

# Equality and difference amongst indigenous australians



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Indigenous Australians have poorer education rates compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts. The ABS reveals that 39% of Indigenous Australian students stayed on to year 12 at high school, compared with 75% for the non-Indigenous population. Less than half of indigenous adults (22%) had a vocational or higher education qualification, compared with 48% for the non-Indigenous Australian population. Although the situation is improving slightly, (with significant gains between 1994 and 2002) these results illustrate inequality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Unemployment rates are also a problem in Australia, more so for Indigenous Australians. As of 2002, the average household income for Indigenous Australian adults was 60% that of the non-Indigenous average. The 2006 census showed a large gap regarding unemployment rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, with Indigenous people being 3 times more likely to be unemployed compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts.

Data from the 2002 NATSISS also indicated that Indigenous Australians were twice as likely as their non-Indigenous peers to be a victim of violent aggression, with 24% of Indigenous Australians reported being a victim of violence in 2001. In 2004, Indigenous Australians were 11 times more likely to be in prison with 1/5 ( 21%) prisoners in Australia being Indigenous-Australian.

A study by the ABS in 2009 revealed the estimated life expectancy at 67. 2 years for Indigenous men (11. 5 years less than for non-Indigenous) and 72. 9 years for Indigenous women (9. 7 years less than for non-Indigenous). It

shows a difference of about 5 years to the previous figures but at the same time, points to another issue of inequality.

Studies in the 1960s reveals, among Indigenous Australians, a high rate of infant mortality of around 100 infant deaths per 1000 live births. In following years, there was a steady decline to around 26 per 1000 by 1981, with much of it due to improvements in post-neonatal mortality. While this can be seen as slightly promoting equality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, the latest statistics reveal that Indigenous infant mortality rates are consistently around two and a half times the Australian average, an obvious example of inequality in this area.

The key to improving indigenous lives is education. Photo: Terry Irwin

The major difference between equality and inequality is very simple - education. Family circumstances and genetics play their part, but the be all and end all to eradicating inequality is a good education.

It is the one essential ingredient above all others that would raise the indigenous communities of northern Australia out of poverty and Third World conditions to an equal place with white Australia - equal health, equal wealth and equal status.

As indigenous leader Noel Pearson said recently, " indigenous education is a shameful failure".

There is no colour divide in maths, physics, world history, geography or languages. Nor to the guaranteed opportunities education brings. The only barrier is the ability to deliver it quickly enough, in enough quantity and <https://assignbuster.com/equality-and-difference-amongst-indigenous-australians/>

quality to make the transformation. And it does need to be done quickly - we are already 200 years behind time.

Pearson calls for two new methods of delivery: a change in the governance of indigenous schools; and a departure from centralised public education delivery in favour of independent publicly funded schools like those known in the United States as charter schools.

This is no easy solution. Cultural barriers, poverty, misunderstandings and a chronic lack of infrastructure are real problems, but they are all within our capacity to solve. If for no other reason, our pride as a nation should drive us.

We are justly proud of our athletes and sportsmen, our business men and women, our actors, painters and scholars. But while we parade our successes on the world stage, just a few words bring us crashing down: " You allow your indigenous people to live in poverty and ignorance. On that matter you are by world standards a huge failure."

We are extraordinarily accomplished and generous in bringing many different cultures from around the world to live peacefully and successfully in this country, yet we cannot accommodate our own indigenous culture.

The delivery of well-educated, indigenous VCE students to universities and TAFEs can be achieved on two levels. Our top schools, both public and private, receive a fortune in government funding and commonly see about 90 per cent of their students enrol in university. They should take on the task of educating the brightest indigenous children.

I once chaired a lunch meeting at which principals made clear their embarrassment that our schools are educating students from cultures all around the globe, but not educating significant numbers of our own indigenous children. Tired of waiting for government policy, many top schools have embarked on their own scholarship schemes in an ad hoc manner.

It is estimated that by working with indigenous communities and with government, these schools could deliver 1000 indigenous university entrants each year without causing a ripple in their daily routines. The problems of culture shock and family support for students at such schools can be solved with the help of local communities.

The second level involves enticing children in the outback to school and providing them with quality teaching. Interactive technology means that teachers throughout the outback can work with the best “ virtual” teachers in city schools.

School attendance might be a condition for joining the local football team, going to swim, or for mum and dad to collect their welfare cheque. If there is transport, a reason to turn up and a pay-off, children will attend. Initiatives in Cape York showing between 70 and 96 per cent attendance rates put paid to arguments by sceptics that high indigenous attendance in far north and outback Australia are unachievable.

Fresh thinking is called for in the delivery of education in outback Australia and it may be we will never get that from government bureaucrats. Is it time

for private enterprise – the bastions of initiative and lateral thinking – to bring some of their energy and relentless determination to the table?

The initiative presently being considered in Queensland of an independent indigenous academy will have its critics, but it is the sort of bold move that is needed. It should attract private money from the many Australian companies and benefactors who support and sponsor important community causes. And what more important cause in this country could there be?

Private not-for-profit schools should collectively take up this challenge as well. With access to private foundations and innovative teaching techniques, and being experienced in providing accommodation and cultural leadership, they are well placed to deliver such focused education institutions.

I am damned if I know why Australia's determination, sense of fairness and ingenuity have not enabled us to overcome this major national failure – even if for no other reason than sheer embarrassment.

(b) The article highlights the importance of education in reducing inequality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. It reveals that education guarantees opportunities thus the improvement of education for Indigenous Australians will promote equality of opportunity and equality of outcomes for Indigenous peoples, by 'raising indigenous communities of northern Australia out of poverty and Third World conditions' and establishing 'equal health, equal wealth and equal status'. The author also hints at Australia pride in its cultural diversity and our success in ensuring different cultures live peacefully and advantageously yet we can't even ensure the same level of equality for Australia's Indigenous population. A <https://assignbuster.com/equality-and-difference-amongst-indigenous-australians/>

number of ideas also surface regarding the ways education can be improved for Indigenous Australians to help promote equality in the long term. A change from centralised public education in favour of independent publicly funded schools is suggested, similar to charter schools in the US. Other ideas also include incentive for Indigenous students to attend school and the use of technology for communication between teachers in the outback and those in the city, enabling them to work together.

Equality and difference for Indigenous Australians has experienced some change overtime. Significant changes include the earlier laws of the mid-late 20th century which focused on the rights of Indigenous Australians. The policy of Assimilation, introduced in 1937 saw Indigenous Australian on a different level to 'white' Australians, with Aboriginal Australians having little or no rights; Aboriginal people of mixed descent are to be assimilated into white society by force and, those not living tribally are to be educated, with all others having to stay on reserves. Segregationist practices were also put in place and continue until the 1960s including separate sections in theatres for Aboriginal Australians, separate wards in hospitals and schools able to refuse enrolment to Aboriginal children.

The policy of integration of was introduced in 1965, supposedly to give Aboriginal people more control over their lives and society. This is an example of a change over time, which allowed Indigenous Australians to make more decisions, however it is still a poor improvement in relation to equal rights for non-Indigenous Australians at the time. The Commonwealth 1967 Referendum is another event of significance as it recognised that

Indigenous Australians were a part of the nation to be included in the census, <https://assignbuster.com/equality-and-difference-amongst-indigenous-australians/>

a significant step in identifying Aborigines as 'equal' and to the rest of Australian society.

The abolishment of the White Australia Policy and the subsequent introduction of the Self-determination (self-management) policy is arguably one of the largest steps in establishing that Indigenous Australians are no different to the rest of Australian society. The change meant that Aboriginal Australians would have the right to preserve their culture and language and to manage the natural resources on Aboriginal land. These rights were already available to non-Indigenous Australians, revealing a delay in equality for Aboriginal Australians, obviously as a result of discrimination. Despite these milestones in policies to improve equality, the issue of poor health among Indigenous Australians is still a major issue. The overall life expectancy and health issues that occur among Indigenous Australians are proven to be more severe than for non-Indigenous Australians with poor education, socio-economic status and employment rates to blame. The infant mortality rate is an example though, that illustrates a decline in the number of infant deaths since the 1960s and proves that future trends may continue to decline, possibly along with other health issues regarding Indigenous Australians.

Individuals, groups and governments can help achieve desirable outcomes for all people in the future by contributing and ensuring equality of opportunity, if not for outcomes for every Australian, in particular, disadvantaged groups such as Indigenous Australians. Individuals need to recognise the level of inequality that can be found in society, especially inequality in many aspects of Indigenous Australian life including, large

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numbers of unemployment rates, many of which are issues that can be solved, although it may take some time to improve dramatically.

Groups can play a large role in improving equality in society, particularly for the state of Indigenous Australians and the issues they face. Dick Estens' Aboriginal Employment Service is an example where action has been taken by a community to improve equality in employment for Indigenous Australians. Establishments like Estens' can also be extended to other services, by the government, such as Indigenous health care; ensuring all Indigenous Australians have access to proper health care.

The recent ban of alcohol for areas in the Northern Territory seems a poor way to reduce rates of violence relating to alcohol consumption. The consequences of alcohol for many Indigenous Australians is evidently a problem with high rates of abuse and violence but Perhaps this government initiative should have been altered to the formation of rehabilitation centres instead. This may also have followed with incentives to attract and consequently help Indigenous Australians overcome excessive alcohol consumption or provide them with better knowledge of its consequences rather than intrude on their rights by not allowing the consumption of alcohol.

For issues regarding Indigenous Australian education; private, non-for-profit schools like SMH author Robert Dean suggested should possibly be put in place to promote better education for Aboriginal Australian students in society, the results of which would most likely achieve a greater equality for Indigenous Australians to have better opportunities and outcomes in life than

in previous years. Hopefully, these opportunities and outcomes will one day, equal that of non-Indigenous Australians.

Helen Pham, 11. 2SOC