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Summarising: Schwab (2006), *Kids, Skidoos and Caribou: The Junior Canadian Ranger program as a model for re-engaging Indigenous youth in remote areas*
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:
Kids, Skidoos and Caribou: The Junior Canadian Ranger program as a model for re-engaging Indigenous youth in remote areas.

Research Publication:

Name of Researcher(s):
R.G. Schwab

Time period:
2006

Geographic location:
Canada, with particular application to Indigenous communities in remote areas of Australia

Methodology:
This discussion paper is based on a visit to Ottawa and British Columbia and interviews with government officials and non-government agencies as well as field work with participants in the Canadian Ranger program in the Innu communities of Matimekosh and Lac John, and the Naskapi community of Kawawchikamach, each in remote locations of Canada.

Aims:
This paper explores the potential application of the Junior Canadian Rangers youth program to the Australian context of Indigenous young Australians living in remote communities who face similar problems of social and educational disengagement.

Selected findings and insights:
The paper identifies a range of community-based land and resource management programs which existed in remote areas such as the Northern Territory. For example, in 2006 there were:

- 35 Indigenous ranger programs coordinated by the Northern Land Council that provided paid work for 300 men and women, covering weed control and eradication, fire management, sustainable harvesting of wildlife and plant materials and the protection of sacred sites.

The paper argues that similar programs could be developed for young Indigenous people and become a focus of youth employment.

There were distinct similarities in the issues facing the Indigenous peoples of Canada and Australia — cultural diversity, living in remote localities on traditional lands where labour markets are limited or non-existent and where participation in the customary economy is variable. In addition, both populations are young and growing in number compared to non-Indigenous people in the two countries, and are characterised by economic and social disadvantage, low levels of educational attainment and high unemployment.
The Junior Canadian Ranger (JCR) Program was a community-based program developed by the Canadian Department of Defence. In 2005, there were 3,014 Junior Rangers (predominately Indigenous) in 104 ‘patrols’ across almost all Canadian provinces and territories, with a target of 3,900 Junior Rangers set by 2008.

The program aimed at capacity building and enhancing self-image and thereby strengthening both Indigenous young people and the communities in general. Important features of the JCR program were that it:

- encompassed and helped maintain traditional culture and practices, taught practical ranger skills and developed personal skills such as leadership and parenting skills;
- had a well developed pedagogy, was activity-based and included a vocational orientation, increasing employment opportunities. The program also had a community focus with program outcomes being of value to the community.

As well as individual and community benefits, there were potential national benefits of the JCR program: search, rescue and disaster relief in remote regions and future recruitment to the Canadian rangers responsible for coastal and land surveillance.

The paper suggests that there were potentially existing links between Indigenous communities in remote areas and the Australian Defence Forces which would facilitate the development of a similar program for Indigenous youth living in remote Australia. If such a program was to be established, possibly by the Australian Defence Forces (to parallel the Canadian experience), then the paper emphasises the need for:

- adapting current approaches to program delivery to better fit cultural values and practices;
- comprehensive community consultation in both the development and implementation stages;
- programs to be meaningful to young people, in terms of traditional culture and values, practical skills and personal development;
- programs to be underpinned by solid pedagogy, as Indigenous youth are already generally disaffected with formal education; and
- integrating the program within the current government policy agenda, including developing partnerships between communities, government departments and non-government agencies.

Educational implications:

With the increasing emphasis by the Commonwealth government for Ranger Programs in Northern Australia, it is important that suitable education and training is delivered by educational institutions. Whilst acknowledging that many rangers are already undertaking Certificate courses in Land Management and Horticulture, it is timely that the relevance of these courses be thoroughly evaluated to ensure that they are meeting the skills required in what is amounting to a new industry with the prospects of significant employment opportunities. [training]

The introduction of junior ranger programs associated with secondary education as a means of re-engaging early school leavers or those at risk of leaving school early is not merely a watering down of adult ranger program training requirements. Curricula will need to be developed for those Indigenous youth who, all in probability may not have been sufficiently motivated to participate in adult Ranger programs and/or complete the training necessary. The paper identifies key characteristics of courses which will need to be developed to meet the various ranger programs that are currently being proposed. [VET in Schools]
Just as the courses will challenging for prospective junior rangers they will also challenge secondary schooling to respond in a way in which they may not be well equipped – designing curricula and adopting teaching strategies which are grounded in cultural contexts, working collaboratively with adult ranger programs and local Indigenous organisations and possibly incorporating the expertise of other educational institutions. This is largely unchartered curriculum territory and will require close monitoring to ensure the best possible outcomes for the students, local community and their ‘country’. [teacher training]

Relevance:

*Domain 5: Pathways to training, employment and higher education*
- Student aspirations and key transition points
- Pathways and strategies for remote locations

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