



Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
The Australian National University

Education, Training and Indigenous Futures
CAEPR Policy Research: 1990-2007

Research Summaries

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Reference No. 42

Summarising: Finlayson, (1997), *Service provision and service providers in a remote Queensland 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.

The MCEETYA report and associated research summaries are available at <www.anu.edu.au/caepr/education.php>.

Title of Research:

Service provision and service providers in a remote Queensland community

Research Publication:

CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 133/1997

<http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/DP/1997_DP133.pdf>

Name of Researcher(s):

J. D. Finlayson

Time period:

1997

Geographic location:

A remote community in northern Queensland

Methodology:

A case study of service provision.

Aims:

The purpose of this paper was to explore the relationship between perceptions of cultural differences and government service delivery in a remote Aboriginal community, particularly in regard to non-Aboriginal service personnel and how, for example, they balance their personal and professional lives in remote locations and act as participants in another's cultural milieu.

Selected findings and insights:

The paper sheds light on the experiences of service providers in remote communities and its impacts on the nature of the service and its delivery to the community.

Although managers and administrators of service agencies held influential positions in communities, they were also a **minority** population and cultural group:

- The impact of their minority status was differentially felt – single women and families were most severely affected by a general lack of social support and the pressures of locational disadvantage.

Individuals needed to **balance the pressures** of negotiating a credible professional existence with the tensions of personal adjustment to the lack of facilities, professional and social support, managing cross-cultural social relations and 'feeling safe' in a unknown 'frontier' environment.

- These tensions often consumed the energies of service staff to an overwhelming extent.

Service agencies were aware of the difficult working conditions and the **need to engage appropriate staff**. The issue of staff selection was a priority, especially since staff turnovers were high and continuity of service and expertise fragmented. The study found that:

- Government agencies searched for the 'right person' to fill positions but tended to do so without any clear vision of who the 'right person' might be and what conditions would facilitate their effectiveness.

The paper identified **poor morale** among many staff, who believed that 'nothing would ever change'; few incentives existed to promote Indigenous self-management through training programs, and individual staff who challenged the status quo were considered 'dreamers'.

- A common view was that Aboriginal residents were incapable of effectively operating the services.

A variety of **motives** attracted staff to remote locations. Money was an important incentive. But for young people, work in these communities was often the only employment option they had. Others accepted employment because it represented a stepping stone to fulfilment of a personal goal (such as educational opportunities; funds for overseas travel; promotion).

Educational implications:

The paper makes a range of suggestions to improve the quality of the personal and professional lives of those non-Aboriginal people working in remote locations. These suggestions are equally relevant to teaching staff employed in remote community schools. Aspects may also apply to teachers working in schools with significant numbers of Indigenous students in regional and possibly even urban Australia.

To lessen the tensions between personal and professional life for staff, service agencies such as education authorities need to address the following areas:

- Staff selection criteria; staff orientation and education programs so that teachers recruited to these more remote schools are aware of the cultural complexity and diversity within Indigenous communities, including educational, social, behavioural and economic characteristics and expectations of communities;
- Mentor support on a continuing basis so that teaching staff can continue to feel capable of delivering quality and appropriate educational programs and have both the intellectual and physical resources to do so;
- Assistance with performance monitoring and accountability to the local Indigenous community as well as departmental criteria; and
- Development of social infrastructure and ongoing support to deal with the problems of locational disadvantage, including the maintenance of a feeling of being within a safe environment. **[staffing]**

Relevance:

Domain 3: School Leadership

Domain 4: Quality Teaching