Childhood abuse or trauma: A racial perspective

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Abstract

Racial trauma describes the emotional trauma and associated psychiatric reactions, such as distress and compromised well-being, which arise from perceived incidences of racism. It is an emerging psychological paradigm that is intimately linked to state-based policy measures such as child removal. Racial trauma is also deeply institutionalised in Australia's education system as a consequence of the focus on dominant (white Standard Australian English speaking) culture, language, literacy and numeracy standards. Despite receiving little recognition in mental health work or the education sector, the effects of such trauma are profound and can account for the high rates of suicide and social dysfunction that we see in remote Indigenous communities as well as the low academic achievement and English language acquisition rates in Aboriginal students. This paper presents a literature review related to publications that scrutinise the relationship between racism in policy and schools and racial trauma, drawing on some research findings by one of the authors. It suggests alternative Indigenous pedagogies that can both mitigate and remove racial trauma from the school environment and lead to successful academic outcomes and well-being for Aboriginal students.

Introduction

Racial trauma can inhibit and/or damage the psychological, emotional and physiological development of both victims and observers (Jernigan & Daniel, 2011). It is underpinned by the ideology of racism, the belief in the 'inferiority of a person due to prejudice against his or her ethnic group, phenotypic characteristics, or purported "biological nature"' (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2006, p. 2). Racial trauma affects individuals and the community at large and often becomes intergenerationally embedded in the fabric of a community and society (Carter, 2007). There has been research to suggest a link between elevated levels of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and racial trauma (Carter, 2007).

Aboriginal children in Northern Australia are currently suffering extreme racial trauma that is associated with the historically high incidence of removals from family as a consequence of institutional discrimination, structural marginalisation and consequential poverty (Hunter, 2008). This has resulted in anxiety and depression among these children, which in turn contributes to the Northern Territory (NT) having the highest rates of youth suicide in the country (Hanssens, 2016). These factors also contribute to high rates of disempowerment, poor socialisation, poor educational achievement, sustained poverty and poor indigenous identity formation (Anders-Baer, Henrik-Magga, Dunbar, & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2008; Cummins, 2000; Magga, Nicolaisen, Trask, Skutnabb-Kangas, & Dunbar, 2005).

Racial trauma can be mitigated through education by the adoption of specialised Indigenous language and cultural curricula, known in the USA as Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy and in the NT as 'Both Ways' learning (McCarty & Lee, 2014; Ober, 2009). This paper examines the trauma faced by Aboriginal children in relation to colonisation and racism. This includes both a re-evaluation of existing literature and research relating to racial trauma and draw on aspects of research conducted by one of the authors of the present paper, Janine Oldfield (2016), who conducted a critical discourse analysis of policy text and remote Indigenous community interviews. It then details alternative pedagogical approaches that can enhance the social and emotional well-being as well as academic achievement of Aboriginal children.

State-induced trauma

We are becoming more aware of the physical, emotional, mental, social and cognitive effects of abuse and trauma across many platforms. It is now recognised that exposure to highly stressful situations, threat and danger that are either acute or chronic, can induce trauma and that trauma can commence sometime after an experience (Alvarez, Milner, & Delale-O'Connor, 2016). This can occur when an individual recalls the psychological, physical or emotional pain of an experience or suffers psychological or physiological responses when memories of an experience are evoked (Alvarez et al., 2016). Increasingly, state-sanctioned measures stated to mitigate child abuse and trauma, such as the forced removal of children, are being recognised as the cause of childhood trauma among one of the most marginalised groups of Australian society, Aboriginal

children (Cunneen & Libesman, 2016). Some decades ago, Cunneen and Libesman (2016) noted the seriousness of such measures when they reported on the intergenerational effects, such as the 'violence, grief, trauma, depression and mental illness', arising from historical incidences of forced removal. They also remarked on the continued over-representation of Indigenous children having contact with welfare agencies largely due to perceived neglect by families or the failure 'to provide adequate supervision, food, shelter, or clothing' and hygienic conditions (Cunneen & Libesman, 2016, pp. 103–104). These conditions are, in fact, a consequence of the effects of marginalisation, displacement, economic deprivation, and psychological and physical violence that go hand in hand with colonisation (Carnes, 2014). This has been exacerbated in the past decade with the extreme marginalisation and human rights abuses against Indigenous communities that have occurred as a consequence of the NT Emergency Response,[1] with 50% of Indigenous children in the NT having 'come to the attention of the child protection system by the age of 10' (Murphy, 2017). The number of children having contact with welfare agencies has also grown due to government failure to enforce its own policies and legislation, which were ostensibly designed to regulate the use of intervention measures. For example, independent NT Member of Parliament, Yingiya Mark Guyula, criticised the NT government for repeatedly breaching its own child protection legislation and whisking away children from north-east Arnhem Land to Darwin (Everyingham, 2017).

Racial trauma

While racially related trauma, as noted earlier, includes exposure to extreme incidences of racism, it is also caused covertly through daily interactions that result in harassment, lack of validation of identity, deficit construction of identity and low expectations (Alvarez et al., 2016). The exposure to any racism, in fact, can induce racial trauma and ensure, if conditions persist, that the victim remains in a high sympathetic/adrenal response state in of which social responses are shut down (Levine, Porges, & Phillips, 2015). This results in disruption to brain and organ operation which can manifest as learning difficulties in classrooms, personal isolation, detachment and withdrawal (Alvarez et al., 2016). These disruptions can also induce hyper-arousal or the 'loss of core-capacities for self-regulation and inter-personal relatedness' (Alvarez et al., 2016). Hyper-arousal, in turn, can develop into escalating classroom behavioural problems in addition to a loss of focus when background noise cues become stimulants for the recall of a traumatic event (Alvarez et al., 2016, p. 34).

Racial trauma, evolving from repeated experiences of racial and ethnic discrimination, can, as Butts (2002) noted, lead to prolonged psychological responses of depression, anxiety and mood swings comparable to the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. This comparison has also been substantiated by Sanders-Phillips (2009) and in a meta-analysis study by Franklin, Boyd-Franklin, and Kelly (2006). However, while the comparison with PTSD has been acknowledged, racial trauma is not clinically recognised as such owing to the extreme levels of exposure to highly traumatic stress and direct physical violence associated with the onset of PTSD symptoms (Carter & Forsyth, 2009). The trauma symptoms that occur following racial discrimination have nevertheless been reported by Butts (2002) as being catastrophic in intensity and include nightmares, flashbacks and distressing dreams, depression, hypervigilance, obsessive ruminations, paranoia, being easily startled, insomnia, avoidance of thoughts and feelings linked to

the trauma, experiencing the desire to flee, confusion and shock. Butts (2002) also outlined extreme physiological symptoms that can result from such trauma including hair loss, gastrointestinal disorders, headaches and migraines. In Australia, former Chair of the Lowitja Institute for Indigenous Health Research, Pat Anderson (2013), also acknowledged the association of racism with illnesses caused by the functional disruption and hyper-arousal of major organ systems in the human body (the immune, cardiovascular and endocrine systems). In addition, Sanders-Phillips (2009, p. 174) argues that persistent racism represents a 'chronic source of trauma' which curtails the ability of communities and parents to provide sufficient support for 'optimal child development' and the development of children's resilience. As a consequence, failure to thrive, lower socio-economic status as well as the 'gap' in educational and health status between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, can be attributed to a considerable extent to racism and racial trauma.

Bryant-Davis and Ocampo (2006) noted that the ideology of racism is systematic and pervasive, driving 'both individual and collective action that is derogatory, discriminatory, and dehumanizing' (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2006, p. 2). Within a health system that is 'culturally bound' and 'limited to the conceptions and experiences of the White middle class', the normativity of racism, they believe, has resulted in the failure of mental health professionals to correctly diagnose the cause and treatment of racial trauma and stresses (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2006, p. 3), allowing racism to remain endemic at a broad-scale institutional level. Indeed, the problem of institutional racism is so acute in Australia that it prompted Pat Anderson to write:

> there is enough evidence now to consider racism in itself – whether structural or personal – a serious public health issue in its own right (Anderson, 2013, p. 6).

