

Recipient Details

Name of organisation or individual: [O] Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education

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Responses

Curriculum and assessment

We do not see that the Australian Curriculum restricts outcomes in remote schools. There is sufficient flexibility within the curriculum framework to allow for inclusion of local priorities and take account of student learning needs. The recent addition of a Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages is a helpful resource for schools wanting to privilege local languages. There are also adequate resources and sufficient guidance for teachers who teach English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D). The larger problem, which we discuss later is the development of trained EAL/D teachers.

We see a need for approaches that respect and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and cultures: approaches reflected in 'Both Ways' approaches and 'Red Dirt Curriculum' (RDC).

Both Ways teaching and learning

Underpinning Batchelor's practice is a philosophy we call 'both ways'. Both-ways is a philosophy of education that 'brings together Indigenous Australian traditions of knowledge and Western academic disciplinary positions and cultural contexts, and embraces values of respect, tolerance and diversity' (Ober & Bat, 2007, p. 69). While at Batchelor this is enacted out through adult teaching and learning, the principles of both ways can equally be applied to school education and is reflected in bilingual learning, team teaching, skilled educators teaching English as an additional language, and schools in genuine partnerships with communities, consistent with the ideas of Red Dirt Thinking and pedagogies that work with a RDC.

Operationalising RDC

At the core of a red dirt curriculum is local content. But a red dirt curriculum does not seek to divorce itself from external curriculum priorities. The two can go hand in hand because philosophically, local people want their children to be 'strong in both worlds'. In order for teaching to be culturally and contextually responsive (a prerequisite of successful teaching in remote schools) a red dirt curriculum demands local input from local knowledge experts and a solid base of local culture and local philosophy. Red dirt curriculum is not divorced from Western philosophies. Both-ways learning reinforces the need for an understanding of and a utilisation of Western philosophies.

Rating: 5

Teachers and teaching

Delivery of a red dirt curriculum requires a specific set of teacher qualities and teaching practices. For teachers to teach to local views of success, local language teachers are required. Consistent with the idea of being 'strong in both worlds', this requires English language teachers with ESL or EAL/D capabilities.

Employing local staff and recruiting new staff are important, they must be coupled with an adequately resourced workforce development strategy. Beyond professional skill development, evidence points to the need for workforce development to deal with issues associated with community engagement, Indigenous teacher development, assistant teacher training and support, mentoring, managing turnover and managing induction.

Preservice preparation that includes learning on country

While we note that the age of the remote non-local teaching workforce tends to be young, this of itself should not be a concern. Evidence shows good teaching is not differentiated from bad on the basis of age or experience. There are some positive examples where universities have assisted students considering taking up a remote teaching position. Deakin University's Global Experience Program where pre-service teachers pay their own way to spend two weeks of their own time in a remote community in the Katherine region, with support from an experienced university mentor. The University of Melbourne's Arnhem Land Master of Teaching program has been held up as an outstanding model. This program took students to Arnhem Land. We came across a number of students from University of Tasmania, particularly in Western Australia, who had been part of a 'Remote Area Placement' program. Programs like the University of Notre Dame's annual trip to Tjuntjuntjara Remote Community School in Western Australia prepare students for a remote teaching experience. There are examples of quite specific pre-service teacher units within Bachelor of Teaching programs, that help students prepare for remote service. These units and the remote experiences can filter out students who would otherwise not survive. They are coupled with resources produced by the Society for the Provision of Education for Rural Australia (2012), which identify standards required in addition to the Australian Professional Teacher Standards.

Rating: 7

Leaders and leadership

We note the importance of leadership in remote schools, however, we focus our attention on other areas in this submission.

Rating: 5

School and Community

Good governance of remote schools is not a silver bullet which in itself will bring about improvement in outcomes. However, if as we noted above that 'improvement' necessarily involves increasing community ownership and parent involvement in schools, then having an effective, locally representative school council is a foundational precondition. We have seen some models of governance which work quite well in a remote context, particularly in independent schools such as the Nyangatjatjara College in the south of the Northern Territory and the Aboriginal Independent Community Schools of Western Australia and the Yiramalay Wesley Studio School in the Kimberley. There are some examples of good governance in government schools that we could point to also—for example Yuendumu School in the Northern Territory and the Dawul School in the east Kimberley region of Western Australia. These schools tend to have either high or increasing attendance trajectories. We note the dearth of targeted research on this topic in the literature however and suggest that this is an important area for future research.

Parent and community engagement

There is evidence to suggest that meaningful partnerships between communities and schools are vital ingredients to success. However, engagement that 'targets' certain groups of individuals on the

basis of so-called disadvantage, behaviours, race or location will inevitably meet with resistance and fail (Guenther, 2015a). Engagement that is mutually beneficial will be more likely to achieve community buy in. Strategically, this is possible from within an education system bureaucracy or it can be facilitated alongside a bureaucracy. A constructive example of the former is the operation of the Northern Territory Department of Education's 'Transition Support Unit'. Here, the benefits to parents accrue in terms of better and more informed decisions while for the department, its goals of improving remote to boarding school transitions can be achieved. An example of the second is 'Families and Schools Together' (FAST) which works with schools and communities to facilitate better parent-school relationships (see for example Guenther, 2014). Enacting strategies that promote the more effective forms of community engagement for mutual benefit necessarily involves a degree of negotiation, adequate time and resourcing.

Rating: 7

Information and Communication Technology

Access to ICT and internet with good bandwidth is an important issue for remote schools. Our focus however, is on other aspects of infrastructure.

Rating: 5

Entrepreneurship and schools

For remote schools, we do not see a major issue relating to entrepreneurship, probably because in the most part remote schools in Aboriginal communities are for primary aged students.

Rating: 2

Improving access – enrolments, clusters, distance education and boarding Boarding schools for remote students

While boarding strategies and policies have been rolled out in recent years with considerable public investment, there is little credible evidence on which to base the scholarship programs, transition support services, or other initiatives to show that they work for students or communities.

The independent evidence we do have on boarding is disturbing. The mostly qualitative work of Mander, Benveniste, O'Bryan and others point to risks associated with mental ill-health, racism and difficulties associated with adjusting to life post boarding. There are no publicly available evaluations of initiatives such as the Indigenous Youth Leadership Program or the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation or any of the diverse models of boarding hostels, schools or residences, which have attracted millions of dollars of public funding. The need for evaluation in research in this area is paramount for the sake of young people and for the sake of transparency and accountability.

The other impact that is often overlooked in the debate about boarding, is that of the community. If boarding strategies were to be successful, what is the likely impact on communities? We know in rural communities there is a dynamic of 'learning to leave', such that the loss of youth leads to a depletion of human and social capital. In remote communities, this loss—on top of other existing challenges associated with violence, incarceration, substance abuse and suicide—will probably only make things harder. While we have no research evidence to support this assertion, that is the point.

Batchelor Institute uses several modes of delivery for training. For remote students, this often involves combining study in community, either through a study centre or workplace, and a one to three-week workshop at the Batchelor or Alice Springs campus. This combination provides opportunities for students from diverse contexts across remote parts of Australia to come together

and engage in intensive learning. While Batchelor's training is mostly focused on adults, for senior years secondary students, this approach may offer an alternative for some students who find the long periods of time away from community, a challenge.

Rating for enrolments: 3

Rating for clusters: 4

Rating for distance education: 2

Rating for boarding: 7

Diversity

Equity and access issues

Diversity is part of broader equity and rights issue, which is of particular importance to the remote schooling where English is often not the main language spoken at home and where Aboriginal culture is treated as secondary to the culture of school. As a result students do not always get a fair go in remote schools.

Our estimates suggest that about 1500 secondary-aged young people are not attending school in the Northern Territory. We are not sure why that is, but we know the intent of the NT Government following the Wilson Review was to wind back secondary programs in remote schools in favour of boarding school options. However, while this was apparent in 2015, in 2016 secondary provision returned to pre-Wilson Review levels. It should be noted that the apparent availability of secondary education and the actual delivery and uptake of secondary education in very remote schools are not necessarily the same. Nor does the provision of senior years education mean that the Australian Curriculum is applied in those schools. In 2016, the Northern Territory Department of Education developed an 'Employment Pathways Curriculum Framework' as part of its Indigenous Education Strategy, which was endorsed as an alternative model of secondary education provision that meets the needs of Indigenous students from remote communities'. There are some positive developments in this document. However, we should not lose sight of the 32 communities without any senior secondary availability. And we should not be lulled into accepting that just because My School says there is Year 12 provision in 49 community schools, that it looks anything like Year 12 in an urban context. While completion and retention rates remain low, it is difficult to imagine that they will improve without accessible offerings within easy reach of their communities.

Rating: 7

Transitioning beyond school

As noted earlier, many of the schools in remote communities only properly cater for the primary years. The connection to education or work or careers beyond school is not something that many educators or community members think about. There is a tacit expectation that education will lead to jobs and a hope that someone from a remote community could become a pilot or lawyer, but the pathways are unclear. More attention needs to be placed in this space.

Rating: 6

Additional Comments

Key messages

We have identified 9 key messages that are pertinent to remote education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Key message 1. The discourse of deficit and disadvantage which pervades much discussion about remote education, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students must be challenged. Being 'remote' brings significant advantages for people in communities, as does their indigenous identity, culture and language.

Key message 2. Success and the purpose of schooling in remote communities is not the same as it might be in an urban context. School must connect with local aspirations for young people.

Key message 3. Outcomes for remote students are improving. The successes of young people, of dedicated teachers, and patient, persistent parents should be recognised in their own right---not always in comparison with urban Australians.

Key message 4. Remote schools need more local staff. Local staff, including educators, provide the strongest foundation for schools to improve outcomes. Strategies to build local capacity must be strengthened.

Key message 5. Quality teachers in remote schools are not the same as quality teachers in urban areas. They are culturally and contextually responsive and require a different set of skills to achieve good outcomes. Local language and EAL/D capability should be prioritised.

Key message 6. Quality teaching in remote schools requires an approach that is contextually sensitive and culturally respectful. The philosophy called 'both ways' and adaptations called 'red dirt curriculum' provide guidance for remote schools.

Key message 7. More opportunities for preservice teachers to experience remote teaching, prior to graduation, are required. These opportunities will better prepare new teachers and filter out those who are not ready for teaching in remote contexts.

Key message 8. Money makes a difference in remote schools—if it is directed where it is needed. More local staff make a measurable difference to attendance and outcomes in remote schools.

Key message 9. Boarding schools will not solve the problems of remote education. Access to secondary school is still lacking in many remote schools and consideration needs to be given to the educational needs of those who do not qualify for a boarding school place.

Please also note that we have prepared a more complete version of this review which we were hoping to be able to upload. The full version has more citation and data references to support our submission. We will email it to you for consideration.