Reference No. 109

Summarising: Schwab (2000), *If You Have a Dream, You Make It Happen: Approaches to Maximising Educational Engagement among Young Indigenous Students*
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:
If You Have a Dream, You Make It Happen: Approaches to Maximising Educational Engagement among Young Indigenous Students

Research Publication:

Note: Use Acrobat file for downloading – not the RTF file (it is linked to another document)

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

Time period:
2001

Geographic location:
Three localities in urban and remote areas of Australia: Kempsey (NSW), Broome (WA) and Cairns (Qld.).

Methodology:
Three case studies selected on advice from the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and State education departmental staff as well as Indigenous consultative bodies. The three case studies covered:

- a remote non-government secondary school where Indigenous students comprised over 80% of student enrolments;
- an independent Indigenous College where students from local high schools enrolled in VET in Schools studies in community health care; and
- an urban government high school, with a large proportion of Torres Strait Islander students.

The case studies brought together both qualitative information and data drawn from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and DEST.

Aims:
The aim of this study was to identify some of the key personal, school and community factors associated with educational engagement among young Indigenous people who are enrolled in senior secondary schooling.

Selected findings and insights:
The study describes in detail the approaches used by the three case study schools to improve the participation of Indigenous young people in post-compulsory schooling. An overview of each approach is given below.
The remote non-government secondary school focused upon:

- **A Pathways Program** for ‘at risk’ Indigenous young people as they moved from primary to secondary schooling, typically having literacy skills well below that necessary for mainstream secondary education. Students worked with mixed-age groups of peers but at their own pace through three sequential levels of study so that they were ready where possible to enter mainstream education at Year 11. At the end of the Pathways program most continued into Year 11. In terms of aspirations they tended to be modest – entering vocational education and training courses or directly into employment.

- **Youth Arts Gallery** which was a small business enterprise utilising the natural artistic skills of Year 11 and 12 Indigenous students who had graduated from the Pathways Program. The Youth Arts Gallery program was also suitable for re-engaging early school leavers and unemployed young people. The benefit of this program was that it provided tangible and meaningful outcomes or benefits from investing in education.

- **Hospitality and Tourism Training Program** which fitted both the interests of the students and future employment opportunities in a very competitive labour market. The program combined a cluster of Year 11 and 12 subjects, a selection of Australian Qualification Framework modules related to Hospitality and Tourism and hands-on training in the workplace. The course was delivered in partnership with the local TAFE College. Overall the program matched the realistic work aspirations of local Indigenous young people.

The independent Indigenous College catered for students from local high schools in its **VET in Schools** studies in **community health care** at ‘non-vocational’ Year 9 level, pre-vocational for Year 10 students and vocational levels for Year 11 and 12 students through to Diploma levels. The following key features in the provision of VET at this college were identified.

- The school aimed to strengthen a student’s academic, social and cultural capacities and in turn strengthen community capacity;

- Pedagogy recognised ‘Aboriginal learning styles’, was practically based and interactive. Indigenous staff and the involvement of community Elders provided role models;

- Students’ value system and cultural traits were acknowledged and respected, and account was taken of important cultural aspects such as Indigenous English, extended families, body language, group orientation, sharing and past/present orientation;

- There were high completion rates of students undertaking the VET in Schools program, with an overall completion rate of over 75%; and

- Courses were matched to future employment opportunities, in this case the expected growth in the aged care needs of the region.

The program also provided an avenue for early school leavers to return to schooling as well as catering for those who, having completed secondary schooling, seek further education.

The urban government high school catered for a group of secondary age students from the **Torres Strait Islands** who were:

- culturally distinct from Aboriginal people in the region, were often separated from home by great distances and had different educational experiences and needs than those of other Indigenous Australians; and
had difficulties, due to lack of Standard Australian English skills, in coping with an increasingly theoretical underpinning of vocational education courses offered by the school. Consequently, students completed secondary schooling often with basic vocational competencies, insufficient to enter an apprenticeship.

Developing opportunities for TSI student engagement was the priority adopted by this school, using avenues such as:

- representation on an Indigenous Student Council and involvement in small business enterprises;
- targeting the engagement of male Indigenous students through a Peer Reading Program with feeder primary schools and involving a tertiary institution and the introduction of adult Indigenous men into the school to work with ‘at-risk’ boys.
- quite explicitly valuing Indigenous cultures, including the establishment of a community cultural centre in the school; and
- development of cross-cultural understandings between teachers and students.

Educational implications:

This study has identified the following personal, school and community factors associated with educational engagement among young Indigenous people which have direct implications for educational leaders, teachers and those responsible for curriculum policy.

Visibly and continually promoting respect for Indigenous culture which includes:

- an understanding by staff of the validity of Indigenous languages, Creole and other forms of non-standard Australian English and an understanding of Indigenous family structures and responsibilities. [curriculum]

Indigenous staff facilitating connections between Indigenous students and what is often, at least initially, a foreign and unfamiliar institution. They play the role of:

- educator, translator, role model and bridge between home and classroom. [staffing]

Leadership and a clearly articulated vision for addressing the needs of Indigenous students. Such a vision will be:

- local and context-specific, derived from careful analysis of both the particular local needs of students and communities and a realistic assessment of what resources and opportunities were available to meet those needs; and
- shared by committed and creative staff who are adequately supported. [leadership]

Community engagement of both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous sectors in supporting the school’s endeavours, which included the school developing:

- mechanisms to consult with and link to the community, including parents, families, employers and other education and training providers; and
- ways to draw the community into the process of educating and training its young people. [partnership]

Curriculum relevance being in terms of life skills and a pathway to employment necessitate close integration of curriculum offerings with local opportunities, targeted career counselling and community consultation.
An ability to identify additional sources of funding to complement existing resources, which requires an 'entrepreneurial' role for the school leadership and the use of all resources, from whatever source, in a coordinated manner to maximize benefit. This may involve entering into partnerships with other educational institutions.

Recognition of the individual and maximising the individual's opportunities to succeed requires careful adaptation of educational programs to meet the needs of the individual — and a preparedness of the school to do so. The experience of success results in increased self-esteem and increased engagement with learning. [curriculum]

Through providing tailored programs and approaches, students are given a sense of empowerment — with the skills and knowledge they have gained, they can affect their own social and economic futures within their own cultural context.

Relevance:

Domain 2: School and Community Partnership Agreements
- Cross cultural relationship between school and community
- Use and negotiation of educational partnership agreements between schools and communities

Domain 3: School Leadership

Domain 4: Quality Teaching
- Significance of curriculum
- Cultural understanding
- Adoption of pedagogies to develop high expectations and outcomes

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
- Pathways and strategies for remote locations

Related papers: