'*We make no discrimination':* Aboriginal children and the socio-spatial arrangements of the 1960s Australian classroom[1]

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School space shapes pedagogical practice and student identities, yet how this happens has culturally differentiated significance and effects. This chapter develops a case for seeing school classrooms as racialised spaces, and does so by considering the aims and provision of education for Indigenous children in 1960s Australia. Widespread educational reforms were underway in Australia during this period, with rapid expansion in the building of state secondary and technical schools (Campbell and Proctor 2014; Minister of Education 1968) and renewed interest in progressive and child-centred education (Potts 2007; McLeod 2014). Both old and new progressive ideas were gaining ground concerning the freedom of the child, the space and openness of school environments and the role of pedagogies to foster self-discovery (Punch 1969). The 1960s was also a period during which the federal and state-level policy of assimilation of Aboriginal people, in place from the 1930s, was officially enacted via a number of legislative and constitutional changes (Attwood and Markus 2007; McGregor 2011). Following a period of political agitation, other changes included giving Aboriginal people the right to vote federally and counting them in the national census. This happened alongside the continued forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families into state care or adoptive white families (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) 1997; Haebich 2008), where they were to be assimilated into white domestic and social cultures.

School facilities, buildings and pedagogies were crucial in both mediating and contesting assimilationist projects, with the school environment reflecting and mobilising ideas about the type of education deemed appropriate for Aboriginal children. Edward de Soja has argued that 'there is a growing awareness of the simultaneity and interwoven complexity of the social the historical and the spatial, their inseparability and interdependence' (Soja, 1996: 3). In the case of Indigenous education, however, acknowledging the 'influence of space' is not simply a corrective to an alleged over-reliance on temporality in understanding schooling. The form and impact of socio-spatial dynamics are enmeshed with the history and effects of colonization. The inside and outside of classrooms, the spatial, rhetorical and material arrangements of curriculum and pedagogy, were critical factors, we suggest, in deliberations on whether or how to recognise Aboriginal children as a

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distinct category of students. In this chapter, we seek to draw out the racialised and colonizing dimensions of school space, and in doing so contribute to cultural histories of school design and environments in Australia.

The sources for analysis are published debates among teachers and educators across Australia in the 1960s (Gunton 1964; Tatz and Dunn 1969; Roper 1969) regarding how best to educate Aboriginal children, and reports from School Inspectors' annual visits to schools in the state of Victoria. Teacher-led conferences conveyed strong criticisms of how the education of Aboriginal children was being managed by the various states, and many participants presented outspoken challenges to assimilationist thinking. While not always of the same voice, there was, especially among those with direct experience of working in Aboriginal schools, an openness to incorporating Aboriginal culture and language into schooling, practical suggestions for teaching strategies as well as some recognition of the ways in which the classroom and school environment itself could in fact serve to alienate Aboriginal children and families. This contrasts with the predominantly pro-assimilationist views towards the education of Aboriginal children as expressed in reports discussed here from School Inspectors in the Victorian Department of Education. These reports reveal how assimilationist agendas were incorporated into judgements of the proper classroom, good pedagogy and the ideal student. In such texts, we argue, the racialization of the classroom emerges in attempts both to not notice and to remediate difference through adoption of the cultural and domestic practices of white Australia.

Before turning to develop these arguments, we provide, first, a summary account of current scholarship on space and schooling and its relevance to our concerns regarding the racialization of school space, and second, a brief contextual discussion of twentieth century race relations in Australia as background to educational debates in the 1960s.

Space, colonialism, schools

A flourishing scholarship has investigated how school design and spatial arrangements reflect understandings of the purposes of education, changing relations between schools and communities and conceptions of the child and adolescent (Kozlovsky 2010). Both historical and sociological studies of education have been influenced by the 'spatial turn' (e.g. Massey 1994; McGregor 2004; Paechter 2004), with growing attention to the ways in which 'space, power and knowledge' intersect in the domain of education (e.g. Burke 2010; Gutman and De Coninck-Smith 2008). School buildings, Burke and Grosvenor argue, 'should not be viewed merely as capsules in which education is located and teachers and pupils perform, but

also as designed spaces that, in their materiality, project a system of values' (Burke and Grosvenor 2008: 8). Such work encompasses a focus on the material culture of schooling, which is 'taken to include the landscapes, buildings, rooms, furnishings, clothes, toys and many other objects and things that children [and all students] wear and use' (Gutman and de Coninck-Smith: 3). Herman *et al.*'s (Herman *et al.* 2011) study of the school desk illustrates how what are often un-noticed classroom objects, such as chairs, desks, or blackboards and whiteboards, are in fact integral to the history of schooling and are usefully understood as the 'materialisation' of school culture (p. 98). Other work has given close attention to the affective dynamics of classroom objects and to the kind of normative student subjectivities and dispositions the spatial dynamics of schooling invites and makes possible (Rasmussen 2012; McLeod 2014). Accompanying this is an interest in rethinking the spatial boundaries of schooling in light of the impact of 'new mobilities' (Leander, Phillips, and Taylor 2010). Leander *at al*. (2010: 329) argue that the idea of the 'classroom-as-container' remains a dominant discourse, even in educational discussions that seek to take account of space and place. This discourse 'constructs not only particular ways of speaking and writing in educational research, but also systems of rules concerning how meaning is made', functioning as an '"imagined geography" of education, constituting when and where researchers and teachers should expect learning to take place'. This chapter introduces additional questions regarding the 'imagined geography' of education, ones that underscore the racialization of school space, and draw out the multiple resonances of 'geographies of education' to encompass the very land on which schools have been imagined, built, designed, inhabited and renovated under sway of any manner of pedagogical innovations.

Recent postcolonial scholarship has questioned understandings of the arrangement of spaces – and the bodies within them – as having emerged naturally over time, exploring the ways in which the 'the development of space is a process of uneven power inscription that reproduces itself in the creation of oppressive spatial categories' (Banivanua-Mar and Edmonds 2010; see too Razack 1998; Wolfe 2001). Much of this scholarship has focussed on the mapping of settler space onto and over the top of Indigenous lands during early periods of colonialism (see notes 13-19, Banivanua-Mar and Edmonds 2010). We propose that such arguments regarding space and power are also relevant to understanding the socio-spatial organisation of schooling and pedagogies for Aboriginal children into the twentieth century. Such matters underwrote, for example, contestations over the merits and rationale for segregated or integrated schooling – all of which were materialised or silenced in the form and aspirations of school design.

Policies of Aboriginal assimilation in Australia were put in place by state governments, which were responsible for their Indigenous populations (as was education policy), on an ad hoc basis around the

turn of the twentieth century. These policies were predicated on the social-Darwinist idea that Aboriginal people of full descent were destined to die out in the face of the superior European civilization (Anderson 2003; McGregor 1997; Wolfe 2001). The growing population of mixed-descent Indigenous people, a cause of concern for state governments, were forcibly removed from the stations and reserves, and had welfare support removed in the hope that they would blend into the white population (*Aboriginal Welfare* 1937: 3). At the same time, Aboriginal people living under the various Acts had their movements, working prospects, living arrangements and even marriage rights controlled by the state. The forced removal of Aboriginal people from the missions and reserves which had, for many, been their only home, did not lead to their absorption into white society, due to discrimination and lack of opportunity. Many Aboriginal people thus ended up living in fringe camps on the outskirts of towns and cities (Broome 1994; McGregor 1997). In order to further facilitate the assimilation of Aboriginal people into the community, a number of states also removed children of mixed descent from their families and put them either into institutional care or adopted them out to white families (HREOC 1997). The responsibility for Aboriginal affairs passed to the Commonwealth following a constitutional referendum in 1967 (Attwood and Markus 2011).

Political protests during the 1960s era of civil rights cast a critical light on these discriminatory practices and brought into the foreground issues about educational and social possibilities for Aboriginal children, under models of either assimilationist or segregated schooling. Herbert (Herbert 2012) describes the history of Aboriginal education in terms of dynamics between 'centre-periphery', with Aboriginal people deliberately positioned on the periphery, which she argues 'not only rendered people powerless but, the resolute retention of such systemic positioning until well into the 1970s, sustained perhaps even institutionalised such powerlessness' (p.94). Moreover, she argues that although the 1960s saw changes in legal status and government involvement and financial commitment to Aborigines, 'little seemed to be happening in education for this was the era of the deficit model, where excuses such as lack of English language, cultural deprivation, poor health and low self-esteem' (p.97) were offered as explanations and causes of educational disadvantage. Although by the mid-1960s, most Aboriginal children of primary school age were attending school, the participation rate dropped drastically for secondary school. A survey by the New South Wales Teachers' Federation in 1964 found that 'only 9 per cent of Aboriginal children proceeded beyond second-year secondary school and over 58 per cent were rated as slow learners' (Duncan 1969: 30). Speaking on the situation in Queensland, at a conference on Aboriginal education in 1967, Joe McGinness, of Kungarakany descent and a founding member of the Board of the Centre for Research into Aboriginal Affairs at Monash University, suggested that 'Till very recently, the official attitude was that a standard education for a nine-year-old child was sufficient for

an Aborigine or Islander to see him through life'. (McGinness in Tatz and Dunn 1969: 52). He suggested that 'it would be safe to say that less than one in every hundred Aboriginal or Islander children [in Queensland]… was receiving secondary education' (p.51). At the same conference in 1967, Mr P.E Felton, Superintendent Aborigines Welfare Board, estimated that in Victoria there were then approximately 750 Aboriginal children of school age, with 500 in primary and 250 in secondary schools (P.E. Felton in Tatz and Dunn 1969:8).

Questions about the capacity and dispositions of Aboriginal children as learners and their sameness or difference from white peers fuelled discussions about the type of school environments that should be provided. At the same time, education was held up as providing important opportunities to orient Aboriginal children towards culturally dominant (white) norms. The status, potential for educability and future of Aboriginal children were all at stake, closely managed and monitored by the state, with education a central agency in mediating assimilationist policies and aspirations. To develop this proposition, we look in two directions: first to reports from conferences of educators and teachers held during the 1960s that debated and commonly repudiated education's role in assimilation; and second to reports of school inspectors from their visits to schools located within Aboriginal settlements or nearby Aboriginal communities. In the latter we see not simply the endorsement of assimilation projects but the active normalization of a particular kind of domesticity and family life in and beyond the classroom – one that held up the classroom and the school as spaces for modeling desirable forms of family and social life.

***Insert figure**: Poster of Aboriginal and white children*

On noticing and not noticing the Aboriginal child in 1960s schooling

While each state (apart from Tasmania) had some 'special' Aboriginal schools on stations and missions, from the 1950s Education Departments began closing Aboriginal schools where there was a nearby 'normal' or mainstream school to absorb the pupils (and where there was no resistance or protest from the white community; see Fletcher 1989). In line with assimilationist policies, state Departments of Education did not keep separate statistics on Aboriginal children at these schools, one presumes because statistics serve to mark out and re-inscribe difference, which officially was meant to be receding. As a senior bureaucrat in the Victorian Education Department stated, in response to a request for statistical information on Aboriginal enrolments, 'we make no discrimination or segregation of pupils. Aboriginal children receive the same educational treatment as all other pupils. … We tend to avoid thinking of them as a separate group' (Tatz and Dunn 1969:

3). Insisting on not seeing Aboriginal children as a separate group and providing 'the same educational treatment' represents a form of 'progressive' thinking that does not hold onto racial hierarchies, yet it is also a telling instance of how 'sameness' discourse is mistaken for a politics of equality, as if difference is antithetical to equality (see famously Joan Scott's (1990) deconstruction of the equality/difference opposition in feminist politics). Questions about the value and purpose of differentiating the student population troubled educators and bureaucrats alike, and not only in relation to Aboriginal pupils. On the one hand, such differentiation and recognition of specific group needs and interests can be seen as another kind of progressive response, a way of acknowledging identity claims (for example of girls, or the migrant child). On the other hand, recognition of some groups was framed in the language of deficit (as Herbert notes above) and deprivation, naming 'backward children' or culturally deprived children as warranting being singled out for special intervention, and as beyond the possibility of being included in 'sameness' discourses. In its 1968 annual report, the Victorian Department of Education described efforts to educate those they termed 'backward children', a category which included '"mentally handicapped" children' as well as a group of children who are 'socially handicapped or have suffered cultural deprivation. … Many of the culturally deprived are aborigines to whom special attention is given by the provision of carefully chosen teachers at Lake Tyers' (a school in East Gippsland and the site of a former mission (Minister of Education 1968: 12). Much educational debate thus pivoted on the status and recognition of the Aboriginal child as inherently different or potentially the same, with schools having a pivotal role in mediating these issues in and beyond the classroom.

In proceedings from teacher's conferences during this period, we see struggles over how and whether to name and recognize difference, without collapsing into deficit accounts, or refusing the politics of equality (construed as a politics of sameness) or ignoring the impact of historical legacies of race relations and dispossession. In this politically and affectively charged context, how might the social-spatial arrangements of schooling accommodate and recognize, or refuse to recognize Aboriginal pupils? At a conference on the role of the teacher in Aboriginal education organized by the National Australian Union Australian University Students, a strongly expressed position was that mainstream school curriculum did not provide space for Aboriginal cultural values and learning systems, and that the school culture was un-self-consciously white and western-oriented. One presenter, G.W.L McMeekin (Lecturer, Australian School of Pacific Administration, Sydney) observed that attempts to assimilate Aboriginal children served to underscore their difference and separation from 'White Australia':

> Our schools have an inbuilt value system that is essentially "White Australian" in its

> orientation. Within the school we have provided a place for the Aboriginal child, but does the school really admit such a child to the fullest participation? It demands of him a cultural conformity to standards that he cannot meet, activities that are wholly out of context in his life, experiences to which he cannot respond. The school can easily become not the means of involving the child in the wider Australian community but an effective means of accentuating the differences that mark off the Aborigine from the dominant socio-cultural group. (McMeekin 1969: 24)

A number of mission or reserve schools had predominantly or entirely Aboriginal students, and the curriculum was usually based on the mainstream curriculum, with some adaptation. In a report from a 1964 'in-service' conference for (non-Indigenous) teachers working in Aboriginal schools in South Australia, J.D. Gunton, Assistant Superintendent of Primary Schools (Special Schools), observed that '[O]ne test of modern civilisation is the thought and care given to its members who are handicapped in any way (mentally, physically, colour of skin etc.' (Gunton 1964: 15), articulating the language of deprivation as expressed in the Victorian annual reports noted above. On one hand, the conference aims were expressed in a progressive language of attending to 'Communication, Curricula, Community', (p.8) and on the other, it rehearsed a familiar racial paternalism towards Aboriginal children and their capacities. Presentations at this conference included 'Reading Retardation among Half-Caste Children and its Treatment', the removal of grading and an emphasis in the curriculum on creative arts – music, painting, oral communication– and 'outdoor activities'. Attention to these areas of schooling and to customising the standard curriculum (no testing, for example) suggested that the education of Aboriginal children lay properly outside the boundaries and functions of the regular classroom. In particular, teaching approaches had to be adapted to teach the basics such as literacy (e.g. Roper 1969), and there was some interest in the value of teaching in the 'vernacular' (that is, teaching Aboriginal languages), a view at odds with the policy of Departments of Education, which mainly insisted on instruction in English throughout school (Tatz and Dunn 1969: 34). Miss. S.B. Hill from Ernabella School in South Australia reported that in her experience of teaching Aboriginal children, teaching in the vernacular 'helps to retain their culture and gives a foundation on which to build. A respect for their culture is encouraged' (S.B. Hill quoted in Gunton 1964: 26).

Similar themes were echoed in a 1967 conference on the role of the teacher in Aboriginal Education, convened by the National Union of Australian University Students. In his introduction to the published proceedings, conference organizer Tom Roper observed that: 'Where the people were primarily tribally oriented it was emphasized that part of any programme should have major sections

on the Aborigine's own culture and elders should be involved. All Aboriginal people should have special sections on their own history and culture to enable them to have feelings, not of guilt or inadequacy but pride and self-respect' (Roper 1969: vi-vii). Questions about how and under what circumstances to recognize difference – when to value, minimize or ignore – also arose in relation to deliberations on whether there was a need for special facilities, provision and settings. This encompassed customized school buildings as well as initiatives such as scholarships to support Aboriginal children to attend secondary school and extending the provision of pre-school education.

At the 1967 Monash conference, a presenter from South Australia noted that 'A quite extensive building programme has been undertaken, including new schools, residences for head teachers, showering facilities for children, a kitchen-dining room, a woodwork room and a "home management" unit in which older girls can be taught the rudiments of modern house-keeping' (Tatz and Dunn 1969: 34). The anticipated and already circumscribed destinies of Aboriginal children are materialised in the type of classroom spaces specially provided for them: manual training and domestic arts. The special facilities – kitchen-dining room, showering facilities – in elevating cleanliness and domesticity, convey concerns about their absence in Aboriginal families, and show how the school room itself was positioned as a model for home and family life. Provision of such special facilities was questioned by others, such as A. P. Duncan, a lecturer in Adult Education at Sydney University, who saw them as damaging 'the self-concept of the Aborigine himself as a person and further strengthens his feelings of his inadequacy, his dependence and lack of self-confidence' (p.29). This view was challenged in the following discussion by another participant, Dr Colin Tatz, who argued that because Aboriginal people were not in an equal position, then 'programmes of discrimination in favour of Aboriginal people were necessary' (p.35), and that this might encompass special facilities and arrangements as part of a more affirmative (rather than assimilationist) agenda. We see in these debates among educators, then, a critique of assimilation as well as some uncertainty about what a progressive politics might look like in relation to how to recognize and name difference, in political and ethical terms and in the practical matter of how to organize schooling.

Figure: Poster: Education is the Key

These concerns extended to the structure of school buildings for Aboriginal children and the appropriateness of their design and layout. Tatz, a White South African now living in Australia, was a political scientist, a member of the Aboriginal Welfare Board in Victoria, and a vocal contributor to conferences and public debates on Aboriginal rights and race relations. Tatz condemned the symbolic violence of school buildings constructed for Aboriginal people, and in so doing brought

into view the perspective of Aboriginal parents and families, not as the source of their children's cultural backwardness but as communities concerned about their cultural traditions – their 'tribal mores and values'. Such criticisms expressed an acknowledgement of cultural difference, not necessarily as a deficit to be remediated but as a difference to be recognized, valued and accommodated. He argued that:

> The model for every Aboriginal school is the standard metropolitan or country town school with the same size classrooms, blackboards, and window sizes. Some times lip service is paid to an arid zone by building from some sort of brick material which is supposed to be heat-proof. One of the things that is very clear in the minds of Aborigines, particularly in northern reserves and Settlements, is that white men are simply collecting their children together early in the morning and the children are disappearing into this dreadful prison-like building for about seven or eight hours and the Lord alone knows what kind of indoctrination is going on there. The parents may well be rubbishing everything that takes place in that school during the day. If the school were held out in the open in such a way that the parents could sit around on the periphery and listen to what is going on so that they could see that there is no subversion of tribal mores and values' (Tatz and Dunn 1969: 86–7).

Here the conventional school building is lambasted not only for its inappropriateness for Aboriginal children but also its restrictions for all students. The idea of the school as part of the community, as having a more open orientation and design, echoed discussions about alternative education taking place around the same time. The embrace of the 'open plan' classroom, an interest in community-based schooling, respect for the culture and knowledge children bring from home – these were strong emerging themes in the mainstream education of white Australian children. Yet, as Tatz's comments above suggest, they were far from commonplace in the imagination and design of school environments for Aboriginal children. The provision and design of schooling to accommodate Aboriginal children drew on the language of 'special schools' (as in the language noted above of catering for 'backward' or 'handicapped' children) and on missions and reserves imitated a somewhat older style model of school environment, an almost nostalgic school house; yet it was a classroom that was being radically reimagined and redesigned in other spheres of state education. Images of what classrooms and schoolhouses for Aboriginal children should look like are evoked in reports from School Inspectors, which we now turn to consider.

Figure 2. School Building Lake Tyers, 1938 [old school house]

Inspecting the organization of schooling: designing a 'pleasant learning environment'

Throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s inspectors in Victoria continued to made regular annual visits to all state schools, observing classrooms and teachers, documenting the atmosphere and physical environment of the school, evaluating teacher's lesson planning and conduct in the classroom, liveliness of classes, the perceived learning and achievement of pupils and the tone and activities of the school in general. While these reports represented a form of surveillance of teachers' work, they also provided rich documentation about what a good classroom was deemed to be at a particular time and place – how it should be arranged, how children should be behaving and what they ought to be learning. Inspectors' reports thus offer powerful insight into prevailing norms of students as learners and the pedagogic organisation of school space. In the case of the education of Aboriginal children in the 1960s, the reports also show how assimilationist agendas were incorporated into judgements of the proper classroom, good pedagogy and the ideal student. In such texts, we argue, the racialization of the classroom emerges in attempts both not to notice, and then to remediate difference through adoption of the cultural and domestic practices of white Australia. Here we consider reports from Inspector's visits to two schools – Club Terrace in rural Victoria (Gippsland), which had a significant population of Aboriginal children, located in a mill town just over an hour from Lake Tyers Aboriginal Mission (Roper 1969: 8); and a school located on the former Aboriginal reserve of Framlingham in south-west Victoria ('School Records: Framlingham Settlement (Primary School No. 4532); Also Known as Framlingham Aboriginal Settlement 1934-1967').

Inspectors commented on aspects of the curriculum, such as reading, composition, spelling, speech and arithmetic, but what is of particular interest here is their reporting on the classroom set up, facilities and equipment. This included detailed notes on the condition of desks and chairs, light and ventilation, decoration and blackboard use, as well as approving acknowledgement when, for example, a teacher showed awareness of the importance of 'a pleasant learning environment' ('Club Terrace Inspectors Report Book 1954–1974', VPRS 9332/P/0001, Unit 1; 17–18 June 1968). In 1968 the Inspector for the Gippsland area of Victoria, reporting on the Club Terrace primary school, wrote that 'the two classrooms provide sufficient accommodation for the present enrolment. Both rooms are very attractively decorated, with child art, selections of compositions, Health and Nature charts and blackboard preparations of a very fine standard. The environment is thus highly suitable for learning and children are responding as well as can be expected' (17–18 June 1968). The school enrolment reflected the

town population, which was a mix of Aboriginal and white, often transient (due to the need to follow mill work) and socio-economically disadvantaged. The inspector's comments on children learning as 'well as can be expected' suggests race- and class-based judgements of the normative pupil and the idea of the school classroom as compensating for deprivation and educational backwardness.

A few years earlier an inspector had advised that the head teacher was 'to be commended on placing emphasis on the important needs of this school, i.e. the restoration of tone, discipline, pupil–teacher co-operation and the development of good personal and social habits' ('Club Terrace Inspectors Report Book', 27 November 1957). Reporting on the same school, an inspector commented in 1971 that, 'The problem of successfully stimulating children with a deprived cultural background and fostering a desire to learn still emerges as the greatest difficulty confronting teachers' (20 October 1971). The idea of inciting a desire to learn echoed through inspectors' reports, with lack of desire constructed as an object of pedagogical repair, which could be achieved by being in the right learning environment. Moreover, a desire for learning (or the potential for the realization of desire) and the display and enactment of discernment were crucial markers in determining Aboriginal children's educability and their capacity for assimilation. This is evident in the frequent emphasis on the aesthetic and orderly arrangement of the classroom. 'The development in children of a pride in achievement and in their school should be the aim. This could be developed by making children aware of their role in ensuring a pleasant learning environment and gaining their cooperation in the maintenance of both classroom and grounds which are in an untidy state' (20 October 1971).

Repeated attention was given to the intrinsic educational value of floral arrangements and visual decorations, along with the uplifting effect of cultivated gardens. This was particularly striking in the annual reports of Inspectors to Framlingham. From the first inspector's report in 1934 (5 October 1934), the school was described as 'enfenced'; 'large trees supply ample shade and shelter', clearly demarcating the stylized cultivation of the school environment and its visible separation from the surrounding community. 'Desks should be arranged differently to allow ready access to pupils, desk tops need to be cleaned and coloured, and pictures are necessary to make the room more attractive', one inspector opined. The pedagogic effect of a designed school garden was held to be very important, with the Inspector in 1936 observing that 'The small lawns and garden beds make an attractive approach and the aim is to encourage similar improvements in the homes'…' (31 July 1936). Similar themes echoed inspectors' reports throughout the 1960s. In 1963, Inspector Emerson happily noted on his annual visit to

Framlingham that:

> The school entrance and surrounds have been transformed by the establishment of well-kept and colourful garden beds. A newly established vegetable garden is also making very good progress. Although of comparatively recent origin, the School Committee has developed a basketball court. Septic closets have been installed and garden seats have been purchased. Ground and pavilion are tidy, water is satisfactory and a new jungle gymnasium has been erected as a result of School Committee interest.' (3 October 1963)

The exhortations and praise for orderly and contained horticulture is in one sense a celebration of the domestication or even taming of the natural environment. In relation to Aboriginal school environments, however, such exhortations could also suggest attempts to ward against perceived impulses towards a traditional way of life, of living in the uncultivated natural environment, a mode of living that would threaten the assimilationist project of education. The Inspector similarly commended the evident attention to the appearance of the room, reflecting orderliness and discernment: 'Building: Close attention is paid to maintenance duties, and room appearance is enhanced by good prints, curtains, and tidy storage. Monitors could be encouraged to keep an impressive array of sporting trophies bright and shining. Furniture is well preserved' (23 July 1959). Instilling a desire for pride and encouraging obedient and docile bodies became evidence not of dull passivity but of educability. In this respect, children taking an active role, such as becoming a class monitor, was seen as an important step. It demonstrated capacities for responsibility but it can also be seen as a kind of complicity in the teacherly and pedagogical aspects of assimilation.

It is important to acknowledge, yet not possible to elaborate here, that school inspector reports from visits to mainstream schools reveal a similar pre-occupation with floral arrangements, paintings, and the cleanliness and comportment of the classroom (see, for instance, the Inspectors Report Book for Glengarry West Primary School in western Victoria, VPRS 9351/P/0001, Unit 2, 9 December 1963; 30 July 1964). Yet, such attention has a different resonance and consequence in relation to the schooling of Aboriginal children, where the school's disciplining influence required scrupulous attention to documenting evidence of pupil capacities, not only in the basics of curriculum but also in the manners of life. Demonstrating a keenness of eye for everyday aesthetics was evidence of educability and of capacities that could be cultivated in the service of assimilation. The focus on conventional forms and objects of classroom propriety – manners, floral arrangements, gardens, simple domestic symbols – was a reminder of difference, while also representing a set of pedagogical techniques to remediate such difference. Attention to these matters also underscores how classroom objects and spatial arrangements can be seen as the materialisation

of cultural values and broader political projects (Herman *et al.* 2011). Training students to recognise the aesthetic and uplifting value of the floral design or the orderly cultivated garden was part of the pedagogical project of assimilation, and learning these cultural dispositions as motifs of a normative (non-Aboriginal) way of life was arguably as important as work-book diligence.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have examined discourses on the provision of education and organisation of school environments for Aboriginal children in the 1960s, and argued that the classroom itself can be understood as a racialised space. Education was crucial in the project of assimilation and we have canvassed some of the contestations over how school curriculum and classroom arrangements should respond to the politics of race and the education of Aboriginal children. As a backdrop to these arguments, we noted that the 1960s was a period of significant educational change as well as political activity and legislative reform in relation to the formal status of Aboriginal people – even so, assimilationist practices and attitudes continued. The type of education provided to Aboriginal children was thus a topic of considerable national importance, with more educators and teachers taking an interest, in both Aboriginal children entering mainstream schools and the role of non-Indigenous teachers in Aboriginal settings.

Debates among teachers and educators reveal fissures and fractures in assimilationist agendas as well as some uncertainty regarding how to negotiate and accommodate difference: that is, when to notice and not notice Aboriginal children. A key dilemma, articulated across diverse forums, was whether or how to recognise Aboriginal children as a distinct category of students: was noticing Aboriginal children as different a form of hierarchical racial discourse, an acknowledgement of the failed or doomed project of assimilation, or respectful recognition of (unassimilable) cultural difference? Discussions regarding the provision of special educational facilities and buildings for Aboriginal children revealed some of these tensions. In conferences dedicated to discussing Aboriginal education, we see a largely – but not entirely – critical view of then current educational and assimilationist agendas in relation to schooling provision for Aboriginal children. The physical environments and curriculum of schools were topics of concern but, at the same time, proposals for special facilities – dining rooms, craft rooms, outdoor activities – underscored the differentiated futures anticipated for Aboriginal children, registering that their education did not easily belong in the spaces of regular, mainstream classrooms. In contrast, other educational discussions, such as the reports of school inspectors, reveal a concerted effort precisely to make Aboriginal children fit in to the spaces, norms and modes of conduct associated with the arrangements of conventional class rooms. We have analysed the importance the school inspectors attached to the aesthetic and orderly

aspects of classroom design, which we argue were cast as vital in the pedagogic mission of cultivating the proper sensibilities and conduct of Aboriginal children and their assimilation into mainstream, white, Australian society.

Overall, we have shown how the socio-spatial arrangements of schooling, including the seemingly ordinary objects of classrooms and the pedagogic work of cultivating pupil taste and comportment, are not only interconnected but form part of the processes by which classroom space is racialised and, as such, affectively charged and cut across with desires and aspirations to notice and not notice difference. In this way, the classroom is never simply a space of learning but also and always a space of learning to become a particular type of person. Finally, in the case of Aboriginal education, no matter how school buildings are designed and arranged, they are erected on colonised lands, and the repeated focus on the cultivation of domestic gardens, the ordinary 'pleasant' aesthetic of classroom settings, all these seemingly benign expressions of a caring pedagogy should also serve as reminders of how settler colonialism has insinuated itself into the micro and macro practices of schooling.

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