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:

Research Publication:
CAEPR Research Monograph No. 16 1999

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

Time period:
1999

Geographic location:
National

Methodology:
This paper draws upon existing literature, an extensive array of ABS and administrative data as well as the researcher's considerable experience with Indigenous communities.

Aims:
This paper identifies factors influencing continuing low levels of Indigenous retention through to Year 12. It focuses upon not only the traditional educational influences on educational attainment levels but also, and more importantly, draws attention to a wide range of socio-cultural influences that operate within an Indigenous community.

Selected findings and insights:
The research monograph presents detailed information on Indigenous retention rates, highlighting the low retention rates of Indigenous young people. Since more up-to-date retention information is readily available it will not be repeated here; otherwise the reader is redirected to the research monograph. Nevertheless, it is worth highlighting that:

- the relative difference in Year 12 retention rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students remain much the same, despite improvements since 1999 (which have applied equally to both student groups).

The study identified the following interlinking factors that appeared to influence — or were at least strongly associated with — patterns of Indigenous retention. While socio-economic status correlated with early school leaving, this is not a sufficient explanation of the low levels of Indigenous retention. This study identified several other factors that also related to early school leaving:

- Whether the young person had been previously arrested had a powerful effect, reducing the likelihood of a young person being in secondary school by about 26% for males and 18% for females. This was such a significant factor since a much greater proportion of Indigenous youth were involved with the justice system than were non-Indigenous youth. Living in a household where someone else had been arrested reduced the likelihood of males attending school by an additional 23% and for females by 20%.
Marriage or being in a de facto relationship had an influence on school attendance — young married students or those in de facto relationships or being a sole parent increased the likelihood of attending school by about 25%. This applied to young males and females (13-17 year olds).

Household crowding was the most significant of the family and household influences for males. Sharing a bedroom with three or more others and living in a household with no major utilities reduced the chances of males staying at school by 28% (females by 12%).

The study also points to parents' occupation and education levels as significant influences on school retention (an issue explored more thoroughly in other CAEPR research).

When factors such as school achievement and socio-economic background were controlled for, Indigenous students still left school at a rate that is greater than other students. This may be explained by factors associated with Indigenous culture and history. The researcher emphasises the importance of particular cultural and historical experiences in shaping attitudes of both students and their parents to schooling and hence attendance: dispossession, and forced extinguishment of languages and cultural practices, racism, discrimination and forced assimilation. Despite public policy shifts, the research considers that there remains a powerful legacy of history and continuing conflicts in cultural assumptions about child rearing and autonomy. To sum up,

- the factors associated with the historical and cultural experiences of being Indigenous, parental discomfort with schools, and strong notions of shame and fear of failure by school children all interact in such a way as to reduce the chances of Indigenous youth attending school.

Furthermore literacy levels, while remaining at such low levels, do not provide a sufficient base upon which Indigenous students can succeed in secondary schooling, a reason possibly influencing their decision often to withdraw from secondary school and take up training courses offered by VET providers. Note: more up-to-date literacy benchmark information is available and findings about literacy levels in this study are not included here.

Educational implications:

Increased understanding of the complex reasons underlying low retention rates is the key message from this study - with no ‘quick fix’ likely to bring immediate results. The study does suggest some possible avenues for improving school attendance, with flow on effects to increased Year 12 retention. These relate to:

- Increased cultural awareness and sensitivity among teachers, of socio-cultural characteristics of young Indigenous students so that they can build more effective educative relationships with Indigenous students. [culture]

- Creating schools as more ‘comfortable’ experiences for both Indigenous students and their parents, recognising that many parents have had disturbing school experiences themselves, with likely intergenerational flow-on effects; [culture]

- Introducing learning opportunities for parents in literacy and possibly IT skills as well as programs to help them better understand ‘modern’ education and its likely benefits; [parental engagement]

- Developing the concept of 'Indigenous learning communities' in those areas of concentrated numbers of Indigenous students so that local communities are more integrated with the local schools. Learning communities involve all members of the community having the opportunity to continue their education as a 'life-long experience' by being able to access education and training facilities as well as other facilities such as libraries. [learning communities]
• Establish multiple pathways whereby Indigenous students are able to move between schooling and training which is meaningful and related to future work and career opportunities. [pathways]

Relevance:

Domain 2: School and Community Partnership Agreements

Cross cultural relationship between school and community
Complexity and diversity of communities

Domain 5: Pathways to education, training and higher education

Participation, retention and achievement in post-compulsory schooling, training and higher education

Related papers:

