



indigenous community engagement

@ charles darwin university

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executive summary

Forty-five people responded to the invitation to be involved in the Indigenous Community Engagement (ICE) project conducted under the auspices of the Pro Vice-Chancellor Community and Access at Charles Darwin University (CDU). The focus of the project was to research and evaluate CDU's history of engagement with Indigenous communities – successes and difficulties, and possibilities for future enhancement. Respondents answered an email questionnaire, wrote short case studies, attended meetings and seminars, and responded to successive drafts of the report.

Compared with other Australian universities, CDU has a reputation as a leader in Indigenous Community Engagement, in terms of both theory and practice. Most of this reputation arises as a result of work in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector and in participatory research. Our engagement with Indigenous communities has, with a couple of notable exceptions, been less successful in the area of higher education teaching and delivery. Respondents recognised that the Community and Access team have achieved a lot within the university to build understanding about Community Engagement as the third arm of our work. They also note that there is more work to be done and many possibilities for further action. We have divided the recommendations into four groups.

one First, from the Indigenous respondents, there was a remarkably consistent emphasis upon respect as being key to successful engagement. This respect manifests itself largely through effective practices of communication and the first major group of recommendations focuses upon ways to improve the flow of information. By and large VET students in remote Indigenous communities were happy with the quality of teaching, but unhappy with the quality of support for their learning journey. Some of the issues for students are a product of national regulatory requirements such as the AQTF. These set out the

forms and requirements of information that is given to students, some of which they have difficulty with such as memorandums of grades. Other issues for students emanate from CDU practices and include: lack of clarity around what stage they are up to in their courses, with some students even unsure of what course they are enrolled in; not knowing what other things CDU is doing in their community (what courses, research etc) or what plans are being made; and, no easy way of finding answers to any of these questions. This failure of CDU to ensure good communication is seen as a sign of bad faith and disrespect, and undermines our considerable successes.

We recommend a range of strategies to ameliorate this complex problem, which could be addressed by: the university Infoshop; VET lecturers; researchers; the Human Research Ethics Committee; Remotelink field officers; and, Community and Access, and Research Champions.

two The second group of recommendations depends upon and enhances good communication: trust and respect. Respondents identified that community 'ownership' or 'buy-in' is crucial to improving Indigenous Community Engagement. Suggestions for action in this area came with the caution that often community councils are unrepresentative of the Indigenous polity, and that there is ongoing need to identify and work through traditional governance arrangements – at the family and group level, and with the knowledge and cooperation of the clan elders – who are often not represented at the community council level.

Strategies for enhancing community ownership of collaborative strategies of sustainability and development include identifying a role for CDU staff to help communities (family groups, clan groups, ranger groups etc) articulate their aspirations for the future, and work out the sorts of training calendars,

research agendas, and advocacy processes which can be pursued to achieve them. The case studies showed that one critical CDU contribution to this process would be a commitment to further develop 'blended' VET packages along with a genuine commitment to the participatory planning processes that enable them.

A key strategy to enable communication and Community Engagement would be the identification and employment of an Indigenous engagement champion in those communities or cluster of communities where we have relatively intense research and teaching activity. These 'CDU Indigenous community champions' would be chosen on the basis of their reputation as respected negotiators in their community, and would be paid to facilitate the distribution of VET assessment results, broker research planning and outcomes, supervise and facilitate consultancies, actions emerging from research, including feedback to the community, and circulate employment and engagement opportunities. These people, identified and formally recognised as the 'CDU Indigenous community champions', could be paid on a consultancy basis. Some communities already have people acting formally in these roles.

three The third and possibly most important cluster of recommendations is focused upon the long-term engagement of CDU staff in particular locations. Students expressed unhappiness with the constant turnover of lecturing staff, and staff constantly reiterated the cumulative benefit of long-term relationships. We recommend CDU finds ways of encouraging 'local-focus staff' who invest in a long-term relationship with particular groups. This can be done by encouraging VET lecturing staff to diversify their matrices of competencies to enable them to deliver more courses in fewer places, also by funding and encouraging staff to learn and research local languages, histories and cultures. As researchers and consultants develop a documented history of

developing successful collaborative projects with particular groups and individuals, it greatly enhances their chances of obtaining further funding, and of collaborations which make long term beneficial changes to Indigenous livelihoods. A related spin off is that Indigenous partners who also develop their skills through their work on CDU projects, increasingly have their contributions to projects factored into funding applications and are properly paid and acknowledged.

We also recommend that CDU pilots a regional approach to VET delivery, negotiating a broad range of training within particular communities in a coordinated way. This approach, rather than the current system where VET teams deliver within their subject area across a range of communities without reference to the other CDU work, allows for training to be delivered that responds to community needs in an efficient and strategic way.

four Finally it was found that successful Indigenous Community Engagement for CDU is seldom simply a two-way relationship. It seems always to involve networks involving other organisations, land councils, government departments, other RTOs like Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE), and Aboriginal organisations. Collaboration with these organisations is essential to good Community Engagement, but often at the cost of CDU's competitiveness in attracting research and training funding. CDU should accept that cost, enter into further such arrangements, and publicise and celebrate the productiveness of its networking.

In short, our recommendations revolve around communication, collaboration, embedding expertise, and long term commitments. They require commitments from every level of the university. They imply some changes to structures, and the creation of some new positions to ensure that CDU maintains and improves its leadership in Indigenous Community Engagement.



introduction

Indigenous Community Engagement is often embedded in the activities of CDU staff when they work with Indigenous people in teaching or research contexts. The embedded nature of this engagement often means it is unable to be clearly seen, however its presence often underpins successful teaching or research work. The Indigenous Community Engagement project has not exhaustively documented the full range of engagements with Indigenous people contained within CDU's teaching, research and business development work. This report provides an in depth study of a small number of specific projects, drawing out understandings of Community Engagement as an area of interest and contributing to a greater awareness of the key factors that produce successful projects. For a fuller range of activities see page 46.

the purpose of the ICE @ CDU project

Charles Darwin University (CDU) is committed to high quality Community Engagement and two recent CDU reports review the national and international literature relevant to our strategies:

- 'Working from our Strengths' by Catherine Halkon from the School for Social and Policy Research (SSPR) and Matthew Campbell from the School of Australian Indigenous Knowledge Systems (SAIKS)

and

- 'Identifying the Value of Community Engagement at CDU' by Linda Cuttriss, Community Engagement Coordinator for the Office of the PVC Community and Access

This project was funded to look specifically at our Indigenous Community Engagement (ICE). CDU has a long history of successful engagement with Indigenous communities and our aims were:

- Through questionnaires and case studies, to document some of that history
- To identify through analysis of the case studies, questionnaires, and through discussions with CDU staff and Indigenous community members, what characterises successful Indigenous Community Engagement, what enables it within university projects and what makes engagement difficult
- To make some recommendations to the university as to cost-effective and respectful ways of improving our Indigenous Community Engagement practice.

what did we do?

- Funding was obtained for this project in May 2007, as a sub project of the 'Translating Intent into Action' project developed by the School for Social and Policy Research and funded by the Office of the PVC Community and Access.
- Matthew Campbell began by working on a review of the literature (to be published separately).
- We received clearance from the Human Research Ethics Committee for the overall project, and for the case studies.
- We developed a questionnaire on Indigenous Community Engagement which was sent to CDU teaching and research staff.
- Staff were also invited to develop case studies of Indigenous Community Engagement. Key to the case studies was an invitation to involve Indigenous community members in the collective telling of their own stories of engagement with CDU, and to pay and acknowledge them properly for their contributions. Included in our funding submission was money to pay for Indigenous participation, and funding for travel to remote communities for case

studies to be developed collaboratively.

- We sent the questionnaire and invitation to work on case studies to 140 teaching and research staff at CDU. We kept following up with the questionnaires and invitations to do case studies over the next six months.
- On the basis of discussions over case studies and the questionnaire we started to develop some emerging findings and key workable cost-effective strategies and actions for recommendation.
- In early November 2007 we held a meeting at the School of Australian Indigenous Knowledge Systems (SAIKS) for all staff interested in working on writing case studies and to discuss what they saw as key points and recommendations for the university arising from their work in Indigenous communities.
- Later in November 2007, we held a meeting at SAIKS of people who had responded to the questionnaire, to discuss emerging findings and to map out case studies
- In February 2008 we met with staff at SSPR to discuss connections to the 'Working from our Strengths' document, and early feedback from the PVC Community and Access concerning the emerging findings.
- We held a seminar at SAIKS to workshop the new statement of emerging findings, and for case study writers to discuss their writing plans and negotiation strategies with others, and to report progress on their case studies
- We held a public panel discussion where Indigenous community members gave their ideas about engagement with the university, and what those engagements entailed (see page 25).
- By the end of March 2008 we had collected twelve

short case studies, analysed 23 questionnaires, and drafted out some key findings and recommendations.

- In April 2008 copies of the draft report emailed to all the CDU contributors for comment.
- In May 2008 this version submitted to the PVC Community and Access for discussion.
- In June 2008 minor changes to the document were suggested by the PVC and incorporated
- In August 2008 a feedback seminar was held in Alice Springs with attendees from CDU, BIITE and the NTG
- In September 2008 a seminar reporting on the research was held in Alice Springs as part of the AIATSIS Indigenous Public Policy series. The seminar was linked to Darwin and Canberra.



questionnaire summaries

1. What does Community Engagement mean for you in terms of your work in Indigenous communities?

Community Engagement finds itself expressed through: bottom up approaches, community ownership, 'relevance' to the community, and collaborative approaches.

It is built on: open and clear communication, strong relationships, respect, flexibility, local participation, sharing, positioning yourself as a learner, trust, cooperation, and collaboration.

It often means being prepared to do more than generally required by a staff member; doing teaching or research 'beyond the call of duty'. This leads to the development of relationships that are of long term benefit to the university.

"To me the term Community Engagement means building relationships with individuals and community members. The relationship is one which is built upon trust, cooperation and mutual respect. A project may be the initial vehicle for engaging the community but the relationship extends beyond the life of the project".

"To me Community Engagement means working successfully with traditional owners, community members, community organisations and groups and other research partners, such as Indigenous organisations and government agencies, to produce research and research outputs that are meaningful to all people involved".

"Community Engagement is all about a bottom up approach where the community has ownership of ideas, speed of progress, and direction".

2. Give some examples of the ways in which you have engaged with members of Indigenous communities beyond the routine work of teaching or research.

The examples that people provided have two common elements:

1. Engagement always takes place in specific places and occur through the relationships that particular CDU staff have with particular people, indicating that engagement is not a generic activity linking 'the university' with 'Indigenous communities'; and
2. Successful engagements almost always entail CDU staff working on issues that are not part of CDU 'core' business (in addition to the CDU activity).

Some of these examples have been written up as case studies for this report.

"Engagement has required a long term association with people that involves a commitment to people as people rather than just informants, resources or enrolments. Engagement requires you to be prepared to be involved in people's day to day life".

"Every time I go to do work with Indigenous communities ... I find myself addressing agendas which are quite different from what the actual work at hand demands".

3. If you have had to revise teaching or research activities in response to community needs, please give some examples.

The recognition amongst respondents that Community Engagement underpins successful work in Indigenous communities meant that staff were both prepared and able to adjust their approaches to respond to the needs of the community. A common theme was that 'community need' is almost

impossible to determine until you are working in context, therefore the process you employ to do your work must be flexible. This suggests that to take Indigenous Community Engagement seriously, a certain proportion of your work will be negotiated on the ground with Indigenous participants, and may entail meeting immediate community needs first, such as food or funerals, before program demands can be met. This can be difficult for CDU staff, especially if it requires resources in addition to those already factored in, or where, for example, CDU's role entails a strong focus on competency-based training.

