Reference No. 78

Summarising: Kral (2007), *Writing Words – Right Way: Literacy and social practice in the Ngaanyatjarra world*
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.

Reference No. 78

Title of Research:
Writing Words – Right Way: Literacy and social practice in the Ngaanyatjarra world

Research Publication:

Name of Researcher(s):
I. Kral

Time period:
2004–2006

Geographic location:
Warburton in the Western Desert region of West Australia

Methodology:
This is an ethnographic study of the literacy practices of the Warburton community, which comprises about 600 people. The methodology consisted of life history interviews, key informant interviews, primary and secondary research, participant observation, the collection of literacy artifacts and access to administrative data. Most data were collected during 2004, with follow-up interviews in 2005 and 2006, seeking additional information or checking information already gained.

Aims:
The thesis examines the literacy processes used by a remote Indigenous community from educational, social and cultural perspectives and within historical and contemporary contexts.

Selected findings and insights:
This thesis provides a detailed ethnographic analysis of literacy practices within the community, emphasising that literacy practices have been shaped by situation and context across the generations and cannot be understood simply in terms of school-based pedagogy with the intent to developing technical competence. That is:

- Success in developing literacy skills in a remote community was seen as a gradual process which needed to be embedded within the life experiences of the person.

In this regard, the research points out the success of earlier missionaries in developing literacy skills among the community members by embedding the ‘teaching’ of literacy within the religious context to which they had given meaning and incorporated into everyday practices. For example, elders were trained as literate church leaders.

The research showed that about one-third of the adult community regularly read and wrote.

- Most literacy requirements were met by the individuals themselves or through support networks – or else ignored.
However it was in the area of administrative literacy such as responding to administrative or judicial requirements that there was the greatest ‘real’ need and the role of literacy was most relevant to community members.

The role of families in the transmission of literacy was reliant upon them incorporating literacy within everyday cultural processes and practices – where that was not done then literacy levels of children would be insufficiently developed to be ‘school ready’. In addition, if children experienced literacy only through non-Indigenous adults as role models then this was not likely to lead to enduring literacy skills and formal schooling would be less effective.

The research notes that, for remote communities, there are only weak linkages between schooling and meaningful occupations for young people and, similarly, weak relationships between schooling and young people’s socialisation into their own cultural community.

Educational implications:

The researcher draws the following educational implications from this detailed analysis of literacy development that may be applied across remote communities:

- For those of school-age, schooling needs to be more flexible in adapting to the learning needs of these students and, in the case of literacy, be embedded within the local experiences of the students.

- For adults, the challenge is to create opportunities for literacy learning through mentoring so that literacy learning is an ongoing informal part of their lives. [curriculum]

In both cases therefore there appears to be a need to move outside westernised formal education and training processes and take advantage of alternative learning environments, including more collaborative approaches, which fit their own culture and relate in a meaningful way to their life experiences. For example:

- Multimedia and the arts provide meaningful opportunities for literacy learning;

- Advantage can be taken of community centres, youth centres and the juvenile justice system as ways of situating literacy learning in contexts which are relevant to everyday experience;

- Educational programs can be aligned with traditional learning cycles and the emerging leadership roles of young men; and

- Mentoring in land management and native title activities can lead to related knowledge skill acquisition and a strengthening of connection to country. [culture] [curriculum] [mentoring]

Finally, the research highlights the importance of developing strategies whereby young adults can acquire the necessary literacy skills to become involved in community governance and be effective in deal with government agencies and meeting administrative requirements. [capacity building and training]

Relevance:

Domain 4: Quality Teaching

Significance of curriculum

Explicit teaching of English literacy and Standard Australian English
Domain 5: Pathways to training, employment and higher education

- Participation, retention and achievement in higher education
- Return to adult education
- Pathways and strategies for remote locations

Related papers: