NCVER

Exploring locality

The impact of context on Indigenous vocational education
and training aspirations and outcomes

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Key messages

✧ More realistic employment opportunities exist for Indigenous learners who complete their vocational education and training (VET) programs in urban areas, than those in regional and remote areas.

✧ Compared to regional and remote learners, urban learners encounter less racist attitudes toward their entry into employment or training, are able to access a wider variety of Indigenous employment and training programs, and participate in programs more closely related to work available to them.

✧ Indigenous learners in regional areas often compete with each other and a large pool of unemployed people for specific Indigenous employment opportunities.

✧ Employment opportunities for Indigenous learners in remote settings are severely limited. They are largely unaware of opportunities for expanding their learning, or for employment, and so have few aspirations for further education or to seek work. Hence, VET needs to relate more concretely to the conditions and opportunities presented by remote localities.

✧ The Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) appears to be the only avenue for expansion in employment opportunities for remote learners.

✧ Considerations such as family and community responsibilities, and connection to the land prevent regional and remote learners from relocating to urban areas in order to greater access employment opportunities.

✧ Many regional Indigenous learners are committed to further training, which may be related to the lack of immediate employment opportunities and the alternative to unemployment offered by technical and further education (TAFE) institutes.

✧ The majority of both regional and urban Indigenous learners are apprehensive about moving into mainstream courses due to a lack of confidence in their potential for success.

✧ The availability of desired courses, teaching staff and community attitudes to vocational education and training in the various locations are all issues impacting on successful outcomes for further training and employment.

✧ Further investigation is needed into how structures linking Indigenous training to work opportunities can be established, in particular how training can be more closely connected to the Community Development Employment Program.

✧ Successful outcomes of Indigenous involvement in vocational education and training are not always related to further education or employment. Therefore, Indigenous learning approaches should acknowledge the importance of outcomes such as increased confidence, improved literacy, and the ability to promote and facilitate family and community knowledge and wellbeing.

Executive summary

Introduction

This study explores the extent to which differing contextual settings in South Australia—urban, regional and remote—impact upon the outcomes of Indigenous learners who have undertaken vocational education and training (VET). In this project the outcomes considered were those which concerned subsequent employment and/or further education.

Indigenous learners, training facilitators and other personnel involved in VET provision in each of the localities selected were invited to contribute to the project. The study took a qualitative research approach, beginning with a review of literature on Indigenous participation in VET courses nationally and within South Australia, the training aspirations and outcomes for Indigenous learners, and the factors determining and issues arising from location.

Interviews were then conducted in a small number of learning organisations in the three differing contextual settings across South Australia. These three settings were:

✧ *Remote:* Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands—Amata and Indulkana communities

✧ *Regional:* Murray Bridge campus of the Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE, and Berri and Loxton campuses of the Murray Institute of TAFE

✧ *Urban:* Adelaide Institute of TAFE, Tauondi College, the Wiltja Program at Woodville High School and Maxima Training, a private registered training organisation.

Research questions

The research undertaken for this project focused on four key questions:

✧ What differing issues and factors specific to the settings do these learners encounter that impact upon employment opportunities during or following VET courses?

✧ To what extent do the learners intend to continue their engagement in learning?

✧ What aspirations do these learners have with regards to employment or further study following their VET courses?

✧ What types of outcomes can be achieved and how different are they for Indigenous VET learners across the different settings?

Locality counts

In the urban localities, learners seem to encounter less entrenched racist attitudes towards their entry into employment or training than do their regionally located counterparts. Furthermore, learners in the urban areas are able to access a wider variety of Indigenous employment and training programs than those available to either regional or remote learners, and the programs offered to urban Indigenous learners generally relate more closely to available work. Hence such programs provide more realistic employment opportunities.

With very few programs focusing on specific Indigenous employment opportunities, regional learners must compete with each other and a large pool of unemployed people within the wider community. Indigenous learners in these localities can experience some antagonism from the mainstream community, and consequently find that employment opportunities are often limited by discrimination associated with their Indigenous identity rather than with their level of training or skill.

In remote settings, employment opportunities for Indigenous learners are severely limited by an almost complete lack of agencies or industries offering training and employment opportunities. Currently, the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) appears to be the only avenue through which these opportunities could be expanded. However, there is also an implicit acceptance in these remote locations that most available employment is taken up by non-Indigenous people, many of whom travel from other areas to take up this employment.

In both regional and remote settings, learners' opportunities to access wider employment placements have to be considered in relation to the social and cultural issues arising from their attachment to land and community. Relocation to an urban locality where more employment may be available is not simply a matter of distance, but includes considerations such as family ties, community responsibilities and cultural connection to land. When considering relocation, Indigenous learners also take into account the safety of their known community, the prospects of finding economical accommodation, concerns about suitable schooling for their children and acceptance of them by the new community they might plan to enter. A shortage of public transport in regional areas also impacts significantly on learners wanting to follow up employment opportunities that might arise within travelling distance of their homes.

Aspirations for further training and employment

The extent to which Indigenous learners intend to continue an engagement with VET varies from locality to locality. In the remote localities, Aboriginal learners were found to be largely unaware of opportunities for expanding their learning, or for employment, and so have few aspirations to continue to learn or to seek work. Because there is an almost total lack of work opportunities beyond possible participation in the Community Development Employment Program, these learners do not expect that work *will* be available. Many of the learners in these remote locations are highly mobile and move from school to school, often with long periods of non-attendance at school. However, VET programs do not always have continuity across institutions, which makes ongoing participation in vocational education and training difficult. Moreover, uncertainty over the way in which VET programs operate in remote localities appears to have been a factor in limiting ongoing aspirations for further or continued learning.

Regional Aboriginal learners, on the other hand, were found to be more committed to further training. However, in the regional case study sites this finding was related to the lack of immediate employment opportunities and to the relative security and continuity of programs offered by Aboriginal education departments in regional technical and further education (TAFE) institutes which provide a valid alternative to unemployment. More women than men access training, but do not necessarily aspire to being employed. Rather, they use the enhanced access to each other and the TAFE facilities as a means for resolving social, health and welfare issues in their own communities.

As well as aspiring to higher levels of training following completion of current courses, urban Indigenous learners have greater aspirations for employment than those from other regions. This was found to result from there being more opportunities, more contact with successful role models and a wider access to training and apprenticeships than elsewhere. In urban areas learners can gain entry to employment opportunities without moving away from their homes, and generally have access to public transport. Given these advantages, they more readily aspire to enter the world of work and further training than do remote and regional learners. At the same time, the majority of

both regional and urban Indigenous learners are apprehensive about the prospect of moving into mainstream courses due in part to a lack of confidence in their potential for success.

The types of outcomes achieved

In relation to learning outcomes, all participants across the localities are able to undertake and complete VET courses in *one form or another*. The availability of desired courses, teaching staff and community attitudes to VET learning in the various locations are all issues which have an impact upon successful outcomes for further training and employment. However, the critical finding here is that successful outcomes other than those related to further education or employment can emerge from Indigenous involvement in VET studies.

In both the regional and urban localities, Indigenous participation in VET courses gives learners increased confidence in themselves as well as more control over their lives. In the case of the Introductory Vocational Education Certificate, for example, learners may not always complete the course, but from it will learn the value and importance of being able to read and write. Being literate enables individuals to make informed choices for themselves based on what they find out, not on what other people tell them. Additional and equally important outcomes are achieved through the participants' greater ability to provide more informed help to immediate family as well as to their communities. For example, helping their children with homework adds to the likelihood of those children being more successful at school and increases the likelihood of their completing school. Thus participation in VET has outcomes that translate into a multiplier effect within communities and should be perceived as achieving more than just participation in further training and/or participation in employment.

In the remote context, training for some of the women is not necessarily related to potential work opportunities but can assist in providing help for them, their family and community, 'in the home'. These findings are important comments on the value of unpaid community work and, in this instance, demonstrate how some Indigenous people see unpaid cultural or voluntary community work and looking after family as an occupation, rather than something that is done while unemployed. The notion of employment not specifically tied to paid labour makes it possible for VET learners in Aboriginal communities to be recognised as gaining positive outcomes from their training, outcomes which promote and facilitate community wellbeing.

Further investigation is needed into the ways whereby structures linking Indigenous training to work opportunities in the specific localities can be established, a priority being an exploration of how training can be more closely connected to the Community Development Employment Program. Furthermore, an approach which recognises and values the work done 'in the home' and among Indigenous communities, and which may be enhanced and enriched by participation in VET needs to be formulated.

Introduction

The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) publication, *A bridge to the future* (1998) stated that vocational education and training (VET) initiatives will address specific areas of disadvantage. In particular, a specific priority might include 'increasing participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in vocational education and training, particularly in higher-level award programs, achieve improved retention and completion rates and *improved employment outcomes*' (p.16, our emphasis). This project is focused on Indigenous[1] students as one of the various groups undertaking VET courses.

This document reports on a project which set out to investigate the impact and consequences of location on improved retention, completion and employment outcomes for Indigenous learners involved in VET studies, taking account of suggestions that post-course destinations arising from such studies differ widely depending upon geographical area (Moore,[2] personal communication; Bromley & Grace 2000). At the same time, VET outcomes are intrinsically tied to expectations that some sort of further training and/or study-to-work transition will take place. Given the wide variety of conditions in which Indigenous learners undertake VET courses, the question arises as to whether such transition options are always available and whether there are factors which will subsequently impact on learners' aspirations for that transition.

Comparisons between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school retention rates, VET completions and outcomes, and general employment rates are frequently made in the literature. Less apparent are comparisons between the differing localities where Indigenous learners undertake VET programs or are making the transition from training to work. Consequently, this research has taken place in a variety of localities across differing urban, regional and remote settings.

Negotiations with the education institutions involved, local Aboriginal community councils, student council bodies and members of the various Indigenous education management councils resulted in the following institutions which offer VET courses to Indigenous students in the various localities agreeing to take part in the research. These were:

- ◇ Urban
    - ◆ Adelaide Institute of TAFE
    - ◆ Tauondi Aboriginal Community College, Port Adelaide
    - ◆ Wiltja Program at Woodville High School
    - ◆ Maxima Training

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[1] The term 'Indigenous' within the context of this report also implies Aboriginal, and the two terms are used interchangeably. 'Indigenous' is taken as comprising the following three criteria of Aboriginality:
a) that the person identifies as being Aboriginal, b) that the person is of Aboriginal descent, c) that the person is accepted by their community as being Aboriginal.

[2] Julian Moore, teacher at Mimili, Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands, March 2000.

♦ Regional/rural[3]
  ◆ Murray Institute of TAFE, Berri and Loxton campuses
  ◆ Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE, Murray Bridge campus

♦ Remote
  ◆ Anangu Education Services Schools: Amata and Indulkana, Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands

It should be noted that the three differing locality types described in this study as 'urban', 'regional' and 'remote' have been defined by using the same classification by postcode as adopted by the South Australian Department of Education, Training and Employment in the publication, *Partners in a learning culture* (Department of Education, Training and Employment 2000). The classifications were obtained through the Australian Bureau of Statistics and are also used by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) to match South Australian postcodes to geographical localities.

The locality designations can also be rated according to the Accessibility and Remoteness Index of Australia (Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing 1999) developed by the National Centre for Social Applications of Geographic Information systems at the University of Adelaide. The urban and remote sites in this study are at the extremes of the accessibility and remoteness index, which ranges from 0–12, with a value approaching zero for Adelaide, and approaching 12 for Amata which is described as 'very remote'. Berri is considered as 'moderately accessible' in the accessibility and remoteness typology with a rating of 4.4, and in the context of this study is therefore more rural than regional. Murray Bridge, only 55 kilometres from Adelaide has a rating of 1.1 and is considered in that typology as 'highly accessible' and thus regional.

Despite a relatively large number of research projects and studies addressing a wide range of Indigenous training issues, little research has taken place in relation to post-course destinations, and how differing settings will impact on learner aspirations of being able to gain work subsequent to their vocational training. Thus it becomes important to follow outcomes beyond the attainment of qualifications, and to investigate how Indigenous course participants view their opportunities for progression from vocational training to work in the three differing settings.

The current literature on Indigenous vocational education and training provides a wide range of commentary on outcomes related to course participation and course completion; for example, Robinson (2000); Australian National Training Authority Research Advisory Council (1998); NCVER (1998); ANTA (1996); McIntyre et al. (1996). Many of these works result from research undertaken in specific geographical areas, such as remote (Durdin 1996), or urban locations (Miller 1999). Other research has assessed learning and outcomes and access issues for specific Indigenous groups such as women (Koupusar & Wilson 1997; Open Training and Education Network 1999). Similarly, where the wider research into delivery of and access to courses has been undertaken, this too tends to be either area- or group-specific, for example, Durdin (1996), and NCVER (1998), or in relation to access to learning in a college setting (Durnan & Boughton 1999). However, these studies do not cover post-course destination outcomes and aspirations as they relate to the differing localities in which Indigenous learners undertake VET.

While researchers have indicated that differing types of work opportunities are available to Aboriginal learners in VET courses in both urban, and regional settings, the answer is not necessarily the same for learners in remote communities. Pathways to post-course destinations are less clear in the remote regions and may only link into other government-funded programs; for

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[3] While applying the designation 'regional' to both Murray Bridge and Berri, researchers acknowledge that Murray Bridge is a regional locality due to its accessibility, and Berri is a rural locality. However, to prevent confusion within the report, it has been decided to use only the term 'regional' from this point forward to cover both localities and make them distinct from remote or urban.

example, the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) administered by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC).

Purpose and objectives

The purpose of this project was to explore how the differing localities of urban, regional and remote impact upon Indigenous VET learner opportunities and subsequent aspirations in relation to post-course destinations, such as employment or other training opportunities.

While based on South Australian data, the study contends that an understanding of various post-course pathways, to which Indigenous students across differing settings in this state aspire, has wider implications for those types of settings as they occur nationally.

This study therefore contributes to an understanding of:

✧ whether similar VET provision is appropriate for Indigenous learners across all of the different settings

✧ the nature of formal and informal outcomes which these differently located groups of Indigenous VET clients hope to realise in relation to post-course destinations.

Research questions

Working comparatively and using samples from each location within South Australia, this project has explored the following questions:

✧ What differing issues and factors specific to the settings do these learners encounter that impact upon employment opportunities during or following VET courses?

✧ To what extent do the learners intend to continue their engagement in learning?

✧ What aspirations do these learners have with regards to employment or further study following their VET courses?

✧ What types of outcomes can be achieved and how different are they for Indigenous VET learners across the different settings?

Methodology

Introduction

The form of this project changed greatly from the initial proposal, particularly during the process of collecting and analysing the data.

A number of factors were influential in this change. The research team had assumed that access to student records from the various institutions would provide them with data indicating the post-course destinations of Indigenous VET students in terms of further education, employment and mobility across the regions.

The team had asked each VET institution for details on their record-keeping during the process of obtaining permission to access students during class times. It had been envisaged that records pertaining to participation and outcomes would provide this research with data that could give at least a three-year data-set analysis. Subsequently however, the project team was advised that the individual institutions involved do not keep records relating specifically to Indigenous students' post-course destinations. Privacy issues also prevented these institutions from providing the research team with any listings of prior students so that they could be contacted individually. Campus staff who knew the students were able to offer information on an ad hoc basis, but understandably, such data would lack the rigour required by this type of research. The study is therefore unable to supply a three-year data-set for this project. Consequently, the research questions as listed in the previous chapter indicate a shift in focus from the initial objectives of the study where the emphasis had been on long-term outcomes and post-course destinations.

Approvals to undertake the research

The University of South Australia Human Research Ethics Committee gave final approval to conduct the study on 9 November 2000. This approval followed discussions with and input from the Aboriginal Research Institute of the University of South Australia.

Access to Indigenous students and teaching personnel from the nominated post-compulsory VET providers was obtained by written contact with the directors of Indigenous education at the various institutions. At this time the research background was explained and agreement in principle for the conduct of the research during student teaching hours was obtained. Where possible these personnel also sought agreement from the Indigenous student bodies and councils or communities within each institution.

Agreement to conduct the research on the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands and to interview staff and students during teaching hours was obtained through access in principle from the South Australian Department of Education Training and Employment via the coordinating principal, Anangu Education Services.

Access to the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands and permission to conduct the research among students of the Indigenous communities were obtained through the Pitjantjatjara-Yankunytjatjara Education Committee.

At the beginning of this project, when sites were being proposed for the research, the project team had been advised that VET in Schools programs were being conducted on the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands in various Anangu Education Services schools. These details were confirmed during negotiations with the Department of Education, Training and Employment to visit the schools on the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands. Advice was also received that, at the time, VET programs in this locality were mainly conducted under the auspices of the Spencer Institute of TAFE, Port Augusta campus. Amata and Indulkana were confirmed as two of the schools involved with VET in this way, and were therefore visited as study sites.

Data collection: Sampling, questionnaires and interviews

In relation to establishing sample groups to take part in the research, the team was unable to arrive at a definitive means of choosing and/or defining the quota and make-up of the cohort of students at each locality. Following fairly long, drawn-out negotiations with the various organisations, the team members were presented with only a limited number of days considered suitable for visits to the various localities. In addition, the nature of Indigenous teaching and learning as is understood at the various institutions meant that pre-determined numbers of staff, students or classes could not always be guaranteed for any of the arranged and given days when the team made their visits.

During the interview sessions with students at various localities, the questionnaire forms were offered to students to complete. It was found that these 'pre-interview' sessions helped students to familiarise themselves with the ideas surrounding the questions that would be asked by interviewers. Following their written responses, the researchers recorded interviews with the students as a group, using the questionnaires as a basis for the discussions.

The data collection was planned to partially incorporate a 'questionnaire' to be used as a guide only—as information for possible interviewees, for interviewers, and as information for the organisations who were taking part in the project. The questionnaires were forwarded before visits to each participating organisation, and were used as a basis for the Indigenous student councils and local communities to make decisions regarding their participation in the study. Advice was received that research situations would differ and that, while some interviewees may feel more comfortable with giving written responses, others may prefer to talk directly during a recorded interview. However, it has been interesting to note that, despite advice to the contrary, all participants seemed positive about the audio-recording of interviews.

The researchers went to the various sites with sets of questionnaires developed and trialed to address the research questions. However, in a process of evolution in the field, these instruments were eventually simplified from a three-page to a one-page set of questions for reasons of expediency, literacy and privacy. Questionnaires obtained from the various localities, except for the remote region, were made available for analysis alongside the interviews obtained during visits by the research team. However, due to these variations in questionnaire format, use and response, the data they generated could not be collated or analysed with consistency and reliability. Instead, for purposes of comparison, the questionnaire responses were used to provide additional qualitatively rich data and to augment the site reports.

As noted in the literature review, the Community Development Employment Program plays a very strong role in the aspirations for, and transition process to employment for Indigenous people. However, as will be discussed later in this report, for the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands communities, this organisation has become virtually the only employer of Aboriginal people and has taken on a 'local council' type role in providing community-based services for the local Aboriginal population. Consequently, the research team felt that the program personnel at the two localities would have important and useful information to give to the project regarding participant aspirations and employment opportunities in this remote region.

The number of respondents to the project is illustrated in table 1.

Table 1:   Respondents to study

Locality	Staff	Students	Other
Urban centres	9	13	
Regional centres	6	34	
Remote centres	5	14	3 CDEP* personnel
			5 Aboriginal Education Workers

Note: * Community Development Employment Program

A total of 24 of the student respondents from urban and regional centres completed written questionnaires in addition to participating in focus group interviews. It is also worth noting that, in these centres, the student respondents ranged in age from early 20s to late 50s, while respondents in the remote area centres were younger, and included teenagers.

Qualitative analysis of data

The analysis undertaken from the case studies, as described later in this report, occurs across all the sites, with the interviews from student participants, education personnel and where relevant, employment personnel, providing qualitative data. This research focuses on locational factors inherent in the aspirations of Aboriginal students for post-course destinations. Quantitative data collected and disseminated by NCVER (2001) on outcomes and employment are valuable in providing information about numbers of completions or withdrawals and take-up of further studies. However, these figures do not provide an interpretative 'understanding of understanding' (Geertz 1983) that enabled the research questions to be answered from the point of view of the Indigenous people who are the subjects of this study. Hence, only background information was sought from VET institutions about course outcomes, type of study, its length or level. For its part, the qualitative research focused on gaining information from stakeholders about areas problematic for students progressing from study to work, locational information on issues of aspirations for post-course destinations, and identifying areas where pathways following VET might be addressed differently in differing settings.

The major resources informing this study are the interview data collected from students, teachers and other personnel involved with Aboriginal students who have undertaken or are undertaking VET courses. The rationale for using the interview material as valid evidence within a qualitative analysis has been well argued and documented (Eisner & Peshkin 1990; Bogden & Biklen 1992; Merriam 1998). This present study has had little in the way of hypotheses to test, so has sought to use the data to 'build abstractions, concepts, hypotheses or theories rather than test existing theory' (Merriam 1998, p.7).

Limitations

It should be noted that there were significant limitations in conducting interviews in the more remote locations due to language barriers and limited time spent in the region. It is further acknowledged that the time needed to get to know the research context, be accepted by the people and to have appropriate interpreters available is an issue to be kept in mind for this and subsequent research. It is also important to acknowledge that Anangu people are wary of 'being researched' by outsiders, particularly if they do not discern any apparent benefits or outcomes arising from such activity.

The visits to the various sites revealed a major discrepancy between the researchers' initial expectations and the realities on the ground. Not only did the English language ability of interviewees vary from site to site, but also within the Aboriginal student population groups who agreed to talk with the researchers. To a certain degree, this has impacted on the level of information obtained from the sites.

The variation in English ability was especially noticeable in the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands component of the research. The area is particularly remote and research preparations required long distance travel and careful arrangements. Despite the care taken, and although the researchers had access to Anangu Education Workers who, it was anticipated, would help with translation if required, the research raised many issues during the interview process that had not been taken into account beforehand. Students had difficulties with both filling out questionnaires and verbally answering questions. In addition, the number of students available, and with VET experience, varied from the initial negotiations, and some staff and personnel at the localities were different from those with whom we had made the original arrangements.

The study is further limited by the relatively small sample of respondents in each location and the fact that the institutions and organisations taking part in the study may not necessarily be representative of the wider field, or the national picture. This is partly the reason why the literature review focuses more on the national picture of Indigenous VET provision.

Literature review

A major part of the initial methodology for this project was to conduct a literature review related to:

✧ the context of VET delivery for Indigenous students

✧ key features of national Indigenous VET provision

✧ outcomes and pathways for Indigenous students across the various localities

✧ the effect of locality on participant intentions and aspirations for VET provision.

The literature is reviewed under these four broad areas in the following chapter.

Literature review

Context of VET delivery for Indigenous students

Learners undertaking VET courses and modules are assumed to be directing their learning towards some sort of training-to-work transition, or to the upgrading of their skills within work they currently undertake (NCVER 1998, p.5). This project identifies the extent to which such assumptions hold for Indigenous learners in South Australia, and how the differences between the various learning localities of those students have an impact upon the post-course destinations available to them.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Training Advisory Council has provided an advisory function to the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) on ways to improve VET for Indigenous Australians. Part of this advisory council's function has been to assist in the coordination of Indigenous employment, education and training programs. The report, *Partners in a learning culture* (ANTA 2000), arises from such advice. This strategy argues that 'VET can, and does play a constructive and meaningful role in achieving equity and equal opportunities for Indigenous Australians' (ANTA 2000, p.8). Acknowledgement that Indigenous students are not achieving the same outcomes from education, training, employment and income as other Australians, provides direction for policy towards development of programs that *can* achieve worthwhile outcomes for participants. Such policy is generally based on conclusions arising out of comparative statistics between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups of students (for example, Long, Frigo & Batten 1999, p.29).

It is important to stress again that the project undertaken here has been concerned primarily with Indigenous communities of learning, and that the variations existing between them may impact upon the learner's aspirations and their eventual post-course destination outcomes. However, given that literature on Indigenous outcomes and post-course destinations is invariably phrased in Indigenous/non-Indigenous comparative terms, it is inevitable that some of the figures within these comparisons will be noted during the course of this review.

Depending upon location, Indigenous participants across Australia can access VET from either a VET in Schools-based situation, from a registered training organisation such as a TAFE, or from an Aboriginal community-controlled adult education college, such as Tauondi College at Port Adelaide, South Australia.

Although not acknowledeged as a vocational training context, the Community Development Employment Program and its place within Indigenous communities occupies a large part of the discussion of literature presented below. The program also figures strongly in interviews and discussions with participants in this research. It is pertinent therefore, to situate the scheme as a form of VET provision through a brief overview here.

Introduced in 1977, the Community Development Employment Program was established to respond to perceived problems arising from the payment of unemployment benefits. Its basic premise was to provide work programs that would help achieve a greater economic, social and cultural strength in communities. The program provides opportunities for each community to make decisions about the types of development they consider important or worthwhile, and each

community is able to run its own separate program through the auspices of a paid manager. In 1984, the program was expanded beyond remote areas to include Indigenous people living in rural and urban situations. The type of work now undertaken by participants in the program varies from community to community, although maintenance and provision of local services form a major part of the program's activities, as many incentives cover the provision of services that in other regions would be carried out by local councils.

Although not widely recognised as a training program, the Community Development Employment Program nevertheless figures strongly in the development of work-related skills for many Indigenous communities across Australia. An independent review of the program was undertaken in 1997 (Spicer 1997), and pertinent to this research is Recommendation 7 regarding training, which states that 'the issues of training for CDEP participants be referred to the ANTA Ministerial Council to ensure that strategies are put in place to raise the priority given to vocational education and other training for CDEP participants' (Spicer 1997, p.7).

The Community Development Employment Program is currently purported to account for between one-quarter and one-third of the current employed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander labour force and is considered to be a major factor in addressing 'spatial mismatch of Indigenous workers and jobs' (Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, cited in Spicer 1997, p.2). The Community Development Employment Program funding through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission amounted to approximately $400 million in 1999–2000. However, as community members volunteer to pool their social security payments as part of the program's accounting, up to two-thirds of the government costs can be offset against these income support payments that participants would otherwise receive (ATSIC 2004). Participation in the Community Development Employment Program is open to any member of an Indigenous community who is over 16 years of age and eligible for some type of income support payment.

Key features of current national Indigenous VET provision

The main learning contexts in which Indigenous VET tends to take place are the registered training organisations, such as TAFE institutes, which account for approximately 90% of VET provision, along with private training organisations, the adult community education (ACE) providers and Aboriginal community colleges. Most TAFE institutes in Australia offer specialised programs aimed at Indigenous learners. Indigenous learners at school age are offered access to vocational training through the various VET in Schools programs operating throughout Australia in both rural and urban localities. In some very remote cases where TAFE and other registered training organisations do not operate, Indigenous learners of all ages are invited to access school-based programs. A brief overview of the two learning contexts is provided below.

TAFE and other registered training organisations

The 1999 Australian vocational education and training statistics (NCVER 1999a) estimate that there were approximately 1.54 million learners across Australia undertaking publicly funded VET programs in 1998. Of this figure the TAFE sector comprised 1.15 million. By 1999, Indigenous participation in VET had reached 3.1% of the national student body, accounting for some 50 800 learners (NCVER 1999a). Of the providers of VET to Indigenous participants, TAFE holds 80.5%; other registered training organisations, 14.9%; and community education providers, 4.7% (Robinson & Hughes 1999, p.8). The Aboriginal community-controlled adult education colleges offer formal and nationally accredited VET (or higher education) programs. Unlike TAFE, and obviously because of their nature, these colleges are substantially focused on making a contribution to the Aboriginal community's educational goals.

The nature of training undertaken by Indigenous participants in VET varies widely, although as Robinson and Hughes (1999) note, this group is significantly under-represented in areas such as

business, engineering, hospitality and science. At the same time, Indigenous learners are over-represented in the TAFE multi-field education categories covering:

✧ skills and knowledge development of across the range of VET courses or fields of study

✧ pre-vocational courses

✧ literacy and numeracy skills

✧ secondary subjects within a TAFE setting

✧ general skills development—focusing on a range of personal, interpersonal, communication and technical skills.

The authors observe that courses in these categories may be popular because Indigenous participants are more likely to have had poorer schooling prior to VET entry than non-Indigenous participants. At the same time, the level of over-representation also accounts for fields of study that are consistent with Indigenous people's relationship to community, land and the marine environment, as well as being relevant to Indigenous communities, such as education, health and community services; land and marine resources; and animal husbandry.

Overall, the number of learners identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander involved in VET has risen considerably over the past decade. In 1990, these VET learners made up 1.4% of the total student body, and that figure had grown to 3% by the end of 1999. In South Australia it is noted that approximately 3 800 Indigenous VET students were enrolled in that year. Of this total, 1 600 had studied in the urban area, 1 200 in a regional (and rural) situation and 800 had undertaken study in a remote location (NCVER 1999a; 2000). Table 2 presents a comparison of these figures nationally, showing the proportion of urban to rural and remote clients in South Australia in relation to the other states and territories.

Table 2:   Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander clients by geographic region of client address by state/territory

Clients ('000)	NSW	Vic.	Qld	WA	SA	Tas.	NT	ACT	Aust.	%
Urban	5.8	1.9	3.9	1.9	1.6	0.3	1.3	0.2	17.0	32.9
Rural	8.6	1.9	5.3	1.5	1.2	0.6	0.1	0.0	19.3	37.4
Remote	1.0	0.1	2.2	3.7	0.8	-	5.7	0.0	13.6	26.4
Total of all clients	**15.9**	**4.3**	**11.8**	**7.2**	**3.8**	**1.0**	**7.5**	**0.2**	**51.7**	**100.0**
% of all clients	**30.7**	**8.3**	**22.9**	**14.0**	**7.3**	**1.9**	**14.4**	**0.4**	**100.0**	

Source: NCVER (2000)

VET in Schools

The VET in Schools programs offer students the opportunity to gain workforce skills while continuing to stay at school and take part in the general school curriculum. These programs include access to school-based New Apprenticeships. During 1999 there were more than 136 000 school students involved in a VET in Schools program across Australia as well as 3 994 in New Apprenticeships (ANTA 2004).

For Indigenous students, VET in Schools accounts for only 2.3% of their total VET delivery (Robinson & Hughes 1999, p.22). This figure, however, describes mainly school-aged Indigenous students attending remote area classrooms, rather than those in regional or urban centres who have wider access to VET programs.

VET in Schools for Indigenous learners is offered through various programs differing from school to school, as well as from state to state and community to community. For example, school–industry programs can be highly localised and often arise out of strategic partnerships between a school and its

local Indigenous and industry bodies. Several examples of such partnerships are described in the Western Australian Department of Training and Employment consultation paper (1999) and include Boggabilla Central School in New South Wales, the Cape York Cluster (Queensland) and Leigh Creek Area School (South Australia). An important feature of such programs is that while they offer VET to school-aged students, there are also opportunities for other members of the Indigenous community who are beyond compulsory school age to take part in the courses.

In other situations, Indigenous VET programs may be directed specifically to the school age group who undertake a nationally recognised training qualification while completing Years 11 and 12. In South Australia, the Anangu Education Service on the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands has a number of schools where teachers have incorporated aspects of VET into the curriculum across all year levels (Edwards 1998, p.3). For Anangu students attending the Wiltja Program attached to Woodville High School in Adelaide, the access has been arranged with a number of training providers around that city, whereby students are able to participate in accredited courses as well as undertake work experience with businesses.

Other programs in schools incorporate students from the post-compulsory sector and are offered through the auspices of a nearby TAFE or Indigenous community college. The Croydon Youth Learning Centre is such an initiative at Croydon High School in South Australia and is open to Indigenous young people in the western suburbs of Adelaide.

Experiences and outcomes of Indigenous learners by locality on a national basis

Statistics from the NCVER 2001 Student Outcomes Survey for Australian vocational education and training provide little indication of differences between localities in relation to Indigenous employment figures after completion of VET programs. However, these figures do indicate the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates in each state where courses were completed in 1998.

Total respondents to the survey numbered 39 426. Of this total, 1.9% indicated an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background. State-by-state percentages of employed graduates were broken down as indicated by table 3.

Table 3:   Graduates of VET employed at 25 May 2001

State	Total	ATSI* % of total
NSW	39 115	1.6
Vic.	16 099	0.6
QLD	18 668	2.4
SA	4 802	1.2
WA	9 280	1.0
Tas.	1 592	2.6
NT	888	15.7
ACT	1 227	0.6

Note: *Aboriginal or Torres Straight Islander
Source: NCVER (2001)

The national Student Outcomes Surveys produced by NCVER provide detailed information on VET students nationwide. An analysis of the 2001 data reveals some interesting indications that location has some bearing on Indigenous learner aspirations, their experiences and outcomes. (Note

here that the term 'rural' is used in tables 4 to 7 rather than the regional definition given in this research. The information obtained did not provide further breakdown into remote sectors.)

These differences are particularly manifest in:

✧ the reasons for taking up study

✧ the satisfaction (or lack of it) expressed by students with the process of studying

✧ the employment outcomes following study.

Table 4:   Reasons for Indigenous VET learners undertaking study by locality compared to total VET learners

Locality	Personal		Job-related	
		(%)		(%)
Indigenous				
Urban	320	31.7	691	68.3
Rural	450	33.9	877	66.1
Total VET				
Urban	24 132	27.3	64 198	72.7
Rural	8 669	24.1	27 368	75.9

Source: NCVER (2001)

Indigenous students in rural areas were slightly more likely to undertake study for *personal interest* than their urban counterparts. However, the survey also indicates that, while in both rural and urban areas reasons for undertaking study were significantly more *job-related* than personal, they were less so than for the total population of VET learners.

Table 5:   Indigenous VET student satisfaction

Locality	Information poor	Admin-istration poor	Career information poor	Counselling poor	Counselling good	Overall quality good
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Indigenous						
Urban	2.8	4.6	7.8	13.3	50.5	83.1
Rural	1.8	2.2	4.0	4.9	63.9	89.1
Total VET						
Urban	2.9	5.8	7.8	8.4	51.8	80.6
Rural	2.5	3.9	6.2	7.1	56.9	83.3

Source: NCVER (2001)

Rural Indigenous learners appear to rate the overall quality of VET courses higher than do their urban counterparts and also in comparison to the total VET learner population.

By comparison with the total VET population, Indigenous graduates are less likely to be employed, whether they continue study or not. Compared to urban graduates, rural Indigenous graduates are less likely to be employed and more likely to be unemployed or not in the labour force after exiting a VET course, whether they continue study or not. This distinction is even more apparent in table 7.

Following a VET course, 55% of previously unemployed urban students gain employment, compared to 34% of rural learners. Of previously employed rural learners, 12% become unemployed after VET courses compared with only 4% of those in urban areas. The differences in locality are not nearly as significant for the total VET figures.

Table 6: Employment status of Indigenous VET graduates post-course

Locality	Employed (%)	Unemployed (%)	Not in labour force (%)
Indigenous—not studying			
Urban	70.7	12.5	15.4
Rural	62.5	19.3	17.7
Indigenous—studying			
Urban	69.8	11.4	18.2
Rural	47.6	17.3	32.3
Total VET—not studying			
Urban	79.2	10.7	9.8
Rural	79.7	10.7	9.3
Total VET—studying			
Urban	63.3	13.7	22.4
Rural	65.5	14.1	19.8

Source: NCVER (2001)

Table 7: Labour force status of Indigenous VET graduates before/after course

Locality	Unemployed to employed	Employed to unemployed	Continued employment	Continued unemployment
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Indigenous				
Urban	55.2	4.4	90.4	29.9
Rural	33.9	12.4	79.3	40.0
Total VET				
Urban	43.9	5.5	88.4	36.7
Rural	47.9	5.9	88.5	34.5

Source: NCVER (2001)

The above differences would seem to reflect the differences in availability of employment between urban and rural/regional areas for Indigenous participants, who in rural areas, may use VET more to follow personal interests and less to gain employment, possibly because there is less employment available. The labour market status of rural learners before and after VET study shows the much higher rate of unemployment that one would expect in rural (and by extrapolation, remote) areas. Nevertheless, following VET study there is still improvement in employment status for *both* groups.

Students outside the urban areas surveyed seem to be less critical of college administration and counselling and information services and rate the quality of the training they receive as better. This could be because their college experience is more rewarding in terms of personal development and their expectations of gaining employment are more realistic. Whether the VET services in rural areas are as effective in providing students with optimum outcomes as those in urban areas or not, it would appear from these data that the non-urban learners enjoy their VET experiences more than do their urban counterparts.

The effect of locality on participant intentions and aspirations for VET provision

As the issue of locality was a key focus of this research project, it is relevant to consider some of the literature that examines how geographical location 'shapes' VET. If the 'value' of courses is not always tied to employment outcomes from the participants' perspectives, does this impact on what is offered

on the basis of whether the location is in urban, regional or remote communities? In the proceedings of the Benchmarking Workshop (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 1998) such aspects of geographical location and the impact on employment outcomes are raised. The need to 'seek out practical and effective ways to measure the performance of government with particular emphasis on … incorporating cultural and geographic realities into the setting of targets' (1998, p.10) is identified. However, missing from the discussion was what such measurements might look like.

In relation to how aspirations for post-course destinations are influenced by geographical locale, the ways in which regional and remote communities take up new enterprises and how these creative approaches work to shape the courses offered is exemplified in a number of documents which cite case studies of successful programs. In several of the examples, the desired 'post-course destination'— for example, the work that the community generated was what drove the courses on offer. In these instances, remote communities appeared to have greater say over the VET modules offered than did their urban cousins.

Post-course destinations in these instances become synonymous with pre-course work possibilities. While not tied to specific employment outcomes, these arguments are supported by Seemann and Talbot (1995). In their study, the authors argue that the ATWORK (Aboriginal Technical Worker) program, located at the Centre for Appropriate Technology in Alice Springs, aims to 'develop students' practical skills and self confidence, and their awareness of technological options and applied designs and technacy [sic] skills, that support and influence indigenous Australian community functions and lifestyle choices' (Seemann & Talbot 1995, p.73).

Other, more generalised course offerings and their subsequent outcomes are also apparently tied to locality. Phan and Ball (2001) question whether enabling courses—lower-level preparatory and pre-vocational courses in VET—actually produce employment outcomes. Their findings suggest that such courses tend to result in employment if the person undertaking the course lives where there is employment available. In addition, the authors find that, while there was a rise in employment for some groups of students following their enabling courses, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants, the employment outcomes did not differ greatly when compared against the proportion of these students who were employed before commencing a course. The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from regional and remote areas also remained the same in terms of employment outcomes following their enabling courses (Phan & Ball 2001, p.10).

This correlation between employment options, training and location resonates in discussions of locality as an issue in defining outcomes in terms of employment and Aboriginal women's participation in VET courses. The Women's Education and Training Co-ordination Unit (1996) issues paper notes:

> The further young women are away from employment options, the more affected they are by recession. Spending money on training appears to be a problem, especially impacting on young women. Tying funding to employment outcomes can severely disadvantage isolated areas where there are and always will be limited vocational outcomes. A more creative or broadened definition of the term 'vocational outcomes' needs to be adopted, so isolated young women do not miss out on the training dollar.
>
> (Women's Education and Training Co-ordination Unit 1996, p.32)

Teasdale and Teasdale (1996) noted the importance of taking account of locale in analysing outcomes. They used seven general categories: capital city; other metropolitan; large rural centre; small rural centre; other rural area; large remote areas; other remote area for their analysis. The authors observed that 'in a depressed labour market, jobs are hard to get for everyone—particularly in rural and some of the areas where many Indigenous people live' (Teasdale & Teasdale 1996, p.83).

Locality arises also in Boughton's (1998) analysis of research and policy documents on the development needs of Indigenous peoples. This particular analysis brings together a body of evidence to indicate that there is a need for alternative approaches to VET provision. Boughton

suggests that a key question for research should be 'how better to match VET offerings to the development needs and aspirations which are expressed through Indigenous community organisations' (Boughton 1998, p.18).

Some of the issues stressed by Boughton as impacting upon Indigenous post-course destinations are:

✧ the restructuring of rural economies

✧ the assumptions that Indigenous people can easily move off their own country to chase work

✧ the involvement of Indigenous communities in promoting their own alternative pathways to community and regional development

✧ the assumptions underlying 'assimilationism' within the political economy of VET resource allocation.

(Boughton 1998, pp.28–9)

Boughton presents a strong argument for redefining the parameters of post-course destinations from 'employment' to something much broader. More attention should be paid to the diverse nature of Indigenous peoples' reality and to their location, as well as to the actual paid and unpaid work being done in local communities (1998, p.26).

Australia's national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education policy of 1989 enshrined in legislation educational equality principles for Indigenous people across the country. Its rationale was to 'achieve broad equity between Aboriginal people and other Australians in access, participation and outcomes in all forms of education and training by the turn of the century' (Robinson & Bamblett 1998, p.5). Commenting on the impact of the policy since its inception, Robinson and Bamblett show that considerable gains have been made in Indigenous participation in education as a whole (1998, p.5). In particular, VET participation rates between 1986 and 1996 show the following increases among the Indigenous population:

✧ 16–17 years: from 4.8% to 23.4%

✧ 18–20 years: from 4.0% to 22.5%

✧ 21–24 years: from 2.6% to 17.1%

✧ 25+ years: from 1.6% to 12.6%

It should be noted however, that the rates are for Indigenous participation overall; that is, across Australia. The figures neither give a breakdown by state nor indicate differences between participation in urban, regional and remote localities, and hence cannot provide comment on differences between Indigenous aspirations.

The authors also observe that module outcome indicators from vocational education in 1996 do not show Indigenous failure rates to be significantly higher than non-Indigenous failure rates; that is, 'all being in the 4–6% failure rate range' (Robinson & Bamblett 1998, p.17). Such figures provide positive indications for Indigenous VET participation and outcomes overall. Once again, however, these figures are Australia-wide and give no indication of differences that occur in differing localities nor do they necessarily translate to labour market participation rates for Indigenous students. Furthermore, these figures do not identify the aspirations of Indigenous VET participants in regard to their expectations arising out of undertaking and succeeding in a VET course or unit.

Another study that raises questions about aspects of locality on provision and participation in VET by Indigenous learners is the ANTA-funded study, *Culture matters,* undertaken by the University of Technology, Sydney (McIntyre et al. 1996). This study examines factors leading to positive outcomes in VET for Indigenous Australians. The project examined:

✧ the range of VET provision and how it varied according to urban, regional and rural, and remote areas

✧ the main concerns of students in their VET study

✧ the typical pathways taken in VET by Indigenous Australians

✧ language and literacy issues in VET delivery.

The study by McIntyre et al. (1996) highlights Indigenous participation in VET as a cultural process. The report stresses the complexity of program delivery as it interfaces with Aboriginal communities, government and other interested influences. The authors note that for effective VET provision to occur, several factors are integral to the process including:

✧ recognising that participation in VET is a cultural activity

✧ making a space for Aboriginality within the institution

✧ involving Aboriginal communities in course design and delivery

✧ being flexible and negotiate appropriate teacher–learning processes

✧ making relevant language and literacy learning integral to course delivery

✧ evaluating the effectiveness of each part of the system of course delivery.

The study also identified the differences that emerge between younger and older people's experiences of learning and of the impact of changes in economic and social circumstances that have occurred over time. Whereas many younger VET participants are undertaking training to find employment, for older participants, there are cases cited where VET study allowed them to move into different areas of employment. The extensive qualitative data within McIntyre et al.'s (1996) research provides a constructive basis for understanding the contextual factors influencing aspirations and experiences of Indigenous learners within VET provision.

Continuing the discussion on locality issues, the Aboriginal Programs Unit's draft document, *Learning for vocational success* (2000), cites reasons why young Indigenous learners in rural and isolated communities have less successful participation and fewer options of employment as a post-course destination. Among the reasons are travel distances, the lack of accessibility to 'natural labour markets' other than local community or those provided by Community Development Employment Program, and lack of obvious incentives. This policy document also notes that 'isolation may be social, cultural, vocational and economic as well as geographic' (2000, p.11). It is worthwhile noting here that similar issues relating to employment or workplace training are highlighted by Kilpatrick and Bell's (1998) study of non-Indigenous VET access in rural and remote farming areas in Australia. However, the authors point out that there are traditions of 'non-formal training in agriculture' (1998, p.16) and various business-related farming networks that have 'outcomes of improved business profitability, responsiveness and adaptability' that impact favourably on non-Indigenous rural VET participants. For Indigenous VET participants, however, while there are important and tangible attachments to a local area, such business or agricultural opportunities are limited to a few contexts such as pastoral interests in the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands and projects like the community-run winery in New South Wales (Neill 2002). In many instances, therefore, involvement in VET will not necessarily lead to employment.

Not only do issues of locality impact in post-school Indigenous learners, they also impact on school-aged participants. Reporting on the literature available regarding the school-to-work transition of Indigenous students, Long et al. (1999) emphasise that the transition barriers and difficulties existing for Indigenous students were greater than those for non-Indigenous students. Importantly for our study, the authors also note that 'Indigenous youth in rural and remote areas may experience additional barriers in their experiences of school and subsequent transition from school to work and further education' (Long, Frigo & Batten 1999, p.6). 'Rurality' is described as a salient

factor for many Indigenous young people in a further study by the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia (1996). The effects of rurality influence a number of issues including:

✧ average literacy achievements

✧ culturally inappropriate teaching strategies and forms of assessment

✧ relevance of school

✧ teacher training expectations

✧ teacher expectations

✧ student motivations

✧ student–teacher relations

✧ language

✧ attendance

✧ housing, health, substance abuse

✧ community funding resources

✧ lower self-esteem

✧ drop-out rates.

(National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia 1996)

With specific regard to VET delivery in remote/regional areas, rurality also exacerbates the situation of multiple disadvantage for Indigenous students (Volkoff & Golding 1998, cited in Long , Frigo & Batten 1999). Yet such disadvantage can be hidden by certain statistics, one example being labour market programs, such as the Community Development Employment Program and subsequent apparent employment outcomes. As Long, Frigo and Batten note, given the availability of the programs, 'the likelihood of employment prospects for Indigenous people in rural areas does not appear to be significantly different from urban areas' (1999, p.6). Issues involving the Community Development Employment Program are further discussed below.

Community Development Employment Program and its influence on understanding local aspirations and outcomes

Questions about the relative nature of employment outcomes for Indigenous participants in the differing localities are addressed by several authors. The lack of ongoing employment opportunities continues to be critical factor in assessing successful Indigenous learner outcomes for many remote and regional communities. While there is strong participation in the Community Development Employment Program, it often did not lead to other kinds of jobs (Keenihan 1996; Edwards 2000). Actual employment rates may be masked by participation in this program in some of the localities. Thus, how other kinds of post-course destinations are accounted for in the statistical data and valued in reporting procedures is of significance; and as Volkoff and Golding point out, for Indigenous as well as other non-English-speaking background groups, 'the concept of a career path may be new' (1998, p.29).

Other questions regarding an understanding of what constitutes career as an employment outcome come from Durnan and Boughton's study *Succeeding against the odds* (1999). This study presented outcomes resulting from a survey of Indigenous people who participated in VET courses in some of the Aboriginal community-controlled adult education colleges. Two issues raised by the authors are particularly relevant here. The first relates back to the point previously made in Boughton's (1998) study that the survey statistics showing 36% of students achieved a 'positive employment outcome' may be masking other positive outcomes from VET that do not translate specifically as

employment. For example, within the survey, many respondents chose to nominate options such as 'unpaid cultural work' or 'voluntary community work' and 'looking after family', rather than designate their situation as unemployed.

The argument here is that such occupations within Indigenous communities may 'count as legitimate work in their communities' (Durnan & Boughton 1999, p.37). Hence, aspirations of a positive employment outcome may not specifically be tied into the paid labour market area. The authors argue that the contextual factors affecting attitudes towards what constitutes paid and unpaid work raises many questions about the VET sector for Indigenous clients. 'Most importantly, what outcomes are students and their communities seeking and getting from this sector, and are they adequately recognised and valued in current policy and resourcing arrangements?' (Durnan & Boughton 1999, p.38).

The issues relating to what constitutes actual paid employment following vocational training resonate with the situation of Community Development Employment Program. Durnan and Boughton's survey revealed that 42% of post-study employment was sourced from this program. In addition, analysis of the non-Community Development Employment Program work showed that 70% of the remaining employment came from Aboriginal organisations and communities. The proceedings of the Benchmarking Workshop (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 1998) also raise the issue of Community Development Employment Program and employment. However, this analysis shows slightly differing figures, that 'an estimated 65 per cent of all Indigenous employment growth between 1986 and 1991 was due to CDEP scheme employment, and that overall in the 1990s, the Community Development Employment Program share of the total Indigenous employment has been consistently between 20 and 25 per cent' (1998, p.92).

Durnan and Boughton add that, 'in many communities and the regions of which they are a part, CDEP is the only available form of employment' (1999, p.37). Does this finding mean that access to the wider labour market is unavailable to Indigenous students, or not considered an option by the students? Do they aspire to work only for the Community Development Employment Program? Whatever the answer to this question, it is apparent that this program plays a crucial role in the context of post-course destinations and aspirations for a great many communities.

It is interesting to note that, of the colleges taking part in Durnan and Boughton's study, two are located in Sydney, one in Adelaide, and the other in Alice Springs. However, comparisons between the opportunities available to urban-based students in Sydney and Adelaide, and those available to regional students in Alice Springs, were not made as part of the conclusions. At the same time, the figures offered by the authors do provide a worthwhile basis from which to widen the comparison between urban, regional and remote post-course destinations available to Indigenous participants.

The discussion paper, *Indigenous participation in labour market and training programs* (Taylor & Hunter 1996), also points out certain anomalies existing between the delivery of a variety of labour market programs and the numbers of the participants, and a subsequent actual and observable job growth:

> Aside from key structural and cultural barriers to employment, one explanation offered for this has been that many labour market program placements have not represented 'new' entrants to 'new' jobs, but simply the same individuals recycled several times.
>
> (Taylor & Hunter 1996, p.16)

In addition, the authors suggest that other barriers to Indigenous employment are found in a changing labour market, one that requires a higher level of skills at the expense of more unskilled

jobs—where most Indigenous people continue to find employment. Significantly for our project, these authors note that:

> … to ensure that Indigenous job seekers are not left behind in a changing labour market there is a need for regional estimation of likely areas of employment growth (and decline), and an attempt to focus training and work experience towards matching supply with anticipated demand. (Taylor & Hunter 1996, p.16)

The concept of the Community Development Employment Program and other labour market programs as viable post-course destinations for Indigenous people will be addressed again in the final chapters of this report—most particularly in relation to South Australia and the differing localities under study.

Case study scenarios across the localities

From March through to September 2001, members of the project team visited the following localities:

✧ Remote:
  ♦ Amata School and Indulkana Schools,[4] Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands

✧ Regional:
  ♦ Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE, Murray Bridge campus
  ♦ Murray Institute of TAFE, Berri and Loxton campuses

✧ Urban:
  ♦ Adelaide Institute of TAFE
  ♦ Tauondi College
  ♦ Maxima Training
  ♦ The Wiltja program at Woodville High School

This chapter presents some of the data from interviews, conversations, questionnaires and observations taken during these visits under the three main locality headings.

Remote sites

Amata School and Indulkana Schools, Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands

Context

The *Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act 1981* ensures that the Anangu Pitjantjatjara people have control over some 102 500 square kilometres in the far north west of South Australia. There are eight major communities and some 160 homelands or satellite communities (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997). The Indigenous population on the Lands is rising overall, and while Indulkana's population of around 330 showed relative stability between the 1991 and 1996 census, Amata's community had risen from 370 in 1991 to 537 at the last census of 1996.[5] This region is at the extreme end of the Australian accessibility and remoteness index and considered to be very remote in that typology.

The major income-producing industry is arts and crafts. The two centres of Ernabella Arts and Kaltjiti Crafts provide services for artists and craftspeople in the surrounding areas. Much of the work is marketed and sold interstate and overseas. The Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands are under the auspices of a community executive body administering land use, tourism, access, community management, essential services, trade stores, road works and so on. Facilities such as schools and health centres are largely run by government bodies and much of the infrastructure is serviced by outside expertise. Salaried employment is funded either directly or indirectly by the South

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[4] South Australian Government schools.
[5] It should be noted that the Australian Bureau of Statistics Indigenous community profile data collected at the last census (1996) was defined as being inherently flawed due to various issues relating to collection and recording. Hence, these, and any other bureau figures cannot reflect absolute accuracy.

Australian Government or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and basic community services maintenance is largely carried out by community members employed within the Community Development Employment Program which 'accounts for about 85% of the total labour force on the Lands' (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997).

Indulkana is the closest community to the main north–south Stuart Highway running between Adelaide and Darwin. In 2001 the Indulkana School put its overall enrolment at around 60 students from reception to Year 12. Staff indicated that up to 18 secondary students were enrolled, although considerably fewer were regular attendees. Amata is a community situated approximately halfway between the Darwin–Adelaide Stuart Highway and the West Australian border. It is 284 kilometres from Indulkana. The most recent Anangu Education Services (Edwards 1998) figures suggest an enrolment of 70 students from reception to Year 12 at its school.

Student responses

Subjects and courses

In the main the secondary students taking part in focus group discussions seemed unaware that courses they were involved in were related to VET with the ultimate aim of employment. At the same time, VET was viewed as particularly related to learning in a TAFE institute type of setting, rather than to their school setting. However, interviewees identified various aspects of VET that were either part of their ongoing learning program, or were part of what they viewed as a separate 'TAFE' mode of instruction:

✧ using tools—chainsaws, jig saws

✧ making paper—recycling materials

✧ painting

✧ knitting and sewing

✧ operating machinery—the fire truck.

Although reserved in the majority of their replies, students who recently completed a radio broadcasting course offered through the school were particularly enthusiastic about the course. They spoke of aspirations for work being available in a community radio situation in the future—if it were to be run from their community or if they could get to the radio station based at Umawa near Ernabella that broadcasts in Pitjantjatjara and English. The students also undertake computer-oriented training, although did not perceive this as part of a VET program.

Skills acquired through VET

The students had trained in the use of tools and agreed that knowing how to use tools is a good thing—whether in a work situation or in other settings. Given that there are art galleries on the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands, it is not surprising these learners identified painting as a particularly useful skill to have, although on the Lands communities, such skills are held by a large number of the community beyond those involved with structured VET programs.

Further training or other courses available

Students saw welding and building courses as useful skills, if such training were offered in their region. They did not identify nor aspire to other courses, although they discussed aspirations for being teachers or office workers if opportunities arose. As mechanical skills are viewed as useful and important in this locality, the learners felt that a garage on the Lands would be an important step in setting up a training situation. Students suggested that having a garage in the local area would provide opportunities for training and jobs in mechanical work. Nursing is of interest to some of the females, if health centre jobs were available. Female students also aspire to work as Aboriginal education workers, and this is a viable option for those school leavers with appropriate grades. A bicycle maintenance course is proposed for one community where interviewees expressed interest.

However, the interviewer notes that whatever was made in the way of suggestions, the students would all agree—they did not themselves offer examples of VET courses they would like to be involved in. There remains some doubt as to whether these learners are aware of what vocational education could offer them or what is entailed for their being involved.

Employment in the locality

Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands VET students were aware that employment does exist in their locality. They knew that the police station, health centre, art centre, store and school office are places of employment. However, the majority of such jobs in these areas seem to be held by non-Indigenous Australians. Working as an Aboriginal education worker seems a popular choice for females, and students were aware that training courses are available locally through the University of South Australia's Anangu Teacher Education Program. Some students expressed aspirations for being involved with radio broadcasting, but it was not clear whether they saw this as actual paid employment or as an occupation that involved them in the community. Although there are thriving art centres on the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands, these students did not associate them with employment outcomes or with their own aspirations.

Willingness to move away

The students had some difficulty with the concept of having to move off the lands to take up employment elsewhere. The issues they would have to face in order to do this are complex and integral to their view of their place in the community. During their time within the community, the researchers became aware that the concept of moving, and being away from close family ties, are very real issues for community members. But it must be emphasised that, due to mutual language barriers and a reservation on the part of interviewees, this view cannot be verified by researchers. There is however, similar anecdotal evidence from teachers in other communities who have senior students attending the Wiltja program in Adelaide. As is discussed in the section relating to urban learners, Wiltja teachers see many students return to the Lands well before completion of courses. On the whole, these VET participants did not consider the idea of moving from their community to find work. A minority expressed some preparedness to move to Alice Springs or Darwin, but only to work within radio if the opportunity arose. It should be noted here that much of the radio announcing is presented in the Pitjantjatjara language, hence there would be a level of confidence not matched when participants were expected to use English language skills.

