

Life Journeys Towards Higher Education in Maningrida



ARPNet

Aboriginal Research
Practitioners Network, at
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**Whole of Community Engagement in higher education -
Higher Education Participation and Partnerships
Program (HEPPP)**

Life journeys – Pathways to higher education in Maningrida

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(Revised)

SUMMARY

This report is a summary report presenting some of the data and outcomes from the participatory Action Research conducted in Maningrida, Arnhem land. The focus of the PAR was community members in Maningrida. Targeted activities included ranking, flow diagramming, key interviews and a computer based survey for some of the key interviews. Participation was dependent on willingness to participate and signed consent was granted for activities. PAR was conducted by approved community based ARPNet researchers.

Results show that there are many issues related to education in general and more specifically to the issue of higher education. Perspectives on education centre on the expectations and satisfaction with the type of education being delivered currently. The separation between Balanda and Bininj education and the issue of both ways education were the focal points in the conversations about higher education. Further, the value of education in relation to jobs was also another important area of discussion. As we asked questions, community members also asked questions of government, of the school and of the project. For instance, they asked what is the point of education?

Perceptions and views regarding higher education were explored across a three very broadly defined age groups – young people, middle aged people and old people. The sample size was not big enough to look at the gender dimension of the issues surrounding education though some strong points came through related to teenage pregnancies.

Photo of a road in Maningrida showing a rainbow which one of the researchers saw as hope for the future.

DISCLAIMER

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers should be warned that this document may contain names and photos or make references to deceased persons.

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Enquiries

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INTRODUCTION

The Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) initiative is funded through the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme (HEPPP) by the Commonwealth Department of Education and Training. WCE aims to engage up to six remote and very remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory to build aspiration, expectation and capacity for higher education.

Objectives include:

- Exploring current community perspectives of higher education, and linking with existing strategies for achieving quality of life aspirations;
- Co-creating ongoing opportunities for community, research, academic and public policy leaders to engage in mutually beneficial and critical relationships; and
- Identifying means for making education relevant and culturally and physically accessible

These objectives support the establishment of strong and sustainable educational pathways from early childhood to lifelong post-secondary education.

The Research Institute for the Environment and Livelihoods, through an auspice arrangement with the Aboriginal Research Practitioners' Network (ARPNet), has agreed to partner with the Office of Pro-Vice Chancellor-Indigenous Leadership on the WCE initiative to achieve the above objectives. It will achieve this by supporting three cycles of participatory action research in the West Arnhem Region. In this instance the West Arnhem region includes both Maningrida and Gunbalanya communities.

This report is a summary of the ideas and suggestions coming out of Wave 1 (CYCLE 1) of the fieldwork conducted in Maningrida by ARPNet. Results came from participatory tools used with a target groups including, women, men, young people and the elders.

METHODS

The approach taken in this project is Participatory Action Research (PAR). ARPNet was guided by HEPPP on how to implement the project and work within the PAR framework defined in the overall HEPPP project. However, there was flexibility on how we conducted the participatory research and which methods we used. Two key factors have influenced the process, sample and the nature of our findings:

- *Period when contract was started*

The scheduling of the research at the end of the year coincided with events in the community that made it difficult to conduct fieldwork. In Maningrida, there were events in the community related to the school which created a tense environment so we postponed the research. We cancelled the first proposed period of fieldwork in February 2016 on advice from HEPPP project and the time proposed turned out to be inconvenient for a number of the ARPNet team members. This period was used by ARPNet to inform and consult with the Traditional Owners and Djunkayi and plan for the April field trip. The re-scheduled period of fieldwork was April, 2016.

- *Presence of two teams in the field*

1. Preparatory consultations and lengthy presence in the community by the HEPPP¹ team while important for the project has created challenges for the ARPNet Team because of the constant cross reference to the other team and the confusion of the roles and sequencing in the PAR approach of the project.
2. Further, there is not a clear enough break between what the two teams are doing in the community in terms of PAR actions suggesting that the division based on target group was not adequate (i.e. HEPPP team focused on local organisations while ARPNet focused on the community). Further, there was a clear need to rethink the sequencing of effort and activities conducted in the communities. The separation of roles between the two teams was difficult because of the almost continuous presence (every other week) of the HEPPP Team in the community.

¹ The HEPPP Team (used here to refer to the team comprising Dean, Jamie and Milie). Please note that Jamie left HEPPP sometime before the field work was completed. Thereafter the HEPPP Team refers to Dean Yibarbuk and Milly Olcay)

These issues have affected ARPNet field team’s morale, performance and relevance in the project.

3. The other important issue is research fatigue, as some people responded that they had already discussed their thoughts with the HEPPP team, and there was confusion. Sometimes it appeared to be the case that people were informed about the project but had not actually participated, and there was mention of another HEPPP survey with similar questions to the ones the ARPNet researchers were asking. It would have been good to be informed of the activities of the HEPPP team we limit duplication. Consequently, activities were often preceded by a discussion about the Project and why we had two teams working in the community though we suspect not many people understood the differences between.

The ARPNet field team in Maningrida

The ARPNet Team comprised the following ARPNet members listed in the Table 1.

Table 1. List of ARPNet members involved in the Maningrida field work

Women team members	Male team members
Christine Brown	Dennis Naroldol
Maurissa Henwood	Godfrey Blitner
Alycia Campion	Eddie Phillips
Josie Diddo	Mike Radford
	Josiah Campion
	Charlton Richards
	Jack Nawilil
	Julius Kernan

Though there was a smaller group of woman researchers than expected, this was not an issue. The women were divided into two groups. The team in Maningrida were supported by ARPNet researchers from Gunbalanya – Dennis Naroldol and Eddie Phillips and Godfrey Blitner from Ngukurr. Some of the Male team members including Traditional owners who periodically came to support the team are shown in the picture below.



From left to right: Dennis, Josiah, Jack, Godfrey, Charlton, Mike, Eddie and Julius

For some of the female team members, the team in February included, Josie Diddo, Christine Brown and Hmalan Hunter-Xenie. Christine Brown organised the field team and made first contact with Traditional owners and Djunkayi. Three of the members of the ARPNet field team are Traditional owners and this helped with consultations with different groups.

Maningrida was sub-divided into targeted areas (Middle camp, New suburb and Bottom Camp) and the research team were allocated areas to work in where they felt most comfortable to work in. Since planned fieldwork activities were constrained by various factors including sorry business, we concentrated on key interviews, ranking and flow diagrams (See Sithole, 2012)² as the time in the community was very limited. We used the following 5 general key questions (translated into common idiom with the researchers as we talked through the questions provided by HEPPP through the contract).

- What do you think of higher education? [Do you know what that is? What you mob think about higher education? Would you let your kid get higher education?]

² See Sithole B. (2012) The ARPNet Dilly Bag – A practical field guide to participatory and other research tools for use by Aboriginal research practitioners in Australia. ARPNet at RIEL. Charles Darwin University, Darwin].

- What is both ways education? [What is both ways education? Is there Bininj education? Is this different from Balanda education?]
- What kind of education do Aboriginal people want for your children? [What kind of education do you want for your kids?]
- Is getting an education important for Aboriginal people? [What is education for, why get it? Is getting an education important for you? What happens to you mob after you get an education?]
- What three important things are important for you when you talk about education?

