Reference No. 26

Responsibility for the preparation of this research summary rests with the authors of the MCEETYA report *Education, Training and Indigenous Futures: CAEPR Policy Research 1990–2007* and not the original author(s) of the summarised material.

Title of Research:
Indigenous Australians and preschool education: Who is attending?

Research Publication:
Unpublished article 2006

Name of Researcher(s):
N. Biddle

Time period: 2001

Geographic location:
Australia-wide

Methodology:
This is an analysis of questions related to preschool attendance contained in the 2001 Census.

Aims:
This aim of this paper is to examine the relationships between individual, family, household and area level characteristics and preschool attendance for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (aged three to five years who are not at school).

Selected findings and insights:
There was substantial variation in preschool attendance across the States and Territories. For example:

- The Northern Territory (NT) had the lowest attendance for Indigenous preschool age children, which was less than 60% of the non-Indigenous rate; whereas
- South Australia had almost equal attendance rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous preschool age children.

There was also a substantial decline in Indigenous preschool attendance the greater the distance from major cities, and this decline was greater than for non-Indigenous pre-school age children.

Educational attendance for 3–5 year olds increased with age. The proportion of children who attended infants/primary school increased, but so too did the rate of attendance at preschool (for those not at school). However the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous attendance was also larger the older the child. That is, the ratio of Indigenous to non-Indigenous Australians who were not attending any school increased from 1.04 at age 3 to 1.26 for those aged 4 years and then to 1.97 for those aged 5 years.

After controlling for a range of potential external influences upon preschool attendance, the research found that 3-year-old Indigenous children were more likely to be attending preschool than non-Indigenous 3 year-olds whereas Indigenous 4 and 5 year-olds were less likely to be attending preschool than non-Indigenous children of the same age.

- Due to methodological issues about the quality of the Census data, the reasons for the higher participation rates for 3 year-old Indigenous children, compared to non-Indigenous children, is not clear.
• The lower probability of 4-5 year old Indigenous children attending preschool than non-Indigenous children may in part be due to something about them being Indigenous in and of itself.

A small sex effect was identified – among 4 year-olds, females were more likely to attend than males.

**Family characteristics** such as one family member having completed Year 12 and obtained a degree were associated with increased chances of the child attending preschool as was higher income levels of the family.

There were significant **State and Territory differences** in preschool attendance rates and these differed according to age. For example:

- For three year olds, children in NSW had the highest probability of pre-school attendance (South Australia and Victoria had the highest probabilities outside NSW).
- For four year olds, those in NSW no longer had the highest probability of attending with those in South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory all having a higher probability and Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania having the lowest; and
- For five year olds, NSW had the lowest probability of attending. Victoria, South Australia and the Northern Territory had a slightly higher probability with the others all having a probability 0.100 higher than NSW (a probability of virtually one).

There were also differences in the extent to which four and five year olds attended preschool within States and Territories: For example:

- In South Australia and the Northern Territory, five year olds attended preschool at the same rate as four year olds;
- For NSW, five year olds attended at only a slightly (though significantly different) rate whereas for Victoria, the ACT and Western Australia, the differences were quite large; and
- In Queensland and Tasmania, four year olds were not very likely to attend preschool with a very large increase in the probability for five year olds.

**Remoteness** also influenced pre-school attendance – those preschool age children living in very remote areas were least likely to attend preschool.

Whilst the same factors of **low household income** and **low family education attainment levels** affected preschool attendance for Indigenous and non-Indigenous children, the effects were greater for Indigenous children, and this was especially the case for those living in **very remote** Australia. This remoteness effect also applied to those Indigenous young children living in remote Australia, although it was not the case for non-Indigenous young children.

Finally, the research found a **positive effect of employing an Indigenous preschool worker** upon Indigenous participation rates, with no such relationship found for non-Indigenous participation in pre-school.

**Educational implications:**

The major influences of low family income and low education attainment levels cannot be directly addressed by educational authorities. However they do suggest opportunities for influencing preschool attendance through parenting programs, developing preschools as part of infant/primary school provision and possibly by subsidising attendance at preschools. [planning]
The important role of Indigenous preschool workers also emphasises the need to develop promotional strategies that encourage the uptake of Indigenous young people into preschool teacher and teacher assistant occupations. [training]

Relevance:

Domain 1: Early Childhood Education

Access to quality programmes

Related papers: