Summarising: Kral & Falk (2004), *What is all that learning for? Indigenous adult English literacy practices, training, community capacity and health*
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:
What is all that learning for? Indigenous adult English literacy practices, training, community capacity and health

Research Publication:
2004 Report to NCVER 2004

Note: This is not a CAEPR publication but since the report Kral has joined CAEPR staff and followed through on this work.

Name of Researcher(s):
I. Kral and I. Falk

Time period:
2003

Geographic location:
A remote Indigenous community of Alyawarr and Anmatyerr people of the Sandover region located in Central Australia, some 250 kilometres north-east of Alice Springs and comprising some 17 decentralised outstations (NT).

Methodology:
This is a case study of the community over a two month period using an ethnographic approach involving interviews and conversations with community members, observation of everyday literacy practices and analysis of literacy artifacts and documents. Interviews were held with 49 community members, the Indigenous director of the health service and 10 non-Indigenous key people from the education department, the health service and training providers as well as linguists.

Aims:
The Alyawarr and Anmatyerr people have maintained a strong link with Indigenous law and culture, through their unbroken connection to ‘country’, the strength of the kinship system and the ensuing ceremonial and cultural obligations. Within this context of a remote Indigenous community, the aim of the study was to:

- Examine the relationship between the English literacy practices and the literacy requirements of further education, training and employment

More specifically, the research sought to:

- Identify the links between individual and community history of literacy learning and current literacy practices;
- Describe how adults use literacy in everyday life;
- Describe how literacy is acquired/learned within the social and cultural framework of the community;
- Identify approaches which engage and motivate adult literacy learning;
- Examine the extent to which adults perceive the relevance of adult literacy to ongoing training and employment pathways; and
• Identify any linkages between adult literacy learning and community capacity building.

Selected findings and insights:

The research found that the intergenerational transmission of literacy practices in the home was minimal, as was the cultural transmission of the purpose of Western schooling across the generations. Nevertheless, people believed that the purpose of schooling was important, especially in regard to the learning of English which:

• Enabled community members to deal with government agencies such as Centrelink, the police and the justice system. That is, the need for functional literacy was high and was the most common form of literacy practiced, although it should be noted that what comprised functional literacy may have required only very low level competence. A similar qualification applied to the use of home literacy by community members. The most developed form of English literacy competency applied to ‘Christian’ literacy, involving using hymnals and Bible reading.

About half those community members interviewed had participated in an adult literacy or training course, or both, however only a small number had any aspirations for formal training.

• Community members did not see the connections between training and employment pathways nor how formal training might fit into or strengthen community life.

• Employment options were extremely limited for community members and generally restricted to the local school, health service or CDEP scheme. Across the community, one qualified Indigenous teacher was in charge of an outstation school and 19 ‘community teachers’, comprising 11 full-time and part-time teacher assistants and eight Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme tutors, were employed in the five Homeland learning Centres. Aboriginal health workers were also employed.

• The research found a general lack of interagency coordination and planning, with each employment sector operating independently and not within an overall strategic framework for the future of the community. In terms of employment aspirations, community members were limited to those employment experiences with which they were familiar, such as CDEP, health and education and did not have a broader vision of the ‘world of work’ or the overall relationship between training, work and the opening up of alternative employment opportunities.

The research also examined in detail the delivery of health services in the community, especially in regard to Indigenous employment, greater community involvement in health care and the opportunities for capacity building. The research found:

• Aboriginal Health Worker training was affected by: high turnover of staff, community desiring on-site training only, lack of English literacy and numeracy skills among Aboriginal Health Workers (although this is being overcome with younger people being employed who are more literate) and a general lack of integration between training and community planning.

• The importance of governance and management training to improve health service management which was based on a ‘both ways’ model: culturally appropriate, underpinned by community control and relevant to community priorities. Young people were being identified for future leadership roles and mentored.
Educational implications:

The educational implications of this research flow directly from the study's findings. The study confirms the value the community places upon schooling but this is limited to the basic teaching of English and numeracy skills. While there is no apparent labour market in these remote communities, it will be difficult to encourage a wider belief in the types of educational outcomes schooling can achieve, such as those reflected in the National Goals for Schooling or the Aboriginal Education Policy. Until a more coordinated interagency approach is taken to widening the employment base for remote communities, the concept of establishing pathways through schooling to training to employment will largely be wasted. Unfortunately this study suggests a general lack of inter-agency coordination in this regard, including a more collaborative effort between government agencies and Indigenous community organisations within a regional planning and capacity building framework. [pathways] [regional development] [partnerships]

The potential role of literacy education assisting the 'flagging' health provisions is that it provides an avenue not only for improving literacy skills among Health Aides but it can also be used to engage young mothers and children in being conscious of health problems and how best to deal with them. This is an important extension of the concept of functional literacy. [literacy]

Relevance:

*Introductory Topic: The Health of Indigenous Australians*

*Domain 2: School and Community Educational Partnerships*

- Cross-cultural understanding of purposes and value of education
- Cross-cultural relationship between school and community

*Domain 4: Quality Teaching*

- Explicit teaching of English literacy and Standard Australian English

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

- Participation, retention and achievement in post-compulsory schooling, training and higher education
- Culturally inclusive support strategies, culturally appropriate work readiness strategies, career counsellors and mentors
- Adult return to education and/or training
- Pathways and strategies for remote locations

Related papers:

I. Kral and J.G. Schwab 'The realities of Indigenous adult literacy acquisition and practice: Implications for capacity development in remote communities', *CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 257, 2003*