



Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
The Australian National University

Education, Training and Indigenous Futures

CAEPR Policy Research: 1990–2007

Adrian M Fordham and RG (Jerry) Schwab

October 2007



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Executive Summary**

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The full report can be accessed via the web at:

www.anu.edu.au/caepr/education.php

www.mceetya.edu.au/mceetya/

www.education.qld.gov.au/schools/indigenous/resources.html#teachers

The appendices, which contain summaries of the 148 research reports on which this report is based, are on the ANU website www.anu.edu.au/caepr/education.php

For hard copies of this report, please contact Director, Indigenous Education Policy Unit, Department of Education Training and the Arts, PO Box 15033, City East, QLD, 4002 or (07) 3237 0808.

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Executive summary

Background

In 2006, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) endorsed *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005–2008*, which provides policy recommendations to improve Indigenous student outcomes over the current schools funding quadrennium and beyond. The policy focuses on five domains in which engagement is critical, namely:

- early childhood education
- school and community educational partnerships
- school leadership
- quality teaching
- pathways to training, employment and higher education.

The Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) at the Australian National University (ANU) is a unique Indigenous economic and social policy research centre, with staff backgrounds in anthropology, demography, economics, geography, education, statistics and political science. It has produced numerous research reports that are relevant to Indigenous education and training.

The Australian Education Systems Officials Committee (AESOC), which supports MCEETYA, commissioned this review to provide in one document a summary of the Indigenous education and training information in over 100 CAEPR reports. It is a ready reference for practitioners, so that research can assist their practice, in a format that is convenient for readers who are not academics.

The focus on CAEPR's research is due to its distinctive multidisciplinary approach, such as demographics and labour economics, and its work being relatively untapped by the education community.

This report is a summary and analysis of existing research, following a scan of the entire research output of CAEPR since its inception in 1991, including work currently underway. The report includes summaries of 148 projects and an exploration of the implications of the research for education and training, linked to the five domains in *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005–2008*. The project summaries contain links to the full research reports.

The intended audiences for this report are people working in education and training policy; school principals; Indigenous education staff and units; Indigenous units in universities and TAFE colleges; and Indigenous community leaders in education and training.

Key findings

The report provides information which may be new to many people already working in Indigenous education and training, including information about changing Indigenous demographics, complexities of Indigenous governance, and the labour market for Indigenous people.

The report also provides information that confirms existing research and experience, which may be of particular interest for people new to Indigenous education and training. This includes information on Indigenous culture, teacher staffing, the benefits of employing Indigenous education workers and language barriers.

The report, as a research review, does not contain recommendations.

The findings have implications for policy and practice in the areas of facilities planning, curriculum, professional development, pedagogy, support services, family and community involvement in schools and training institutions, and pre-service.

The changing demography of Indigenous Australia

- Over recent decades there has been a major change in the geographic distribution of the Indigenous population, towards the larger proportion of Indigenous people residing in urban areas—almost one-third in capital cities and some 45 per cent in regional Australia, with the remaining 25 per cent in remote and very remote areas.
- There has been a significant increase in self-identification as Indigenous, especially in cities.
- Some rural towns are becoming increasingly ‘Indigenous’, with large numbers of non-Indigenous Australians leaving, and high fertility rates among Indigenous resident women.
- Further marked changes in demographics are projected. These include younger people moving to regional centres and to a limited number of low socioeconomic neighbourhoods in capital cities, mainly seeking education, training and employment.
- The consequent likelihood of demographic ‘hot spots’ will place high demand on existing education and training provision.

Culture, community and family life

- Family is central to every aspect of Indigenous social and economic life. The composition, structure and place of residence of an Indigenous family go well beyond the basic family unit of biological parents and children. Household composition can change daily in some households.
- Many Indigenous children are given a high level of personal autonomy—a factor which might affect parents’ capacity to ensure school attendance.
- Cultural identification with a language group, kin or one’s own ‘country’ continues to be high. Over 50 per cent of Indigenous Australians identify with a cultural grouping, and at least 11 per cent speak an Indigenous language at home.

The health of Indigenous Australians

- Health status impacts on early child development, readiness for schooling, education participation and achievement and participation in the work force. Quality of health may also affect individual and community wellbeing and the capacity of Indigenous communities to develop strong governance structures.
- While Indigenous people were more likely to report being in poor or fair health than other Australians for each income group, there was no significant difference in self-reported health status between low- and high-income Indigenous families.
- Indigenous people were much less likely than non-Indigenous people to use health services, despite high levels of morbidity.
- Both malnutrition and alcohol abuse have been identified as high risk factors influencing Indigenous health.
- Broad-based alcohol education programs undertaken by schools or through community education programs need to be supported by targeted education and training.

Domain 1: Early childhood education

- The participation of Indigenous three- to five-year-old children in early childhood education is less than for non-Indigenous children, and the extent of the disparity increases significantly with age.
- After controlling for a range of external factors, Indigenous four- to five-year-olds, are significantly less likely to participate than non-Indigenous children, suggesting the disparity is in part due to their Aboriginality. For three-year-olds the situation is less clear.
- The presence of an Indigenous preschool worker in the area significantly increases preschool participation rates.
- Early childhood is a period of critical physical, emotional and social growth, but child care or early childhood education does not feature strongly in Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) to early 2007.

