

## CHAPTER 8 INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

All young Territorians should be able to achieve mainstream educational outcomes.

It is a right for all young Territorians to have access to quality, affordable education and training, no matter how difficult this may be to deliver.

The Territory values Indigenous languages and culture, and the desire of Indigenous people to preserve, maintain and participate fully in that culture.

Effective learning for all young people of the Territory can develop fully in schools only when neglect, violence, substance and sexual abuse, and other forms of antisocial behaviour are no longer tolerated in the community.

1. This chapter is concerned with Indigenous secondary education and the challenges and complexities it presents. On the one hand we have ostensibly equal access but divergent outcomes for Indigenous students in urban and major regional centres, on the other, we have overwhelmingly poor access and negligible outcomes in our remote areas. We are faced with an expanding student cohort and an increasing incidence of refusal, disengagement and disruptive behaviours that impact far beyond the school grounds. In this section the review team paints the current picture of secondary education provision and attempts to unpack the legacy of the varying historically situated roles of Indigenous education, and to suggest strategies forward, and we discuss how the cultural diversity in our Indigenous communities shapes the identities, values and aspirations of young Indigenous peoples.
2. The review has already made a series of recommendations that will contribute to improved attendance and learning outcomes for secondary aged Indigenous young people. A particular focus is to encourage the secondary-aged Indigenous people who are not currently attending school to enrol. Recommendations concerning the stages of schooling, the reorganisation of schools into learning precincts and the revision of the current policy whereby NTOEC is the registered provider of secondary education in most remote communities are designed to increase opportunities for Indigenous young people to have improved access to secondary education. These changes will enable schools in remote communities, that have sufficient numbers of students in Year 7 or beyond, to offer a middle years program with teachers onsite delivering core subjects and a pool of teachers available in the regions to deliver the other subject areas. In addition, the proposed changes to teaching and learning will allow Indigenous

young people to receive a high quality education that is challenging and relevant to their life experiences, as well as accounting for their individual learning needs.

3. The review team has taken note of numerous recent reports into the state of Indigenous education in the Territory, including the Learning Lessons report (Collins and Lea, 1999) and Taking Control (Boughton, 2001) and propose recommendations that build on the best and enhance other current DEET initiatives that are under way. We recognise and value the depth and breadth of the stakeholders in Indigenous education, and consistent with our overall approach, have put students at the forefront of our thinking and proposals.
4. In this section we look at the models and practices of current education provision and how young Indigenous people are, or are not, being prepared for educational success. We consider the role of language and culture in our schools. We address issues relating to the capacity and capability of our teachers and learners, and how we nurture family and community ties. The review team has also investigated how the services, resources and infrastructure of education do or do not meet the changing needs and cohorts of our Indigenous student population. Most importantly, we have extended this analysis to enable links with both whole-of-government approaches and emerging models of integrated service delivery, particularly for our remote regions. We consider strategic approaches to address the 'constancy of mobility' and to achieve transparency and mutuality of accountability measures.
5. In remote areas of the Territory, where the locus of education provision is the community itself, the review team has focused on the whole of education provision rather than just secondary, recognising that in these contexts the transitions, pathways and provisions of education services must not be further hampered by sectorial approaches.

## **The current situation**

### *The educational picture for our young Indigenous people*

6. Indigenous students currently comprise 32% of the secondary school population, with predictions of a substantial increase in the 14–19 age group by 2016 (Taylor, 2002). However, DEET enrolment and attendance data, ABS data, as well as evidence from consultations and submissions and the literature (Collins, 1999; Boughton 2001) revealed that significant numbers of young Indigenous people of secondary do not participate in education at all, and those who do are often disengaging by Years 8 or 9 in urban areas and even earlier in remote regions (see Chapter 2). In the major townships there is a diversity of secondary education provision in which they might participate. This includes comprehensive, and junior and senior high schools, non-government schools that may also have boarding facilities, one government boarding facility

and varying sites of alternative provision. While Indigenous students are attending most Territory schools, there are distinct concentrations of Indigenous students and in some areas, such as Alice Springs, there are diverging enrolment patterns between government and non-government secondary schools which resonate as a racial divide, with much lower proportions of Indigenous young people in non-Government schools not specifically established for them. In spite of the diversity of educational provision in Alice Springs, the Taking Control (2001) report estimated there are anywhere between 150 to 250 secondary-aged young people who normally live in Alice Springs who are not participating in education.

7. Across the remote regions of the NT there are 40 schools delivering some form of education to secondary-aged students. There are also a few non-government schools and two independent Indigenous boarding schools. In many areas there is no provision of secondary education. Where there is government provision, some occurs in Community Education Centres (CECs), some in Area Schools and some in Homeland Learning Centres (HLCs). Most of these participate in the dual enrolment system and utilise courses and support provided through the Northern Territory Open Education Centre (NTEOC). A few continue to use the Foundation and General Studies courses, originally conceived as a bridge to mainstream. There are few qualified secondary teachers in remote areas and curriculum offerings tend to be limited to English and maths supplemented by sporadic VET programs and other activities depending on the luck of the submission to government agencies for support. Of the 83 Teachers of Exemplary Practice (TEP) in the NT only one is located in a remote school. Many students also leave their remote communities to go to boarding school whether or not there is any local secondary education provision, in the hope of getting a 'better' education. Most do not stay away for more than a year. The issues relating to boarding schools will be taken up later in this chapter.
8. In remote areas, secondary provision, most often called post-primary, is tied structurally and in terms of resources and funding allocations to primary education. This association was consistently identified by review respondents as problematic, particularly where the provision, pedagogy and intent of 'post primary' education had not been demarcated clearly from that of primary education. The review team received many comments regarding the need for young people of secondary age to be treated as adults, for there to be separate provision for young men and women, and for the content and pedagogy of their learning environments to respect their cultural learnings and emerging status as adults.
9. Despite a few very positive examples of appropriate secondary education provision for Indigenous young people in discrete locales, the overall picture is grim. Issues of poor attendance, inadequate or inappropriate teaching practices, anti-social behaviour, classroom

disruption, trauma and neglect were frequently cited by parents, teachers and students in consultations and submissions as reasons for the poor performance of many Indigenous students in secondary programs. As stated by one Indigenous educator

*We are going backwards because of the many social problems. The parents are into drinking and gambling and their children make their own choices but they don't recognise any boundaries. It needs a holistic approach.*

The consistent challenge for schools was whether to 'fit' these young people into the system through bridging programs, attempt to address the ever widening gap in achievement through withdrawal practices, or to remove them altogether by suspension or letting them 'vote with their feet'.

10. It is the review team's view that both change and increased investment in teaching and learning must occur. However, it is also our view that the necessary change and investment cannot occur just within the 'silo' of education but also needs to be in partnership with broader strategies and approaches that are beginning to emerge. These are designed to support thriving regions and communities, pathways to employment, improved livelihoods and enterprising economic activity, strong governance and closer to the ground decision making regarding the provision and nature of essential services, including education. To this end we have put forward the concept of Learning Precincts, which were discussed fully in Chapters 6 and 7.

#### *Issues impacting on education provision*

11. The settlement patterns of remote Indigenous Territorians are decidedly different from those of other Territorians and other Australians. There are nine Indigenous communities with populations between 1 000 and 2 000 (all in the Top End), 50 communities with populations between 200 and 999, and the majority of Indigenous people are resident in some 570 small and dispersed communities of 50 people or fewer across some of the most remote and climatically harsh landscapes in Australia (Taylor, 2003; Walker, 2001). Indigenous people have responsibility for more than half of the land base, in terms of rights of use for traditional purposes; however, they are frequently the poorest people in Australia (Yunupingu, 2003). Indigenous people make up 25% of the adult population in the NT but have only 11% of the income (Altman, 2003).
12. Frequent mobility of residents within regions, and between regions and major towns is also a prominent characteristic across the NT. These patterns of settlement and movement, to an extent moulded through the histories of rations, missions, protectionism, assimilation and self determination, intersect with complex and enduring systems of language, obligation and affiliation to kin and country. This has resulted in considerable diversity of needs and aspirations amongst Indigenous peoples and groups.

13. Since the beginning of government education provision during the 1950s, decisions about schools have been formulated at the top, but enacted on a community-by-community level. These decisions have presumed permanent student/family domicile within the community, teacher availability and sustainable governance structures of schools and councils. This construction of the discrete community as the most valid social structure of Indigenous peoples dismisses the enduring reality that they always have moved, and will continue to move, socially, culturally and economically across a series of overlapping and interconnected regions (Ah Kit, 2003).
14. The geographic spread and small size of these communities present great difficulties for effective service provision, including provision of education. The evidence before the review team suggests that maintaining enrolment numbers in the face of shifting student populations, sustaining parent and community engagement with the school, even in terms of cultural transmission, and maintaining resources and infrastructure, raises questions about the 'community' as the most viable locus for decisions about educational service delivery. In many sites, the reality of increasing community dysfunction places further strains on sustaining education services.
15. The review team notes the moves of the Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs (DCDSCA) towards regional approaches to service delivery as identified in their Stronger Regions, Stronger Futures Strategy (2003). There are links between what we are suggesting regarding ways of organising educational service delivery, and emerging regional models, that should be expanded to support capacity building and sustainable futures for Indigenous peoples. For example, the emerging focus on developing new regional governance structures that more authentically represent families and clans across regions rather than a community, and enable a focal point for decisions about service delivery, could also serve to enhance education services as well as the management of these. The excessive and burdensome accountability and reporting requirements for each program of funding additional to core educational services could well be addressed through a more streamlined and 'one stop shop' conduit for distribution within identified regions.
16. Mobility of students is also a critical issue for town schools. Increasing numbers of Indigenous people are resident both permanently and periodically in the major towns of the Territory, including in town camps. One Year 8 teacher in a regional high school commented that *one quarter of the students turned over four times per year*, that is, a quarter of the students in the class were new in each of the four terms.

17. While some secondary schools in the major towns report Indigenous enrolments of up to 45% of total enrolments, the cohort is focused within the junior secondary years and decreases by Year 9 or 10. In 2002 there were 78 Indigenous students undertaking the NTCE in Years 11 and 12 and only 52 of these completed, representing 6% of the total number of Year 12 students eligible to complete the Certificate. These are quite small numbers given that 32% of the secondary cohort are Indigenous. The reasons for such low retention rates are multiple and complex. For some students it is lack of access, for others it is insufficient literacy and numeracy skills, and for many issues such as poor health, substance abuse and a lack of family support combine to make attendance at school problematic. The Taking Control Report (2001, p.22) suggests *a fundamental lack of fit between the school system and the needs of aspirations of its Indigenous clients* underlies these poor retention rates. For many young people, school is a pastime until the age of 10 or 12, marked from the beginning by poor attendance and achievement, and largely irrelevant and not proper in structure and design once they become young men and women.
18. Alternate models of educational provision for those disengaging or refusing mainstream education have emerged but many struggle to sustain themselves. The Yarrenyty-Arltere Learning Centre at Larapinta Valley town camp, for example, is an initiative in alternative education for 'at risk' young people. Its set-up was supported by the Commonwealth, and currently it is struggling to continue as ongoing funding is not readily forthcoming. There is also a need to formally evaluate these models of alternative provision to determine the extent to which they improve educational and social outcomes for secondary students (Boughton, 2001).
19. Many schools with large numbers of Indigenous students have to devote significant amounts of their effort and energy to behaviour management, withdrawal programs and remediation rather than teaching and learning. A comment heard often by the team and certainly of some concern to many teachers was that the least skilled and supported of the school staff often supported the most at risk and educationally needy students.
20. In many areas, but particularly remote, the review team doubts that what is being delivered meets acceptable criteria for secondary education. We saw watered down or ungraded curricula with examples of busy-work and low expectations of young people due to their poor attendance and 'lack' of English literacy and numeracy skills. In some instances, there was a strong demand for *mainstream* rather than *special* curriculum. There were good examples of dedicated teachers trying to do the best for students, and parents desperate to see their children succeed, but overall the picture is disheartening.

21. Where VET courses were being trialled there were some successes but they were easily dismantled through lottery-like funding regimes and minimal pathways to enterprise or employment. As one community-based education worker commented
- We live and die on the goodwill of DEET and they froze all their funding in February, so there's been no driver training in the community at all. At this stage we're still waiting for the official story. The irony is they'll probably get it flowing in July and there'll be no students!*
22. The prevalence of substance abuse, and the increasing numbers of very young mothers highlight the fact that there is an urgent need to re-frame education to address the realities of young people and their health, social and personal problems (Boughton, 2001; Central Australian Regional Indigenous Health Planning Committee [CARIHPC], 2001). It has been documented in recent reports about Indigenous education (Collins 1999, Commonwealth of Australia, 2002; HREOC, 1999; MCEETYA, 2001) that educational provision to remote communities of Indigenous people is very much embedded in the increasingly social and emotional dysfunction that forms the fabric of daily life. Two generations of passive welfare dependency, ongoing and chronic health problems and escalating patterns of addiction (alcohol, gunga, petrol) overlay a dynamic and changing composition of cultural, kin and language practices of the 'traditional' culture. Communities are complex ecologies of language, affiliation and hybrid economies (welfare, gambling, royalties, work, small enterprise, art and so on) presenting with stressed physical infrastructure and marked by poverty, and often despair. What was also apparent was the onslaught of a plethora of often uncoordinated if well-intentioned programs and services across sectors of government and private enterprise, which have the unintentional effect of adding considerable burden to local governance structures, including schools and their staff, with seemingly little sustained impact (Pearson 2001).
23. Based on the results of national benchmark tests (see Chapter 2), the educational outcomes of Indigenous students in the NT through the primary years of schooling are demonstrably poor. It has been emphasised earlier in this report that outcomes for Indigenous students must improve if they are to have any chance of succeeding in secondary education. Additionally, the transition to secondary schooling, with its emphasis on learning content rather than on the process of learning, is a huge hurdle for most young Indigenous people. We were nevertheless heartened by some concerted efforts being undertaken on some communities. For example, rather than blaming poor literacy and numeracy skills, or 'culture' as reasons for not pursuing rigour in secondary education, the teachers and principal at one CEC, supported by the community, have lifted expectations dramatically. Instead of adhering to a lock step approach to literacy and numeracy development they are using applied learning and ICT to support students' literacy and numeracy learning at age-appropriate levels. The school principal commented

*To us the secondary program starts in Transition. You must start with high expectations and sustain them throughout the primary and secondary years.*

24. Effort and improved outcomes by young Indigenous people should be celebrated. Yet such success can seem hollow when the transition from school to 'what' looms as large for those in remote regions who do well as for those who disengage. One of the most repeated comments from Indigenous parents and elders was the need to *stop petrol* and do something about *boredom. The young people have nothing to do.* The team consistently heard comment from parents about the need for their 'kids' to be literate and numerate in English, to have jobs and employment on their communities. Pockets of intensive effort and dedication by teachers exist, but it was apparent that only where there was systemic change at the whole school level, a willingness to re-invent the nature of classroom pedagogy and practice and develop proactive linkages to community, youth, health and employment services, was the challenge being transformed into an opportunity for both students and teachers.

25. The review team observed that increasing numbers of young people were being sent away by their families to boarding schools across the Territory and even interstate, as a means to divert them away from an induction into boredom and dysfunction. The main reasons were for them to be away from substance abuse and for their learning to continue. In many instances we found that parents and community members had little understanding of the 'real' levels of achievement of young people upon completing primary schooling, or an understanding of the level at which they would be working at a high school. The boarding school pathway through secondary schooling is only proving partly effective. Both parents and young people themselves spoke of these issues, as the comment below indicates

*Over the years we've had heaps of kids go away to boarding school but sending them away hasn't helped at all. A lot drop out. They are either too homesick or the work is too hard for them. They might get into fights or they might get teased.*

The issue of boarding schools will be further discussed in a later section in this chapter.

26. The review team frequently received comments, from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people that many of those schooled in the 'mission' days, or those taken away, are the people who are the most literate, numerate and orally proficient in English and often may be the only ones so skilled on their communities. This seems a simplistic view, with a trade-off between literacy and numeracy and trauma taking a long time to resolve.

27. There is no doubt that the regimes of community life were also decidedly different during the mission days. Indigenous people educated in those times also spoke of school as places of hunger, fear and punishment operating within a structure of strict controls around what Indigenous adults and children could and could not do (Cummins, 1990). Movement was

restricted, awareness of the outside world very limited. The missions have been described as cocoons of attempted conversion, smoothing pillows<sup>18</sup> and 'saving' the young by enforcing educational participation in ways unacceptable today.

28. More recent educational policies have enabled a place for language and culture in schools in the Territory. The handing back of significant tracts of land and sea to Indigenous peoples and the associated 'back to country' movements have supported a range of Indigenous organisations. Diverse and growing service provision has provided at least a minimal economic safety net through welfare support payments. However, such policies have also effectively locked many Indigenous people out of the 'real' economy (Pearson, 2001).
29. Currently 60% of total Indigenous income is from welfare payments (Taylor, 2003). These policies have co-existed and perhaps unwittingly aided a gradual demise and escalating social crisis for Indigenous communities. It is arguable that the current ways of being inclusive of traditional languages and cultures in education, or in governance structures, have not stopped the negative effects of cultural change and have not assisted in improving economic and social conditions for Indigenous people.
30. There is a pressing need for Indigenous people to negotiate explicit ways of engaging with what education is for and to then move towards an educational provision based on mutual respect and a balance of rights and responsibilities. Given the diversity of Indigenous peoples and ways of living, these negotiations must be enacted locally. An elder in one Indigenous community commented
- Parents need more education about the whitefella's way of education, about attendance and curriculum. You have to spend some time teaching parents and explain why kids need schooling.*
- Capacity may at this stage be tenuous but there is a need for a partnership as opposed to a supplier/consumer approach; that is, where mutually enacted agreements spelling out rights, responsibilities and performance outcomes for educational services are explicitly and jointly negotiated, and the services are supplied on the basis of these rather than provided and measured against outcomes far removed from the users of that service (Cunningham, 2003). Only then can education capture its role in enabling the aspirations of individuals and families, rather than enabling the providers to look and act culturally appropriate.

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<sup>18</sup> This comment refers to a belief, popular in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century and heavily influenced by social Darwinism, that 'primitive' peoples such as Australia's Aborigines, would in effect die out as the struggle for the 'survival of the fittest' progressed. The euphemism "smooth the pillow of a dying race" is drawn from writings by Dame Daisy Bates.

## Issues of pedagogy and purpose

*Respect is a little word with a big meaning*

31. The above statement from an Indigenous educator echoes our focus on mutual respect as a core component for effective teaching and learning practices. As outlined in Chapter 3, the most important factor in student performance is the quality of teaching and learning and the relationships it entails. Where we have a cohort of students entering secondary school with
- minimal fluency in English language
  - a fragmented primary school experience
  - significant health problems
  - home environments where their education can not be adequately supported
  - few positive role models
  - the reality of school and school achievement as peripheral to daily life and future expectations
- the quality of teaching and learning becomes absolutely critical, and very challenging, to deliver.

32. The reality for many young people is that English is a foreign language or a different dialect, where school 'work' is the main and often the only context for speaking, listening, reading and writing English. The living practices and expected ways of 'being' young people within schools may differ dramatically from the rest of their lives. Put all this together and we have a situation where educational pedagogy and purpose must not only be explicit and rigorous but must also push the comfort zones of mediocrity and implicit deficit models.

One teacher put it this way

*Struggling students are labelled as poor achievers from when they arrive in high school, with the majority of these students being Indigenous. They are viewed as deficit and the expectation of these students is much lower even by the most well-intentioned teachers. These students can only access different curriculum, special programs and withdrawal groups for their learning needs.*

As this quote would suggest, many of our young Indigenous people are faced with not only being labelled as 'different' because of their language, culture or appearance, but where such difference interacts with the systems and practices of Western culture, this 'difference' tends to align with being viewed as deficient.

33. As pointed out in Chapter 3, there has been some debate amongst educators about the need for a particular set of pedagogies to cater for Indigenous learning styles. One of the seminal works on Indigenous pedagogy was Harris' (1980) research into Indigenous learning styles. Harris argued that Indigenous people learn in different ways from non-Indigenous students; they learn from observation and imitation rather than from verbal instruction, they use trial and error to practise new skills and they learn from real life experiences rather than in

artificial settings. Many Indigenous educators have embraced Harris' work; however, others are sceptical claiming learning styles theory offered an excuse for the poor educational achievements of Indigenous students, while ignoring the social and economic disadvantages that impede their learning. They also argued that Harris' reductionist view presents Aboriginal and non-Indigenous belief systems and learning styles as mutually exclusive and oppositional and his research cannot be applied to the diversity of Indigenous groups across Australia (DETYA, 1997; Stewart, 2002).

34. More recent literature (Hughes, 1997; Stewart 2002) asserts that while there are some learning approaches which are more likely to occur among Indigenous students, there is no single set of Indigenous learning styles. Moreover, although students (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) may have preferred learning styles, most students use a combination of approaches when learning. While an awareness of these preferred learning styles can be helpful when planning and delivering lessons for Indigenous groups, knowledge about individual learning styles must take precedence. It is important to avoid using learning styles to stereotype Indigenous students, and teachers must take into account the wide variations amongst individuals in any cultural group.
35. Gray's (2003) scaffolding approach to teaching literacy is currently being trialled in the NT in pilot schools in urban, regional and remote areas through DEET's Accelerated Literacy Project. Early results from these schools indicate Indigenous students, particularly older students, have made significant improvements in their reading literacy levels. The most recent report on the project states that, *on average, those students who have joined the scaffolding literacy teaching programs...have gained almost 2 year levels in reading per year of actual schooling*. Given the success of these strategies, the review supports the expansion of this project and its pedagogies. We also believe that the recently developed School for Social Research and Policy at Charles Darwin University (CDU) can play an important role in working with teachers using an action research model to develop, trial and evaluate new pedagogies for Indigenous students.
36. There is much documented evidence (Rose, 2003) that despite more than 20 years of curriculum changes, policies and practices of inclusivity and new methods of teaching and learning, our school system continues to produce outcomes for students that reflect the stratified social system of the old economy. That is, we have 10-20% moving through to higher education, 20-30% moving through to VET and vocational learning, and the remainder either finding unskilled work or joining the unemployment queues. For too many of the Territory's Indigenous people the latter option remains the most likely. Welfare or Commonwealth Development Employment Program (CDEP) payments comprise more than two thirds of

Indigenous income in the Territory with only 16% of Indigenous people employed in the mainstream, a figure that seems to be steadily dropping (Taylor, 2003).

