

A Controversial Reform in Indigenous Education: The Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy

John McCollow

Queensland Teachers' Union, Brisbane, Australia

This article examines a controversial initiative in Indigenous education: the establishment of the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy (CYAAA). The article provides a brief description of the Academy's three campuses and their communities and considers: the circumstances of its creation, including the role of Noel Pearson and Cape York Partnerships; the rationale and philosophy underpinning the case for establishing the Academy; implementation; and some key issues relevant to assessing this reform. These include its impact on a range of performance measures, the veracity and power of the social and educational rationales on which the reform is based, the use of 'Direct Instruction' (DI), and the practicability of extending and broadening the reform. The time period considered is from late 2009 through 2011. The article draws on publications, and on visits to campuses of the school and meetings/communications/discussions with personnel from the Queensland Department of Education and Training (DET, now Department of Education, Training and Employment), Cape York Partnerships, the CYAAA and others undertaken in the author's role as a teacher union officer.

■ **Keywords:** Indigenous education, literacy, Indigenous social policy, direct instruction, schooling reform

Introducing the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy Campuses

The Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy (CYAAA) campuses currently operate at three sites: Coen, Aurukun and Hopevale. These are remote communities located on the Cape York Peninsula in the state of Queensland, an area also termed the Cape York Welfare Reform communities (Family Responsibilities Commission, 2011). Coen is a small town, which in 2006 was home to approximately 253 people. The school has an enrolment of 45 primary students, all of whom identify as Indigenous, and has five teaching staff. Until 2010 it operated as a stand-alone state school. In 2010, as part of the implementation of the Cape York Aboriginal Academy described below, it became a campus of Western Cape College (which had campuses at Aurukun, Weipa, and Mapoon as well). According to the MySchool website (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2012), in 2009 Coen's Year 3 and 5 NAPLAN results were 'substantially below' the average of all Australian schools across all areas tested. However, Coen's results were 'substantially above' the average for 'similar schools' in Year 3 writing, and

grammar and punctuation, and in Year 5 reading, writing, spelling, and grammar and punctuation. Coen's Year 7 student population was below the My School reporting threshold.

Aurukun had a population of 1,043 in 2006. The community was originally a mission station, being reconstituted in the late 1970s as a local government (shire) council. The area was the subject of the successful Wik Native Title case in the High Court in 1996. The main language spoken in the community is Wik-Mungkan. The school, which has operated in recent years as a campus of Western Cape College, has an enrolment of 174 primary students and 45 secondary students, and has a teaching staff of 20. The My School website does not report disaggregated 2009 NAPLAN results for Aurukun, combining the results with those of the Weipa and Mapoon campuses. However, the Business Case for the CYAAA provides a chart showing that the percentage of Aurukun students performing at

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: John McCollow, Queensland Teachers Union PO Box 1750, Milton QLD 4064, Australia.
Email: jem@qtu.asn.au

or above the NAPLAN national benchmarks in all areas tested was substantially below not only the national percentage but also the percentage for 'Indigenous Queensland students from remote and very remote areas' (Cape York Partnerships, 2009).

Hopevale, the home community of Noel Pearson, is a community of 765 people according to the 2006 census, and is located about 45 kilometres north-west of Cooktown in eastern Cape York. It is home to several clan groups of the Warra peoples. It was a Lutheran mission until 1986 when it received a 'deed of grant in trust'. Native title was recognised in 1997. Hopevale School has a student population of 123, all of whom are Indigenous. It became a campus of the CYAAA in 2011, the second year of Academy's operation. According to the My School website, its NAPLAN results for 2009 were 'substantially below' those for all Australian schools, but at or above (in some cases 'substantially above') those for similar schools.

Noel Pearson

The Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy is the brainchild of Noel Pearson, an Aboriginal Australian lawyer, academic, land rights activist and founder of the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership, an organisation promoting the economic and social development of Cape York. He is a prolific essayist and has written a regular column for *The Australian* newspaper. Pearson is a polarising figure in Indigenous social policy debates, in which he is a high profile and formidable participant. The *Koori Mail* noted that 'there are few more contentious figures in contemporary Aboriginal . . . affairs than Noel Pearson' ('Cape Crusader', 2010). Of particular note has been Pearson's support for the 'Intervention' in the Northern Territory (*Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act* of 2007) and his involvement in and promotion of the Queensland Family Responsibilities Commission legislation as part of the Cape York Welfare Reform. This support has seen him publically criticised by other Indigenous commentators such as Chris Sarra (2012) and Gracelyn Smallwood (Michael, 2012), but also vigorously defended by other Indigenous commentators, notably Marcia Langton (Langton, 2012).

Pearson is Executive Chair of Cape York Partnerships, which may be said to be an auspicing organisation for the CYAAA. It is:

A development organisation aimed at ensuring the people of Cape York Peninsula have the capabilities to choose lives they have reason to value. The organisation enables reform by building innovative partnerships between Indigenous individuals, families and communities, government and the philanthropic and corporate sectors. (Cape York Partnerships, 2012)

The Business Case for the CYAAA was published in 2009 and explicitly linked this proposed school reform to the previous community work undertaken by Cape York Part-

nerships, including its involvement in the Cape York Welfare Reform trial. This trial 'mandates and supports key parental responsibilities' (Cape York Partnerships, 2009, p. 9) by, for example, linking school attendance to 'income management' of welfare payments.

Pearson on Indigenous Social and Education Policy

In this section of this article, some of the assumptions underpinning Noel Pearson's approach to Indigenous social policy and education are identified. The observations are based primarily on his essays 'White guilt, victimhood and the quest for a radical centre' (Pearson, 2007) and 'Radical hope: Education and equality in Australia' (Pearson, 2009). The key strands of Pearson's approach to Indigenous education reform can be said to be:

- an approach to the current situation of Indigenous Australians based on the notion of a 'radical centre' and of 'radical hope'
- a critique of left/liberal social theory and of the social policies that derive from it — particularly as these relate to Indigenous social policy
- a critique of 'progressive' approaches to schooling — in particular, in terms of their implications for remote Indigenous students.