Racial trauma and education

Institutional racism, a primary contributor to racial trauma, is increasingly pervasive in the current Australian educational milieu as a consequence of the wholesale adoption of neoliberal principles of governance in the past few decades (Lo Bianco, 2001). This has resulted in education policy being increasingly state directed, and the education system being market-oriented and treated as a commodity (Lo Bianco, 2001). Neoliberal education governance has entailed a focus on centralisation, accountability, quality control and efficiency (Clarke, 2012). In settler colonial[2] nation-states, where colonisation involves a structural process of territoriality causing Indigenous people, culture and language to become either invisible or constructed as deficient, these standards are almost exclusively focused and measured against dominant white norms of language and culture (Fogarty, 2013; Wolfe, 2006). In this context, Indigeneity in terms of language, culture, knowledge and identity becomes viewed as a problem (Fogarty, 2013). Institutionalised racism is therefore exacerbated as dominant culture and language have become normative in classrooms and regulated by nationwide standardised tests (NAPLAN – National Assessment Program, Literacy and Numeracy) at the exclusion of other languages and culture. This follows the pattern of contemporary, especially settler colonial, nation-states enforcing linguistic and cultural assimilation in a bid to ensure ideological conformity and homogeneity of perspectives and cognition (May, 2012). In such contexts, a single national language also becomes a prime symbol of nation-state sovereignty and legitimacy (Reilly, 2013).

Language standardisation and normativity both naturalise hegemonic privileges and rights and perpetuate the deficit discourse of an Indigenous 'other' that currently pervades policy, programming and curricula text (Tollefson, 2006). For example, a critical discourse analysis[3] of an NT language education policy text, undertaken by co-author of the present article Janice Oldfield, noted the repeated representations of Indigenous people as deficient and 'outsiders', coloured by a 'persistent emergence of covert racism' (2016, p. 328).[3] The covert discourse of racism in the text effectively constructed Indigeneity as the 'problem' and the failure of Indigenous people to conform and achieve as a 'choice' (Oldfield, 2016). This evidently conflicts with the realities of poorer health and socio-economic conditions and lower academic achievement that result from structural inequity, marginalisation, racial exclusion, denigration and the withdrawal of financial and social resources, as well as educational inequity (in terms of physical and human resources and the added burden placed on students who are forced to learn in a foreign language (Oldfield, 2016)).

The racism that pervades such policy texts is also reproduced through school and classroom practices in the form of unequal relations of power in social macro-interactions. For instance, the language and culture of Australian Aboriginal children frequently remain invisible in schools (Sellwood & Angelo, 2013), compounding the consistent use of deficit discourse and inferences of Indigenous 'criminality' in references to poor school attendance and academic outcomes. Oldfield (2016) also highlighted Indigenous invisibility in a 2008 NT language education policy text, which affirmed that literacy and language skills were only ever associated with the teaching of English despite a near 40-year history of Indigenous biliteracy education in the NT. It was also apparent in this policy document that the cultural competency of Indigenous students was only to be measured in terms of white hegemonic norms (Oldfield, 2016). Such discourse engenders low expectations in students and can lead to them suffering abuse from dominant group peers, abuse that is then reinforced by the inaction of teachers (Alvarez et al., 2016). This 'pedagogy of indifference' (Lingard, 2007) and blame for failure by Indigenous students, families and communities are exacerbated by inclusion strategies that equate linguistic assimilation with social justice. The negative impacts of these processes on students are magnified with repeated exposure to multiple trauma events and translates into cultural conflict and resource deprivation (including teacher attention) for non-mainstream students (Cummins, 2000). Teachers' exclusionary positioning of non-mainstream students is also replicated by other students (Kilman, 2009). Additionally, the failure to include Indigenous language and culture in the classroom results in the need for students to relinquish their Indigenous identities and languages and adopt mainstream perspectives that contrive Indigenous people as deficient (Cummins, 2000). Many of these issues are also noted from the data gathered during Oldfield's 52 interviews with remote Indigenous community NT participants, conducted as part of her PhD research.[3]

The inability of Indigenous students to 'navigate and negotiate these negative experiences' can ultimately lead to a prolonged trauma (Alvarez et al., 2016, p. 31). This trauma can manifest, according to Alvarez et al. (2016, p. 32) in 'behavioural manifestations of race-based traumatic incidences'. The consequences may include an 'internalized devaluation' or a demotion of a student's own racial ethnicity, history, identity and racial experiences as well as a distorted and an 'assaulted sense of self' that arises from cumulative random incidences of racism, as opposed to those that are systematic or intentional (Alvarez et al., 2016, pp. 31–32). It also

results in an 'internalized voicelessness' that leaves students unable to defend themselves against a constant onslaught of slights from both society and individuals, since their 'self-advocacy' is regarded as threatening by the dominant culture (Alvarez et al., 2016, pp. 31–32). Consequently, they engage in unhealthy coping strategies such as drugs and alcohol (Alvarez et al., 2016). Behaviours that manifest as resistance to learning and lack of engagement can also occur when students disconnect from their surroundings in response to taunts and/or remain guarded in readiness for the next onslaught (Alvarez et al., 2016). If sufficient investment in and development of their first, vernacular and/or mother-tongue language or dialect and culture has occurred, resistance can lead to a student's outright rejection of dominant language and culture with concomitant behavioural and truanting issues and difficulties for them to achieve (Cummins, 2000).

The racism, racial marginalisation and the racial trauma that are perpetuated by practises of racial and linguistic exclusion and racial vilification have been shown globally to have negative long-term effects. These effects include sustained poverty, poor educational attainment, high suicide rates, social dysfunction including high crime rates, domestic violence, maladaptive and maladjusted behaviour and economic marginalisation (Dunbar & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2008). United Nations experts Dunbar and Skutnabb-Kangas (2008) have also found that language exclusion and monolingual dominant education result in poor 'maternity care, high infant mortality, undernourishment, dangerous work (for example, mines, logging, chemicals in agriculture) or unemployment, child labour, poor housing and health care'. That is, the racist macro-interactions endemic in the dominant society, reinforced in its educational institutions, perpetuate racial trauma in school settings resulting in deleterious long-term academic and well-being effects (Dunbar & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2008; Oldfield, 2016). These phenomena, in relation to monolingual dominant educational policy and school practises, were also all noted by remote adult interview participants in the PhD research by Oldfield (2016).

Solutions in schools

There are a number of approaches that can be used by teachers to address racial trauma in an educational space and thereby decolonise the learning environment. In the first instance, Alvarez et al. (2016) have pointed to the importance of identifying and addressing trauma induced and inducing behaviours among students in the classroom environment as well as recognising racism and racist experiences as causes of trauma. They have also recommended creating a safe classroom space where race-centred issues can be safely and comfortably explored, and also stress the necessity of for teachers to apply critical race reflection to their own teaching practice. This can include examining ethnocentric bias in appraisals of student behaviour and academic performance as well as reflecting on their own personal behaviour, which might be construed as insulting, demeaning or disrespectful and so represent a cause of classroom disruption (Alvarez et al., 2016). The USA National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2017, p. 5) also suggests the use of 'cultural references that resonate with your students', to be respectful and authentic, and to recognise and acknowledge the impacts of systematic and historical racism. In addition, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2017) suggests empowering students and developing strategies that allow students to deal with emotions raised by racial discussions and issues, for example, with the use of art, music, or time in a quiet place. Apart from these

strategies, however, a number of studies (see below) have noted how effectively racial trauma in Indigenous student populations can be mitigated through Indigenous language and culture. This is even more pronounced if a school engages in culturally responsive pedagogy as discussed later.

Indigenous language knowledge alone can account for high levels of enhanced well-being, with 98% of Indigenous respondents in an Australia-wide survey noting their 'self-esteem, pride and positive feelings' were connected to a knowledge of language and culture (Marmion, Obata, & Troy, 2014, p. 29). Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011) report also recorded far less substance abuse and suicide among Indigenous language speakers, while another study recorded higher educational attainment, employment levels and self-assessed health as a consequence of speaking an Indigenous language (Dockery, 2010). This is partly related to the fact that speaking an Indigenous language not only validates and elevates the status of Indigenous identity, it also forges intergenerational relationships, knowledge transfer and social values, and so provides a 'crucial intergenerational link' that acts as a 'conduit and a solid and stable foundation for identity formation for the coming generations' (Nicholls, 2005, p. 165). In fact, such language socialisation is integral to 'cognitive self-regulatory mechanisms' that ensure an individual has the 'ability to resist temptations, distractions, destructive high-risk situations as well as the facility for holding information and skills in working memory', according to Heath (2008, p. xii, in Wilkins, 2008). These impacts of Indigenous language on socio-economic and cognitive well-being were frequently recognised by remote NT Aboriginal interview participants, who identified the death of identity, social dysfunction, poor socialisation and language development, failure to develop academically and low employment as the consequences of Indigenous language and culture extinguishment in schools and classrooms (Oldfield, 2016).

By contrast, when Indigenous languages are used as a resource in the classroom and are viewed positively in school settings by being given equal status – and when the learning environment supports the addition of a dominant language rather than the loss or exclusion of a first or heritage language or dialect – positive academic, identity and well-being outcomes are more likely, according to Canadian language expert Jim Cummins (1996, p. 43). In other nations, the implementation of such language instructional programs in schools has led to substantial achievements, such as 100% Year 12 matriculation rates in Hawaii as well as substantially higher matriculation rates in New Zealand where heritage language bilingual programs were implemented (Luning & Yamauchi, 2010; May, Hill, & Tiakiwai, 2006; Wilson & Kamana, 2011).

Culturally responsive pedagogy

The most successful Indigenous language programs in schools, including those in New Zealand and Hawaii cited above, incorporate culturally responsive pedagogy or culturally sustaining pedagogy. Culturally responsive pedagogy involves a teacher identifying, being inclusive and responsive to a child's culture and cultural norms, and celebrating these in learning activities and classroom interactions (Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2014). This can involve, for instance, culturally specific discourses and interactions becoming accepted practices in the classroom in order for children to achieve higher academic levels (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally responsive pedagogy also involves setting high academic and behavioural standards, but without the enforcement of a power hierarchy (Bondy et al., 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2014).

While, culturally responsive pedagogy enhances student engagement because it attempts to promote cultural cognitive understandings, culturally *sustaining* pedagogy improves academic, well-being and engagement outcomes more significantly (Fogarty & Schwab, 2012; McCarty & Lee, 2014). In contrast to culturally responsive pedagogy, Indigenous culturally sustaining pedagogy emphasises place-based pedagogy where curricula, lesson creation and delivery are informed by the local 'on country' context; that is to say, lessons are conducted in the 'bush' or linked intimately to Aboriginal bush, culture and language knowledge and prior experience (Fogarty & Schwab, 2012). This approach recognises the deeper cognition that results with the linguistic and cultural engagement of students (Fogarty & Kraal, 2011; Oldfield & Willsher, 2017). For Indigenous students, there is an emphasis on experiential learning, community development and environmental guardianship through the use of the local environment, culture, language and local issues (Fogarty & Schwab, 2012; Preston, 2015). As such, there is a corresponding focus on the employment of local Indigenous teachers in the classroom. There is also an emphasis on Indigenous language, knowledge and culture in the curriculum (Devlin, Disbray, & Devlin, 2017; NT Department of Education, 1986; Oldfield & Willsher, 2017). The Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages in the Australian Curriculum, with its focus on culturally relevant topics of Country/Place, kinship and identity, can, in fact, form the basis learning across all or most subject areas. Thus, culturally sustaining pedagogy classrooms are able to use the cultural cognitive frames of students to form the foundation of all languages and learning activities, rather than using these only to achieve engagement and understanding.

