Reference No. 53

Summarising: Gregory (2006), *Asking the right questions*?
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.

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Title of Research:
Asking the right questions?

Research Publication:

Name of Researcher(s):
R.G. Gregory (a participant in the CAEPR sponsored NATSISS seminar)

Time period:
2002

Geographic location:
National level information.

Methodology:
Statistical analysis of the 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) and Department of Employment and Workplace Relations administrative data was undertaken with particular reference to Indigenous job seekers and employment.

Aims:
This paper seeks to identify relationships which may exist between employment training programs and employment of Indigenous job seekers.

Selected findings and insights:
Over the last three decades the state of Indigenous employment has moved backwards:

- Mainstream employment-to-population ratios have fallen from 42% in 1971 to 33% in 1991 and down to 30% in 2001. The ratio is projected to fall to 26% by 2011.

Those Indigenous persons in employment also included a small but growing number of high income earning Indigenous people, often associated with Indigenous economic and political activities. If this group was excluded from the calculations so that the focus was upon the ordinary Indigenous population then:

- The mainstream employment-population ratio fell from 28% in 1991 to 24% in 2001, with a projected further fall to 20% by 2011. That is, after removing those Indigenous persons on high incomes, 80% of the remaining Indigenous adult population did not have a mainstream job.

The analysis found that Indigenous job seekers were extremely poorly qualified – they had very low education levels and very low levels of English competence:

- 48% of Indigenous job seekers had not completed Year10 and 28% had writing ability considered less than 'good'.
The researcher concludes that from the Department’s administrative data it appeared that employment training schemes were relatively ineffective. That is, employment growth could be solely derived from increased skill development and job search skills for adults.

In summary, greater policy and research emphasis needed to be placed on the interplay of culture and Indigenous decision-making, rather than relying so heavily on treating employment problems in typical economic terms of maximizing income generation.

Educational implications:

This paper gives a cautionary note to training providers that the development of job search, job readiness and other formal training courses, without reference to the influence of Indigenous family and social or community relational issues, of themselves are not likely to lead to effective pathways to employment. The paper highlights that current employment policies are not working well for the majority of Indigenous people and the young who do not relate well to the school environment or a disciplined work environment. For this reason the paper suggests:

- greater policy and research emphasis needs be placed on the interplay of culture and Indigenous decision-making in regard to choice of jobs and actual job aspirations and commitments to kin and ‘country’, rather than relying so heavily on treating employment problems in typical economic terms of maximising income generation. [policy] [culture]

This also relates to schooling and similar research would be advantageous in regard to how best to help develop career aspirations, interest in work and school to work transition strategies for Indigenous ‘at risk’ youth.

Relevance:

*Domain 5: Pathways to training, employment and higher education*

- Access to post-compulsory schooling, training, employment and higher education
- Participation, retention and achievement in post-compulsory schooling, training and higher education

Related papers:
