Education, Training and Indigenous Futures

Research Summaries
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Reference No. 113

Summarising: Schwab (2005), *Education and Community*
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:
Education and Community

Research Publication:
Article in. Culture, Economy and Governance in Aboriginal Australia (eds. Diane Austin-Broos and Gaynor Macdonald 2005

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

Time period:
2005

Geographic location:
Australia-wide, with special application to remote areas

Methodology:
A review of Australian and international research and literature as well as government policies associated with Indigenous education, with a particular emphasis upon school and community.

Aims:
This paper aims to develop alternative models of educational practices and delivery to address contemporary Indigenous educational issues, especially strategies to improve participation of Indigenous young people and adults in education and training.

Selected findings and insights:
Early school leavers either did not have access to schooling in remote regions or perceive the curriculum as irrelevant. This paper draws attention to the social costs of high levels of early school leavers, including:

- mental health, criminal activity and drug abuse.

Early school leavers in remote communities were less likely to be able or willing to attend boarding schools, as has been proposed by some advocates, or participate in other government high profile Indigenous programs such as Youth Mobility or Youth Leadership Programs.

Reconceptualising learning: communities of practice

The paper emphasised that a community of practice did not simply involve linking classroom learning to ‘on-the-job’ training such as the acquisition of skills through traineeships or apprenticeships. Rather it argued that a community of practice involved much more than skill acquisition and was defined by:

- a set of social relationships with flexible, complementary roles built around things that matter to the community.
Therefore it was important to identify what was important to the community and build learning experiences around those things that mattered most. For example, the paper suggested:

- adapting school curricula and transition programs to address land and sea management issues, underpinned by the Indigenous valuing of ‘caring for country’ was one way of engaging young people in a community of practice.

Such land and sea management programs provided a unique opportunity to bring together culturally-based knowledge and western knowledge to enhance the skills of young people and in a meaningful way and one that may lead to employment.

**Building Indigenous learning communities**

The paper also defined an Indigenous learning community in terms of:

- a collection of ideas and strategies to improve life-long learning, build partnerships between families, schools, business and government and provide a means whereby communities could identify their most pressing needs and develop skills and knowledge to enact solutions.

An Indigenous learning community was therefore a means of individual and community development and empowerment which could involve, for example:

- delivery of health services within a vacant classroom; and
- provision of adult literacy or parenting classes, internet access after school hours, opening the library for community use on weekends or use by the community for meetings and classes outside school times.

**Educational implications:**

The ‘community of practice’, particularly as it relates to land and sea management is now an Australian Government priority with recent funding for Ranger programs across northern Australia. The extent to which it can be applied to traditional ‘apprenticeship’ areas such as motor mechanics is untested but warrants attention due to the priority given to vehicle maintenance in remote Australia. [training]

The development of a ‘learning community’ represents a working concept of an educational partnership between a school and its community, with an emphasis upon learning taking place within a ‘comfortable’ learning space, consistent with cultural understandings and values, and being relevant to all members of the local Indigenous community by offering lifelong educational opportunities. Its success would be as much dependent upon non-Indigenous staff understanding and being sensitive to cultural differences between themselves and the Indigenous community as being dependent upon the Indigenous community understanding the requirements of educational authorities. [learning community]
Relevance:

Domain 2: School and Community Educational Partnerships

- Cross-cultural understandings of the 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

- Pathways and strategies for remote locations
- Adult return to education

Related papers:

R.G. Schwab and D. Sutherland 'Building Indigenous learning communities'.

CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 225, 2001