Whole of Community Engagement Initiative

Evidence based actions to support remote Indigenous participation in higher education

Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership
Charles Darwin University

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The WCE logo was created at the beginning of the initiative to represent unity and a shared vision. The design was created by Darwin based Indigenous artist Jessica Sariago, who has Djaru heritage from the WA Kimberley region.

The narrative, on which the design is based, is available on the WCE initiative website. The logo was co-developed by Dr. Lisa Watts, Ms. Donna Stephens and Ms. Aurelie Girard in consultation with other WCE staff.

Go to: https://remotengagetoedu.com.au/about/

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Suggested Citation
Foreword

I am pleased to present this compendium of Evidence Briefs, the final in a series of project publications produced as a result of the Whole Of Community Engagement (WCE) initiative.

The initiative was led by the Office of Indigenous Leadership at Charles Darwin University (CDU) in collaboration with Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE), North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA), and the Northern Territory Department of Education (DoE). The initiative was conceived in response to recommendations contained in the Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People released by the Commonwealth Government in 2012. The WCE initiative engaged six remote communities in the Northern Territory, aiming to ‘inspire [them] to include higher education as a normal expectation and milestone along the life journey.’ The project was funded through the Commonwealth Government’s Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program and spanned 2014-2017.

This collection of Evidence Briefs was developed to further increase the impact of the substantial amount of collaborative research and engagement that was conducted through the WCE Initiative. As the name suggests, the Briefs are based on an academic analysis of evidence and key findings from the WCE initiative. Specifically, these Evidence Briefs have been carefully crafted to synthesise findings from the WCE initiative into sound, easy-to-read, practical considerations and recommendations for policy makers and education practitioners with an interest in remote Indigenous education in the Northern Territory. In reading these, you will note the wealth of social capital being invested in education by Aboriginal people, local leaders and professionals within the remote communities involved in the WCE initiative. This is despite the considerable socio-economic and political challenges they face, and tangible barriers such as access to English language, literacy and numeracy skills training, high turnovers of (outside) school teaching staff and centralised Departmental decision-making for remote education.

Investment is required, and it is not only fiscal. This analysis calls for attitudinal shifts by policy makers and practitioners in order to respond to the complexity of working in the intercultural education space, in devolving decision-making and scaffolding required change through in-service training and innovative professional development.

I encourage you to read and refer to these Evidence Briefs to stimulate, and perhaps challenge, your thinking and actions for advancing Indigenous education in the Northern Territory.

Professor Adrian Miller
Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership
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Whole of Community Engagement Initiative: Evidence Briefs

Introduction
This booklet presents a series of Evidence Briefs that summarise the findings of the Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) initiative and offer guidance for policy makers and practitioners with interest in remote Indigenous education. The WCE initiative was led through the Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership (OPVCIL) at Charles Darwin University (CDU), in partnership with Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE), the Northern Territory Department of Education (NTDE), North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management (NAILSMA), and a number of community-level organisations.

The initiative sought to ‘inspire six remote and very remote Indigenous 1 communities in the Northern Territory to include higher education as a normal expectation and milestone along the life journey.’ The communities were Galiwin’ku, Gunbalanya, Maningrida, Tennant Creek, Yirrkala and Yuendumu. In pursuit of the aim, the initiative explored ‘community perspectives of higher education’ and examined the connections with ‘existing strategies for achieving quality of life aspirations’. It co-created ongoing opportunities for stakeholders to ‘engage in mutually beneficial and critical relationships,’ and identified ‘means for making education relevant and culturally and physically accessible’ [1 p9].

The Evidence Briefs represent the major themes that emerged from the initiative, many of which relate to the schooling provided in the six communities. Whilst they are specific to the communities studied, they provide useful lessons about comparable remote contexts. The Evidence Briefs are as follows.

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1 The term Indigenous is used in these briefs to refer to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and/or Australian first nations people, unless specified otherwise. The term is used for brevity. The authors acknowledge the diversity of views with regard to preferences for the terms.
Each Evidence Brief outlines current understandings of the topic, adds the contributions that the WCE evidence makes to that knowledge, and refers to implications it may have for relevant policy and practice. Taken together, the Evidence Briefs can have a significant impact on remote student engagement in education, by supporting quality improvement and promoting the possibility of further education. Three key messages underpin the Briefs.

- Remote students’ engagement with school and pursuit of further education depends on the education system and each school developing a culture in which practitioners understand the complexity of their own task and that facing their students.
- The necessary institutional and organisational culture must nurture among policy makers, principals and teachers an openness and capability to respond to the complexity of remote education.
- The WCE communities are determined to maintain their cultural distinctiveness and to be equal participants in the modern world. They are prepared to negotiate the tensions this involves. They can be expected to match any investment in the necessary institutional culture with an equal commitment.

The Evidence Briefs suggest the need of systemic investment in the development of the culture referred to, institutionally and at school level primarily through staff training and sustained support. They suggest investment in a ground-up effect, encouraging teachers and principals to better adapt in order to build on community strengths and support them to flourish. Many of the necessary ingredients lie within the communities, with many people doing whatever is possible to make the best of their circumstances and to achieve their aspiration. A precisely targeted and sustained measure of support may have significant educational, social and economic benefits.

The Evidence Briefs draw on key publications and resources of the Whole of Community Engagement initiative, including:

- Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) Initiative Final Report 2017
- Collective School Council Statement on Remote Indigenous Education
- Updated Action Statement on Aboriginal Adult English LLN in the Northern Territory, September 2017

- Shalley, F and A Stewart (2017) *Aboriginal Adult English Language Literacy and Numeracy in the Northern Territory*, September
  

**Reference**

1 *WCE Initiative Final Report* (2017), available from
  
Evidence Brief 1 Taking a mutually respectful approach to practice

The Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) initiative team was very aware of colonial and recent history, and the different understandings of school education held by the education system and remote communities [1]. In its research, the WCE team was highly responsive to those communities’ cultural mores, agency, aspirations and leadership in education and community affairs. It took a place-based ground-up approach, consulting a wide range of stakeholders and undertaking research led by local Indigenous community-based researchers who knew local protocols and languages. The approach retained the fidelity of the local knowledge systems, knowledges, and practices alongside Western social scientific equivalents. It drew from both traditions. It engaged the subjects of the research, and generated new insights into community and student engagement with school and aspiration for further education [2].

