Reference No. 123

Summarising: Smith (2000), *Kuranda and Yuendumu: Comparative Conclusions*
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:
Kuranda and Yuendumu: Comparative Conclusions

Research Publication:


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

Time period:
The research was undertaken between 1999 and 2001

Geographic location:
The research was undertaken in Kuranda (Qld.), considered part of ‘settled’ Australia, and the remote community of Yuendumu (NT).

Methodology:
This research combines both ethnographic data-gathering and quantitative analysis to the study of ‘family’, ‘households’ and ‘governance’ in the Kuranda and Yuendumu communities.

Aims:
This summary paper aims to compare the findings from the two case studies in terms of policy and service delivery issues which need to be addressed, with particular reference to enhancing family welfare.

Selected findings and insights:
The findings presented here are those which deal with *family views about the future*.

Indigenous residents in both communities identified a very similar range of family strengths including:

- their own networks of economic support and resource redistribution which were critical to the wellbeing of families and children;
- the social distribution of parenting and shared child care operating within and across extended family households; and
- the key role of senior women in maintaining the domestic viability of families and caring for children.

Conversely, respondents identified a longer and similar list of *threats to the wellbeing* of their families and children including:

- the adverse social and economic impacts of large overcrowded households where adults were predominantly dependent on low incomes;
- the excessive burdens placed on aged carers of children;
- the growing number of young families headed by inexperienced parents;
• the high proportion of sole parent families;
• the recycling of sole parenthood within families;
• the impact of fathers being absent from socialisation of their children;
• children receiving marginalised care;
• the erratic and low level (often lack) of maintenance income;
• poor health, and the problems for families of members’ substance abuse;
• youth at risk from boredom, violence, and crime;
• inadequate housing;
• the impacts on families of disaffected youth; and
• a lack of local employment and training.

The paper concludes that these two communities share similar characteristics.

On the concept of family and household

The concept of ‘family’ based on the extended family formation was the central and abiding social and economic construct, and a key component of individual identity:

• the extended family formed the basis for critical economic networks between linked households, for the economic support for parents and children, for the redistribution of cash and other domestic resources, and for the amelioration of low and erratic levels of family and household incomes;
• in the context of welfare dependence and poverty, this network also operated under considerable duress and could become overburdened with demands, so that some people (and especially children) could fall through the safety net of care;
• individual members of families passed through various life stages of being a welfare recipient which could be characterised as ‘recycling welfare dependence’; and
• entire families and their households had entrenched welfare-based economies.

On parenting

• sole parents and their children were key social and economic units within extended family households where there were often multiple generations of related sole parents in residence;
• sole parenthood was a social as well as a biological fact and constituted a serial status which many women re-entered throughout their life, with the result that households also contained aging women who effectively continued to operate as sole carers for the children of other relations;
• parenting was socially distributed across a wide range of kin who could assume primary care of children for short and longer periods of time; and
• fathers (and particularly young fathers) often appeared to be absent from family domestic arrangements and marginal to the financial support of their children.
On mobility, childcare and demographics

- family members, including children, were mobile across a geographic circuit and resided in a number of usual home bases; children could be extremely mobile, traveling with or without their parents and siblings;
- the flow of extended primary care of children was dynamic and often unpredictable; and
- a youthful demographic profile suggested that an Indigenous ‘baby-boomers’ generation was being created, where young families were being formed and headed by young unemployed couples or sole parents.

Educational implications:

The nature of childcare and the overall lack of financial resources to support young children is likely to reduce significantly the readiness of young children to attend school. This suggests an urgent need for very early childhood educational interventions, perhaps using the combined services of health care workers and early childhood educators. It also suggests the need to maintain social and educational support throughout the primary school years if the students are to achieve the necessary social and basic literacy and numeracy skills to make an effective transition to secondary schooling. [curriculum].

Under such family circumstances, the strategies used for parental/carer engagement with the school will require long-term allocation of time and resources — it cannot be achieved quickly, and will be dependent upon sustained efforts by the principal, teaching staff and Indigenous Education Workers employed by the school. Where there is little male involvement with children, and this is frequently the case, gaining male parent involvement with the operation of the school as well as their own child’s education will be particularly difficult. This situation is heightened if the case of those male parents who themselves are not interested in further education or who are not employed – thereby not reinforcing with their children the importance of education and training to future life prospects.[staffing] [resources] [parental engagement]

Relevance:

Introductory Topic: Culture, Community and family Life

Domain 1 - Early Childhood Education

Domain 2 - School and Community Educational Partnerships

Complexity and Diversity

Related papers:


R. Henry and A.E. Daly ‘Indigenous families and the welfare system: The Kuranda community case study, Stage Two’ CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 216, 2001