Radical Centre/Radical Hope

In his 2007 essay, Pearson explores the possibility of constructing a radical centre that transcends what he called the 'Washington-Dubois dialectic'. The dialectic revolves around the legacies of two great Black American leaders, Booker T. Washington — who argued that the key to securing Black American emancipation was through moral self-improvement and acceptance of responsibility — and W.E.B. Dubois, who argued that emancipation must be built around the assertion of Black American rights and the elimination of discrimination. While Pearson argues that both the rights and responsibilities agendas are valid and necessary and that the radical centre must be based on their 'dialectical synthesis', he identifies himself with a Washingtonian responsibilities agenda:

When I decided that we could no longer go on without saying that our people held responsibilities as well as rights, it was not a repudiation of rights . . . [but] it is simply not possible to see how any social or economic problem can be solved, or opportunity seized, if we don't first accept responsibility. (Pearson, 2007, pp. 54–55)

And further:

It is not possible for the same actor to play several roles in the dialectical process . . . I and my associates in Cape York Peninsula decided to champion the Indigenous responsibility agenda, because this was the most under-developed area in the

then Australian discourse. The side-effect of our decision is that we are perceived to represent only the principle of responsibility; in a political and societal sense, we are largely limited to this role, despite our continued work and ongoing practical achievements in securing rights for our people. (Pearson, 2007, pp. 56–57)

In ‘Radical Hope’, Pearson (2009) again juxtaposes the approaches of two notable American leaders of oppressed minorities: Chief Sitting Bull of the Sioux Nation and Chief Plenty Coups of the Crow Nation. Sitting Bull is most famous as the leader of the American Indian forces that defeated Custer’s 7th Cavalry at the Battle of Little Big Horn. In Pearson’s description (based on the work of Lear, 2006), Sitting Bull’s response to White American conquest, which was to defend the traditional Sioux way of life to the death, compares unfavourably with the response of Plenty Coups, who — though no less aggrieved by the devastation of traditional culture — accepted the inevitability of White American dominance and pursued a strategy of cooperation, adaptation and negotiation.

Pearson argues that once it became apparent that the Sioux would not prevail against the White American conquest of their land, Sitting Bull’s strategy provided no basis for constructing a viable future. The Sioux were reduced to dysfunctionality, nostalgically hankering for the return of an idealised past. In contrast, under Plenty Coups’s program of hard work, education and adaptation, the Crow were able to secure relative autonomy in their native lands and preserve key elements of their culture and language. Pearson argues that not only was the approach of Plenty Coups more successful in objective terms, it was *braver* — Plenty Coups had the courage to face the inevitable loss of the traditional Crow way of life and yet to develop a positive approach to securing his people’s future.

For Pearson, the lesson of Sitting Bull/Plenty Coups is that you can’t sustain an Indigenous culture if you don’t engage pragmatically with the realities of the material circumstances faced by Indigenous peoples — that is, with the loss of the conditions that sustained traditional culture — and adapt the culture accordingly. This is the basis for constructing ‘radical hope’. He critiques what he describes as an ‘unholy alliance between black conservatives and white libertarians’ to support ‘ancient rites which offer no prescriptions in respect of things that are fundamentally destructive of the very things that are supposed to be the purpose of the rites: the continuity of the culture and the people’ (Pearson, 2009, p. 11).

Critique of Left/Liberal Social Theory

Pearson’s critiques of left/liberal social theory (what Sutton (2009) describes as ‘the liberal consensus’) and of policy that derives from it is based on the ‘malignant’ (though unintended) effects of its focus on the structural causes of social problems such as racism, poverty and inequality. He notes that the ‘moderate left’:

[w]ould probably argue that neo-liberal dominance increases the number of disengaged people and the difficulties of returning them to the working mainstream. This may well be true. However, disadvantage can develop and become self-perpetuating, even without neo-liberal government policy. In Australia, Aboriginal disadvantage has become entrenched during decades when social democrats, small-l liberals and conservatives influenced policy; many policies for Indigenous Australians have been liberal and progressive. (Pearson, 2007, p. 16)

The problem, according to Pearson, is that the focus on the structural causes of racism and inequality have acted to absolve Indigenous people from accepting any responsibility for improving their own situation and cultivated a culture of victimhood and dependency: ‘structural explanations . . . absolve individuals from personal responsibility and agency’ (Pearson, 2007, pp. 52–53). Indigenous Australians are projected as weak and incapable of achieving advancement on their own, and the solution is for them to be rescued through the coordination of services. Furthermore, structurally based social policies reflect a form of ‘moral vanity’ in that they embody a ‘state-imposed vision of the social good’ (Pearson, 2007, p. 21). This creates a dynamic in which, despite the ongoing failure of successive interventions — which not only do not work but create a whole new set of secondary problems — the ‘progressive’ premises on which policy is based are immune to challenge.

Pearson links his analysis to neo-liberalism when he writes of the ‘unintended consequences’ of left/liberal social policy:

By impeding and superseding decision-making in the market [my emphasis], ambitious rationalist social planners cause unintended consequences by using the state to plan good societies and good futures for citizens, when they do not have the capacity to do so (Pearson, 2007, p. 45).

Pearson contrasts the ‘denial’ of those on the cultural and political right with the ‘moral vanity’ of those on the left and concludes:

The denialists [i.e., those who ‘deny that racism in Australia against the country’s Indigenous people is a serious problem’] . . . understand how debilitating it is to adopt the mentality and outlook of victimhood. It is easy for them to say that victimhood is worthless, as it grows out of their ideological contempt for interventionist social policy that seeks to ameliorate the impact of the market even on the most vulnerable, but this does not make them wrong. Those on the cultural and political right are therefore more correct than their opponents in recognising the folly of the impact of policy that turns people into victims. (Pearson, 2007, p. 30)

The bottom line for Pearson is that ‘what is really needed is an increase of self-regard among the disadvantaged, rather than strengthening their belief that the foundation for their uplift is the welfare state and the other-regard of the successful’ (Pearson, 2007, p. 17).

Critique of 'Progressive' Approaches to Schooling

'Radical Hope' (Pearson, 2009) provides a critique of progressive education and its implications for remote Indigenous students, and specifically sets out the ideas which form the basis for the establishment of the CYAAA. Pearson depicts the right/left 'dialectic' in educational debates as follows:

These discourses centre on fundamental disagreements about four issues: skills, creativity, critique and self-esteem and how these relate to knowledge and to each other . . . Warriors from the Right of the ideological field give priority to the acquisition of core academic skills . . . and they range from carelessness to suspicion on the matter of creativity, but harbour a strong ideological aversion to critique. Their opponents from the Left give priority to creativity and critique . . . but their aversion to focusing on skills has a strong ideological animus . . . On the matter of self-esteem, the two camps stand poles apart. The Left have developed a panoply of theories about approaches to the matter of children's esteem, while the Right argue that effort and achievement are the source of true self-esteem. (Pearson, 2009, p. 74)

Pearson sees a progressive (i.e., left/liberal) approach to education as the prevailing orthodoxy and his critique takes as its starting point the egregious failure of schooling under this approach to provide remote Indigenous students with outcomes anywhere near those provided to non-Indigenous students. As NAPLAN results and a number of other measures attest, there can be no argument with Pearson on this record (though a good argument can be had on the pervasiveness and role of left/liberal progressivism in schooling — see below).

Pearson takes particular issue with what he sees to be the left/liberal 'aversion to focusing on skills' (Pearson, 2009, p. 74). While 'progressive education currents set up skills as antithetical to creativity', he argues that, 'the acquisition of strong skills is not contrary to the maintenance and growth of creativity. Indeed, the acquisition of many foundational skills through explicit instruction and long practice is usually a prerequisite to the maturation of creativity' (Pearson, 2009, pp. 78–79). He also sees mastery of foundational skills as a prerequisite to the development of critical capacity.

For Pearson, progressive education is a specific manifestation of left/liberal social policy. One reason for its failure to improve Indigenous outcomes is that it draws on structural analyses of disadvantage; the effect in schools is a 'soft bigotry of low expectations', and Pearson notes that though this phrase was originally associated with George W. Bush, the concern about the effects of low expectations and the need for 'no excuses' has now been embraced by politicians on both sides of politics in both the United States and Australia:

No Excuses has been growing as an educational movement . . . It is premised on the idea that the achievement gap can be closed between students of different racial groups . . . if you get the schooling right — and that the socio-economic and racial backgrounds of students are no reason for underachievement. (Pearson, 2009, p. 16)

Many features of progressive education, according to Pearson, play out in practice in ways that reinforce or rationalise low expectations. The failure specifically to address skills development, over-sensitivity about student self-esteem, and a misplaced emphasis on cultural appropriateness and relevance, all can lead to the delivery of a dumbed-down or restricted curriculum and acceptance of low levels of performance. He quotes Theodore Dalrymple:

The educational absurdities foisted on the lowest orders were not the idea of the lower orders themselves but of those who were in a position to avoid their baleful effects: that is to say, middle-class intellectuals. If I were inclined to paranoia . . . I should say the efforts of educationalists were part of a giant plot by the middle classes to keep power for themselves and restrict competition, in the process creating sinecures for some of their less able and dynamic members — namely the educationalists. (Pearson, 2009, p. 91)

Pearson is also concerned that mass education 'teaches to the middle', that is, that it assumes a standard distribution of academic aptitudes in classes (consisting of an upper quartile of advanced or 'gifted' students; a middle half of capable students and a lower quartile of low-progress learners) where mainstream instruction targets the middle half with extension and remedial programs for the other respective quartiles. In remote Indigenous schools, however, the 'academic tail' constitutes the majority of students. In these settings a mainstream program supplemented by remedial programs is not appropriate. For Pearson, the education establishment including teacher education institutions, teacher unions and state education bureaucracies are implicated in the failure of remote Indigenous education in at least two significant ways. First, all are bastions of the prevailing progressive education orthodoxy, which they vigorously defend. Second, in Pearson's view, as manifestations of a centralist welfare state, they embody state-imposed visions of social good and operate outside of, and restrict the (corrective) disciplines of the market.

Pearson's Way Forward

Pearson's model for remote Indigenous education reform can be said to have three dimensions:

1. Demand-Side Reforms

Consistent with his emphasis on building Indigenous responsibility, Pearson argues that school reform needs to take place in Indigenous communities that have signed up

for welfare reforms that provide the following conditions (as he argues is true for communities participating in the Cape York welfare reforms):

- school-ready students keen and curious to learn;
- supportive parents who fulfil their responsibilities and demand good education for their children;
- community that values education and provides a good neighbourhood for children.

2. Governance

Pearson is attracted to the American charter school model where schools are funded by the government, but have considerable autonomy when it comes to matters of staffing, curriculum and pedagogy (e.g., National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2012). This allows these schools, in Pearson's view, to encourage and reward excellence from both teachers and students, pursue innovative approaches, engage authentically with their clientele (in the market place) and avoid the 'dead hand' of educational bureaucracy.

3. Curriculum and Pedagogy

A central problem for schools in remote Indigenous communities is the ever-widening gap, as students progress through school, between Indigenous achievement and the achievement of mainstream students. Remedial programs are simply not adequate to provide the level of support needed. Pearson proposes an approach specifically designed to address the needs of remote Indigenous students. He proposes an extended school day and dividing the curriculum into three domains: class, club and culture (Cape York Partnerships, 2009, p. 21).

The 'class' domain is 'delineated as an English language domain dedicated to Western learning' (Cape York Partnerships, 2009, p. 19) with a very heavy emphasis on basic literacy and numeracy. Students do not move on to higher-order learning activities until they have mastered basic skills. There are to be no cross-cultural or bilingual dimensions to the class domain. The 'club' domain incorporates activities such as sports, music, IT and recreational reading, some of which in a mainstream school would be considered curricular activities and some of which would be considered extra-curricular. The 'culture' domain includes Western art and music, but also incorporates learning of traditional Indigenous language and culture and requires engagement with the local community. It is designed to move beyond token acknowledgement of Indigenous culture and be equally valued with the class and club domains.

As noted above, Pearson is concerned about how 'educationalists' are implicated in the 'educational absurdities foisted on the lowest orders'. His solution is to adopt for the class domain a virtually teacher-proof instructional strategy known as 'Direct Instruction' (DI), which had been developed in the 1960s in the United States by

Siegfried Engelmann (National Institute for Direct Instruction, 2012). DI is a highly scripted and prescriptive approach to teaching literacy and numeracy basics in which learning is broken down into a hierarchy of skills and tasks (National Institute for Direct Instruction, 2012; SRA McGraw-Hill, 2012). In the American literacy wars, it has positioned itself not so much as an alternative to constructivist teaching, but as its antidote (e.g., Carnine, 2000).

The Academy Proposal

In late 2009, a 'business case' for the establishment of the CYAAA along the lines described in Pearson's essay and developed by Cape York Partnerships from the beginning of the 2010 school year was considered by the Queensland Government. The proposal was for the Academy to have two campuses initially, at Coen and Aurukun, with potential for expansion to other Indigenous communities. The Academy as proposed would incorporate an extended school day (for students) so that all three domains could be included and so that support programs such as breakfast, lunch and afternoon tea could be provided. Teachers would work standard industrial Award hours, delivering the class component at the appropriate Award salary rates. They would be DET employees and would have the same transfer rights as other teachers. It was proposed that the Academy would have a 'board' (all apparently personally picked by Pearson, see Cape York Partnerships, 2009, pp. 38–40) that would exercise decision-making in relation to its operation. An executive principal would oversee both campuses.

The government subsequently announced that the CYAAA would proceed from the commencement of the 2010 school year in a modified form and as a 3-year 'pilot'. The Coen and Aurukun campuses of the Academy would be part of Western Cape College with an executive principal appointed to the College and heads of campuses appointed to the two sites. The class domain would be implemented immediately (using DI). The Department of Education and Training would have responsibility for all aspects of this component of the Academy. Teachers would be DET employees with the same conditions and transfer rights as other DET teachers. The club and culture components of the proposal (overseen by Cape York Partnerships) were to be implemented later. The Academy Board, which purports to provide greater engagement with the local communities, was formed. DET advised that funding for the academic dimensions of the Academy would be provided through normal resource allocation measures plus the Federal Government's Low SES National Partnership Agreement (\$7.2m over 3.5 years — a greater share of NPA funding than the two sites would have received had they participated in the NPA outside of the context of the creation of the CYAAA).

Implementation, 2010

Uncertainty about the program and its implications for staff had probably contributed to a higher than anticipated number of transfers out of the two communities at the end of 2009. Significantly, the principals at both sites were among those who relocated at the end of that year. At the beginning of the school year 2010, it became clear that a number of teachers were very dissatisfied with the situation in the two school communities. The causes for this dissatisfaction included some factors unrelated to the implementation of the Academy but also some factors seen by the teachers to be directly related to the Academy. These included:

- dissatisfaction/disagreement with DI and its effects on students
- allegations that teacher aides were being used to provide instruction
- inadequate numbers of DI resource materials (at Coen)
- concerns about the inappropriateness of resource materials, which were American and featured American topics, spellings and measurements (e.g., pounds versus kilograms, Fahrenheit versus Celsius, miles versus kilometres)
- concern about community backlash against DI resulting in a deterioration in the relationship between the schools and the communities
- concerns about the role and influence of Cape York Partnerships
- complaints that Award entitlements (e.g., non-contact time) were not being provided due to the instructional program (Duffy, personal communication, March 19, 2010).

The issues played out somewhat differently in each community. By the end of the first week in March, eight teachers in a school of twenty teachers (including the head of campus) had transferred out of Aurukun, and three teachers in a school of five teachers (including the head of campus) had either transferred out of Coen or were seeking to do so. The very high level of staff turnover exacerbated problems relating to the effective operation of the campuses.

The local community in Coen circulated a petition signed by the majority of parents/guardians of students at the school asking for the current approach to be abandoned and for the school to sever its relationship with Cape York Partnerships and return to the standard Queensland pedagogy and curriculum. This dissatisfaction became the focus of media attention in early March. *The Cairns Post* (Harrington, 2010) ran a front-page article alleging that students at Coen were singing the *Star Spangled Banner* rather than *Advance Australia Fair*, and *The Australian* (Koch, 2010) reported that 'teachers were voting with their feet' at the two sites. Further, Pearson had devel-

oped and negotiated the Academy proposal and recruited the executive principal without reference to the regional educational bureaucracy, which caused tensions between it and Cape York Partnerships/CYAAA. At a regional principals' meeting, which occurred while the *Cairns Post* was highlighting the problems in Coen, a recording of the *Star Spangled Banner* was played to open a session — much to the dismay of the executive principal. Regional Office adopted a 'hands-off' policy in relation to operation of the Academy.

In discussions with the teachers' union in April, the executive principal stated that in his view much of the controversy about DI related more to staffing issues and, in the case of Coen, to issues in the community than to concerns about DI as a pedagogy. He felt that that much of what was reported about DI was sensationalised and inaccurate (e.g., he asserted that the *Star Spangled Banner* was never played or studied at the Coen campus). While the materials were indeed North American, teachers were adapting them or using them as examples of ways in which things were done elsewhere. He stated that Indigenous students were responding well to the prescriptiveness of DI as it gave them a clear structure. He also stated that since the staffing disruptions earlier in the year, he had not received any further complaints from staff about DI.

QTU Visit to Aurukun and Coen, 2010

A delegation from the Queensland Teachers' Union (QTU) visited the Aurukun and Coen campuses of the CYAAA in June, 2010. They had an opportunity at both locations to observe lessons and to talk with staff. In the previous week the Aurukun campus had been visited by the State Minister for Education, the Assistant Director-General, Indigenous Education and Training Futures, and the media. Both *The Courier-Mail* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* ran articles on the weekend heralding the CYAAA as a major success and step forward for Indigenous education (Chilcott, 2010; Devine, 2010). At the time of the QTU visit, only the class domain was operational at either campus. Students spent approximately 40% of instructional time per day on DI literacy activities and 40% of instructional time on DI numeracy activities. The remaining 20% of instructional time (always the last hour of the school day) was for other curriculum areas as determined by the teacher. At Aurukun, students were provided with breakfast, morning tea and lunch. Contrary to the media reports, this practice was in place before the establishment of the CYAAA. It was not possible for union representatives to directly gauge community views in this short visit, but staff at Aurukun did not believe that DI was an issue for the local community and the newly appointed Indigenous head of campus at Coen told the QTU that after the controversy at the beginning of the year, things had settled down.

DI in Action

As noted above, DI is an extremely prescriptive and behaviourist approach to the teaching. Teachers work from scripted lesson plans and use a set of instructional and classroom management techniques that are specified in the program. Deviation from the script or the use of alternative pedagogical or management techniques is strongly discouraged. Classroom management techniques are based on a classic 'rewards' and 'sanctions' approach. Lessons are a combination of teacher-led didactic drills and activities and worksheet work. All materials (lesson plans, activity sheets, workbooks and reading materials) are supplied by DI. Students are grouped by achievement level (as measured by weekly tests) and can move to a different group based on rate of achievement. They can be in different groups for literacy and numeracy. The DI groups observed ranged in size from six to twelve students.

Despite the highly didactic nature of the DI lessons and materials, they are well constructed and interesting, and students were engaging with the tasks. In many remote Indigenous classrooms, students are too 'shamed' to read to a classroom visitor, but students eager to demonstrate their reading skills spontaneously approached the QTU visitors. All the teachers acknowledged that students were making progress in literacy and numeracy under the DI program and that behaviour was improved. Some commented that the 'structure' provided by DI suited the learning needs and styles of the students. The views of the teachers ranged from enthusiastic support for DI (particularly from the two heads of campus, first-year teachers and Indigenous teachers) to expressions of frustration with its extreme prescriptiveness, while conceding that 'it works' in terms of student literacy and numeracy outcomes.

Several teachers commented on the extremely dogmatic and inflexible approach taken by the DI coaches, who insisted that there was only one right way to deliver a lesson and intervened to take over instruction of a group from a teacher if they perceived that a teacher was not presenting the lesson correctly, which the teachers found belittling. DI coaches, who come from Victoria and Guam, visit the campuses from time to time to observe lessons. Student results on DI assessments are sent to weekly to the National Institute for Direct Instruction (NIFDI) in Eugene, Oregon and are discussed weekly by teleconference with a DI supervisor based there.

In September 2010, the QTU held its biennial Indigenous Educators Conference in Brisbane. At the conference the Indigenous head of campus at Coen described the operation of the Academy at that site, including the use of DI. She identified the following positives:

- high attendance,
- consistent parental involvement in school activities,
- improved student self-esteem and behaviour,
- an enthusiastic, committed staff,

- improved student outcomes in literacy and numeracy (Cannon, 2010).

Introduction of the Club and Culture Domains

Implementation of the club and culture domains proceeded in fits and starts in 2010. It was planned to introduce the club component from the start of Semester 2 in early July. However, at the time of the QTU visit in June, staff at the two campuses (including the heads of campus) had been told remarkably little about how it would be rolled out, and teachers raised concerns about the potential impact of the introduction of a number of additional staff on the teacher accommodation situation.

By the end of 2010, implementation of the club and culture domains had entailed employment of a sports teacher at Aurukun, establishment of a club and culture program coordinator position, commencement of a music program, and 'regular visits' by AFL Cape York project officers to both campuses. Some of the roles in these domains were undertaken by teachers who were already at the school (with backfilling by additional DET-employed teachers).

In an interesting development, Pearson advised the QTU in a meeting in mid-November 2010 that a key curriculum strategy to be employed in the Culture domain would be 'rich tasks' as developed through the 'New Basics' program (Department of Education, Training and Employment, 2004). New Basics and DI would probably be seen by many as representing opposite poles in current curriculum strategies/debates. Rich tasks are described as assessable activities in which 'students display their understandings, knowledges and skills through performance on trans-disciplinary activities that have an obvious connection to the wide world' (Department of Education, Training and Employment, 2004). Arguably, it is very much in the progressive, constructivist paradigm that Pearson criticised in 'Radical Hope'. Pearson was familiar with Rich Tasks as they were being used in Indigenous schools in Cape York. According to Pearson, his position was never an anti-New Basics position; however, he felt that explicit instruction in the basics of literacy and numeracy (as provided by DI) was a precondition for students to participate in activities such as rich tasks.

Implementation, 2011

In late 2010, the teaching staff at Hopevale State School became aware of moves to expand the CYAAA to that community. Subsequently, the State government announced the expansion of the Academy to Hopevale from the beginning of 2011. As was the case in late 2009 at Coen and Hopevale, there was concern about the implications of this for the local teachers. A number of teachers expressed deep concerns about the lack of consultation, the short proposed timelines for implementation, DI, and the implications for them if they did not agree with the

DI approach (given that, as in 2009, the transfer process had been completed prior to notification of the proposed change). However, there was not a unified view among staff. In particular, Indigenous teachers (some with connections to Indigenous staff at Coen) were enthusiastic supporters of Hopevale becoming part of the Academy. There was also a significant push from the community for Hopevale to participate. The mayor and several prominent community members had visited Aurukun to observe the operation of the Academy and the use of DI.

The addition of the Hopevale campus was accompanied by structural changes to the CYAAA. As noted above, in 2010 Coen and Aurukun, as well as campuses of the CYAAA, were campuses of Western Cape College, which also had non-CYAAA campuses at Weipa and Mapoon. The main reason for this hybrid arrangement was to create a school of sufficient enrolment to allow for appointment of the principal at the 'executive principal' salary level. (The Weipa campus had by far the greatest number of enrolments.) With the resignation of the executive principal at the end of 2010, Coen and Aurukun were excised from Western Cape College (except for some administrative matters). The new principal with responsibility for the three CYAAA campuses was still called an 'executive principal' but was paid at lower rate commensurate with the classification of the campuses.

QTU Visit to Aurukun, Coen and Hopevale, 2011

Representatives from the QTU (along with the Australian Education Union national president) visited the three CYAAA campuses in October 2011. The main difference noticed from the visit in 2010 was that the club and culture domains were now operational. As part of the club domain, the CYAAA had developed programs in cooperation with the PCYC, and athletics, cricket, AFL and tennis organisations, and a music program was provided at all three campuses. Cape York Partnerships had indeed developed curriculum in the culture domain, particularly around rich tasks. The unit being undertaken at Aurukun at the time of the visit was based on the theme of 'performance', with students investigating Western (ballet) and Aboriginal (traditional dance) manifestations in order to produce a performance work. The aspects of the culture domain that related to Aboriginal culture engaged the local community and employed local culture tutors.

In contrast to 2010, when it appeared that a focus on basic literacy and numeracy had virtually driven all other aspects of the curriculum off the agenda, students were undertaking work that was varied, intellectually demanding and grounded in their lived experiences. The executive principal informed the union delegation that work was also being undertaken to 'map' the DI materials against the national curriculum documents so that

concerns about the lack of connectedness to 'mainstream curriculum' could be addressed.

Of the 12 teachers on staff at Hopevale, 6 are Indigenous and all of these are from the community. All were trained as teachers through the Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP), an alternative teacher education program that allows Indigenous teachers to gain their teacher qualification in their home communities (Education Queensland, 2012). Several of these teachers expressed strong support for DI, stating that it had given them more confidence in teaching and classroom management and that their student results were improving. One stated that on the basis of the improved outcomes of her students, she now felt that the community saw her as a 'real teacher', not just a token Aboriginal face on staff.

The executive principal drew attention to a positive link between the CYAAA's operation and one aspect of the Cape York welfare reforms. Parents had been encouraged to become involved in their children's education through student educational trusts (SETs). The SETs, maintained by Cape York Partnerships, are funded by voluntary deductions from welfare payments to parents and can be used to support student-learning needs (e.g., for the purchase of ICT, to fund excursions, for boarding school fees). As of September 2011, there were 614 SETs with over \$1m in contributions (Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy, 2011).

Evaluating the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy

In this section of the article, some key issues relevant to an evaluation of the CYAAA are identified and discussed.

Performance Measures

An 'interim evaluation' of the CYAAA was conducted in November 2010 by the consultancy firm PhillipsKPA. It does not appear to have been made available publically. In September 2011, the CYAAA provided a 'Key Results Briefing' which highlighted the establishment of the Class, Club and Culture domains and other programs, and improvements in literacy, numeracy and attendance. In April 2011, Professor Peter Bycroft, assisted by Dr Annie Holden, was appointed to develop a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework for the CYAAA. The framework was submitted to the Department of Education and Training (as it was then) in November 2011. Stakeholder groups, including the QTU, were consulted in the development of the framework and were provided with a confidential copy. The framework sets out a robust evaluation methodology that uses a range of data sources, both quantitative and qualitative. According to the Department, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) has been contracted to conduct the evaluation in 2012 using Professor Bycroft's framework. The current evidence, such as it is, indicates that literacy and numeracy outcomes (as measured

by DI and other assessment instruments) have improved significantly, and that attendance and student behaviour have also improved (though attendance fluctuated and had been trending upwards before the establishment of the CYAAA).

Carrying out a rigorous evaluation of the CYAAA is both important and difficult. A key performance indicator will obviously be the literacy and numeracy results of students. It will be important to interrogate carefully the reasons for these results. Should there be a significant improvement, it may prove difficult to sort through the relative contributions made by factors such as DI (vs. any other highly structured learning program, for example), smaller-sized learning groups, enthusiastic teachers, an ongoing commitment to high standards ('no excuses'), and substantial additional resourcing. It will also be important to recognise that literacy and numeracy outcomes (even in the context of dramatic improvements) are not the only measures of educational success. The degree to which students are exposed to deeper and broader knowledge and thinking and prepared for learning outside of the context of highly scripted lessons is a relevant issue that needs to be assessed. In relation to student discipline, as noted above, several teachers and other employees ascribed improved student behaviour to DI. However, it should be noted that at Aurukun there is a teacher who has full-time responsibility for behaviour management. Very few other schools have the capacity to allocate a staff member on a full-time basis to behaviour management responsibilities. It may be difficult to sort out the relative contribution of DI versus management arrangements.

Social and Educational Rationales

A fascinating issue, which may be addressed but is unlikely to be resolved in any evaluation of the CYAAA, is the validity of the social and educational philosophy/analysis underpinning the reform, as described in some length earlier in this article. Pearson develops his argument through the use of dichotomies: left versus right social policy, progressive versus conservative educational approaches. While calling for a 'radical centre' to emerge based on a 'dialectical synthesis' of these putative positions, he disavows any attempt at synthesis, arguing that it is not possible for him to play 'several roles in the dialectical process' (Pearson, 2007, p. 56), and prosecutes a case against left social policy and progressive education. This is a pity, as it appears on the evidence that Pearson's approach is more nuanced than he claims or is credited for.

Pearson's Approach to Indigenous Social Policy

An extended consideration of Pearson's critique of the 'liberal consensus' on Indigenous social policy and his alternative is well beyond the scope of this article. However, some key issues, relevant to the CYAAA, can be identified.

Pearson's depiction of 'a downward spiral' in the living conditions of Indigenous Australians in various locations across the country (Sharp, 2009) as an unintended consequence of left/liberal social theory and policy has force and he was an important contributor to the shift to:

A new policy era in Aboriginal affairs . . . that turns its back on the vision of a semi-autonomous, de-colonised and modernised discrete realm for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, where they would largely manage themselves in culturally appropriate ways. The new era is characterised by the intention to re-engage the state with its Aboriginal peoples, and normalise their relations within their communities and with the wider population. (Sullivan, 2011, p. 100)

Hinkson (2008, p. 5) notes that as a result of statistics relating to 'child abuse, alcohol use and violence' marshalled to support the change to a policy of normalisation, many people now regard reconciliation and land rights as 'having failed'. To what extent does Pearson's critique entail a repudiation of these approaches? Is there anything worth salvaging?

Sharp (2009) argues that if the old liberal consensus had 'blindspots' and unintended consequences, this is also likely to be true of the new 'neo-liberal consensus' promoted by Pearson, and Pearson has a responsibility to consider these. In particular, the possibility for an approach to Indigenous policy associated with neo-liberalism to 'feed a new form of assimilation, apparently tolerant but potentially more destructive than even the assimilation of the past' is argued by Hinkson (2008, p. 7). Hinkson (2008, p. 9) notes how the institutions of neo-liberalism 'eat away' at 'tangible social relations' and makes a case for the development of alternative strategies where Aboriginal people 'might recognise, along with increasing numbers from non-Indigenous backgrounds, that the road offered by neo-liberalism threatens cultural disaster of historic proportions'.

Pearson's enthusiastic promotion of the responsibilities side of the rights/responsibilities dialectic has made it easy to pigeonhole him as an apologist for unbridled neo-liberalism and what Sullivan (2011) calls the 'neo-assimilationist position of governments', particularly as these were promoted by the Howard Federal Government in the late 1990s/early 2000s. However, while it is possible to see the Cape York Welfare reforms, of which Pearson may be described as the architect, as of a piece with the approach taken by the Federal Government in the Northern Territory Intervention, they have features which distinguish them. The Cape York communities volunteered to participate and what might be termed the 'punitive' features of the reforms (e.g., income management) are embedded in a network of support and community and engagement programs and processes. As noted above, the communities have embraced the student educational trusts (SETs), contributing over \$1m by the end of 2011 to support students.

Martin (2001) observes that Pearson's concept of 'mutual obligation' can be differentiated from the concept as promoted by the Howard government, and he endorses a number of Pearson's proposals for welfare reform. But Martin also notes a number of 'difficulties' with Pearson's approach, including:

The ethnography from Cape York and elsewhere suggests that certain widespread Aboriginal values and practices may be inimical to the kinds of social and attitudinal changes which Pearson is advocating and, further, that these values and practices have not simply arisen as the consequence of the experience of colonialism or the introduction of welfare. This then raises the question of the moral suasion and authority necessary to demand and implement change in Aboriginal societies. Pearson proposes that these lie variously within 'families' and other local groups and 'communities'. This view is challenged here . . . such contemporary groupings do not have the requisite moral and political authority . . . The answer may lie in the new forms of Indigenous governance that Pearson proposes. However, these would involve significant changes within Indigenous polity, which may be beyond the capacity of Indigenous groups themselves to institute. (Martin, 2001, p. vii)

Pearson's Approach to Education

Pearson's depiction of progressive education in 'Radical Hope' is a caricature. He over-simplifies its tenets; for example, the degree to which it is 'averse' to skills acquisition, and he overstates its influence on current classroom practice. Kohn (2011) and Luke, Woods, & Dooley (2011), for example, argue convincingly that the prevailing orthodoxy in classroom practice is far more attuned than averse to skills mastery. Pearson's argument that remedial measures are woefully inadequate to closing the gap between the educational outcomes for remote Indigenous students and 'mainstream' Australian students is compelling. However, while Pearson may well be correct in asserting that mass education 'teaches to the middle', there is a substantial literature by researchers operating from what Pearson would undoubtedly characterise as a progressive educational paradigm that, far from defending the status quo, identifies pedagogy and curriculum for disadvantaged students as key problem areas. Australian examples date back at least to Connell et al. (1982) and include Lingard et al. (2001), Ladwig and Gore (2005) and Mills et al. (2009).

Lingard et al. express concern that Pearson's educational philosophy, as expressed in 'Radical Hope' 'is in many ways paradoxical' and it is worth quoting them at length here:

There is a tension between wanting to 'achieve' according to mainstream standards and wanting young Aboriginal people to 'walk in two worlds and enjoy the best of both' . . . The No Excuses approach assumes that Aboriginal people are already assimilated and that participation in the dominant education system is the only way forward. The education system, as we are well aware, was built and is sustained by discourses of white

race dominance, power, and privilege and does not easily or willingly make space for the other world that Pearson wants for the next generation of Aboriginal people. The catch is that the No Excuses approach removes accountability from educators for ensuring that it is possible for Indigenous students to sustain their strong sense of identity as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and actually gives them an excuse for perpetuating the disempowerment of Indigenous people through education by ignoring the cultures with which they identify.

Pearson expects educators to engage in 'explicit instruction' . . . with Aboriginal students, that is, 'a means of communication that allows only one interpretation and which is capable of transmitting the relevant concept or skill to any learner' . . . This approach is at odds with the multiple ways of knowing, which exist in Indigenous Australian communities and the diversity across those multiple ways of knowing according to location, landscape and Law. It is not possible — nor is it equitable or ethical — to assume that all Indigenous communities are the same, yet the 'explicit instruction' that he strongly advocates, seems to rest on the understanding that all Indigenous children are a homogenous group . . . While Pearson may draw his inspiration for hope from multiple sources and while it may very well be radical, the colonial underpinnings do not bode well for delivering the promise of empowerment, self-determination and freedom that Pearson holds onto. (Lingard, Mackinlay, & Vass, in press)

This criticism does not appear, however, to consider the use in the CYAAA in the Culture domain of curriculum and pedagogy based on rich tasks, which engages with local Indigenous culture.

Pearson's inclusion in 'Radical Hope' of Dalrymple's quotation depicting teachers as the 'less able and dynamic members of the middle class', who foist 'educational absurdities' on their students is worrying. As Levin (2010, p. 742) points out:

Far too many education reforms . . . have seen teachers as the equivalent of assembly line workers whose job is simply to follow instructions or, in some cases, as an opposition to be controlled by policy. This cannot work . . . Motivated and committed people are by far the most important resource any human service organisation has.

In this context, Pearson would do well to note that the teachers at the three campuses of the CYAAA, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, are deeply committed to improving educational outcomes for their students and a number are enthusiastic proponents of the Academy's work.

Despite his attraction to the 'charter school' model of school governance, operation within the state system does not appear to have hindered Pearson's ability to create an institution that reflects the educational vision expressed in 'Radical Hope'. Indeed, it can be argued that the location of the Academy within the public system provided more advantages than disadvantages (e.g., in relation to the recruitment of teachers).

Direct Instruction (DI)

Perhaps the most controversial feature of the CYAAA is its embrace of DI. The 'literacy debate' has tended to polarise around two approaches: constructivist (whole language) methods and skills-based methods (Northern Territory Department of Education and Training, 2010). DI is clearly an example of the latter and its proponents have been active in the debate.

According to its proponents, DI was assessed as being the most effective literacy intervention program in use in US schools by *Project Follow Through*, a US Department of Education study described as 'the most extensive educational experiment ever conducted' (see Engelmann, 2007). The findings of *Project Follow Through* were contested in an article in the *Harvard Educational Review* (House, Glass, McLean, & Walker, 1978), which was seen by DI supporters as a clear attempt to discredit DI by the progressive educational establishment wedded to constructivist approaches (Carnine, 2000; Engelmann, 2007). In his influential synthesis of research on achievement, Hattie (2009, pp. 204–207; pp. 258–259) supports both the efficacy of DI and the DI supporters' version of the fate of *Project Follow Through*. Interestingly, as pointed out by Lingard et al. (in press), Hattie 'also demonstrates from his synthesis of multiple research projects, that teacher pedagogical strategies around meta-cognition and challenging goals also have powerful effects'.

Kohn (1999), on the other hand, has provided a summary of the problems with use made by DI proponents of the *Project Follow Through* report:

- The 'clearest finding' of *Project Follow Through* was that there were significant variations in student performance from site to site for each approach evaluated, and that these were greater than the variations between the various models.
- The primary measure of success was performance on a standardised test (which emphasised very closely the skills addressed in DI).
- There were numerous methodological problems with the study itself (Kohn, 1999, pp. 213–214).

Kohn goes on to identify a number of subsequent studies where constructivist approaches were seen to be equal or superior to DI. He notes that even where DI had been shown to provide superior short-term improvements in literacy and numeracy, these were not sustained, and the use of DI was associated in the longer term with more behaviour problems and lower school completion rates. Rundle (2009) contests the contention that the publication of the *Project Follow Through* report was followed by a concerted effort by the progressive educational establishment to undermine the adoption of DI in schools, arguing that the failure of DI to be widely adopted was due primarily to its very steep implementation costs.

Recent reviews of literacy research have advocated a balanced approach, drawing on the strengths of both constructivist and skill-based approaches. For example, Education Queensland asserts: 'Effective literacy approaches involve an informed blending and theorised matching of program decisions, rather than from an adherence to any one particular method or approach' (Education Queensland, 2000, p. 69). This is based on a view that while research emphasises the importance of 'explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and text comprehension' (Northern Territory Department of Education and Training, 2010, p. 7):

Comprehension is a cognitive, but also social and intellectual, phenomenon, and that narrow understandings of comprehension are insufficient for literacy education for diverse and marginalised students . . . Autonomous models (Street, 1984) of skill acquisition — whether decoding or comprehension — stop short of addressing the students' need for substantive cultural content and engagement with the social texts and intellectual demands of everyday community life and institutional and social action. (Luke et al., 2011, p. 158).

Professor Allan Luke, a recognised expert on literacy education, has stated that while he has some serious reservations about DI, it would be unhelpful for the debate to develop in a way in which the choice is between polarised 'pro-DI' and 'anti-DI' positions. He believes that there are aspects of the DI approach which it could be argued are more consistent with traditional Indigenous teaching and learning modes than constructivist alternatives. There is also evidence supporting explicit teaching and highly formalised literacy strategies to provide a strong grounding in 'the basics'. The potential problems with such an approach are that it could lead to a deskilling of teachers and that, once it provided a grounding in the basics, it might not provide the necessary means by which students could broaden and extend their knowledge and develop analytical and critical skills. According to Luke, DI needed to articulate with 'something more substantive' (Luke, personal communication, August 26, 2010).

The situating of DI (class domain) alongside the club and culture domains and, in particular, the use in the latter of rich tasks may provide the basis for linking DI with 'something more substantive', as well as address the concerns of Lingard et al. about the failure of Pearson's approach to connect with Indigenous culture. However, the potential for DI to deskill teachers, the apparent 'disconnect' between DI and pedagogy and curriculum in other state schools, and extent to which learning within the class domain itself allows for broader and deeper social and intellectual experiences remain, at this stage, open questions.

Sustainability/Transferability

It is clear that the Academy is a resource-intensive initiative. Contributing factors to this include:

- costs of purchase of DI materials (many of which are 'consumables' which need to be replaced or replenished)
- costs of DI coaches flown in from places such as Guam and Victoria
- cost of training of teachers in DI (including attendance by the Coen campus head in 2010 at a DI Conference held in Eugene, Oregon)
- small class (i.e., group) sizes
- additional staff for club and culture domains.

In addition to general school resource and staffing entitlements, additional (short-term) funding for the Academy is provided under the Low SES National Partnership Agreement, and it is possible that some costs are being picked up by NIFDI, Cape York Partnerships or philanthropic sources. The degree to which the Academy relies on significant additional funding is obviously a key issue in evaluating the sustainability and transferability of the CYAAA 'model' of Indigenous education reform.

Conclusion

Will the CYAAA succeed or fail? It remains to be seen, and indeed measures of success and failure are deeply problematic. In the end, however, neither the 'success' nor the 'failure' of the CYAAA (however measured) is likely to be unambiguous. If it fails, will it be because of flaws in the concept as developed by Pearson, or poor implementation, or surreptitious undermining by educational progressives in the bureaucracy, or because Pearson was constrained from implementing his plan exactly how he had originally envisaged it? If it succeeds, will it be primarily because of DI, or of the additional resources and staffing; is it a transferable model or a once-off, and can it be sustained over time? It seems likely then that the debates about the CYAAA will continue.

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About the Author

Dr John McCollow is a (non-Indigenous) research officer with the Queensland Teachers' Union. In this capacity he supports the union's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Committee, Gandu Jarjum. In his teaching career he worked with Indigenous students in rural and remote settings. He has also worked as a curriculum research writer, a casual academic in educational policy studies, and as Acting Federal Research Officer with the Australian Education Union.