Background

The idea that ‘genuine local engagement and involvement’ is a necessary condition for successful community work [3 p1-2] is well established. We know that local peoples’ engagement is bolstered if their voices are heard in defining the issue, particularly when the work is collaborative and for community benefit. These principles are consistent with developing Indigenous research paradigms that make research accountable to its subjects and use methodologies that fit Indigenous priorities through relationships, narrative and story-telling [4,5,6]. At the same time, it is important to draw on Western knowledge systems and research methodologies, and find synergies, such as those between story-telling and narrative, or context-dependent and grounded research [7,8]. The move to better recognise Indigenous orientations and integrate them with Western equivalents is paralleled in governance (EB8). In Northern Territory education, tensions persist between the system in the form of ‘metropolitan’ definitions of remoteness, classification of ‘teacher’ and expected outcomes, and remote people living ‘on country with ancestral connections’ such as for culture, kin and country [9 p5]. These tensions need to be addressed.

Key messages from the WCE

• The WCE approach was ground-up in focus. It involved participatory action research and developmental evaluation approaches [4,10 p10]. It asked potential participants (identified on the basis of their existing interest in school and further education, and community capacity) if they wished to participate. All took up the invitation. It worked co-operatively with community leaders, listened ‘carefully and deeply’ [9 p51-6], and took direction from their concerns, needs and vision. It used local Indigenous and non-Indigenous co-researchers to conduct field work.
Many of the Indigenous community-based researchers were cultural and education leaders. Some were nominated to the role by their community. They ensured that local protocols were observed, power disparities minimised and that participants were culturally safe [11].

- The community-based and campus-based researchers worked as partners. They used each other’s strengths; reflected on meanings of cultural metaphor; moved fluidly between their positionings in community, school and academy; negotiated the intersections of Indigenous and Western ways of thinking; and constantly checked the relevance of their work against local concerns. The approach rested on their cultural and intercultural capabilities (see EB4a, EB4b, EB5, EB7).

- The project sought to impact education policy and practice more widely, so it introduced theoretically-informed research practice and critical interpretive analyses. The relationship of the two was negotiated on the basis of the trust generated within the team and with the communities. The process was reciprocal; the non-Indigenous staff worked to understand Indigenous insights, and the Indigenous staff worked to understand Western analyses. All benefitted by the shared knowledge. The understandings that resulted helped in negotiating the challenges when systemic demands (academic requirements, government regulations and organisational accountabilities) intersected with those of community.

- The approach and the trust it generated was helpful in interpersonal interactions too. It helped community-based researchers negotiate tensions around accepting community opinions at face value and considering them critically.

- The approach led to the discovery that local educators and leaders recognise the need for both systemic and local imperatives (despite their tensions), understand them to be interdependent (EB6, EB7), and are actively engaged in managing the tensions that arise locally where they are not reconciled at a higher institutional level. The larger failure manifests in pressure on the practitioners to ‘work the in-between’ [9 p41], and in student (dis)engagement. Local efforts are subsequently required in relation to non-Indigenous cultural awareness training, local teacher professional development and student mentoring (EB9 and EB10).

Key considerations for policy and practice

- Place-based responses are important. They need to be adequately resourced and flexible to adapt to change. Trust is critical to success when planning and implementing educational programs in remote contexts, and can be enhanced by adopting emerging ground-up resolutions.

- An openness to searching for ways to navigate the intersections of systemic and community imperatives is necessary. Efforts to understand and reconcile contradictions between the two should occur at the highest level, in order to reduce the pressure imposed at the local level on practitioners and students.
• Design career structures that recognise and reward local teachers’ expertise, and that of non-Indigenous teachers with the attitude, knowledge and skills to sustain intercultural relationships. It represents an advanced teacher skill set.
• Deliver pre- and in-service training to ensure that all teachers and principals have the necessary cultural and intercultural sensibility, knowledge and skills. A sustained, long-term commitment to this endeavour is required to achieve systemic change.

References
2 Smith, JA, M Bullot, V Kerr, D Yibarbuk, M Olcay and F Shalley (2018) Maintaining connection to family, culture and community: Implications for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pathways into higher education, *Rural Society* 27(2) 1-17, https://doi.org/10.1080/10371656.2018.1477533
9 Shore, S, P Chisholm, M Bat, B Harris, P Kell, & S Raeburn (2014) *Pathways for Yolngu Teachers: Rethinking initial teacher education (ITE) on country*, Darwin, NT: School of Education, Charles Darwin University
10 White, L (2015) Finding the common ground with Indigenous and western knowledge systems and seeking the common good for all present and future Australians: Where is the common ground if we are going to find it?, In Huijser, H, R Ober, S O’Sullivan, E McRae-Williams and R Elvin (eds) Finding Common Ground: Narratives, Provocations and Reflections from the 40 Year Celebration of Batchelor College (pp. 8-19) Batchelor, NT: Batchelor Press

Evidence Brief 2 Forming partnerships and networks with impact

EB1 referred to the benefits of the mutually respectful approach to remote research and education. The Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) initiative identified difficulties students have in finding and following a path into further education, and facilitated formal partnerships as one way to improve pathways. The initiative followed the same relational approach to engagement. It supported local organisations through formal partnerships that connected the various sectors, organisations and generations within communities to the wider education system. This brief focuses on the structured engagement in formal partnerships and network developments.

Background
Governments are committed to the idea of community engagement, and this is particularly important in Indigenous affairs contexts. They recognise that best practice lies in inclusivity, respect for local community strengths, and collaboration [1]. At the local level, communities aspire to engage with government on the basis of their cultural and value frameworks [2] in all phases, i.e. design, implementation and evaluation. There is tension however, to the extent that governments seek quick results and are reluctant to reduce their control [3 p7-8]. Where such tensions exist, Indigenous engagement, ownership and capacity can be restricted. For sustainability, partnerships need to be based on shared goals, equality of control, clear responsibilities, and depend on participants’ personal capabilities [3 p7]. In education, the recent Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education [4] acknowledged the centrality of school community partnerships to student learning and entrepreneurial education.

Key messages from WCE
- The WCE initiative found that major barriers to participation in further education included:
  - lack of understanding of post-school pathways;
  - limited number of relevant school courses;
  - limited work experience placements and employment opportunities within and beyond the local community;
  - student and family anxiety about leaving home for senior secondary and tertiary education; yet
  - Charles Darwin University (CDU) and Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) are generally well-regarded in the NT context.
- Most local employers, such as in health, education, local government, tourism, art and retail business sectors, are not active in providing work experience
placements, recruiting locals or progressing current local employees to paid senior levels.

- The WCE worked to improve organisational connections and build awareness of pathways. It connected institutional and community stakeholders on its steering group. It made formal partnership arrangements with capable local organisations and networks in each community (e.g. to conduct research, provide training, deliver services), and brokered others between organisations, schools and external agencies.

- The partnerships embedded the WCE approach (EB1). They formalised local responsibility for some services, e.g. school mentor training. They made local organisations more secure in terms of funding and consultation. They fostered dialogue and cooperation between local leaders, and the possibility of shared vision. They supported local leadership (EB8) and legitimised the organisations involved. They raised higher education providers’ profile and catalysed discussion of further study and pathways; they also made providers aware of problems in the way they serve remote communities (e.g. useability of web sites and burdensome enrolment processes).

- Some partnerships were being stabilised post-WCE, with discussions about BIITE adopting Northern Australia Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA) curriculum, and schools offering VET health courses (e.g. bush medicine, paraprofessional training).

- The partnerships reflect what generally works, i.e. the commitment and cultural competence of all parties, framework of self-determination, and reduction of power inequalities [3 p32].

**Key considerations for policy and practice**

The findings suggest that consideration should be given to supporting:

- remote schools offering subjects that enable students to gain a NTCE or pursue transition to higher education via VET pathways [5], e.g. early childhood, and locally-relevant VET subjects such as tourism;
- remote schools developing relationships with local and external employers;
- remote schools dedicating part of a staff position to career/further education counselling in the senior secondary years (and see EB10);
- higher education providers raising their profile in remote communities with visits, career expos, and a shop front/office space presence, and a genuine commitment to sustained relationship development (e.g. MOUs and service agreements); and
- leverage the dual-sector university status of CDU and BIITE to streamline VET to higher education pathways in remote settings.
References
1 Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (2018) Indigenous Advancement Strategy Evaluation Framework, Commonwealth of Australia
Evidence Brief 3 Building parental engagement with formal education

Many in remote communities are hopeful that their young people will be more engaged with school and further education. A consistent theme in the Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) initiative research was the importance of relationship. The quality of the relationship between the school, parents and community is fundamental to student engagement with school and the desire to pursue further education. Parental and wider community support is critical to student engagement and success. This is the core of attempts to build student engagement. It depends in turn on a reciprocal relationship with the education system.

Background
Parental and community engagement with schooling is accepted as a powerful factor in educational success [e.g. 1], especially in the form of engagement with learning at home [2]. The NT Department of Education articulates a commitment to empowering communities to be more involved in the education of their children. The emphasis on community engagement occurs in other social policy areas, like natural resource management, justice and health, where governments recognise the community power to drive change [3 p67]. Its importance is heightened in the case of remote Indigenous schooling, where perceived student disinterest can stem from parental dissatisfaction with schooling that is not respectful of Indigenous knowledge [see 4, 5]. Though based on town environments, Lea et al’s [6, 7] accounts of the contemporary pressure on parents and their satisfaction with schools is helpful in understanding the situation in remote communities. They indicate that parental and community engagement depends on the education system’s appreciation of the contexts, respect for local knowledge, and provision of enabling structural support, without which the problem of engagement is ‘perfectly irresolvable’ [6 p321, 4 p9].

Key messages from WCE
- Most in the WCE communities expressed concern for their children’s futures and worried about their level of engagement with school and further education. They valued education, accepted the benefits of schooling, and generally trusted the school. However, other life challenges meant that they chose not to intervene actively in school affairs or contribute to their child’s schoolwork at home [see 6 p328]. They tended to be ‘invisible’ [7] but not without care.
- In the WCE communities, the perception persists that school education can alienate children from their heritage culture and language. The perception is based on the differences between ‘culture’ and education at the system level (noted in EB1). It can compromise student engagement, because the threat to
culture is implicated in the teasing and bullying of students who are engaged in schooling and/or aspire to further education (see EB4a).

- Many parents and community members are actively engaged in their schools, as mentors for instance, though often restricted by their own level of education. They call for systemic action to have the schools become more culturally safe (EB4a), teachers more culturally competent (EB4b), and to include a cultural element in curriculum and pedagogy (EB5). Such action can overcome feelings of alienation and improve engagement. Kinship relationships strongly influence student, teacher, parent and wider family interactions, and efforts to accommodate them in schools can contribute much to better engagement.

- Engaging community is easier where the community is more cohesive. It is difficult where the community is troubled by internal division, but school may productively reach out to invite community participation, e.g. on School Council. Participation on School Councils is beneficial and increasingly important [8] (see EB8), and may be one way to gauge community engagement in remote contexts [5 p35].

Key considerations for policy and practice

- In pursuing the devolution of decision-making responsibility to communities and schools, governments need to make concerted attempts to understand and treat remote communities’ concerns, ways of working and desired changes in legitimate ways. Bureaucratic structures, formal relations and disconnected output measures on communities should be avoided [5 p36]. Social policy must enact stated support for investment in more informal, personal and relationships-based approaches that incorporate local Indigenous knowledges and practices [5 p33, 36-41,3].

- Effort should be made to progress the establishment of formal partnerships between remote schools and VET and higher education providers in co-hosting community-based graduation ceremonies.

References

5 Smith, JA, S Larkin, D Yibarbuk, and J Guenther (2017) What do we know about community engagement in Indigenous education contexts and how might this impact on pathways into higher education?, Ch. 3 in J Frawley, S Larkin and JA Smith (eds) Indigenous Pathways, Transitions and Participation in Higher Education: From Policy to Practice (pp. 31-44), Singapore: Springer Open
8 Collective School Council Statement on Remote Indigenous Education
Evidence Brief 4(a) Providing culturally safe school environments

The Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) initiative found that a key to building the student-teacher and student-student relationships on which school learning rests is to ensure that schools are supportive environments that encourage honest interaction. Students must feel confident to express their developing ideas, engage with the gentle challenges teachers pose to those ideas, and consider the ideas of others. They will then be learning. In remote contexts like those in which the WCE worked, the challenge includes that imposed by the ‘external’ Western social and cultural construction of schools (e.g. in terms of interactional norms and behaviour management). That imposition can alienate students whose cultural orientations are different, and compromise their engagement. Changes to make the school environment more responsive to local social and cultural norms can make it more culturally safe, welcoming and educationally successful. The goal of cultural safety has to be to build confidence to engage in critical thinking. A culturally safe school is a base from which to gain ‘self-determining’ control of the complex educational environment.

Background
Culturally safe workplaces are those ‘in which people feel safe and secure in their identity; where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, who they are and what they need’. It is ‘about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning, living and working together with dignity’ [1 p213, see 2]. As places of learning, efforts to make schools more responsive are aimed at students. As workplaces, efforts aim to support local teaching, administrative and ancillary staff, parents and community. Both are progressed by reducing the power disparity between non-Indigenous and Indigenous staff, and between students and staff. This can be done by employing more local people, involving community members, localising curriculum, adapting pedagogy to suit learners’ preferences (EB5), and by ensuring that visiting non-Indigenous staff are aware of and happy to respond to local social and cultural norms (EB4b). Principles include staff awareness of local culture and their own culture, their active efforts to change to accommodate it, to invite participation, and focus on the individual and his/her strengths and needs [3,4].

Key messages from WCE
• Cultural ‘danger’ for Indigenous people in remote schools is associated with the threat of having to interact with non-Indigenous people and Western knowledges and social norms that are often imposed in a taken-for-granted way. There is a structural imbalance of power. The WCE approach aimed to produce a culturally safe and productive environment for both its Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff.
• The cultural and power imbalance exists in schools despite attempts to moderate it via bilingual/bicultural education, attention to local social structures and cultural conventions, and the employment of local teachers. Some outsider teachers understand local cultural orientations, speak local language(s), and work in productive partnerships with local teachers. Some stay after retirement or return at times to conduct training. Their capacities for relationships help establish environments that empower local people to participate actively, knowing that their perspectives will be heard.
• Some outsider teachers do not have the same understandings, and rely on structural authority to maintain control, which degrades student and family engagement.
• Local team teachers can help make the classroom environment more culturally safe, but their impact depends on the attitude and skills of the qualified teacher.
• Some schools are working to produce culturally safe environments by addressing social and cultural dynamics that flow from the unresolved discrepancies between the imperatives of the education system and community (EB1). Those discrepancies allow interest in school and further education to be interpreted as indicating desire for the Western world and (following the logic of difference) rejection of the local. The interest can invite bullying, exaggerated by social media. And having to leave the community for further education is felt to restrict the ability to attend to cultural obligations and gain cultural seniority. Both dynamics can pose threat and compromise engagement.
• Culturally safe environments are important in building the resilience students need to go on to deal with the challenges of social and cultural interaction.
• The cultural safety of non-Indigenous staff is also relevant. Efforts to develop an environment that was safe for Indigenous staff had the fortunate effect of making the contributions of non-Indigenous staff more welcomed.

**Key considerations for policy and practice**

• Training should be provided to help non-Indigenous teachers and principals adapt current Western education practice towards an approach that is more collaborative, negotiated and delivered in partnership with local teachers (see EB10). This may extend the system of mentoring already envisaged by the NT Department of Education to build teacher capability and school leadership. Genuine team teaching can begin to make the culture of schooling responsive and developmental.
• In remote Aboriginal schools mentoring should mean support and incentives to retain long-serving teachers and use them to advance the cultural and intercultural skills of newer staff. (This also applies to local teachers; see EB10.)
• The NT Department of Education should prioritise the provision of housing for community-based local Indigenous staff.
• The NT Department of Education should celebrate the achievements of remote schools that foster culturally safe environments, and disseminate their methods.
• The NT Department of Education should explicitly recognise and address the importance of achieving quality education in remote contexts, in contrast to the current promotion of boarding schools as the sole preferred option.

References
2 Hall, L and M Wilkes (2015) “It’s a safe environment for us Indigenous students”: Creating a culturally safe space for Indigenous pre-tertiary students (pp. 112-122), In J Frawley, JA Smith, S Larkin and M Christie (eds) Learning Communities: International Journal of Learning in Social Contexts, Special Issue: Indigenous Pathways and Transitions into Higher Education
Evidence Brief 4(b) Employing culturally competent teachers and principals

EB4a concerns modifications to remote schools aimed at providing an environment in which students feel safe and learn well. Evidence Brief 4b concerns the necessary changes required of visiting non-Indigenous teachers and their practice. This is greatly influenced by local social and cultural values, habits and sensitivities. In the schools with which the Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) initiative worked, effective teachers were able to build relationships, develop engaging curriculum, communicate ideas with students, maintain a positive classroom environment, and form collaborative partnerships with colleagues, across the cultural differences they encounter. Their capacity for culturally competent practice depends on knowledge of local culture, critical knowledge of their own, openness to the differences and energetic response to the implications.

Background
Cultural competence refers to the attitudes and behaviours teachers need to be effective in guiding the learning of culturally different students [1,2]. It is practices, but more. It depends on their desire and ability to learn about the people for whom they are working, in interaction with them, and to integrate what they learn into their practice. They must learn the nuances of local culture and the different ways that different individuals express them. They must know Whiteness and its impact on themselves and others [3]. They must be culturally humble [4] and proactive in response. These changes should challenge the ‘entrenched and durable attitudes and structures’ [5 p29] of the education system that differ from community imperatives (EB1). There are potential dangers if the changes are approached without care. Stereotypes of Aboriginality and lists of competencies for instance, cannot account for lived ambiguities, and may have negative effects [6 p208-209]. Naïve attempts can assume that Indigenous people are passive recipients whose behaviours can be predicted and directed. This perception must be continuously challenged and opportunities in leadership and governance (EB8) explored.

Key messages from WCE
• The WCE communities and schools were aware of the nature and effects of cultural difference, and many are implementing local responses to it. One response was to teach the local kinship structure and its expectations, and use it to build student relationships with others and organise their classroom interactions. Many teachers are adopted into families and taught how to live and work within it. This is valuable when embraced wholeheartedly. These teachers’ practice can become more culturally competent as a result. Others need to know and learn how to work within its parameters. In places where kinship structures
are less influential, cultural competence is more ambiguous, more finely tuned, and bridging differences can be more demanding.

- Local Indigenous teachers, some fully qualified and others in training, worked in most of the WCE schools in team situations with qualified colleagues. They are vital to the development of culturally safe places, both-ways learning and culturally competent practice. However, this is often dependent on the qualified teachers’ acknowledgement of, and preparedness to address, difference, and to respect the value of local colleagues’ knowledge and contribution.

- Some schools are developing training programs for this issue (see e.g. https://remotengagetoedu.com.au/communities/galiwinku/cultural-awareness-training/). An ‘emergent’ approach that follows issues and events as they emerge in school life is important. It may better suit the local audience than a highly structured approach. However, resources need to be developed for new staff, and training embedded in school life, if such programs are to be sustainable.

**Key considerations for policy and practice**

- Pre-service teacher training that provides knowledge of cultural specifics and sets of practices [7 p9-15] can be of benefit. Further professional development should focus on guiding teachers’ and principals’ attitudinal shifts so that they can acknowledge the legitimacy of the different ways of thinking, perceiving and doing that exist in remote Indigenous communities. Attitudinal shifts are needed to be able to adapt to new and complex circumstances. These changes are necessary for effective team teaching with Indigenous colleagues.

- Consideration should be given to facilitating placements for selected pre-service trainee teachers in remote Indigenous schools.

- Governments should invest in scaffolded training and professional development opportunities for teachers and principals that support culturally competent educational practice across a continuum. This would mean cumulative investments that build relevant skills across a career pathway.

- Consideration should be given to embedding relevant elements of cultural competence in Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Standard 1.3, across the career stages of graduate, proficient, highly accomplished and lead teachers [8]. Consideration should also be given to referencing relevant elements of cultural competence in leadership practices and requirements [9] and to embedding relevant attitudinal and skills development in training for principals [10].

