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Indigenous Community Engagement Edition

Contents

EDITORIAL

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Community engagement has recently been positioned as a core role of regional universities, a role that calls on them to develop partnerships that yield mutually beneficial outcomes. In Australia's Northern Territory (NT), there is only one university, Charles Darwin University (CDU), whose role is to deliver "value though education, research and community engagement to the Territory and the nation". Indigenous people make up approximately one third of the NT population, a proportion that is projected to grow for the foreseeable future. Many Indigenous people still live on their traditional lands, speak Indigenous languages and have different conceptions of knowledge from those that universities are based upon. This provides CDU with unique challenges as it seeks to embed community engagement into its teaching and research work. These challenges revolve around working different traditions of knowledge and practice together respectfully and productively so that partnerships can yield mutual benefit.

In 2007 and 2008 we undertook research to examine community engagement with NT Indigenous communities, looking to develop understandings of some unique aspects of our engagement. This research produced a report "Indigenous Community Engagement at Charles Darwin University" which showed that Indigenous knowledge and agreement making processes are alive in well in the NT and that respecting and working with them are critical elements of good community engagement. CDU staff contributed to this research in a number of ways, including through writing up short case studies of their work. These case studies highlighted a range of strategies that respond to the challenge of building mutually beneficial partnerships.

A number of the short case studies have been expanded and are included in this edition of the Learning Communities journal. They highlight a snapshot of the approaches employed by CDU staff as they seek to do education or research work that delivers benefit not only to CDU, but also to Indigenous people and their communities.

RESEARCHING A UNIVERSITY'S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES IT SERVES

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Abstract

Charles Darwin University (CDU) is committed to community engagement and is developing ways of embedding this role within university structures and processes. One strategy to achieve this was the Indigenous Community Engagement (ICE) research project, conducted in 2007 and 2008. The ICE Project aimed to document and make explicit the engagement embedded within past and ongoing projects with Indigenous people as a way of informing the development of CDU's community engagement strategies. This paper documents the origins, methodology, findings, recommendations and implications of the ICE Project.

CDU has a long history of conducting successful teaching and research projects with Australian Indigenous people. A key assumption underpinning the development of the ICE project was that there were numerous examples of good existing collaborations between CDU staff and Indigenous communities that the university as a whole could learn from. One of the critical aspects of the project was to create space for Indigenous people, from both within and outside the university, to participate and tell their stories of engagement, including what they consider it to be and what the preconditions are for good community engagement.

The ICE Project demonstrated that good community engagement with Indigenous people is an emergent process embedded in respectful relationships between individuals. Successful Indigenous community engagement depends on recognising Indigenous knowledge and its practices and Indigenous identity as central to the development of partnerships and collaboration between the university and Indigenous communities. Successful Indigenous community

engagement also requires that university staff see their professional relationships with Indigenous people as extending beyond the life and concerns of individual projects.

Keywords: Community engagement; Indigenous knowledge; cross cultural research

Introduction

Charles Darwin University (CDU) is committed to community engagement and sees it as core business (Charles Darwin University, 2006a). Good engagement with Indigenous people is central to the achievement of CDU's vision which is "to be a thriving university that dares to be different and takes advantage of its unique geography and demography to benefit the whole community though education, research and community engagement" (Charles Darwin University, 2008a p xxviii). However, formal procedures and strategies at CDU for developing partnerships with Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory (NT) have not yet been developed.

CDU aims to "draw on its own rich cultural and social environment to provide solutions to complex issues in cross cultural environments, particularly those where traditional Indigenous knowledges and western knowledge systems meet" (Charles Darwin University, 2008b). One significant hurdle CDU faces in achieving this goals is the ongoing marginalisation of Indigenous perspectives and voices growing out of the fact that Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies are poorly understood, and Indigenous ways of knowing are widely regarded as deficient within contemporary Australian society (Sunderland, Muirhead, Parsons, & Holtom, 2004; Verran, 2002). The university is acting to address this and recently appointed a Pro Vice-Chancellor for Indigenous Leadership whose multiple roles include: incorporating Indigenous perspectives into mainstream University core business, enhancing key relationships between the University and its Indigenous stakeholders, and ensuring CDU is the leader in providing outcomes for Indigenous students (Charles Darwin University, 2009). Community engagement is also increasingly seen at CDU as one vehicle to assist in building awareness of the value of Indigenous knowledge, and as a way of developing mechanisms whereby the tensions between Indigenous and western ways of knowing can be discussed. One strategy to develop CDU's knowledge of community engagement as it relates to Indigenous people was the Indigenous Community Engagement (ICE) project.

Charles Darwin University was formed in 2003 as a result of a merger between the Northern Territory University and Centralian College (Charles Darwin University, 2008c). Charles Darwin University is the only university in the Northern Territory and has campuses in Darwin, Alice Springs, Nhulunbuy, Katherine and Tennant Creek. In addition, staff deliver

Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education (HE) to many of the 641 discrete communities within the NT, most of which are Indigenous communities (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2007). This means that CDU's 'region' is roughly one sixth of the Australian continent.

Indigenous people comprise almost a third of the NT population (the highest proportion of any jurisdiction in the country by a significant margin) and 80% of Indigenous Territorians live in the regional and remote areas of the NT (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007; Barnes, Condon, Cunningham, & Smith, 2004; Productivity Commission, 2009). Many Indigenous groups in the NT continue to live on their ancestral lands, speak Indigenous languages and continue to live in ways informed by traditional rules and understandings (Bird-Rose, 1992; Christie, 1994; Swain, 1993). They are also some of the most disadvantaged groups in Australian society, with high unemployment, poor health, and high rates of incarceration (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, 2008; Productivity Commission, 2009).

The Indigenous Community Engagement project was conceived as a result of a conversation between the authors after a trip to Walungurru (Kintore) in the Western Desert by Campbell to teach units from the Conservation and Land Management (CLM) National Training Package. From the perspective of a CDU Land Management Lecturer the visit was very difficult. While the students had a vast knowledge of their country, the requirements of the training package could not to be achieved in any real sense because remote Indigenous students' understandings of the world were completely different to those embedded in the curriculum materials. On the lecturer's return from the trip the authors talked about the dilemma this appeared to present: should we refuse to offer further training as it would only lead to failure on the part of the students; or should we deliver relevant training largely unrelated to the curriculum? Neither of these two approaches was a solution to the more fundamental problem of the knowledge traditions being unable to be effectively reconciled within a training situation. The authors decided that the theories emerging around community engagement nationally and internationally might be useful as a way to work through the issues presented by these divergent knowledge systems having no effective meeting points and began researching community engagement and developing a literature review.

Before long the authors concluded that, given the lack of relevant literature examining situated Indigenous community engagement in practice, research was required on the particular issues facing the university's engagement with Indigenous people, and at the same time take up the opportunity for CDU to contribute to the engagement literature through documenting examples of community engagement already embedded in CDU projects. The ICE project was

designed to document existing practices, and to provide opportunities for CDU staff and Indigenous community members to contribute their engagement stories.

The ICE project was funded by the office of the Pro Vic-Chancellor for Community and Access, and office whose purpose is to act as a broker of relationships between various sections of the Northern Territory community and the university (Charles Darwin University, 2008d). The project looked specifically at the history of successful CDU engagement with Indigenous groups to identify what characterises good Indigenous community engagement, what enables it within the university and what makes engagement difficult. It also sought to make recommendations to improve Indigenous community engagement practice within CDU. The following section will detail the methodology and findings of the project, highlighting those factors that research respondents identified as key elements of Indigenous community engagement.

Methodology

The project methodology consisted of three key strategies, creating opportunities for university staff to be involved in the project in a variety of ways. The first aspect was a questionnaire, asking any staff willing to reflect on their experiences working with Indigenous people and their communities, to contribute their understandings of community engagement, and what it might require to be effectively institutionalised at the university. This questionnaire was sent via email to 140 teaching and research staff that through their work had some contact with Indigenous people or groups. The second strategy was to invite these same staff to complete a case study on Indigenous community engagement, with funding available to pay Indigenous partners to collaborate with staff to tell their stories of their engagement experiences. The third aspect was a strategy whereby through a series of meetings, CDU staff and Indigenous community members collaboratively identified key findings as the project progressed.

45 people participated in the project in some way. 16 people responded to the questionnaire, with five of these respondents going on to produce a case study for the "Indigenous Community Engagement at Charles Darwin University" research report (Campbell & Christie, 2008). Responses to the questionnaires were summarised and can be found in the research report. The responses to the questionnaires provided the basic framework for the findings and recommendations and highlight that good engagement in Indigenous contexts means recognising that Indigenous views and day to day realities are not obstacles to be overcome, but realities to be accommodated if fruitful collaborations are to be produced.

The collaborative meetings to identify emerging findings brought together CDU staff that completed the questionnaires and/or produced a case study with other CDU staff and Indigenous community members who had not. These were informal meetings where we presented summaries of the questionnaire responses and asked those present for their reactions to those responses. We made notes on these discussions and provided feedback to those who attended with invitations to make further responses or contributions. This process had a number of iterations over a six month period and assisted us to refine our understanding of Indigenous community engagement in the CDU and NT context. The only significant difference arising in the range of discussions about community engagement between Indigenous and non Indigenous participants were that Indigenous participants focused on the foundations of good engagement (including shared commitment and acting in good faith), whereas the non Indigenous participants were more focused on engagement as a process to produce good outcomes.

A total of 14 CDU staff took up on the offer to produce a case study for the research. These staff either: produced their own case study; worked with staff from other institutions to produce one; or worked with members of Indigenous communities to produce one. The list below represents all the case studies produced for the first stage of the research.

The case studies prepared for the project cover a wide range of CDU projects and activities. Around half of the case studies are based on engagement practices that surround individual projects, examples include: “Djelk Rangers and Charles Darwin University: what can we learn about Indigenous community engagement?”(Williams, 2008); “Restoring harmony: a case study of Indigenous community engagement at Wugularr” (Anderson, 2008); “Community engagement in a health project in Gapuwiyak” (D. Campbell, 2008); “Technology for community engagement at Djurranalpi” (King, 2008); and, “Community engagement: on whose terms?” (Greatorex & Murakami-Gold, 2008). These examples document the situated and unique engagement practices that grew up in particular places, showing that engagement with Indigenous people is an emergent practice necessarily growing from the particular situations that people find themselves in. They also suggest that good engagement is responsive to changing demands.

Another set of case studies look at more general lessons learned about community engagement drawing from a range of projects and situations. They include “Research, collaboration and community development: a holistic approach” (Gorman & Garnett, 2008); “Is it the community, or is it something else (that we engage with)?” (M. Campbell, 2008) and, the case study entitled “Working from our strengths: Indigenous community engagement through enterprise development and training” (Wallace, Manado, Curry, & Agar, 2008). These case

studies draw out broader factors that underpin good engagement, in particular demonstrating that community input and ownership, and an understanding of how communities are constituted, were crucial to effective engagement.

The last set of case studies look specifically at how Indigenous knowledge can be accommodated within projects undertaken by the university and include: "Engaging with Australian Indigenous Knowledge Systems" (Christie & Verran, 2008); the case study "Respect" (Gaykamangu et al., 2008); and "Investment in Yolngu community engagement : the case of an Indigenous 'Market Research' consultancy" (Christie & Greatorex, 2008).

The three strategies to collect information for the research each produced useful data. Yet the questionnaire (which could be completed in around 15 minutes) had a limited response when compared with the case studies (which were much more time consuming). Our approach to the research was to provide opportunities for anyone interested to participate. We considered that having a range of strategies was a good way to do this, however from the responses it is clear that some strategies were more useful than others. Having the three strategies interweave was a useful approach, for example the collaborative meetings were a good way to build on the limited data extracted from the questionnaire responses while also providing a space for case study ideas to be discussed and developed. This suggests that employing only one of these strategies alone would have been insufficient in terms of producing meaningful information.

Findings

The project findings were drawn from three sources: responses to the questionnaires; the 10 case studies prepared for the project; and, staff and Indigenous community member participation in collaborative feedback meetings. The findings can be broadly grouped into three sections:

- what is good Indigenous community engagement in our context
- what are the preconditions for successful engagement with Indigenous communities, and
- what enables or inhibits engagement within the CDU context

1: What is good Indigenous community engagement in our context?

The first finding was that there are four main elements to respondents' understanding of community engagement. One element is that engagement is centred on relationships between individuals (rather than the university as an institution). The second is that engagement is an ongoing process, part of everyday life and something that extends beyond the life of individual

projects. Thirdly, engagement requires the recognition of Indigenous identities and knowledge and a commitment to serious engagement with them. Finally, respondents perceive that community engagement is about creating time and space where knowledge systems can interact respectfully. These four elements will now be discussed in some detail.

Relationships between individuals

One of the major themes to emerge from the research was the engagement is centrally about relationships between individuals. This resonates with the finding in the Foundation Paper that "engagement 'happens' in the spaces between persons in the social medium in the present and over time" (Sunderland et al., 2004 p.16). The significance of this finding about the perceived importance of relationships for community engagement with Indigenous people lies in their understandings of the rights and responsibilities that inhere in relationships. Relationships within the Indigenous sphere are the lifeblood of Indigenous identity and create and sustain the mechanisms through which people understand themselves and those around them, and what their rights, responsibilities and behaviour in relation to others needs to be as a result (Christie, 1994). University staff must be aware of the reciprocal nature of these relationships and understand that in turn these relationships link them with other Indigenous people. As Ian Gumbula commented in the seminar given by the Yolngu consultants, "we only know we can respect that person through the connection with other people that we have been working with in the past" (in Gaykamangu et al., 2008 p.29). University staff members wishing to engage respectfully with Indigenous communities need to be willing to take on the responsibilities such relationships with Indigenous people create above and beyond the life of their project/work.

Beyond the life and scope of individual research and teaching projects

The second element of engagement identified in the research, was its embeddedness as an ongoing process entrenched in everyday life. University staff are often called upon by their Indigenous students and co-researchers to do more than is required by the university. They may often need to address agendas quite different from what the actual work demanded by the university's imperatives. This was found to be equally true for lecturers as for researchers. Good engagement may mean assisting people with day to day problems such as banking issues, transport or the provision of food. This process of responding to the real world issues presented by working with Indigenous people is not an optional add on, it is central and without it engagement would be "superficial, relationships temporal and the outcomes less than satisfactory" (Williams, 2008 p.19). Further, respondents were united in their belief that the real world relationships through which engagement happens must be ongoing; they are in a sense

above and prior to the university work that staff do with Indigenous people. As one respondent wrote 'relationships have to be maintained before, and after particular projects to keep the trust that is part of the relationship" (in Campbell & Christie, 2008 p.8).

Taking knowledge work seriously

The third element of respondents' understanding of community engagement is that Indigenous identities and knowledge must be recognised. Some respondents saw this as the most important element of what characterises Indigenous community engagement. This finding highlights the importance of recognising the divergent nature of western and Indigenous knowledge systems. To do this requires that university staff recognise that Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous identity are inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing; Yingiya Guyula stresses the importance of his identity and its role in developing new opportunities for himself: "I am now at the stage where I have become a teacher from what I've learned from our old people...maybe through new technology there could be linkages where you can understand the way we feel about our land and our culture" (in Gaykamangu et al., 2008 p.28). It also means that university staff need to recognise the entrenched practices that marginalise and silence Indigenous people through rendering their knowledge as deficient and unable to effectively address contemporary issues (Sherriff, 2000; Sunderland et al., 2004). The ICE research clearly showed that in the NT Indigenous people continue to practice their own knowledge traditions, systems that have vastly different ontologies and epistemologies to those on which western knowledge is based (Verran, 2002). Good Indigenous community engagement involves serious engagement with divergent knowledge practices and the collaborative articulation of new forms of pedagogy and research (Christie, 2006).

Time and space

The fourth element of engagement articulated by respondents is the creation of time and space where representatives of divergent knowledge systems can interact respectfully. Establishing time within projects for Indigenous people to articulate their knowledge requirements so that they can be taken seriously within the academy requires explicit planning. The research found that unless this time and space was deliberately created it was very difficult to adequately attend to issues created by tensions that inevitably arise in work of an intercultural nature. Sometimes this work involves waiting for the agreement or contribution of a clan elder before travelling to a particular place, or sharing knowledge about a particular issue. Sometimes it involves travelling to a particular place in order for the place itself to become an active agent in the production of knowledge. Regardless of the reason behind the tensions that might arise in

projects, the research found that trying to create time for negotiation within already established projects was far more difficult than factoring it in at the start.

2: Preconditions for successful engagement

The understanding of engagement being ongoing relationships embedded in everyday life and nurtured within spaces created for intercultural knowledge building leads to the second set of findings: the preconditions that enable engagement to happen. Successful engagement between Indigenous communities and the university depends on three main factors respect, ownership and long term and focused commitments.

Respect

Respect is a concept that is not easily translated between cultures: it is inferred from peoples' behaviour and different cultures require different practices of respect. The research highlights that respect in Indigenous engagement was found in things like sitting down and talking together, letting others know what is happening and acting in ways that recognise each persons rights to speak (Campbell & Christie, 2008). Further, respect is demonstrated through the recognition of the centrality of Indigenous knowledge in doing cooperative projects. This manifests itself through understanding negotiation as central to Indigenous knowledge production, ensuring that the projects the university invests in work with the Indigenous governance structures that exist within Indigenous communities (Campbell, 2007). The research found that Indigenous people within the NT rarely articulate their group identities at the level of the community. Communities are often old missions or government stations, and people invest their identities in more traditional clan and family groupings. This has profound implications for how organisations work with Indigenous people and groups and suggest that more effort is required to identify and work with existing governance. One case study documented the significant efforts Indigenous people went to in developing contemporary "community" governance that drew on traditional governance structures (D. Campbell, 2008). This suggests that through thorough processes initiated and owned by Indigenous people new governance arrangements (that draw on and respect traditional arrangements) can be developed which respond to the desire of governments and others to work at the "community level".

Overwhelmingly the failure to embed new projects within the already present governance structures was seen as disrespectful and a failure of engagement (Campbell & Christie, 2008). Failure to negotiate respectfully manifests itself in many aspects of everyday community life. Council offices are full of unopened letters to students telling them of their results or their enrolment status. While Indigenous students in remote communities are mostly happy with their

lecturers, they generally have little idea of where they are in their courses, and feel disrespected by incomprehensible bureaucratic letters composed by computers being sent to them as a substitute for proper face-to-face engagement.

Ownership

The unequal distribution of power that attends most interactions between the university and Indigenous people has the potential to silence or marginalise Indigenous perspectives. Without paying careful attention to how power operates in intercultural settings, activities justified under the banner of engagement can be simply ways of the university achieving its own ends with impunity. Respondents to the research saw genuine ownership of projects by Indigenous people as a key to addressing this concern. It was noted that this is not necessarily an easy thing to achieve as it requires addressing basic but potentially difficult issues such as: whose knowledge is being utilised, how to recognise and incorporate different ways of making knowledge; and, perhaps most significantly, how do we know that what we are doing is "mutually beneficial"? This is a particular danger for the university as often its involvement in teaching or research projects in Indigenous communities is predicated on producing outcomes largely predetermined by funding arrangements.

Creating the conditions through which Indigenous people have a sense of ownership of projects was identified as a critical success factor. Creating this sense requires university staff to be flexible, recognising that "successful" university work is that which meets the needs of the students/co-researchers and their communities as well as the institution. Often it meant that university staff had to understand that the "community" is not a useful level on which to constitute Indigenous groups. Indigenous people are often more comfortable being engaged at the level of the family or clan, meaning that university staff had to move past democratic notions of working with the community so that they could be effective.

Lastly the university needs to guard against using this notion of 'ownership' as a code for requiring communities to be accountable for the failure of teaching or research work. Joint ownership of engagement practices requires the university to be accountable to its students and co-researchers and their communities, and the building of formal practices in the community to monitor, acknowledge and reward those successful relationships.

Long-term and focused commitments

The third key precondition for high quality engagement with Indigenous people is staff making long term commitments to working with particular groups of Indigenous people. This directly relates to relationships being the cornerstone of engagement. The research found that

staff with long term, trusting relationships were able to more effectively respond to community concerns, more able to work within the governance structures already in place, and as a consequence were more likely to be able to ensure that the work that they did as employees of the university enabled local ownership and investment. Their ability to work effectively with Indigenous people was built on the work that they had done previously, with some working in the same communities for over 30 years. Obviously the university cannot mandate staff's continued involvement, however the knowledge and respect that individual staff build up over time is an asset that the university relies upon to generate both good engagement and good outcomes. Through discussion the researchers and academics together negotiated a range of strategies which could enable longer-term commitment of university staff to particular regions and communities.

3: Making it happen – enablers and inhibitors

The third set of findings relate to the enablers and inhibitors of engagement at CDU. Things that were identified as supporting and enabling engagement include: the presence of a School that specifically recognises Indigenous knowledge and works to ensure its use and transmission within CDU (the School for Australian Indigenous Knowledge Systems - SAIKS); the Yolngu studies program run by SAIKS; recognition of community engagement contributions through university structures including promotion and professional development; the recognition that Indigenous people need to be paid properly for their contributions to collaborative work; and, the growing awareness of community engagement as a central aspect of CDU's activities which is being fostered by the Community and Access portfolio and the Community Engagement coordinator in particular. These enablers will now be set out.

Enabler: A school dedicated to Indigenous knowledge

Engagement at CDU was seen to be enhanced by the presence of the School for Australian Indigenous Knowledge Systems (SAIKS). This school, unlike any other in Australian universities, is a site supportive of Indigenous knowledge and providing Indigenous studies and importantly is also a site that demonstrates CDU's commitment to embedding alternative knowledge practices within its structure. This commitment has seen the emergence of situated Indigenous methodologies resulting from work between Indigenous researchers and Indigenous knowledge holders, and places CDU at the forefront of developing processes to work through the ontological complexities presented by seeking to connect disparate knowledge communities (see for example Christie, 2006).

The Yolngu studies program, based within SAIKS is an example of knowledge work that is faithful to both academic and Indigenous knowledge perspectives (see Yolngu Studies Program, 2008). This program has been going for more than ten years and has been widely recognised for its unique approach that places Yolngu epistemology at the centre of the learning process. The program was developed and implemented under the guidance of Yolngu elders and continues to be overseen by them, and informs the ongoing research and consultancy collaborations (see Christie, 2008).

Enabler: Recognising community engagement action

CDU has also made efforts to recognise community engagement formally as a critical aspect of the university's responsibilities. It has done this through the development of the Community and Access portfolio whose role is to act "as a broker of relationships between the various sections of the Northern Territory community and the university" (Charles Darwin University, 2007). CDU also has a dedicated coordinator whose role is to sensitise staff to the possibilities and responsibilities of community engagement and, amongst other things, draw together engagement stories from within the university and disseminate them via the CDU website.

CDU is also embedding community engagement within university systems such as promotion and professional development. CDU staff undertake regular performance review and planning through the Performance Review and Development System (PDRS). This is completed annually and gives staff and their supervisors the opportunity to discuss work related achievements and goals. The PDRS is based around the four core business areas of CDU: Teaching, Research, Community and Access, and Business Development. Staff are expected to outline their goals in each of these areas with the opportunity for staff to articulate goals relating to community engagement (within the Community and Access core business area). Achievement of goals are recognised at subsequent PDRS meetings and form the basis for ongoing planning and professional development. If a staff member does undertake and document their action in the area of community engagement action, then this is able to be used in applications for promotion. Again achievements in the four core business areas form the foundation for applications for promotion.

Enabler: Acknowledging and paying for Indigenous knowledge contributions

CDU works to meet the engagement challenge by acknowledging and paying Indigenous people for their contributions to collaborative projects. This acknowledgement often involves more than recognising Indigenous people as experts within their own knowledge domains,

something many organisations are now doing (see for example Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre, 2008). It also means ensuring that they are paid properly for the intellectually complex work they do, the authority they show, and the accountabilities within their own communities which they take on in the interdisciplinary knowledge space that attends some projects. Although CDU is getting better at recognising the contributions that Indigenous people make, in practical terms the systems to make payments to them simple and efficient have some way to go.

However it must be acknowledged that the enablers that exist at CDU are not yet enough to promote widespread awareness of the unique characteristics of what engagement with Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory entails. This is partly due to the emerging nature of community engagement as a core responsibility of universities in Australia, and partly due to confusion about what taking engagement seriously really involves . Many of the inhibitors of community engagement are embedded within systems (such as funding and information dissemination) that are not designed respond to the unique knowledge needs of Indigenous communities.

This provides particular challenges to organisations such as universities, whose traditional mission is based on providing expert advice, or training or education that is premised on their superior knowledge. If the goal of the university is to become "engaged", the traditional position of the university as the "one who knows" must be reconceived to that of a partner. It is a 'both-ways' transdisciplinary learning process (Christie, 2006)

Inhibitor: Funding systems not designed to cater to Indigenous needs

Our research made clear that successful engagement is not something that happens only at the beginning of projects; it is something that runs throughout and beyond projects. However the university does not receive funding to support such engagement work. This is compounded by the additional work CDU must undertake to cater for Indigenous people for whom English is often a second language and who do not have an in-depth understanding of the university system. This is a particular issue for Indigenous VET students, where the success of their training in part depends on the work that lecturers do in customising course content for their specific needs. Without additional funding, lecturers cannot do the up-front work required to build relationships through which they can identify and support the aspirations and needs of their students, nor can they do the time consuming customisation work to mould a course to meet their requirements. The current VET system is designed only to fund delivery, based on timelines set

for students without additional support needs. Thus CDU must allocate additional funds if staff are to undertake engagement action that surrounds the work they are funded to do.

In the area of research this can be less of an issue; applicants for research funding can include engagement action as part of their research submissions. Nevertheless the reality that engagement commitments often calls on CDU staff to do more work than is "professionally required" means that it is difficult to plan adequately and fund engagement work. Further, the emerging nature of community engagement as a core responsibility of universities means that many research staff still do not see engagement as central to their work, and are thus less likely to include a component in their budgets to allow for it.

Inhibitor: lack of systems to provide or elicit feedback from Indigenous partners

Funding systems are not designed to accommodate the engagement needs of Indigenous people. Nor does CDU have good systems in place to provide or elicit feedback from Indigenous partners. One of the main findings was that a lack of credible and comprehensible feedback to Indigenous people undermines a lot of the good teaching and research work being done. This lack of feedback is partially due to the funding systems (mentioned above) which do not provide the additional resources required to do engagement work. This means that schools and VET teams within CDU must allocate additional funds to undertake feedback. Understandably, from a financial point of view, many sections within CDU feel that they cannot follow through with feedback due to the cost and resource implications. The university itself has few mechanisms to allow it to monitor the nature or success of its engagement practices, meaning that lessons that arise from CDU's successes and failures in Indigenous communities are not being documented and are therefore unable to be shared around the university. The end result is that students in remote places are often in the dark as to exactly what course they are studying, or how well they are doing, and university staff remain in the dark as to how to best negotiate to meet their needs.

Recommendations

The Indigenous Community Engagement research project made recommendations directed and enhancing the quality of our engagement with Indigenous communities. These recommendations range from practical steps requiring little change in structures or processes, to those that have implications for national level university policy. The main recommendations revolve around meeting the accountabilities required by respect in the intercultural context.

At the broadest level the research shows that investments made by staff in Indigenous community engagement link strongly with successful outcomes. In order to build on this success,

and to achieve the community engagement goal of "mutual benefit", CDU must position community engagement generally, and Indigenous community engagement in particular, as standard practice. The overarching recommendation arising from the research is for community engagement to be explicitly repositioned as an integral part of all work involving Indigenous communities. However it must also be noted that Indigenous people want to work with people who are interested in getting to know them, not just deliver them a service. This has implications for how Indigenous community engagement must be positioned if it is to ensure accountability to the communities it is intended to serve.

Develop formal feedback requirements for teaching and research

CDU needs to take action to ensure that the requirements for feedback about the results of research and teaching are more systematically followed up and to develop systems to enable better flow of information between the university and the Indigenous communities with which it works. This may involve augmenting the responsibilities of staff already within the university and setting out the requirement for community engagement to be formally included within research and training programs. This would assist in moving community engagement from its current position as an optional extra that self selecting staff undertake, to a core responsibility of all staff who do face to face work in Indigenous communities.

Position Indigenous community based work as a privilege (not a right)

Indigenous respondents put respect as the most fundamental requirement of successful engagement. This is a precondition of the mutual benefit criteria that defines community engagement, and contrasts with the service delivery approach that underpins traditional university teaching and research. Indigenous respondents made clear that they do not want to work with people who are not interested in getting to know them, in learning from them 'both ways' or respecting them. Positioning work in Indigenous communities as a privilege (rather than as a right or a responsibility) would assist in creating the conditions through which successful community engagement becomes an integral part of all CDUs work in Indigenous communities.

Develop processes to sensitise staff to Indigenous community engagement

Given the complexity of community engagement in an intercultural context in the Northern Territory it is critical that the difficulties that staff face in engaging are explicitly addressed. One strategy to further embed Indigenous community engagement practice at CDU is to develop processes (that may include workshops, seminars, and the buy-out of staff time) to sensitise staff to some of the philosophical work entailed in the equitable engagement of

Indigenous knowledge practices into their teaching and research work. This is seen as a way of addressing the overwhelming bias of knowledge work within the university towards western modes of knowing, and goes some way to opposing the forces of silencing that marginalise Indigenous perspectives within the academy.

Increase long-term focused CDU investment in Indigenous communities

CDU currently "invests" in the communities it works with in a variety of ways. Given the importance of generating a sense of community ownership of CDU activities taking place in communities, efforts must be made to build on the existing investments. There should be an increased focus on building human resource capabilities both within CDU and the communities it works within. This means supporting individual CDU lecturers to focus on particular communities or groups of communities through professional development activities such as language courses or to broaden their skill base. It also means supporting people within communities to become CDU contact people, who can be contracted to support CDU staff during their visits, to provide follow up, to assist with the contextualisation of VET courses and to provide training (where they have the appropriate skills and qualifications).

Implications for community engagement policy

The ICE research project has some important implications for engagement policy within the university and in terms of community engagement with Indigenous people more widely. Firstly, the research highlights that links between university activities and the development aspirations of Indigenous communities need to be more comprehensively explored. This is because all respondents generally perceive engagement to be inextricably linked with the overall development of communities. However, this community devlopment role is not currently considered core business by CDU, nor is it considered a key role of universities as Sunderland et al note: "little consideration has been given to the role of higher education as a vehicle for building or strengthening local communities" (Sunderland et al., 2004 p.56). This suggests that the university needs to find ways in which it can support Indigenous communities to articulate their aspirations and develop mechanisms to act on these aspirations collaboratively. This, according to the respondents of the ICE research should be the university's community engagement core business.

The recently finalised Review of Australian Higher Education recommended that there should be no explicit funding for community engagement "given that these activities are an integral part of an institution's teaching and research activities" (Bradley, 2008 p.xxviii). This provides challenges to universities such as CDU which operate in a vastly different knowledge

context all other Australian universities and which are still working through what the recently articulated "requirement to engage" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2003) means in practice. The danger of positioning community engagement as an embedded rather than explicit university activity, without a clear articulation of what CE is and how to achieve it, is that all activities that are not strictly teaching or research come to be labeled engagement without due consideration of their role in producing mutual benefit. The ICE research suggests that more needs to be known about the nature of community engagement in practice in order for it to be effectively embedded within CDU's teaching and research activities. This points to the need to build a CE evidence base that links inputs with outcomes and impacts. The development of tracking and measurement tools will assist with the task of assessing the nature and type of investment required to achieve effective engagement. It also suggests that more research is required to monitor the impact of existing engagements over time, identifying both key start up and ongoing processes that enable universities and their communities to engage sustainably over time for long term mutual benefit.

Conclusion

The ICE project at CDU was an opportunity for university staff and Indigenous community members to document and reflect on the community engagement aspects of their shared work. It revealed that awareness of and respect for Indigenous knowledge and governance is the major precursor for successful engagement. It showed that when engagement met the needs of each party, fruitful collaborations would ensue that were faithful to the knowledge and governance traditions of each. The research showed that Indigenous knowledge and ownership are key to successful intercultural undertakings, and that the university is well placed to build on the successes it has achieved. However there are hurdles that need to be overcome; Indigenous knowledge continues to be marginalised by processes entrenched in wider Australian society that see it as deficient and irrelevant to the development needs in places like the NT. Further, national level systems that the university works within, set up to create consistency of outcomes nationally, are not well suited to meeting the knowledge needs of Indigenous people with their vastly different understandings of the world, and the very different lives they lead, and hope to lead. The ICE project demonstrates that CDU has implemented a range of actions and projects - from complex transdisciplinary work to simple and respectful engagement that attends vocational training - which show that community engagement, when taken seriously, can meet the challenge of producing mutual benefit for both CDU and the Indigenous communities it works within. The next challenge is to implement changes to policy and practice so that the lessons learnt allow further development of the community engagement agenda for the benefit of Indigenous people in the NT.

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ENGAGING WITH AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS: CHARLES DARWIN UNIVERSITY AND THE YOLNGU OF NORTHEAST ARNHEMLAND

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Abstract

The Yolŋu Studies stream of tertiary teaching and academic research has a long history within the School of Australian Indigenous Knowledge systems at Charles Darwin University. This case study tells the story of the gradual unfolding of the engagement between the university and Yolŋu (northeast Arnhemland Aboriginal) knowledge authorities and their practices. It begins with the long negotiations to set up the teaching program under the authority of senior Yolŋu advisers, to set up a curriculum and classroom practice which remains faithful to Yolŋu laws around knowledge exchange and representation. Alongside the Yolŋu laws, was a particular epistemology which we worked hard to validate and support within the academic classroom. The institutionalisation of Yolŋu knowledge practices in the academy allowed the academics and the Yolŋu advisers to develop collaboratively a transdisciplinary research methodology which attends to the requirements of both Yolŋu and academic knowledge traditions. The paper gives examples of successful research collaborations, and examines some of the philosophical work which needed to be done for successful respectful engagement.

Introduction

Other universities have schools of Indigenous Studies, but Charles Darwin University (CDU) distinguishes itself by having 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 engagement with alternative knowledge systems. This case study is a story of non-Indigenous academics and Aboriginal knowledge authorities slowly and tentatively learning to do knowledge work together productively and in good faith. The Indigenous knowledge practices in this case study are those of the Yolŋu Aboriginal people of northeast Arnhemland in the Northern Territory, Australia. Yolŋu have been sharing their knowledge and agreement making practices with foreigners for hundreds of years, so were well experienced in sharing knowledge carefully and respectfully when the missionaries arrived and established for themselves a long tradition of language-learning and negotiation.

The Yolŋu studies program started at the Northern Territory University (now CDU) at a time when regional universities were expanding, the university was keen to support Indigenous studies, (and had in fact founded a new Faculty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies,) and the use of Indigenous languages in Northern Territory schools was still being supported and encouraged. The particular Yolŋu who have been key to the success of the Yolŋu relationship with CDU have all been highly respected members of their various clan groups and most have been associated in some way with the successful tradition of bilingual education. Some have spoken little English, and others have been fluent, bilingual and bicultural. A key figure until her recent death was Dr Marika who was instrumental in articulating Yolŋu philosophy for educationalists, and who co-wrote the first Yolŋu languages and culture courses taught at Northern Territory University (now CDU). Following her was Waymamba Gaykamangu, the CDU Yolŋu studies lecturer who worked with students, university authorities and researchers for over 12 years until her retirement. Currently the Yolŋu Studies lecturer is Yingiya Guyula a Liya-Dhalinymirr man. Accompanying them has been a legion of senior Yolŋu knowledge authorities, (some of whose details can be found on the Yolŋu consultants' website www.cdu.edu.au/yaci). Three non-Yolŋu who have worked on the academic side of the engagement have had long experience speaking Yolŋu languages and working collaboratively with Yolŋu (John Greatorex and I since the 1970s), and doing philosophical work collaboratively with Yolŋu (Helen Verran since the 1980s). We have all been 'adopted' into different clan groups as is the traditional practice.

This is a story of a long, slow and careful collaborative process, starting with a well-supervised Aboriginal language teaching program, which grew slowly into a research capability which eventually allowed for some careful work articulating the nature of engagement between these diverse knowledge traditions.

An Aboriginal/Academic teaching program: Yolŋu studies

I was invited to set up an Aboriginal languages program for the new Faculty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies at the (then) Northern Territory University, after twenty years working in Yolŋu languages and culture in Northeast Arnhemland. The university's original idea was to choose a widely spoken Aboriginal language, and set up a stream of units for a major in the new Bachelor of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies degree.

I was paid to work for a year to negotiate the setting up of the program, an investment that is almost unthinkable in today's university climate. Although my skills were in Yolŋu languages, I began by talking at length with the Larrakia traditional owners of what is now the Darwin area, where the main university campus is situated, to see whether they wanted support and assistance for their own language work, whether they would want a Larrakia program set up at NTU, and whether they were happy for a 'foreign' Australian language to be taught on their land. After discussion over some months, with the blessing of some senior Larrakia and the support of the university, we agreed to investigate the development of a Yolŋu language program. I was funded to travel to the three biggest Yolŋu communities (the three ex-missions of Milingimbi, Galiwin'ku and Yirrkala) to look for advice and support.

From the university's point of view, a Gupapuyŋu language program would fit in nicely with the linguistics teaching and research program at the university. Gupapuyŋu had been chosen by early missionaries to be the language for the church and school, so there was an established literacy tradition. Gupapuyŋu had been later chosen by the Department of Education to be the language of instruction in the Milingimbi school bilingual program. By the time I arrived at NTU, I had spent well over ten years making books, newspapers and dictionaries in Gupapuyŋu and other languages, and there were hundreds of good texts and language notes available to support the program. Gupapuyŋu seemed to be the natural choice for enlistment to the academic world, but I was also conscious of the fact that many Yolŋu from other language groups felt that their own languages and stories had been marginalised by the Gupapuyŋu ascendency.

So I was not surprised, as I travelled through the Yolŋu communities on behalf of the university, visiting my old friends and 'adopted' relations, that the people with whom I sat down to talk, all said unequivocally that *all* Yolŋu languages, not just one, would need to be taught. They also made it clear that not just the language, but the *culture* as well needed to be taught. The culture, from their point of view, starts with the links between people, languages and lands (each person has her language, each language has its territory, each territory has its people and species…). Just as importantly, 'culture' entails the links between those various land-language-people combinations, as they relate together as mother and child, or as sisters, grandmothers and so on. These kin links bring with them complex responsibilities and a politics of representation.

If you want to hear the story of *this* place, or *this* totem, or *this* ancestral connection or event, you need to talk to the right person, the owner (or the 'manager'), the person with the right to make those particular representations.

I should not have been surprised by this demand. I had already been carefully inducted into the Yolŋu theory and practice of knowledge production in my previous position at Yirrkala Community Education Centre (CEC). This requirement emerged from an ancient pedagogical theory, fundamentally counter to the prevailing transmission model dominating Western classrooms in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal schools throughout Australia. (see Marika-Mununggiritj and Christie 1995, Christie 2006c). Emboldened by the strength of their numbers after years of intense formal training for Yolŋu teachers, the Yirrkala School Council and Action Group at the CEC had begun to agitate for a recognition and implementation of Yolŋu pedagogy in their schools. Using various metaphors from everyday Yolŋu life, community elders worked with the school Action Group and with Helen Verran, their consultant philosopher, to help Yolŋu articulate, and Balanda (non Indigenous people) understand, what a true Yolŋu education might entail. One popular Yolŋu metaphor which emerged from these collaborations was *garma.* Speaking of the space and practice of particular public ceremonials in the Yolŋu world (Marika-Mununggiritj, 1990), the garma metaphor elaborates the basis of a particular sort of public knowledge work. People come together in a specially identified neutral place, working collaboratively to produce for public edification and approval, a complex performance combining contributions originating from a variety of independent but connected people-place assemblages or Yolŋu ideolocalities (Tamisari, 2002). Anyone of good faith is welcome to contribute to the Garma, including potentially, academics, bureaucrats, school teachers, or any other outside representatives, so long as they follow the rules.

I was rather daunted by the demands to reproduce a garma in the academic classroom, it seemed an impossible task to set up a program where students learn all Yolŋu languages, learn them only from their owners, and learn the attendant culture as well, following Yolŋu rules for knowledge production. I enlisted eight Yolŋu community elders to supervise the program development and implementation. The advisers helped me work with the university to select a Yolŋu lecturer – Waymamba Gaykamaŋu – and to write up the course outlines and resources. The advisers' group is still active, and increasingly involved in consultancy work, although there have been several deaths and replacements over the years, and Waymamba has only recently retired after fourteen years of continuous service.

Setting up the program turned out to be not too difficult. The Yolŋu advisers were keen to have their languages taught at the university, and had a clear vision of the stages through which a

neophyte should pass: the experience of students in the classroom should recapitulate the experience of young Yolŋu children as they grow into Yolŋu life. Their lecturer was Gupapuyŋu so it was appropriate for them to start learning Gupapuyŋu, (all Yolŋu children begin their lives by learning a language other than their own – their mother's) and this is what the Yolŋu Studies students do for their first semester of study. By the time they learn their first suffix – suffixes are the way Yolŋu grammar makes connections in the world – the students are already adopted into the Yolŋu kinship network. Yolŋu have been adopting newcomers into their kinship system since long before the first Europeans arrived. It is both a sign of welcoming generosity and a way of keeping strangers under control and ensuring they have a part to play and contributions to make. For most Yolŋu Studies students, the first few weeks of class are as exciting as they are confusing, like the first few years of a child's life. As you get to know the people in your social network, you also get to know how they relate to you – as mother, grandmother, sister, nephew etc – and how you should treat them – whom cordially, whom respectfully, whom with complete avoidance, whom you can pressure for assistance, whose interests you need to serve.

The first 'grammar' the Yolŋu studies student struggles with, are those which connect them to their kin, and at the same time to their land and ancestral lore. My job as coordinator was to be very active behind the scenes making sure the students understood what was expected of them, as students in a Yolŋu context, as well as to help them understand the complexities of their suffixes, pronouns, verb classes, transitivity etc. We avoided linguistic and anthropological representations as much as possible and centred the teaching in the storytelling and conversations of the Yolŋu lecturer. Students grow into an understanding of the language and culture first through their relationship with their lecturer and with each other. Their first assessment item is to translate into English a Gupapuyŋu short story about their lecturer's daughter, and grandson which uses all the correct kinship terms and suffixes. For their second assignment they write a story about their own kin in their own world – wherever they come from - using Gupapuyŋu kin terms, pronouns and suffixes. As they 'grow up' over six semesters of study, the students start to hear and read stories of other people, places, ceremonial objects and practices told by different people in the languages to which they belong.

Slowly but firmly and often without me being fully cognisant of their goals or reasons, the advisers and the Yolŋu lecturer massaged the course outlines and assessments to conform to Yolŋu protocols for knowledge work. We had the occasional difficulty with the university – I had to fight to prevent the first Yolŋu Studies unit from becoming a 'core' unit in the undergraduate degree on the grounds that respect is the basic condition for effective Yolŋu learning, and that could not be guaranteed for students who were required to study Yolŋu

languages compulsorily. But most of the time it was an easy process full of good will, laughter and hard work. Students are able to fulfil academic requirements while being immersed within a knowledge community in which stories belong to people, you need permission to explore particular ideas, words must be used carefully because they make new worlds possible, and there is much that must not be asked or revealed. These arrangements, developed in the mid 1990s, set the foundations for an ongoing process of the negotiation over knowledge in research and consultations which remains recognisable and faithful to both academic and Yolŋu knowledge traditions.

An Aboriginal/Academic Research practice: The Yolŋu Consultancy Initiative.

As the Yolŋu knowledge authorities slowly gained recognition for their contribution to academic work, they found themselves in a position to mobilise their knowledge resources in a wide range of collaborative activities. Teaching, researching, consultancy and community engagement became mutually constitutive (Christie, 2008). However the engagement of senior Yolŋu as professional researchers was not without its difficulties. Assumptions of the deficiency of Indigenous knowledge are deeply embedded at all levels of contemporary Australian society including the academy. We started slowly.

Our first projects were supported through the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (CRC-AH). The first of these was a study of communication breakdown between Aboriginal patients and non-Aboriginal health professionals in a local renal centre. The Aboriginal researchers insisted upon an agreement-making model of communication as building shared understandings within clinical contexts. The project was called '*Sharing the True Stories*' (Cass et al, 2002). The Yolŋu researchers mobilised the garma notion that the biomedical model and its practices are one particular way of 'doing' the body, sickness, treatment and health that needs to be engaged in the context of alternative models and practices. Yolŋu arrive at the renal centre with their own stories, their own knowledge of their bodies, their own theories of the 'good' of treatment (Mol, 2003). Effective communication is not so much a matter of passing a message on diagnosis and treatment from doctor to patient, but of both sides working together to build a situated agreement and a way forward. Thus the introduction of an alternative (indigenous) model of communication made for a clean break from the established literature on communication in medical contexts which depended upon the conduit metaphor (Reddy 1979).

The second project, called the '*Longgrassers research*' (Maypilama, 2004), was an attempt by Yolŋu researchers to use a Yolŋu methodology to research the lives and ways forward for their Yolŋu relations living under the stars in the long grass along the Darwin beaches and in

parks and vacant land. In this early example of indigenous research, we saw a refusal of the disjunction between the research work, the 'findings' and the 'recommendations'. What was found and recommended was that which has always been going on. The research functioned not to discover new ways of supporting Yolŋu in the long grass, but new ways of validating and making visible to the research world, the ongoing and ancient work of caring for kin.

We then received some money from the Australian Research Council (ARC) to conduct research into the emerging uses of digital technologies in the intergenerational transmission of traditional Aboriginal ecological knowledge. This research, which we referred to as *Making Collective Memory with Computers* exposed, explained and helped resolve issues around the insistence of the archive in contemporary institutional Indigenous knowledge work (Verran, 2005), the accompanying resistance of Yolŋu knowledge authorities to centralized formal repositories, and a critique of Western ontologies hidden within conventional software, such as ethnobotanical databases which are being implemented in Indigenous contexts around the world (Christie, 2008a; Christie, 2006a; Verran, 2006; Verran, 2007).

The success of these three projects allowed for the emergence of a more formalised team of Yolŋu researchers under the auspices of CDU's School of Australian Indigenous Knowledge Systems and the School of Education. This team, through the loosely constituted Yolŋu Aboriginal Consultants Initiative, has collaborated over a wide range of significant intercultural research – including technical, social, medical, ecological, and educational –and at the same time continued to explore some of the significant philosophical issues which this work demands.

Philosophical work around the engagement of academic and Yolŋu knowledge.

Our collaborative transdisciplinary (Christie, 2006) research work is occasionally difficult for two reasons: first, the received metaphysics which underlies most academic research is so entrenched, and so reluctant and awkward in its reflexivity, that academic knowledge work has great difficulty unthinking or stepping back from, or even thinking *about* its Western European assumptions. Thus second, the deficit model of Aboriginal knowledge is equally entrenched, its critique of other knowledge practices is seldom seriously recognised. Western scientists know, for example, that Aboriginal fire ecology produces better results for sustaining biodiversity than do Western practices, yet the two practitioners find it very difficult to talk to each other (Verran, 2002).

Perhaps the most troublesome obstacle to overcome in the *Sharing the True Stories* (Cass et al, 2002) project was the health professionals' unshaking conviction of the objective reality of

the biomedical body. The insistence of the stories of the Yolŋu renal patients presented to the academic researchers an ontological problem which generally goes unrecognised – at least until different claims of significance come to the table and refuse to go away. The biomedical notion of truth as lying out-there in a pre-existing discoverable machine-like body is in contrast to a Yolŋu notion of truth as something residing and regenerating through attention to ancestral reality (one could call it the dreaming) and manifesting itself in varied and multiple ways (Mol 2003) in here-and-now secular contexts. Truth in this sense, as in the garma, has a physical embodiment. There is no *a priori* split between the social and the natural, between language and reality, spirit and body, or theory and practice. Thus in the *Making Collective Memory with Computers* project, 'we came to see how Aboriginal Australians struggled against the grain of digital technologies designed as tools for representation, turning them to use in knowledge practices where each instance of re-presentation is a unique performance choreographed for a particular momentary situated purpose'(Verran, 2007).

Thus the model of knowledge that holds in Yolŋu Australia is in many respects very different from that embraced by science and Western traditions more generally. We had a chance to examine these differences when the Yolŋu researchers were invited to elaborate Yolŋu understandings of *gifted and talented* children for the National Centre for Science, Information Technology and Maths Education in Rural and Remote Australia (see www.cdu.edu.au/g&t). Whereas in Western models, knowers are born as more or less clean slates, and are gradually filled with ordered knowing by virtue of experience, in the Yolŋu world, knowers are born full—filled with everything they will need for effective participation in adult life. But they must be treated properly for their talents to take good effect. Learning here is the mobilisation of an ordered flowing of that ancestral experience already and always filling the knower. Experience of the right sort is crucial here if knowers are to reach their full potential. Places, families and events are the motive forces. *Gifted and talented* children are born gifted and talented, their gifts are coextensive with the land and what it provides, their talents are their minds and bodies, connecting each to his or her ancestral places, kin, totems and connections. These are the same knowers who in the *Sharing the True Stories* project, came to the renal unit full of knowledge of their bodies, their symptoms, and their meanings, ready and able to build shared understandings and strategies with health professionals consistent with their Yolŋu destinies.

The *Longgrassers* research was already well underway by the time John and I were called in to help to develop a report for the CRC-AH. It was a good thing that it was already well under way: I wasn't given a chance to infect the methodology. As it turned out our pleasant job was to talk carefully with the two researchers, and help them formalise a report, including some

recommendations. We encountered a problem helping the Yolŋu researchers write up the methodology: the Yolŋu researchers couldn't see, and didn't want to pretend, that their research methodology was anything other than the right, decent, everyday, ongoing way to behave. The methodology was not a way to discover an answer to an intractable question, but rather a way of acting together in good faith, visibly and well, and with proper support and recognition on this, and any number of other issues of current concern. There was no real distinction between the method and the outcomes. The report itself was seen as a presentation rather than a representation. The *Longgrassers* project was initiated by Yolŋu as part of their ongoing everyday work with their relations living in the long grass.

More recently, the work of the Yolŋu consultants each time has been commissioned from outside. The negotiation of a Yolŋu research methodology for projects with external funding can prove tricky. We generally have work to do delineating a workable model of the knower or of the known (or both) and sometimes the funding body may see that work as a waste of time, or money or power. How *do* we understand the child who is (or isn't) gifted and talented? How *do* we reach agreement over how to build shared understandings on the floor of the renal unit? How do we understand the life of numbers in a Yolŋu community? (see www.cdu.edu.au/macp). The Yolŋu consultants spend a good deal of time considering their method, which to them, while complex and painstaking, is a respectful, and obvious process, understood in many ways, including through the metaphor of those ceremonial practices which fall under the class of *garma*.

The methodology begins with a close examination of the questions to be addressed, in the context of who wants to know and why. What *do* we/they mean by 'gambling'? What *do* they mean by 'harm'? Who in fact do they mean by 'Indigenous' or 'Aboriginal' or 'gambler' or 'at risk' or 'responsible'? We take care to treat these questions seriously as metaphysical questions. Yolŋu are experienced in building agreement while taking difference seriously. They use the 'language of indeterminacy' (Povinelli, 1993), not because they are uncertain or at risk, but because agreeing over words is agreeing over worlds. It is work to be done carefully. Much is at stake. We need to get it right. Of course we do not try to persuade the funding bodies that they are paying for an exercise in metaphysics – they *know* what they are talking about. But we are sure to offer them through the process, some new, interesting and profitable ways for them to think about what can be done. We take pleasure in working to find and talk about buried assumptions wherever we find them, and redo them in productive ways which remain faithful and useful to both the Yolŋu and Western ways of thinking and doing.

Always, but usually in the background, there hovers the question of truth. How do we make honest, accountable and viable claims for our truth? The academic tradition comes with its sealed package of epistemic criteria based upon reason. But Yolŋu often judge truthfulness in research through other criteria to do, with example of agreement in good faith. When we worked on the evaluation of the *Financial Literacy* project the consultants came up with two interesting ideas which the funding body took on board: One was that what looked like poor financial literacy was often a matter of the Yolŋu ethic of sharing everything you have, including money, rather than saving it up. The other was that what looked like poor financial literacy was often a matter of the Credit Union not providing easily accessible information about account status, for example, at the right time, and in a suitable manner for Yolŋu to do their money business in their own ways, in their own places, in their own time, for their own purposes.

In a feedback session to the consultancy funding body, some of the credit union staff quite appropriately defended current practices on a number of grounds. At this, the chief Yolŋu consultant for one of the communities became concerned. He wasn't worried that the credit union was reluctant to commit fully to implementing all the recommendations. He was worried that they were acting a little defensively. The good faith between the consultants and the credit union was being strained, and this would strain the good faith between him and his community, and between the community and the credit union. He was committed to taking back to his community news of the outcome of the consultation and of the good will and commitment of the Credit Union to respond to the recommendations (not necessarily to implement them). To him, the fundamental criterion for the success of the project – its truth - was the building and preservation of good faith between all the negotiating parties (truth in the sense of its faithfulness, not its representational accuracy). Yolŋu philosophers are experienced working with epistemic criteria other than abstract reason, and working through these in the context of university research is an exciting part of the engagement process.

Turning finally to the lessons we have learnt and which may be useful to other people in other contexts wanting to develop similar collaborative arrangements, the first lesson is that all contexts are unique. Principles and practices which work in one context may not be transferrable to another. A key lesson is to work slowly and allow new ideas and practices to emerge here and how, and grow slowly through mutual respect and a history of shared experience. These will always be different in each new place. We succeeded largely because the Balanda in the program were fluent speakers of Yolŋu languages the Yolŋu were good speakers of English, and we placed Yolŋu principles, practices and concepts at the centre of our work – methodologically and analytically. We slowly came to a position where we were able to pay people well and properly

for their contributions, and we refused to take on any work which wasn't properly negotiated within both the academic and the Yolŋu frameworks for ethics. In the unreflexive and intractable world of western academic knowledge we found that some difficult philosophical work could be done by paying close attention to methodology (who speaks when, who gets input into framing the question, how do we agree upon people's authority to speak etc). Our experiences may not provide many take-home messages for others in similar contexts beyond those they know themselves. They may however strengthen the resolve to work on research truth and method as both fundamentally local.

Conclusion

We are very fortunate that we have at Charles Darwin University the space, the structures and the resources to engage respectfully and profitably with Indigenous knowledge systems. Here the amazing resilience and creativity of Aboriginal knowledge traditions have been explicitly mobilised in addressing issues of fundamental concern, not only to academics, but more importantly to government and nongovernment organizations who genuinely want to engage with Aboriginal people in new ways and on terms negotiated in good faith.

This work has relevance not only in the local arena, but on the world stage, where the strongly centralised model of knowledge production with the state seen as the major site of knowledge production gradually gives way to a radical localisation and privatisation of knowledge resources - an issue to which Yolŋu knowledge traditions have long attended, and from which academic knowledge traditions have much to learn.

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LEARNING RESPECT: A CASE STUDY OF INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN VET AT WUGULARR

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Abstract

Indigenous learners in remote communities comprise a large proportion of the learners engaged in Vocational Education & Training (VET) in the Northern Territory. Given the high participation rates, course and unit level completion rates remain low. Understanding what constitutes good community engagement is essential to any consideration of VET delivery and assessment practice that seeks to meet the expectations of remote community members.

This paper reports the findings of a case study of indigenous community engagement by Charles Darwin University (CDU) among indigenous learners in the community of Wugularr in south-eastern Arnhem Land. Whilst the majority of participants expressed satisfaction with the quality of their teaching and learning experiences, in particular the performance of teaching staff, they were disappointed with the university's approach to relationship building, the continuity and consistency of VET delivery and its associated student support. Community members expressed a desire for teaching staff to consistently return to the community and develop ongoing long term relationships which include active support and follow up of learners who did not attain module or course level completion.

The study's findings point to the university's need to consistently embed good community engagement practice in the negotiation, delivery and evaluation of VET in indigenous communities; and highlights the importance of developing meaningful longer term relationships with indigenous communities that facilitate the achievement of community negotiated outcomes based on mutual benefit to the community and university alike. This paper discusses the implications of these to regional universities including CDU that seek to serve remote indigenous communities.

Introduction:

VET training to Indigenous Australians living in remote communities is an important and growing market in which Charles Darwin University (CDU) is both highly experienced and uniquely placed in Northern Australia to deliver. The university has a strong commitment to the continued engagement and development of health and education outcomes in remote indigenous communities. Charles Darwin University has realigned its strategic direction to include community engagement as part of its core business alongside the more traditional areas of teaching & learning and research. Indigenous participation and relevance is a key element of the university's strategic direction as outlined in the Futures Framework 2007 - 2016 1st in 5 in 10 Strategy (CDU, 2006). Community engagement is critical to all university activities and is characterised by two-way relationships in which the university forms partnerships with its communities to yield mutually beneficial outcomes (Cuttriss, 2007).

Whilst community engagement is still very much an area of emerging knowledge, it remains an area of key strategic future development to the university. In its report on the future responses of higher education to regional need the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) suggests that for universities: *"The agenda has moved on from a desire to simply increase the general education of the population and the output of scientific research; there is now a greater concern to harness university education and research to specific economic and social objectives" (OECD 1999, p9).*

Effective community engagement provides a mechanism to strengthen and expand partnerships between indigenous communities, educational institutions, government, industry and broader community networks (AUCEA, 2005). CDU is however not alone in this realignment; regional universities nationally and globally serve large and diverse communities of people that may be from urban, regional and remote settings, and in particular remote indigenous communities. To this end Cuttriss & Wallace (2006) note the importance of community engagement to realign the activities of regional universities with the regional priorities of the communities they service and bring these communities into the global knowledge economy.

Garlick & Pryor (2002) describe the process of community engagement to be deeply rooted in the development and maintenance of trust relationships based on mutual benefit, consisting of: "*Active Engagement and learning for the partners both in process and outcome; it is built on demonstrable and ongoing commitment, clear expectations, trust, and has tangible quantitative and qualitative outcomes for the community and the university.*" (p.6)

This statement defines the process that should guide best practice engagement and delivery of all education including VET programs to indigenous communities. It also highlights an area of potential disparity between responding to community aspirations and community timeframes and the outcome, fiscally oriented objectives of large public VET providers such as CDU.

A considerable volume of literature supports the significance of effective and committed community engagement strategies when working with indigenous communities. Dodson and Morton's report examining an indigenous Engagement Project between the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) and the Australian National University (ANU) considered that an effective engagement strategy would lead to an increase in the employment of indigenous people and the development and implementation of research that is inclusive of indigenous interests (Morton & Dodson, 2005). Similarly a report prepared by the Australian Flexible Learning Framework on engaging indigenous communities identifies several factors that are critical to successful engagement. This includes awareness that the process of education implies active encouragement of relationship building and community involvement that values the skills and knowledge community members and fosters community ownership (AFLN, 2006). Whilst these and other reports make very valuable observations on why we should engage indigenous communities well, few propose ways in which these assertions can be practically applied to actual community contexts.

In considering how we engage indigenous communities it is important to define what is it to be ‘indigenous’ and how this influences the perception of ‘community’. The united nations working group on indigenous people, (United Nations, 1987) define being indigenous as not only inhabiting a region prior to its colonisation but also have maintained at least in part their distinct linguistic, cultural and social characteristics, remaining distinct from the dominant culture of colonisation. Across Australia there are an immense number of communities occupied by indigenous people. In the indigenous community sense the word 'community' may be to describe groups of people identifying by kinship, language or belonging to a particular place or 'country'. Communities can have similar or separate cultural values with a single individual or group of people conceivably belonging to a number of communities (Yunkaporta, 2007). Accordingly definitions of communities are as wide-ranging and diverse as the communities themselves; there is no one definition of community that can be simply applied; to do so ignores the diversity of groupings within communities (Peters-Little, 2000). These notions are important as they hints at both the challenges inherent in engaging indigenous communities and perhaps more significantly

the importance of truly engaging indigenous communities with a spirit of mutual benefit and a willingness to shared understanding and knowledge for the future.

In a recent review of CDU's indigenous community engagement Campbell and Christie (2008a) surmise that in a developing community engagement strategy it is necessary to be aware of the multiple ways that 'community' is defined, and relate the engagement strategy to the needs of the particular community. In such a discussion it is essential to consider how non-indigenous or *'Balanda'* educators working with indigenous people in the top end of the Northern Territory perceive the concept *'community'* within indigenous contexts very differently to the indigenous people or *'Bininj'* living in these communities themselves. This recognition of the cultural uniqueness of individual communities as well as their spiritual relationship to surrounding *'country'* and neighbouring communities is essential. In practice terms this places vocational educators on a continuum of being actively involved in learning about the individual cultural, historical and spiritual characteristics of indigenous communities where they deliver VET.

Wugularr- A Community Profile

The community of Wugularr, also known as Beswick is situated approximately 118km south east of Katherine and 31 km east of the neighbouring community of Barunga on the banks of the Waterhouse River, in Southern Arnhem Land. Wugularr is situated in Jawoyn Country, which occupies all lands around Katherine in a roughly triangular area that extends from Mataranka in the south along the Stuart Highway in a north westerly direction to near Pine creek and in the east to Bulman as shown in Figure 1. Early settlement in this region by non-indigenous people was strongly centred on the development of the pastoral and mining industries. The arrival of these industries in traditional Aboriginal lands resulted in a major disruption to traditional life amongst Aboriginal people living in the Katherine region (Merlan, 1998). During this time the Beswick cattle station was established by the Nagadgoli Cattle Company to provide a training site for Aboriginal stockmen. Its closure in 1984 left the Wugularr community without this valuable source of income enterprise and training opportunities (Schwab & Sutherland, 2008).

People from at least 11 different language groups live in the community consisting of: Jawoyn, Ngalkbon, Rembarrnga, Mayali, Mara, Rithangu, Mudbara, Jingili, Woyala, Mangarrayi, and Warlpiri people. Whilst a diversity of traditional languages from each of these groups is spoken, the most frequently spoken and understood language is Kriol with English as a second or third language (Schwab & Sutherland 2004). Whilst English is spoken by the majority

of indigenous residents 63 people (17%) reported they spoke little or no English at all (ABS, 2008a).

The population at the 2006 census indicating their usual place of residence as Wugularr, was 390 persons (ABS 2008b). The median age of people living in this local government region is 23 years, which is significantly less than the figure of 31 years for the rest of the Northern Territory (ABS 2008b). There are 70 households situated within the community, 67 of which are occupied by indigenous people (96%). Thirty percent of these households reported that they have 6 or more residents; which were reported to be mainly immediate family and extended family members (ABS 2008b). Weekly household incomes are low with 49% of indigenous households reporting gross weekly incomes less than $499 and 78% of households receiving gross incomes of less than $999 (ABS 2008c)

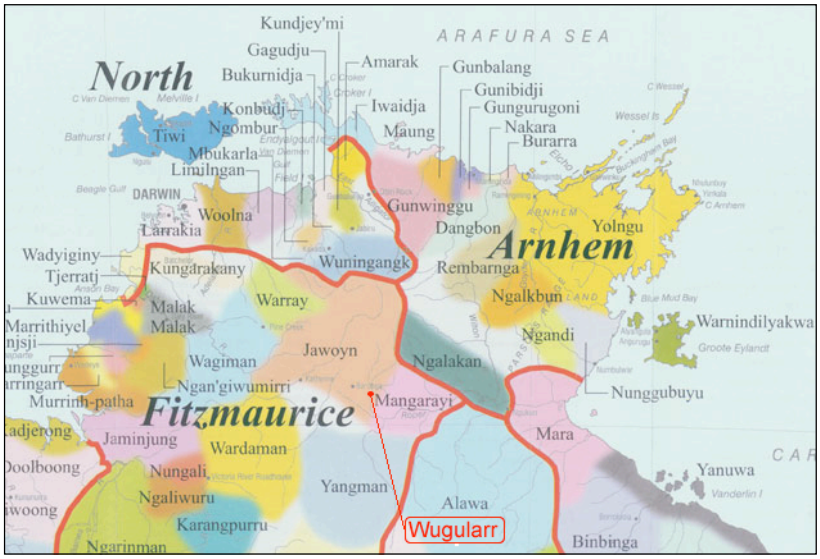

Figure 1: Location of Wugularr community in relation to surrounding Aboriginal lands by language group (Excerpt from Horton, 2000)

Like many other indigenous communities in the Northern Territory chronic diseases including diabetes, heart disease and kidney disease significantly reduce life expectancy and place heavy burdens on the limited allied health services within the community. These issues are further exacerbated by licit and illicit substance use problems by community members and visitors from other centres. Wugularr is a restricted area under the Northern Territory Government's Liquor Act, which prohibits the consumption of all alcohol outside of designated consumption areas within the community (NTG, 2007). The Roper Gulf Shire Council (RGSC) operates a community patrol service a role formerly performed by the smaller Nyirranggulung Mardrulk Ngadberre Regional Community Council (NMNRC) prior to recent council amalgamations.

The clinic and youth centre is managed by the Sunrise Health Service, and are staffed by a team of two registered nurses, one youth outreach worker and four Aboriginal health workers. The clinic co-ordinates a two day per week doctor's visit along with regular visits by specialists and other allied health and community services. A variety of health promotion programs exist in the community including a partnership with the Fred Hollows Foundation to improve child nutrition through the management of the community store (NTG 2007). In the last year a larger, new, well-resourced school has been built on high ground above usual wet season flood levels, which is perceived by most community members as a very significant and positive change toward the future.

Literature Review

Adult training in Wugularr is dominated by large public training providers such as CDU formerly Northern Territory University (NTU), which accounted for 27 of the 36 student enrolments during the period 1991-2001. Areas of VET delivery included: health studies, creative arts, business, community broadcasting, local government, first aid, community services and sport and recreation.

Completion rates as collected by DEET for unit modules delivered during this period were 73% for female students and 62% for male students (Schwab & Sutherland 2008). Also revealed was NTU's previous inability to report completion rates for courses that were delivered during this period. Schwab and Sutherland summarise that the standard records kept by the university prior to 2001 was generally poor.

Since the amalgamation of Northern Territory University (NTU) with Centralian College to form CDU this situation has changed significantly with the university being able to provide complete and up to date records of all subsequent VET training delivered to all communities including Wugularr. In 2008 the university has undertaken a major restructure of its VET programs. The 'Doing VET better' initiative specifically seeks to embed continuous improvement strategies into VET delivery in urban, regional and remote settings across the Northern Territory. This is reflected in CDU's 2008 operational plan for the CDU's division of Primary Industries and Community Services under 'Doing VET better' which has as its expressed aim: *"ensuring that our training profile and courses are aligned to the needs of Northern Territory Industry and/or build remote and regional community sustainability"* (CDU 2008, p2).

A recent policy monograph published by the Centre for Independent Studies (CIS) was quite critical of VET education in the NT citing that whilst the university delivers VET courses in over 100 rural and remote locations and its equipment is of a high standard many participants

treat VET courses as holidays due to their low literacy levels (Hughes 2008). Hughes also states that *"pass rates are high, with certificates I, II, III and even IV freely dispensed because everyone knows that they are only valid for CDEP jobs"* (Hughes 2008, p15). She continues by saying that vocational training can only begin when trainees have a command of the English language, are literate and numerate. These statements unnecessarily simplify what is a complex and challenging situation. They downplay the potential importance of flexible delivery and assessment within units of competence placed in training packages, which can include multiliteracies that incorporate traditional, and community-spoken languages. Hughes assertions also fail to recognise the importance of effective community engagement and ongoing relationship building with community members in the negotiation of VET delivery. In all these aspects there is a definite need for all regional universities working with remote indigenous learners to continually strive to improve indigenous community engagement in their educational practice, a point that is also made by Campbell and Christie(2008a). They particularly emphasise the importance of long-term relationship building with indigenous communities by all university teaching staff if delivery in VET and higher education, or as research partners is to be successful and avoid community fatigue.

The National Centre for Vocational Educational Research (NCVER) further expands on the complexity of successful delivery in a review of vocational and educational training for indigenous Australians. In this paper Miller (2004) proposed seven factors considered to be critical in the successful engagement and delivery of VET training in indigenous communities. Amongst these are; the involvement of and 'ownership' of training by local communities, the incorporation of indigenous identities, cultures, knowledge & values into training programs, the establishment of true partnerships between indigenous communities and flexibility in course design, content and delivery. All of these points extend the scope of discussion for successful VET delivery well beyond literacy and numeracy considerations.

CDU has had many success stories in the delivery of rural and remote education to indigenous communities. Its commitment to improving delivery through the integration of community engagement into its teaching and learning practices in both VET and Higher Education sectors is well documented. Case studies in the university's recent indigenous Community Engagement (ICE) project such as; 'Working from Our Strengths: indigenous Community Engagement through Enterprise Development and Training' (Wallace & Curry in Campbell & Christie, 2008a), 'Djelk Rangers and Charles Darwin University: What can we learn about indigenous community engagement?' (Williams in Campbell & Christie 2008a) and 'Research, collaboration, and community development –a holistic approach' (Gorman & Garnett

in Campbell & Christie, 2008a) demonstrate the strength and quality of this commitment among many individuals and teams. This quality of individual commitment demonstrates the university's reliance on *"relationships developed by individual lecturers and community members through personal involvement"* (Cuttriss, 2006).