Domain 2: Partnerships

- Indigenous people consider education an avenue towards employment, a means of developing the skills and knowledge to deal with the dominant culture, or one mechanism for ensuring the continuing vitality of Indigenous culture.
- Many Indigenous people appear more concerned about the relevance of education and training to what they are currently doing than gaining a qualification to assist some future employment aspiration.
- Governance structures need to recognise that Indigenous representation and leadership is based on kinship, geographical boundaries and the issue being dealt with.
- Indigenous representatives operate within a ‘two-way’ legitimacy environment—one way towards their members and the other towards external agencies.
- Indigenous people are being stretched as they serve on an ever-increasing number of governance structures.
- New governance arrangements need substantial levels of support (e.g. in planning, funding, administration and governance capacity) in the lead-up and early implementation phase.
- The capacity of government agencies and the private sector to participate in partnership arrangements needs addressing, through emphasis on increased understanding of how partnerships are developed, monitored and maintained.
- CAEPR has identified key ‘enabling’ factors for the development of effective community–agency partnerships.

Domain 3: Leadership

- Understanding Indigenous family structures and responsibilities and the values Indigenous people attach to education is essential for school leadership.
- Schools and training bodies working with Indigenous students can benefit from recruiting Indigenous staff and developing the cultural sensitivity of staff, enabling them to modify their teaching strategies to suit Indigenous students.
- Educational leadership in Indigenous education requires the setting of long-term goals as change management can be slow.
- Encouraging Indigenous parents to become involved in the education of their children continues to be one of the greatest challenges.

Domain 4: Quality teaching

- Teachers need to be authentic, that is, understand Indigenous culture as it relates to schooling, have a capacity to display culturally sensitive teaching behaviours, have an ability to hold positive expectations of Indigenous academic performance and build strong self-esteem in students.
- Teachers and students are required to operate in different worlds. Teachers are required to develop a strong understanding of Indigenous culture, social issues and local context so that they can meaningfully engage Indigenous students with learning. Indigenous students are required to adopt learning behaviours and study habits for which they often have no previous family experience or support to draw on.
- Indigenous students have difficulties in 'code-switching' between Aboriginal English and Standard Australian English (SAE) and teachers need to have a strong appreciation of this.
- Primary schools with very high proportions of Indigenous students appeared most challenging for teachers.
- The recruitment of high quality teachers for schools with significant numbers of Indigenous students is a major challenge faced by principals.
- Indigenous staff are essential to student engagement in their functions as educators, translators, role models and bridges between home and classroom.

Domain 5: Pathways

- Male Indigenous workers are concentrated in declining industries and low-growth occupations, and in Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) employment. Female Indigenous workers tend to participate more in high growth industries (non-residential care services, childcare services and cleaning services) and a wider set of occupations.
- Part-time CDEP employment had a significant negative impact on young Indigenous people's job or career aspirations.
- A 'hybrid' labour market operates in remote Indigenous communities and, to a lesser extent, some rural communities, combining:
 - a market sector: the productive private sector of the local community
 - a state sector: the government provider of local services, including the welfare safety net and other government interventions
 - a customary economy: productive, culturally based activities that occur outside the market but deal with hunting, gathering, fishing and other traditional land and resource management activities.
- The Indigenous sector is a source of employment that may have its own training and organisational needs.
- The employment situation for Indigenous people may well continue to deteriorate through population growth, lack of competitive skills in emergent high-growth industries and locational disadvantage restricting mainstream employment growth.
- Completion of Year 10 appears to be the critical point with regard to lifetime employability, including full-time employment.
- Being arrested and placed in juvenile detention centres has a substantial effect on young Indigenous people completing secondary school.

- Indigenous Australians' participation in training and employment may be affected by them having different aspirations to non-Indigenous people on the benefits of completing Year 12, having a VET qualification and holding a university degree.
- Course and career aspirations are often influenced by a commitment to community, with enrolments in areas such as education, Aboriginal Studies and health seen as of benefit to the community rather than for solely individual benefit.
- Case studies among young Torres Strait Islanders show the importance of culturally inclusive support strategies and career counselling.
- Indigenous young people seeking jobs or already in jobs may experience some form of racial discrimination, for whatever reason. This suggests the importance of support strategies, promotion of Indigenous graduates to the business community, and ensuring work readiness skills include the capacity to work within a competitive work environment.
- 744 (69%) isolated communities were 50 kilometres or more from Year 12 secondary schooling.
- Indigenous higher education and TAFE students tend to commence their courses and gain post-school qualifications at an older age than non-Indigenous students.
- Undertaking regional labour market analyses is important. Such regional analyses need to take account of a wide range of demographic, labour market, socioeconomic and cultural characteristics, and have special regard to existing demand for employment, the generation of future employment opportunities and the supply of sufficiently skilled job seekers across industry and occupational groupings.