**References**

2 Universities Australia (2011) National Best Practice Framework for Indigenous Cultural Competency, Canberra, ACT


8 Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (2011) Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, Carlton, Vic: Education Services Australia

9 Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (2015a) The Australian Professional Standard for Principals and the Leadership Profiles, Carlton: Vic, Education Services Australia

10 Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (2015b) Preparing Future Leaders: Effective preparation for aspiring school principals, Carlton, Vic: Education Services Australia
Evidence Brief 5 Incorporating Indigenous curriculum and pedagogy

A major factor in Indigenous students’ disengagement from school and higher education is the middle-class Western bias of curriculum and pedagogy. Much curriculum derives from that socio-cultural context. It is less meaningful to students who are unfamiliar with that context. Pedagogy is biased to literacy-based methods. Though increasingly holistic, experiential and discovery based, it has not been effective in remote education. Leaders of the communities in which the Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) worked call for schools to provide a cultural education as a first priority. It is to them a matter of sovereign right (as expressed in the Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous Peoples’ Rights in Education [1, p192-194, 229-236]. It provides the foundation on which their children can engage with other components of their learning. They call for adaptation of curriculum to enhance its relevance to the local community, and for more learning to be ‘on country’. Learning on country programs (as developed by the Northern Australia Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance, NAILSMA) partner Indigenous students with Indigenous Rangers and others in their management of weeds, feral animals, fire, people, monitoring of fish stock, habitat restoration, and much more. Such programs embed standard curriculum (including literacy and numeracy and higher order science, geography and ICT) in meaningful real activity. They integrate curriculum ends with Indigenous aspirations, perspectives and transfer of cultural knowledge [2]. This is to have schools, seen as working in ‘cross-cultural’ contexts, become more culturally safe and/or appropriate. It can amount to a ‘both-ways’ education [3,4].

Background
Some remote communities in the NT have a long tradition of bilingual/bicultural education, in which the strength of local cultural knowledge grounds student ability to access the knowledge of the West. The ideas of culturally appropriate curriculum and pedagogy and both-ways education have a long history, as do associated notions of cross-culturality and cultural awareness, sensitivity and competence. These ideas respect Indigenous and Western cultures, and imply that adaptations are required to better suit Indigenous students’ backgrounds, strengths and needs. ‘Both-ways’ education acknowledges cultural interface and intersection [5 p74]. It is recognised that both-ways is relevant to more than educational practice, and needs to be continually re-examined [6]. That need is related to the complex intersection of cultures and remote education environments. Nakata has theorised the cultural interface, its outcomes as difficult and its educational demands as profound [7,8]. Though both-ways education may invite more nuanced responses to the relationship of the Western and Indigenous worlds [9], it may also obstruct them. Indigenous learners can be left underserved if the implications of the complexity in which they are living are not incorporated into educational practice.
Key messages from WCE

- Leading voices in the WCE communities call for language and cultural learning as the base for other learning. This is a longstanding call. In the remote communities, examples include land and sea management, fire and emergency management, language maintenance, health and emotional wellbeing, local histories, and art, story, dance, music and song. The leaders regard such curriculum, taught on country, as critical in its own right. They also regard it as the foundation of other learning.

- Leaders regard a cultural education as important because it can teach students about their own ways of interacting and relating, about their obligations to others, and why and how to have respectful relationships with their Elders, and with their teachers [10]. Indigenous curriculum and pedagogy can be productively delivered in tandem with locally-developed mentoring programs aimed at acknowledging the concerns and voices of those young people who are somewhat disengaged (see EB9).

Key considerations for policy and practice

- Responsiveness to diversity is a specific concern in the NT Curriculum Framework. In the case of remote Aboriginal education, this implies that the Department of Education commit to the continuing development of both-ways education and require that teaching staff and principals are fully trained in the approach. Bat and Shore [11 p12-17] note the importance of teachers’ willingness and ability to make choices that are consistent with the both-ways philosophy. Teachers and principals must be able to take a community development approach in their work [6 p11, 11 p17].

- The NT Board of Studies (NTBOS) argues that Indigenous language and culture programs should be developed for all school and post-compulsory years, and incorporated in school strategic plans and professional development [12 p47-61].

- An embedded language and culture program should develop a framework that will assist students learn how to critically compare the cultures that influence them [6 p15] and negotiate their intersections (see EB7).

- Development and delivery of language and culture curriculum will require ‘sustained systemic support’, including for Elders who hold the knowledge [12 p51, 13]. It should include a pre-service training program to ensure that teachers and principals are able to deliver the curriculum effectively. Training would be most effective as a pre-service program complemented by an in-service program that reflects on current events.

References

1 McConville, G (2006) Regional agreements, higher education and representations of Indigenous Australian reality: (Why wasn’t I taught this in school?), in Read, P,
27


6 White, L (2015) Finding the common ground with Indigenous and western knowledge systems and seeking the common good for all present and future Australians: Where is the common ground if we are going to find it?, In Huijser, H, R Ober, S O’Sullivan, E McRae-Williams and R Elvin (eds) *Finding Common Ground: Narratives, Provocations and Reflections from the 40 Year Celebration of Batchelor College* (pp. 8-19) Batchelor, NT: Batchelor Press


13 Collective School Council Statement on Remote Indigenous Education
Evidence Brief 6 Investing in English language, literacy and numeracy (LLN)

Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) initiative stakeholders stressed cultural education as a top priority, in part as a base for further Western learning (EB5). They stressed equally, that competence in LLN\(^2\) for students and adults was important to sustain culture and language, and to function and achieve in Western society. This mutual dependency reveals some of the complexity of remote Indigenous education. The stakeholders recognised that their poor English literacy and other foundational skills make further education very difficult. It impacts on their capacity to be active, participatory, self-determining Indigenous citizens in the contemporary world. The necessity to engage with the West is the most profound challenge of school and further education for remote Indigenous people. LLN provides the key tools to begin doing so.

Background

LLN skills are the basis of further education and social equality in terms of employment, socio-economic status, material wellbeing, personal security, and physical and mental health. The ability to communicate is necessary for all if they are to have a voice. Also, Indigenous people make up 30% of the NT population and are highly significant to economic development and cultural richness. Commonwealth and NT governments recognise their importance to economic development in Northern Australia and have strategies that target their stronger participation in local community decision making, greater education and employment success and improved health and safety. English LLN competency relates strongly to the ability to participate in all these areas yet has received limited policy attention and program support. It is essential in most areas of life, including post-school education, employment, health [1 p55-60], and to Indigenous peoples’ capacity to be leaders in their local communities and active participants in the wider Australian society. Without LLN skills, the understandings needed for full social inclusion are not possible [2].

Achieving LLN competency is a challenge for the 54% of the NT Aboriginal population as a whole and over 80% in the remote communities who do not speak English as their first language [1]. Indigenous learners must also overcome a history of school learning that has been assimilatory and damaging to culture and language.

Key messages from WCE

- WCE stakeholders and community members insisted that a primary focus on local culture is fundamental and not something that can be negotiated.

\[^2\] LLN is used as a shorthand; it incorporates English literacy, numeracy and other foundational skills.
Aboriginal languages are central to cultural practice, identity and connection to country, and must be established first. In a written statement following a strategic project focused on LLN, a number of Elders stressed that young people need ‘a deep understanding of their own languages, our cultures and our traditions’, not only ‘understanding of the meaning of words [but also] of the power of knowing’ [1 p3]. The Elders wished their collective statement to be used to promote a systems response and catalyse action.

- Many Aboriginal adults have further educational aspirations for themselves, their family and community, and view the ability to speak, read, write, learn and communicate in English as essential.
- The Elders above also stated that proficiency in English is required to ‘continue to care for our country; fully participate in all the jobs in our communities; go on to further education; talk confidently to government and services about issues and negotiate our needs; grow our own businesses that will make the future bright in our communities; and support children and grandchildren in their education so they will have all the successes they deserve’ [1 p3].
- A large network of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal practitioners, service providers, academics and advocates agreed that literacy is a fundamental human right, essential to social inclusion and peoples’ ability to realise their potential [3]. See https://www.cdu.edu.au/sites/default/files/opvcil/update_sep2017_action_on_lln.pdf
- Current levels of adult English LLN are very low. Shalley and Stewart’s statistical overview revealed that 85% of a sample of 660 Aboriginal adults from across the NT lack the English LLN skills to function independently in life, education and work [1]. This constitutes a major barrier to their participation in society, VET and higher education [5,1], as well as access to public services, engagement with government, participation in the economy and workforce, and navigation of the health and legal systems.
- Governments have neglected remote schools’ ESL needs. No NT government agency has lead responsibility for adult education/adult LLN, and there is no adult literacy policy and no strategy or framework for action. In addition, the LLN workforce is ageing, and the opportunities for education and training are diminishing and becoming more expensive. A result is that the majority of the adult Aboriginal population, particularly those like remote people who are at the lower measures of the scale, are missing out on any form of assistance with English LLN. This impacts on their children and future generations.
- Some WCE communities are providing community based LLN training for adults. They call for LLN to be included in programs at all levels of schooling, from Family as First Teachers to VET-in-schools courses in land management, administration, tourism, business and counselling. Charles Darwin University offers a Graduate Diploma of Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practice.
Key considerations for policy and practice

- The LLN Action Statement [3] and Stewart [5] contain clear guidance on policy direction, focusing on the need for government leadership in LLN policy, strategy and delivery. Key issues are for government to commit to long term funding of the development of models of LLN delivery that are appropriate to NT contexts, and of an Aboriginal-led NT policy and strategy.
- Shalley and Stewart [1] support implementation of the Action Statement, and stress the need to:
  - establish adult LLN assessment, data quality, collection, monitoring and analysis (within and beyond Darwin region);
  - provide long term funding and sustained resourcing for LLN development;
  - support culturally appropriate service delivery, including a ‘whole family’ approach to LLN delivery [6]; and
  - conduct relevant research about LLN and Indigenous peoples’ learning needs and aspirations.

References

1 Shalley, F and A Stewart (2017) Aboriginal Adult English Language Literacy and Numeracy in the Northern Territory, Whole of Community Engagement Initiative Office of the PVC Indigenous Leadership, Charles Darwin University
4 Bauer, R (2018) Case study on adult literacy and socio-cultural learning at Pina Pina Jarrinjaku (Yuendumu learning centre), WCE
Evidence Brief 7 Ensuring intercultural education practice

The Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) initiative found that the Indigenous people in the communities in which it worked wanted schools to teach their own cultures and knowledges, and Western equivalents. However, these dual priorities are not entirely distinct. The cultures and knowledges intersect, and individuals identify with them and continually negotiate and transform their various meanings. In schools, students and teachers must negotiate the intersections to sustain their relationships, and teachers must manage them so that they can effectively guide students’ learning. In the local community, such negotiation is important to the relationships between teachers, parents and other community members. These are matters of communication that are fundamental to learning, and so of concern to everyone involved. Managing the interactivity in classroom and community relationships well, will enhance student engagement. Engaging students in study of interculturality as a subject of curricula focus will enhance their own agency and the community’s self-determination in the contemporary world.

Background
The attempt to account for the effects of cultural difference on Indigenous learning began with both-ways approaches, which acknowledged some cultural intersection. An intercultural perspective sees the interface of the local customary world and that of the global West as comprehensive. It sees those worlds as deeply interconnected, with cultures changing continually, particularly as the local incorporates elements of ‘mainstream’ influences. Interculturality recognises shared humanity and co-existing differences and samenesses. It sees a complexity [1 p12-13] that extends the both ways thinking that has influenced many teachers and principals to understand the Indigenous and Western worlds as dichotomous [2]. Intercultural complexities need to be made visible. As Nakata says [3, also 4 p16], Indigenous students need higher order skills to gain control of this situation. They need a meta-knowledge (built on LLN basics) that allows a critical understanding and the ability to negotiate the structural factors that shape their lives.

Key messages from WCE
- The approach of the Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) initiative was intercultural. It used research teams that shared insider/outside perspectives. It combined the prioritisation of local perspectives then applied scholarly critique. It negotiated local and Western knowledges. The team understood the following as interculturality: the mutuality of cultural and Western education and local language and English LLN; the blending of local and scientific ways of knowing in Land and Sea Management; and the integration of different styles of leadership in emergency management. It found that leadership requires sophisticated
management of intercultural demands. In such instances, difference and sameness are respected, and a balance of the local and the West is negotiated.

- Interculturality is a factor in remote lives and the barriers to engagement in school and further education. It raises demands that coexist, and sometimes compete and produce tensions, as in the name-calling of those who show interest in education (EB4a).

- Cultural intersections are sometimes tricky to negotiate, as in the case of a teacher or principal seeking to reconcile kin expectations and the professional obligation to treat every child equally. Some raise serious ethical issues, but even those that apparently compete are negotiable. With good will and creativity, common ground can usually be found, and people are most often generous in accommodating difficulties. In this sense, culture is flexible.

- The tensions exist (and affect student engagement; see EB9) because schools do not know of or avoid dealing with their structural roots. Ways to undermine the roots and build individuals’ capacity to negotiate them, must be found if Indigenous people are to be equal citizens who can also live in accord with their cultural orientations. Some teachers and schools are addressing the intersections, such as that between ceremonial and teacher responsibilities. The approach adopted by the WCE (EB1) is a necessary condition of the possibility of doing so.

- Many in remote communities are aware at different levels of interculturality, and know that to be self-determining they, their children and community must have the best possible control of its negotiation. Some community organisations are tussling with it, developing programs with schools that combine cultural competence (EB4b), student mentoring (EB9) and professional development (EB10). These are excellent starting points in gaining control of the complexities.

**Key considerations for policy and practice**

- Explicit government assistance is necessary for schools to take interculturality into account in all aspects of practice. The NT Department of Education should acknowledge interculturality as a specific focus for action in future strategy and policy development. This is facilitated by the inclusion of intercultural capability as a key competency in the national curriculum.

- All teaching staff and principals must be sensitive to intercultural intersections and the issues they produce in education, and have the skills to manage them [e.g. 5 p 122, 6 p55]. NT DoE, BIITE and CDU must prioritise the development and delivery of pre-service training and in-service professional development to develop both.
References
4 White, L (2015) Finding the common ground with Indigenous and western knowledge systems and seeking the common good for all present and future Australians: Where is the common ground if we are going to find it?, In Huijser, H, R Ober, S O’Sullivan, E McRae-Williams and R Elvin (eds) Finding Common Ground: Narratives, Provocations and Reflections from the 40 Year Celebration of Batchelor College (pp. 8-19) Batchelor, NT: Batchelor Press
Evidence Brief 8 Mobilising Indigenous leadership and governance

Christie et al. [1] found that in remote Top End and Central Australian communities similar to those with which the Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) initiative worked, there was an existing leadership culture and processes of traditional governance. There was also a strong aspiration to reassert both, to become more locally self-determining. This was in the context of government interventions in communities that were generally perceived to be imposed. In some communities the aspiration was to take over leadership and governance completely, but more often it was to collaborate in partnership with governments and other agencies. There was an underlying recognition of the new and changing world. The aspiration to self-determination and support in developing local capacity to lead it, is echoed in remote education. D’Arbon et al. [2] describe remote schools as spaces that require multi-dimensional leadership capabilities in order to bridge the personal, relational, organisational, professional and intercultural demands involved. In schools and community organisations, there are tensions where Indigenous styles of leading (often based in relationships) intersect with more managerialist bureaucratic systems [e.g. 3,2 p9-10].

Background
Many managers of community, government and non-government organisations in remote communities, including schools, are non-Indigenous, partly because few locals have had the required technical, financial and administrative skills. But in contemporary situations those skills are but one dimension of the capacities required. Other skills are needed, to broker relationships with non-Indigenous mechanisms and people, lead locals who are immediate and more distant kin, and reconcile the tensions between governmental emphases on short-term outcomes and efficiency, and community level emphasis on relationships that are less easily measured. The challenges are accentuated for women leaders in a largely masculine field [4,5]. Effective governance requires leaders with strategic understanding and ability to manage the many simultaneous and sometimes differing demands. They must be able to draw on Western technical skills and local customary practices, so that, while maintaining a distinctively Indigenous profile, neither takes over [6 p8-10]. Both aspects are needed to manage the demands on contemporary remote organisations [7 p12], and Nolen [8 p150] and Kamara [5] reveal that some remote NT schools are responding to the challenge with models of group leadership.

Key messages from WCE
• Many of the WCE researchers were community leaders, literate and numerate managers of community organisations, who sat on several boards of
management, including School Councils. They were deeply engaged with the challenges of local leadership.

- Managing a community organisation or government school in a remote community is highly complex. The tension between managerialist and relational styles of leadership was evident in WCE schools, and leaders had to try to satisfy the competing demands. Formal authority is intersected, and may be sidelined by local authority structures. Indigenous leaders must be skilled at the several interfaces, mediating and brokering the constantly changing demands and ‘strategically balancing [sometimes competing] accountabilities’ [9 p177]. They also must negotiate identity pressures.

- Partnerships brokered by WCE (EB2) formalised existing local educational leadership, with local organisations leading the provision of student mentoring services, visiting teachers’ cultural awareness training, and local teachers’ professional development. They demonstrated the value of partnership support. In their leadership of various local bodies, Indigenous people demonstrated their awareness of the impact of the outside world, and their strategic engagement with it. The collective school council statement on remote education was an outcome of a meeting of representatives of the WCE community school councils and others at Yirrkala [10]. The statement demonstrates the leaders’ awareness of the issues raised in these evidence briefs. See https://remotengagetoedu.com.au/uploads/files/73/2016-5-23_4-73.Collective%20School%20Council%20Statement%20on%20Remote%20Indigenous%20Education.pdf

- Local Indigenous leaders consistently expressed their concern to build the leadership capacity of their young people.

**Key considerations for policy and practice**

- The NT Government is committed to devolving decision-making responsibility to community school boards. This should continue. Indigenous school leaders and members of school councils need support to develop the mix of standard skills (e.g. LLN, meeting procedure) and cultural, cross-cultural and intercultural skills they need to be effective. This requires institutions to embrace the complexities indicated in these Evidence Briefs, leading to:
  - recognition and better support for schools’ capacity to be self-determining in education, including funding to develop the leadership capacity of members of school councils. The NT Council of Government School Organisations (COGSO) could assist in this regard;
  - provision of more opportunities for young people to build their leadership capacities (EB8, EB9);
  - provision of support for local Aboriginal teachers to thrive and lead (EB10).
References


5 Kamara, MS (2009) Indigenous Female Educational Leaders in Northern Territory Remote Community Schools: Issues in Negotiating School Community Partnerships, Unpublished PhD, Australian Catholic University


Evidence Brief 9 Supporting mentoring for Indigenous students

Earlier Evidence Briefs in this series from the Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) initiative indicate the complexities of remote Indigenous life and schooling. They also suggest that student engagement in and aspiration for further education is reliant on adequate system responses to the complexities. Suggestions for making the responses more ‘innovative’ as recommended in the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education [1], have been made in earlier Briefs. The focus in EB9 is how locally developed mentoring programs try to compensate for system inadequacies. Many students need guidance to find a way through the issues they find in pursuing school and further education. Mentoring is currently being provided by a mix of respected Elders with cultural authority, older ex-teachers with pedagogical skills, and young people with shared experience of the frustrations and potential satisfactions of school and higher education. The mentoring is crucially important to current students, and must be a policy and practice priority.

Background

Mentoring programs have proven beneficial for young people, including Indigenous young people, in school and university [2 p395-396, 3,4,5]. They work to build an emotional connection between mentor and mentee, and through the connection, student confidence, basic skills, awareness of pathways, and favourable disposition towards formal education. In some ways, mentoring accords with the Indigenous focus on social relationships, and it complements other efforts to build culturally safe environments (EB4a). However, no off-the-shelf or sufficiently tailored mentoring programs currently exist for remote Indigenous students. Those like The Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) [6] are primarily pitched at Indigenous students in urban settings. Others have emerged at tertiary level, with several universities investing in ambassador programs. There are a number of differences, some subtle, that make pre-existing programs less than appropriate for remote students. Most are for individuals who share a community of identity but no lived community, where local programs are dedicated to people embedded in a lived community with shared history, language, kinship rules and other cultural mores strongly embedded in social norms. This is variable in every case, and so programs need to be place-based.

Key messages from WCE

- Students in WCE initiative schools face an array of issues arising from constant socio-cultural change. Issues include competing cultural imperatives, variable parental and community engagement with schooling (EB3), identity-based teasing, and the challenge of critical learning.
The WCE initiative recruited Mentoring and Engagement Officers and community-based mentors. Some of the WCE schools provided locally-specific mentoring programs to support students in addressing these issues. They employed cultural Elders, retired local teachers and young people. Many of the older people are concerned to ensure a new generation of leaders, and young people who show potential are engaged in mentoring programs. Some mentors work in formal partnerships with local community organisations. Programs aim first to build relationships between student and mentor, and then to guide students to adopt their community’s expectations (in part to influence their behaviour towards their teachers), provide career pathways advice, and do standard remedial work. Some mediate between local groups to resolve clan or family disputes that spill into school.

Programs are developed locally, organically responding to local events, priorities and contexts. They are as a result, of immediate interest and relevance.

As suggested in EBs 4a, 4b, 5, 6 and 7, these community-initiated programs can be seen as ‘plugging a gap’ in what many in the WCE communities regarded as core business of the Northern Territory Department of Education. They are required to fill in for deficiencies in the remote school system.

There is some preliminary evidence that where locally-developed mentoring programs have been implemented (including through the WCE initiative) there have been improvements in attendance and engagement.

Key considerations for policy and practice

- Further research into the factors that support mentoring programs in remote Indigenous education contexts is warranted.
- An increased systemic focus on the lived situation in remote communities, and better networking of services, would increase the effectiveness of mentoring.
- NT Department of Education should support current community-led mentoring programs, and invest in the further development of such locally-based, suitably contextualised mentoring programs to support the growth of aspiration among remote Indigenous students and their families.
- The research and design should be integrated in a sustained pilot program designed to test the effectiveness of mentoring programs informed by current programs.

References


Evidence Brief 10 Maximising the contribution of local Indigenous teachers

Local Indigenous people are employed in the Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) initiative schools as qualified teachers and semi-qualified assistant teachers (many in training), the latter working in team teaching situations with mainly non-Indigenous visiting qualified teachers. All are immensely valuable to their schools and communities, whether in charge of their own class leading both-ways and intercultural learning or working well in an intercultural team. Their role is often misunderstood and their potential frequently undervalued. They are knowledgeable about local historical, social, cultural and intercultural realities, and often adept at negotiating the dynamics of school and community, and their own teaching relationships. Many are considered as leaders in the education occurring in their schools, and so in their communities, and the demands on them parallel those outlined in EB8. They are considered in that light here. Informed by Shore et al.’s terminology of ‘Yolngu teachers’, we use the term ‘local teachers’ to refer to all local teaching staff, on the basis of ‘the mix of conceptual, cultural and experiential contributions they offer’ their schools [1 p13, 2 p6-7].

Background
The value of Aboriginal teachers and education workers (under various titles) is recognised in all states and territories. They are central to school-community relationships, cultural safety, student engagement, and curriculum and pedagogical relevance [3]. In recent times, the numbers of Indigenous aspirants to tertiary teacher training, and the retention rate of those who enrol, are both lower than parity [4]. Some earlier programs, including the Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) and Deakin-Batchelor Aboriginal Teacher Education (D-BATE) Programs, have been highly regarded for their responsiveness to trainees’ geographical and socio-cultural situations [2 p14-15]. A contemporary exemplar is the Catholic school system’s Growing Our Own program [5]. As Shore et al. [1 p20] say of parental engagement, it may be that current training courses do not address the demands revealed in these Evidence Briefs that are made on local teachers in remote schools. Shore et al. also depict a system that obstructs community educational goals. Training for local teachers must be very sophisticated if it is to be adequate to the demands that are placed on them. It must equip them to work in ways that contribute to community perspectives, development and capacity building aspirations on the one hand, and to the importance of school education on the other. Teachers of local languages must be able to ‘teach through the language, but also to teach the language and to teach about the language’ [6 p54]. One of the more complex and difficult to realise demands is that it ‘retain the graduates’ social standing within their communities’ [7 p11]. To do so, system and training must be highly responsive to the everyday cultural and intercultural complexity.
**Key messages from WCE**

- Local teachers in WCE initiative schools are hugely important because of their close relationships with their communities and schools. They work with non-Indigenous colleagues at the intersections, and mediate the many demands raised in earlier Evidence Briefs, including mentoring non-Indigenous visiting teachers (EB4b). To be effective, they must be highly culturally and interculturally competent. Their own communities have very high expectations of them, while the educational community may value them, but is less aware of their local status and value, and more ambivalent.

- They are expected to achieve the fine balancing of the local and the Western in their classrooms, and many are competently doing so. Murphy and Railton [8] provide evidence of WCE teachers integrating the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and cultural knowledge in primary schooling.

- They are expected to manage the relationships with visiting qualified staff, collaboratively develop learning material, and assist students who may be having difficulties in their relationships with those teachers. They must bridge differences of culture and language, seek common ground, and negotiate relational nuances, with little official authority. Their contribution is often contingent on the attitude and skills of their qualified non-Indigenous teaching colleagues and principals. This needs to change.

- WCE community leaders are keen to ensure that local teaching staff are the best possible role models for their students: defenders of traditional authority, ‘balanced upstanding member[s] of the community’ [9 p310], highly disciplined, models of co-operation with non-Indigenous colleagues, and more. In partnership with schools, some are providing training to this end, in a conscious attempt to account for what they see as shortcomings in current training.

**Key considerations for policy and practice**

- The key messages highlight the failure of the NT Department of Education to accommodate remote Indigenous peoples’ educational needs. The failure explains the complex demands imposed on local teachers (akin to those on other leaders; see EB8). It establishes the need for sustained and long-term effort to bring about cultural change across the system. A first step in bringing about such change should be the provision of cultural and intercultural training for all teachers and principals. This training is fundamental, and recommended in Evidence Briefs 1, 4a, 4b, 5 and 7. Cultural change also demands a career structure that encourages successful teachers to remain in remote teaching.

- A position in each school to provide tutoring support for local teachers undertaking training and professional development is urgently needed. The same position could support mentors and pathways counselling for senior students.
The NT Department of Education should prioritise the training of Bachelor qualified Indigenous teachers, extending on recent investments in vocational training delivered through BIITE and informed by other successful programs like RATE and Growing Our Own. This needs to be a central feature of the NT Indigenous Education Strategy 2015-2024. Consideration should also be given to shorter accredited training programs for language teachers [6 p 55].

References
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