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Summarising: Schwab & Sutherland (2004), *Literacy for Life: A Scoping Study for a Community Literacy Empowerment Project*
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.

Research Publication:
A Report prepared for the community of Wugularr, the Jawoyn Association and the Fred Hollows Foundation, 2004 ANU Press

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

Title of Research:
Literacy for Life: A Scoping Study for a Community Literacy Empowerment Project

Time period:
2001 - 2003

Geographic location:
The remote Indigenous community of Wugularr (also known as Beswick), located 120 kilometres south of Katherine (NT) and the home of the Bagula clan of the Jawoyn people.

Methodology:
As this was a scoping study, information gathering was largely through consultations with the Jawoyn Association and members of the Wugularr community during two field trips to the community. This information gathering was supported by consultations with relevant government agencies and education and training providers and analysis of demographic and employment-, education- and training-related information.

Aims:
This study is part of a longer-term study designed to enhance health, education and employment outcomes in the Katherine region through a community literacy program. Specifically, this scoping study aimed to:

- Provide up-to-date baseline data on employment, education and training outcomes as well as demographic information for the community;
- Map out community perceptions about and aspirations relating to English literacy;
- Identify a set of case studies of international best practice for community literacy; and
- Develop strategies for increasing literacy levels throughout the region.

Selected findings and insights:
The study provides a fairly comprehensive profile of the Wugularr community against which to develop a community literacy program:

- The community comprised between 350 and 450 people, with a very large and growing proportion of young people. The community was linguistically diverse, with Kriol the most commonly spoken language. English was almost exclusively used when speaking to non-Indigenous people in the community or wider region.
- **School attendance** was a significant problem, with average attendance in 2002 by pre-shoolers and primary school students being 3 days per week and for junior and senior secondary students about 2.5 days per week.

- The numbers of students achieving national literacy and numeracy benchmarks in 2001 were extremely low, and lower than for other Indigenous students in remote schools.

- Despite poor quality data for further education and training, the study found that 36 adults enrolled in adult, technical and further education courses over the three year period 1999-2001 (Note: the same adults could have enrolled in more than one course) and that overall the provision of adult education was irregular and low.

- Whilst the training courses tended to focus upon health, first aid, remote area local government and community services, there was an extremely wide range of types of modules actually undertaken.

- The labour market in Wagularr was extremely limited. Unemployment increased between the 1996 and 2001 Censuses, labour force participation dropped and dependence on welfare payments increased. The reliance on CDEP was evident — if CDEP is excluded from employment calculations, then for 2001 the unemployment rate would have been 93%.

The importance of English literacy was recognised by the community, especially in regard to:

- Increasing employment opportunities
- Maintaining and improving the health of individuals and the community
- Improving community governance and community development.

Furthermore there was support with the notion that improving literacy was a joint responsibility between the school and the community, although the study does point out that many in the community did not wish to participate in the consultations and hence might hold differing views.

The study identified three areas of intervention for the Wagularr community to consider and these are very much interdependent. The study proposed a range of activities for supporting:

- young children, mothers and families - through the development of a Wagularr Child and Family Support plan and the recruitment of an Early Childhood and Support Officer;
- adolescents and adults - through the development of a Wagularr Community Literacy plan, conducting an audit of literacy and numeracy skills of CDEP jobs and recruitment of an Adult and Community Literacy Officer; and
- children at school – through building an Indigenous learning community around the school.

**Educational implications:**

This scoping study identified a range of programs from around the world that could be applied in some form to increasing adult literacy levels in the Wagularr community. In so doing the study stressed the importance of:

- Involving the entire community, reflecting local cultural context, and focusing upon those skills relevant to the community;
- building on what the adults and children already know, and developing strategies for literacy development that may involve adults and children learning together;
• engaging mothers and young women so that health and early childhood issues can be addressed through literacy programs.

within the overall aim to enhance community capacity and social capital, and to empower the community to implement community literacy programs. [literacy] [curriculum]

Relevance:

Domain 1: Early Childhood Education
   Parental capacity to support literacy acquisition and participation in child’s education

Domain 2: School and Community Educational Partnerships
   Cross-cultural relationship between school and community
   Cross-cultural understanding of purposes and value of education

Domain 5: Pathways to training, employment and higher education
   Adult return to education and/or training

Related papers:
Inge Kral and Ian Falk What is all that learning for? Indigenous adult English literacy practices, training, community capacity and health, 2004 Report to NCVER.