In the USA, Indigenous culturally sustaining pedagogy is community directed and controlled (McCarty & Lee, 2014). In Australia, the most successful forms of this pedagogy developed during the pinnacle of bilingual education in the 1980s and 1990s in the NT. Although more limited in Australia than in the USA, community control was actually achieved to a degree through the appointment of local school boards and teaching staff in many very remote, 'Both Ways' bilingual schools (Devlin et al., 2017; Oldfield, 2016). These very remote areas that exist far from major towns and cities contain 24% of the 34,000 NT student public school population and 90% of their students are Aboriginal (NT Department of Education, 2018). 'Both Ways' bilingual schools are community directed to the extent that the community decides on the language(s) taught. Team teaching is practised so that non-Aboriginal teachers help to train Indigenous teachers in western methods of teaching in conjunction with formal institutional training, while Aboriginal teachers train non-Aboriginal teachers in local cultural knowledge and practice (Devlin et al., 2017; NT Department of Education, 1986; Oldfield, 2016). Culturally sustaining pedagogy in Hawaii, New Zealand and the USA generally involves immersion heritage language education that sees students immersed for a short period in the heritage language, after which the program becomes bilingual using a 50:50 model (May et al., 2006; McCarty & Lee, 2014). After the bilingual approach was introduced in the NT in 1973, it was predominantly used transitionally, with the first language initially used for the majority of instructional time before being gradually replaced with English, so that few schools were bilingual or providing biliteracy programs by the end of Year 6 (Devlin et al., 2017; Oldfield, 2016). It has only been in recent decades that high school curricula have been offered in primary schools for students of high school age living in very remote communities (since one of the consequences of

institutional racism is that there are no middle or high schools in very remote areas) (Fogarty, 2013). However, this offering is intermittent depending on government resources and policy and so usually few or no bilingual programs are offered in these years (Oldfield, 2016). Furthermore, teaching instruction invariably relies on text-based materials, given the lack of digital resources for most languages and poor resourcing and Internet service to remote area schools, although the creation of the Living Archive of Aboriginal Languages at Charles Darwin University has more recently resulted in the digitalisation of many decades' worth of Indigenous language resources and allowed the re-use of extant material in digital formats (please refer to Bow, Christie, and Devlin (2014) for more information).

While there has been little research into the success of such bilingual programs in very remote areas, small-scale studies at various locations suggest that their impacts range from being negligible to moderately significant (refer to Devlin et al. (2017) and Oldfield (2016) for a detailed account of this research). These outcomes can be influenced by poor execution of bilingual programs due to lack of resourcing, a lack of professional development of teaching staff, and interference from department staff (Devlin et al., 2017; Hoogenraad, 2001; Oldfield, 2016). Currently, the transitional model of bilingual education is fundamentally a subtractive one – it has the aim of dominant language development at the expense of a first language (Cummins, 2000). Yet, well-implemented and resourced bilingual culturally sustaining programs can achieve considerable success.

Lewthwaite et al. (2015), working with remote community members, found in their qualitative research study that part of the success of culturally responsive schools was a consequence of teachers' empathy, teachers' abilities to redress inequalities, recognition for Indigenous students' capabilities, as well as teachers' capacity for respectful, warm interactions with students and the use of Indigenous languages and cultures as the foundation of learning. Lewthwaite et al. (2015) also established the importance of explicit teaching of the differences between home and mainstream cultures and languages. These factors which contributed to greater academic success and well-being are magnified in culturally sustaining settings which privilege 'Aboriginal distinct cultural ways of knowing, being and doing' (Daniels-Mayes, 2016, p. 45). For example, recent evaluations of an NT Arnhem Land cognitive linguistics project involving Indigenous language teachers, called 'Strong Literacy and Numeracy in Communities – Numeracy Component', show assessment results in mathematics in some areas at comparably much higher levels (Wilkinson & Bradbury, 2013). In Western Australia, linguist Ian Malcolm (2003) noted the enhanced well-being, identity and academic impacts of culturally sustaining pedagogy and bilingual education for Indigenous students learning English as a second language and English as a foreign language as a consequence of their ability to 'reconstruct' themselves as Indigenous language achievers, as opposed to English language failures. Similarly, Oldfield (2016), in her PhD research, not only observed the appreciably enhanced NAPLAN scores of a bilingual remote Indigenous school in comparison to a monolingual English school, but also noted the enhanced resilience of its Indigenous students. This was aided by students' preference for and acceptance of English language teachers in the bilingual school, as opposed to their resistance to and rejection of such teachers in the monolingual English school context (Oldfield, 2016). In addition, Oldfield identified a greater acceptance rather than rejection of an English language identity in the bilingual school environment. Her study also found that

