Navigating community engagement within remote Indigenous further education contexts in the Northern Territory

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1. Office of Pro Vice Chancellor – Indigenous Leadership, Charles Darwin University
2. Yambirrpa Schools Council
3. Yalu Marnnggithinyaraw Indigenous Corporation
Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that this meeting is being held on the traditional land of the Larrakia people and pay respects to elders past, present and future. We recognise their strength and resilience.
A team effort

Information presented today is the result of collective efforts of the WCE team. It draws on the collective team experience.
Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) initiative:

- $7.5m funding from the Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program (HEPPPP) from July 2014 until December 2016
- Large-scale multi-site Participatory Action Research project
- Working with six remote Indigenous communities in the NT in both the desert and tropics
- Underpinned by a partnership approach
Our communities:

- Gunbalanya (n = 1,200+)
- Maningrida (n = 3,500+)
- Galiwin’ku (n = 2,100+)
- Yirrkala (n = 840+)
- Tennant Creek (n = 3,560+)
- Yuendumu (n = 810+)
WCE Aim and Objectives

Aim:
• To work with specified remote Indigenous communities across the NT to build aspiration, expectation and capacity to participate in further education

Objectives:
• Explore current community perspectives of further education, and linking with existing strategies for achieving quality of life aspirations;
• Facilitate ongoing opportunities for community, research, academic and public policy leaders to engage in mutually beneficial relationships; and
• Identify means for making education relevant and culturally and physically accessible;
How were communities selected?

Steering Group oversee project (est Feb 2014)
Site selection criteria developed over the following four months (n = 20).

Example selection criteria:
* Enrolment data – Yrs 9-12
* Completion Data – Yr12
* VET enrolments and completions - CDU and BIITE
* Existing educational programs and projects
* Infrastructure – i.e. learning centres, child and family centres
* Bandwidth

Note: Communities were not involved in this short-listing or preferred sites
Strategic recruitment

* Unique opportunity to recruit to culturally balanced teams
* Consideration was given to the existing relationships staff had with identified communities
* Broadened institutional recruitment policies and processes by considering both Western and Yolngu knowledge
* Indigenous employment currently sitting at around 60% of personnel
Framing the approach

What do the terms ‘community’ and ‘community engagement’ mean?

What does culturally appropriate ‘community engagement’ look and feel like?

How to recognise achievement of successful ‘community engagement’ (or not)?
How did we define community?

* Put simply – we didn’t define ‘community’

* There were different views about ‘community’ among partners, staff and Indigenous citizens. Cultural understandings of what a ‘community’ constitutes varied significantly.

* It was accepted that each participating ‘community’ was best positioned to advise us about what the term meant to them

* Community representatives were invited onto the Steering Group in consultation with key cultural authorities after sites had been selected

* There is no consensus in academic scholarship about what a ‘community’ constitutes in Indigenous contexts
Warren Mundine delivers blunt message to Tony Abbott over 'lifestyle choice' comments

The chairman of the Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council, Warren Mundine, says he has delivered a blunt personal message to Tony Abbott about his comments on remote communities.

Last week, Mr Abbott angered Indigenous leaders when he backed a plan in Western Australia to close more than 100 remote communities and move more than 1,000 people, saying "what we can't do is endlessly subsidise lifestyle choices".

Indigenous leaders, including Noel Pearson and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda, later criticised Mr Mundine for using intimidating language.

PHOTO: Mr Mundine urged the Government to engage in genuine discussion about how remote communities should be supported. (ABC News, file photo)

Indigenous Advancement Strategy

A new approach to engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to achieve real results.

The Australian Government is committed to achieving better results for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in three priority areas - getting children to school, adults into work and building safe communities.

To make this happen, the Government is transforming the way Indigenous programmes are delivered through the implementation of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy.

Implementation Plan 2015–2017

Indigenous students in the Northern Territory are successful and confident in their education journey.
There were differences in staff, local community and public opinion and peer-reviewed evidence about how to define community engagement (CE)

There are differing discourses relating to ‘engagement’, which are impacted by the socio-political context

There were differences in experiences among staff and participating communities about preferred CE approaches

There were different theoretical conceptualisations and positions about CE, including underpinning principles and values

There were different CE frameworks and models
NT – Engagement Commitment

3: A critically engaged university of the region

CDU places the Northern Territory, Australia and in the region, strategically important and comes with unique responsibilities, opportunities and challenges compared with other Australian universities. We are and will remain strongly committed to and focused on meeting the Territory's education and research needs and expectations of the Northern Territory community so that our region can develop and prosper, while continuing to develop our outreach to students and communities across Australia and internationally.

We believe there is something unique and important to offer those we engage with in all of our spheres of operation, an understanding and capability born out of our sense of place in the Northern Territory that fosters new ideas and innovative approaches.

We will engage with governments, other education and research organisations, industry and the community to foster mutually beneficial partnerships and relationships so that we can continue to provide the best possible educational services and research outcomes for the people and regions we serve. As the only university based in the Northern Territory, CDU has a unique opportunity, and a strong alignment in focus, with the Northern Territory Government to provide the skills and knowledge the Territory needs to prosper.

**Goa**

- **All students attend regularly** and are fully engaged in learning through all years of their school.
- **Parents and communities are engaged** with purpose to support their children throughout their learning journey.
- **Schools and regions achieve strong and consistent attendance** of students from early childhood through to secondary schooling.
- **Quality student engagement programs** support young adults in schools.
- **Schools provide** a whole-system approach to behaviour management and wellbeing.

**10-Year Target**

The proportion of Indigenous students in government schools attending four or more days per week is consistent with the Territory's non-Indigenous cohort.

**Element 4: Engagement**

The best results are achieved when students are engaged with their learning and attend school regularly.

**Vision**

Indigenous children at all stages of schooling attend school regularly and are supported in their education by their families and community.

**Goals**

All students attend regularly and are fully engaged in learning through all years of their school.

1. **Parents and communities** are engaged with purpose to support their children throughout their learning journey.
2. **Schools and regions** achieve strong and consistent attendance of students from early childhood through to secondary schooling.
3. **Quality student engagement programs** support young adults in schools.
4. **Schools provide** a whole-system approach to behaviour management and wellbeing.

**Key Indicators**

- A 100% increase in retention from all courses by 2015, compared with 2013.
- Implementation of an appropriate framework for measuring, monitoring and growing key stakeholder engagement over the life of this plan.

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**Priorities**

1. **Meet the needs and expectations of key stakeholders including alumni**
   - CDU places a high priority on developing strategic, productive and mutually beneficial relationships with students and alumni to ensure that the services we deliver and the graduate we produce meet the needs and expectations of local and broader regional communities. CDU will commit adequate time and resources to ensuring that these relationships are developed and maintained so that they remain an effective part of our external engagement.
2. **Empower and equip staff for successful engagement outcomes**
   - CDU recognises that effective and successful engagement cannot occur without the full support of all staff. CDU will develop and maintain relationships with external stakeholders and partners, as well as our own academic and administrative staff, to achieve sustainable engagement outcomes. CDU will prioritise engagement with CDU’s community to enhance its profile and to develop partnerships.
3. **Serve regional needs with flagship engagement activities**
   - Within the context of delivering the needs of our region, CDU will develop flagship areas of engagement that will deliver results in targeted areas, particularly those linked to the sustainable development of Northern Australia and addressing the need for enhanced Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education.
4. **Further diversify income sources**
   - As an organisation, CDU must operate sustainably and maintain an adequate level of energy to support its teaching and research activities and to deliver the services required by our community and the nation. Revenue from teaching and research is expected to increase as student numbers and research activity expand. CDU will also seek to diversify its revenue streams and build philanthropic income as part of a secure future.

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24/11/2016
New way towards learning

AN initiative between Charles Darwin University (CDU) and key education stakeholders will build a deeper understanding of the aspirations of indigenous learners in higher education.

The Whole-of-Community Engagement (WCE) initiative is a large-scale participatory action research project being carried out in a range of NT communities — Yuendumu, Tennant Creek, Yirkala, Maningara, Gunbalanya and Gallinwku.

Indigenous community-based researchers and leaders have been employed as part of the initiative, and have a crucial role in identifying the higher education needs and aspirations of people within their community.

CDU Pro Vice Chancellor, Indigenous Leadership Professor Steven Larkin, said barriers often restricted or prevented communities from participating in higher education.

“The WCE initiative is about removing these barriers by adopting a bottom-up approach which listens and responds to community needs,” he said.

“This means the vision and actions are owned by each community involved.”

Program Manager, Associate Professor James Smith, said WCE wanted to use local knowledge to form unique solutions for each community.

“WCE acknowledges the importance of working together to make this goal a reality,” he said.

The initiative is funded by the Australian Government through the Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program.
How are we tracking?

* Australian Rural Education Awards
* Society for the Provision of Rural Education in Australia
* International Symposium for Innovation in Rural Education

Existing project that demonstrates a proven link between a rural, regional and/or remote school or learning context and the local community, and benefiting a defined group.
Practicalities of CE
Logistically Challenging...

- Adverse weather events
- Seasonal access
- Dynamic nature of communities
- Long distances
- Limited transport options
A quest for common CE models and tools
Theories & Principles of CE

* Journal of Community Engagement & Scholarship
* Inter-sectoral approach
* Principles of community engagement:
  * Relational and partnership approaches (Dempsey 2010; Johnston 2010)
  * Empowerment (Dempsey 2010)
  * Consultation (Johnston 2010)
  * Collaborative practice (Dempsey 2010; Johnston 2010; Kotze et al. 2013)
  * Sustainability (Clifford & Petrescu 2012; Ramachandra & Mansor 2014)
  * Collective impact (Barnes et al. 2015)
* Indigenous community engagement (Cervone 2007; Campbell & Christie 2008; Madden et al. 2013)
* Higher education and community engagement (Campbell & Christie 2008; Dempsey 2010; Bernado et al. 2012; Clifford and Petrescu 2012)
Engaging with communities on their terms
Engaging with communities on their terms

- Different perspectives - occasional personality clashes
- Community politics and relationships
- Institutional politics and relationships
- History of relationships/partnerships
- Acknowledge challenges and tensions
- Partnerships take time and effort
  - 3 MOUs
  - 4 internal service agreements
  - 8 external service level agreements
- Delivered over 100 partnership activities; involving over 2,500 episodes of engagement
Using cultural metaphors

* Metaphors such as the emu foot were used to help engage stakeholders in the education discussion
* This was helpful in illustrating education pathways as well as system reform
Conclusion - Genuine CE

Genuine partnership with commitment to shared goals
Funding Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the WCE initiative is funded through the Australian Government’s Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme.
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