37. In the Territory there have been significant changes to curriculum over the past ten years and pockets of intensive effort regarding teaching methods and practice. However, much of the debate has centred on appropriate learning styles, bilingual as opposed to tuition in English, recruiting, retaining and training teachers, special education, behaviour management and attendance. While these are very important micro issues to do with school functioning and student outcomes, the debate is noted for its overall lack of engagement with the broader or macro issues that impact on educational outcomes.
38. If education is currently moving the majority of our Indigenous people through to 'nothing', it is more than time that the provision of education services, particularly secondary, becomes driven by the goals of enterprising action and an aspiration to viable social and economic futures. Such goals explicitly incorporate the means to enable the social change process required to build sustainable capacity across the regions of the NT. The Taking Control report (2001, p.44) supports this position, claiming *not only does education greatly increase an individual's chance of employment, it is also absolutely essential for the community's capacity to maintain a functioning economy.*
39. The incorporation of enterprise and vocational learning as a core aspect of teaching and learning for the new territory has been discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. For young Indigenous people living in vast and remote landscapes, such a pedagogical shift is paramount. Not only was the need to focus on the pathways that education could open up repeated in almost every consultation, so also was the need for young people to learn *what work means*. Yet these concepts are often alien to the realities and role models around them. There is also a need for VET training to lead to productive outcomes, so it is important to develop programs in accordance with both community aspirations and local employment and enterprise opportunities. The Taking Control report (2001, p.44) believes this will lead to *VET being seen as of value in its own right, not a lesser option.*
40. To say that this is no easy task is trite. Opportunities for social and economic participation must be created, as few currently exist. The issue of grants to establish enterprises in local communities is explored in more detail in Chapter 10. Teachers will have to be at the forefront of enabling innovative and practical applications of enterprise learning. These can then be supplemented where possible by VET programs. Teacher training programs that prepare people to do this are rare.

### **The role for Indigenous languages and culture**

41. Schools are sites of cultural transmission. Beginning with learning the communicative tools and practices of the school, literacy and numeracy, students progress 'logically' to secondary schooling, where they learn a range of subjects and the literate ways of thinking and doing within each subject. While this natural progression of schooling is being challenged Australia wide, nowhere is the challenge of providing effective English as a second language instruction to native born Australians more sharply defined than in the NT.
  
42. During the past 30 years or so there has been a concerted attempt to graft Indigenous knowledge and communicative practices onto school practices as a means to value their heritage, increase relevance and promote Indigenous ownership and control. There is much evidence to suggest that practical measures to value the knowledge capital and identity of our Indigenous young people are critically important to improving outcomes. While the Indigenous Languages and Culture component of the NTCF offers schools the opportunity to include studies of Indigenous culture and languages in the curriculum and Indigenous learning is a cross curricula perspective, some students and parents commented in consultations that there was insufficient Indigenous content in school courses.
  
43. On the other hand, we saw many examples of strong Indigenous school councils and committed Indigenous teachers trying to support their students' understanding of their place in both cultures. We also saw examples where bush tucker excursions and football were so prominent that the young people, although attending well, were engaging in little formal learning. These were the contexts where 'culture' was so much the focus of schools that mainstream educational outcomes were increasingly diluted. That Indigenous peoples have a right to practise and maintain their traditions and languages is not in question. The role schools should play in this task is a matter that requires further examination.
  
44. How do we move beyond what is in essence the mainstream's 'cultural cringe' and turn the lens forward to enable young people and their families to negotiate the interface of traditions and futures, including those possible and viable within communities and regions as well as in urban centres? How can being a 'traditionally enriched' Indigenous Territorian *not* negate educational achievement or be a sentence to welfare dependency? Building on the Collins report implementation strategy and the current Secondary Indigenous Education Strategy, the review team would aim for a practical consolidation of ways to value Indigenous knowledge capital and role models and mentors across school learning, while also working towards enhancing young Indigenous people's ability to operate effectively in Western domains. This should include rigorous support for the transitions of schooling, including the critically important post-school pathways to livelihoods, enterprise or employment activities, as well as enacting

targeted early intervention strategies for those at risk. A requirement by elders for young people to reach a certain level of achievement at school before they can be initiated into manhood and womanhood is a potential strategy that could be taken up with communities.

45. Most learning environments in remote areas of the Territory – primary, secondary and adult – are contexts of multi-lingual and multi-dialectical practices. Young Indigenous people there will almost certainly speak a language other than English as their first language, most will speak the primary language of the community as their first but there will also be some whose first language may be a related language, for example, one of the Western Desert languages, or another discrete language. Some will speak Kriol and all will have varying fluency in Aboriginal English.
46. With greater exposure to the outside world and the pervasive engagement with the various media, young people *are* developing skills in a range of ‘Englishes’ appropriate to the differing contexts and relationships of their environments. In essence, these are contexts of complex language ecologies, that are largely oral and graphic and where literacy in the sense of print is more often than not limited to school-based practices. Overall opportunities for English language use are usually very limited, and many young people expressed *shame* about their English language skills, which they come to realise are hard to understand in mainstream society. They did tend to use English more readily where they were engaged in collaborative activities, with shared purpose. As one student commented, *I like going on excursions where we have to try out our English and we all help each other out.*
47. Bilingual, or two-way schooling, has been the most formal attempt to work with these complex language ecologies of communities. There are currently 12 government schools in the Territory that are part of the Two-way Learning Program and a smaller number of independent schools are also participating. The two way model attempts to explicitly value Indigenous languages and traditions as equal in the learning environment and is thus staffed and resourced differently from other schools. It is also premised on instilling a literate orientation to learning through Indigenous language first followed by English and to this end has been dependent on Indigenous adults or dedicated long term teachers or teacher linguists, with vernacular literacy skills and access to avenues for developing literacy resources. Its realisation as an effective pedagogical approach also arguably depends on both vernacular and English literacy practices becoming *a way of being* within the community, so that immersion in and use of these practices can reinforce and support educational activities. As one teacher stated  
*What do they need to read and write their language for, when for many it isn't even their language and there isn't anywhere to use those skills?*

48. The evidence before the review team would suggest that there are few examples of vernacular or English literacy practices integrated within community life and two-way schools are currently struggling with their endeavour as much as other schools. This may not have been the case in the past, but current reality appears quite stark. In a number of schools with two way learning both Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers were concerned about their students' abilities to read and write in English. A non-Indigenous teacher commented

*All teaching is done in the local language until Year 4. Sometimes it's not even the kids' first language. It's impossible to get the students up to benchmark by Year 7 and prepare them sufficiently for secondary education.*

This is not to question the value of languages but to suggest that all schools in remote areas, not just those designated two-way, and many in urban areas, operate in multi-lingual contexts and all teachers must have the capacity and capability to negotiate these. There is a need to recognise the diversity and dynamics of local language ecologies and practices and use these as the stepping-stone for productive pedagogical practice.

49. In essence, a language ecology approach would enable a focus for the professional development of all staff that is premised on the recognition of the existing language skills of students and the social practices of their environments. It would also allow an explicitness in teaching and learning practices based on rigorous recognition of what are and will be the difficulties experienced by students, as well as the means to utilise existing social practices of language use and expand on these. These approaches to English language and literacy learning are integral to the pedagogical transformations recommended in this review.

50. We therefore suggest that there are a number of critical issues for educational endeavours operating in multi-lingual contexts. There is a need to

- focus on the relationships in teaching and learning between young Indigenous people and their teachers
- develop locale specific linguistic and intercultural understandings of the difficulties faced by young Indigenous people in learning Standard Australian English
- match language programs and literacy tasks to the contemporary situations of young people
- align the goals of education towards the repeatedly expressed goals of community members to achieve self determining post colonial regions with social and economic futures
- build the future capacity of Indigenous people to negotiate effectively at the interface of the range of traditions and ways of life.

51. Many family and community members as well as teachers, spoke of the importance of two-way approaches to learning and the importance of these to achieving successful mainstream

outcomes for young people. Some spoke of how young people are *forgetting their culture* or *don't feel connected* because of the explosion of violence and dysfunction. Most spoke convincingly of the need for *young people to see themselves as the next school teacher or principal* and the critical importance of post school pathways on the community.

52. Most schools in remote areas have over time assumed a role as the locus for cultural maintenance and transmission. In two-way schools this locus was formalised over time as vernacular and other resources were developed, utilised and housed in the literacy production centres attached to these schools. There is no doubt of the importance of maintaining Indigenous languages and cultures and until recently there has been a studied indifference and withholding or whittling away of support for their perpetuation by education systems. There is a need for renewed resourcing and state of the art mechanisms to enable language, maintenance of traditions and renewal activities, but the review team believes strongly these need to be established as activities distinct from the core responsibilities of schools.

53. One's language and traditions are intrinsically important to identity and to establish self-esteem. As the experience of the Indigenous art, tourism and music industries would attest, they also present unique avenues for viable economic activity and social cohesiveness. In light of the emerging desert and tropical knowledge initiatives, the fluctuating but ever present demand for authentic tourism experiences, the emerging interest in biodiversity for pharmaceuticals and 'tucker' and land for mining and development, Indigenous knowledge has currency not only for its intrinsic value but also for the social and economic opportunities it can generate. Innovative ways to support the holding, renewal and protection of this knowledge and practice must be supported. A submission from the Diwurruwurru-jar Aboriginal Corporation pointed out

*We have over half of our Indigenous interpreters move on to mainstream employment after training in the use of Indigenous languages in the workplace. Knowledge of languages has been invaluable in increasing understanding of the legal and medical fields. Interpreting is providing ongoing and expanding opportunities for employment.*

54. To this end the review team proposes that facilities and mechanisms should be identified to enable the establishment of Language Nests at the community level. These would be small centres, linked to a larger regional Knowledge Centre, that are sites for nurturing language and tradition, are places where these are studied, sung, discussed, viewed, painted, video edited, archived. They can happen on Saturdays or daily and add value to the Indigenous studies, music or extra-curricula activities. The links between these Nests and the school should be brokered initially by Indigenous education staff.

55. There may also be benefit in investigating and building on the Ara Irititja project in South Australia and the initiatives being undertaken through the Cape York Partnerships in relation to

digital holdings of Indigenous knowledge and enabling contemporary avenues for cultural transmission. The Indigenous Knowledge Centre Initiative of the Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs could be linked to the smaller Language Nests and become the places for the holding, renewal and creation of traditional practices that could be accessed and utilised by education and other services. With the current rollout of ICTs across the Territory, and Commonwealth initiatives through the Telecommunications Action Plan for Remote Indigenous Communities – TAPRIC (DCITA) that include the establishment of Community Access Centres, the digital medium presents great opportunity for education, enterprise and cultural maintenance.

56. Literacy and numeracy have been discussed in detail in Chapter 3. While the importance of literacy and numeracy manifests itself nowhere more starkly in the Territory than in the contexts of Indigenous education, it is by no means the only context where issues regarding their teaching and learning arise. We believe an ‘all stops out’ approach to raising the skills levels of young Indigenous people in these practices should be embraced. Separate or special measures for Indigenous young people have not been supported by this review. Instead we recommend that teaching and learning strategies currently reporting outstanding results, such as the Accelerated Literacy program, be supported.
57. Alignment of these with informed English as a Second Language (ESL) programs and professional development is also recommended. Combined with a targeted focus on enterprise education activities as core school activities, as well as attention to the economic and social pathways beyond formal learning, we believe we will be setting the stage for renewed vigour and outcomes from our educational endeavours in Indigenous communities. The charge upon all involved in Indigenous education will be to foster continuous improvement and innovation that work for young Indigenous peoples despite acknowledged obstacles and disadvantage.

### **Capacity and Capability**

58. Effective schooling is dependent on the capacity and capability of the people involved. Where schooling is trying to respond to the very challenging needs of Indigenous learners in primarily Indigenous domains, on the fringes of mainstream or within the mainstream, the range of skills, knowledges, attitudes and the ability to apply these to foster positive learning experiences and outcomes are critical.
59. Many leaders, teachers and support staff are struggling to cope and adapt to the expanding demands being placed on them. Not only are they reacting to the increasingly frayed social fabric, they are often working within contexts for which they are ill prepared and unsupported.

*The level of the kids coming into secondary dumbfounded me. Many education staff also spoke of the daily trauma experienced by young people*

*It's amazing kids get to school at all. If kids down south had this level of trauma they wouldn't be here.*

60. It was very apparent to the review team that many of the people involved in education feel they are operating in isolation and this is exacerbated by feelings of powerlessness. In urban schools many teachers spoke of ineffectual or non-enforced rules or behaviour management policies and there were a number of comments about being no longer *respected as teachers* or being threatened within classrooms. In remote areas teachers often spoke about being the only ones *trying to educate the community about education* to improve attendance or discuss levels of achievement or future options for the young people. Family members and elders on communities often spoke of their own powerlessness in getting the young people to listen to them and were also dealing with being *bossed or bullied*. Many expressed great despair about the reduction of jobs or traineeships for Indigenous people on their communities and felt very *upset that these were all going to whitefellas and their families*.

61. Distributed leadership, timely and focused support, within collectively negotiated and agreed directions to improve capacity to address such issues, are of paramount importance. At one remote school, seven Indigenous teachers representing each language group in the community, are sharing the assistant principal duties. The teachers commented

*We prefer to share the responsibility of leadership as we can support each other with the workload and in making hard decisions.*

To this end the layered recommendations put forward by this review, beginning with pedagogy and moving through to enabling structures and linkages to support real outcomes reflect the layered complexities of Indigenous education provision.

### **The needs of our young Indigenous people**

62. That all young people, including young Indigenous people, have talents, abilities and strengths is one of the underpinning principles and beliefs of this review. Our current capacity to nurture these in educationally meaningful ways is nowhere brought more sharply into question than when considering our Indigenous students. The rise and demise of pockets of alternative provision, the drift of these young people to Indigenous and/or VET providers and most worryingly the numbers disengaging altogether, raise critical questions about the current relevance of our secondary education system.

63. In remote areas, young Indigenous people spoke of their ambitions to be football players, go on CDEP, get a car and in a few instances get a job as a health worker at the clinic or go to Darwin to become a mechanic. Many found the English and maths curriculum boring and as

one teacher observed, *they don't understand what literacy and numeracy are for*. It would seem that not only are the links between education and future aspirations tenuous, but many young people express future choices almost always within the constraints of the limited opportunities currently available to them.

64. Both parents and the young people themselves enthused about the intermittent occasions Centralian's Mobile Adult Learning Unit (MALU) van appeared, or trainers from the Centre for Appropriate Technology (CAT). But these occasions come infrequently, seeming to drop out of the sky, and life reverts quickly to being *pretty boring*. It is little wonder that the excitement of football matches and trips within regions or to town take precedence over schooling.
65. Where education arrangements conflict with ceremonial expectations, cultural obligations often take precedence. However, in some places, the cultural responsibility around Men's Business is being re-negotiated to include Western educational issues. Ways to re-define status could include making a ceremony of transition from primary to secondary. This could be similar to or incorporated in initiation, to clearly identify growth towards adulthood in Western education, so that the young men's difference is clearly marked, even if they remain in proximity to the younger ones. A traditional elder suggested
- Secondary programs for Aboriginal people need some kind of distinction from primary, to acknowledge that the students are no longer children, plus find a way to pass on the traditional skills that are being lost, so the two go together, and they 'grow up' in both cultures.*
66. Taking this a step further, it might be possible to make traditional initiation contingent upon achieving a certain level in Western education. This has been tried successfully in some communities in South Australia, but obviously is only possible where there is a carefully negotiated and strong commitment from the elders. This will create a tension with the current trend towards boys being brought forward for initiation at younger and younger ages, because the elders hope to 'catch them before they go bad', or before the elders themselves get too old, or die and the knowledge is lost. The place to begin discussions of this kind is in the development of social compacts between schools and community, in Phase Two of precinct development (see Chapter 7). This is a two way process, because, for traditions to be changed in these ways, there must be a clear *quid pro quo* for the Indigenous community – the education system for its part must be willing and able to provide an achievable primary and secondary education to those initiates.
67. Other ways of encouraging commitment to secondary (and to primary) education have been suggested to the review, and in fact are already practised in some places. These include using an integrated services approach to target educational and other needs, and provide lifestyle coaches for the whole family, as often the grandmothers are the only functional ones who are

keeping the young people going. This can become very much dependent on the personal interaction between individual staff members and individual families, and so it would be useful to build in a learning process for such staff members on how to manage this.

68. Involving the whole family in the educational process alongside the young adults, has many benefits. It means also providing a learning environment that encourages all adult relations to use the facilities, so that they are there for the young students and perhaps for their own education if there are suitable courses available in which they can be enrolled. In this way the older relatives can step in when needed, for cultural activities or other support. For example the women who are enrolled at the school doing art might go with the young people on a culture trip. Conversely, the very young children are exposed to the school and education early enough to make a lasting impression. If this also incorporates childcare support for young mothers within the school or nearby, and special programs set up to support them through their schooling, this will be a strong step forward in keeping young women learning in the formal school setting.
69. In regional towns models of provision that enable inter-generational learning, adult literacy programs and opportunities for those who wish to re-enter learning, and that bring the passion of 'experts' to the learners also should be considered. For many young people, that their needs are being met in sites of alternative provision is exactly because these sites welcome family contact, respond flexibly to the sometimes chaotic realities of young people's lives, and work individually with them to achieve goals and aspirations. Strategic linkages with VET providers, including Indigenous providers such as the Desert Peoples Centre (DPC), Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE), and the Institute for Aboriginal Development (IAD) as well as CDU, will need to be made. Collaboration with programs such as Reconnect and other Commonwealth initiatives whose focus is on supporting those young people who are chronically homeless and often caught up in the cycle of substance abuse, will be critical. The nature of these collaborations will need to be responsive to a framework of service provision that ensures pathways for progression and re-engagement are identified and made explicit to the young people themselves and their families.
70. Many of the schools that have the best attendance are those providing physical incentives. For young people who are virtually homeless, suffering from poor nutrition and disrupted sleep, providing breakfast and lunch, and the opportunity for physical comfort such as warmth and security, or even a shower and clean clothes, are worthwhile inducements to start a contract for learning. We have to be honest about what might be meaningful contributions to lives that can be devastatingly bereft of even the most basic comforts.

71. In the more dysfunctional communities, the schools have no choice but to engage in the total lifestyle of the young people, as Western education and learning are not a major part of survival, and can be dropped (and picked up) at various stages. A lot of the work in the schools is actually social work – one must have the basic needs met before it is physically possible to learn new and demanding things. To be independent enough to come to school, one must have at least some kind of reasonable physical and emotional level in life, and young people have said to us that it helps to be clean and fed, so they can concentrate and learn.
72. At the same time, educational provision is not about encouraging a welfare dependency by providing 'something for nothing'. There has to be a contingency that if these things are to be supplied, they have to be earned by staying at school and participating in learning. It has long been recognised that trying to learn on an empty stomach is difficult, so breakfast to start is a reasonable proposition, but lunch might only be given to those who stay to work on the morning's literacy and numeracy or other core activities. To encourage afternoon attendance, many schools have found that it helps to make that a time for electives, or for something the young people have identified that they want to learn.
73. For many young Indigenous people the rigours and structures of school may present considerable difficulties. These may be young people coming to town from communities, young people experiencing health difficulties, substance abuse issues or emotional trauma, young people who are homeless. Alternative learning spaces must be provided and this issue must be raised above the current shifting of responsibility between departments and jurisdictions to be addressed through a concerted and whole-of-government approach.
74. Significant numbers of young Indigenous people have intermittent and chronic hearing impairment, due to the prevalence of *otitis media*. It has been reported that at any one time between a quarter and a half of Indigenous students may have hearing loss (Howard, 2003). Teaching these young people effectively requires much more than mere awareness. The 'chalk and talk' model of teaching and learning tends to compound the disadvantage these young people experience, based as it is on listening and responding appropriately, as does the inadequacy of the available infrastructure in most locales. In many schools the acoustics are so bad that regardless of interventions such as securing hearing aids for young people, the impact will remain negligible. Small group, collaborative, hands on and authentic teaching and learning practices can enhance the learning environment for these young people. Practical measures to address poor infrastructure must also be prioritised.
75. An estimated 1 464 young people in the NT are considered homeless and are at a far younger age than is the case in other jurisdictions in Australia. Many are still at school and an

estimated 80% are Indigenous. Add to these figures the fact that the attendance rates of Indigenous students are far below those of non-Indigenous students, that they are more likely to present with a range of disabilities and far more likely to be English as a second language learners, and the issues impacting on educational achievement become palpable.

76. Considerable effort is currently being directed towards retaining Indigenous students in urban and regional schools, through the transitions from junior to senior secondary and through to NTCE completion. In 2003 it is estimated that 300 Indigenous students out of a total of 313 made the transition from Year 10 to Year 11 successfully. However, the challenge is to ensure these students go on to complete their NTCE. Retention through the post compulsory senior years is problematic for Indigenous students, and explicit strategies of support and encouragement should be implemented for those at the threshold of 'success'. A number of respondents to this review made comment about the need for *elitist* strategies – ways of identifying young Indigenous people who might make it through their schooling, and targeting and providing whatever supports are necessary. One individual commented

*Any Indigenous kid who has an educational vision should be given 150% support and opportunity.*

77. There is an urgent need to develop our capacity to expand the educational orbit of young people in remote areas; to lift the outcomes achieved at primary school and enable strategic engagement with learning beyond the classroom, beyond the community and with a clear focus on existing and emergent pathways from education to meaningful activity and remunerated work, whether in their communities or elsewhere. At one school in a remote community teachers have taken their senior students on an excursion to higher education institutions in South Australia. A teacher pointed out

*Indigenous students must be given an opportunity to explore their dreams and goals. They need to know that education will allow them to make choices about their future. We don't limit them to what may be available in the community.*

This educational orbit must positively embrace the cultural learnings and identities of these young people and foster identities as students who can succeed. The 'sister school' initiatives mooted in DEET's Secondary Indigenous Education Strategy are a critical first step in this direction. Moves towards greater co-ordination and co-operation between schools, as discussed in Chapter 6, should further enhance this.

78. The review team believes that the NT Government has a critical role to play in initiating such targeted strategies. The Government also has an important role to play in facilitating processes between Indigenous communities or groups and private enterprise. Where such organisations, for example mining companies, enter into negotiated agreements or Memoranda of Understanding with Indigenous communities or groups, there is a need for strategies to improve educational outcomes that are integral, financed and able to be implemented. In an era

of corporate social responsibility and leading edge examples of mining companies providing support through mentoring programs and scholarships for young Indigenous people of educational promise, there is great opportunity to shape these agreements to greater effect. An example is Rio Tinto's program with Roebourne School in WA.

### **Indigenous involvement in education**

79. Issues of governance, involvement in education, and agreements for enabling a balance between rights and responsibilities of learners, families, communities are given focused consideration in this review in the chapters on Learning Precincts and Quality and Accountability. There is no doubt that in remote regions effort needs to be directed towards developing the necessary capacity and skills to enable community and school councils to come together to make informed and effective decisions about educational provision. In regional and urban areas avenues for effective representation and involvement of Indigenous leadership groups and families must be strengthened. ASSPA committees struggle not only with membership but also with having the sole responsibility for Indigenous cultural awareness within the school. At one remote community a member of the local council stated

*There's no partnership between the school and the community and that's something we'd like to see. We like the Year 8 program at the school but we are not sure what it is about. We need more information about it.*

80. There is a confusing array of employment categories for support staff within remote schools. Most are Commonwealth funded, each attracts its own application and reporting regimes and are perennially casual positions. The review team heard many comments about the lack of clarity regarding these roles, from the employees themselves, as well as from other staff. Indigenous people in these positions were often seen as *the black face that black kids are sent to for what may be a normal classroom issue*, although a number of schools have implemented strategies to address this. Later in this report it is recommended that there be a joint approach between the Territory Government and the Commonwealth to address issues of provision and this issue should be part of such considerations.

81. There is a need for secondary schools to be places of safety and belonging for all young people, and where visible and valued Indigenous staff contribute not only to supporting Indigenous students, but are a core part of a whole school approach to fostering cross cultural understandings and tolerance. To this end, as stated in one submission, *skilling all teachers to teach all students* is the platform for our recommendations regarding putting pedagogy first and developing our capacity and capabilities. A need for a re-examination of the roles of and continuity for support staff, including Indigenous staff, is also identified. Many Indigenous staff made comments like

*We would like some teacher training and some staff development. We teach small groups within the class under the teacher's supervision but we need opportunities for more formal training.*

82. The capacity and capabilities of our teachers to teach the young people of the Territory, who demand respect and authenticity in educational relationships and learning, must be enhanced. While the review team spoke to, and saw in action many excellent teachers in remote, regional and urban schools, the reality of many learning environments was often less than ideal. The rigour and focus of induction and professional development for our teachers must be lifted and opportunities for both reflective practice and context focused learnings and innovations enabled. As pointed out to the review team by one teacher

*ESL training undertaken on the east coast has limited relevance to the ESL contexts of the Territory, and to top it off ESL teaching and learning are very different between the Top End and Central Australia.*

83. The capacity of DEET to facilitate the enabling structures for teacher support, induction and professional development will need to be enhanced. Top down provision should be supplemented by bottom up innovation. For Indigenous students, it is critically important that education staff, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, engage in cross cultural effectiveness training. Learnings and understandings that relate to the issues, challenges and complexities at the interface of traditional and contemporary Indigenous cultures and 'mainstream' Australia need to be gained, for this is the world young Indigenous people must traverse.

## **Service Delivery**

### *Homeland learning centres*

84. There are over 50 homeland learning centres across the Northern Territory with enrolments between approximately 12 and 40 students of various ages. These are staffed as primary schools, although students from 4 to 17 years are considered of school age for funding purposes. While several of the homelands communities have a classroom, some have no power or water let alone educational facilities. They are serviced by visiting teachers who assist local teachers in delivering programs of instruction. Some secondary students in these communities are doing NTOEC courses. A National Enquiry into Rural and Remote Education (HREOC, 2000) found that

*distance education...is not appropriate for homeland children, partly because English is the language of instruction and because the schools lack the infrastructure to bring technology such as computers to the community.*

The homelands communities in their submissions to the review echoed these concerns. They mentioned

*the lack of educational facilities and resources; the training and poor literacy levels of their homelands teachers and the difficulty Indigenous teachers and students have with NTOEC courses.*

85. Members of the review team who visited the HLCs were impressed by the communities' determination to offer a healthy and safe environment for their young people where *they learn about country, language and culture*, and the communities' commitment to education. However it was obvious that given the student numbers and the isolation of many of these communities, it is not possible for DEET to offer a secondary education program equivalent to what is available in larger communities and regional centres. Many parents and teachers recognised these difficulties and asked that their secondary numbers be combined with other nearby homeland communities so a secondary teacher could be deployed in the area. They also requested that *NTOEC teachers be placed in the regions so they could deliver units of work (at the school) rather than just supporting teachers*. Many spoke of the need for a regional boarding school like the one recently established at Woolanin where young people from the region attend during the week and come home to their communities at weekends. The review believes that DEET must explore these options with the homeland communities but there is a need for honesty about the level of educational outcomes that can be realistically achieved by secondary young people choosing to stay in these communities.

#### *Boarding schools*

86. The establishment in recent decades of boarding schools for young Indigenous people uses a recipe for teaching that can be traced to boarding schools of the United Kingdom, copied here in this country more than a century ago. The majority of boarding schools in the Territory are non-government. While providing an element of choice for Indigenous people regarding secondary education, for many they are the only choice. There are obvious and ongoing affiliations between some communities and boarding schools, some of these based on religion, some on proximity, some on history. There are currently between thirty and forty young Indigenous people from the NT attending boarding schools in other states.

87. Issues faced by most schools in remote areas of the Territory can often be intensified in boarding school contexts. The review team was heartened by the efforts being undertaken in a number of boarding schools to enable students to excel in their area of strength and to foster an explicit understanding of the link between secondary education and meaningful work or enterprise activities

*It's hard for them at first. When they say "It's boring" it really means "I don't understand/can't handle it". It takes them outside of their comfort zone. We need to lead them by the hand to do it, give lots of support and they end up loving it, are blown away by it. They begin to develop aspirations beyond the community.*

88. Given the dispersion and movement of Indigenous people across regions in the NT, it is not surprising that recent initiatives in secondary education provision have included the development of regionally based boarding school models. These can be noted for their responsiveness to building upon cohesive language, kin and affiliation networks as the basis of their student enrolment and the incorporation of mechanisms for close family support and gender separated classes. Some comments from young people attending these schools highlight the effectiveness of this regional hub model

*They teach us more at this school. At home we only learn a little bit of reading because the teachers keep going away. We don't like it when they go away because there's no one to teach you. When a new teacher comes I feel shy because I don't know them.*

*Too many temptations at \_\_\_\_\_ and too much trouble. Plus I don't like staying in Darwin. I like it out bush. No traffic. You can't hear the drunks screaming and it's very quiet. And there are no shops where there are sweets and lollies.*

*I like it here because we learn different things. We go on excursions and it feels like home. No security and no caged up houses.*

The issue of the structure, placement and design of future boarding schools is discussed further in Chapter 10.

89. The review team did find, however, there was often little transparency in explaining or communicating to Indigenous families the actual educational content and expected outcomes of participation in boarding schools. In some instances parents and family members were unaware that their young people would be undertaking bridging programs or un-graded secondary. From the perspective of a number of boarding schools, the preparedness of these young people for secondary schooling was so minimal that the schools felt they had little choice but to pursue preparatory and bridging programs. Some Indigenous parents who had themselves been to boarding schools acknowledged that students are not always adequately prepared. One said

*If the kids can do the work they cope better. When I left to go to boarding school I knew the basics. It made a big difference.*

90. Teachers, students and parents all agreed that Indigenous students often lack the emotional and social maturity as well as the literacy and numeracy skills for them to operate effectively in mainstream schools. Consequently, many young people attending boarding schools in regional or urban centres begin and end their time there in bridging programs. As a model of service delivery it has its place, but it was very apparent to the review team that the expectations parents had of the boarding school option were consistently not met. In the words of one community member, *they learnt nothing*.

91. Parents are also concerned about poor communication with current boarding schools, and some cited examples where students were sent home without any explanation by the school.

One suggestion to address this problem is that of employing someone in the community to liaise between local schools and boarding schools, to act as a mentor during transition and to keep in touch with the boarding school and local students there, so that they can support them and report back to the community on their progress and problems. This might become a learning precinct responsibility under the new structures.

92. Many Indigenous parents say that their children do not complete their boarding school education because they are too homesick, or they find themselves in trouble and are suspended or expelled. Sometimes those forced to return to boarding school when they do not want to go deliberately seek trouble so they can be expelled. Some may leave because of homesickness, because of clashes and *being teased* by other clans or groups, some are removed for business, and many refuse to return or come and go sporadically. For these reasons, many Indigenous parents and young people to whom we spoke, wanted secondary education to be provided on their home communities, or closer to them, or at least in a manner which allows them to spend as much time as possible close to their homes. The review believes boarding schools that enrol Indigenous students from remote communities must provide more support to students in their transition from the community school to boarding school and work with parents and their communities to improve student retention and achievement.

#### **Infrastructure and integrated services**

93. It has been noted in this review that the Territory boasts some of the best and some of the worst educational infrastructure in the country. Much of the latter was evident on remote communities where many schools were in advanced states of disrepair. Some schools, urban and remote, exhibited a siege mentality with high fences and overt barriers, at times paradoxical to the nature of the effort occurring within. As one principal in a remote school pointed out
- Parity of infrastructure is important if students are to meet the required outcomes and in keeping staff.*

94. There is no doubt that available infrastructure and regimes of maintenance and repairs on many remote communities present difficulties. Many schools that were attempting to provide some form of education for secondary-aged students had no space to accommodate the young people, were aware of the pressure to separate young men and women but were unable to do so, and were often struggling to keep these students motivated in the face of the inevitable 'workbook' delivery pattern. Some schools had obvious facilities but struggled to encourage young people to attend. Some schools were riddled with discarded equipment, evidence perhaps of better times past, and some boasted rose gardens and vegetable patches, often teacher maintained.

95. The realities of maintenance and repairs issues in remote areas are summed up in one submission to the review team. *There is a can't do mentality*. If a contractor happens to be visiting the community to service the clinic's air conditioner they cannot be utilised to service the school, no matter how dire the need, because of differing contractual arrangements between departments. It may take three weeks to get the 'right' contractor out to service the schools. This issue exemplifies the service dilemma issue experienced across the board in remote communities, and steps towards more integrated approaches are urgently required.
96. The notion of integrated service delivery must also be extended beyond the confines of technical services and be encapsulated in how we approach people services, education, health and others. The integrated approach outlined in other chapters in this report demands effort in mapping both the capacity and range of existing services available and in leveraging resources to fill any gaps identified, within a co-ordinated and strategic, outcome-oriented framework.
97. The Desert Peoples Centre initiative in Central Australia is proposing a 'one stop shop' for educational, enterprise and livelihoods services to remote communities of Indigenous peoples. Centralian College, about to become part of CDU, has an enterprise unit facilitating economic outcomes alongside educational activity. Cross-service provider 'steering groups' are emerging. Initiatives such as these need to be embraced and backed by governments and their departments. These issues and approaches to resolving them are discussed further in Chapter 10.
98. The education of our young Indigenous people is of critical concern to many, including to the members of this review team. The issues we have discussed in this Chapter can be summarised as
- the need to address the educational neglect of Indigenous young people, especially those living outside of the main towns in the Northern Territory
  - the need for quality, trained and committed staff, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who have skills and fluency in negotiating the interface of cultures and can foster respect, rigour and success in their teaching practice
  - the need for relevant and authentic educational experiences that foster positive learning
  - the need to transform the nature and resourcing of language and cultural maintenance, to enable cultural transmission and opportunities to shape the social and economic benefits that may arise from these
  - the need to promote transparency in and accountability for the educational achievements of young Indigenous people so that families and communities have an informed understanding of their responsibilities, rights and the outcomes they have achieved

- the need for innovative teaching and learning practices, targeted cross-sector collaborations and investments to ensure that young people who have special needs, including those with hearing impairment, can experience success as learners
- the need to provide targeted support for those young Indigenous people on the verge of educational success
- the need for regional, cross-sector and sustainable approaches to service delivery, including that of education.

99. Our response to these issues has been to take a position of universal design. That is, what works for the most disadvantaged will work for all. All young people benefit from rich, dynamic and varied learning contexts. All young people can benefit from effective scaffolding approaches to literacy. All young people benefit from explicit and authentic teaching and learning practices. All young people thrive with high expectations and just-in-time support. All young people, particularly in the middle years, need support to consolidate their identity, develop their self-esteem and self-worth, and experience concrete and valued achievements.

100. We recognise that our Indigenous young people stand to inherit a rich world of cultural and language practices, and that Governments and education services must play a role in the dynamic evolution of these, particularly where they interface with non-Indigenous practices and domains. We recognise the entrenched disadvantage, dysfunction and chronic health problems impacting so deeply on the daily lives of young people and we are suggesting an orientation and structure for education services that will serve as the platform from which to improve services and outcomes for Indigenous Territorians.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Indigenous Education

*While there are only three recommendations attached to this chapter, this should not be seen to indicate that the review team considers Indigenous education as an area warranting limited attention. Every set of recommendations in the other chapters of this report includes recommendations that will contribute to improvements in secondary education provision for Indigenous young people.*

It is recommended that

19. The NT Government establish a cross agency task force to develop community based Language Nests that link to the existing Indigenous Knowledge Centre initiative. The task force should consider
- the ways in which such Nests should operate

- educational potential of consolidating contemporary ways and means to value Indigenous knowledge capital in schools
  - existing programs or initiatives that the Language Nest model could build upon
  - business models and emerging enterprise opportunities that could be facilitated
  - the role of Indigenous education workers and community members in brokering the knowledge capital enhanced by this initiative.
- 20.** To expand the educational experiences and leadership opportunities for young Indigenous people, the NT Government
- establish in 2004 a scholarship and mentorship program that builds over five years to 100 Indigenous students, for Indigenous young people who show that they have a talent, or have taken initiative, or show signs of potential high achievement in a range of areas of endeavour.
  - instigate discussions with key private companies operating on or near Indigenous lands or communities, and with the Indigenous peoples and their representative organisations, regarding how negotiated partnerships or agreements can improve explicit educational outcomes for young Indigenous people.
- 21.** the NT Government require that those involved with the provision of secondary education in existing and future boarding schools in regional and urban settings, work with schools and families in the home communities to improve Indigenous student retention and achievement. Both the boarding school and the school in the home community or precinct must work together to be accountable for
- implementing assessments and programs so that young people are socially and academically prepared for secondary education in an urban/regional setting
  - the provision of ongoing support to Indigenous young people before, during and after their transition from remote communities to urban/regional boarding schools and hostels.