"The process of teaching requires you to work with a curriculum document while engagement necessitates you ensuring that the process of education and the needs of the students drives curriculum rather than the curriculum driving the activities of the classroom".

"The timeline of the research project had to be extended significantly to allow adequate time for the participatory action research stages to be completed and for community members to become meaningfully involved".

4. Has this engagement work fostered the sustainability of the Indigenous communities? How?

Most respondents offer a tentative 'Yes'. A significant proportion of respondents feel that it is too early to tell, and that more time is required to see the full range of outcomes of their work. Working in engaged ways with Aboriginal people not only allows better participation in the project at hand, but often enables the same people to participate more meaningfully in future projects and other activities. This could be called a capacity enhancement effect of Indigenous Community Engagement.

Given that focusing on Community Engagement as a specific area of interest is a relatively recent phenomenon, the work that people have done has often been unrecognised and unacknowledged (and possibly not even thought about explicitly). This has meant that it is difficult to clearly identify Indigenous Community Engagement and therefore very hard to measure its concrete results at this point. As a consequence, defining and documenting Community Engagement in practice is required to make explicit the value chains which Indigenous Community Engagement entails.

"Yes, because if you take a bottom up approach then individuals do things because they want to do them not because they have to".

"I think so in that we are engaging Indigenous people to undertake research in communities, sometimes their own, sometimes elsewhere, on research questions that they themselves help devise".

"At Galiwin'ku, our history of engagement with the CRC-Aboriginal health has led to the establishment of the Yolŋu Yalu Marnggithinyaraw Centre – a tangible and sustainable outcome of concerted engagement".

5. Has this engagement work enhanced the outcomes of the teaching and research? How?

Respondents noted that a 'Community Engagement approach' promotes community involvement, leading the research and teaching in new directions. This enhances the usefulness and applicability of the work being done through grounding the engagement in the realities of the communities in which they take place. The effect is more useful impact and more enjoyable engagement. Working with Aboriginal people in engaged ways allows them to contribute

more fully to the work at all stages.

One respondent says that without engagement nothing of worth would have been done. One outcome of working with Indigenous communities to negotiate and refine teaching and research agendas is the potential for CDU to position itself as a university with an enviable reputation as an engaged organisation in Indigenous Australia.

"Yes, the early engagement of Aboriginal elders as advisers allowed us to work to professionalise a cohort of Yolŋu researchers who are now far more central to ongoing research and consultancies than they ever were before. It has helped to develop unique Indigenous methodologies which are becoming recognised internationally".

"With a shared responsibility to this relationship, teaching and research outcomes are greatly enhanced. I would not feel happy, confident or as directed in my work if I did not share a trust relationship".

"Certainly – engagement has had substantial impacts on the nature of the research undertaken – its methodology, ethics, governance, transfer and accountability – and resulted in greater Indigenous engagement with the research and the results".

6. Did the engagement require resources (money, time, support) that were not factored in or recognised by the university? What?

Yes, most respondents observed that engagement required additional resources. However most also noted that often more money, more time, more complex reporting costs can be built in, but not all of these can be predicted. Either the university or the individual staff member ends up paying. Often

additional funds for unforeseen circumstances can be sourced through external funders, as in the Dell Foundation being enlisted to pay for computers for collaborative Indigenous research into remote community sustainability. However CDU has a significant role to play in providing the structures and processes that enable the engagement resources to be identified, delivered and accounted for. The Research Panel has some good processes in place to help with this in the area of research.

In many cases Indigenous Community Engagement requires personal contributions that cannot be factored in. This relates to individuals doing their work and sharing personal resources within trusting relationships. A lecturer or researcher with a university vehicle on a community who does not go some way towards putting the vehicle to use towards immediate community goals, can be seen as lacking in good faith towards the people. The good will and trust which survives in a community between the end of one project (teaching or research) and the beginning of another, is a key aspect of good Indigenous Community Engagement.

"In a sense, there is no avoiding being involved with the activities of a community. Being in a position of having, for example, access to a vehicle, can be of great benefit to these activities".

"Developing and maintaining relationships with individuals takes time, money and support – much of which is not factored into projects. These relationships have to be maintained before and after particular projects to keep the trust that is part of that relationship".

"Yes. This has more than doubled the initial time for this project and resulted in an enormous amount of in-kind contributions on my behalf".



7. Is it useful for the university to think of Community Engagement explicitly as its third role in addition to teaching and research?

There is a general consensus that Community Engagement is best embedded in the ongoing work of the university, as part of teaching and research and not an add-on. However there is also the view that in order to make it visible, it needs to be articulated clearly as it is a very important role for the university. Recognising it explicitly might be the best way of enabling resource issues to be clarified so that capacity can be built over time to do it better.

Indigenous Community Engagement must go further than 'motherhood statements', which do not enable action at the project level. People reported that it would be good to have recommendations happening at a variety of levels from the generic (guiding principles level) to the specific (allowing them to be targeted at who needs to be responsible).

If so should reporting structures be developed to create Community Engagement accountability? If not why not?

There is a general feeling that reporting structures should be developed for a number of reasons: they would enable monitoring and evaluation; they would generate some consistency across the university; and, they would allow Community Engagement work to be recognised and accounted for (and possibly provide guidance for those who are not confident that they know how to start an engagement process). There was a view that if there were mechanisms to recognise Community Engagement (and for it to count in workloads etc) then people would be encouraged to do it. Further if staff were required to report on it then awareness and knowledge of engagement as a

process would be enhanced, enabling the sharing of information on benefits and limitations.

However it was also noted that establishing reporting structures to create accountability could be counterproductive if there were no accompanying process to build understanding and commitment. To ensure that understanding and commitment are built requires a vision of the purpose of engagement and a clear understanding of the benefits. It was also noted that having requirements to report does not necessarily mean that useful information will be generated.

"Whilst Community Engagement is integral to our role as a teaching and research institution, it is not well understood. Developing reporting structures and accountability mechanisms without building understanding and commitment would be counterproductive."

"It needs to have measurable outcomes, that are monitored and evaluated, NOT simple motherhood statements which might happen if it becomes the third role."

"The critical factor will be to build Community Engagement into researcher, and teacher job descriptions, and incentive systems ... currently researchers receive no benefit from putting time into Community Engagement"

8. Community Engagement can either be planned explicitly at the university or individual project level, or it can be embedded in the practice of teaching and research. Do you have any experience or opinions which may lead to better policy for CDU's Indigenous Community Engagement practices?

This question provided a variety of not always compatible opinions. For example that Community Engagement should be embedded in the planning for everyday teaching and research work in Indigenous communities, but a formal CDU policy is required to convince those who don't think they should be embedded. As one respondent says 'it needs to happen at both levels – the university needs to be seen to be supporting it'. Another respondent thought that embedding is the direction in which CDU should head, however this was accompanied by the observation that this would require a change of the prevailing research culture and one that would be best brought about by a combination of incentives, mentoring and reporting.

Given that the building blocks of good engagement are related to relationships between individuals (involving long term commitment and the building of trust) Community Engagement is something that cannot be forced from the top down, although it can be enhanced and supported. Awareness of Indigenous Community Engagement as a key strategy of the university is the first step and needs to be augmented by orientations and training for staff in Community Engagement. Possibly it could be best brought about by CDU setting the guiding principles (parameters) while ensuring that planning takes place at the project/community level and accountability created by reporting mechanisms.

Engagement with Indigenous communities is a privilege, not a right for CDU staff. It needs to be positioned so that it is done at the invitation, pace and direction of senior Indigenous community members.

The planning should not be at either the university or the project level, but at the community level – to allow for community ownership and control over

a confusing range of teaching and research over extended periods.

"Community Engagement needs to be embedded in the practices which are employed in all university activities, which in my mind means that it will then be explicitly articulated when it comes to specific projects. It needs to be kept in mind that there is limited value in the occasional researcher working within a Community Engagement framework if the common approach is for uni staff to work in a more traditional top-down framework".

"I think orientation programs and training for work or research in indigenous towns and schools should be embedded/mandatory/expected ... especially language studies".

"Engagement will always occur at an individual level, but the institution needs to be able to recognise its existence, and value and provide support for individuals who are engaged in such activity".

"Needs to happen at both levels – the university has to make more effort to engage with stakeholders and hear what they want in terms of research and teaching but it probably also needs to be embedded in practices to make sure it is happening".

"CDU should provide a set of guiding principles university wide for Indigenous Community Engagement, however the planning and 'meat' of Indigenous Community Engagement must be dealt with on a 'project' or 'community' level".

9. Would it be useful or practicable for the university to develop, fund and implement an integrated Indigenous Community Engagement strategy? If not why not? If so, how might this be achieved?

There was qualified agreement that it probably would be a good thing to develop an integrated Indigenous Community Engagement strategy, however a number of respondents thought that there are issues that need to be thought through prior to going down this path. The first is that for Indigenous Community Engagement to become part of the fabric of CDU requires commitment to it from the heads of the university. It needs to be driven from the top down, and needs to start by working from our strengths. The general feeling was that more needs to be done to build knowledge and awareness of engagement in other ways before embarking on developing a university wide strategy. Concern was expressed that having such a macro level strategy runs the risk that it would appear tokenistic. However it was also observed that for Indigenous Community Engagement to be really activated across the institution it can't be left entirely to the individual.

If the strategy were to be developed it needs to:

- retain local flexibility
- include training and orientations
- include Indigenous practices and personnel
- have guiding principles
- be monitored and evaluated
- be developed by a group made up of a cross section of CDU staff

"Yes, this is absolutely essential. If worthy yet often vague terms like Community Engagement are to become operational then they need to be clearly articulated in the first instance. Then clear and doable action strategies that can be implemented by staff across the uni need to be developed. The development of this strategy must involve the people who it will be used by if they are to have any sense of ownership of it and therefore commitment to it."

"We need an Indigenous Community Engagement strategy, and it needs to be driven from the top down. I'm

just not sure how integrated it can be. I think it is preferable to work from our strengths and support those areas that are working well"

"Yes if it was done properly AND monitored and evaluated. I think it is done quite well in research already, partly through the ethics process, but in terms of teaching it is not good overall"

10. Would it be useful or practicable for the university to require a Community Engagement strategy to be written into all plans for research and teaching in Indigenous Communities? If not why not? If so, what would it take to make this work?

This question elicited a variety of responses. Those who saw it as a good idea thought that it would assist in placing consultation, engagement and building capacity up front as crucial to our work. It makes it visible and would make people think seriously about the approaches and processes they use (highlighting that Indigenous Community Engagement requires intellectual work in addition to interpersonal work). It would also prevent unskilled or unprepared people from being sent to Indigenous communities to do teaching or research work which hasn't been properly negotiated. Respondents saw that it would require strong dedication from management and perhaps would require the development of a committee to review strategies and assist with ethics etc. Some thought it essential, particularly in relation to teaching (more so than research where there are already elements of ethics that refer to Community Engagement). One suggestion was to trial it with willing staff who would develop, implement and review a pilot Indigenous Community Engagement strategy within their teaching or research work.

Even amongst those who thought it might be a good idea there were a series of concerns including:

- the need to guard against formulaic responses
- experienced people are required to assist in the development of strategies and for assessments of success
- there is a risk that articulating Community Engagement separately means that people don't think of it as core business
- that local flexibility needs to be retained

Some respondents thought that it was not a good idea. They saw the requirement to complete documents as bureaucratic excess that would act as a disincentive, especially for local Aboriginal researchers. It would also require additional investment for staff to do it adequately and further time and resources for them to see it as useful.

"I think that staff should be asked to account in some way for their engagement – either in their teaching and research plans, or in their final reporting. However, I think that others, a smaller proportion, may be invited and encouraged to develop a fuller more long term and strategic plan for a particular 'community', integrated with other research and teaching plans".

"I think this may be a good idea, because it will ensure Community Engagement considerations are taken into account".

"Flexibility and responsibility to locally identified needs of the community would have to be very strong guiding principles".



case study summaries

We have summarized twelve Indigenous Community Engagement case studies for this report.

Extended versions of these and others will be submitted for consideration for publication in the refereed journal *Learning Communities* later in 2008.

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research, collaboration, and community development – a holistic approach

The School for Environmental Research (SER), Charles Darwin University, is involved in a variety of research initiatives with Indigenous stakeholders across the Northern Territory. Research includes quantifying the impacts of Indigenous natural resource management activities, research aimed at ways of improving Indigenous livelihoods through wildlife based enterprise development opportunities, research on the benefits of engagement in Indigenous natural resource management and more broadly-based research on Indigenous community development.

“Indigenous community engagement tends to be most effective when there are existing relationships between the researchers and individuals in Indigenous communities with an established level of trust.”

From experience Indigenous community engagement tends to be most effective when there are existing relationships between the researchers and individuals in Indigenous communities with an established level of trust. This will aid participatory planning and guide the researcher over some of the many hurdles that exist in cross cultural communications. If this engagement can be facilitated in language through a local person who understands the cultural and kinship sensitivities then the community engagement is likely to be more effective.

Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory are in many cases suffering from ‘research fatigue’ as a result of many years of research with few tangible benefits coming back to communities. SER has had to adapt its research approach to ensure this did not happen by making research as ‘active’ as possible and involving the community in a ‘bottom-up’ approach so that they had ownership of ideas and control of the direction and speed of development of the research.

Research in itself will seldom meet community expectations if the outcomes from the research do not directly improve the quality of life within the community. Initially SER research could not offer more than academic outcomes but it has adapted its approach through collaboration to be able to offer more tangible outcomes. These collaborations have largely been with the Northern Land Council’s Caring for Country Unit (CFCU) who have close connections with Indigenous groups on the ground and a dedicated position to assist Indigenous groups progress wildlife based enterprise development. This collaborative link between SER and CFCU has allowed for a better identification of research needs on the ground and also allowed for the application of research through action. This collaboration has resulted in joint projects with both academic and applied outputs.

An example of such a project is one funded through the National Landcare Program which required the identification of barriers to Indigenous wildlife based enterprises development. In this instance the SER project officer and NLC facilitator worked together to host a workshop involving ranger groups, Landcare groups, and representatives from Aboriginal Resource Centres from across the wet dry tropics of the Northern Territory. The academic outputs from this project (reports, seminars and a journal paper) contributed to the longer term progress of Indigenous livelihoods through influencing policy change and assisting relevant government agencies and funding bodies to provide the right support. On a more applied level the funding allowed the NLC facilitator to improve techniques used in planning and implementation to address some of the issues raised by participants. This collaboration between the SER and CFCU progressed into a secondment between the two organisations allowing for better network building and understanding of institutional procedures and processes.



Many of the wildlife based enterprises supported by the Northern Land Council involve harvest of plants and animals which may have implications for ecological sustainability. The SER have staff who are ecologists and population modellers and when there are sustainability issues and ecological questions such as these they can be addressed through SER and a number of research funding grants. This relationship allows for a more effective engagement with Indigenous communities and improves the facilitators' skill base for community development.

is it the community, or is it something else (that we engage with)?

SAIKS and its predecessors have been delivering community based natural and cultural resource management training since 1996. I began with CDU (then NTU) in 1999 to deliver the new course 'Certificate 1 in Land Management Skills- Aboriginal Communities Caring for Country' in both on and off campus settings. In 2001 a decision was made to focus on community-based delivery. This delivery formed an integral part of the support network that surrounded Northern Land Council's Aboriginal Ranger program (facilitated by the Caring for Country Unit). This case study examines some of the issues relating to Indigenous Community Engagement brought to light as a result of this community-based delivery.

Aboriginal Ranger groups are often called 'community ranger groups', suggesting that they represent the geographic community in which they are located. Closer examination however indicates that these groups all reference identities other than the community in which they live. For example although we know that the Mimal Rangers live in Bulman, Weemol and their outstations, the Djelk Rangers live in Maningrida and its outstations and the Guwardagun Rangers live in and around Pine Creek we do not know whether they represent these geographic communities in any encompassing sense. They are obviously connected to 'communities' for practical reasons (housing, receipt of CDEP wages) however the work that I did with the Rangers indicates that their primary affiliation was not to the community in which they lived.

This has important implications for the negotiation and delivery of community-based training as it signifies that CDU lecturers need to be aware of who they are working with, and what their aims are. This is due to the fact that these Ranger groups are already embedded within a governance network that oversees

their work and provides them with guidance and legitimacy. We need to be aware that the governance that surrounds such groupings is more reflective of traditional practices that are still alive and well and need the support of the university (so as not to continue the practices of undermining them that is so commonly practised by outsiders coming in).

Although the community is an important organising location for conducting CDU work, it should not be mistaken for the organising principle of the people who live there. My work was most effective when it recognised the configurations that people themselves constructed, and responded to their agendas.

Training was most effective when it was done in consultation with senior people actively involved in overseeing their Ranger groups as this enabled the training to respond to local issues of concern. The training that I delivered was obviously focused around geographic communities, however one of the main lessons from my work was that although the community is an important organising location for conducting CDU work it should not be mistaken for the organising principle of the people who live there. My work was most effective when it recognised the configurations that people themselves constructed and responded to their agendas.

The awareness that Indigenous people organise themselves in ways that are only peripherally related to their communities suggests that Indigenous Community Engagement needs to be able to respond to these configurations. Importantly the ways that people articulate their own positions has flow on effects relating to other organisations and institutions around them (and of which they are a part). Effective



training was not simply a matter of me working with a group of students, it required understanding these groups as being embedded in networks of other organisations and being able to relate their work to these networks. In the case of Ranger training this meant understanding the agendas of and working with the Northern Land Council, Government departments (at both Territory and Federal levels), Community Government Councils and Outstation Resource Centres. It also meant working with groups to understand legislation, research and wider discussions about the role and place of Aboriginal people in managing landscapes

SAIKS work with Rangers proceeded slowly as we got to know the students, their families, their country and their links with other people and places. Interestingly this knowledge was always evolving, meaning that the people with whom we work constantly rearticulate their identities and positions in subtle but important ways (as do I as the lecturer). This means that there are no fixed groups, agendas or directions. These need to be understood as things that change over time, meaning that our engagement needed to be flexible enough to accommodate the changing nature of these positions. The Ranger training has been successful as it has engaged at the group rather than the community level, making it easier to understand and respond to the always changing shape of the group, their governance networks and agendas.

The implication for CDU is that staff need to focus on the already at-work articulations present within communities. This requires staff to develop greater knowledge of geographic communities and regions so that the contemporary articulations that exist can be identified and worked with. This developing awareness is unquestionably the role of the lecturer, who must be awake to these multiple configurations.

However it also suggests that there could be a special role for Remotelink, which might be encouraged to develop significant relationships within Indigenous communities and regions, not only to identify and be aware of the various groupings that are present, but to provide a coordination, feedback and a troubleshooting role. They could also develop a strategic linking role, not only between areas of the university, but between other organisations and the groups that exist, enabling better use of external resources and knowledge of relevance to the work of the university.

djelk rangers and charles darwin university: what can we learn about Indigenous community engagement?

Staff from the Faculty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (the present day SAIKS) were invited in 1996 to carry out accredited training in natural and cultural resource management with the Djelk Rangers (based in Maningrida). The only condition was that the training must be carried out 'on-country' in a manner which engaged the students and prepared them for successful interaction with academia and the professional world of natural resource managers.

It was clear from the start that the students had a wealth of knowledge and that the educational process was going to be more of a cultural exchange than it was about basic skills transfer, given that the students had vast knowledge and skills in the management of natural and cultural resources. Working out what training meant and what processes would be used in this context was going to be an important framing exercise and would determine the nature of the relationship between CDU and this particular group of rangers. The first sessions set the scene for the next ten years of working with the rangers, and created the space for the establishment of a relationship of trust between the staff and the initial cohort of students.

The first program implicitly developed an environment where real engagement could begin to occur. Enough space and time were devoted to the project to ensure that it was seen as a serious activity (and not the usual 'fly-by-night' or 'in one day and out the next' type of program), while ensuring that an equal amount of time was allocated to allowing students and staff to get to know each other and establish the basis for a strong relationship. This foundation of doing serious work, while devoting time to relationship building has led to a continuing and fruitful relationship between CDU staff and the different cohorts of students that have moved through the program.

As the relationships between staff and rangers developed, important aspects of the educative process became clearer. Negotiation of the curriculum and the strategies for working their way through the training programs became an important point that cemented the engagement of the rangers in training. By opening the educative process up to negotiation and by being explicit about the way in which the staff engaged in carrying out their responsibilities, the rangers were involved in the process and felt as though they had a right to direct and shape their education and ensure that it related directly to their work and the issues they faced at any particular time. In short, the students' educational and training needs were imposed upon the curriculum rather than the curriculum being imposed upon the rangers and their work. Students came first and the needs of bureaucracy were subordinate to the needs of the students and the importance of the relationship between the staff involved and the rangers.

By opening the educative process up to negotiation and by being explicit about the way in which the staff engaged in carrying out their responsibilities, the rangers were involved in the process and felt as though they had a right to direct and shape their education and ensure that it related directly to their work and the issues they faced.

It became very clear early on in the process that engagement with the Djelk Rangers meant engagement with the broader organisation and the community in general. Staff were known to the wider community and it became clear that a visible and active presence in the community was an important part of both legitimising the training program and developing a broader understanding of the role of the rangers within the community and with landowners. Additionally it became clear that the institutional



support on both sides of the training equation was invaluable in supporting the ongoing engagement with the rangers.

Within CDU, the underwriting of training costs and ensuring long term allocation of staffing to the program meant that the engagement process could be facilitated. Without institutional support on both sides of the educative process, real engagement would have been difficult to sustain, even with best of intentions.

Overall, probably the most important outcome from the process and perhaps the key aspect to successful engagement was something which was intensely personal and in some ways removed from the direct educational process- a focus on cultural exchange. This focus drove staff to explore what it was that they could and did bring to the exchange. It forced those involved to reassess their own ontological assumptions and to come face to face with the cultural nature of their own knowledge systems, something which is unacknowledged or perhaps unrecognised in most educational settings. Real engagement necessitates an examination of the cultural baggage that you bring with you to the engagement process.

The recasting of staff as cultural agents in the education process was probably the most revealing and unexpected requirement and outcome of the engagement process. Without it engagement would have been superficial, relationships temporal and the outcomes of training less than satisfactory. Indigenous community engagement is not something that you can leave on your office desk or on the whiteboard at the end of the working day; it requires an ongoing commitment and has lasting consequences for how you see yourself and how you conduct yourself as an educator and a member of the broader community.

engaging with australian indigenous knowledge systems

Other universities have schools of Indigenous Studies, but CDU distinguishes itself from other universities in that it has a School of Australian Indigenous Knowledge Systems. From an international academic perspective where the knowledge practices of science and the enlightenment are so thoroughly entrenched, it is a remarkable commitment on the part of our university to embed and commit to alternative knowledge practices in its structures and policy. And it has paid off.

The Yolŋu Studies program which teaches Yolŋu languages and culture at undergraduate and postgraduate levels is a key example. From its inception, the university enlisted eight community elders to supervise the program development and implementation, according to traditional Yolŋu law – provisions about the necessary links between language, land and identity, the importance of respect embedded within the kinship system, rules about who can say what and to whom, strict laws governing the secret/sacred, and so forth. Their work is ongoing after more than ten years.

These arrangements set the foundations for a continuing process of negotiations over knowledge work which is recognisable and faithful to both academic and Yolŋu knowledge traditions. This work, which is unlike any Indigenous Engagement practice in other Australian universities, has relevance on the world stage where the strongly centralised model of knowledge gradually gives way to a radical localisation and privatisation of knowledge resources. The twin drivers of this change are generally identified as economic globalisation and information technologies.

Rising to the challenge, SAIKS supported collaborative research work on the uses of digital technologies in the intergenerational transmission of traditional

knowledge through the ARC Linkage project 'Indigenous Knowledge and Resource Management in Northern Australia' (see www.cdu.edu.au/ik). This project attracted international attention when collaborative research outcomes revealed a critique of the western ontologies and epistemologies hidden within conventional software and their functions, such as ethnobotanical databases, and to identify and support emerging Indigenous uses of digital technologies for knowledge work on country.

The engagement of elders in the development of the original teaching and research program has resulted ten years later in the emergence of a team of highly qualified bilingual consultants working on behalf of their communities (see www.cdu.edu.au/yaci). While attending to the philosophical complexities of transdisciplinary research involving Aboriginal knowledge practices, this group has won tenders to investigate a wider variety of issues including financial literacy, community mathematics, the education of gifted Indigenous children, and the use of multimedia in medical interpreting.

The work has been taken up by Indigenous researchers Terry Dunbar and Lorna Murakami-Gold who have, under the auspice of the Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation, worked with other Top End Indigenous groups, including Tiwi, Anindilyakwa, Murrinh and Burarra, to develop their own situated Indigenous methodologies. Documenting the entailments of these negotiations over knowledge is a work of international academic significance.

What SAIKS does in working Yolŋu Aboriginal and modern academic knowledge practices together is a much more difficult case to articulate than the more usual interdisciplinary knowledge practices, which many other institutions are currently struggling with. In



being clever at working the harder case of connecting the practices of disparate knowledge communities, CDU is 'far ahead of the pack'. Putting some resources into a university wide programme of philosophically sensitising more CDU staff to the ways of managing ontological (and epistemological) tensions would widen the numbers of CDU academics who could benefit from the remarkable resource that SAIKS is, in enhancing their capacity to deal in transdisciplinary knowledge contexts. This would be using the learning-teaching resource that SAIKS is, with its worked out ways of proceeding.

The deficit model of Indigenous knowledge is being assertively and decisively opposed. The amazing resilience and creativity of Aboriginal knowledge traditions are now more explicitly and widely recognised . . . and CDU's engagement here is at the forefront of globally significant knowledge work.

Assumptions of the deficiency of indigenous knowledge are deeply embedded at all levels in contemporary society. But the deficit model of indigenous knowledge is being assertively and decisively opposed. The amazing resilience and creativity of Aboriginal knowledge traditions are now more explicitly and widely recognised through such engagements, and CDU's engagement here is at the forefront of globally significant knowledge work.

technology for community engagement at djurranalpi

When I was approached to consider a 'case study' for the ICE project, I thought of my times working on Elcho island as part of the ARC project 'Indigenous Knowledge and Resource Management in Northern Australia'. Among the myriad tasks associated with this project in a number of different places, I had become involved with a particular extended family group on a remote homeland centre called Djurranalpi on Elcho Island. I had studied Yolŋu languages and culture at CDU – itself an investment in community engagement – so I at least had some ideas of the language, kinship, and ceremonial systems which underpinned life at Djurranalpi.

Spending time at the community, addressing the issues of everyday life, getting to know all the community members, learning more of the language, and trying to remember how I was related to each of them through my adoption into the kinship system, I became the target of a particular type of community engagement – the community was in a sense engaging me, under the watchful eye of the old man.

My work on that community involved facilitating and documenting the use of new digital technologies – video and still cameras, computers and various software – for the intergenerational transmission of traditional ecological knowledge in the tiny community and its school.

The technologies found their place naturally in everyday life, when the classroom spilled out into the bush, and at home in the evening looking at images of local plants on i-Photo and talking about them, and listening to the old man telling stories about them, or correcting the stories the youngest people were telling.

Before long Wulumdhuna, the school teacher and daughter of the old man, started to imagine how the small local uses of the technologies may be expanded and networked to connect up the languages and images of other nearby places on the island, to represent the network of kin which had been put into place with the ancestral journeys of creation. Connections at CDU and with the NT Library Service put me in touch with a funding body for which we worked up an application to pursue the goal of involving elders from other communities who could teach the Djurranalpi children (and their own) about ancestral connections and the songs, dances and sacred images which maintain and renew them.

Spending time at Djurranalpi, addressing the issues of everyday life, getting to know all the community members, learning more of the language, and trying to remember how I was related to each of them through my adoption into the kinship system, I became the target of a particular type of community engagement – the community was in a sense engaging me, under the watchful eye of the old man – in their ongoing work of sustaining traditional life in a very remote community which had been largely ignored by the larger communities, and disinvested by government.

The research work proceeded well, and contributed to significant insights internationally for academic research work investigating uses of digital and databasing technologies for knowledge work in cultures which don't have an epistemology in which knowledge is representational, where there is no metaphysical split between the social and the natural, where species have no ontological status, and where there is no hierarchy of natural phenomena.

I was in a sense a broker, brokering aspects of the western world for the Djurranalpi community, (fixing



the generator, trying to set up internet connections) and brokering understandings of Djurranalpi knowledge work with academic colleagues at CDU.

After some months during which I visited the community several times, the old man grew very sick and died one stormy wet season night. Wulumdhuna contacted me with a request to come and help to make a video of the funeral ceremonials. Permission to film had been sought from the various clan leaders before my arrival, and I was made welcome and usually given a place behind the singers to sit with the camera.

As I was still working on the research project, I was able to justify being there to my colleagues and had obtained further permission from family members to take some notes at the end of each day of filming. I spent a week camping with everyone, there were around 1000 people there.

I realise that as a part of my engagement in this context, it was the note-making which helped me feel comfortable in what turned out to be quite difficult physical conditions; little food or shelter in the middle of the wet season. The less I needed the more useful I was. As long as I could talk to myself each night by taking notes, I was also able to remain engaged with my work colleagues and my own culture through my work, and have a justified place at Djurranalpi without needing to impose 'institutional authority' on the situation.

Sometimes I would be asked what I had been writing that day, but because I had made all the necessary arrangements, or at least they had been made for me, and because I had had a history of association with this place and family, I was very well looked after for the duration of the ceremony, and continue to be invited to work with this family.

investment in yolŋu community engagement: the case of an indigenous ‘market research’ consultancy

In 2007 the NT DBERD put out a tender for consultants to develop a methodology for ‘market research in remote communities’ in conjunction with conducting preliminary research into community understandings and aspirations around community, work, business, training, housing and research. The Yolŋu Indigenous Consultancy Initiative which is run through the School of Australian Indigenous Knowledge Systems won a small part of that consultancy – to investigate the methodology and some preliminary answers to the questions at Galiwin’ku. This group had previously won tenders to investigate a wide variety of issues including financial literacy, Indigenous gambling, community mathematics, the education of gifted Indigenous children, and the use of multimedia in medical interpreting.

What does the university invest in a collaborative research project such as this, and what does the Indigenous community invest? How does each keep track of its investments? The university invests its knowledge, its expertise, and its time in this engagement – and the NT Government invested the funding. CDU shares the emerging Intellectual Property with the NTG, and special arrangements had to be made and written into the agreement to share the ‘background Intellectual Property’ which remains the property of the Aboriginal consultants and the community members they worked with. Accountability for the time and resources that CDU invests in the project is agreed to by the Dean who signs off on the time and resources to be invested. And the ethical behaviour of the CDU staff is accounted for by the CDU Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Finally, the expenditure of money is accounted for through CDU’s financial management. In collaborative projects such as these, the Aboriginal co-researcher-consultants occupy a somewhat ambiguous position. The HREC generally requires that the Aboriginal consultants be given a ‘Plain English’ statement, and

sign a consent form as if they are the ‘subjects’ of the research. This then raises the question of payment, for there are generally thought to be ethical questions surrounding the payment of research subjects for contributing to research because such payments may constitute an ‘inducement’.

In the past it has generally been assumed that Aboriginal people will be happy to share their knowledge and their time to assist university anthropologists, linguists, etc, in exchange for ‘informants fees’. The current Desert Knowledge CRC rate for a ‘senior knowledge expert’ is \$315 per day. But the bicultural consultants in the Indigenous Consultancy Initiative are working at a quite different level from simple expertise in their own fields. They are attending to the philosophical complexities of transdisciplinary research involving Aboriginal knowledge practices, and through this work, developing complex methodologies which identify address and document ethical, and epistemological issues throughout the process. The Indigenous Consultancy Initiative has been paying bilingual bicultural knowledge experts around \$600 per day.

While the consultancies which this initiative attracts have been very profitable for the university and for the consultants – there is a high demand for quality cross-cultural research consultations – there have had to be some adjustments made at the university level. It is difficult in terms of the university’s financial accountability for the consultants to be paid cash for their participation – an important consideration from the consultants’ point of view. Good will and a commitment on the part of individuals in the relevant university departments has meant that, while these issues are ongoing, they are being worked out. We can and do pay cash for participation. On the SAIKS side, there is lot of time-consuming paperwork which



makes this possible: receipts, invoices, 'hobby forms', reimbursement claims etc.

How does all this look from the Yolngu point of view? First, Aboriginal knowledge is understood to be owned and traditional regimes of authority and rights over knowledge find their place in cross-cultural consultancies. They are happy to work hard and to be paid properly. Community members are always paid for their opinions, and usually provided with drinks and snacks according to traditional protocols. This often proves to be expensive, but a history of success has allowed us to write these expenses into the budget. The exchange of money shows respect for knowledge ownerships and commitment to collaborative work within a Yolngu economy, which is sometimes difficult for those outside the Yolngu economy to understand.

The consultants engaged in the initiative also see themselves as highly accountable to their people, and take great care to negotiate properly within the community so as to avoid repercussions. (In a recent consultancy evaluating financial literacy programs for a major Australian bank, one consultant from Roper River was worried that the bank may not be happy about some of the critical comment he would pass on to them in the spirit of the research collaboration. If they reacted badly the good faith of collaborative knowledge work would be broken and he would look bad in the eyes of the community.) This entails a politics of knowledge production for the 'good' of the community (rather than the production of objective knowledge), of which much of the university is barely aware, it is difficult to write up for the funding bodies or academic review. Poor, unnegotiated, and cheap research in fact avoids the complexities which such research entails by engaging unrepresentative Aboriginal consultants who are happy to receive payment for unnegotiated claims. Many such cases

have damaged both the sustainability of Aboriginal governance and the reputation of the university.

The consultants have their own traditional politics of engagement. Great care was taken to bring together a group who can cover the full spectrum of a complex community like Galiwin'ku, the different clan groups, the genders and generations, to ensure that their work is representative of the constituency they were asked to survey – in this case the whole of the old ex-mission community of Galiwin'ku. They took great care to work out whom to talk to, where to hold meetings, how payments should be made to the participants, how to work together to make a collective statement of the findings, how to ensure the visibility of differences in opinion as well as consensus and how to follow up, and provide good feedback about the process and the outcomes.

