their ability to achieve.

3 Data and descriptive analysis

As mentioned in the review of the literature, one of the potential contributions to poor education outcomes for Indigenous Australians (compromising the equality and equity dimension of reconciliation) is experiences of racism at school (concerning the race relations dimension). This has not, however, been demonstrated empirically in Australia.

To fill some of this gap, the analysis presented in this paper is based on data from the LSIC. This is the first large-scale longitudinal survey in Australia to focus on the development of Indigenous children. The first wave of the survey was carried out between April 2008 and February 2009, and collected information on 1687 children and their families.

The sample for the LSIC was designed around two cohorts: babies (born between December 2006 and November 2007) and children (born between December 2003 and November 2004). The eventual baseline sample comprised 960 children in the baby cohort and 727 in the child cohort. Although the survey administrators aimed to keep the sample within these birth date ranges, in practice, a minority of children in the sample fell outside them. Specifically, 32.2% of the child cohort was younger than 42 months or older than 54 months.

According to the Australian Government department that administers the LSIC (now the Department of Social Services, but formerly the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs), the main objective of the LSIC is to provide high-quality quantitative and qualitative data that can be used to provide a better insight into how a child's early years affect their development. Specifically, the survey is structured around four key research questions (FaHCSIA 2009):

- What do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children need to have the best start in life to grow up strong?

- What helps Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to stay on track or get them to become healthier, more positive and strong?
- How are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children raised?
- What is the importance of family, extended family and community in the early years of life and when growing up?

Despite the (admirable) focus on strengths in the LSIC, the dataset also has a range of information on experiences of racism and discrimination. It includes questions on experiences of the child's carer, the child's family and the child themselves. The following question is asked of the child's carer across four waves of data: 'As far as you know, has (STUDY CHILD) been bullied or treated unfairly at (preschool/school) because (he/she) is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?' There are four possible responses to the question:

- Yes, bullied (other kids being mean to him/her)
- Yes, treated unfairly (adults being mean to him/her)
- Yes, both bullied and treated unfairly
- No.

Table 1 gives the distribution of the responses to this question for the relevant waves and cohorts.

Table 1 provides a number of substantive and survey-based findings. With regard to the latter, sample sizes are small and the question varies in terms of when it is asked (i.e. the wave) and whom it is asked of (i.e. the cohort). Substantively, however, the carers of Indigenous children in the LSIC are much more likely to report that their child was bullied by other children at preschool or school (because of their Indigenous status) than to report that their child was treated unfairly by adults. However, as is common with single-item responses, prevalence for either question is reasonably small, with the vast majority of carers reporting neither form of discrimination.

Table 1 Distribution of carer-reported discrimination against study child, by wave and cohort

Response	Wave 2	Wave 4		Wave 5	Wave 6
	Child cohort, <i>n</i> (%)	Baby cohort, <i>n</i> (%)	Child cohort, <i>n</i> (%)	Baby cohort, <i>n</i> (%)	Child cohort, <i>n</i> (%)
Bullied by other children	51 (10.1)	12 (2.77)	32 (6.19)	33 (5.31)	70 (14.26)
Treated unfairly by adults	0 (0)	1 (0.23)	6 (1.16)	1 (0.16)	1 (0.2)
Both	2 (0.4)	4 (0.92)	8 (1.55)	3 (0.48)	8 (1.63)
Neither	452 (89.5)	416 (96.07)	471 (91.1)	585 (94.05)	412 (83.91)
Total	505 (100)	433 (100)	517 (100)	622 (100)	491 (100)

The prevalence does tend to increase with the wave in which the question is asked, although that may be driven by the fact that the question does not specify a time period, and many carers would therefore interpret the question as being cumulative across the child's lifecourse.

4 Factors associated with experience of discrimination

Table 2 summarises an analysis of the factors associated with carer-reported bullying or unfair treatment of the child. The data come from wave 6 of the LSIC, using the child cohort. Respondents are aged around 8–10 years for this wave and cohort. To analyse the factors associated with the experience of discrimination, we construct a binary variable with a value of zero for those whose carer thought the child was neither bullied nor treated unfairly because of their Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander status. A value of 1 is for children who experienced either bullying or unfair treatment.

