Reference No. 120

Summarising: Smith (2004), *From Gove to Governance: Reshaping Indigenous Governance in the Northern Territory*
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:
From Gove to Governance: Reshaping Indigenous Governance in the Northern Territory

Research Publication:
CAEPR Discussion Paper 265/2004

Name of Researcher(s):
D.E. Smith

Time period:
2003

Geographic location:
Whilst the paper is directed towards Indigenous Governance in the Northern Territory, it is applicable to other remote regions of Australia.

Methodology:
This paper was initially prepared in 2003 as a Background Briefing paper for participants of the Building Effective Indigenous Governance Conference held at Jabiru, Northern Territory, 4–7 November 2003. The researcher analysed research literature and government policies relevant to Indigenous governance.

Aims:
The paper aims to identify the key challenges facing Indigenous people and governments in reshaping the architecture of Indigenous governance in the Northern Territory and strategic options for a way forward.

Selected findings and insights:
The governance environment in Indigenous communities was characterised by:

- a major increase in incorporated organisations providing legal, health, child-care, recreational, aged care, cultural, employment, and training services alongside incorporated women’s centres, art centres, and community stores;
- complex organisational relationships and political networks, with issues of leadership and representation of paramount importance, often leading to overlapping responsibilities;
- governance arrangements which were the product of cultural values, institutions, behaviours and motivations – governance was not culture neutral.
- inadequate literacy and numeracy levels, and poor health, among community members which could result in reliance upon non-Indigenous people for important aspects of community management and decision-making. As is documented elsewhere literacy levels were generally extremely low among many in the adult Indigenous population, yet it has been claimed that Year 7 level literacy and numeracy is necessary for operating in everyday life in wider Australia; and Year 10 level literacy and numeracy for working in management positions in the Indigenous sector.
In examining the implications for regional governance, the paper identifies key issues to be addressed.

- Regions will be defined by the social, economic and cultural characteristics of their potential constituencies. That is, the constituency will be determined by a process of negotiation and consensus about what constitutes the ‘right’ coalition of interests and cultural identities;

- Systems of representation and electoral procedures are not based upon western democratic notions but will be strongly based upon cultural institutions, relationships and land-owning groups, and the recognition of these is crucial to ongoing perceptions of legitimacy;

- Establishing any new regional governance arrangements must take account of the governance environment operating in every community where powerful organisations, alliances and individuals influence process and outcomes;

- To achieve a ‘cultural match’ requires a two-way process of adaptation, innovation and choice;

- New governance structures need substantial levels of support (in planning, funding, governance, capacity etc.) in the lead up and early establishment phase;

- The capacity of community residents, councils, organisations and government departments to understand and engage in the process is highly variable, and requires considerable input.

**Educational implications:**

The paper’s detailed account of the complexity and diversity of community governance structures and processes within Indigenous communities is relevant to the development of educational partnerships involving representatives of the Indigenous community and school representatives. The paper draws attention to:

- the complex governance environment operating in Indigenous communities. The level of schooling and scope of educational agreements will determine the extent to which the school-community governance structure becomes involved in the network of community governance. The message is that, if school community governance is to be effective, it is not likely to be restricted to a group of ‘interested’ school parents;

- the cultural principles which underpin Indigenous governance – leadership, representation, cultural match and adaptation of governance structures and processes for addressing contemporary issues and the legitimation of decision-making; and

- the need to establish processes for the development of educational agreements which seek to achieve a ‘cultural match’ between those decision-making processes valued by the Indigenous community and by the school principal and staff. This requires a two-way process of adaptation, innovation and choice.

The paper identifies limited skills as a significant barrier to good governance and addresses the need for ongoing capacity development of Indigenous communities if they are to participate fully in community governance or, in this case, school community governance. [adult learning] [community development]

This raises the question as to the scope and delivery of relevant training. Similarly the paper highlights the need for training for principals and staff in how best to establish processes for developing educational agreements. [staff training]

Finally, the issues raised in the paper are possibly even more important in regard to monitoring and follow-up once educational agreements are in place. [education partnership agreements]
Relevance:

Introductory Topic: Culture, Community and Family Life

Domain 2 - School and Community Educational Partnerships

- Complexity and diversity of communities
- Use and negotiation of educational partnership agreements between schools and communities

Domain 5: Pathways to training, employment and higher education

- Adult return to education and/or training

Related papers:


