Education, Training and Indigenous Futures
Research Summaries
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Summarising: Hunter & Schwab (2003), *Practical reconciliation and recent trends in Indigenous education*
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:
Practical reconciliation and recent trends in Indigenous education

Research Publication:

Name of Researcher(s):
B.H. Hunter and R.G. Schwab

Time period:
1986–2001

Geographic location:
National level information only.

Methodology:

Aims:
This paper aims to identify recent trends in Indigenous participation, especially within the public policy framework of 'practical reconciliation'.

Selected findings and insights:
Over the 1986–2001 period, the participation rate in education of the Indigenous working age population increased overall, compared to a decrease among non-Indigenous working age people, reflecting the different age profile of the two groups – with the Indigenous population being much younger and with a higher proportion of youth at the point of entry into post-secondary schooling. Of interest though was:

- the continued trend for higher levels of TAFE enrolments among the Indigenous Australians compared to other Australians – due to regional accessibility, vocational focus and flexibility in its modular approach, entry via employment programs and programs such as CDEP; and

- the gap in higher education participation rates of Indigenous Australians had widened relative to non-Indigenous Australians in 2001 when compared to 1986 participation rates, after controlling for the more youthful Indigenous profile.

The life-cycle profile of participation in post-secondary education differed between the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous population:

- the Indigenous population showed much higher participation rates in post-secondary education later in the life-cycle, whereas the non-Indigenous population had a higher participation rate at a younger age.

For Indigenous Australians, the degree of inequality in educational attainment as compared to non-Indigenous Australians increased with qualification level. That is, Indigenous people tended to have fewer higher qualifications relative to their non-Indigenous counterparts than they did for the more basic vocational qualifications.
between 1991 and 2001 there was however a small but significant narrowing of the gap for almost all educational levels.

Nevertheless the equity or parity ratios remained at about 0.4 or less for undergraduate diplomas, bachelor degrees and postgraduate diplomas and degrees.

The Discussion Paper also examines the barriers to Indigenous participation in education and training, drawing upon other CAEPR research which highlights the importance of family and cultural factors:

- Poor quality housing and crowding, others in the household having been arrested, cross-cultural misunderstandings between school and Indigenous families, racism and the continuing impact of intergenerational negativity to western institutions all had a negative affect on educational participation; by contrast

- The presence in the household of others who have an educational qualification or who are attending school had a positive influence.

Finally the Discussion Paper considers the changing demography of Indigenous Australians - up until about 2013 there will be considerable pressure upon educational expenditure as the younger Indigenous cohort enters post-compulsory schooling, training and higher education. Therefore:

- to bring about ‘practical reconciliation’, defined in terms of achieving parity in education participation and attainment levels, in the near future will require substantial additional expenditure on Indigenous education than is now being made.

Educational implications:

This paper represents the other part of the challenge to Commonwealth and State and Territory governments in terms of creating an educational pathway to employment for Indigenous young people.

- The first is the large number of additional jobs that must be created and occupied if Indigenous employment is to reach parity with non-Indigenous employment levels;

- The second is that the educational attainment levels (that is, post-school qualifications) of the Indigenous workforce must also reach parity with the non-Indigenous workforce if they are to compete effectively when seeking employment. Absolute improvement will not necessarily be sufficient to fill available jobs, especially those associated with higher level occupations. [policy]

The postponing of post-secondary education to a later age, possibly due to family commitments, implies the need by tertiary institutions to provide additional support for (older) Indigenous students returning to study.

- They may well require initial support in settling into the institution. These students will often be separated from family, and once again be employing study skills which have either waned in the interim or which had not been all that well developed in the first place. For women this will be particularly difficult as frequently they will have had children prior to returning to study. [support services]

Relevance:

Domain 5: Pathways to training, employment and higher education

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