Analysis is undertaken using maximum likelihood estimation of the probit model. Results are presented as marginal effects, or the difference in probability of carer-reported discrimination while holding other characteristics constant. The base case child is male, is aged 9, lives in low/zero isolation, attends a public school, lives with a primary carer who has not completed year 12

but is employed, and lives in a house without a non-Indigenous adult. Marginal effects are calculated relative to this base case (selected to be representative of the sample), although conclusions do not change if an alternative base case is chosen.

Three variables were found to be statistically significant as factors predicting carer-reported experience of discrimination against children (at the 10% level of significance). Age is important, with a 1-year increase in age associated with an increase in the probability of discrimination being reported from 0.078 to 0.133 (a marginal effect of 0.055), while holding all else constant. That is, as Indigenous children get older, their chances of experiencing bullying or unfair treatment appear to increase.

The marginal effect for location is even larger, with a near trebling of the predicted probability to 0.191 for those who live in extreme isolation

Table 2 Factors associated with carer-reported experience of bullying by other children or unfair treatment by adults because the child is Indigenous, for child cohort of LSIC at wave 6 (ages 8–10)

Variable	Marginal effect	P value
Child is female	0.017	0.483
1-year increase in age	0.055	0.052
Lori index of isolation = high	0.048	0.241
Lori index of isolation = extreme	0.121	0.014
Child attends a private school	-0.023	0.530
Primary parent/carers completed year 12	0.045	0.098
Primary parent/carers is not employed	0.040	0.143
Non-Indigenous adults are present in primary household	-0.021	0.354
Predicted probability of base case	0.078	
Pseudo R-squared	0.0543	
Sample size	445	

compared with the base case (low/zero isolation). This geographic distribution is different from the association that has been found for adults, where discrimination appears to be higher in nonremote areas (Biddle et al. 2013). Experiences of racism within schools do not always occur in the same areas as experiences in the workplace, criminal justice system, and so on. This may be because most teachers in remote areas are still non-Indigenous, whereas adults in remote areas are more likely to be exposed to other Indigenous Australians. However, this would need to be tested empirically.

Finally, although it is only just significant at the 10% level, carers who have completed year 12 are significantly more likely to report that the child had experienced discrimination. This finding was more consistent with research on adults (with regard to their own education) and may be due to either higher reporting of discrimination or greater exposure to discrimination.



5 Relationship between experience of discrimination and education outcomes

The factors associated with experiencing discrimination are important, as they help target subpopulation groups who may need additional support. However, the justification for that support is only likely to come from a careful analysis of whether the experience of discrimination predicts other policy-relevant outcomes. This is not to say that a child living a life that is free from discrimination is not a basic right in and of itself. Rather, with scarce resources available to government, demonstrating that discrimination has further negative outcomes provides a stronger case for intervention.

There are currently no studies (as far as the authors are aware) that use longitudinal data to test whether experiences of racism and discrimination predict other outcomes. Although some cross-sectional data (discussed in earlier sections of this paper) are available, it is difficult to tell from these data whether the experience of racism/discrimination predicts outcomes or whether the outcomes themselves predict racism/discrimination. Alternatively, there may be a third variable or set of variables that predict both.

Longitudinal data allow us to get a little closer to causal inference. Specifically, we are able to look at whether experiences at time t predict outcomes at time $t + \Delta$. This allows us to be reasonably confident that the outcomes are not influencing the experiences back in time (i.e. reverse causality). However, we cannot rule out the possibility that a third set of variables influences both, including lagged values of the outcome variable.

To completely eliminate the potential for such unobserved heterogeneity, researchers would need to either randomly assign experiences of racism/discrimination or identify other exogenous sources of racism/discrimination that are not driven by the choices made by the child themselves or their families and do not directly

effect the outcomes. Experiments of this type are clearly very ethically problematic, and no such quasi- or natural experiments exist in Australia, as far as the authors are aware. The longitudinal data described above are therefore the most robust set of data that we have for identifying the effect of discrimination on Indigenous education outcomes. We mitigate the effect of omitted variable biases by controlling for the factors associated with experience of discrimination (summarised in Table 2).