Properly negotiated engagement has good results. This consultancy produced a complex, authoritative, fully representative and visible account of the range of opinions in a way endorsable by both the Aboriginal community members and the funding body. It produced a clear account of the methodology. Community members remarked that they felt like they were being listened to carefully and respectfully. The project helped to professionalise a group of bicultural consultants who are increasingly confident in representing the perspectives of their community, and increasingly able to use their knowledge work towards the economic and cultural sustainability of their families and the community at large. They may in the future be taking work away from the university. Yet the whole process adds to internationally significant endeavours working together divergent knowledge systems. For more information about the Indigenous Consultancy Initiative, see www.cdu.edu.au/yaci.

restoring harmony: a case study of indigenous community engagement in VET at wugularr

Eleven learners from the Wugularr community were asked to report on their experience of Vocational Education and Training from Charles Darwin University. Wugularr, also known as Beswick, is situated on the banks of Waterhouse River on cattle country. The population of about 400 people is made up of at least 11 traditional language groups. The Nyirranggulung Mardruk Ngadberre Regional Community Council (NMNRC) serves Beswick as well as Bulman, Barunga and other smaller communities.

In general the people of Beswick who have taken advantage of CDU's VET training expressed satisfaction with their learning experiences. They described the performance of the lecturing staff in a very positive light. One learner, DD has now articulated into a full trade level qualification as an electrician and continues to be enthusiastic about CDU and the opportunity it has afforded him.

"Uni helped me a lot, get all qualifications, paid me to go to Darwin and the lecturer came here"

DD (Remberre/ Rithangu man), Electrotechnology Apprentice

Many learners were however disappointed with the continuity and consistency of CDU's delivery and support. Interviewees reported that staff often changed during their program without notice, or only came for brief periods never to be seen again. Community members expressed a preference for staff who returned to the community and with whom they could develop an ongoing relationship:

'After two weeks we start to get to know each other, and we get to know who we can trust'

CB (Jawoyn Woman) First Aid, and Computing Studies

"Too much time waiting, it made me forget."

CH (Remberre man) Certificate III in Community Services (Domestic Violence)

Other learners were happy with the teaching they received, but were confused as to their course progression, or even what the courses were called. Of those who received statements of attainment or memoranda of grades from CDU most felt that they had little support to explain what they meant, and in the case of an incomplete unit what their future options might be to attain competence. There was also considerable confusion among them as to what training was available and when delivery was scheduled. One participant's suggestion to better communicate information about CDU activities was to put a notice up in the store so that community members can know what is going on.

Analysis of student records and transcripts of interviews both revealed that course level and unit levels completions were often very low. In some units many students did not attain competence on their first attempt. Efforts to change the way the course was delivered in response to this were reported by respondents to be very limited, few participants were given the chance to evaluate their experience of training and there was no follow-up of learners not attaining competence on their first attempt. People were disappointed about this, and felt that it made the university look bad.

Whilst the perception of CDU's delivery of VET teaching and learning was good, issues that damaged the university's relationship with learners, revolved around consistency, continuity, support, follow-up and evaluation.

The majority of the NMNRC administrative structure is located in Katherine, with only a small local office operating in Wugularr. As a result of this training in Wugularr is often brokered by CDU's RemoteLink



Field Officers with the council's office in Katherine, without regular visits to the community to talk to people on the ground who may not be connected with the council. One effect of this is that the training tends to be oriented towards the council's work environments – building and construction, business and office skills, parks and maintenance. Some people expressed enthusiasm for training in areas which weren't currently being offered including cooking, small business establishment, aged care and especially driver training and licensing. Despite this enthusiasm the majority of learners interviewed felt they had little choice in what the university offered in Wugularr.

In a discussion with a NMNRC project manager co-ordinating a very significant training project in general construction in partnership with CDU, it was stated that:

"CDU is good at the teaching, but it often promises more than it can deliver, and this makes it look bad ... Whilst things are not perfect we have high hopes for the future".

CR (NMNRC Project Manager)

Of importance again was the identification that in Wugularr whilst the perception of CDU's delivery of VET teaching and learning was good, issues that damaged the university's relationship with learners, revolved around consistency, continuity, support, follow-up and evaluation. These areas of potential deficit are key considerations in how this community is being engaged and should be seen as being inseparable from actual delivery.

It is therefore proposed that the university should concentrate on enabling individual VET teaching staff to deliver a wider range of competencies and courses in Wugularr. This continuity of contact will help build longer term relationships and facilitate the negotiation of mutually beneficial community outcomes with

a broader range of community members. Teaching staff who build longer term associations are able to provide greater consistency and are in a better position to actively follow up learners who need extra work to achieve competence. By virtue of an improved consistency and strength of relationships they are also in an improved position to negotiate strategic collaboration with other service providers in the community and potentially implement innovative solutions such as the use of emerging digital technologies for distance education.

Compiled by Michael Christie

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respect

The ICE Research project hosted a public seminar at the School of Australian Knowledge Systems on the 20th February 2008. Eight Indigenous consultants made up a panel discussion which focused on Aboriginal knowledge and collaborative research, and approaches to achieving community support and engagement.

When a new person comes into our community ... to do a research, we sometimes have deep concerns about that person, because we haven't known that person ... We only know we can respect that person through connection with other people that we been working with in the past.

Respect emerged as a key theme, and what follows are excerpts taken from a complete transcription of the 90 minute discussion. They are arranged in chronological order (words in brackets inserted for clarification). We hope to publish a fuller account in the Learning Communities journal later in 2008.

Lawurrpa: If a researcher comes to our community they have to approach a mala-leader (elder), and introduce themselves. Go through that process ... and your research will be acceptable, and you'll get support.

Garrngulkpuy: Managing both-ways researches to find a successful way of working in the communities ... listening to each other and learning from each other is a very important strategy ... to build a successful research methodology ... and accepting each other's views.

Terry: Negotiation and agreement ... you do that up front and you think it's finished but it's not. Negotiation on how you're doing things, the meaning of things, on

who you're working with ... that's a continual process throughout the whole research project not just at the end when you think you've finished ... recognising and valuing the knowledge ... you're being given trust through that process, and ... with trust ... you get responsibility.

Yinija: I am now at the stage where I have become a teacher from what I've learnt from our old people ... the Yolngu way of education ... the university of Yolngu culture and ceremonial grounds ... Maybe ... through new technology, through computer and cameras, digital technology, there could be linkages that you can understand the way that we feel about our land and culture. That's the sort of education I would like to back up.

Djirrimbilpilwuy ... I've had a lot of experience ... and now I'm getting involved through Yalu (Yolngu research centre), through Menzies, through CDU, Batchelor ... it hasn't been just myself, I have had a lot of support from my people, with these people here, the panel, and some of the staff from this organisation. And I'd take my hat off, (if I had one) for the staff at CDU ... I think we have a great team and these people have great things to offer.

Ian: One of the things that brought me here is the engagement of CDU, (evaluating) the banking service at Ngukurr ... the people in our community, they struggle, they see this service as just banking and that's it; but there's more than that ... We put them into the picture ... some of them never know what's happening ... and that's the sort of information that really can inspire the community, and then they get to know ... the 'inside story' as they say.

Garrngulkpuy: ... the importance of listening to one another, this way has the best process of

Yinjiya Guyula

Milingimbi elder and consultant

Gwen Rami

Ngukurr elder and consultant

Dhanggal Gurruwiwi

Galuru elder and consultant

Frank Djirrimbilwuy

Galiwin'ku elder and consultant

Ian Gumbula

Ngukurr elder and consultant

Mercy Gumbula

Ngukurr elder and consultant

consulting and negotiating how we can both give our perspectives ... build a good foundation.

Gwen: ... When a balanda comes into the community the people would like to know ... who that person is, someone might be wondering who is this? Unless you have someone there who knows that you're coming in to do your research in the community, that the person has a contact person. That sort of relationship (is) what good research is about.

Terry Dunbar: ... having respect for someone else is respecting who they are, where they've come from, keeping an open mind about how things are expressed ... you don't know everything ... you still need to question what you think you know ... arriving at new understanding ...

Waymamba; ... the (community people) are looking at you as a researcher and... looking at ways they can see the respect in you. After that, they ... have an understanding of your feelings ... then they can respect you.

Guthadjaka: ... If you come out to the homelands, the respect is already there in the hearts of people and in the land ... some town areas, you will find very hard because a lot of people living there are confused ... before you can get respect you have to be part of the community. Like, people who work here in Charles Darwin University ... it took a long time for us to get to know them ... working with them. And once we know what kind of people they are, we ... feel confidence ... we can trust them ... when we have a problem we come and ask them for help. You have to listen to us, and we have to listen to you. It takes a long time for that. You have to work and earn before you can get that respect.

Ian: When a new person comes into our community ... to do a research, we sometimes have deep concerns about that person, because we haven't known that person ... We only know we can respect that person through connection with other people that we been working with in the past.

Mercy: You can earn respect through connections ... we've known John (Greatorax) for a long time, and we've learned to respect him and John in return respects us. So John told us he wasn't going to come out (but would) send Trevor van Weeren, so when Trevor came out, we straight away showed him respect because of the connections through John ... Learn to respect our culture, our ways, and then in return we'll respect you and your culture.

community engagement - on whose terms?

"In the homelands people are determined to take over, and take up what ever opportunities they are offered. This is because we can, because we are on our own land. I have a responsibility to tell governments the truth. Governments only give infrastructure to the towns, missions, but we are from homelands. That is where our madayin (sacred business) is, it is where our Law is, where we have a right to talk."

Oscar Datjarrarrnga, Manager of the Marthakal Homeland Resource Centre from the evaluation of AFLF project: E-Learning for Remote Family-Level Micro-Business

In 2006 staff from CDU won funding from the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (AFLF) for the project 'E-Learning for Remote Family-Level Micro-Business' to deliver computer and business training on-line to three very remote homeland centres in East Arnhemland.

The project was ideal for us as we have long term relationships with each of the communities stretching back over thirty years. Through these decades of constant contact a bond of mutual trust had grown. We knew of their struggles to survive 'on country', and their determination to secure a safe, healthy and meaningful future for their children and grandchildren. We had personal obligations to work with them to improve their circumstances not only through our CDU commitments, but as close friends and adopted 'relatives'.

People had been telling us for years that they wanted: practical Information Technology (IT) skills that were relevant to their life goals especially internet banking. The project was an opportunity of facilitating the delivery of business and IT training to be linked to the development of new family-level businesses.

Respected and knowledgeable community members with computer expertise including Gotha, the teacher

and her grand-daughter agreed to become the project's 'IT champions'. Their task was to become local experts, then to pass on sought-after skills to other community members.

The CDU Research Panel through another previously funded project had been able to buy and set up computers and internet connections in two of these communities, and this was a chance to build upon earlier success. The CDU research program called 'Internetworking communities' - was itself a collaboration of researchers from the School of IT, the School of Education and the School of Australian Indigenous Knowledge Systems.

Without internet banking, people can't access account balances, or manage their funds in very remote communities. Phones are unreliable and phone banking isn't easy when the instructions are in English, and the whole culture of banking is foreign. People often don't know the name of their account type, and often, if you miss one question with phone banking, your account will be suspended, and will not be opened until you arrive in person. This is very costly as access to the closest branch to one of the locations, Mapuru, costs over \$1,100 for a return airfare.

IT training and in particular internet banking is crucial to the economic viability of remote communities. Consultations with the CDU School of Business helped us to understand the range of competencies and the modules we might be able to deliver. First we needed to identify courses and modules the participants could enrol in order to win funding from the AFLF. We thought Certificates One and Two in Information Technology, and Certificates One and Two in Business would be a good starting point. However of all the modules on offer, almost none matched the expressed needs of the people we consulted, some were near



enough. There is an assumption that the individual undertaking the unit is literate and is familiar with the language of the unit. For example BSBCMN 107A Operate a personal computer assumes that the individual is familiar with desktop computers and is able to locate the various components of the desktop such as the start button, screen, mouse, keyboard etc. Some individuals were familiar with language and some discussion took place about what this word or concept was in a Yolngu language. We had a moral responsibility to teach what we were being asked for on a 'need to know' basis, rather than what was dictated by course structure, and to work to accredit competencies retrospectively.

Ultimately there were no certificates earned (and we failed to win further funding from the AFLF), but that didn't matter to the participants. What we did do was get a few people up and running with essential business and IT skills, then initiate a process whereby further learning would continue when we left. What made this project different from others is the funding of local 'champions' which enabled the community to continue learning at their own pace.

Training mustn't stop when the program has ended. Commitment to the people and fostering a relationship of trust is crucial for long term community engagement and community development.

This is a sustainable model for community learning that will result in more learning for more people. Teachers like Gotha and her granddaughter know who, and how to approach each member of their personal and extended families. This intimate knowledge of Yolngu governance structures ensures that as long as the topic is relevant, teaching will occur and reach far out into the community.

An important lesson here is that training mustn't stop when the program has ended. Commitment to the people and fostering relationships of trust are crucial for long term community engagement and community development. Respect for the cultural background, knowledge of the language(s) of students and the sincere commitment to sit with, and enjoy the company of your fellow students, remembering that you as a lecturer are also learning.

The need is there, but unfortunately course and programs of study rarely match the needs on the ground. Until we can get this right then we are not engaging in the most meaningful way with a community.

For more information visit www.cdu.edu.au/aflf

This project won a 2008 Northern Territory Indigenous Innovation Award.

community engagement in a health research project at gapuwiyak

Community engagement was a central aspect of the research I conducted with the Gapuwiyak community that examined ways to improve the NT Department of Health and Community Services 'Growth Assessment and Action' (GAA) program through the incorporation of Yolngu understandings of child growth and development. The research was a major aspect of the project that was funded by the CRC for Aboriginal Health (CRC-AH) and managed by the NT Department of Health and Community Services. The research was undertaken through the Menzies School of Health Research. The aim of the project in Gapuwiyak was to work with the community and clinic to document the Yolngu and clinic stories about child growth and then to use these stories to take action to improve child growth. The Gapuwiyak project was intended as a pilot that would inform the GAA program and community action in other NT communities.

Decisions made during the negotiation phase proved critical to the success of the project. The employment of local people (workers and advisors) on 'real' wages (as opposed to CDEP) demonstrated to the community that the CRC-AH took the project seriously. The second critical decision was that I would spend significant time in the community, avoiding the 'fly in fly out' approach that attends much of the external world's interaction with the community. These two decisions were seen as a form of investment in the project and assisted in allowing the community to understand the project as a serious and important response to child growth that they too could invest their time and effort in.

Once the project began the project team spent a lot of time working out how to implement the project, and how the community needed to be involved and consulted throughout its duration. Significant time and effort were required by the Yolngu participants in the project to develop a supervisory governance structure

for the project that was significantly grounded in traditional relationships and accountabilities. This work was often complex and required careful negotiation, but also subtle and not always obvious to a nonYolngu observer. The negotiations also reflected the need to constitute Gapuwiyak as a unified recognisable 'community' (over and above the complex clan and family arrangements which form the basis of everyday socio-political life) that gave the project its legitimacy. This process has implications for engagement work in Indigenous communities as in the original project planning we unproblematically planned the project to work with the 'community' as if it was a meaningful or useful entity in the work of growing up healthy children. We found, however, that traditional relationships and authority structures were drawn upon in developing governance for the project that came to be seen as legitimate by other members of the community.

The engagement aspects of the project that arguably underpinned its success depended on having someone (i.e. myself in this case) from the world of health bureaucracy located in Gapuwiyak for significant periods of time. This allowed issues that emanated from both sides of the project to be worked through in appropriate ways. My knowledge of the two systems that the project straddled created space for solutions to be generated to problems that may have otherwise stalled or derailed the project. My ability to fulfil this role depended on my relationships both in Darwin and Gapuwiyak. In the same way I had to work hard in Darwin to build relationships and earn professional trust and respect so too did I in Gapuwiyak. This required that I spend significant time in the community, learn the language and work to earn trust and respect.



However there were problems within the project that were beyond my ability to deal with them. The top-down approach to health care delivery is so entrenched that individual projects for community based (bottom-up) changes to health care are in danger of raising false expectations in the community and can not be generalised to practice in other communities without massive changes in structure and policy.

There are ways to work with . . . existing regimes to provide contemporary governance for projects as long as they are negotiated by locals on their timeframes and in their own ways. Crucial to this process is a respectful outsider who supports this process and can act as a broker, but does not try to force it.

The lessons from the project for Indigenous community engagement include:

- The Gapuwiyak 'community' does not exist in the way outsiders think it does
- There are power structures and governance regimes that already exist which can, with time, patience and respect be coopted to ensure support of a government program.
- There are ways to work with these existing regimes to provide contemporary governance for projects as long as they are negotiated by locals on their timeframes and in their own ways. Crucial to this process is a respectful outsider who supports this process and can act as a broker, but does not try to force it.
- It is possible (though not inevitable) that supporting local people to develop governance regimes for particular projects will lead to the strengthening

of people's ability to position themselves from a 'community' perspective if they think it expedient to do so in future projects.

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working from our strengths: indigenous community engagement through enterprise development and training

Over the past four years a team of Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners has come together, made up of members of enterprise, industry and Vocational Education and Training Registered Training Organisations across Northern Australia based in Indigenous cultural tourism enterprise development training. The work all began with a vision – Indigenous partners' vision that included the opportunity for personal / family gain and improvement, but also often the desire to follow a dream and destiny and to build opportunities for their community and other Indigenous people. The engagement was constantly renegotiated as the work developed and the priorities of Indigenous partners have developed with the enterprises and partnerships.

The most successful enterprise training programmes started with what the individuals wanted to achieve and then worked back to the training system, deciding which units would be appropriate, which should be delivered together, when, who else might need to get involved and how it could lead to a full qualification.

Community engagement was developed around defining and implementing quality training programmes facilitated by expert trainers/learning facilitators over a long term partnership, this made a significant difference to enterprise success. Effective training programmes were developed through shared knowledge and trust. They assumed Indigenous people had considerable knowledge and competence to bring to the training relationship and focused on positive elements and outcomes. Trainers with high skill levels in relevant areas and appropriate cross-cultural knowledge were identified and supported to develop sound learning relationships. It was important to link delivery of training (and assessment) to actual

industry practice, relating both directly to work on the ground.

Enterprise owners all emphasized the importance of the Indigenous family, clan or tribal group leading the direction and processes of the enterprise and training. The engagement needed to be based on strong partnerships with family groups and enterprises, where Indigenous participants have essential knowledge management roles. Engagement started from the assumption that the relationship was about building a strong business in line with best business practice and Indigenous cultural and social priorities. Approaches to engagement and relationship building were connected to Indigenous enterprise contexts and steeped in reality through actual projects or enterprises.

The project outcomes highlighted the importance of community ownership of learning partnerships. This challenged training providers and other stakeholders to take a holistic approach to engagement in the partnership and continually ensured that enterprise owners maintained responsibility for the learning contract. It was not the role of training providers to generate the enterprise ideas, rather they played an important role in sharing what is possible and how the VET system can help. Seeing what other people do was a great way to stimulate the imagination, as projects develop through sharing. Some of the learning was undertaken with other Indigenous enterprise peers through a community of practice. This reduced the emphasis on the trainer as the only expert. In successful partnerships, facilitators, mentors and partners walked together with Indigenous enterprises in a number of ways.

Trainers developed training experiences and materials in response to the area of need or interest identified



with the enterprise and student. Training providers had a role to make people aware of a range of options but the vision had to come from the community. This changed the way a training team in a learning partnership was constructed, including trainers, community leaders, Aboriginal development officers and industry partners. Partners varied between the enterprises, however the members of each enterprise viewed them as being essential to their enterprises' success. Industry support and business partners, where possible, were essential to enterprise development and sustainability.

Working with Indigenous enterprises depends upon long term interactions based on trust and commitment. Partnerships with elders and local experts were significant in recognising students' knowledge, competence in a range of contexts and supporting the integration of learning into the everyday work environment. It is only after having a clear idea about participants' aims for their enterprise that the trainer could negotiate the training plan, even when the trainer disagrees with that assessment. The most successful enterprise training programmes started with what the individuals wanted to achieve and then worked back to the training system, deciding which units would be appropriate, which should be delivered together, when, who else might need to get involved and how it could lead to a full qualification. This tailor-made approach to developing a training plan took considerably longer than a standard qualification, was progressive over the life of the partnership, and achieved better outcomes for all stakeholders. This was evident in workforce outcomes, completed studies, continued studies and extension of the programme to other enterprise partners.

Any enterprise development training is framed by social learning partnerships that work across diverse

knowledge systems and unequal power structures. Being able to accurately understand, describe and support frameworks for social partnerships in learning will make a significant difference in moving from a check list for effective training, to being able to actualise the concepts described. Indigenous enterprise development training is part of core business and can be effectively developed with mainstream and Indigenous specific programmes that focus on building successful enterprise. Training is discussed, negotiated in the context and with the people who will participate in the training. Training is linked to diverse knowledge sets and experiences. This requires partnership with the people who recognise, understand and own this knowledge. These partnerships need to be developed so that the shared professional decisions are valued and recognised.

research governance – convening the merne altyerr-ipenhe (food from the creation time) reference group

Charles Darwin University is a core partner to the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre (DK-CRC) which has research initiatives in desert Australia. Since late 2005, we have collaborated, as an Indigenous Research Fellow and Ethno-ecologist respectively, on a bush food and harvesting research project. The project aims to examine the sustainability of small-scale commercial 'wild' harvest and the attitudes, knowledge and practices of Aboriginal harvesters and traders in relation to the collection and sale of bush foods.

Over more than 5,000 years, desert Aboriginal people have refined their knowledge about the use and management of bush foods, medicines and other natural products. Customary management included complex governance systems and applied manipulation of species and ecosystems. Harvesting for domestic use and small-scale commercial trade continues today using traditional knowledge and harvesting methods. In the past 10 years, commercial markets dominated by non-Aboriginal people have rapidly expanded, as has research into bush foods and other produce.

Early in our research, it became clear that bush foods were much more than economic commodities in the eyes of harvesters and other Aboriginal people. Ethically, it was a priority that the Aboriginal history and contemporary significance of bush foods be reflected in the structures and processes of the research project. We decided that an all-Aboriginal reference group was needed to reflect Aboriginal interests and to increase local Aboriginal engagement with the project.

In 2005, the DK-CRC management agreed to support a 'Bush Harvest Reference Group' with a budget allocation so that we could pay people for their time

and expertise. Josie compiled a list of people who she knew through her professional relationships to have bush food experience and knowledge then approached them individually to ask if they would be interested in being part of the proposed group. Everyone agreed to be part of the group.

