Summarising: Schwab & Sutherland (2001), *Building Indigenous learning communities*
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:
Building Indigenous learning communities.

Research Publication:
CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 225/2001

Name of Researcher(s):
R.G. Schwab and D. Sutherland

Time period:
2001

Geographic location:
Australia and United States of America

Methodology:
This paper reviews the literature on social capital theory and Indigenous learning communities, factors influencing Indigenous participation in education and the development of learning communities in Australia and the USA by selecting specific examples.

Aims:
This discussion paper is policy oriented and seeks to develop a model of 'schooling as learning community' which will improve the educational participation and attainment of Indigenous young people as well as strengthen the overall capacity of the Indigenous community. In particular the paper:

• explores educational policy and program options for linking families, schools and communities (including business and government) in the creation of learning communities that identify and address local needs and draw upon local resources.

Selected findings and insights:
The paper details the overall context which the researchers argue have shaped existing approaches to Indigenous education:

• an historical legacy of an 'unwelcoming' approach to schooling for Indigenous young people, structural arrangements which do not take account of local Indigenous needs and practices, philosophical underpinnings of educational policies such as 'compensatory' education, and the complexities of empowerment within cross-cultural settings.

Five examples of learning communities are provided, each example being a school which operates as an integral part of a community education centre. The schools serve communities typical of many Indigenous Australian communities in terms of existing levels of socio-economic disadvantage and educational participation and attainment.
• Each of the examples involve parents as full partners with teachers in their children’s education, with programs offering extended learning opportunities and incorporating programs of social development, empowerment and ownership of the educational process. The five schools are:
  • Aboriginal Family Education Centres in northern New South Wales;
  • Parent/family Centres in the USA
  • Community Learning Centres in the USA;
  • Full service schools in Australia (particularly the Northern Territory) and the USA; and
  • Community schools, using an American community school as an example.

In summary, each of these five case studies has the school situated at the centre of the community, is involved in community capacity-building and the development of social capital, has integrated a range of adult and child services into their operation — as well as the education of students. The paper cites:

• overall positive outcomes in terms of increased student participation, academic performance and retention, improved student social behaviour, and increased parental and community involvement in the school.

Educational implications:
This paper is primarily about policy options for developing Indigenous learning communities to address the broad needs of families and schools through, where practical, integrated service delivery. Key features of such a learning community model of education would include:

• empowerment of participants;
• cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity;
• structural and infrastructural changes to encourage parent and family ‘comfort’;
• programs derived from local needs based on local consultation, and involving cross-cultural skill transfer and skill development;
• a dedicated community liaison person, engaging with parents, families and the wider community, including business and other agencies; and
• a focus upon the home as well as the school, and breaking down the barriers between school and community.

[learning communities]
Relevance:

Domain 2: School and Community Educational Partnerships
- Cross-cultural understanding of purposes and value of education
- Use and negotiation of educational partnership agreements between schools and communities

Domain 5: Pathways to training, employment and higher education
- Return to Adult Learning

Related papers: