Reference No. 68

Summarising: Hunter & Schwab (1998), *The determinants of Indigenous educational outcomes*
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:
The determinants of Indigenous educational outcomes

Research Publication:

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

Time period:
The paper mainly covers the period 1986 - 1996

Geographic location:
National with some analysis at the regional level.

Methodology:
This paper draws upon statistical analyses of data collected in the 1991 and 1996 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census of Population and Households as well as in the 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey.

Aims:
This study aims to identify the major geographical, social and cultural determinants of the educational attainment of young Indigenous Australians, especially in regard to those factors which influence:

- attendance of 13-17 year olds at high school; and
- attainment of a post-school qualification by 18-24 year olds.

Selected findings and insights:
The paper presents trends in educational participation for Indigenous people between 1986 and 1996 which highlighted the continued high levels of primary school participation which then dropped off dramatically during secondary schooling, and the low levels of post-secondary qualifications of the Indigenous population, although it did note a small improvement relative to the non-Indigenous Australian population.

The paper makes the point that in terms of educational disadvantage, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had poorer educational outcomes than the Indigenous populations of Canada and New Zealand.

- In 1991, 91.2% of the Australian Indigenous population over the age of 15 years lacked any educational qualifications (high school or higher). This compared to about 77% for New Zealand Maoris and 51% for Canadian Indians.

The study provides new insights into the family and social influences upon educational participation:

- the experience of arrest reduced the probability of attending school by 25.6% and 18.4% for males and females respectively, but was not significantly related to having a post-school qualification for adults.
- place of residence appeared to be a problem only for teenagers in remote areas who are about 20 percentage points less likely to be in school.
Local social environments in the household were strongly associated with increased attendance and retention rates at high school for 13–17 year olds:

- for males, poor quality housing reduced the probability of being at school by 28 percentage points. Similarly, living in households where others have been arrested reduced the probability of attending school by an additional 23.3 and 19.8 percentage points for males and females respectively. The presence of household members who were qualified or at school significantly increased the chance that a person would be at school.

However the study found that having a long-term health issue increased the probability of remaining at school, as did being married.

Whether or not an Indigenous adult aged 18–24 years old had a degree, diploma or other qualifications was largely influenced by:

- living in a remote area, having young children, poor quality housing, and having difficulty speaking English, which reduced the likelihood of having a post-school qualification; whereas
- other household members being qualified or at school increased the likelihood of having a post-school qualification.

The study concluded that family and social variables dominated the decision to stay on at school. The effect of the geography variable, representing proximity to educational institutions, was in general dwarfed by the influence of the local social and family environment.

Educational implications:

The important influence of being arrested in disrupting secondary schooling and reducing the likelihood of secondary schooling being completed is a major challenge for educational authorities as well as the justice system. For while the juvenile justice system, together with educational authorities, provides educational programs, these may not be sufficient to motivate students in continuing education, especially if the immediate social environment does not value education.

Yet if students can finish secondary education, then the influence of having been arrested does not affect their likelihood of attaining a post-school qualification and hence increased employment prospects.

This finding emphasises the importance of evaluating existing educational programs for young people held in detention to ensure that they present those in detention with the greatest chance of continuing with their education on release. [juvenile justice] [curriculum]

With such a high proportion of Indigenous youth being placed in juvenile detention, effective policy action is required by both law enforcement agencies and the justice system in minimizing the number of Indigenous youth being detained.

Education can play a role in both focusing upon appropriate social behaviours and developing curricula relevant to the educational and cultural needs of Indigenous youth. If as other CAEPR research shows, a significant proportion of young people leave school because they don’t like schooling, schools can play an important role in reducing such high levels of school alienation, with its consequent non-attendance and increased chances of boredom and low level criminal activity. At the same time the training sector can play a role in the continuing professional development of police, increasing their understanding of cross-cultural issues and how best to address Indigenous youth misbehaviour. [at risk students] [curriculum]
The impact of poor housing conditions on educational participation and attainment provides an excellent example of the priority which needs to be accorded to joint government agency action, in association with Indigenous communities and their organisations, in addressing pressing welfare issues. At the same time educational authorities can focus upon providing additional learning spaces for Indigenous students such as has been the case with Homework Centres and with ongoing professional development of the teaching force to understand better the family living conditions of many Indigenous students and how that influences student learning and behaviour. Of particular concern is the recruitment of new teachers who will be teaching Indigenous students and who have generally had little preparation – being reliant solely on a quick induction or 'on-the-job' learning from experience. [welfare] [planning]

The third area for intervention is the continued emphasis upon the need to improve the English language capacity of Indigenous adults, as well as school-aged young people, so that they can participate in continuing education and gain post-school qualifications. Already this is being addressed by jurisdictions through inclusion in training courses. Possibly this needs expansion through alternative delivery strategies aimed at those currently not interested in further education – but who, given the opportunity, may be interested and thus be better prepared to take up opportunities in any newly developed labour markets. CAEPR research on governance points to the need for increased literacy and oracy skills among the adult population which would support attention being paid to this group of people. [governance] [literacy skills]

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

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