As we did not have many experienced research team members on the field team and so we decided to put the key questions into a small survey on survey monkey <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PXK923P> hoping that the use of iPads would encourage more young people to participate as well as make it easier for new ARPNet team members to conduct the survey. We had access to 2 iPads available borrowed from HEPPP. These computer-assisted key interviews were useful but not as productive as we had hoped as people skipped questions and did not feel comfortable to write detailed answers. At least some of the young people interviewed were reluctant to type and tended to skip questions or offer no opinions.

The participatory research was targeted at social groups. We divided the community into three rough age groups – young people (roughly 18-25), middle aged people (between 25 years and 50 years and old people (over 50 years old) and. For each group answers were considered by gender (Table 2). No attempt was made to get actual ages so these are approximate age ranges except in the computer assisted key interviews.

Table 1. Distribution of target social groups by gender and age

	Maningrida	Old people	Middle aged people	Young people	Total
Dilly bag tools ³	Bininj (men)	0	4	2	6
	Daluk (women)	1	12	2	15
Computer based Key	Bininj (men)	3	14	7	24
	Daluk	6	8	4	18

³ See Sithole B. The ARPNet Dilly Bag – A practical field guide to participatory and other research tools for use by Aboriginal research practitioners in Australia. ARPNet at RIEL. Charles Darwin University, Darwin].

interviews (iPad)	(women)				
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The term Daluk for women and Bininj for men will be used as references in the quotes rather than an age reference to the respondent. All quotes except for a few (indicated as responses from Merle) were from respondents in Maningrida. survey responses

Using the key interviews on the iPad we, interviewed 32 people living in Maningrida and 9 from outstations, and 1 did not specify. Of this group 43% were women compared to 57% men. The respondents using the iPad were comprised of 57% middle aged people, 31% young people and 12% from old people.

FINDINGS FROM THE PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

This section summarises some of the issues raised during the participatory research activities in Maningrida.

Conceptualising higher education in relation to life journeys

We started the fieldwork by talking about pathways to higher education and quickly realised that this conversation was going nowhere. It was better to talk to people about their life journeys rather than just pathways because then we would find out what people's aspirations and interests were and why. So in the key interviews and flow diagrams we got people talking about their aspirations for themselves and for communities. We found the following:

- that self-determination is an important goal, people want control over decision making, over children, over life choices;
- we found out that people want control over their livelihoods and they discussed plans for land management and businesses; they want to become independent and get off welfare;
- become more competitive in the job market so they can get real jobs and perhaps be in control of key programs in the community and,
- meeting cultural obligations was a very big motivator for the life journey.

One of the persistent themes coming out of some of the key interviews was the idea that education is not something Aboriginal people can make choices about, they have to do it or suffer the consequences. One of the dominant views is that education is a good example of those areas where Aboriginal people have really lost control, over their kids, their money and the type of education they want the kids to receive. It is also given as a good example of how government controls key areas of Aboriginal living. There was much concern about the relationship between the government and the community over education as evidenced in this statement,

“.....Government changing, future is coming back to old days, if kids not going to school, the parents not getting money. The parents are forcing kids to go back to school, same as in the old days..... (Group discussion with Daluk at Merle, 052015).

Some of the people were comparing the current practices in education as worse than in the mission days. On the other hand, we found respondents who saw the relevance of education in Balanda world⁴, the need for kids to be able to speak English to communicate and complete forms, people who told stories about sending kids to better schools in Darwin and down south so that they could come back with “*real education that would get them real jobs*”

During ranking with a group of males we considered how common some of the more common life journeys for people in Maningrida are where members of the community allocated scores to different types of life journeys based on perceived frequency of occurrence (Table 3).

Table 3. Common life journeys in Maningrida

Life journeys	Ranking Scores	%
No school, no job	63	22
No school but they have got job	23	8
School and training from BIITE but no job	31	11
School and you have job	56	19
You have school you have no job	115	40
	288	100

⁴ Balanda world was used here to refer to White fella world or

Some of the different types of the life journeys in Maningrida are captured in this ranking exercise, where members of the community allocated scores to different types of life journeys based on perceived frequency of occurrence. Based on this ranking activity, one can see that the most common pathway is when people can get an education but still be unemployed in a remote area. Some of the big choices in life journeys are determined at an individual level. The common goal for many families is to be self-sustaining while meeting obligations on country. Some of the issues raised in relation to life journeys are presented on Figure 1.

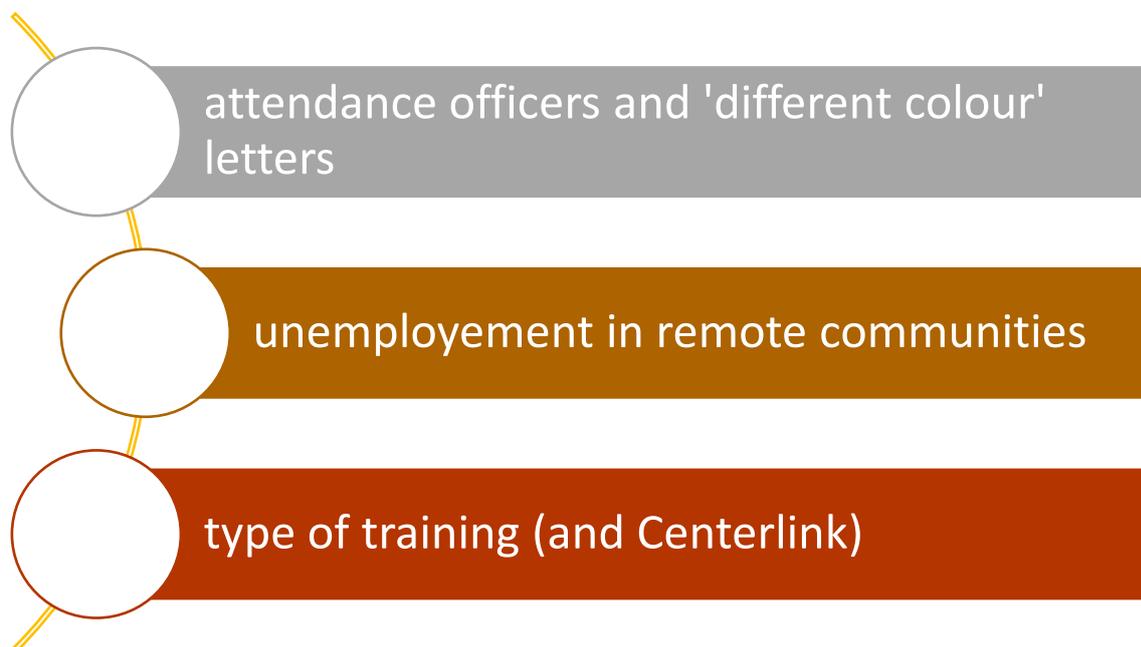
Figure 1a. A summary of some of the issues discussed with reference to schools



Figure 1b. A summary of some of the issues noted around why Bininj education is so important



Figure 1c. A summary of some of issues identified around social welfare and education

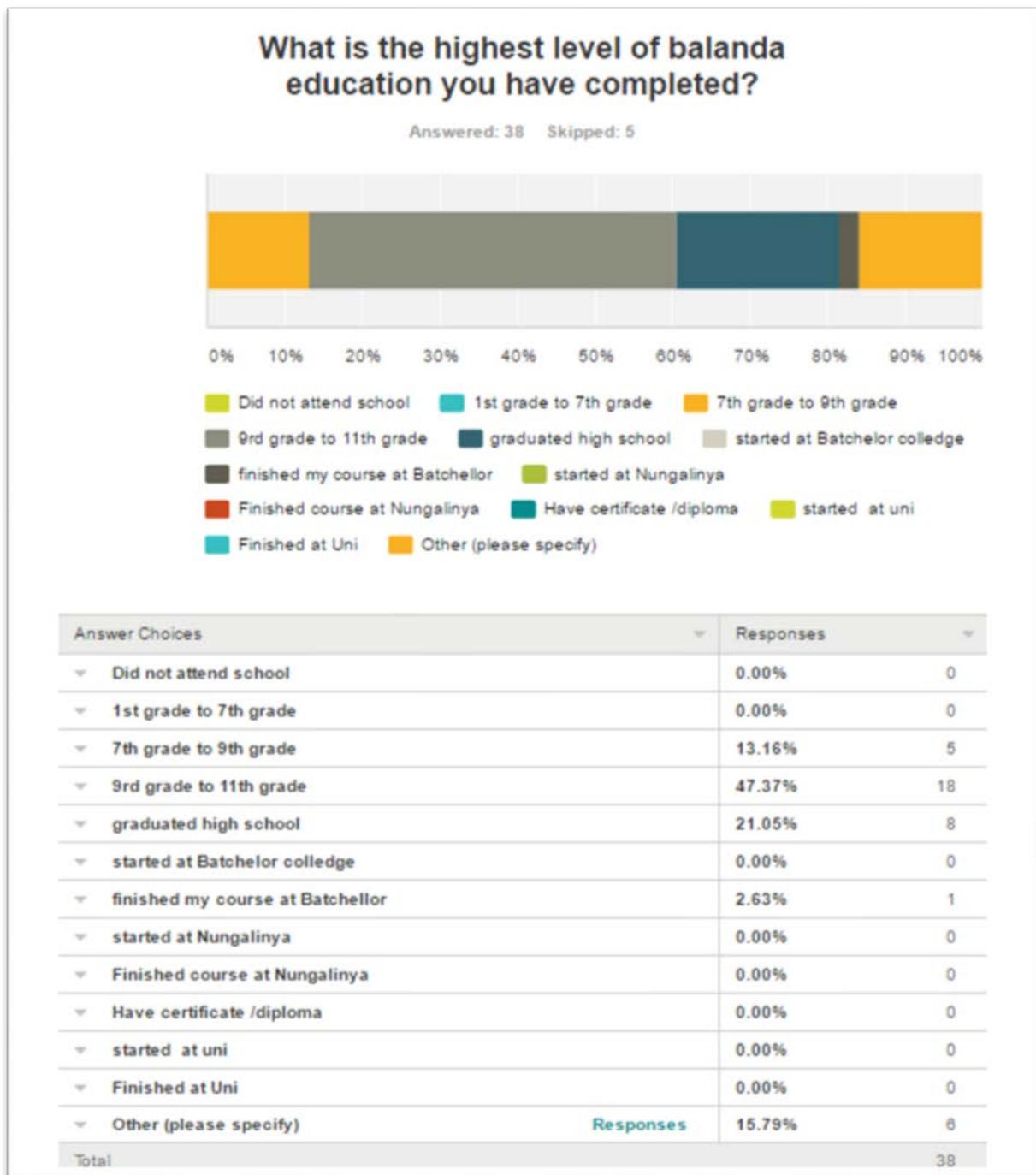


Education is seen as a vehicle for empowerment of the people. However, this is not occurring. Government power over education is discussed with regards to 'letters' and attendance officers. Unemployment is high even among those that have been trained. The type of training one receives is also a point of discussion as this is not always reflecting the choice of the individual.

jobs or suitable jobs, there should be follow on for that child, a job offered once they get that education” (Key interview with Daluk, 042016).

Some of the people felt one could also get too many certificates and still not get a job. Most people on the Money Management find they are offered jobs in the community that have no connection to their interests. Results from the computer assisted key interviews shows the spread in levels of education attained within the respondent group (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Levels of education attained in the population



Other refers to answers where people wrote the actual year they stopped school or just stated that they went half way through school. One response stated that they had never been to school.

Generational differences in attitudes and opinions are clear. Much of the education experience of the old people during missionary time was not positive and they retain vivid memories of the concerted efforts by the school system to stop Bininj education (not allowed to speak language or attend ceremony, some ran away and were brought back). These memories have not gone away. Many in this group did not know what higher education was, so their focus tended to be on differences between Bininj and Balanda education. One old lady *“flat out said no to education”* (Key interview with Daluk, 042016). She did not see the point of sending children to school. Old people are wary about Balanda education primarily because they feel Bininj education is being left behind or forgotten and prefer to take kids out bush to teach them the Bininj way. The second reason is that even when kids are encouraged to go the Balanda way they don’t come back or come out and *“some people think we loose culture”* (Survey Response, 042016). When there is little in the community that requires one to go all the way to Manwernkimuk, it is difficult to see how people would pursue it. There are people in both Maningrida who enrolled in Universities but among those interviewed none completed their degrees. There are many people who have also not completed their VET courses.

There are many challenges to get people all the way through the various steps in education. People felt, it was difficult to talk about higher education when there are problems getting children to school. The survey responses to open ended key interview questions indicated that some of the reasons for people not pursuing higher education are as follows:

- ✓ *Well got kids to look after and need to get more education to learn both way Bininj high education Balanda way*
- ✓ *Yeah violence kids not going school*
- ✓ *Drugs, alcohol, family problem, kids sniffing*
- ✓ *Young married/violence/gambling*
- ✓ *Problem kids are doing wrong things*
- ✓ *Not enough support or education*
- ✓ *Family too much not to have go far for balanda education any further*
- ✓ *My Ceremony maybe too far*

- ✓ *Balanda law us Bininj want to learn more Bininj way*
- ✓ *Balanda not teaching as right, reading and writing is not good enough*
- ✓ *Getting married early; Early married*
- ✓ *Family matters*
- ✓ *Family worry too much*
- ✓ *We do need help to do Balanda education*
- ✓ *Changing the age to give the right (chance) to repeat year level*
- ✓ *Young people are not like old people working for a long time, young they like school here, before they didn't go school, nothing only learning from old people*
- ✓ *Still want to learn sometimes but I have family problems/young married or no job*

The following are the different terms for different levels of education identified by a mixed group of Daluk and Bininj from Gunbalanya and Maningrida in May 2015,

- 🔔 Creche and preschool (Manyawurd)
- 🔔 Transition (Walaki)
- 🔔 Primary school (Walaki Manyawkimuk)
- 🔔 Secondary school or high school or college (Mankimuk)
- 🔔 University (Manwernkimuk)

There are many challenges to get people all the way through the various steps in education. People felt, it was difficult to talk about higher education when there are problems getting children at lower levels of school.

Mapping out people's life journeys might create more interest to go further. There are more examples of people in jobs who go for more training and more education, compared to those that get more education and then come to look for a job.

- ❖ *Yeh, I would let my girls do more studying so they can come back and help, and also they can do Balanda one, study and our Bininj knowledge. They can come back and learn our culture way, they can go and study (Key interview with Darluk at Merle, 052015)*
- ❖ *“Biggest mob been to school but no job. Many of them bin to school but don't work I know. Lots of them young people, no school no job, lots of young*

people walking around all night, some never went to school, no job, just wanna sit at home” (Key interview, Daluk at Merle, 052015)

Perspectives on higher education in Maningrida

Most of the discussion around education is focused on young people. In Maningrida, the young people are seen as the future of the Aboriginal people in general, the hope for the culture and there are great hopes that they will take over jobs in the community. There is a big discussion about self-determination and empowerment and Balanda and Bininj education feature prominently in the discussion. As stated by this female respondent,

“We love the idea of big education, further education, higher education, but the reality of this is there are no jobs for our kids in this community. Our so called leaders with many hats, they don’t support our community in the right way, they don’t support our young leaders, they forever listen to the balanda. They are not thinking about the future for this place. And also they think about themselves, where they stand with balanda not with the cultural leaders for this community. That is why our community is going down... This community a lot of Balanda come in this community and they have no cultural awareness training. This community is going backwards in terms of education, employment wise and housing, it is going down... just a head count of balanda tell a story of high employment, high number of Balanda in employment” (Key interview with Daluk, 042016)

Measured in terms of overall community wellbeing and progress, empowerment and jobs, education is not really delivering the outcomes that the people in Maningrida expect and want to see. This is a cause for concern. A respondent expresses the frustration in the statement below,

“Maningrida is going backwards, that’s it full stop from me. Until there is a Bininj running clinic, I will go dance there; Bininj running Arts and crafts I will clap; black CEO at Bawinanga; Bininj way, Bininj ideas that’s what we want. If they say education is the key, give them the opportunity to further education and given them a job. Why are they allowing our kids to further education but there is no follow up, we don’t like what we see, they the Balanda are not giving us the opportunity. Always

Balanda got to be in front leading us, Trying to stand up for rights is getting us nowhere” (Key interview with Daluk, 042016)

By contrast, most of the people interviewed indicated that most of the young people do not value education in the same way. Further, some people underlined the challenges of getting and keeping kids at school. The main aspiration is for young people who are educated to get jobs in the community as indicated in the statement,

“...if our kids are given a fair go and after their higher education they get a job and move on. If you are thinking of higher education, please have a job for them. Find out what their skills are or give them on the job training whether it be office or cleaning, give them more opportunities for training. There is no future in Maningrida, without the young being considered in the right way in our own community which is rightfully ours, and we have to run all our businesses ourselves, not someone else who is making us look like we all mild. Every little job you see there is no Bininj boss, we gotta change all that.” (Key interview with Daluk, 042016)

We asked people if they would say yes to higher education if they got the chance (survey question 12), and we found generally there is agreement that education is important as a pathway to jobs. In the computer assisted key interviews respondents made some of the comments listed below,

- ✓ *Yes I want to learn read and write learn and work for policeman, Najja we got Najja mob working and even in the clinic we got most Balanda and few Bininj mob. It is the same in the school they got a lotta Balanda and few Bininj.*
- ✓ *Yes, my kids are going to boarding school and university;*
- ✓ *Yes, I want to do more learning, like mechanics, cooking, maybe even learn dancing, hunting, going out bush with family, go fishing, hunting;*
- ✓ *Yes I'm already teaching 2yrs for 3 half years*
- ✓ *Yes I would put kids in school or get job do more training*
- ✓ *Yes like to do more education; Yes need more education; want more courses and more jobs*

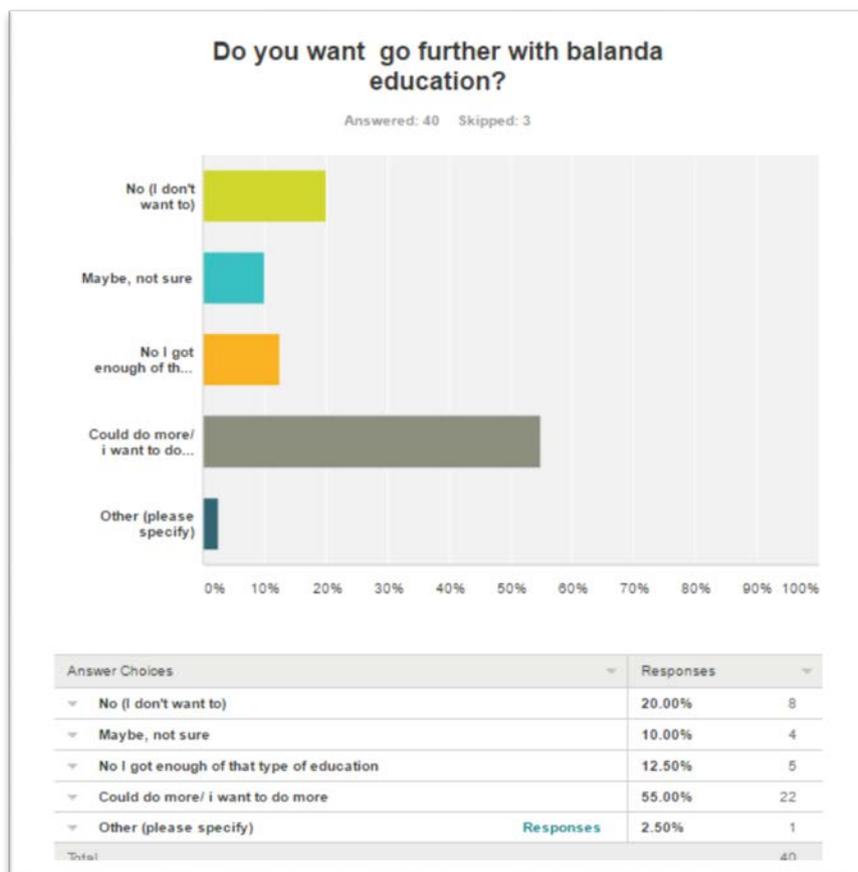
Not many people knew what ‘higher education’ referred to or made a distinction between getting a course and a degree. People were comfortable to talk about CDU (Charles Darwin University) and Bachelor (referring to the Bachelor Institute). Often it sounded like people were not sure what Higher education was referring to and underlining the importance of reading and writing rather than professional courses and degrees. Some assistant teachers

went to Charles Darwin University and they felt that was okay because it was for a short time. There is a lot of interest for training when people are in the job. Some jobs like being a ranger you can

“get it on your Bininj knowledge, they don’t look at if you have school, and you get training on the job” (Key Interview with Bininj, 042016).

A related question in the survey (Question 6) asked people if they want to go further with higher education shows that by far the more than half of all respondents (55%) see a need to go further (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Desire to go further with higher education



Most of the people (55%) would like to continue with higher education. However, 20% didn’t have any desire to continue and 13% felt they already had enough education. Some people underlined the challenges of getting and keeping kids at school. It is important to distinguish between education for adults and education for young people coming out of the school or college. Generally, adults could see a need to Balanda education and were quite specific about what kind of training they wanted or were wishing for.

Generally, there is a feeling of despondency among parents and elders concerning the wellbeing of young people and their futures. Most of the key interviews underlined the concern for the future for young people and ultimately there is concern too for the future of Aboriginal culture, lore and practice. Some of the problems affecting the youth are mentioned including grog, ganja, house breaking and teenage pregnancies. Levels of education currently attained by people are too low therefore there are not many people who qualify.

- Distance to higher education institutions - away from home and social networks therefore people worry about homesickness
- Substance abuse among the youth
- Youth drop out from school
- Early marriages and pregnancies

A big issue related to teenagers is their lack of respect for elders which is mentioned in most interviews. Parents and elders find it hard to control, influence or guide these young people. One respondent observed the following,

” I think that is right , some don’t really like to learn our way, young people. They should be doing our culture, like dancing, ceremony, hunting should be out with old people so old people can talk to them instead of hanging around, breaking in and stealing, should be learning our way, Bininj culture...” (Key interview with Daluk 022016)

Teenage pregnancies and early marriages are an issue that was mentioned a couple of times and this can interrupt schooling for the young people with no opportunity to go back to school. Some young people have the potential and interest but do not see a clear pathway towards completing school and getting a job. Programs to keep young people in school are needed and generally, people are very concerned about this

Some respondents felt that families have no control over their kids and it is difficult to talk or guide them. Some of this disconnect is seen as a consequence of government policy especially that on school attendance, which punishes parents without allowing the necessary space or means to control kids.

Stereotypes of Aboriginal people vis a vis education

Aboriginal people believe the government and outside organisations have pre-conceived ideas about them with regards to education. Several issues were raised in relation to stereotypes as follows:

- So called Aboriginal attitudes towards education
- The different quality of education delivered to Aboriginal kids
- The force government uses to get children to school
- The dominance of Balanda in jobs in rural communities

Aboriginal attitudes towards education are not always clearly understood or appreciated. One of the respondents suggested that the government approach is similar to saying “*you mob need eat even when you don’t feel hungry or you don’t like the tucker that they give you*’. People must really see the value of education and be invested in seeing their children go through the process. The constant tension between what is right for Aboriginal people versus what the Australian Government provide is a real one and needs to be addressed.

Some respondents felt the need to tell government the following,

“.....Aboriginal people aren’t dumb, they are smart.... The government needs to have understanding of indigenous people and not just seeing us as drunks with no jobs, who can’t express feelings, and here we are being forced to live the Balanda way of life. Give us funding if you want us to understand the white man’s system, we all the same, different colours but we have all got feelings..... there is real intelligence in Bininj people” (Key interview with Daluk elder, 042016)

Aboriginal people felt the common misperceptions affect how the government deals with them and consequently affects the responsiveness of government. They give examples of some of the draconian measures that the government has put in place to make sure (force and rules) Aboriginal children to go to school.

Another common basis for stereotyping occurs in the community among Bininj themselves. Being educated is equated with the following;

1. Becoming more Balanda and therefore being seen as losing your identity as a Bininj. One young respondent recounted a story when he went to ceremony and elders watched him get his painting on and following some of the rituals and made comments that suggested to him that he was losing his Bininj culture. He was troubled by this and wanted to correct the situation.

2. Becoming too much Balanda is viewed in a negative way and is seen as the basis for people especially young people rejecting their culture and refusing to attend ceremony. Their lack of respect for elders is seen as part of this trend.
3. Bullying among kids when they meet out bush relates to the differences that are seen between bush kids and the ones going to school in the community. When Out bush, bush kids bully community kids and when in the community bush kids also get bullied.
4. Some of the influential people are given names because of the way they work with Balanda or in the system. They are either seen as being too Balanda or balanda like. There are a few examples of role models who have completed higher education and are holding key positions in the community,

We asked people in Q11 of the computer assisted key interviews whether they worry that getting Balanda education will affect they are seen by others. In the computer asking key interviews, some of the different ways people feel there is a chance people can be viewed differently when they pursue higher education are listed below,

- ✓ *We see Balanda managing, we should see Bininj managing or helping. Bininj should go with him, Balanda should be teaching him not going on his own;*
- ✓ *Yes they call you balanda;*
- ✓ *Yes they say you learning more balanda way;*
- ✓ *Yes you are mixing culture;*
- ✓ *I think some Balanda be alright (are okay) when get together with Bininj. Not just all Balanda, it is good to learn both ways. We need to get more balanda education to help us (ourselves). Some Bininj don't get us when we talk, they have to get balanda to do it;*
- ✓ *Bininj people look at you got (you have) more Balanda in you; and*
- ✓ *Because you will have more power and influence I guess.*

Some of these comments demonstrate the perceived effects of education on the way people look at themselves or are seen by others. We got a range of responses, most suggesting that getting an education in a remote community does affect how people see and relate to one. For example, the most common fear was that getting Balanda education meant that one lost the culture as shown in some of these statements,

- ✓ *Some people think like to lose our culture; Some people think we loose culture;*

- ✓ *People sometimes we lose future of balanda not learning Bininj;*
- ✓ *People sometimes we lose culture because of Balanda, not learning Bininj;*
- ✓ *Yes because the Bininj way education is not Balanda way. We know that it will be ok, how our way, the Bininj way is ok and it is the only way in Maningrida Community*

Others believe both ways is good and that education should cover both types of education as shown in the following statements;

- ✓ *Yes they (kids) do ask why school or for work it is important to learn more Bininj way and Balanda way.*
- ✓ *Not really good to learn only Balanda education, important to learn white and black, two ways.*
- ✓ *No it's ok if help my people to learn and understand both ways.*
- ✓ *Early married (young) people don't realise that you need to be learning in both ways.*

Some people acknowledged that people do say things, but they are generally not bothered by the comments. Several stated that *“I don't worry about other people”*. Despite comments or negativity that might be expressed, people do see the value of Balanda education and believe it is important to have good role models in the community. Some of the responses about being Balanda or being Balanda many not have much to do with how much education one has but may be related to the association that one has with balanda. So one respondent felt that people have changed the way they view them because *“some people think that I work for balanda”*. Jealousing is very much part of everyday living and some of this stereotyping may be due to that. On the whole the stereotyping associated with getting an education is a real issue within the community.

There are also stereotypes about community schools and the quality of education delivered. Some of the people consider or send kids out of the community to schools down south or in Darwin. There are several reasons for this;

1. People generally want their kids to perform better and get a good education.
2. People are concerned that the environment in the community is not conducive to getting a good education

3. The curriculum delivers Balanda education which people find is not very relevant in their everyday situations or for getting jobs.

There is concern that the community is not a good environment for kids to go to school.

While communities have better infrastructure and staff, some people felt outstation based education had more merit and kids were more likely to thrive in those situations. The school in Noni was frequently mentioned as a good example.

As a child grows, they become caught up in a tug of war between the Balanda education system and the Bininj system. Most people talked about grandparents wanting to educate the young people on Aboriginal lore and ceremony and some were forced to drop out of school to meet the cultural obligations. The tension between Balanda education and Bininj education is obvious especially among the elderly who went through mission education and experienced practices which discouraged any Bininj ways in the education system (kids ran away from school all the time, they were hunted down and brought back, they couldn't speak language). Thus they feel justifiably nervous that the young people will miss out on the culture. Further, some of the old people indicated that they worry that as the elderly people pass on there is not much time for passing on knowledge if they wait for kids to complete Balanda education. People believe that there needs to be more understanding for what Aboriginal people value and how this can be integrated into education so people do not come out with a complex.

It is clear that people see a need for both types of education but the sequencing of the educational experience seems to be the crucial issue. In the discussions about life journeys the main struggle was related to people's fear of missing out on the Bininj education while their elders are still alive. There are also other pressures that put brakes on some young people who might be wanting to go further. There is also the issue of identity raised by some of the young people. How one is seen in the community is important, thus the question of whether one is able to remain true to the Aboriginal culture and lore but still go as far as possible in higher education requires discussion. Some respondents do acknowledge that young people when they have gone through Balanda education can be different and not see the importance of Bininj lore and practice. Young people especially, feel they miss out on Bininj education and their identity in the present and in the future becomes affected. In a community situation, your knowledge and practice of lore defines you much more than level of education.

Issues with educational curriculum

In some of the key interviews some of the people were concerned that some of the kids are not getting a proper education. This word proper is a bit problematic because it could be referring to many things. They are not able to do much when they come out of school. Parents send their kids to schools in Darwin and in the south and they come back they are still behind and did not get the real education. The belief that kids are not getting the same education like other kids raises questions about equity issues in Educational policy. One respondent questioned the quality of the education because he said he noticed a lot of the young blokes could not read or write or spell.

“.....What ever education they are giving at school is not working , we don't see our young educated children come home and have high jobs and suitable jobs. There should be a follow on for that child, a job once they get that certificate. The education system is neglecting our children, what I can see is that they really are neglecting our children. When they come back there is no follow up, where is the help. No cultural activities at school anymore” (Key interview, Daluk, 042016,)

Some young people observed that when they went to other schools outside the NT they were shocked, they were not the best student anymore and they found school really hard as evident in this comment,

“... Our teenagers, 16-18, when they turn age up and go to the next level they find it is hard and they drop out. They don't have the option to repeat, the school just looks at your age, we want our children leaving school reading and writing, both know they kick them out at the age of 18 with no literacy and numeracy. They leave school because they find it too hard...” (Key interview, Daluk, 042016,).

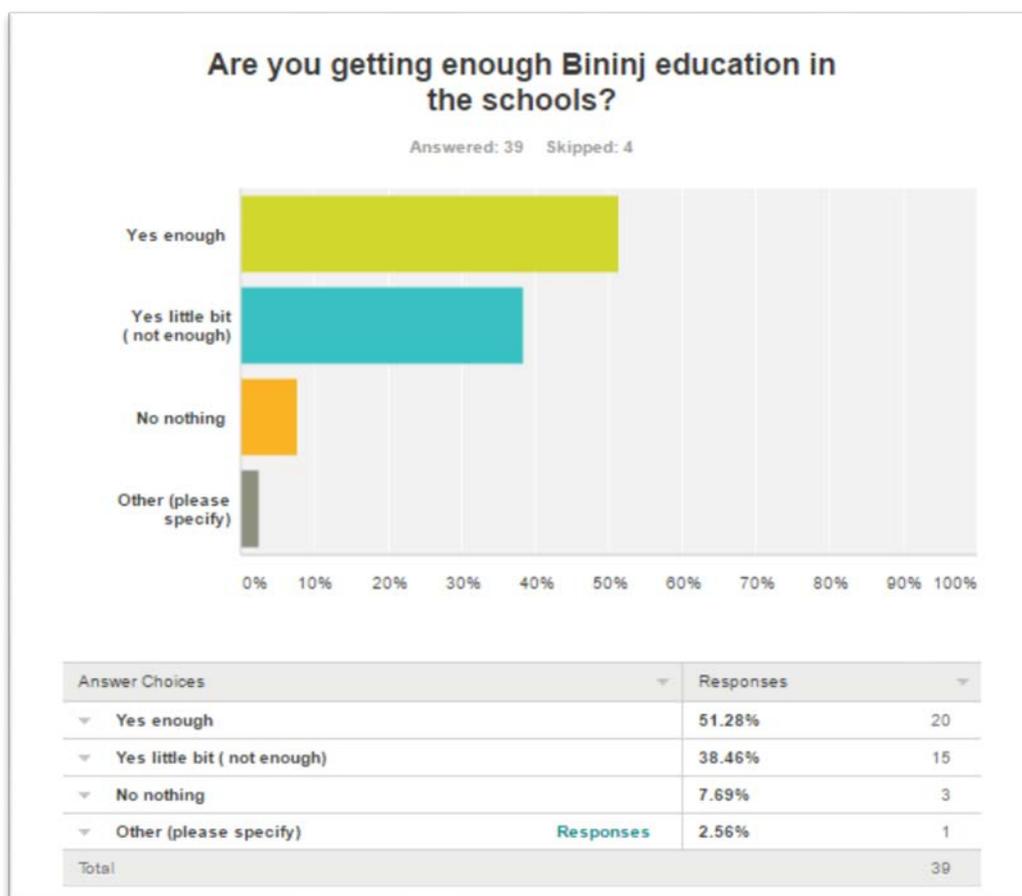
The big question is why is the education for Aboriginal people perceived to be different and is therefore failing to deliver the expected outcomes that the 'other education' is able to deliver. When we asked people in the survey if they worried about the type of education the government was delivering in Maningrida

“.....Balanda education is good, it is very good but Bininj education is more important. You gotta know your culture and your boundaries and your land. And to be a strong leader and if you haven't got any culture or land you haven't got anything, you haven't got any competition, because that what the government is about. It is an achievement, we got it and government needs to give us a chance with funding. We got our language, our land from our old people or otherwise we wouldn't be recognised as TOs. We get that

from our grandfather, grandmother, aunties and uncles where they light the way before us doing or knowing.....” (Key interview with Daluk, 042016).

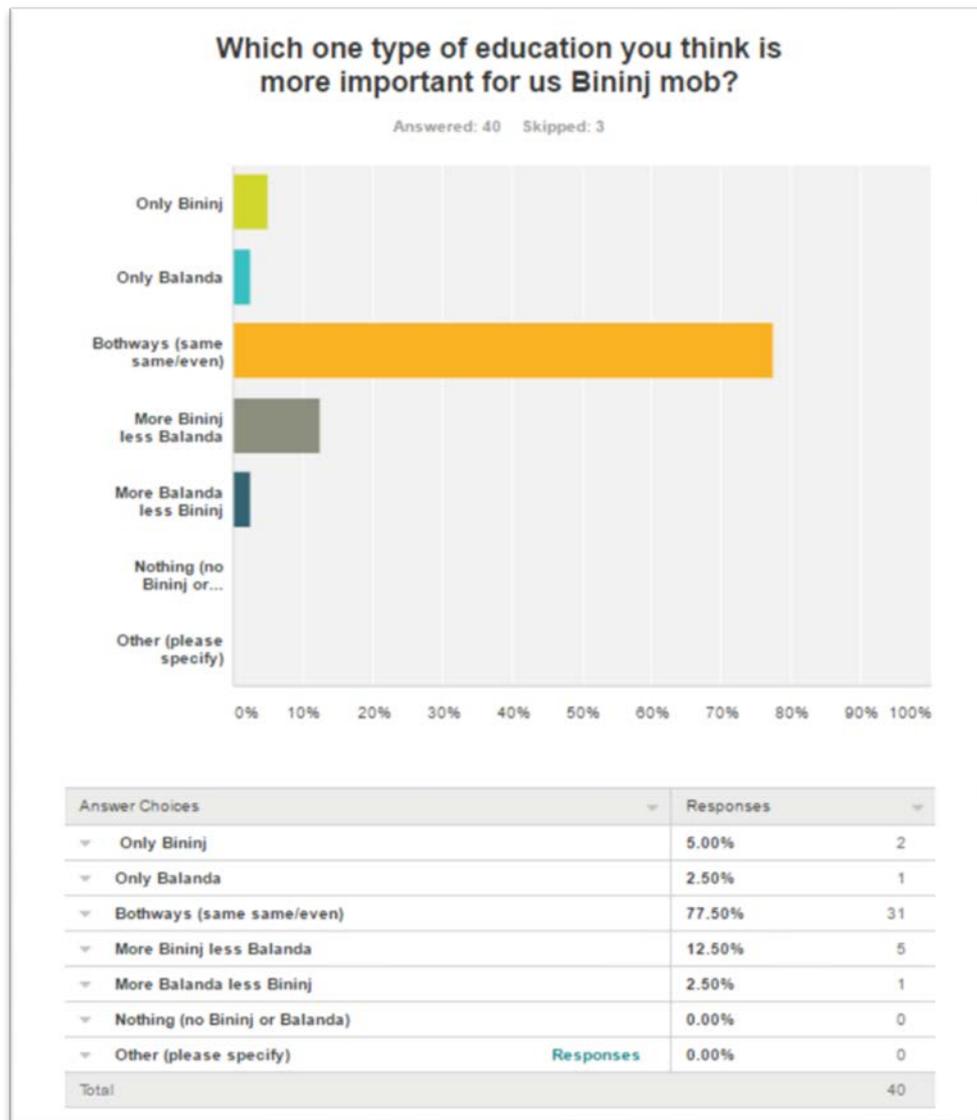
The need for both ways education was underlined as people see a need to engage in the local economy and increasingly to meet obligations on country in the looking after country they need Balanda education to write reports, projects and meet with Balanda. For most people the concern was for improving reading and writing. Question 10 in the computer assisted key interviews asked people which type of education is more important for Bininj, and found the results presented in the Figure 5 below.

Figure 5. Perceptions of delivery of both ways education in the community



Generally, there is agreement that kids should get both Balanda and Bininj education, what is at issue is the dissatisfaction people have with the amount of Bininj education they feel the school in Maningrida is providing. The question about people’s preference showed an overwhelming support for both ways education (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Preference and relevance of different types of education to Aboriginal people



Both ways education has a lot of support in Maningrida though sometimes the respondents tended to speak of Bilingual education. Most of the people spoke about wanting to see a bit more balance between Bininj and Balanda though they were clear that for various kids, the balance will be different. For others, it was to increase the Bininj part of the curriculum. One respondent observed changes in both ways education in the following statement,

“In the past we had really good bilingual education and school attendance was really good. In that time we treasured our language and culture and there was a lot of cultural activities in the school. We had Aboriginal dancing and we had children learning every song and dance from every culture. This is at the school I am talking about. Then somewhere along the line something went wrong and children started dropping off, attendance was getting low “ (Key interview with Daluk elder, 042016, old lady)

There is a general feeling that while most are not seeking equal weighting of the different education seems, they believe some of the crucial elements of Bininj education are currently being discounted to the detriment of both ways. For example, participation of kids in various ceremonies was mentioned as a big issue for some families. If kids are out of school for a certain period, then the truancy people get involved and a family might get into trouble. Yet as families argue, instead of calling attendance for ceremony truancy, Balanda education should be trying to integrate it and perhaps create opportunities so that this becomes a legitimate educational experience. In Maningrida, one old lady felt

“ education is too much balanda now, balanda way now We need Bininj too, yes Bininj education is more important, sometime if they learn Balanda way, otherwise they get the memory out for Bininj way. Families teach Bininj education, like in Bininj way important for them young people, like teach them language, ceremony too, they become strong person, like they can look after the land, we can teach them Balanda way our way..... ” (Key interview with Daluk Elder, 022016)

There were some who felt western education was good and should be more important because people need to get jobs and develop on their country.

Some comments suggested that the community is not a good environment for kids to go to school and there is a preference that outstation schools provide a better option for education and have higher expected outcomes. While communities have better infrastructure and staff, some people felt outstation based education had more merit and kids were more likely to thrive in those situations.

Education, skills training and jobs

We asked about people whether they believe getting an education will result in getting a job. Most people we spoke to are concerned with the job market in the community and do not see themselves moving to other places for employment. Generally, most people in both the computer-assisted interviews and the key interviews believe there is a connection. Some of the responses to the Question 8 suggest that people believe there is a connection, for example the following statements indicate that,

- ✓ *Yes but find it hard to find job here;*
- ✓ *Yes, I need a job help for getting good services in the community, getting in to attend meetings and learning through leaderships programs;*

- ✓ *Yes, I need education, because everything and writing is in English;*
- ✓ *Yes I would like to search a job;*
- ✓ *Yes, to get a better job with better pay;*
- ✓ *Yes, want to get a job and need more education; and*
- ✓ *Yes want to work.*

There also some who felt that having an education was not so important as there are no jobs in the community. The size of the job market is so small that most responses indicated that the main requirement for getting a job or understanding what people refer to as Balanda ways is basic numeracy and literacy.

Currently, young people especially do not appear to have a clear vision for what career path they wish to follow. Some who did know, were not sure how to achieve their objectives. Job seekers moved from one job to the next or one training program to the next also implying a need for more focused discussion about career pathways and education. Some respondents expressed a wish to see young people get educated, and get the right skills to take over some of the jobs that are currently held by Balanda. The perception that there are no jobs in remote communities is quite strong, though it is not clear if this is really the case. One statement repeated several times about jobs is as follows:

“...I don’t know what grade they went to and that time I think there wasn’t enough higher education when they went to pass through that grade. There was nothing else for them to do. They just went home, there was no training. Some went to Kormilda college and came back, no job. There was no on the job training for them to do. And where they could get a job no one could train them and give them a stable job to do. Otherwise our young students would have been trained and taken over to prove and take over that job, No one wanted to take us, maybe they were afraid to train them, I don’t know, because if you were trained and qualified you would come back and get a job, But they come back to nothing, most of them go on Centerlink. The jobs that are available just went to the Balanda not our Bininj kids... Balanda should move and give room to our kids, give that child a chance but nothing like that is happening here, what you find is still lack of employment for young people, a waste of education, wasted opportunities, they had the education, western education but no fair go for employment and there is too many (not to be too racist) Balanda passing on jobs to friends when we have our own kids here who are capable.... I have seen things go

from better to worse, to more worse today. I have seen with my own eyes. From school the big question is where would them (the) kids go. We have been invaded by Balanda in Maningrida community. I have seen it and its sad, it's a sad thing for me becauseI was educated, I got good job ... most of our kids they study and they come back to no job. I have never seen an educated young Aboriginal person run anything in this community, nothing, our own kids" (Key interview with Daluk elder, 042016)

People perceive that there are no jobs in their communities and therefore see no incentive to go further. However, in some key interviews people expressed a wish for young people to go further. The remuneration when one gets a job is not comparable to what same job would pay in an urban situation. Sit down money is not a real wage.

There are several voices to the issue of jobs and education. The one voice underlines the importance of education to get the jobs, while the other says, what education it is not really getting people jobs. Even with education people don't get jobs. Another voice says those people with jobs don't really need training because all good jobs are taken by balanda who are not giving way to the people or in other cases you get trained when you are on the job. The qualifications of people show that there are trained people and some of them even call themselves overtrained and have too many certificates but are still on the list at Jobfind. There is much resentment about the following,

1. The continued dominance of Balanda in jobs in the community;
2. The perceived preference of outsiders and Balanda over local people with similar sets of skills. For example, one respondent mentioned their interest to do landscaping but felt they had been passed over for a Balanda.
3. The strong influence that Job find and previous like organisations had on what jobs people end up doing.

Some people clearly see themselves as 'over trained' but they don't have the jobs they would like or feel they are capable of getting.

Trends in employment in the community highlight the clear patterns based on population group. Interpretation of these trends elicited different responses in the key interviews with one respondent noting the following,

I have never seen an educated young Aboriginal person run anything in this community, nothing, our own kids and that's is why Balanda think we are lazy, we

don't want to work but they are not given the opportunities. There is no on job training when a new person takes over. Give me a name where there is a young man running something, they are not even trusted to run the arts and crafts center, not even trusted to run anything where there is money involved but when money went missing, Aboriginal people are blamed, but we never had the safe keys where the cash is kept” (Key interview with Daluk, 042016)

Why are people not being employed? Is there really no capacity for anything higher than menial jobs for Bininj people? Some respondents argue that,

Bininj can run own country in our own way without Balanda (Key interview with Bininj, 042016)

But at present there is no evidence that any educated young people would have jobs in the community. Until the patterns of employment change and start to reflect the demographics more clearly there is little value placed on educating children.

SUGGESTED AREAS FOR ACTION

One of the questions we asked people was what they would say to government if they got the chance. On the computer assisted-key interviews, the responses of what people would like to say or see happen can be divided into clusters of ideas. The first cluster relates to demands for more education. However, from the findings we know that this is a loaded statement and has multiple interpretations including more education to improve literacy and numeracy, more training, improved quality of education and more skills training. Some of the comments in this cluster are,

- ✓ *We need, more education; Give us more education, More education in Balanda way.*
- ✓ *Yes, I need my kids to get better education I don't want my kids taken away. I want them here to be educated.*
- ✓ *Yes more education for our land and helping this community and future kids*

There were also a number of statements related to the need for greater engagement between Bininj and Balanda. Within this there was specific mention of the need for balanda to also learn and understand the Bininj ways. In some previous comments, there was a call for government to be more understanding of the needs and aspirations of the Bininj.

- ✓ *Bininj need to learn more Balanda but some Balanda also need to learn our Bininj way.*
- ✓ *Bininj to learn more Balanda but some Balanda not learning our Bininj way*
- ✓ *More funding for us (Bininj) people, to learn to read and write.*

- ✓ *Work with Bininj mob*
- ✓ *Give us chance to work well between Balanda and Bininj*

Other comments from the survey were general calls for more funding in Bininj education (*we need more money to help Bininj education (Text response in survey 042016)*), in particular, funding for bilingual programs and other components of Bininj education that are identified to be crucial for children. Some comments mentioned the need for more funding for training (*We need support to get our people get education/works kills education (Text response in survey 042016)*). Suggestions to take children out bush and support their education there were raised. People want the government to believe there is an alternative way, i.e. *We make our own way here, aboriginal way la (in) bush, they can learn more education (Text response in survey 042016)*. Further, people feel that there should be mutual respect -. *We like to respect the government and they should respecting us back education (Text response in survey 042016)*. The government needs to consider and support alternative solutions to education that would allow for better education outcomes. One comment suggests that education outcomes are dependent on environment (*kids need more education better community*”.

People made various comments and suggestions for actions across a range of areas. We have tried group these according to the themes and foci.

1. Actions targeted at young people

- Community want option to repeat for young people who drop out; Readmission of young parents back to school.
- Schools at outstations
- Adult education – literacy and numeracy classes
- On job training and more skills training
- On country delivery of courses
- Recognise the legitimacy and importance of rites of passage for young people through ceremony and other cultural training on country
- Set up leadership programs, run in Bininj way which are designed and delivered by elders and ceremony leaders.
- Address substance abuse issues and review the juvenile justice system/process

2. Actions in the schools

- More funding for outstations schools, e.g teachers to come to outstations every day, to increase the hours currently allocated.
- Further, there are calls for adult education programs as more and more adults are realising that” it is never too late to start learning”.
- Others mentioned sending kids to boarding school, but this option faces some challenges. In particular, kids get home sick and come back to community and refuse to go back. Kormilda college and schools down south were mentioned as examples of target schools from the community for those that are interested in the boarding school option. Schools should organise visiting student programs that allow local students time in other schools to experience a different educational environment and see what standards are out there. Close collaboration between schools in Darwin and those down south on curriculums to allow for a seamless shift from one system to another.
- There needs to be advocacy to recognise and legitimise participation and practice of Aboriginal lore as a crucial part of education. For example, the attendance of ceremony by children especially over extended periods means the family gets penalised by the government.
- Create forums for discussing with the elders what are those elements of Bininj education that can be integrated into the curriculum and how other elements can be delivered outside the school curriculum and still be recognised.

3. Actions related to getting education to be more valued for jobs

Greater clarity is needed on life pathways for Aboriginal people. There are many different life paths for Aboriginal people in remote communities. These life paths are determined by a host of factors including home and community situation, government policy and most importantly by obligations on country and Aboriginal lore. Suggestions to make education relevant to the job market in remote communities, suggestions were made related to the following,

- Advocate to government for people to get real jobs and real wages, that way training and education will start getting really valued.
- Programs and activities to facilitate industry involvement in schools should become strengthened so career paths are clearly mapped out and understood. A good example is the ranger program. Develop programs that allow kids to go for work experience while they are still at school through attachments or junior programs.

4. *Training needs*

People identified a variety of training needs during the key interviews. Some of the course needs mentioned during interviews are listed here

- Adult education especially literacy and numeracy
- Computer skills
- Administrative training (completing forms, emails and telephones)
- Land management training
- Enterprise development/business training
- Governance training
- Mechanics for vehicles

Several people suggested the need for Balanda to teach a Bininj person so that transfer of skills in the existing jobs can start to happen.

5. *Government Policy*

- Important to create space and opportunities to talk with the elders and the ceremony leaders about their needs for educating young people about the Aboriginal lore and ceremony so there is more effective sequencing and integration of needs to meet aspirations of the community.
- Important time to consider developing alternative education streams in remote areas and offer them to families. Perhaps these can be discussed to see if there is interest.

Stream 1: Conventional education as currently offered in all schools in NT (e.g this would be an option for boarding school)

Stream 2: A more balanced curriculum for both ways education perhaps similar to that being implemented where community has more say in how the curriculum is constituted and delivered.

Stream 3: Bininj education (with a documented curriculum and performance targets developed by elders and executed by them for an agreed period) and then a late start into Balanda education. This stream would require a policy change to keep kids out of school longer before they have to attend Balanda school.

Stream 4: Outstation/bush school

This way families can choose which streams they feel more fitting to their needs.

CONCLUSION

There is a need to address some of the methodological challenges that are affecting the performance of the community based researchers and the outcomes of the discussions.

Though it is theoretically possible to separate the two teams, in practice this is very hard and has presented challenges. In particular, the fact that our team is not privy to the activities or discussions of the HEPPP team mean it is difficult for us to either explain, continue, expand on or broaden the scope of the research activity.

It is understandably difficult for communities to discuss pathways to higher education. There are clearly many issues that are identified that affect schooling life way before higher education which makes the discussion seem fanciful and irrelevant. In particular, discussions about some of the challenges faced by young people especially that act as strong push factors for this group completing education and getting appropriate professional training. The fact that people don't currently see the benefits of education in employment in the communities, means that the interest in higher education is low. The passion that people have demonstrated about wanting to run things, be in charge and self-determine is palpable and should be harnessed as the basis for discussing aspirations targets for the community. Can a young person be set on a path to achieve a specific target job? Link each key position e.g school principal, BAC CEO, MPA CEO e.t.c to a life journey for a known person in the community and support it. Maningrida already has an indigenous person in the position of Australian Government coordination. This is feasible and would really change the tone of discussion about education and remote some of the underlying layers of complexity to the subject of higher education.

Most of the areas for actions identified are not new. But the current policy and institutional environment is difficult for Aboriginal people to operate in starting with the school to the job market. Barriers to education are real and occur at various points on the life journey. This project must see beyond getting a tally of number of children who are complete higher education and start to address some of real life philosophical, aspirational and political issues that make it impossible to achieve a change in trends in pathways to higher education.