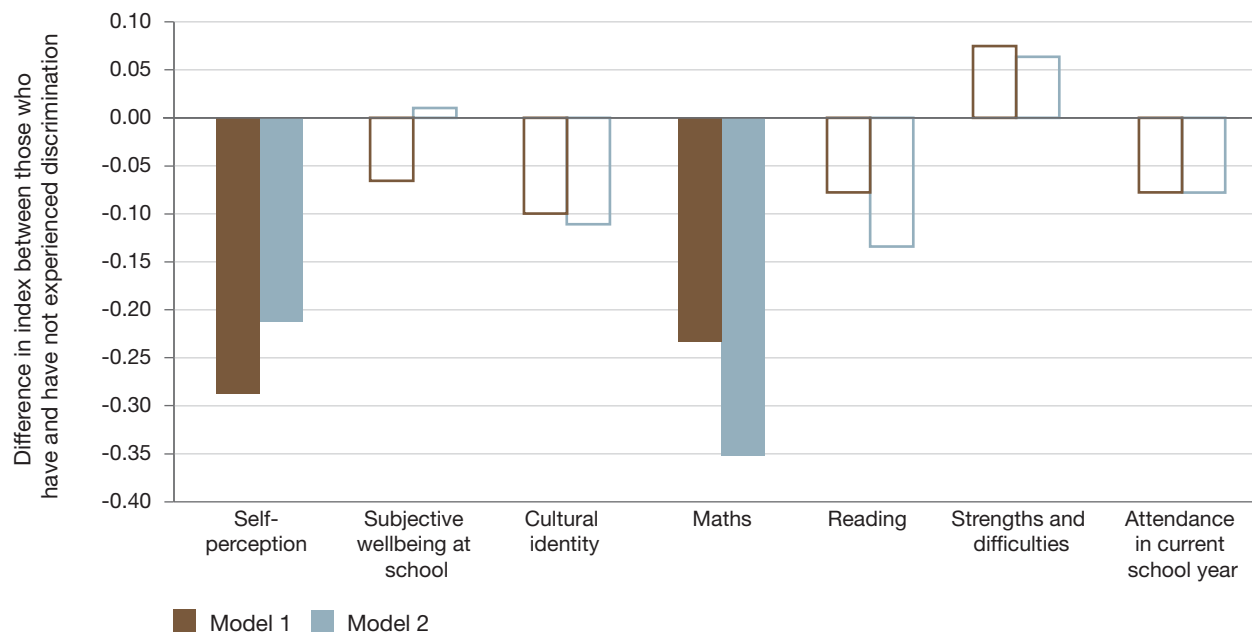
To capture all aspects of discrimination, we pool data across waves 3, 4 and 5 of the LSIC, and include in our measure whether the parent responds in the affirmative to either of the following two questions: 'As far as you know, has (STUDY CHILD) been bullied or treated unfairly at preschool/school because (he/she) is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?' (asked in wave 4) and 'How often does your family experience racism, discrimination or prejudice?' (asked in waves 3 and 5). We label this 'ever experienced discrimination'. Of the child cohort (used in the analysis), 49% reported having experienced some form of discrimination because of their Indigenous status (out of a sample of 347 respondents).

The outcomes used in the analysis were measured in wave 6 when most children were aged 9 years (1% of the sample were aged 7, 7% were aged 8, and 14% were aged 10). We use seven outcome measures, all of which were scaled to have a mean of zero and a standard deviation of 1. They are measured across four domains:

- Child reports
 - self perception – a principal component analysis of a 12-item scale based on the child's agreement to the following statements: 'I like all school lessons', 'I learn things fast in all school lessons', 'I am good at all school lessons', 'All my

- school lessons are hard', 'I like reading', 'I learn things fast in reading', 'I am good at reading', 'Reading is hard', 'I like maths', 'I learn things fast in maths', 'I am good at maths', 'Maths is hard'
- wellbeing at school – a principal component analysis of a 7-item scale based on the child’s answer to the following questions: ‘Is school fun?’, ‘When you get up in the morning, do you feel happy about going to (preschool/school)?’, ‘Do you wish you didn’t have to go to school?’, ‘Do you ask your Mum or your Dad to let you stay home from school?’, ‘Is your teacher nice to you?’, ‘Are the children at school nice to you?’, ‘Do the children at school pick on (or tease) you?’
 - cultural identity – a principal component analysis of a 2-item scale based on the child’s answer to the following questions: ‘I feel good about being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander when I am in class’, ‘I enjoy sharing things about being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander when I am in class’.
- Teacher reports
 - attendance rate – a standardised count of the number of explained and unexplained absences since the start of the school year.
 - Assessment scales
 - maths – a standardised PAT Maths Plus Comprehension Scale Score
 - reading – a standardised PAT Reading Comprehension Scale Score.
 - Parent reports
 - strengths and difficulties questionnaire – a standardised score from the difficulties component of the strengths and difficulties questionnaire.
- As all variables are linear and continuous, the data are analysed through ordinary least squares regression. The results are interpreted as the predicted difference in outcomes (as a proportion of 1 standard deviation of the sample) between those who did and did not experience discrimination. Two models are used for each dependent variable:
- model 1 – discrimination only
 - model 2 – discrimination and gender, age, remoteness, carer education, household finances and mobility.
- Results are summarised in Figure 1 as the difference between those who did and did not experience discrimination. In the figure, outcomes for which there is a statistically significant

Figure 1 Relationship between experiences of discrimination and child outcomes



Source: Customised calculations based on waves 3–6 of the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children

difference between those who did and did not experience discrimination are shaded, whereas those for which there is no significant difference even at the 10% level of significance are hollow.

Results presented in Figure 1 give very strong evidence that experiences of discrimination are negatively associated with child outcomes. Keeping in mind that lower values are preferred for the difficulties questionnaire, all but one of the seven outcome variables in wave 6 were predicted to be worse if the child or their family experienced discrimination in waves 3, 4 or 5. Although not all the differences were statistically significant (not surprising, given the sample size), the magnitude of the association relative to the standard deviation of the outcomes was quite large. Importantly, background characteristics do not explain much, if any, of these differences.

The two variables for which the difference was statistically significant were the child's self-perception and their maths scores. Although it will be important to confirm these results, the first finding is perhaps not very surprising. A child whose family is treated differently or who themselves are treated differently because of their Indigenous status is much less likely to feel that their actions lead to improved outcomes (the essence of self-perception).

The finding that there was a very strong association with maths test scores is somewhat more surprising, and highly problematic for policy. Numeracy levels are one of the key targets of Indigenous policy in Australia. It is important to remember that this is one of the targets that the Prime Minister's Closing the Gap report has shown not to be on track. The large difference between Indigenous children who did and did not experience discrimination suggests that the targets are unlikely to be met unless significant improvements are made in attitudes and behaviour towards Indigenous Australians.



6 How can a reconciliation program be delivered in the education context?

The previous sections presented new empirical findings and summarised the findings from an extensive literature review that showed that improvements in the five interrelated dimensions of reconciliation identified by Reconciliation Australia (race relations, equality and equity, institutional integrity, historical acceptance, and unity) are likely to have positive impacts for Australians as a whole, as well as specific benefits for Indigenous Australians. In this section, we build on that literature, and present additional information that points to how a program for reconciliation in education can be designed and delivered.

6.1 Targeting peers

One of the main ways in which negative attitudes between groups has been hypothesised to be reduced, and trust between groups increased, is through increased contact between those in the dominant population (the likely perpetrators of racism and discrimination) and those in a minority group (in this case, Indigenous Australians). Specifically, a large body of literature, according to Durrheim and Dixon (2018), shows that ‘intergroup contact is one of the principal instruments for social change ... [and] under optimal contact conditions has the power to reduce prejudice, promote collaboration and produce a less conflicted and more just society’. Any program related to reconciliation, including in a school and early learning setting, should include, if feasible and appropriate, an increased rate of contact between non-Indigenous students and Indigenous people – both students and community members.

Qualitative findings from an evaluation project of Reconciliation Australia’s Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education initiative⁶ have shown that schools and early learning services are likely to need additional support in this area. A number

of aspects of the Narragunnawali Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) framework for schools and early learning services build on this need for community contact. Specific RAP actions that fall into this category (to a greater or lesser degree) include:

- Build relationships with community
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the classroom
- Elders and Traditional Owners share histories and cultures
- Family and community room
- Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned businesses
- Welcome to Country
- Local sites, events and excursions
- Create stakeholder list.

Although reductions in negative attitudes held by current non-Indigenous students are likely to benefit current Indigenous students, the finding (mentioned above) that much of the discrimination experienced by Indigenous adults comes from the general public highlights the need to target young non-Indigenous Australians to benefit future adult Indigenous Australians. Given the small relative size of the Indigenous population, the future employer, work colleague, customer, shop assistant and so on that an Indigenous Australian will encounter in their adult life is likely to be in school now and likely to benefit from the interventions summarised in this section.

Unfortunately, however, the current Australian school system, and the different geographic distributions of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations make regular or incidental contact between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students difficult. Furthermore, a very low proportion (1.3%) of ‘school teachers’ in the Australian Bureau of Statistics occupation classification (which includes early childhood teachers but not tertiary education teachers)

identified as being Indigenous in the most recent census; this also makes contact between non-Indigenous students and Indigenous teachers less likely.

In analysis that one of us (Biddle) undertook with Ben Edwards (Biddle & Edwards 2018), we showed 'quite high rates of school-level segregation [between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students], which are comparable to those for other ethnic groups in other countries. Depending on the year level, between 54% and 60% of Indigenous (or non-Indigenous) Australians would need to change schools to have a completely even distribution between the two populations'. These figures are based on a Dissimilarity Index (DI); according to Rickles and Ong (2001), 'DI scores above 60 are considered to represent high segregation, while scores between 40 and 60 indicate moderate segregation and scores below 40 indicate low segregation'.

Part of the segregation is due to the geographic distribution of the two populations: Indigenous students are more likely to live in rural or remote parts of the country (despite having, in absolute terms, an urban population distribution) and relatively disadvantaged suburbs in our major cities. However, a large driver of the geographic sorting is the very different rates of participation in nongovernment and/or selective schools. The vast majority of Indigenous students attend comprehensive government schools, whereas a large and increasing proportion of the non-Indigenous population attend fee-paying private schools or academically selective government schools.

Given the demonstrated benefits of intergroup contact for increasing intercultural understanding and reducing prejudice, one aspect of an evidence-based reconciliation policy in Australia would be to decrease the level of school segregation. This could be three-pronged, involving:

- increasing the cost of private schooling for those who have a greater ability to afford it (the non-Indigenous population) to reflect the social costs of school segregation
- increasing the level of resources available to comprehensive public schools
- providing equitable resources to the families of Indigenous students so that they are afforded

stronger opportunities to make the same types of choices as the families of non-Indigenous students.

Ideally, such considerations should be a part of the ongoing schools funding reviews (Sonnemann & Goss 2018).

Of course, the above policy changes are beyond the scope of Reconciliation Australia or other nongovernment organisations. An evidence-based policy on reconciliation in education would therefore look for other ways to increase intergroup contact. This could be through contact across schools and early learning services through exchanges, or other formal or informal avenues. It should also involve contact between non-Indigenous students and the broader Indigenous community in the area in which they live.

An additional avenue by which intergroup understanding can be increased that is being increasingly researched is 'imagined contact' – that is, 'encouraging people to mentally simulate a positive intergroup encounter [imagining] leads to improved outgroup attitudes and reduced stereotyping' (Crisp & Turner 2009). According to a recent review by Crisp and Turner (2012), research 'has shown that mentally simulating a positive interaction with an outgroup member [those who belong to a different racial/ethnic group] can elicit more favorable explicit and implicit outgroup attitudes, less stereotyping, and enhance intentions to engage in future contact'. A more quantitative meta-analysis (Miles & Crisp 2014) showed that 'imagined contact resulted in significantly reduced intergroup bias across all four dependent variables [attitudes, emotions, intentions and behaviour]'.

One aspect, therefore, of an evidence-based program for reconciliation in education would be to trial imagined contact (either through time or across space), to complement the more traditional intergroup contact mentioned above. An important point is that the research focuses on imagined positive social interaction that is supported by well-trained professionals. If not done carefully, imagined (or real) negative interaction has the potential to entrench, rather than reduce, intergroup biases and misunderstanding.

6.2 Targeting teachers

In addition to peers, teacher attitudes and experiences are an important lever for an evidence-based reconciliation policy. Importantly, implicit prejudice has been shown to be at least as predictive of negative outcomes for children from minority groups as explicit or self-reported attitudes (Hardin & Banaji 2013). Although there is no comparable research in Australia (to our knowledge), research in the United States (Van den Bergh et al. 2010) has shown that an ‘implicit measure of teacher prejudiced attitudes ... was found to explain differing ethnic achievement gap sizes across classrooms via teacher expectations’.

Critical self-reflection and continued learning/un-learning/re-learning practices for teachers are therefore important. Although not yet evaluated using causal methods, models developed by the Stronger Smarter Institute⁷ for building relationships based on high expectations between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their teachers also show strong promise as part of evidence-based reconciliation initiatives.

6.3 Increasing knowledge of Indigenous cultures, languages and histories

Although important (as demonstrated by the findings on the effect of discrimination in this paper), reducing experiences of racism and discrimination is not the only focus of a program for reconciliation in education. Increasing knowledge and understanding of Indigenous cultures, languages and histories has intrinsic benefits. Work by one of us has shown a generally positive (albeit complicated) relationship between Indigenous wellbeing and land, language and culture, noting that there is ‘strong evidence that those who participate in arts and cultural activities are more likely to have higher levels of subjective wellbeing’ (Biddle & Crawford 2018). Benefits for the non-Indigenous population are also likely, as demonstrated by the large proportion of adults who reported, in the 2018 Australian Reconciliation Barometer report, that they would like to learn more about these and related topics. Although a growing body of research suggests that new skills and knowledge

can be learned into adulthood, the evidence also clearly suggests that brain plasticity is greatest in youth and adolescence, and students in schools and early learning services have a greater capacity to obtain knowledge than at any other point across the lifespan. (Laura Berk’s [2017] introductory text *Development through the lifespan* is still one of the most cited and influential books on this topic.)

In her foreword to the recent edited volume *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education*, Kaye Price (2015) argues that ‘non-Indigenous Australians ignore or dismiss Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, histories and world views ... [and] far too many Australians have no concept of the unique place Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have in the world’.

Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to cover in depth the science of teacher education, in Kaye Price’s book, Jeannie Herbert’s (2015) chapter on ‘empowering teachers to empower students’ notes a number of features that are relevant to a school-based or early learning service-based reconciliation program:

- ensuring that teaching maintains, or ideally increases, its status within the community (economically and socially) to ensure that those who join the profession are able to learn with, teach and inspire their students
- focusing on pre-service training to ensure that universities produce high-quality graduates
- increasing the amount of engagement pre-service teachers have with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and people
- making sure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth and adults are encouraged and supported to pursue a career in the teaching profession
- being aware of, and responding in an evidence-based way to, the challenges that many students (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) face outside the classroom (at home, in the community, around the school)
- being cognisant of the administrative burden that many teachers face, and not increasing that burden unduly
- making sure that teachers (and classrooms) are not time poor, and are therefore able to

cover content related to Indigenous culture, language and history

- ensuring that teachers (pre-service and in-service) have the materials and resources they need to be effective teachers, perhaps through a whole-of-school delivery of a program or intervention.

6.4 What are some of the risks?

Economics is the scientific study of the effective allocation of scarce resources. Economists argue that we need to take into account not only the costs of a particular intervention relative to the benefits but also the opportunity costs. That is, we need to care about what else we could be spending scarce public or private funds on, as well as what we are actually spending the funds on. One of the biggest risks to a school-based or early learning service-based intervention is that it will divert scarce resources away from other, more worthwhile interventions. That is why cost-effectiveness or cost-benefit analyses are so important (Levin & McEwan 2001). Furthermore, any intervention, no matter how well intentioned, has the potential to create negative unintended consequences. In this section, we discuss three of these: backlash, stereotype threat and moral licensing.

Although reconciliation is important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as well as having wider benefits for Australian society, many non-Indigenous Australians are likely to benefit economically from a system that privileges dominant racial or ethnic groups. This may explain some resistance to initiatives related to reconciliation. In his recent book, Jan-Werner Müller (2017) has summarised the recent growth and reconfiguration of populism. Others have discussed the role of white ethno-nationalism in recent elections and referendums. One of the risks to be managed in actively pursuing a reconciliation process is a potential backlash from those who perceive that their position in society is at risk from improvements in outcomes for the Indigenous population.

An evidence-based policy related to reconciliation needs to engage with the not insubstantial minority of the Australian population who

disagree that past racial policies are the cause of Indigenous disadvantage today, do not agree that the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is important, or believe that non-Indigenous Australians are superior (according to the Australian Reconciliation Barometer). Of course, this does not mean that views that are not supported by evidence need to be accepted uncritically. Rather, these views need to be engaged with in a way that increases understanding and reduces conflict.

Despite the undoubted uniqueness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and languages outlined by Price (2015) and many others, it has been argued that Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians have more in common than they have differences. This is increasingly likely to be the case as more and more students who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander have at least one (and often two or three) grandparents who do not identify as Indigenous (Markham & Biddle 2017). These two points about uniqueness and shared characteristics are not contradictory, nor is it advocating assimilation to point out this tension. Rather, it highlights that a policy related to reconciliation needs to be careful to not artificially inflate differences between groups (including difference within the Indigenous population).

This is important when interventions in schools focus on Indigenous students or Indigenous topics. The research and evidence highlight the care needed to avoid making a student's Indigenous status salient when discussing the need for interventions related to low attendance, achievement or attainment. Fear, anxiety or concern in a situation that has the potential to confirm a negative stereotype about a student's social group (stereotype threat) has the potential to worsen the student's performance (Steele & Aronson 1995). This is particularly likely when the negative stereotype is made salient – for example, in a classroom setting or an intervention that reinforces that the person's population subgroup performs worse, on average. It is important to recognise the diversity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, but also avoid interventions that unintentionally induce shame or negative stereotypes towards this population.

An alternative intervention that has some evidentiary support is described by Garcia and Cohen (2012). Under this approach, 'students are taught to attribute adversity and hardship to factors not directly relevant to race ... Instead they are encouraged to attribute adversity and hardship to challenges inherent in school'. Stereotype threat, deficit discourse and alternatives such as the story-editing approach need to be kept in mind when designing an evidence-based reconciliation policy in schools and early learning services.

A final risk from the literature that needs to be kept in mind relates to moral licensing. According to a review by Blanken et al. (2015), this 'refers to the effect that when people initially behave in a moral way, they are later more likely to display behaviors that are immoral, unethical, or otherwise problematic'. There is also some evidence that anticipating engaging in a moral behaviour in the future can allow people to feel able to engaging immorally in the present; Cascio and Plant (2015) showed that 'people who anticipate performing a future moral action display more racial bias'.

In the context of a reconciliation program, there is therefore a risk that making a small contribution to reconciliation within a school or early learning service may make teachers, school leadership or other students in the school less likely to undertake the type of difficult actions that will truly improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. One way supported by the evidence to mitigate the potential for such moral licensing is to remind people of their moral intentions or commitments, rather than their actions (Efron & Conway 2015).



7 Limitations, conclusions and implications for reconciliation

Racism and discrimination are faced by too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Racism and discrimination can take many forms, including structural. There is no stronger indication of this experience than the consistent finding that Indigenous children have lower engagement with early childhood education; start school with higher rates of developmental vulnerability; experience disability at drastically higher rates; attend school less frequently; have lower rates of literacy and numeracy; complete school at lower rates; and are more likely to transition to being not in employment, education or training. There is no credible evidence to suggest that Indigenous children in any way have lower rates of natural ability (however defined). The cause must be found elsewhere.

This paper has shown (we think for the first time) that there is a clear empirical link between experiences of racism and discrimination and many of these poor education outcomes. A particularly clear finding was the apparent effect on numeracy and self-perception.

7.1 Limitations

Much in the existing literature can support an evidence-based intervention related to reconciliation in schools and early learning services. There is, however, a lot we do not know. It is incumbent on those who are engaged in this area – researchers, practitioners and policy makers – to design programs in such a way that our gaps in knowledge can be filled. Below is a list of important studies in areas that we do not know enough about, and that close collaboration between researchers, practitioners and policy makers could provide insights into:

- Studies of the causal impacts of interventions related to reconciliation in education (or distinct but related interventions in

Indigenous education specifically), using a carefully designed intervention, a treatment group that receives the program, and an otherwise identical comparison group that does not. Some people believe that we know what works in education broadly or Indigenous education specifically (and we just need more resources), but this is frankly untrue. A number of seemingly well-supported interventions summarised by Fryer Jr (2017) in a recent chapter in *Handbook of economic field experiments* have been shown by more careful evaluations to be either ineffectual or to have negative effects.

- Longitudinal analysis at the individual level that carefully measures change through time in attitudes and behaviours, rather than the things that correlate cross-sectionally with such attitudes and behaviours.
- Detailed studies of the implicit and explicit prejudices held by Australian in-service and pre-service teachers, particularly (but not exclusively) with regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- Careful, causal evaluation of whether specific key resources used by teachers change their attitudes and behaviours in a positive way.
- Monitoring of the community's response to, and acceptance of, reconciliation programs (including, and arguably particularly, the Indigenous community).
- Analysis of the cost-effectiveness of interventions, rather than just whether an intervention had a positive effect (or, even worse, whether those who were involved in the program perceived it to have a positive effect).

To answer these questions, it is important to incorporate evaluation into the design of a program (or a new component of a program or change to a program) before it is implemented, as well as to incorporate continued, longitudinal

analyses of the impacts of the program's implementation. Ideally, those who wish to find out whether the intervention they are implementing has had a positive effect need to consider constructing a control group that is otherwise identical to the treatment group – if possible, through random assignment. Not doing so makes it much more difficult to claim definitively (and accurately) that an intervention has had an effect, that the effect is positive in net terms and that the intervention is cost-effective.

7.2 Implications

There are many important policy responses to the structural racism experienced by Indigenous children and the associated poor education outcomes. Some of the gaps (or 'inequalities and inequities' described by Reconciliation Australia's measures of reconciliation) mentioned in this paper are decreasing, and this is an indication that the situation is amenable to policy change. One particularly important finding is that Indigenous children are now more likely to be attending preschool than non-Indigenous children with the same demographic, geographic and socioeconomic circumstances. However, it is still clearly the case (Biddle 2018) that Indigenous children attend schools that are more poorly resourced and have more complex needs than non-Indigenous children.

The direct racism and discrimination documented in this paper (and shown to have an effect) are not abstract. They can be perpetrated by a teacher, a fellow student or the broader school community. Most (although not all) perpetrators will not identify as being Indigenous themselves. The policy response therefore cannot just focus on Indigenous children or their families.

A number of programs attempt to reduce attitudes and behaviours that expose Indigenous children to racism and discrimination. One – Speak Out Against Racism (SOAR)⁸ – is being designed and evaluated by a co-author on this paper. Another program – Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education⁹ – is being evaluated by both of us. These programs are schools based; focus on the total school/early learning community (rather than just minority children);

and attempt to improve opportunities and outcomes for Indigenous (and other) educators, students and children, families and community members by taking into account the institutional environment in which they are placed or with which they are connected. However, just because a program is well targeted does not mean that it is effective. Continuing to evaluate these (and similar) programs for their efficacy and cost-effectiveness is therefore imperative.

Although the effect of such programs on the victims of racism should be front and centre, wider benefits are likely for people in the programs. Racist attitudes – especially those that arise from a lack of knowledge or understanding about Indigenous histories, languages and cultures – are detrimental for those who hold them, as well as those who are exposed to them. The broader benefits of exposing non-Indigenous teachers, students and school/early learning service communities to the intervention should also be factored into any evaluation.

Ultimately, the results presented in this paper, alongside the literature reviewed, have shown that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are exposed to very high levels of racism and discrimination, and that this exposure appears to have detrimental effects on their outcomes. Programs that seek to reduce such exposure and minimise the effects are vitally important for school and early learning systems and environments that value equity and education for all.

Notes

1. In this paper, we use the terms Indigenous Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians interchangeably. Both terms refer to those who are descendants of the original inhabitants of the Australian continent and adjacent islands. When quoting other work, we use the terminology in the existing literature.
2. [https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=\(id:media/pressrel/23e06\);rec=0](https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=(id:media/pressrel/23e06);rec=0)
3. www.pmc.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/indigenous-advancement-strategy
4. It is beyond the scope of this paper to evaluate the Indigenous Advancement Strategy. Rather, it is raised to demonstrate the stated commitment of the Australian Government to improving education outcomes for Indigenous Australians. Suffice it to say, many organisations have been critical of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, including the Australian National Audit Office (www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/indigenous-advancement-strategy) and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Conference (<https://natsiec.edu.au/2018/11/action-statement>).
5. It does not appear that these questions have been repeated in later versions of the Australian Reconciliation Barometer.
6. <http://caepr.cass.anu.edu.au/evaluation-narragunnawali-reconciliation-schools-and-early-learning>
7. https://strongersmarter.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/20180612-SSI_position-Paper_High-Expectations-Relationships-2018.pdf
8. <http://csrcm.cass.anu.edu.au/research/projects/soar-speak-out-against-racism>
9. www.narragunnawali.org.au

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