In their emerging findings, Campbell and Christie (2008b, p2) reported that: *"Good indigenous community engagement starts with respect, which is a quality of individuals rather than institutions. There is something inescapably personal about good indigenous community engagement, something that the university cannot offer but can recognise and support"*.

Whilst citing many success stories documented amongst the case studies from their project Campbell and Christie also assert that there have been many examples of relatively poor engagement of indigenous communities by regional universities serving remote communities, including CDU. Wugularr is a community that faces considerable challenges educationally. Wugularr exemplifies this situation well. A study for the Fred Hollows Foundation found that not one child, passed the year 3 literacy test benchmark in 2001 (Novak, 2006), a figure that almost certainly poses significant implications to school based education and VET in the near future.

Personal communication with key Wugularr community representatives at the commencement of this case study revealed there is significant community disillusionment with the university amongst both its indigenous and non-indigenous members. This case study documents a cross section of CDU's past engagement in VET delivery in this community and proposes strategies to rebuild trust, respect and re-establish expectations of mutual benefit between the university and Wugularr in the future.

Methodology:

Records of training instances delivered by the university between 2006- 2007 in Wugularr were examined to identify potential issues that may be present amongst learners in the community. These issues were identified and used to formulate discussion points that would guide an initial round of community consultation and focus groups.

Permission was sought from the Northern Land Council (NLC) and the Wugularr community to conduct a consultation of its members with the express purpose to evaluate the University's history of Community Engagement in Wugularr. Permission was sought through the Jawoyn traditional landowners family prior to entry and confirmed with a senior traditional elder on entry. Consent was obtained from each participant to collect, analyse and report on data

received from this consultation process. Ethical clearance for this case study was provided by the university's ICE project to which this case study informs (Campbell & Christie 2008a).

A series of small focus groups and individual consultations was conducted over three days with 11 community members. Consultations were open to participants who indicated that they had recent previous experience as learners in VET courses run by CDU, were present at the time in the Wugularr community and most importantly expressed a willingness to relate their stories. It must be stressed at this point that the sample represents a relatively small cross section of the total number of people that have had experience with VET provided by CDU in this community. Collection of further data from other persons was largely limited by their to participate in the consultation due to travel or ongoing community commitments and the fact that some potential participants may have felt a degree of cross-cultural inhibition or 'shame' to participate. Focus groups were chosen for their ability to capitalise on communication processes between participants in order to generate data. Focus groups have the advantage of being non-discriminatory toward people who cannot read or write and they can encourage participation from people reluctant to be interviewed on their own or who feel they have nothing to say. (Kitzinger, 1995). Individual consultations were used for those participants who preferred to provide accounts of their experiences in a group setting. Both individual consultation and focus groups utilise oral methods that are respectful of an oral history tradition that is a characteristic feature of indigenous communities (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

Consultations and focus group discussions were facilitated to cover a range topics around student satisfaction including; user choice, feedback, administrative support, language and literacy support, relationship building and the quality of instruction and learning resources. Members of key service provider organisations including the NMNRC, Sunrise Health Services and Wugularr School who have had contact with the university were also consulted to gauge the perception of the university's engagement practice from the perspective of community stake-holder organisations.

Data from focus groups and consultations was collected from participants as field notes, and then transcribed electronically into Journler^{TM} software which facilitated the tagging of journal entries against key themes arising within entries. Thematic analysis comprises form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes reported by participants become the categories for analysis (Boyatzis, 1998), (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). On the basis of its documented reliability in qualitative enquiry, thematic analysis was conducted on the resultant data to search for themes that emerge as being important to Community Engagement through the

voices of participants. This process involved the identification of key themes and associated attributes through meticulous and repeated and reflection on the data (Rice & Ezzy, 1999).

Boolean responses to common lines of enquiry across the participant group's engagement experiences were tabulated and a mind mapped framework of emerging themes and accompanying characteristics constructed using MindNode^{TM} software. The thematic framework was then fed back to participants on a return visit to the community for validation and to identify what participants considered constituting good community engagement practice by the university.

Key statements, stories and quotes by participants supporting the emergence of these themes are presented to preserve the 'authentic' voice of indigenous participants informing this study. Participants responses were then mapped as either positive or negative statements against the thematic framework. The difference between the number of positive and negative statements for each characteristic was calculated for each thematic element. This method provides an easy numerical indicator to support assertions arising from the main body of qualitative data, identify areas of potential concern and a means of presenting all responses received from participants which would otherwise be impossible.

Results and Discussion:

A preliminary investigation of CDU records from recent training instances conducted in Wugularr suggests that problems with community engagement and educational delivery of VET may exist.

For the 2006 academic year CDU delivered 8328 contact hours to students in Wugularr across a variety of VET programs. For this year unit level completions were found to be very low (29.7%). In Term 1 of 2006, a single VET unit was found with 41 enrolments all resulted as having insufficient participation (IP); or in other words yet to attain competence (CDU 2007). To current date there has been to date no evidence of follow-up and reengagement with these learners to give them a chance to attain competence in this unit.

The following year in 2007 a total of 2515 contact hours were delivered in Wugularr to 148 students. Similarly, unit level completions were very low (26.4%). Poor engagement is suggested in the delivery of the unit HLTFA1A: apply basic first aid where only 8 out of 20 participants attained competency in this unit (CDU 2007). Whilst individual learner and community issues can undoubtedly influence attendance and completion, rates of less than 50% for a highly practical unit requiring very modest levels of spoken English language proficiency

and no written English component are concerning. In line with the university's 'Doing VET better' initiative, preliminary plans have now been made to follow-up these students in a timely manner. Observations such as this highlight the importance of active student follow as an important element of community engagement practice in VET.

Feedback received from the 11 community participants over the three days of consultation with was analysed to consider the participants' quality of student experience and quality of engagement by CDU. From ensuing discussions a collection of common student experiences to which all participants provided boolean (yes/no) responses was tabulated. This data is presented in Table 1.

Student Experience of Community Engagement	Yes (%)
Completed study at CDU	45
Experience met expectations	27
Felt their community had choice in what courses were offered	9
Felt encouraged to learn by teaching staff	91
Thought teaching and learning materials were appropriate for their community	55
Was offered language and literacy support during study	9
Existing skills, previous training was checked and RPL offered	18
Informed of where and when study was happening in advance	55
Certificate or statement of attainment issued for completion of units or course	64
Teaching and learning staff provided feedback about progress	82
Provided an opportunity to give feedback to CDU	27

Table 1: Summary of responses by Wugularr community members receiving VET training from CDU. (n=11)

This data reveals an apparent area of disparity in student experience. Whilst most participants felt that they received adequate feedback and encouragement from teaching staff, few felt that their community had choice in what was offered, or were provided with an opportunity to provide university teaching and learning staff with feedback. Only a small number of participants felt that their student experience met their expectations of what they would have liked to receive. Most learners whilst reporting to have some proficiency in written and spoken English wanted to receive extra support as part of their courses. Few learners actually received this support either embedded within study programs or as a standalone component of their training.

Qualitative data from focus group and consultation documented in field notes was examined for significant themes emerging from each participant's related experience of engagement in the university's VET programs. Each theme was then examined for attributes that

potentially characterised good engagement practice as reported by participants and based on the application of grounded theories of community engagement. These themes and positive characteristics were then used to construct thematic frameworks illustrating what participants believed constituted poor and good community engagement practice. These thematic frameworks are presented in Figures 2.

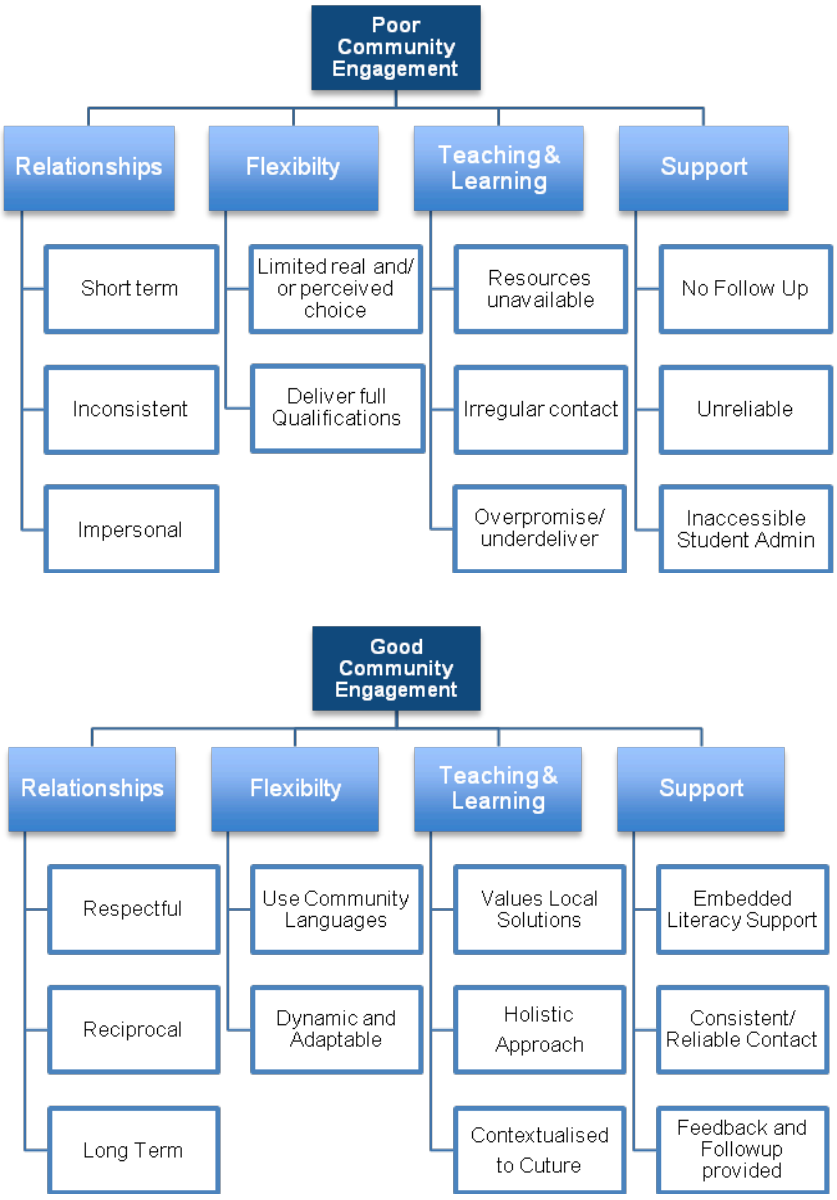

Figure 2: Positive and Negative themes emerging from consultation with Wugularr community members

Selected stories relating to the themes emerging in discussion of the framework above and future involvement are presented below to further elaborate on the nature of the engagement relationship between CDU and Wugularr and give an authentic indigenous voice to this study.

1) Relationships:

When discussions with participants broached relationship building between CDU and their community the following selected accounts were recorded:

CB, a Mayali man and community elder felt that the *"University to be honest hasn't done much here"*. He stated that lack of communication between the university and the community is a problem. *"People in the community perceive that the university is neither different nor any better than every other government department that wants to come here"*. He continued to say that *'It is not easy to know when courses were on or what is available. They are not advertised or negotiated well. Most of it goes through NMNRC without much consultation from the community'*

RF, a Rembarrnga woman questioned the consistency and reliability of teaching staff stating that staff often don't *"come when they say they're going to"*. This sentiment was also shared by DK also a Rembarrnga woman who felt that that lecturers should come to the community more often, and follow up student progress more so that students can work towards completion.

PF, a Western Aranda woman who has married into this community thought that *"Lecturers should stay longer, and build relationships with people"* if the university wants to improve its relationship and build trust with the Wugularr community in the future.

Not all experiences of relationship building described were negative. DD is a Ritherangu/ Rembarrnga man who was engaged in apprenticeship training with CDU in electrotechnology at Certificate II level. DD had an overwhelmingly positive experience of his study with CDU, and was happy with his course in all its aspects he described how his training was negotiated between GTNT, CDU and the New Apprenticeships Centre. DD described feeling empowered by this process and believed his *"culture was respected by this process"* of negotiation. DD's account highlights the importance of respect and reciprocity as key elements in relationship building, and perhaps also reflects the highly vocational nature of his course of study and the 'on the job' learning emphasis of apprenticeship training.

CR project manages a housing construction project in Wugularr in conjunction with CDU, which employs and trains eight local indigenous apprentices in general construction. He related a story that CDU started well with regular lecturer visits every 2 months for one week at a time, however a change in a lecturer's personal circumstance changed this regularity of contact. CR felt that CDU lecturing staff sometimes had to cover a large geographical area making it hard to maintain close relationships with learners, and that lecturers didn't seem to

receive sufficient administrative support, which may account for the lack of notification on course progression provided to learners.

GL the youth outreach worker for Sunrise Health Services believed that *"Training staff should be prepared to spend more time building relationships because culturally relationships are everything"*. R the principal of Wugularr school echoed these comments and added, *"CDU should form better linkages with community structures"* and become more involved in the community if it expects to gain respect and trust in Wugularr. In particular he noted that CDU should make strategic relationships with organisations such as NTOEC to provide distance education in Wugularr. He also suggested, *"CDU staff visiting the community should take the time to come and talk for 30 minutes at the school and provide extra time to build relationships for the future.*

These accounts show a couple of good examples of respect and reciprocity as well as some evidence of community negotiated approaches to the delivery of vocational training; they are also significantly spoiled by a picture of inconsistency and short-term approaches to relationship building.

2. Flexibility:

When discussions with participants broached flexibility of VET delivery by the university the following selected accounts were recorded:

CB felt that *"Uni needs to be more flexible for delivery to Aboriginal people"* in working with learners in his community. This statement was also confirmed by GL who stated that *"CDU needs to look at training on communities in a long term perspective rather than short courses so it all heads to full qualifications rather than just doing modules"* when discussing the necessity of the university to be flexible in the way it delivers training so the community can better create pathways to employment and qualifications.

DK related, *"When doing my studies the lecturer only came occasionally. I had to go to Katherine sometimes, would of preferred it here"* DK indicated she would still like to finish her Certificate III in business.

Some positive stories of flexible delivery also emerged around this theme:

DD stated that the university was *"very flexible with me when my community supervisor left"*. CDU's flexibility in this account extended beyond what may have been normally expected by helping DD find a new supervisor within his own community. He also said that *"Uni helped me a lot; get all my qualifications, paid for me to go to Darwin and the lecturers came here"*.

Similar stories emerged in a focus group with RF, PF and CB. All three women despite not completing many of the units they attempted, believed CDU's involvement in the Wugularr community has generally been positive. Patricia believed that her studies had helped her and given her ideas for the future. Similarly all three women also commented that teaching and learning activities provided by CDU in Wugularr were generally well organised and flexible to their culture. PF noted that the university's First Aid Trainers teamed their male trainer with male participants and their female trainer with female participants, which demonstrated willingness to respect, and work with cultural considerations.

In the university's recent skills audit across all Top End indigenous communities, GL related an example of a CDU staff member, fluent in Kriol language that was able to conduct all of his part of this community consultation in community language. Similarly, FJ, a worker in the Wugularr community patrol related that assessment of participants in patrol training programs was also conducted in Kriol, which is the primary community language used by patrol staff for routine interventions on shift. Role-play assessments done in Kriol were explained back to the assessor in English. The assessor using digital audio recording on his iPod then collected assessment evidence.

Not every story demonstrated an approach that was flexible in a way that met community need. CR described a missed opportunity for flexibility that would be advantageous to community participants, CDU and the Roper Gulf Shire alike. The council employs builder/ trainers as direct everyday supervisors for general construction apprenticeships. Builder trainers are in a unique position to gather assessment evidence, however they were not provided with support to do so. CR stated that despite this opportunity *"Assessment tasks and log books were not made available to builder trainers"*.

Stories emerging from this theme showed examples of flexibility that utilise community languages, are dynamic, adaptable and are similarly to the previous theme, community negotiated. Despite this a mixed picture was still presented with other accounts pointing to approaches that were poorly negotiated and less than dynamic or adaptable.

3. Teaching and Learning:

Again when the theme of teaching and learning was considered a mixture of stories arose highlighting exemplary and poor practice amongst teaching and learning staff. CF believed that CDU staff she had had contact with, were *"encouraging", "easy to talk to", "relaxed"* and cited of her lecturer that *"she explained the material well"*. Both CF and DK believed that feedback by CDU staff was provided in a useful, kind and friendly manner'. Confirming this, CB

commented that learning materials for his course especially those associated with using the computer were good. He stated that he was *"Happy with this course"*.

FJ and CH's experiences reflect a very different story. Whilst they considered the training materials and actual face-to-face delivery to be good; both men were clearly dissatisfied with the university's handling of their previous studies, which they indicated were well short of what they expected. Areas of concern included communication, course progression and consistency of delivery. The real problem that emerged for both men was the irregularity of delivery. GL confirmed that at one point in their course they received *"no training or no contact for 8 months."*

CH stated that the wait was *"too long"* and that he thought the university had *"probably stuffed up, up there"*. The impact on this on CH's learning is also reflected in his statement: *"Too much waiting made me forget"*. FJ stated that his course progression was *"too long, three years to do a Cert III, too long"*. For FJ whose third language is English he felt that in some training sessions there were too many *"big words, no meaning"*. Whilst both men reported a similar experience the emotional impact of the experience on them was quite different. CH felt that he could *"just wait, taught me patience",* whilst FJ found the experience *"made me feel bit sad"*.

A women's focus group held with CHB, RF and PF commented on the presentation of learning materials. They agreed teaching and learning activities were good however all three women were critical of resources provided and indicating they were not appropriate for their community. In some instances there were no resources of any kind distributed, and in other instances as described by PF they were given lots of loose sheet handouts, rather than workbooks which she felt would have been more appropriate for the community context.

CR summarised community sentiment well by stating that *"CDU is good at the teaching, but it often promises more than it can deliver, and this makes it look bad"*.

Discussions emerging here demonstrate some positive examples of flexible learning and assessment methods that are holistic, contextualised to community need and valuing community solutions. Data examples from CDU records however show that consistent student follow-up is a problem, a point that is also confirmed by some of the accounts provided by participants. The provision of learning materials appropriate for communities extends to beyond just the content of the material, and can also include physical form of the materials. Accounts describing large numbers of loose handouts demonstrate little understanding of the realities of community life,

whilst the non provision of materials provide a clear example of a situation where basic student needs were not being met irrespective of geographic locale.

4. Support:

This area received the most negative feedback from participants. Only a single extremely positive account of embedded literacy support in the general construction apprenticeship program was recorded. CR related that CDU lecturers were coming out to the site for one day every second week providing literacy support classes at the council office. He stated, *"Lecturers know what is happening for individual students. In this respect students are receiving good support and CDU are performing very well"*. The integration of literacy support was however not uniform across all programs. FJ stated that this was an area of real need for him however no such support was made to him over the three years of his study.

CB felt that the standard of student support he received when trying to find out course results and follow up an RPL application was unsatisfactory. He said, *"When you ring CDU you get the run around, that's why people lose interest"*. CB also questioned the widely held perception about the levels of literacy and numeracy among Aboriginal people is poor. He articulated that these kinds of assumptions by Balanda have been more widespread since the Federal Government's intervention into Aboriginal communities. CB felt that, *"The problem is more with written skills than numeracy or literacy. You only need to watch the card circles to see how well developed numeracy skills are. People need to see why they need to learn these"*.

CH and FJ both related a story in which they were told they were to graduate in October, instead they eventually graduated the following May. No explanation was provided to either of them for this. Similarly CR was critical of time delays experienced in receiving administrative support relating, *"After one year of work we had a training plan from CDU and NAC but no enrolments. The training plan was a generic document I could have done in 10 minutes that took seven months to get"*.

Participants' accounts for this theme show how embedded literacy support can work well in community settings, however it also points to the work ahead for the university to make this support more widely available to learners in all remote communities including Wugularr.

Few participants reported that they were given an opportunity to provide CDU with feedback, and most participants revealed that student support was difficult to access especially once lecturing staff leave the community and in the time between VET programs.

Whilst student support issues are clearly identified as an area of concern in the university's engagement practice it is also recognised that some of the issues arising in this theme are potentially outside the control of individual and small teams of remote area teaching staff, and potentially require more systemic institution wide solutions.

5. Future Involvement

Participants were finally asked to consider CDU's involvement in their community in the future, how it could change, and their perception of the future of this relationship. Despite a considerable amount of negative feedback received from participants previously most responses were generally positive, with participants expressing optimism toward the future. It should be noted however that whilst optimism is suggested by responses, a culture of 'gratuitous consent' is also a feature of cross-cultural communication in many indigenous communities that may also be illustrated in responses. Discernment between optimistic and gratuitously compliant responses is very difficult; their comments also reflected things they would like to see change in their own community and pointed to corresponding potential opportunities for better engagement by the university.

When CF & DK were asked what are the main areas of need in the community employment in local services was identified as central. CF expressed that she would like to see the development of a community library. She also expressed the desire to do Youth Work studies but be able to flexibly combine this training with another qualification in sport and recreation. Both women considered that education and training were important in allowing the community to meet these needs, and that CDU has a role to play in this. Similarly CHB, PF & RF thought the community really needed an adult learning centre equipped with computers and a library. They felt the university could help provide better access to driver training and licensing. Again, three women agreed that CDU had a role in providing training and education programs that would address these areas of need. RF again emphasised the importance of the university providing information on what it can offer the people of Wugularr.

CB also believed that CDU has a definite role to play in the future development of Beswick educationally, but stated, *"CDU needed to communicate better with the community."* He continued by saying that CDU should *"Have a branch in Beswick, or a more permanent presence"*.

DD considered the opportunity to gain meaningful work to be critical in his community. He thought that more opportunities like the one he was offered should be provided for young people in trades training such as plumbing and electrical. He said the university should offer

"More traineeships to give the same opportunity for young people". CR who offered a considerable amount of comment on his involvement with CDU reflected optimism toward change and growth of the relationship between the NMNRC and CDU in offering trades qualifications to learners in Wugularr. He said *"Whilst things are not perfect we have high hopes for the future". He also cited whilst that communication had been a problem with the university however things had been changing recently.*

In order to giver a broader picture of community sentiment all responses provided by participants were examined for positive and negative statements around community engagement. A summary of all these mapped against the thematic framework is presented in Table 2 as a simple way of illustrating common areas of concern for participants and support the preceding qualitative data.

Theme	Characteristics	Positive Accounts (x)	Negative Accounts (y)	Difference (x-y)
Relationships	Respectful	25	12	13
	Reciprocal	18	11	7
	Long Term	21	24	-3
Flexibility	Use Community Languages	8	6	2
	Dynamic and Adaptable	26	19	7
Teaching and	Values Local Solutions	17	9	8
Learning	Holistic Approach	15	14	1
	Contextualised to Culture	23	12	11
Support	Embedded Literacy Support	5	23	-18
	Consistent reliable contact	20	42	-22
	Follow-up and feedback opportunities provided	14	20	-6

Table 2: Participant responses against emerging themes in Community Engagement (n=11)

These results are suggestive that there are two principal spheres in which CDU needs to significantly change its community engagement practice in Wugularr. These are relationship building and ongoing student support. Within these themes the characteristics of concern are consistency of community contact, the provision of feedback opportunities, the provision of literacy support embedded in delivery and particularly consistency of communication with learners and other stakeholders.

Whilst the themes of flexible delivery and teaching and learning are of less concern areas were identified where improvement is necessary. These areas include active student follow-up, innovative and embedded use of community languages in delivery and community negotiation of programs that give greater levels of user choice to community members.

Synthesis

Data triangulated from student records, participants, stories and thematic analysis of qualitative data suggests there are clear engagement problems by the university in Wugularr of which only a small proportion can be attributed to individual learner and intrinsic community issues.

Data from student records suggests that VET delivery in Wugularr whilst beneficial to the university in the short term has been both inconsistent and not necessarily as beneficial to the community as it could have been. Analysis of student records shows that in many areas unit level completion rates are quite low in some cases follow up is very slow to happen. Qualitative data from received from participants supports these observations with participants' stories revealing very mixed experiences of the university's engagement with their community. Participant accounts received during this study strongly suggest that good community engagement is primarily a characteristic of certain individual staff, occasionally a characteristic of some schools or small teams and not generally of the university as a whole. In Wugularr this has meant an erosion of trust and a reduction in community confidence in the university's capacity to enter a meaningful relationship to its members.

CDU therefore has an implied responsibility to rebuild this relationship in line with its regional responsibilities and the goals expressed in its 1st in 5 in 10 strategic plan. The potential conflict between the university's expressed strategy of improving indigenous engagement in education and training needs to be balanced carefully. The 'Doing VET better' initiative, with its small teams based approach presents a real framework where more personalised framework can be used to better engage communities and realign the university to this strategic goal.

The two major areas of concern arising from thematic analysis that represent key areas of future focus by the university are; long term reciprocal relationship building and the provision of quality student support. These two themes can be seen as two sides of the same coin; it is impossible to maintain meaningful long term relationships if learners are not provided with quality and reliable support services, whilst the provision of such services creates an environment of trust where long term relationships are able to grow.

User choice for Wugularr residents in regard to study at the university is dictated by a process of communication between CDU and RGSC (formerly NMNRC) and Sunrise Health, both of which employ indigenous people from Wugularr, but are managed from Katherine, and co-ordinated largely by non indigenous people or *"Balanda"*. Whilst this does not mean that all planning decisions around training and education are done without consulting *"Bininj",* it does

mean that wider community involvement in the expression of community needs and educational aspirations and the resultant negotiation of appropriate education and training programs with CDU may be deficient. Both *"Balanda"* and *"Bininj"* participants identified that consistent communication was a problem area for the university. This single issue represents a significant challenge to the university potentially requiring a systemic change at an institutional level.

An interesting point of discussion arises in that most expressed dissatisfaction among participants with respect to the university's involvement in their community was not around the actual performance of lecturing staff, who were frequently described in a very positive light. The greater issue revolved around inconsistencies with delivery and planning of delivery to suit the learner's needs. Irregular and intermittent lecturer visits place undue stress on learners, and undoes the positives of the quality delivery. This was further compounded by the inability of the university to maintain continuity of relationships with community members within study programs. Participants comments stating that that lecturers seldom stay out there longer than a week highlights the importance of time in creating meaningful and mutually beneficial teaching and learning relationships with community members. From a human resources management perspective the difficulty of finding lecturing staff that are able to stay consistently within community settings for periods of time longer than one week should also not be understated. Accommodation in Wugularr is very limited, meaning lecturers need to either camp at the training venue or drive daily from Katherine. The former option whilst preferential in terms of good community engagement can be hard to *"sell"* to teaching staff, whilst the latter could be argued demonstrates an unwillingness to truly engage with the community.

Evaluation of VET delivery and engagement by the community was also identified in this study as an area for future improvement in practice. Few participants involved in the consultation identified that they were given the opportunity to evaluate their training. Accordingly the availability of any form of evaluation data for teaching and learning activities conducted by the university in Wugularr is also very limited. At this point in time the usual Student Experience of Teaching and Learning (SELT) tool used by the university has neither been widely used by remote area teaching staff, and could be considered to be an inappropriate tool for this purpose from both cultural and language and literacy standpoints. A commitment to developing an effective evaluation tool is an essential part of strengthening relationships here. The capacity for the university to provide a mechanism for the community to have a voice in how training occurs in their community is integral to the university demonstrating respect to the people of Wugularr and an essential part of demonstrating good community engagement and continuous improvement in its delivery VET programs.

Remote area VET educators do need to think more creatively when using training packages, and utilise evidence collection methods developed to suit community needs, especially around language and literacy. The reality of community life and vocational roles in Wugularr is that for most part spoken interactions between community members are in Kriol language. The ability to develop flexible assessment tools that respect this fact and that are reliable enough to collect evidence of competency is essential to the long term relevance of VET training in Wugularr and other remote communities in this region.

Learners that reported receiving no language and literacy support were unfortunately quite common amongst participants, yet a striking example emerged from the CDU Trades team to who have now embedded literacy programs in their General Construction apprenticeships. This changed approach not only demonstrates the university's capacity to be dynamic and adaptable but also highlights the potential for responsiveness that is facilitated by the small teams approach under the 'Doing VET Better' initiative.

Summary, Conclusions and Implications

There is a definite need to be flexible in the way we use training packages in indigenous communities including Wugularr that allow for customisation to the community's unique context. The combination of Sport and Recreation training package units as electives within Certificate III and IV Youth Work programs as suggested by CF is possible under NTIS packaging rules, but not something regularly done or considered by training providers. Other packaging combinations that match the vocational aspirations of community members also need to be explored and mapped.

A potential future focus for the university should be the enabling of individual VET teaching staff or community focussed teams to deliver a wider range of units of competence in Wugularr and other remote communities. This approach provides familiar individual or team 'faces' which provide the university with a localised identity that is friendly, interested, informed and responsive to changing community need. It will also 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 and negotiate strategic collaboration with other stakeholders in the community. This in turn opens up possibilities for innovative solutions including better access to traineeships, embedded community development projects, hybridised programs across training packages and the use of emerging digital technologies to better facilitate distance education.

Another key area for exploration for the university is how it prepares its teaching staff for travel and work within indigenous communities, in particular the importance of acquiring Indigenous Knowledge and gaining cultural competence to allow the best chance of success in engaging indigenous communities. This is by no means an easy thing. Finding indigenous or cross culturally competent who staff are willing to travel and stay within community settings can be difficult. This means that experienced and highly skilled people can become spread thinly across a number of communities which even for the most experienced worker can diminish their effectiveness in engaging discrete communities. Another option is undoubtedly the overhaul of the staff induction process for new university employees. Staff routinely working within indigenous community contexts should be required to demonstrate cross cultural competence prior to entering communities to train. This extends to more than simply attending a one day workshop; and could perhaps be linked to an accredited unit of competence for example: "HLTHIR404B- Work Effectively with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait islander people", or an appropriate entry in their VET lecturer matrix, or a formal mentoring and supervision arrangement of new staff by cross culturally competent staff.

The recognition that meaningful and respectful engagement with indigenous communities is the precursor successful to VET delivery is essential. At the heart of good community engagement lays the building of quality, mutually beneficial relationships. By its very nature this entails a corresponding building of confidence and trust that may be eroded, non-existent and linked to a historical context of repression and lack of opportunity for indigenous people. This is not something that can be achieved quickly, importantly it takes time, flexibility and consistency and ongoing support to achieve, especially in communities such as Wugularr where the history of engagement has been mixed. The rewards are however great, and critical for the university to meet both its future strategic goals and regional responsibilities.

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RESEARCH AS OPPORTUNITIES FOR ABORIGINAL ENGAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF THE ABORIGINAL RESEARCH PRACTITIONERS' NETWORK

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Abstract

Research is as yet an underutilized opportunity for engaging Aboriginal communities in mutually beneficial relationships. Effective engagement of Aboriginal communities is critical to achieve relevance and adoption of development research. The Aboriginal Research Practitioners' Network (ARPnet) was established as a mechanism to increase the engagement of Aboriginal communities in north Australia in research and development. ARPnet addresses some of the elements of the current critique of research in Aboriginal communities and provides engagement through much needed short term employment. This paper presents some of the experiences of the network and highlights some of the critical challenges for sustaining this model of engagement into the future.

Key words: Aboriginal, community, engagement, research, network.

Introduction

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There is wide acknowledgement that effective engagement between researchers and communities is crucial to achieve relevance and application of research results (Reynolds et al. 2007). With the shift in engagement discourse moving beyond consultation and the participation of communities to wider questions of social justice, inclusion and sustainability, new and more robust models of engagement are needed (Cornwall 2003). Walsh (1995:103) advocates for turning the tables on current interactions to allow opinions and actions of communities to gain credibility and strength. Rather than adopt an 'add the community and stir approach', what is required is a reconfiguration of the rules of interaction between researchers and communities (see Cornwall 2003:1337). Ross and Nursey-Bray (undated:1) argue that engaging with Aboriginal communities must "*go beyond the superficia*l" to ensure effective engagement.

Advocacy for greater, more meaningful engagement between outsiders and Aboriginal communities in northern Australia has grown in recent years. In Australia, the terms engagement and participation are sometimes used interchangeably and are rarely defined. The term engagement has been widely reviewed in the literature (Rowe and Frewer 2005). The absence of clear and consistent definition means there are variable interpretations and applications of the concept. An added complication in north Australia is that generally the debate over engagement with Aboriginal communities is sometimes confused with the debate over the need to integrate Indigenous knowledge in research. The focus of this paper is the involvement of individuals drawn from remote Aboriginal communities in development research.

Conceptions of engagement are challenged everyday in different situations involving communities and outsiders. While The National Aboriginal Education Committee (1985) has stated that research should be conducted substantially by Aboriginal people, very few models exist to guide policy and practice. Similarly, the North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA) in its Forum Report (2004) strongly advocates for greater control and active participation by Aboriginal people in research yet offers little guidance on how that can be achieved. The report states that traditional owners want to train to be researchers and conduct research on their country. Foster et al., (2006) also finds that the Tangentyere council has shifted its approach from simply commissioning research to taking charge of the research. Recently, the Australian Government reiterated its commitment to enhancing support for Aboriginal researchers and research (Senator Carr 2008). The Australian Government acknowledges that involving Aboriginal researchers will strengthen the diversity of Australia's research capacity and capabilities and lead to new knowledge, discoveries and applications. While there is widespread acknowledgement of the need to involve Aboriginal

communities as deliverers of research, the level and type of engagement being demanded, has not been easy to achieve.

The question of who should be conducting research in Aboriginal communities is a pertinent one. McAvoy et al., (2000) addresses this question in relation to Hispanic, African American and Indian American communities and concludes that real issues involved in such settings may best be resolved by engaging locally recruited co-researchers. Further they find that the involvement of local researchers may help reduce the resistance stemming from negative histories of research (McAvoy et al., 2000:486). Aboriginal people have been involved in research in many capacities in north Australia, but their roles in research delivery have so far been limited (Henry et al., 2002). The idea that research should involve local Aboriginal communities affected by it has been promoted in many areas of research (Smith 1997; Henry et al., 2002) and is becoming a very strong and persistent advocacy in northern Australia (NAILSMA 2004; Garnett et al., 2009). Henry et al., (2002) finds achieving the level of engagement advocated for has been slow. While there are many examples and efforts to achieve good engagement, the persistent question has been the extent to which existing efforts address the demands from communities to reposition research and development delivery.

Advocacy to increase Aboriginal people's engagement in research has been growing in the Northern Territory (NT) over the last decade. Much of this advocacy has come from the education and health sectors and is known as the Indigenous Research Reform Agenda (Henry et al., 2002; Brands and Gooda 2006). Advocates of this agenda are fighting for a repositioning of Aboriginal people within the construction of research (Henry, et al., 2002:4; Umulliko 2004). The issue of who controls the research process and the use of research results are some of the critical questions facing research establishment in northern Australia. Lachapelle and McCool (2005) suggest the use of the concept of ownership as crucial in understanding relationships between outsiders and communities. They define ownership as "*ownership in process"* (whose voice is heard); "*ownership in outcome*" (whose voice is codified) and the "*ownership distribution*" (who is affected by the results). Hence ownership is the collective definition, sharing and addressing of problem situations by communities and researchers collaborating together. Lachapelle and McCool (2005: 282) note that the success in such collaborations is not about sharing only the research products, rather it involves learning, relationship building, interest interpretation and social and political acceptability. Involving communities in research produces demonstrable results, yet the nature of involvement in northern Australia is still limited and can be developed further. The Aboriginal Research Practitioners Network (ARPnet) provides a model of how engagement can start to address some of the key elements of research

to enable a balanced shift in ownership. While, ARPnet provides a mechanism through which research be conducted substantially by Aboriginal people, persistent questions remain about how communities characterized by low numeracy and literacy living in remote areas can engage in research delivery? This also raises important questions about the extent to which agencies are willing trust and invest in this model of engagement.

The Aboriginal Research Practitioner's Network (ARPnet).

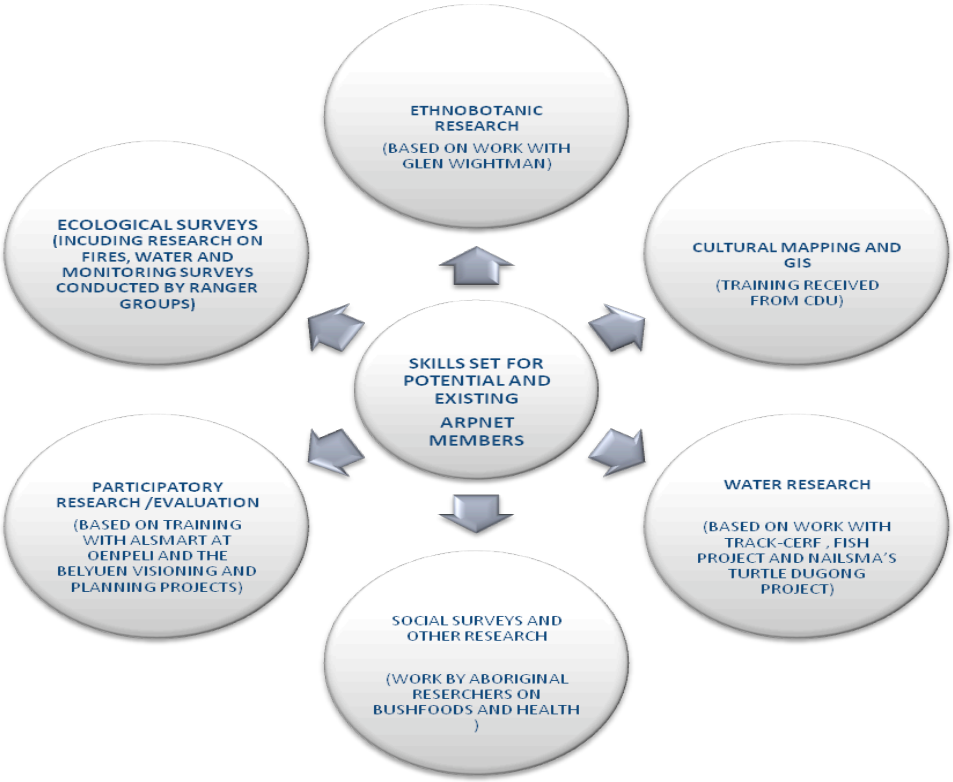
ARPnet is one of the many models that have evolved to strengthen the involvement of Aboriginal communities in research activities in northern Australia. ARPnet was formed in 2007 with funding from the NT Research and Innovation Fund (Sithole and Hunter-Xenie 2007). The main objective of ARPnet is to create a loosely coordinated regional network of Aboriginal people in the top end who are interested, committed and have capacity to participate in a broad range of research projects using participatory approaches.

ARPnet consists of 20 Aboriginal men and women drawn from top end Aboriginal communities in the NT. The network is developed following recommendations from members of the Aboriginal Land and Sea Management Review Team (ALSMART) (see Saegenschnitter & Hunter-Xenie 2006) which was created in 2005 to assist in a project to evaluate community based Aboriginal natural resources management projects in the top end (Sithole et al., 2007b). Membership of ARPnet is voluntary after basic training in participatory approaches, but participation is fluid with varying levels of involvement by members over time *(*Sithole and Williams 2006; Sithole et al., 2007a; Sithole et al., 2008). Members determine their level of involvement and work towards achieving some level of complementarily between their other obligations on country and research activities as they come up.

The establishment of ARPnet resulted from several consultative meetings between researchers and Aboriginal people who were interested to get involved. These ideas were then used as the basis to develop and prepare a strategic plan which currently defines the framework for the ARPnet operations (Sithole and Hunter-Xenie 2007).

ARPnet members have experience as research assistants, liaison officers, translators and interviewees, or been in the presence of researchers. Many of the members have been involved in research through partnerships with researchers in government, universities and private sector and have acquired skills through these interactions shown in figure 1.

Figure 1. The range of skills that existing and potential members of ARPnet members have in undertaking different kinds of research.



Though there is a wealth of combined experience among members the network, it has identified a need for adjunct research fellows. These are non-Aboriginal people identified by the network to work in a supportive and facilitatory role. Currently, there are two adjunct members. One of the members is the trainer and mentor of members in the group and the other provides logistic and training support. The coordinator of the network is a conventionally trained scientist working for Charles Darwin University.

Members of ARPnet who are employed to undertake research activities, are employed on a casual basis and paid a daily rate for their participation through Charles Darwin University. ARPnet has adopted the rates set by the Desert Knowledge Co-operative Research Centre (see DKCRC 2007) as an interim measure while an assessment of rates is underway. Aboriginal Research practitioners are paid AU$245.00 per day excluding meals and accommodation as well as work travel expenses. On one of the projects funding was set aside to pay for services from practitioners for periods ranging between eight to ten weeks. The percentage of the total budget spent on the Aboriginal researchers for salaries was more than 50% of the total project budget excluding additional expenditure on travel, accommodation and other expenses. As well as the salaries, each practitioner is provided with work clothes and requisite equipment for the job.

However, the nature of consultancy contracts or tenders presents challenges for ARPnet in relation to existing job network arrangements and welfare payments. The rates paid by the project are determined to some extent by the welfare payments to members. For example, support from Job Networks may be restricted, as the employment outcomes are not full-time or periods of part-time employment are insufficient to meet regulatory requirements. Prospects for further and continuous employment are also often uncertain and can not be guaranteed as ARPnet mainly relies on a very uncertain funding environment.

The value of ARPnet members to research projects has been underlined particularly due to their presence in remote locations that are rarely easily accessible to mainstream researchers and most are multi-lingual. ARPnet members understand the local context and histories and bring meaning and underline nuances in the data in ways that external researchers cannot. All the members are connected through various networks across large geographical areas in the NT. Employing network members substantially reduces the cost of research delivery in remote locations for longitudinal studies and continuity is better assured. Membership is open to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who meet the criteria.

Under ARPnet, Aboriginal research practitioners have received training in participatory approaches and regularly receive additional and targeted training specific to client and project needs. Most of the training has been funded by the NT Department of Education and Training (DET). Over time these research practitioners have developed strong competences in three key areas:

- Undertaking participatory or community driven evaluations :
- Participatory community visioning and planning activities:
- Collaborating as researchers on research projects in remote areas.

Research practitioners are supported by experienced researchers and receive regular and consistent mentoring and support. Through each project ARPnet recognises and actively cultivates good relationships with other key stakeholders.

The network has created mechanisms for interacting or collaborating with mainstream research agencies and individuals. Outcomes from these interactions have been varied and instructive to the network members in a number of areas affecting their operations:

1. How to develop effective and strategic partnerships

2. How to address numerous administrative challenges related to Indigenous employment policy and support.

3. Steps towards establishing proof of concept

4. Managing members' high expectations.

ARPnet is hosted by the School for Environmental Research (SER) at Charles Darwin University (CDU) through a host agreement signed in November 2007. SER is has been very supportive of ARPnet and has shown itself to be highly adaptable in adjusting to the often unusual accounting and administrative needs required by the members. SER employs the members under casual employment arrangements for the duration of the project. While employed by CDU the members are accorded the same conditions as other stuff of the university under the similar arrangements. For example, they get authority to drive CDU vehicles and follow the administrative rigors required when working within a university system.

The Nature of Engagement through ARPnet

One of the key objectives of ARPnet has been to demonstrate that engaging Aboriginal researchers not only makes sense but is good value for money. Engaging in a number of projects as proof of concept is absolutely critical to the group. The main focus during delivery has been to assure the clients and the partners of the benefits of participatory approaches; of the value of engaging Aboriginal researchers; and consistency in quality and timeliness of our delivery on projects. Ongoing engagement before, during and at the end of the project has been the cornerstone of the ARPnet model.

ARPnet has provided members taking part in project work, with focused pre-project training funded through the Flexible Response Funding provided by DET (see Sithole et al., 2008). DET has already provided funding to the group, approximately AU$31 000 in total, through the participatory training workshops. The support from DET has been consistent and continues to underline the importance of supporting new and innovative ideas of engaging Aboriginal people in remote areas in northern Australia. Each project is preceded by ten days of training with concentrated interactive learning methods being used including, role playing, simulation and practical activities where members identify the overall objective of the project work, develop appropriate questions for use in data collection activities and become familiar with a range of participatory research methods. Approximately three kilometres of butchers' paper is used during the training programs with much repetition until all the members are conversant with the methods and understand the task and their role clearly. Members are

assessed for competency at the end of training. This training focuses on elements of the project, planning for the project and assigns roles and responsibilities in the project. In the field, the research group receives support from adjunct research officers, but leadership and direction of field activities is supervised by nominated members. The availability of continuous mentorship support is one of the cornerstones of ARPnet. Generally this aspect of the project raises the costs of delivery by ARPnet (e.g. by approximately 14% on one project) and has been difficult to finance though it is critical in getting all members of the ARPnet research team familiar, comfortable and conversant with the issues in the project. This pre-project training phase also ensures team building and identification of needs for support while undertaking the project and introduces the team to the contractor.

Current projects for ARPnet have included both collaborative projects with researchers drawn from different agencies including universities and government departments. The key areas for engagement have been in Indigenous affairs where the group has participated in projects to monitor and evaluate current and ongoing activities in remote areas (Garnett and Sithole 2007; Sithole et al., 2007a). Members of ARPnet have been part of the research group involved in data collection and analysis for monitoring and some have participated in policy discussions and feedback activities in relation to their work (e.g. Indigenous Environmental Service Provision Policy Forum, 2007). Since completing this monitoring study ARPnet has been included in several tenders for other monitoring projects though none have been successful to date.

While many ARPnet members recognise the need to work in partnership with other stakeholders or researchers, most of the interactions are affected by the historical relationships between individuals and particular researchers or agencies. Some collaborators are viewed with suspicion and raise the levels of anxiety among the members. Some stakeholders are discounted as "*gamon"* and the members are reluctant to work with them even when good opportunities arise. Since ARPnet started there have been two occasions when projects have been passed over because of bad experiences in the past. ARPnet as a group sanctions which partners are good and which are not. Though there is no clear formal process, members discuss openly their past experiences and then the discussions form the basis for either an individual or collective decision to participate. However, these attitudes towards particular stakeholders tend to be individual rather than communal. Since ARPnet's inception, 2 opportunities have arisen where the group has refused to engage on account of the bad experiences suffered in the past.

ARPnet has also been invited to participate in projects to undertake surveys on different issues pertaining to Aboriginal affairs. One of the projects undertaken in collaboration with Charles Darwin University was the 'Impact of health professional mobility on remote Indigenous

communities'. There is a proposal to undertake projects for a government agency which is still under discussion. Though there have been numerous approaches, this is an area where the group has failed to raise funding.

One of the growing areas for ARPnet involvement is the area of visioning and participatory planning. In 2007, ARPnet was invited to undertake a visioning and planning activity with one of the top end Aboriginal communities (Sithole et al 2007a). This activity was successfully conducted and established the basis for new ideas for collaborations between ARPnet and the indigenous affairs agencies and resulted in a request by one of the regional Governments for the development of a community development framework. Since undertaking this activity ARPnet has been involved in discussions for at least 4 separate projects with the same agency. The head of the monitoring agency held meetings with ARPnet to discuss future collaborations.

Though prospects for project have been good, the group has achieved very little success for raising funds or tendering project. This year the group has been involved in at least four proposals/ tenders for work that have not materialised. This failure to raise funds for projects has had a demoralising effect on group members and affected the way consultations are conducted. The original agreement was that project ideas be discussed and suctioned by all members, however as there has been little success, core group members are directly involved while the rest are informed but do not get directly involved in all the negotiations.

ARPnet as an Engagement Model in Research

The increased number of requests and meetings to find out about ARPnet as well as discuss possible opportunities is indication that recognition of the model is growing. The actual impact of the model is difficult to measure as the network is in its infancy and has only engaged in a few projects. Secondly, there has been little comparison made to date with other models. However, we can discuss the impact that ARPnet has had through analysis of the changing perceptions of members who represent a good cross-section of Aboriginal society.

It is important to start by defining the meanings of the ARPnet. Aboriginal people want the network to target Indigenous Australians though they do not discount the involvement by other races as adjuncts. The term research focuses the area of interest though there is no limit over what subject areas the group can be involved in. Members rejected the term researcher to define their role and agreed to be called "research practitioners" as they wanted to make a distinction between what they do, and conventionally trained researchers. The term practitioner was adopted as members felt they wanted their work to be applied and mean something to the

people who are involved. Therefore "research practitioners'" defines both the domain or target of ARPnet's operations and the approach, process and outcome of research. ARPnet members have been very keen to ensure that a clear distinction is made between them and the mainstream researchers.Members are interested in research but for various reasons, including personal and social circumstance, they have not been able to engage as much as they would like to. The most important characteristic of this group is that they are enthusiastic, available and ready to try this new role. The attitudes of ARPnet members towards research can be characterised into four broad categories. The first category consists of people who have been exposed to research and are curious or want to get involved. Most of the ARPnet members fall into this category. Some of the selected statements made by people holding this view are listed below:

- *"I want to do it, I will do it myself, I have been learning about land management, there is so much more that I could do, I give it a go." (Interview, 04 - 2005)*
- *"Sometime I look at them mob doing their research and I think one way is not good, it must be both ways together, that's what I want to see." (Workshop, 01 - 2006)*
- *"I am tired of being a research assistant, I want to do more." (Interview, 08 - 2006)*

An important characteristic of this group is that though the majority have been exposed to research they have little understanding of the process, function and outcome of research. Few in the group were fully conversant with the research process. This has improved through the training in participatory approaches. Some people in this category are often bewildered by the demands placed on them by researchers and feel overwhelmed or confused by the process.

The second category are members who are clearly disillusioned by their experiences with researchers and believe research does not benefit communities. Generally their sentiments are anti-research and they express a high concern about the need to protect Intellectual Property for Aboriginal people. Some of the members in this category see themselves as researchers on account of their wide experience. This group constitutes a fifth of the network. Generally members in this category are strong willed and have much influence on other members. They also hold very strong views about different types of research or collaborators and are more selective. Statements characteristic to this group include the following:

- *"Researchers are too much humbug, we don't get to do any work, too many coming, all the time. Who sent you and what is this for? We have been*

researched to death! You mob want to come and talk, talk but it doesn't help us much. We get nothing out of this, we never see anything, just humbug!" (Interview, 06 - 2005)

- *"Some(outside researchers) you are happy and you like them but you not sure what they are doing, no one really explains about this 'research' thing my dear. Yeah I have worked with them mob, many times but only helping like. I work with different mob, but never feel I was like them mob." (Interview 07 - 2006)*

The anti-research feeling is not entirely unjustified and there are examples of bad research practice or collaboration. Generally, the conduct of research is largely conventional and adoption and application of participatory approaches is partial or in its early stages (Walsh and Mitchell 2002).

The third category of members can be characterised as opportunistic, exploiting the benefits of the network without really committing or believing in it. Within this group we have found people that are not sure or aware of what the project is about, what the research is about and most have not seen or read any of the related documents. Some do not attend all the training and make little effort even when appointed on the projects. The members in this category are not focused; they don't follow correct research protocols or follow through with tasks and they are often absent from the job without excuse. Though there are few members in this category, their lack of commitment affects the morale of the other members. In any given project where there is a team of six there will be at least a member who falls into this category. ARPnet has put in place processes to address this lack of commitment. Using a simple ranking survey style questionnaire, project members undertake review of the overall project, the work that was done, how it was done and any opportunities to improve the future research work undertaken by ARPnet members. Members also assess themselves and each other's performance and discuss some of the key issues.

The final group comprises members who have received formal training and have received formal qualifications and work as researchers as part of the mainstream research delivery system. There are two members in the network who fall into this category. However, this group often has limited time available to work on the network. Breaking into the mainstream research delivery has not been easy in spite of the upwelling of commitment, advocacy and goodwill existing among the research establishment. Reluctance to actively engage with ARPnet has primarily been driven by two factors. The first is the unwillingness to believe that community based Aboriginal people can do more than assist on projects because of their limited numeracy and

literacy skills. The second factor is ignorance of participatory action research and related methodologies. ARPnet demonstrates that academic qualifications do not always fully define the quality of research.

Generally, members of ARPnet want to have stronger roles in the research projects that they participate in as shown in the statement below:

> "*We have assisted in projects that we have very little interest in. Researchers do research in our presence, we don't often know much about what they do or why they do it. Some scientists just say they work with Aboriginal people when they mean that they consult us about issues and sometimes they notify us that they are here, but they talk to the white fellas.*" (Interview 07 - 2006)

There is clear recognition that capacities will need to be improved and that becoming a provider of a research requires skill and experience.

- *"I want to learn, learn, I want to do these things myself for my people." (Workshop, 07 - 2006)*
- *"This is very useful for us, make me think how I can use this when I get back." (Workshop 07 - 2006)*

Opinions of the members of ARPnet have shifted from the early skepticism and uncertainty. Some of the members have made the following comments;

- *"Over the past year I have gained a number of skills from being involved in research through the Evaluation. The most valid, I think, is the knowledge that I have gained in being able to engage and interact with other people, both indigenous and non-indigenous, on a professional level. The opportunities that I have been given through this work have given me a sense of pride and achievement, which is reflected by my peers, both academically and socially." (Interview 08 - 2006)*
- *"Learning about the methodologies for how to go and effectively work with people in varied situations has also been a valuable experience." (Interview 08 - 2006)*
- *"The network of people I have met through this work has made Darwin seem a bit smaller, but in a good way, I believe I would now have no problem working with*

other agencies around Darwin, which until a year ago were inaccessible to me." (Interview 08 - 2006)

In some instances ARPnet members acknowledge that they do not always know what they want out of collaboration.

Recently, an ARPnet member was asked to develop a plan for his ranger group and he made the following response;

"Its funny, I knew for the first time what they were talking about and what to do. I will get the boys organised and get started on that. I might just need some help with writing if you mob can help, that will be good, yeah I think we can do it, we don't need Balanda[§] for that." (Member feedback, 08 - 2008)

Members have been able to use some of the skills developed through ARPnet to undertake projects in their own areas.

- *"I feel more supported when I am doing projects with ARPnet." (ARPnet member Feedback, 09 - 2008)*

Implementation of appropriately supported training with continuing support and mentoring was effectively undertaken with the visioning and planning report undertaken by ARPnet in late 2007.

Members feel they have benefited from ARPnet and have started to recruit family and community members. Several of the members have expressed an interest and want to enrol in literacy and numeracy programs. Some have put their names down for computer training while some have enrolled to complete courses in natural resource management. Some of the everyday skills like conversing in English are improving while note taking and record keeping are becoming important aspects of life skills being developed. There are still some key areas that need to be addressed like conflict and time management. This is a positive impact.

External Perceptions Towards ARPnet

Getting external support for ARPnet has not been easy. Even when opportunities have arisen much time has been spent by adjunct ARPnet and ARPnet members describing and promoting the model. At least 80% of the time has been spent describing the critical elements of the model which are:

§ Word used, within Arnhem Land, to describe a person who is not Indigenous

- All members are Aboriginal and includes men and women
- The group works in gender balanced teams
- Extended periods are spent in the communities
- Pre-project focused training is a critical feature
- Participatory approaches are used
- Adjunct members support the group in logistics management, data analysis and report compilation.
- Members speak local languages and have extensive networks

As well as understand how ARPnet works agencies have been keen to understand the performance of participatory approaches vis a vis conventional methodologies. For example, a recent discussions with the head of a monitoring division of a Government agency demonstrated the low level of understanding within government staff of the participatory methodology and how communities can be an effective agents to apply them (personal communication, 28 July 2009) ARPnet has thus become the basis for discussing application and adoption of participatory approaches in north Australia.

In one of the projects conducted with the Australian Government a comparison was made of ARPnet and another community focused research organisation. ARPnet was able to meet and exceed the targets set by the contractor and proved that in conflict situations, Aboriginal researchers have more traction than compared to non-Aboriginal researchers and that participatory approaches are very versatile.

One of the most important elements of the discussion about investing in ARPnet relates to the cost of the model. The model and process used by ARPnet in research projects has additional costs that current conventional research consultancy concerns do not have. These costs include i) the costs of ensuring gender balance which means the size of the team is large; ii) the costs of pre-project training and planning; iii) the costs of liability and insurance; iv) overhead costs from host institutions; v)and transport and logistics costs related to working with Aboriginal people. On the projects that we have worked on, costs of logistics have exceeded estimates. Attempts at streamlining the budgets in comparison with other tenders have generally undercut the model and placed tensions on the members in relation to confidence and commitment to the project. Generally, members have felt that attempts at cutting back on

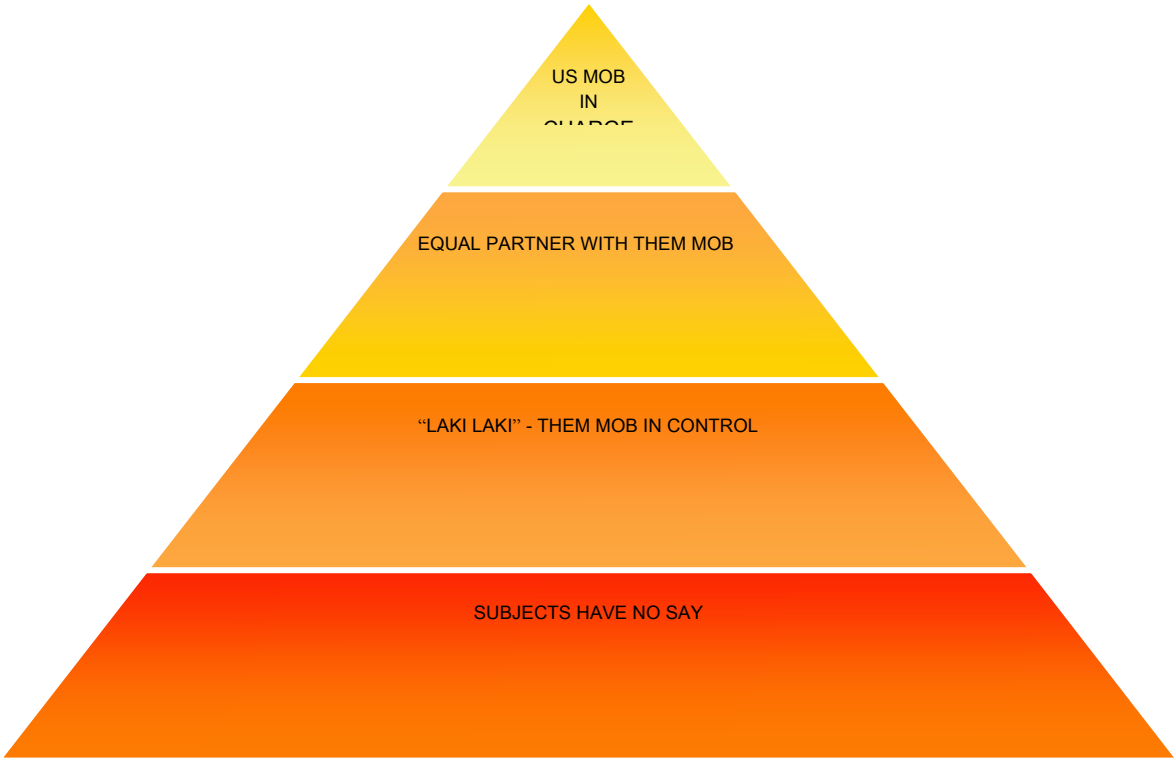
budgets undervalue their contribution and the model itself. In most of the projects where ARPnet was the best suited to do the job, the anticipated success has not been achieved due to costs.

The limited investment in ARPnet is seen by members as a rejection of Aboriginal people and the approach they are advocating. Adjunct members of the network see the limited success as normal for an idea and concept that is clearly new in Aboriginal affairs in Australia. Members are elated when ARPnet is invited to projects but become disappointed when these discussions fail to produce working agreements. Further, members generally view the transaction costs for developing and getting projects as very high.

Defining Engagement

Many of the comments cited in the forgoing sections underline the need for stronger and more meaningful engagement between researchers and communities. However, definitions of engagement are varied in various situations where communities interact with researchers. Finding some common understanding of levels of engagement desired by members of the network was crucial to define the identity and modus operandi of the network. At an inaugural workshop for ARPnet, a visioning excise with members of the group resulted in a ladder of engagement based on Arnstein's model (1969). This visioning exercise and subsequent conversations have led to the development of an aspirational engagement ladder for the group (figure 2).

Figure 2. Ladder of Aboriginal engagement in research



There are four rungs to the ladder, which use the language used by members to define different aspirational targets. The ladder maps out a trajectory of engagement from a situation where Aboriginal people have no say in research to one where the Aboriginal people have greater control and are in charge. Different sizes of the rungs in the ladder reflect the number of interactions that are perceived to be situated in different engagement circumstances. Many members of ARPnet conceive the majority of relationships over research to be dominated by the two bottom rungs of the ladder. While many researchers and collaborators profess equitable relationships with the Aboriginal people, local perceptions tend to differ and indicate that real equity has not yet been achieved.

While the members have identified full control over research at the top rung of the ladder they acknowledge that achieving this would be very difficult. One of the key concerns identified in the need to shift engagement to the top rungs of the pyramid was a candid acknowledgement by the members of the need to strengthen individual capabilities and increase essential skills in key areas to run the network effectively. Further, they identified other reasons which limit the scope for engagement by ARPnet including the following:

- ARPnet tries to address gender, age and other factors when identifying researchers

- The cost of ARPnet engagement with the result that in some situations, more than one researcher is provided.
- Conflict between members
- Remote locations of the member's make accessibility a big issue adding to the travel costs in the budget.
- Limited numeracy and literacy while not an impediment to data collection can limit substantially the capacity for analysis and report writing.
- Some of the issues relate to cultural responsibilities which take some of the members away from the projects for long and often unpredictable periods hence the need to stretch out execution periods in projects.
- Low level of life skills provides some challenges and in some cases creates situations requiring constant and astute but culturally acceptable management by an external person in a position of trust.

The need for good governance in the network and consistence in high performance on projects were also identified as key targets to ensure the viability of the network. Members have identified a need for Aboriginal researchers to also develop appropriate protocols to guide their work in communities. Current protocols define how non-Aboriginal people engage in communities. These protocols could cover how members approach communities; undertake research away from one's home base; how to deal with "*humbug";* conflict resolutions; how one communicates across gender; race and other issues. One of the big challenges for Aboriginal research practitioners has been '*jealousing from countryman'* in the locations where research is undertaken. Male members have found it hard to work away from their partners and consequently, periods of field work need to be short to accommodate family situations and concerns.

ARPnet is hosted by a conventional science institution. However, getting recognition for members within formal settings of science has not been easy. Members have been wary of the interactions with other scientists fearing that they are not taken seriously because of the approaches they apply and also because of their limited academic background. Thus even when there is an appearance of ease, comments made by ARPnet members acknowledge the persistent discomfort when working with the existing establishment as highlighted in some of these comments;

- *"On a slightly negative point, at times I have felt like I was under the magnifying glass from other workers, outside the project group, which may be due to their own inexperience's of working with aboriginal people, or their own stereotypes of blackfellas being poor workers or untrustworthy. A bit rough, but it has been felt by others as well as me." (Interview 08 - 2006)*

- *"I didn't like the way they (the researcher) order you about as if you know nothing, there is no respect." (Interview 08 - 2006)*

- *"Sometimes I worry about what others think about us. I am not too comfortable yet with them, that's why sometimes I just run." (Interview 08 - 2006)"*

The lessons from these comments demonstrate the need to create socio culturally appropriate spaces where Aboriginal people feel at ease. Generally, ARPnet has operated in relation to relationships fostered through individuals within agencies. These individuals have acted as champions and promoted the ARPnet model. So that even though ARPnet signed a memorandum of understanding with SER, the institutional relationship is regarded as secondary to the personal relationships that have been brokered with specific individuals in SER. The presence of one of the founder members of ARPnet at SER goes a long way towards making this arrangement viable.

An achievable goal and target in the ladder is to work in equal partnership. In this relationship Aboriginal people get responsibilities in project, competitive rates of remunerations which recognise and value their contributions and they share in the recognition and participation in all feedback activities and outputs. This focuses on the nature and quality of relationships required to achieve equity. So far most of the collaborations have failed to recognise and value Aboriginal contributions in these processes primarily because Aboriginal people "*lack the paper work*" and certificates recognised by the research fraternity.

Achieving control over research where communities say "*us mob are in charge"* is a big challenge for many reasons. One of the key reasons is the low numeracy and literacy levels of the communities which force a continuing dependency on adjunct fellows and outsiders in the network in roles of coordination, administration, analysis and marketing. Assumption of these roles by community based researchers presents many challenges due to, among other issues, remoteness and communications. Generally, members of the network regard the project proposal stages of the projects as "*humbug"* or a nuisance as there are high transaction costs with no guaranteed projects. One of the strategies engaged in the network to ensure continuity and

succession is to involve young people, however, getting consistent participation and commitment from young people is not easy.

Is Research a Real Opportunity for Engagement?

The tremendous amount of research being carried out in and on Aboriginal land presents an unexplored avenue and opportunity for Aboriginal people to gain employment through project work and to make valuable contributions to research. Research is an opportunity that Aboriginal people are yet to fully utilise. There is growing world experience and approaches that make it possible for Aboriginal people to become researchers or research practitioners (Garnett et al., 2009). Whitehead (2002) argues that Aboriginal people are best placed to deliver services within their own communities. Yet, in northern Australia the adoption of such a model is limited and reliant on champions in a few organisations. However, there are two related challenges. The first is to convince mainstream researchers that partnerships with communities through ARPnet adds value to research process and the research results. Whitehead (2002) identifies monitoring and evaluation as one of the key areas where Aboriginal people should be employed to perform a service. This is one of the key areas for ARPnet expertise. The second challenge is to convince the government and related organisations that this is indeed a viable employment opportunity and an important engagement model that they can invest in. Experiences so far indicate that while agencies are excited about ARPnet few are ready to invest. The hesitancy can be attributed to a number of factors including cost and the limited availability of evidence of good performance and delivery. ARPnet is a model of engagement which needs to be further developed and supported as there is high local commitment to engage and the opportunities are there.

The ambivalent feelings of ARPnet members about research reflect wider attitudes among Aboriginal communities and underline the need to develop new and innovative ways of engagement that more directly address grassroots demands. Populist literature is full of typologies of participation which can be used as a barometer of how much and in what form working together means (Arnestein 1969; Chambers 1995). ARPnet ladder provides a target for engagement which is difficult to achieve but can be a definitive vision to work towards. Experiences demonstrate that achieving full control over engagement in research is ambitious and unattainable under current conditions. Pretty and Vodouhe (1997) suggest that the challenge is to enshrine new ways of learning for researchers and Indigenous people so that the focus is less on what we learn and more on how we learn and with whom we learn. This they suggest implies a whole new professionalism, with new values, methods and behavior. This would redefine ownership of research in Aboriginal people and achieve the reconfiguration advocated

for by the advocates of the Indigenous reform Agenda (Henry et al., 2002). However, Howitt and Sutchet-Pearson (2003) find that the ideal for collaborative research remains difficult to operationalize because of the capacity for organizations to facilitate or even value equitable collaboration, respect alternative frames that might contextualize and value research differently in different cultural settings.

There is a need to find ways of doing research that more explicitly identify how local people will be included and benefit, thus ensuring real engagement of Aboriginal people. Many of the existing approaches continue to operate as if Aboriginal collaborators are assistants rather than 'co–researchers' hence following what Cornwall (2003) would call the "*add and stir* " in the community approach. ARPnet challenges the construction of partnerships between capable Aboriginal people and mainstream researchers. Whitmore (1998) working among the Mexican farmers writes about a need to "*rebuild this house''* as a challenge to look at and find ways of increasing levels of participation and empowerment among local people. ARPnet demonstrates how such a house could be built, though there are acknowledged weaknesses to the structure that can be strengthened in time. Similarly Sjorberg (1975) observes researchers need to formulate research orientations that emphasise the development of alternative structural arrangements that transcend some of the difficulties inherent in the present day social order. However, most recognise the newness of this role and have identified needs for skills that would make them competent and powerful participants in the process. The commitment demonstrated by members suggests that they are determined to explore and utilise the research as an opportunity for engagement.

Conclusion

Research is an important but still undervalued opportunity to achieve multiple outcomes in engagement with Aboriginal communities in northern Australia. While ARPnet demonstrates the presence of a high degree of local commitment to engage in research, the network needs support to demonstrate proof of concept adequately to gain confidence of the sceptics. ARPnet is reliant on a scatter of champions in various agencies who continue to push for greater and more meaningful engagement with Aboriginal people. However, achieving equity or control over engagement remains very difficult to achieve.

Though projects have been limited, members of ARPnet have been paid real wages and they have been involved in the execution of projects. However, valuation of Aboriginal contribution still remains problematic as formats and reporting protocols within institutions constrain current participation levels making real ownership of the research process problematic.

Trying to sustain the momentum and enthusiasm of the members in an uncertain funding environment remains a big challenge. ARPnet demonstrates that the type of engagement described here is feasible, but its achievement is determined to a large degree by prevailing research and institutional context controlling research funding. Currently there is no established national framework for working with Aboriginal research practitioners. ARPnet is a model whose time has come and needs more than a scatter of champions to make it a viable and significant part of the research framework.

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RESEARCH, COLLABORATION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

– EVOLUTION OF A PARTNERSHIP

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Abstract

The approach that is taken in engaging and communicating with Australian Indigenous communities is extremely important and may play a critical role in determining the success or failure of projects. Outputs need to have direct and quantifiable community benefits and often research is best integrated with other work to ensure these outcomes are delivered. Mutual respect, knowledge of cultural sensitivities, longevity of relationship, community benefit of outputs, ownership of ideas and participatory planning, are all components that will contribute to successful Indigenous community engagement. To incorporate these attributes requires collaboration between agencies and a long term commitment to contributing to real community aspirations. The Charles Darwin University and Northern Land Council are working together to adapt their approach to community engagement so that it integrates the research while still providing meaningful community benefits.

Key words: collaboration, livelihoods, trust, Indigenous, engagement

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Introduction

The way that research work is conducted within Australian Indigenous communities has changed considerably over the last twenty years. There is now a greater focus on research that delivers benefit to the individuals and communities involved, which is more easily able to be achieved when research is integrated with practical work. More recently there has been a greater focus on the sustainability of Indigenous communities, with a push for economic development within them. This paper examines a number of related approaches to economic development that utilise land and land based resources, recognising the relation between land and Indigenous knowledge and its importance for Indigenous people. Work conducted by Charles Darwin University and the Northern Land Council shows that engagement with Indigenous communities is a key element to connecting quality research with outcomes desired by Indigenous communities.

This first part of the paper will look at the background of the status of Indigenous people, their land and economic development in the Northern Territory. It will examine some of the approaches to economic development that have been used or underpin approaches used in the Northern Territory (NT). It will also look at economic development strategies utilising wildlife, examining how these approaches have arisen alongside processes of Indigenous people moving back to their traditional lands. The second part of the paper will look at the relationship between research and Indigenous community engagement, drawing lessons from the experience of researchers in the field. It will demonstrate how new ways of working, based around engagement, have grown out of field experience and are leading institutions to adopt new approaches to supporting Indigenous people to develop land based enterprises.

Background

In the NT of Australia, Aboriginal people now own 44% (approximately 620,000 km²) of the terrestrial land mass under communal title, with up to 10% likely to be added on completion of claims and related processes (Storrs, 2003). The majority of the 66,600 Aboriginal people that live in the NT (ABS, 2006) are living in either remote or extremely remote areas mostly in townships or out-stations which are on marginal lands, have very limited infrastructure and services, with very little employment opportunities or private investment (Altman, 2007). Options for Indigenous people to raise capital and engage in the market economy are few (Taylor, 2003), and consequently many depend substantially on

welfare or welfare-related programs such as the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP). Few other job opportunities exist, with the exception of the production of arts and craft (Koenig et al. 2006).

Many Indigenous-owned lands are relatively structurally intact and rich in natural resources (biological, cultural and mineral) but the 'income' or other 'gains' from contemporary landuses (such as the equivalent of royalties from mining, or tourism leases) have not always resulted in social benefits for local Indigenous people (Collins, 2000). This is evident from the fact that most Indigenous townships are reliant on government funding and services and Aboriginal people are the most disadvantaged groups in Australia (ABS, 2008). The poor socio-economic status of Indigenous people in the NT is further exacerbated by poor health, low levels of education, and social dysfunction (Burgess *et al.* 2005; NTG, 2007)

While Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory are becoming progressively richer in terms of land ownership as more cases are processed under the *Commonwealth Native Title Act* 1993, this does not seem to have translated into benefits for Aboriginal communities. Furthermore money alone does not seem to be the solution to many of the issues facing Aboriginal community dysfunction. An example of this is two decades of uranium royalties to people in the Kakadu area with no obvious benefit to the Aboriginal communities who received this money (Collins, 2000).

There have been many attempts to initiate economic development in Indigenous communities. This long history is characterised by an exceptional level of failure (Dale, 1996), mostly for a variety of geographical and cultural reasons (Young, 1988). Communal land ownership, remoteness, lack of infrastructure, the nature of kinship relationships, the approach to community development and limitations in the way the CDEP has been applied, have all contributed to the low levels of successful economic activity in Aboriginal communities. At a fundamental level, however, economic failure on Aboriginal lands can largely be attributed to the top down approach and an engagement which has not been one of partnership (Young 1988; Gorman *et al.* 2006a).

Many of the problems facing remote Aboriginal communities are systemic with no quick remedy. Federal and State governments are working together to change the model of service delivery to Aboriginal communities and this, among other reasons, has prompted a greater desire to initiate enterprise. There are a variety of State and Commonwealth initiatives to boost economic development in these remote settings (Northern Territory

National Emergency Response Act 2007; Gunya Australia 2007; Indigenous Business Australia 2007; NTG 2004).. However, the level of support that the Commonwealth Government is prepared to offer community-based approaches is limited as many of these programs are run by people who are outsiders to the community with little understanding of the complexities of fostering economic development in remote contexts.

Internationally, there are a number of different community engagement approaches that have been used in Indigenous community development and poverty alleviation. However, the dimensions of poverty are wide and complex and the realities of poverty vary between regions, countries, communities and individuals (Cahn, 2002). One common international approach that has resonances with the approaches of governments in Australia is the Sustainability Livelihood Framework (SLF). The SLF is an operational tool which has been developed to assist work on poverty reduction. This approach focuses on people and their capacity to initiate and sustain positive change (Carney, 1999; Alterelli & Carloni, 2000). Various approaches have stemmed from this framework as international perspectives have changed on poverty, participation and sustainable development (Sen, 1981; Chambers & Conway, 1992; Moser, 1998). The SLF is portrayed as providing a more rounded picture of the complexities of poor communities rather than being based simply on understandings of measures of income, consumption and employment (Brocklesby & Fisher, 2003). SLF and the approaches that stem from it attempt to be more people focused rather attempting to provide needs-based, resource–centred solutions.

In determining what might be suitable enterprise development activities in remote Aboriginal communities the common approach (based on theories underpinning the SLF) has involved looking at the strengths (resource and labour) and the threats (sustainability, markets). However, this has rarely been participatory with enterprise ideas often being trialled in the communities with very little input from the community itself. A lack of 'real' community engagement and consideration of cultural factors has often ended up being the downfall of enterprise development initiatives (Young, 1988). Approaches to Indigenous community engagement are however changing and in the Northern Territory there are now many examples of more 'community-based approaches' where the local people have been given carriage of ideas and support to drive these community development ideas at the own speed (Ivory, 1999, Gorman *et al.* 2006a).

Some examples of these activities include small, scale, wildlife-based enterprises that the Aboriginal communities have identified as being something they were interested in developing. These include the domestication of native honey bees for outputs such as honey, wax, pet industry and pollination services. This is being trialed at Aboriginal communities in the Darwin – Daly Aboriginal Land Trust as well as in Arnhem Land. Another example is wild harvest and value adding of native fruit (*Terminalia ferdinandiana*) for the health and food industries. This is being done at a small scale by a number of NT Indigenous communities with some starting to become involved in value adding by making jams, chutney and cordial to sell locally. In the Kimberley area of Western Australia, wild harvest of *T. ferdinandiana* is at a much larger scale (in the order of 15 tonnes annually) with an Aboriginal cooperative being established and plans to grow this species in different horticultural production systems to be able to meet market demand (Cunningham *et al.* 2009). Another wildlife based enterprise that is becoming established is the wild harvest of reptiles for the pet industry. The harvest of northern snake-necked turtles (*Chelodina rugosa*), and subsequent induction and incubation of eggs for sale of the young to the pet industry has been occurring through Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation at Maningrida (central Arnhem Land) for a number of years and is set to expand and include a much wider diversity of reptiles.

It has long been thought that one of the most promising opportunities for economic activity on Aboriginal lands is utilisation of wildlife (Senate Rural Affairs and Regional Affairs and Transport Reference Committee, 1998; Whitehead *et al.* 2006) because there is an abundance of resources and that it will utilise existing Aboriginal skills and knowledge. Nevertheless uptake of these opportunities has been poor both for cultural reasons peculiar to Aboriginal people and for reasons specific to remote parts of the Northern Territory (Young 1988, Gorman *et al.* 2006).

Context

In 1974 Aboriginal self determination was described by the former Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Senator James Cavanagh as a policy to 'lay the groundwork to enable Aboriginal people to take a real and effective responsibility for their own affairs' (Young, 1988). One of the most important Acts in progressing Aboriginal self determination was the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act* 1976 *(Commonwealth)* which recognised Aboriginal ownership of land before European settlement. This Act was enabled in the Northern Territory through the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* 1976. This Act recognised Traditional

Ownership of land and gave Aboriginal people the opportunity to claim back land if they could prove a continued connection to that land. The formation of Land Councils at the same time as these Acts allowed Aboriginal people a certain amount of institutional support to move from townships back out to their country, commonly known as the *outstation movement*.

Around the same time that the *outstation movement* began so too the Aboriginal Land Councils were set up to help Aboriginal people re-establish themselves on country. In the NT there are four Land Councils, the Northern Land Council, Tiwi Land Council, Central Land Council and Anindilyakwa Land Council. The primary emphasis from the NLC has been on establishing Traditional Owners' rights to their country.

As more land has been claimed back by the Aboriginal Traditional Owners there has been an increasing interest in generating income from country to sustain Indigenous NRM and be less reliant on government welfare. However, until recently, there has been limited participatory planning with communities to establish the types of enterprise that they are interested in developing. The Caring for Country Unit (CFCU) was established in 1996 to support community based land and sea management programs as part of an overarching mandate to help Aboriginal constituents build sustainable lives on their own lands (NLC, 2006). There are now over 30 ranger groups and over 400 rangers employed to do this job. While the emphasis of these ranger groups has historically been caring for country using two toolboxes (Indigenous and western management techniques), there has been a general shift to include wildlife based economic development opportunities. These range from Payment for Environmental Service type activities (coastal surveillance, disease monitoring, fire abatement etc.) (Gorman & Vemuri, 2009; Muller, 2008; Luckert *et al*. 2007) to commercial harvest of bush food, domestication of native honey bees, commercial harvest of feral animals etc. Business development is fairly new to many of these ranger groups and, in addition to a need for funding support to get started and professional advice on connecting with markets, product development and complying with legislation, there has also been a need to incorporate research to ensure ecological sustainability, measure social and culture impacts, and planning.

It is extremely important for research to be linked with wildlife based enterprise development because it can help provide the empirical data and guidelines that can ensure development is sustainable. The quadruple bottom line approach, which considers ecological,

economic, cultural and social implications of an activity, can help support sustainable practice and these areas are often best achieved through research in conjunction with Traditional Indigenous Knowledge. Generally, wildlife populations can be harvested sustainably if harvesting occurs at the same or a lower rate than at which the population would otherwise increase (Caughley & Sinclair, 1994). This requires knowledge of both the existing population size and its dynamics over time and space (fecundity and mortality). Sustainable development requires quantifiable data about the extent and robustness of resources (taxonomy, population dynamics, and harvest thresholds), economics (feasibility, market demands, value chains) as well as social and cultural implications of these activities. Often research can incorporate Indigenous Ecological Knowledge to provide this information which is integral to the health and longevity of these enterprises.

Organisational responses

It is against this background that the Key Centre Tropical Wildlife Management (KCTWM) was started at the Charles Darwin University (then Northern Territory University) in 1999 with three years of funding from the Australian Research Council. The initial proposal to establish the KCTWM came from a diverse range of interests that recognised that existing research and teaching did not deal effectively with the critical issues for sustainable use and conservation of wildlife in northern Australia. The role that Aboriginal people played in managing natural systems and improved application of their knowledge and skills to existing and emerging problems were seen as pivotal issues for the KCTWM (KCTWM, 1999). The KCTWM played an important role in the NT as a bridge between organisations that would not necessarily have worked together. It provided a neutral base that other groups could work through and was facilitated through a careful process of networking and relationship building.

One of the research areas that was identified even before the KCTWM was formed was the question of what type of enterprises Aboriginal people aspired to have operating on their country? This question stemmed from some early informal consultations in east Arnhem Land with Yolngu people at Yirrkala in the mid 1990s. Their discussion about enterprise development identified a desire to base an enterprise on plant products. This idea was developed by the newly formed KCTWM with a successful grant to the Rural Industry Research Development Corporation (RIRDC) resulting in a 3 year project titled *Feasibility of local small scale native plant harvests for Indigenous communities* . The project started off

trying to involve communities and clan groups in east Arnhem Land, particularly the Laynhapuy Homelands Resource Centre. Despite numerous visits to the town and outstations nothing eventuated. Enterprise development ideas (such as cycad harvesting) that were identified as opportunities failed to develop. This was probably because a real long term connection between the researchers and the communities was lacking. Alternatively these ideas may have been too novel and the spiritual connections with certain plants too strong for them to be commercially exploited and leave country. Participatory planning was made difficult given the only benefit to the community was research that may have influenced policy and funding bodies.

One of the challenges confronted in this project was ranking plant products for their commercial potential. This was due to the difficulty in applying standard market based approaches which consider market demand and supply and cost per unit because most tropical plant products do not have established markets. This project devised a subjective ranking system of the commercial potential of plant products (based on cultural, social, ecological and economic criteria). This was only used as a guide (mainly for the researchers' benefit) to discuss which species particular communities would like to work with (Whitehead *et al.* 2006, Gorman *et al.* 2006a).

This study produced some excellent academic outcomes in the form of reports, journal articles, and conference presentations. It was also able to communicate various aspects of Aboriginal aspirations towards enterprise development, Aboriginal values and measures of success of these activities, quantify the feasibility of certain enterprises, and recommend further research and policy changes to progress this type of economic development (Whitehead *et al.* 2006, Gorman *et al.* 2006a). However, this project was unable to take these ideas and assist in their implementation into trial businesses and therefore this work did not manage to improve the livelihoods of the people involved in the research.

In this particular instance the research was well intentioned and useful but could not be transitioned into tangible community benefit by itself. It was only recognised at the end of the project that there was no other institution that could take these results and build on them with the community to provide tangible livelihood benefits. This disconnect between research agendas as community expectations is a common problem especially if research does not build on existing cultural knowledge and allow local people to establish their own guidelines for community-based research (Smith, 1999).

It must be noted that this project developed in communities where existing connections and trust already existed. One of the partners in the project, an ethnobotanist with the Parks and Wildlife Service of the Northern Territory, Glenn Wightman, had very strong connections with the Nauiyu Community at Daly River and had worked closely with many Aboriginal people from this area recording knowledge of Aboriginal flora and fauna in the Daly River area (Lindsay *et al.* 2001). Glenn's existing relationship with members of the community, specifically the Woman's Centre, allowed the 'active' research to evolve in the form of case studies which were largely driven by the community. Another part of KCTWM's work depended on an existing relationship with one of the central Arnhem Land ranger groups, the Djelk Rangers and the Bawinanga Aboriginal Resource Centre (BAC). BAC was already actively involved in wildlife based enterprise development and the rangers were involved in Vocational Education and Training (VET) through the Centre for Indigenous Natural Resource Management (now School of Australian Indigenous Knowledge Systems) at the Charles Darwin University.

As a result of these projects the KCTWM realised that the approach needed to be bottom up involving community participation and being driven by people on the community. We needed to have a connection with community to be able to find out what they really wanted. We needed to be able to work out what values Aboriginal people found important and combine these with ecological and market based information (and so fill in the gaps of the chain).

In recent years the concept of university-community engagement has emerged (Commonwealth of Australia, 2003), which provided a framework for the KCTWM to formalise its approach to working in the Indigenous communities of the Top End.

University-community engagement at CDU is framed around the development of partnerships that deliver mutual benefit (Charles Darwin University, 2008). The articulation of community engagement at CDU has allowed the KCTWM to examine its engagement with the view to increasing its focus of delivering benefit to the communities it works in. However how engagement is built, and how mutual benefit is delivered, are still significant issues for Australian Higher Education institutions (Sunderland, Muirhead, Parsons, & Holtom, 2004).

Community engagement has been differentiated from things like community consultation, community service, community participation and community development, focusing on the fact that community engagement is not a service for the community, but a

partnership with it (Wallis, 2006). This means that both the university and the community are required to reconceptualise their relationship, something that is not necessarily quick or easy (Garlick & Pryor, 2002). In the case of Australian Indigenous community engagement literature is scarce, with only a small amount of research documenting its particular nature. Examples of the literature that does exist focuses on the building of trusting relationships, and respecting Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Campbell & Christie, 2008; Christie, 2008; Department of Environment Water Heritage and the Arts, 2008; Department of the Environment and Water Resources, 2004; Sunderland *et al.* 2004).

Ensuring adequate engagement with Indigenous communities is difficult because there are a range of cultural, language and literacy issues that need to be considered. Engaging Aboriginal townships in the NT requires knowledge of the history of that area and how the people came to live in that town. Many remote towns were originally government outposts or missions and they may now contain clan groups who do not get on and whose traditional lands are not close by. There are certain people within a clan group who make decisions for that group and others whose role it is to manage and look after that their country. Different people have different totems which may restrict their ability to harvest a particular animal or plant. There are cultural taboos which restrict certain family members talking to and working with each other. Ceremonial areas may restrict access to certain genders at different times of year. For these reasons Indigenous engagement should be facilitated by a person who is familiar with the community and their culture and is often best done using participatory techniques which give the community the ability to have ownership of the ideas and to define the boundaries according to their taboos, aspirations and other commitments.

Engagement with Indigenous communities is most effective when there are existing relationships with that community and an established level of trust. An established relationship with Aboriginal people often involves an outsider being ‘adopted’ into a family group so that they fit into the Aboriginal construct. This way the community members have a better understanding of how the outsider fits into the community and who they are connected to. Community participatory planning is an interactive facilitation technique which tries to involve the local people in the process and strives to ensure social outcomes such as ownership, empowerment, community control and autonomy (Moran, 2003). However, the level of community engagement is often determined by the framework used by the

organisation doing the engagement and this will determine the time and effort that can be spent in engaging.

Lessons from the field

This type of approach requires a much better understanding of the endogenous drivers within a community and can only be understood through closer interactions with a community often over an extended period. This approach endeavours to take into account many of the issues important to Indigenous communities that may not be included in a 'top down' approach. These may relate to decision making protocols, aspirations, cultural taboos etc which may not be mentioned to outsiders who do not have a close connection to the Indigenous community concerned. There are examples where the SLF has been adapted to try and make this approach more applicable to Australian Aboriginal circumstances (LaFlamme, 2008; Davies *et al.,* 2008) but it is the level of engagement that happens within this framework that will ultimately determine whether an appropriate level of engagement with the community has been achieved.

Working closely with an Aboriginal community can be seen as intrusive but is much less likely to be taken that way where a connection already exists and level of trust has been established with participants. Often a researcher will be adopted into a particular family and moiety which will allow the community to understand the researcher's place within their Aboriginal construct.

Developing a new approach

The awareness of the need to ensure that research delivers mutual benefit combined with the inability of university researchers to apply research findings through the RIRDC project was a concern for the KCTWM management board. One solution discussed was for an organisation more suited to supply this service to create a position dedicated to assisting Aboriginal communities progress wildlife based enterprise development. Since the aim of the CFCU of the Northern Land Council is to support Indigenous land and sea management and related enterprise development activities it was thought that it would be the appropriate place for such a position to be situated. However the critical issues for the KCTWM management board was to ensure that there were links between this position and the researchers within the KCTWM. The research objectives of the KCTWM, now School for Environmental Research

(SER), and land management/enterprise development objectives of the CFCU were complementary and the benefits of collaboration were obvious.

In 2004 the CFCU, with SER as a partner, were successful in securing a two year National Landcare Program grant to provide enterprise development support to Aboriginal communities. This funded a Wildlife Enterprise Development Facilitator position and operational funds to help five Indigenous groups progress wildlife based enterprises on their land. This position was filled by someone who had a good understanding of the value of research and who had good connection with staff from the KCTWM. It allowed for further collaboration in projects which had a research element but also delivered livelihood benefits to communities. It allowed for research to be taken up and put into action so that it could have direct benefits in on ground activity.

An example of a CDU project which linked in with the wildlife enterprise development facilitator position at the NLC was a NLP funded project in 2005/6 which looked at documenting the barriers affecting the progress of wildlife based enterprise development in Aboriginal communities. This project aimed to produce academic outputs (reports, seminars, journal papers) which would influence policy, government services and funding directions but also had potential to have a much more direct and applied output which would benefit the CFCU position and the communities they worked with. The CFCU position had close connections with many of the Indigenous ranger groups and Indigenous resource centres and had developed a level of trust which has proved to be important in fostering real involvement through participation. In 2006 the CDU and the NLC were able to have a combined workshop as part of this project resulting in both academic and practical outputs (Gorman *et al.* 2006a, b c, Gorman *et al.* 2008).

Current SER and NLC collaborations

SER now has an even closer link with the Caring for Country Unit because the Wildlife Enterprise Development Facilitator position is filled by a SER staff member on secondment.

This secondment has allowed for a better working relationship between the NLC and CDU through developing a better understanding of the different institutional procedures, network of staff, and facilitation of research with direct application. The CDU staff member on secondment will gradually reduce their commitment and hand over to the NLC having

developed close relationships with many of the Indigenous ranger groups, Aboriginal resource centres, NLC staff, NT Government Training departments and a working knowledge of how the NLC operates.

It is hoped that, given further research funding to support the NLC position, there will be further secondments to and from CDU and the NLC. The aim is to allow a pathway for research in general to be included in Caring for Country projects and SER research to be driven more from the ground up. Currently, much of the practical land management work that is happening through the NLC does not have a research component to it and in many cases does not take into account the latest research literature available. Facilitators often do not have research backgrounds and therefore are unaware of the benefits of linking their activities with research programs. This can have a number of implications. Firstly, research and its communication may outline an advance in certain land management procedures and techniques of which local practitioners are unaware. Secondly, the impacts of certain land management activities may not be quantified without research (baseline data) and thus less able to develop a case for ongoing funding support. Thirdly, there are specific Commonwealth funds for research that can tangentially contribute to land management activities. Fourthly, the recording and communication of land management activities through journal articles and books helps promote institutional continuity where there is a large turn-over of staff and loss of information. And fifthly, learning research techniques and procedures many open up a whole spectrum of opportunity for practitioners, particularly where those research practitioners are drawn from the community itself (Garnett *et al*. in press).

Summary

The CDU has had to adapt its approach to ensure that its research works in with the aspirations of the people involved in that research. It was fortunate to be able to do this through connecting with the NLC. Building these links with institutions to allow this level of collaboration takes time and needs to be considered a priority by research managers.

The benefits of a secondment approach are many and there are a number of agencies in addition to the NLC with whom it would be useful for research providers to have similar arrangements. Having knowledge of how different groups operate, and a network of people within these groups, allows for a much easier transition or collaboration between groups.

Ideally the NLC and CDU would have two parallel positions which are interchanged through secondments to allow both positions to develop an understanding of research, connections with communities and knowledge of procedure. This allows better integration of research into community development.

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WORKING FROM OUR STRENGTHS: INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT THROUGH ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

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Abstract

Community engagement is predicated on partnerships that respect and recognise all stakeholders' knowledge, strengths and needs. Effective approaches to training and workforce development in remote and regional communities use a range of tools to negotiate each stage of its implementation. The focus on improving engagement is connected to having the flexibility to imagine alternative ways of working with people. The community engagement and training approaches need to be as diverse as the Indigenous communities and participants involved. Approaches must also be connected to Indigenous enterprise contexts and through actual projects or enterprises.

With Indigenous communities, training may involve not only training people but also supporting the development of the workplace that will potentially employ learners. Training, then, needs to incorporate existing knowledge and contextualise all learning for that

particular situation. Enterprise development training is an approach to Vocational Education and Training (VET) policy, design and delivery for Australian Indigenous communities that can incorporate the key features of best practice in designing and implementing learning and business partnerships. The role that VET can play in developing enterprise and providing employment outcomes, particularly in remote areas, has been recently explored through several projects. This paper considers the key learnings through these projects and the implications for effective community engagement negotiated through enterprise development and training with Indigenous enterprise owners and community members, industry partners and registered training organisations.

Introduction

Over the past five years a team of Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners representing local enterprise, industry and Registered Training Organisations (RTO) have worked to improve training delivery and community engagement models in Northern Australia. These partners are based across Northern Australia and work with Indigenous cultural tourism enterprise development training. This work all began with a vision – that of Indigenous people to create opportunities 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. Partners in this vision were members of industry and registered training organisations. The enterprise based training partnerships were based on an asset model of learning. This concept focuses on working from learners' strengths and, often poorly recognised, knowledge to develop relevant skills.

This paper provides an examination of the elements of community engagement approaches implemented through a series of recent projects that were developed through a focus on enterprise development and training. The issues that project teams have explored include the recognition of diverse knowledge systems within the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process, the role of digital literacies in sharing knowledge and work-based learning. The paper then discusses a range of relevant issues such as working in partnership, being community and enterprise centric and negotiating the national training frameworks as they relate to sustainable enterprise development Essentially the paper focuses on the ways partnerships and relationships, rather than systems, can effect change in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system.

At the start of this paper, the authors acknowledge all of the Indigenous and non-

Indigenous partners throughout these projects who have generously shared their ideas, learning and experience, who challenge us to expect more and persist in making positive Indigenous workforce outcomes happen.

Significance

Young, Guenther and Boyle (2007:7) have found there is a

> significant misalignment between the content and delivery models of VET and the prior skills, educational demands and aspirations of desert Indigenous people. VET programs struggle to adapt to and address the types of learning needs that arise as a result of language and cultural differences and the different ways work is constructed.

Training providers, Indigenous enterprise owners, government funders and industry partners are challenged with negotiating new ways of working that are focussed on meeting the aspirations of Indigenous people. These approaches must contribute to Indigenous workforce development and are linked to the priorities and contradictions in resolving Indigenous peoples' cultural, social and economic sustainability, the national training frameworks and regionally based funding and governance structures.

As Mark Grose from Skinny Fish Music noted;

> Often the jobs or occupations that are identified for training in Aboriginal communities are those that do not incorporate or relate to traditional knowledge, languages or skills. They target the weaker skill levels of participants rather than capitalising and building on their strongest skills such as performance, cultural work and Indigenous traditional and contemporary knowledge (interview 19/04/2005).

Guenther, Young, Boyle, Schaber, and Richardson, (2005) identified the importance of training systems responding to client demand rather than driven by the suppliers' interests. In regional areas, a supplier driven programme may be typified by choosing courses based on the available teachers, using generic assessment from an alien environment or being driven by funding models rather than positive learning models. The importance of developing approaches to VET in Indigenous contexts, that develop employment opportunities and positive relationships with organizations that have the capacity and capability to support

community and family goals are well recognised (O'Callaghan 2005). Of value then, is to identify training approaches that reflect these priorities. Enterprise training is an approach to VET for Indigenous communities that has the potential to recognise Indigenous people's strengths to build financial and culturally sustainable livelihoods in remote, regional and urban contexts. Effective approaches to VET need to be identified and developed that incorporate best practice in designing and implementing learning partnerships with Indigenous communities.

Effective approaches to enterprise development and training are necessarily informed by community engagement processes. These processes assess and recognise the areas of strength that exist in communities and community members. The approaches demonstrate that partners hear, and act on, the workforce development aims of Indigenous people in holistic and locally contextualized ways. The Australian Federal Government's National Strategy for VET 2004-2010, *Shaping Our Future,* identified four national objectives and 12 strategies to meet the needs of the VET sector in Australia over 6 years. Indigenous Enterprise training and development projects target National Strategy Objectives 2 and 4 by aiming to ensure Indigenous Australians have the skills for viable jobs, a shared learning culture, increased business development and employment opportunities that lead to greater economic independence with employers and individual are at the core of VET. Indigenous people have identified the essential role of sustainable economic development in community independence, cultural maintenance, self-esteem and economic independence and the importance of engaging Indigenous people in productive economic activity.

The *Northern Territory Indigenous Economic Development Strategy* seeks to recognise the strength, resilience, diversity and cultural integrity of Indigenous people, and the high levels of disadvantage which impact the capacity of people, families and communities to engage in economic and social development activities. Indigenous enterprise training and development has operated in many cases to meet the aims of Indigenous people and communities.

Literature review

The development of models of community engagement around enterprise training is informed by the concepts of social enterprise and social partnerships in learning. Talbot, Tregilgas and Harrison (2002) describe social enterprise as

> a means by which people come together and use market–based ventures to achieve agreed social ends. It is characterised by creativity, entrepreneurship, and a focus on community rather than individual profit. It is a creative endeavour that results in social, financial, service, educational, employment, or other community benefits.

Developing innovative and successful approaches to community engagement through training in remote and regional contexts with Indigenous people necessitates effective partnership and the recognition of diverse knowledge systems as they relate to the worlds of work and learning.

Social partnerships in learning have the potential to offer frameworks for understanding the roles and networks that underpin community engagement for training and workforce development. Seddon and Billett (2004) have described social partnerships as

> the localised networks that engage stakeholders in a local area in a network that works on issues and activities of local importance. Effective partnership work embraces and harnesses the contributions of local partners and external agencies, their interactions and the changes they make in the collective work of realising shared goals. The processes of working together allow…(c)ommunities to identify and represent their needs and secure quality partners and partnership arrangements that will enable them to achieve their objectives

and for government and other agencies to support those goals. Social partnerships in learning, are the interagency and interdisciplinary relationships used to; examine diverse knowledge systems, develop capacity building processes and understand the underlying relationships that facilitate connections, engagement and decision making between government, non-government, enterprise, community, stakeholders and individuals (Wallace 2008:7). These frameworks operate at and across all levels i.e. involving individuals, organizations and learning systems. Social partnerships in learning (Wallace 2008) and social enterprise development (Low and Chinnock 2008) research has indicated that while the aspiration may be to work in systems that are democratic and fair, the realities are that the interactions between systems can be subverted by powerful players and external agendas. Staff turnover, inadequate representation, changes in policy, evaluations systems and input driven economic process can all contribute to social partnerships that work against effective community engagement and capacity building through training and enterprise development.

Any approach to community engagement acknowledges these realities and develop proactive approaches for partners to manage them.

Conducting a review of research Miller (2005) found the key factors in implementing training that meets the aspirations of Indigenous Australians noted they include self development skills, completion of educational subjects and courses at all levels, employment, self determination and community development. These aspirations are the key starting point for developing and implementing a training plan with Indigenous people, training organisations and industry partners. Miller (2005) found seven key factors are associated with positive and improved outcomes from vocational education and training for Indigenous people that must be considered regardless of the location, time or context;

- community ownership and involvement
- the incorporation of Indigenous identities, cultures, knowledge and values
- the establishment of 'true' partnerships
- flexibility in course design, content and delivery
- quality staff and committed advocacy
- extensive student support services
- appropriate funding that allows for sustainability (Miller 2005:5)

In exploring partnerships and effective practices in delivering VET with rural and remote Indigenous communities, the *Djama in VET* (Henry et al: 1998) study found six interconnected issues in VET delivery with Indigenous communities that contribute to best practice. These resonate with Miller's considerations and develop our understanding of key concepts at risk of tokenisation through a lack of deep engagement in their implications, for example, ensuring VET delivery is culturally appropriate by ensuring Indigenous community culture and knowledge are completely integrated and the relevant community has control over all aspects of VET delivery. The authors note training needs to be matched with current and developing work, embedded into community and community business and preferably taught by Indigenous trainers. The training must be based on meaningful partnerships between VET providers and community based enterprises where roles, practices and contexts related to training are justly negotiated. The learning relationships respect, and are sensitive

to Indigenous cultures and community development interests. Indigenous authority is of central importance in all aspects of the programme implementation. This is evident through the use of curriculum materials developed and tested for Indigenous communities, full participation of Indigenous Elders, employers and trainers, transparent processes and procedures to conduct the training and formal agreements that outline these principles and mutual responsibilities for all parties. Underlying these issues is the shared ownership of learning and relationships that underpin learning partnerships. An important element of these learning partnerships is the growing critical consumerism of the learning system.

Flamsteed and Golding (2005) have identified the issues for Indigenous enterprises that are different to the majority of non-Indigenous enterprises. They are more likely to be linked to subsidised or non-commercial community based activity and have a history of non-indigenous management or financial control. Being community rather than owner operated, enterprises emphasise usefulness and employment for community members rather than profit. Indigenous community enterprise members, while having a marketable product, have far less capacity to access the capital to develop their business than non-Indigenous business owners. This includes access to business services, commercial labour markets, business models and sites and learning through involvement in other Indigenous businesses. Flamsteed and Golding (2005) emphasised the importance of learning through business and incorporating learning opportunities that are linked to earning, context specific, developed in parallel to actual work and applied through practice in commercial business activities. They also noted the importance of incorporating resources that developed in terms of Indigenous entrepreneurs and enterprises and potential students and communities needs.

The challenge for enterprise training and development partnerships, then, is to make the enterprise and participants the centre of the programme, rather than the partnered associations, trainers or industry owners. These were effectively summarised by Harrison (2004) who points to the need for partners need to institute consultation processes for developing content and training delivery and establish equal relationships between all stakeholders based on long term mutual trust. Making Indigenous education locally and culturally relevant is a key challenge (Schwab 2006) in understanding how that engagement works or doesn't.

Approach

Over the past 4 years a series of projects were undertaken by a partnership of Indigenous enterprise owners, Registered Training Organisations and Industry representatives to explore the role of accredited training and effective pedagogies. Key partners in these projects were Indigenous enterprise owners across northern and central Australia, the Kimberley College of TAFE, CHARTTES Training Advisory Council (an industry representative body), and Charles Darwin University (CDU). As part of the Indigenous Community Engagement project conducted at CDU, the core research team representing each of these stakeholders subsequently undertook a thematic analysis of the projects outcomes. This was an opportunity to identify the broader themes that explore the role of Indigenous community engagement through enterprise development and training asset-based models.

Thematic analysis examines all of the relevant data concerned, classifies the patterns across the data, catalogues these patterns into sub-themes, seeks feedback from informants and develops an argument for choosing these themes (Aronson 1994). The research team analysed the project reports, outputs and data of each project to identify the common themes that are developed through each project. The analysis process identified examples of similarity and variation and the themes that emerged as the projects developed in expertise and sophistication. In particular, the research mapped the key areas of engagement that made a difference to the outcomes of enterprise based approaches to training.

Case Studies

These five case studies represent a development of thinking and practice across industries and regions about enterprise development and training. They each demonstrate a different aspect of Indigenous community engagement for community goals. These include;

- the role of digital literacies in sharing knowledge and work-based learning
- infrastructure issues such as funding, technology and skills sets
- approaches to sustainable enterprise learning and production,
- professional development and support for successful Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers;
- approaches that focus on partnerships and relationships rather than systems to effect change in the VET system.

The number of enterprises or cottage industries that can be developed in remote areas are limitless, and in these case studies included accommodation, tours, transport, construction, fishing, bush tucker, agriculture, horticulture, catering, arts and craft. The key individual findings are reported here while the broader themes that cut across projects are discussed later.

Our ART, Our PLACE, Our WAY – Sharing Art Centre Knowledge

In 2004 the project team, funded by Workplace English Language and Literacy, Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), now the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) developed resource tools that interpreted the work undertaken by Indigenous artists in remote art centres to the relevant competences and qualifications. This project sought to make the training system more applicable to Indigenous art centres and artists. Central to the project, was representing Indigenous artists' expertise, workplace learning, competence and contexts in a teaching and assessment tool mapped to the relevant national qualifications. The project focused particularly on building capacity in English Language and Literacy through the project rather than a barrier to participation and demonstration of competence. The resources and learning tools were stored on a CD-ROM format and copies distributed to art centres and training providers. As a result of considerable interest by Indigenous artists and art centre management, the resource will be extended to Indigenous art centre management and operations.

Top End Groove – Indigenous Tourism E-Learning

A national Indigenous Engagement project, funded by ANTA, was conducted in 2006 with Indigenous Tourism Operators from the Top End of Australia through which Indigenous enterprise operators, trialled and developed e-learning and e-business tools and information for the establishment phase of an enterprise. Through the workshops, key issues in using digital technologies were identified by successful enterprises and training partners. Key in this process was an exploration and negotiation of ways e-tools can be used to support enterprise development training. The outcomes were analysed and presented as a website www.topendgroove.com.au. This website is a work in progress, Indigenous tourism operators now being trained as administrators of the website so they can manage their own material and web content, create blogs and gain online feedback from visitors to their business.

Make It Real – Training For Enterprise

From 2004-2006, a national DEST project on successful Indigenous enterprise and training partnerships. Developed to explore policy and practices that would support enterprise training models with Indigenous people in the long term and to achieve high level outcomes for Indigenous people and communities. Five in-depth case studies of Indigenous enterprises were conducted across Australia and another sixty case studies analysed for issues related to good practice and strategies for developing businesses. This project brought together a unique knowledge source of VET professionals and Indigenous Community leaders who have been involved in establishing innovative and collaborative training partnerships in communities. The focus was to gain an insight into why these training enterprise partnerships were successful and to share the information and guiding principles for other enterprises and training providers. It is also significant that the project sought to ensure a strong Indigenous voice through active participation from design to implementation. These findings and tools were presented in multimedia format on CD-ROM.

Working from Our Strengths: Using e-learning to recognise knowledge and competence in Indigenous enterprise training and development

This 2007-8 Australian Flexible Learning Framework, project enhances practitioners' ability to work in flexible ways with diverse client groups and developing innovative and flexible approaches to assessment and skills recognition. This project identifies the VET industry-specific English based literacy inherent in the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, and recognises a range of cultural, workforce, digital, visual and other literacies. These literacies are necessary to engage in workforce learning and development or to establish and sustain a viable enterprise that offers ongoing and valued employment in regional and remote Indigenous communities. Participants have identified the literacies evident in their learning and workplaces and the ways these were identified or developed over their studies. Each participant has identified the need to develop expertise and qualifications as a trainer, supervisor or assessor in their industry area to build their enterprise opportunities and capacity within their homeland/ outstation/ community. The final product outlines a series of guidelines for recognising and assessing competence in a range of literacies and provides examples of approaches and tools to recognise and assess the identified literacies.

Working from Our Strengths – Recognising and building literacy through the Training and Assessment competencies

This project conducted over 2007-8 built on the work of Indigenous enterprise operators across northern Australia to develop effective strategies to ensure relevant, quality training and qualifications are implemented that support economic independence and knowledge management at a local and national level. Funded by DEST, the project used e-learning tools and technologies to support Indigenous enterprise operators' needed to map the development of training plan with their current and potential staff. Participants undertook recognition of prior learning (RPL) and current competence (RCC) processes that reflect the work undertaken in locally based enterprises and Aboriginal businesses using digital photographs, videos and stories, e-portfolios and web-based conferencing. The qualifications delivered related to the work in participating remote Indigenous enterprises; tourism, business and frontline management. The final product, a CD-ROM/DVD resource outlined the process for developing a training plan with an Indigenous enterprise team, ways to use e-tools to collect evidence to apply for undertake RPL and Recognition of Current Competence (RCC) and examples of successful e-applications for RPL and training plans.

Findings and Discussion

The important features of training and enterprise development have been outlined previously. The challenge is to translate these principles into deep and meaningful action rather than being tokenised without changing any tangible activities and behaviours. These are analysed through key themes across the projects. These projects' outcomes challenges VET providers to move to a model that works from Indigenous participants' strengths and is based on strong, sustainable social partnerships in learning. They demonstrate the responsibility of trainers and training providers in the community engagement process, before, during and after training had occurred. In these partnerships the priorities of enterprise, training and Indigenous partners developed with the success of their enterprises and partnerships.

Community engagement approaches were developed through the projects 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 though shared knowledge and trust, 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. By being context driven, engagement processes sought to establish in all participants' minds and actions that the centre of the relationship was the students' community and business, while the training provider or institution was remote.

The case studies 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 enterprise owners maintained responsibility for the learning contract. It was not the role of training providers to generate 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, this is achieved 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. There are many ways this can

happen, but all emphasized the importance of the Indigenous family, clan or tribal group leading the direction and processes of the enterprise and training.

Training providers must provide high quality training with trainers who have high level content skills, technological and cross cultural knowledge. Training outcomes and products used, with industry support need to generate income and employment and be linked to actual industry practice. The partners need to demonstrate their commitment to long term economic and industry outcomes; this includes relevant government support programmes such as Community Development Employment Programme employment and management. The partnership must have a commitment to income generation and independence for Indigenous participants, community development and social outcomes at its core.

Working with Indigenous enterprises is based on 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 it 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.

Enterprise development training was 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 was discussed, negotiated in the context and with the people who will participate in the training. Training was linked to

diverse knowledge sets and experiences, this requires partnership with the people who recognise, understand and own this knowledge. These partnerships were developed so that the shared professional decisions are valued and recognised.

Some of the programmes had underpinned the initial engagement and negotiation of training with activities that built self esteem through understanding self talk, comfort zones, goal setting and motivation. This, combined with ongoing customised training and mentoring, had a significant impact on individuals, and through their sharing a business and community. Students have the opportunity to discuss and analyse the ideas that have impacted on their learning engagement in the past and actively develop strategies to address those challenges. It also acted as a vehicle for developing strong relationships built on mutual understanding and trust for future training. Indigenous trainers have been key in implementing this approach successfully.

Workplace based learning and assessment was a key component of VET delivery where work, learning and assessment were well integrated. In the enterprise development workplaces, learning was based on the requirements of working in the Indigenous community context and cultural domains. Training was implemented according to students' individual needs and their involvement in work and cultural responsibilities and obligations. Through work based learning, assessment was conducted by assessors strongly connected to the relevant enterprise's work context. In this way, training was customized to reflect the needs of the Indigenous client group. Trainers, trainees and employers negotiated the learning projects to match appropriate workplace activities. Training activities and resources were developed over time and become part of the learning culture and resources in the community. In this environment, student support was characterised by initially integrating the principles described Langton et al (1998), not an additional activity.

Enterprise owners and trainers involved in training had expressed frustration in the previous lack of recognition of their knowledge and competence and the overriding emphasis on Standard English Literacy in assessment resources. We found the existing resources were inappropriate for Indigenous people who had worked at a high level of competence within their community, had established and sustained successful enterprises. Many people wanted to take up competencies in the Certificate IV Training and Assessment to extend their enterprise's viability and offer remote appropriate training, supervision and assessment services to RTOs and industry. Qualifications were not the final aim of training; employment

and personal outcomes needed to be the focus of any training framework. The exceptions were when the qualification was required for a specific job. Training outcomes and assessment were more relevant and successful where delivered on the job, particularly in remote areas, where industry 'context' is very different from anywhere else. There was a need for training providers to be creative in exploring a range of training packages combinations that are customized to clients' needs. That is, programs that consider clients' long term needs first, and secondly the other issues such as who will fund it, what will be delivered, who will deliver it. Training frameworks developed understood the flexibility of National Training System and ways to adapt the relevant training package to meet enterprises' requirements. The framework reflected the enterprise's goals rather than a single qualification or unit of competence.

Enterprise training recognises the importance of working with local community knowledge about governance, cultural knowledge, land ownership, and enterprise owners' priorities for the business and their lives. Digital knowledge systems and resources offered considerable opportunities to work in new ways. Technology has become increasingly intuitive and accessible in remote areas, making the use of ICT more viable. Digitally based resources supported people to learn and demonstrate competence across language and knowledge systems. The use of technology in training was negotiated rather than mandated which resulted in unexpected use of technology to share ideas and implement the outcomes into the enterprise's' business plan. Key to this is the role of Indigenous people in the development of the resources, using software and hardware resources within the enterprise and collecting evidence through an e-portfolio. The optimal use of multimedia is used in the normal operation of the enterprise and any training built the capacity and resources for that enterprise. Visual and audio means were used to demonstrate competence that has hitherto unrecognised by assessors and ensure students are assessed fairly and accurately.

Implications

The research described suggests some new directions to explore in partnership with RTOs, trainers, Indigenous enterprise owners and industry partners. Any training enterprise development training is framed by social learning partnerships that work across diverse knowledge systems and unequal power structures. Effective training is first and foremost about good partnerships, investing in the development of strong partnerships before, during and after training periods will improve the training and its outcomes, in the long term. 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 professional decisions are valued and recognised, this may be through investigating the developments in the Training and Assessment qualifications and associated payments.

Training can be negotiated within a framework that incorporates employment outcomes, teaching, assessment and learning strategies, units and resources. The framework can include a number of approaches that can build better approaches to training with Indigenous people and enterprises. Skills sets may be a better starting point for designing training plans and qualifications that fit Indigenous enterprise owners' priorities. By analysing the work in context and as it develops over time, skills sets can be established that are then matched to competencies. Digital resources offer the opportunity for people to demonstrate their competence through audio, visual and written forms, that can be flexible, mapped by Indigenous people to their knowledge systems and expectations and to more accurately represent Indigenous people's knowledge. As effective resources are developed and used by businesses they will form the examples for future training and development, and their developers becomes the future trainers. What is important then is ensuring people involved in training have digital literacies and the confidence to work across a range of emerging technologies.

Policy and funding structures need to be developed that focus on the outcomes of the training first, rather than the training itself. The place based approach which has been used by a range of state and federal governments to implement community development recognises the importance of investing in people, within locally negotiated frameworks, that work across and with existing structures and systems and investment in physical and human capital, such as networks (Steuart 2003) Enterprise partners need to work with government to develop participatory evaluation models to identify the impact of enterprise training programmes including economic, education and social determinants of health.

Conclusion

This paper has described a positive future, the challenges for policy and RTOs are opportunities to explore best practice and be partners in sustainable and inclusive training and enterprise development with Indigenous people. Community engagement and enterprise are not based on an idyllic view of the ways people and systems interact rather the focus is on building the capacity of partners to engage in complex and diverse relationships. Investment in those relationships in the long term supported the next stages community engagement such as tools to recognise diverse knowledge systems and examples of training delivery that walked alongside enterprise development. As people develop their awareness of these processes and the language to identify and discuss the ways community engagement operates, partnerships can continue to grow that manage change and complexity effectively and for the long term benefit of Indigenous learners, enterprise owners and workers.

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