English was more likely to be spoken in different areas of an Indigenous language-speaking community that had a bilingual school, whereas a community which offered only monolingual English instruction was more likely to have restrictive use of English, confining English chiefly to the school classroom when students were speaking to an English-speaking teacher (Oldfield, 2016). Culturally sustaining pedagogy can therefore be said to not only mitigate the effects of racial trauma in the wider society but also overcome the racist limitations which exist in the school system that prevent Indigenous progress in attendance, engagement, second language acquisition, academic outcomes and well-being. According to the Indigenous academic Sheelagh Daniels-Mayes (2016, p. 238), culturally sustaining pedagogy can, in fact, afford 'transforming possibilities' with its serious disruption of the 'assimilating and dispossessing spaces' of schools and repurposing of education, so that it services the future educational, well-being and socio-economic needs of Aboriginal students and their communities.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted both the need to examine the endemic issue of racial trauma experienced by Aboriginal children as a consequence of institutionalised racism, and the ways this issue can be successfully addressed in schools. It has outlined how Aboriginal people – adults and children – across Australia are consistently being exposed to racism and consequently suffering extreme levels of racial trauma, the effects of which are akin to those of post-traumatic stress disorder. Schools represent one of the most pervasive sites of racial trauma for Indigenous children with devastating long-term consequences resulting from Indigenous invisibility and institutional and education policy renderings of Aboriginal children as deficient. However, schools, through culturally responsive pedagogy or culturally sustaining pedagogy, can also be sites of transformation and mitigate the wider societal effects of racism if Indigenous languages and culture form the basis of pedagogy and curriculum. By repurposing education to cater for Aboriginal children and their communities, culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally sustaining pedagogy can afford opportunities for Indigenous children to further develop both their own Indigenous language and culture, achieve higher levels of resilience, well-being, higher socio-economic status, higher English acquisition and better academic outcomes. These forms of pedagogy can also help Indigenous students resist the deleterious effects of racism and the trauma that it generates.

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Notes

1 This was an Australian Federal Government set of reforms that included the suspension of human rights legislation for NT Indigenous Australians, forced income management (which resulted in lost government payments as well as remote Indigenous community members unable to access their welfare allocations for food and essential items) and the forcible acquisition of Indigenous assets, housing and land in response to allegations of child abuse in remote communities.

2 Settler colonialism occurs with the mass migration of colonising populations. It is characterised by violence, exploitation, displacement and dispossession of Indigenous people but a notable 'absence' of Indigeneity in national identity (Barker, 2012; Veracinic, 2007). The consumption of 'place' by the coloniser also results in the mass extinction and endangerment of traditional Indigenous languages, culture and identity (Mufwene, 2002).

3 The critical discourse analysis used was the Historical Discourse Approach of Reisigl and Wodak (2009). Designed to ascertain the power relationships in policy text, it examines policy for legitimation, representation and coercion strategies in terms of a set of discursive tools (argumentation, framing, intensification, mitigation, nominalisation) that are realised in linguistic realisations through tropes, modality, grammar, pronouns, lexical choice and suppositions (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). This thesis also used ethnographic case study and content analysis related to remote Indigenous community views where 52 caregivers, elders and children were interviewed in 2014 in two remote communities to unveil a pattern of governance that involved victimisation, injustice and inequality. For more information, please refer to Oldfield (2016).

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