The terms of reference for the group include the provision of expert information, direction and guidance to the Bush Harvest research project, specialist advice on cultural issues, dissemination of research results to a wide group of Aboriginal stakeholders, and feedback to the Desert Knowledge CRC.

The reference group now comprises individuals from six major language groups across Central Australia. They are people with involvement in customary harvest of bush resources, bush product enterprises and/or have extensive traditional knowledge, plus one member from the central land council, for traditional owner representation.

Meetings are held at various venues, creating opportunities for group members to see and be seen inside various organisations involved in bush food research. We also visit places that grow, trade, process or sell bush foods. The main meeting is in plain English but Arrernte and Pitjantjatjara prevail in preliminary discussions. A cultural emphasis upon respect and deference to seniority prevails within the group. Group discussions are active, often intense and sometimes heated.

The group decided to use an Aboriginal language name reflecting the links between Creation, Country and People: 'Merne Altyerre-ipenhe', which translates to 'Food from the Creation Time'. They also decided that 'bush foods' be termed as such, rather than 'wild foods'



or 'native foods' which may imply that the plants are 'wild' and not cared for. They also refer to the plants by local language and common names rather than the commercial names such as 'Bush tomato'.

Through the reference group, issues such as: an apparent lack of appreciation for Aboriginal traditional knowledge; the sporadic recognition of the owners and custodians of the plants; the lack of effective collaboration between Aboriginal people, researchers and industry participants; and, the limited opportunities open to Aboriginal people in employment, training and governance, came to light.

Two important outcomes of this process have been greater external recognition of these Aboriginal experts and a strengthening of the exchange between group members who learn from each other.

As a result, the group members decided that a culturally derived code of conduct for researchers and others in the commercial bush food industry should be developed.

The work of the reference group in highlighting these issues has resulted in subtle but significant changes in research priorities, which includes better documentation of Aboriginal knowledge of plant species and its complex role in their society and the development of protocols that recognise Aboriginal intellectual property. They also see engagement with young people as critical in developing livelihood and work opportunities for Aboriginal people to participate meaningfully in emerging bush food enterprises, particularly in remote areas.

Our challenges lie in moving back and forth between, simplistically, a Western market system and a desert

Aboriginal system in which social and spiritual connections to plants remain valued. We have found that at the nexus between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural systems associated with bush foods lie many different values, some complementary and some in conflict. Some of the group fear that 'the horse has bolted' and recognition of Aboriginal moral rights to a say over bush foods are already lost. A challenge also lies in balancing the time-consuming 'capacity building' aspects of our research with our other research outputs.

The rewards of this engagement are: in doing research responsive to the priorities of local experts that increases the recognition and benefits to Aboriginal people in bush foods enterprises and R&D; creating opportunities for group members to present at national forums; and arranging trips for them to speak to traditional owners in remote settlements to spread their knowledge and seek feedback. Two important outcomes of this process have been greater external recognition of these Aboriginal experts and a strengthening of the exchange between group members who learn from each other. This process is no longer just the researchers providing and recording information but knowledge about plants, products and processing being shared within the group itself and with others across the industry.

Acknowledgements

Members of the Merne Altyerr ipenhe (Food from the Creation time) reference group have provided inspiration and encouragement in the often-challenging cross-cultural environment of Central Australia. For their comments on this article, we thank them, and also Jim Walker and Isla Grundy (CSIRO) and Jenny Cleary (DK-CRC) for their review comments.



findings and recommendations

1. effective communication: meeting the accountabilities of respect

- Indigenous and nonIndigenous academics and community members frequently emphasised **respect** as the precondition for effective Community Engagement. Respect is not easily translated between cultures.
- Emphasis was placed on sitting down and talking together, letting people know what's happening, and allowing Indigenous community members to create a space to articulate their issues.
- Lack of feedback and negotiation seen as disrespectful. Research and enrolment fatigue has resulted.
- CDU is uniquely placed to be internationally recognised for its serious engagement with Indigenous knowledge traditions, including epistemologies, ethics and methodologies.
- Indigenous knowledge is alive and well in the NT and recognising its strength and significance should underpin all successful CDU engagement with Indigenous communities.
- Community Engagement is not separate from other CDU activities, it is embedded in all interactions with Indigenous communities

Strategies	Possible actions	Who?
Regular program of CDU community days where CDU visits communities, runs activities and shares information in key communities where teaching and research are ongoing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BBQs etc to introduce the community to the teaching staff, VET delivery calendar, collaborative research proposals and feedback, evaluation of lecturing etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PVC C&A, DVC T&L, DVC-R, Research Office, Corporate Communications
Putting in place a good system for letting Indigenous students in remote communities know about progress with teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Someone regularly visiting communities the help VET (and HE) students understand the university and course structure, especially enrolment, memorandums of grades, fees advice and evaluation documents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remotelink specifically engaged for this work on particular communities at the VET level.
Better guarantees that research findings are fed back to the communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing Requirements for feedback about results of research already in place should be more systematically followed up with further HREC requirements and supervision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HREC

Strategies	Possible actions	Who?
Putting in place systems for encouraging students to <i>provide feedback</i> to CDU.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring that students are able easily to provide useful feedback to the university about their courses – content, delivery, relevance etc. Make sure that this feedback is collected, acted upon, and resulting actions communicated back to the community. Free 1-800 phone number with guaranteed follow-up. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maybe a role for Remotelink staff with strong relationships and knowledge of communities Maybe a professional requirement for VET lecturers doing remote delivery
Making student <i>feedback easier</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SELTS should be radically modified, or alternative systems of evaluation for Indigenous students with limited literacy developed and implemented Develop systems for CDU staff (not the direct lecturer) to work with students to complete NCVET evaluations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SELTS Project Officer VET lecturers
Making community <i>liaison</i> a systematic, accountable and visible CDU responsibility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular visits from a CDU member whom students or research participants can approach with queries or discuss concerns (with confidence that they will be followed up if required) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PVC C&A Remotelink VET lecturers/champions
Systematic strategies for communities to know what training is happening, what is available, and what is planned.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small poster pro-formas with CDU logo produced for lecturers and researchers to fill in with details and contact numbers, to be placed in prominent places e.g. store, council office, clinic etc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate Communications Remotelink Local CDU representative
<p>Workable system of feedback to individual community members about :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> VET results Research outcomes Actions emerging from evaluations Employment and engagement opportunities Consultancies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Memos of grades, fees advice and other CDU information sent to students in remote communities made more user-friendly. (incomprehensible mail-outs are damaging and disrespectful) Free 1-800 phone number for enquiries more widely publicised with phone staff trained to help¹ CDU staff or field officers required to be proactive in explaining results and follow up IP/CE grades. Employment of 'CDU Indigenous community champions' (see section 2 below) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> InfoShop HREC Lecturing Staff Remotelink field officers
Develop awareness amongst CDU staff of the strength, vibrancy and importance of Indigenous knowledge in the future of the NT's social, economic and cultural development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation of the Protocols document prepared by the CE coordinator Develop processes (workshops, seminars etc) to sensitise CDU staff to some of the philosophical work entailed in the equitable engagement of Indigenous knowledge practices in their teaching and research work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> VET theme and team leaders Community and Access (C&A) Champions Research Panel SAIKS Dean Indigenous Research and Education



2. enabling community ‘ownership’ through collaboration and investment

- Various described as community ‘ownership’ and ‘buy-in’, we found a strong emphasis on bringing Indigenous communities ‘on board’. The greatest success in teaching and research was evident when Indigenous people were comprehensively involved on their own terms.
- ICE was often linked to the necessarily long term but difficult work of negotiating community ‘futures’ or ‘development’ agendas. This takes time and commitment and often involves issues and conversations not strictly relevant to CDU’s immediate teaching or research goals, but ultimately produces better results for CDU as well as the communities.
- CDU respondents emphasised the need to modify their practices continuously to address the always changing needs and issues being addressed at the community level
- CDU needs to come to terms with the problematic notion of the ‘community’ – it often constitutes Indigenous groups on a scale not truly representative of their own socio-political interests or structures. Communities are often fractured and unhappy. People may prefer to be engaged at the family or clan level.
- Ownership is developed when local people become invested in the partnership with the university for their own personal, clan or family ends.

Strategies	Possible actions	Who?
Develop processes to make VET modules/courses more appropriate for Indigenous students	<p>VET teams to undertake customisation of training packages under the Australian Quality Training Framework guidelines to meet local needs.</p> <p>Blended packages negotiated at community level in consultation over community development goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AQP VET • VET lecturing staff • VET theme and team leaders in collaboration with community representatives
Finding local mechanisms for working through the complexities of remote community socio-political structures. (i.e. more nuanced engagement strategies than those simply dealing through the community council.)	Particular staff (lecturers, researchers and Remotelink) supported to get to know, understand and develop trust relationships with particular groups, and work with them to plan, document and evaluate long-term engagement in relation to their ongoing work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools, VET teams and Faculties in consultation with C&A and IASU

Strategies	Possible actions	Who?
<p><i>'CDU Indigenous community champions'</i></p> <p>A trustworthy local Indigenous CDU presence established in key localities of CDU engagement.</p> <p>Specific roles for local people in planning, executing and evaluating teaching and research projects</p>	<p>Employ local people to be 'the CDU person' - for planning and evaluation and provide them with training, orientations and support.³</p> <p>Start with appointing only a few Indigenous people with recognised history of facilitation, in areas of most intensive engagement. Pay consultancy rates for community level facilitation.</p> <p>Role to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • help lecturers develop blended course plans and delivery • help students understand the system and their location within it. • work on collaborative evaluation of teaching and research • negotiate with local senior community members to guide project development • develop VET and HE courses which explicitly recognise and engage local knowledge authorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PVC C&A • Remotelink • IAS • Faculties • Research Infrastructure funding • VET theme and team leaders
<p>Embedding participatory practices (such as PAR) into teaching, training and research.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative negotiation of statements of community aspirations and community-level training programs developed and updated on an ongoing basis (and these used to negotiate research and training programs).² • This work could start with a collaborative analysis of the CDU skills audit in each place. • Workshops to assist staff to develop useful strategies to actively involve students and research participants in project development and implementation, for example through training in participatory planning <p>In collaboration with community representatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • embedding Indigenous Knowledges in e.g. the Bachelor of Teaching and Learning degree. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local CDU representative • an extended Remotelink • locally focussed C&A Champions • teaching staff • research people (through HREC) • PVC C&A • AQP VET • DEET • PVC T&L



3. enabling the long-term engagement of CDU staff in particular locations

- Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants referred to the importance of shared histories and trust
- The 'Working from Our Strengths' paper identifies the history of trust as a viable strength in CDU's strategy.
- A major inhibitor is the radical dislocation of VET, HE, C&A, and Research at CDU and we must look for ways of integrating them at the Indigenous community level for successful engagement
- Teachers and researchers experience success and satisfaction in their work when they have developed long term relationships with particular communities, areas, or other Indigenous groupings
- Time (and lack of it for effective engagement) is seen as a crucial issue, suggesting that long term engagement may create efficiencies in project planning and implementation

Strategies	Possible actions	Who?
CDU develops regional approaches that target particular geographic regions and develops, facilitates and integrates research and teaching plans within them.	<p>Possible regional approaches include Shires or language groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipalities of Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine and Alice Springs • Top End-Litchfield • Tiwi Islands • West Arnhem, Jabiru • East Arnhem, • Groote, Numbulwar, Ngukurr, Borroloola, • VRD, Daly River-Port Keats • Barkly, East Katherine • Central Desert, MacDonnell • Arrente (including Alice Springs) • Warlpiri • Pitjantjatjara lands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PVC C&A • Remotelink
<p>VET teachers where possible to diversify their portfolios of expertise so they can deliver more courses in more targeted geographic areas.</p> <p>Where not possible, CDU staff who have long term relationships with communities able to maintain the flow/relationships when specific content area training is required.</p>	<p>VET teachers encouraged to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify communities of interest as well as areas of expertise. • diversify their matrix of competency to enable them to focus on a particular area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AQPVET and VET theme and team leaders

Strategies	Possible actions	Who?
Helping teachers and researchers get to know communities, and specialise in particular regions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language and cultural courses available for research and teaching staff interested in working in relevant areas (e.g. CDU should pay for staff to attend Indigenous language classes in Darwin and Alice Springs if relevant). Indigenous community members who play key roles in supporting CDU staff should be formally recognised and remunerated (eg as community champions or brokers identified in section 2 above) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IASU SAIKS AQP/VET Faculties, Schools and VET teams
<p><i>'CDU Local-focus staff'</i></p> <p>Job-descriptions that are geographically specific (see regions above) rather than subject-area specific (as in school/IAS/ VET – based expertise) teaching with research and community service.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversifying Remotelink, to allow for negotiations at community level over blended training, collective research, community development goals, rather than just 'business brokerage' reconfiguring C&A Champions, to be responsible for regions rather than CDU schools developing special positions for VET lecturers to deliver to geographic regions (rather than specific areas of teaching expertise), especially for entry level training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PVC C&A through workshops with Remotelink and C&A Champions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal mentoring of suitable new staff, by others with experience of particular sites. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PCV C&A in cooperation with Remotelink and the T&L and Research and C&A Champions in Faculties, Schools and VET Teams
Recognition of ICE investment by staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PDRS and job selection criteria more geographically defined. Specific SPDL funding for developing a deeper knowledge or particular Indigenous histories, cultures or knowledge practices. ICE to be recognised in workload determination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PMD Faculties, Schools and VET teams
Incentives to keep staff with proven CE outcomes.	<p>Professional development funds for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buy out of time for VET and HE staff to do CE research (including action research) Attendance at conferences related to CE eg. AUCEA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DVC Research Faculties, Schools and VET teams
Support of the development of Indigenous Community Engagement capacity among CDU staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workshops to develop ICE awareness including strategies for building engagement time into teaching and research projects, ways of incorporating local Indigenous knowledge into teaching and research, local ethics, accountabilities, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SAIKS CE coordinator



4. networking

- Good ongoing ICE usually involves complex, time-consuming and unrecognised collaborations with other organisations outside of the Indigenous community, including: land councils, NTG, other universities, local councils and outstation resource centres
- A lot of ICE is enabled through strategic collaborations with Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) organisations who have particular relationships with their constituents that CDU lacks
- The work that CDU does in teaching and research should be negotiated in concert with Community Development and Regional Development programs and agendas for and within Indigenous communities
- Indigenous Organisations identified in our research include, BIITE , Bawinangga, Yalu Marnggithinyaraw, Danila Dilba, Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation, Waltja, Tangentyere, Congress, ARPNet, Miwatj, Dhimurru, Nyirranggulung Mardruk Ngadberre Regional Community Council, Marthakal, and NAILSMA,
- Indigenous communities not just spatially related but also constituted on social or political grounds over large geographical distances.

Strategies	Possible actions	Who?
CDU staff to document their work in networking and share this information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CDU Indigenous Community Engagement website for sharing collaboratively generated information about particular places and the work going on in them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CDU web developers • Faculties, Schools and VET teams • Office of PVC C&A
Staff to utilise networks to share and source information, especially to develop an awareness of ICE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute information about networks and encourage staff to participate.⁴ • Annual ICE Symposium where staff and Indigenous community representatives are encouraged to attend and present on their experiences of ICE⁵ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculties, Schools and VET teams • Office of PVC C&A • CE Coordinator
Encourage greater linking between organisations to achieve multiple goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated positions shared between organisations⁶ • Pursue secondments between government and CDU through the agreement schedules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculties, Schools and VET teams • Schedule leaders • DEET
Work with other organisations to implement projects that require multiple forms of expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify projects that fit within the NT Regional development strategy for strategic implementation with NT Government • Lobby govt to modify funding arrangements to support strategic (collaborative) research, HE and VET delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculties, Schools and VET teams • Schedule leaders • VCMG

Strategies	Possible actions	Who?
Work with Indigenous communities to develop and articulate governance arrangements that are faithful to Indigenous structures yet can engage more effectively with external organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific projects examining contemporary governance and its importance in Community Development projects and NT regional development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule leaders Chair of governance PVC C&A
Finding ways to tap into, support and respect the valuable local knowledge, and authority of Indigenous organisations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negotiating MOUs of preferred provider status with key organizations, particularly Indigenous organisations. Negotiating particular projects with these organisations to fulfil collaboratively identified goals High level negotiations with organisations to identify specific teaching, research and community needs that CDU could address 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faculties, Schools and VET teams PVC C&A, DVC T and L, DVC R

Endnotes

1. This system has proven very useful for BIITE
2. The research work of Stuart Anderson at Wugularr and of Ruth Wallace will examine processes for the embedding of PAR in VET delivery.
3. As per the proposed arrangement for the new IDL program in Central Australia.
4. For example the CAETN and the new TEETN
5. Following from the successful SAIKS seminar where Indigenous consultants from Ngukurr, Mililingimbi, Galiwin'ku and Darwin gave their impressions of research engagement with CDU. (See relevant case study)
6. As per the example of the NLC/SER position given in Julian Gorman and Stephen Garnett's case study.

CDU activities that incorporate indigenous community engagement

CDU's activities are informed by the Futures Framework that guides the activities and direction of the university until 2016. One of the central elements of this Framework is the articulation of the "1st in 5 in 10" where CDU seeks to be being benchmarked in the top band of Australian public universities in 5 key areas over the next 10 years. The first of these areas is "Indigenous Participation and Relevance". Clearly Indigenous Community Engagement is central to the achievement of this goal.

The following list documents a range of projects, organisations and initiatives conducted or facilitated by CDU that incorporate elements of Indigenous Community Engagement. The list is not exhaustive and is intended to demonstrate the variety of activities CDU staff undertake with Indigenous partners in the NT. This list does not document the broad range of VET and HE teaching that incorporates elements of Indigenous Community Engagement.

Strategies

- Indigenous Employment Strategy

Units

- Indigenous Academic Support Unit

Programs

- Vincent Lingiari Memorial Lecture series
- SAKS seminar series
- Taste of Uni Program
- Night Patrol Training
- National Accelerated Literacy Program
- Northern Editions printmaking program
- Joint Indigenous Funding Pool Projects
- Indigenous Workplace Program
- Indigenous Pastoral Program
- Corporate Leaders for Indigenous Employment Program
- Skills and Qualifications Audit

Partnerships

- Kigaruk Mens Leadership Development Project
- Northern Territory Governments- CDU Partnerships Agreement

- North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA)
- Yothu Yindi Foundation: Garma forum
- Laynhapuy homelands MOU
- Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education MOU

Research

- Let's Start
- Playing for life
- ABRACADABRA
- Linking bush schools and education to community-based livelihoods
- Indigenous ageing
- Cultural signs in Central Australia
- Bush harvest
- Alcan Learning Education Regional Training (ALERT)
- Natural resource based livelihoods
- Policy, government and empowerment
- Environmental, cultural and economic values of aquatic ecosystems
- Governance of water resources
- Strong souls study
- Australian Integrated Mental Health Initiative (AIMHI)
- CIPHER: Capacity building in Indigenous policy-relevant health research
- The DRUID Study: Diabetes and related disorders in urban Indigenous people in the Darwin region
- Indigenous birth: pathways and people for healthy families, mothers and babies
- Improving primary health care maternity services for Indigenous women
- Indigenous knowledge and resource management
- Recognition of Indigenous rights and cultural knowledge in the management of inland waters
- Inter networking communities- ICT and remote capacity building
- First language project: community harmony
- Literate practices in Indigenous communities
- The university as knowledge broker for sustainable natural resource management

acronyms and abbreviations used in this report

AFLF	Australian Flexible Learning Framework	IASU	Indigenous Academic Support Unit
AQPVET	Academic Quality and Planning and Vocational Education and Training	ICE	Indigenous Community Engagement
ARNet	Aboriginal Research Providers Network	IP	Insufficient Participation (VET grade)
AUCEA	Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance	MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
BIITE	Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education	NAILSMA	North Australian Land and Sea Management Alliance
C & A	Community and Access	NCVER	National Centre for Vocational and Educational Research
CAETN	Central Australian Education and Training Network	NLC	Northern Land Council
CDEP	Community Development Employment Projects	NTG	Northern Territory Government
CDU	Charles Darwin University	NTU	Northern Territory University (predecessor to CDU)
CE	Continuing Enrolment (VET Grade)	PAR	Participatory Action Research
CFCU	Caring for Country Unit	PDRS	Performance and Development Review System
CHARITES	Training Advisory Council for the Tourism Recreation and Cultural Industries	PMD	People Management and Development
CRCAH	Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health	PVC C&A	Pro-Vice Chancellor Community and Access
DBERD	Department of Business, Economic and Resource Development	RTO	Registered Training Organisation
DEET	Department of Employment, Education and Training	SAIKS	School of Australian Indigenous Knowledge Systems
DKCRC	Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre	SELTS	Student Experience of Learning and Teaching survey
DVC R	Deputy Vice Chancellor Research	SER	School of Environmental Research
DVC T & L	Deputy Vice Chancellor Teaching and Learning	SPDL	Staff Professional Development Leave
GAA	Growth Assessment and Action	SSPR	School of Social and Policy Research
HE	Higher Education	T & L	Teaching and Learning
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee	TAFE	Technical and Further Education
IAS	Institute of Advanced Studies	TEETN	Top End Education and Training Network
		VCMG	Vice Chancellors Management Group
		VET	Vocational Education and Training

photographs

Cover: 1. Evaluating a financial Literacy project at Milingimbi. 2. Milingimbi airport

Page 2: Consultancy on the use of multimedia in medical interpretation, for the Institute for Breathing and Sleep

Page 4: CDU community consultation evaluating a financial literacy project for ANZ

Page 6, Small scale cultural tourism in east Arnhemland homeland centre

Page 9: Sorting Akatyerr (Desert raisin) before its cleaned, dried and stored (see page 36)

Pages 13, 15, 17, 19: Small scale cultural tourism in east Arnhemland homeland centre

Page 21: Exploring Aboriginal knowledge and digital technology, CDU

Page 23: Children playing at Djurranalpi

Page 25: Yolŋu consultants meeting with CDU postgraduate students

Page 27: Larry and David Ryan with Stuart at Alligator Hole near Wugularr

Page 31: Lorna and Gurrangurran from Gäwa with Australian Flexible Learning Framework team in Brisbane (end of year forum)

Page 33: Children playing at Djurranalpi

Page 35: Richard, Ruth and Mark at Cape Leveque. (Ruth Mark and Richard)

Page 36: Ian Gumbula, Mercy Gumbula and Gwen Rami, Indigenous consultants from Ngukurr (see page 29)

Page 37: Reference group members attend a special workshop for the development of protocols.

Page 38: Home and satellite dish, Gawa community, Elcho Island

Page 40: Detail from DVD menu *East of the Arafura Swamp*

Page 42: Yirŋiya at CDU "Maybe through new technology you can understand the way we feel about our land" (Yirŋiya research)

indigenous community engagement

