

I am a non-Aboriginal Australian who has been teaching for a number of years now a mandatory NSW government subject on Aboriginal Education for pre-service school-teachers. It has become increasingly clear to me that without some measure of shared sovereignty with Aboriginal peoples, all attempts at reconciliation, or at closing the gap in educational and health outcomes, not to mention reducing incarceration rates, will fail. A Voice to Parliament protected in the Australian Constitution constitutes a first step towards realizing this vision of shared sovereignty and self-determination.

The NSW Department of Education's Aboriginal Education Policy (AEP, 2008) is overwhelmingly dedicated to processes of cultural inclusion but never once addresses the issue of racism and its debilitating effects, despite being advised to do so by the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) in 2004. With this critical omission, the AEP (2008) falls short of truth telling, seemingly convinced that an emphasis on cultural inclusion will of itself overcome any past or present problems of racial injustice. This failure, I submit, is at once the reason for the failure of one of the AEP's key strategies, namely, that it 'is committed to collaborative decision-making with Aboriginal peoples, parents, caregivers, families and their communities'. This commitment was also part of an earlier, 1996 version of the policy. The 2008 version recognizes the failure of this strategy for improving Aboriginal educational outcomes by introducing a further strategy concerning the need for teachers to become culturally competent in their engagement with Aboriginal students and their community. The NSW Board of Studies document, *Working with Aboriginal Communities* (2008) refers to this strategy in terms of a learning partnership, a partnership that concerns consultation with local Aboriginal communities on matters of language, sensitivities and protocols. Learning partnerships, however, are quite different from decision-making partnerships, where there is promise of some measure of self-determination. Ongoing difficulties in bringing about decision-making partnerships seemingly prompted the NSW DET to then release what it called a *Connected Communities Strategy* in 2011, where, amongst other matters, a regional principal would be appointed to ensure decision-making partnerships

between the DET and local Aboriginal communities. The interim and final reports concerning this process are inconclusive at best. There is ongoing failure.

Not until a Voice to Parliament or some measure of shared sovereignty is recognized in the Australian Constitution will this problem begin to be resolved. Cultural inclusion, through learning partnerships where teachers' cultural competency is developed, is not enough to overcome the inter-generational trauma of personal and institutional racism. Aboriginal peoples will only begin to feel fully respected, recognized, or culturally included once non-Aboriginal peoples assent to their right to sovereignty.

Colin Hearfield.