Staff responses

VET programs

In the Anangu-Pitajantjatjara Lands teaching in VET at the government schools visited was undertaken by various teaching staff members, usually those working with the secondary students. Some had workplace assessor qualifications while others indicated they were working towards them. In addition, some programs were offered through the auspices of a TAFE institute, and while there was some crossover between the schools and TAFE programs, there was a clear distinction between those for 'kids' and those for adults (see issues below). The types of accredited programs being offered included a certificate level drawing course and other art courses through the community art centre, the Certificate II in Community Radio, and various modules in maintenance and use of tools and equipment that could lead towards certification and be counted as part of the South Australian Certificate of Education.

Student outcomes

Staff reiterated that employment opportunities in the communities centre around the school, store, health centre and art centre. However, any student who aspired to learn a trade through workplace training or an approved apprenticeship would need to go to a large centre like Alice Springs. While such services as plumbing, air conditioning and mechanical maintenance are vital to the

communities, there are no service delivery organisations based in the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara lands that could provide either work experience or apprenticeships in these fields.

However, the successful completion of the South Australian Certificate of Education by three Indigenous students from Indulkana recently has been seen as inspiring to other staff in the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands and as contributing to widening the aspirations of other students. These three students had gone on from their school-based VET studies to Batchelor College near Darwin, studying teaching, community health and community management.

Issues in VET delivery

The major issues identified by Department of Education, Training and Employment staff in regards to organising VET programs were time and community liaison. Planning and implementing an accredited VET module takes time and impacts upon a very full secondary school program. Setting up a new course requires a very high volume of paperwork relating to applications for funding and student participation. In addition, there are intensive negotiations required to get approval from community and Aboriginal education workers. The Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands schools have an endemic problem of consistently high teaching staff turnover, so by the time all the paperwork has been completed and various local and department bureaucratic requirements accommodated, the staff member involved might have moved on. As well, the local council may have changed, or TAFE institute community officers have moved on or finished a contract, and negotiations will then have to start again. Despite immense time taken to plan and set options in motion the plans may not actually eventuate.

There is also the consideration in Aboriginal schools of irregular attendance by students, often for cultural and family reasons. Of 18 secondary students on the books at Indulkana, staff reported that there were usually only 13 regular attendees. However, a number of students from Indulkana were in Adelaide at the time as part of the Wiltja program and some of these took part in the interviews conducted there.

During the data collection visit there were discussions about the efficacy of a separation between TAFE studies and VET in Schools in a way that can be clearly understood by the community. Although the remoteness of this locality lends economic sense to having all groups working together, especially the schools and TAFE institute in regard to younger students, teachers here see that with some cultural issues, TAFE studies need to be seen as separate from schools. They cite the example of where men here are initiated, it becomes a 'shame' situation to go back to school afterwards. TAFE-type studies provides an alternative that does not carry the connotation of a child's place for learning. The successful completion of a program in terms of measurable outcomes and accountability also depends on attendance. As mentioned above, staff can neither guarantee nor expect consistent attendance, given the many cultural commitments of everyday Anangu life that must take precedence over school and VET training. Co-opting VET programs into the school system has to take account of these commitments.

Suggested VET courses and subjects

There was a suggestion that management-related training designed to encourage business and entrepreneurial skills would be very beneficial to Anangu in being able to capitalise on marketing products such as artworks produced by the communities. The possibility of professional development for staff and training in the delivery of courses in English as a second language, art in the community, as well as health and recreation, were mentioned at Amata. It was also suggested that, although there was a clear need for something like an office skills certificate, given the possible job opportunities in school and municipal office administration, the prediction was that only older girls would be interested and even then, attendance could be poor. Another suggestion for a course on bicycle maintenance was proposed and seemed to have some support from the community, with funding applied for through the municipal office. Again, this would probably only appeal to the boys, but the teacher planning it believed boys weren't as interested in arts-based courses as girls and

that the main aim of the course would be to model a 'vocational education learning style' that could lead to more enterprise learning, even if the content and context were rather limited.

Further opportunities are expected to be made available for students this year if the Anangu Education Service three-year plan that includes a coordinated VET approach is implemented.[6] The objectives for the 'work education training' section of the plan are to 'co-ordinate VET on the Lands' and to 'support students in transition from school to work and/or further study' (Anangu Education Services 2000).

TAFE institute courses

TAFE courses on the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands, as elsewhere, are funded on outcomes. There was a perception among staff and other personnel interviewed that many of the students are passed and graded even when they have not reached standard requirements of a course. Given differing student abilities and levels, one response to this is to look at what the students are involved in and able to do, and then identify modules that will fit their capabilities. An example is that of telephone operations, a unit that all students seem able to undertake and successfully complete. Communications technology is valued by the Anangu because of its ability to link community members who are separated by the very long distances in the area. The most successful and continuing area seemed to be the modules associated with form filling because they help community members to obtain driving licenses and to learn road rules and obtain driving lessons and support.

TAFE institutes and Community Development Employment Program personnel also worked together with students, in one case largely using the latter's equipment as the TAFE facilities were no longer functional. Year 10 boys were undertaking small modules on familiarisation with tools and machinery and addressing power supply maintenance, water maintenance and local community work, such as weeding and roadside clearance. These short courses can lead to certification, although it was not clear whether actual certification was occurring in this locality. Students could however link into further TAFE studies if staffing and courses were available.

There is also a high level of gender division in VET course participation. One male TAFE institute instructor who ended up only offering modules to men or boys for cultural reasons. He was willing to offer some art classes through TAFE but it would become problematic for the instructor if he had women in his classes—he may not only be accused of 'stealing' students from the art centre, but also he is not allowed to 'look' at certain women unless they are of school age. TAFE staff recognise the importance of working closely with the school, but as with school staff, acknowledge the necessity for the community to see the institutions as separate as well. It encourages school leavers to feel good about continuing on, as well as allowing initiated men to access courses without 'shaming' concerns.

Community Development Employment Program staff responses

Community Development Employment Program is the major provider of any sort of employment[7] for local communities on the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands. As with other respondents, personnel here consider the opportunities for employment of local VET graduates to be in the school, health

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[6] In relation to proposals for VET delivery on the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands, the Anangu Education Service has a current 'three year strategic directions and objective 2000–2002 plan' (2000) that has provision for a large workplace training component. A VET officer has been employed since the beginning of 2001 and negotiations are underway to involve the Pitjantjatjara/Yankunyjatjara Education Committee in planning and implementation. However, while this plan has been in place for some time, few of the school staff involved with VET delivery seemed to have been made aware of the program and its aims. The TAFE staff at Indulkana did not appear to be aware of the plan's inception. At the same time, it must be noted again that staff turnover at the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands schools is very high and this may account for an overall lack of knowledge about future programming or the current programs that other schools or groups may be involved with.

[7] As was noted earlier, separating the concept of 'real' employment and 'Community Development Employment Program employment' in this and other regions continues to be problematic.

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centre and trade store area. The Community Development Employment Program is the organisation most closely aligned with the local Anangu Council which controls municipal functions. Within this organisation many people are opened up to other areas of employment tied in with vocational training, including infrastructure maintenance (such as road machinery operation), fire-fighting equipment use and landscaping. There are also organisational management opportunities in municipal services, office procedures, budgeting, accounting and computer use.

The Community Development Employment Program has also discussed community involvement and training on cattle operations near the Amata community currently run by a non-Indigenous manager. The likely restructuring of this facility may result in community involvement and training under Community Development Employment Program auspices. This cattle area is part of the Anangu Education Services 2000–2002 VET program, and the Community Development Employment Program feels that the station could become a viable education facility for Anangu people if there is culturally appropriate liaison between the parties involved.

One of the program coordinators acknowledged that training does have a more significant role to play in the Community Development Employment Program employment and work program, especially in a project such as on the cattle station. However, he also felt that it was not his role to act as a trainer or educator and that he did not possess the necessary skills or qualifications for such a role. Another Community Development Employment Program coordinator questioned what the schools were doing to make kids 'job ready' and whether they were leaving school with relevant and appropriate skills and attitudes that would increase their employability.

Anangu education workers responses

Although unwilling to discuss themselves or their training in literacy and their Anangu Teacher Education Program studies, Anangu education workers interviewed at one of the sites suggest there is a place in the schools for projects and infrastructure that would provide workplace training and experience. As parents, they also saw the need for a school canteen to be established, not only as an alternative to the food available at the community store but to provide employment or work experience. While this group's view is that students understand the relationship between school and work, they know that to find a job generally means going away and that very few people leave. The Anangu education workers group listed several areas where employment/work could be available— the store, council and Community Development Employment Program offices, rubbish collection, grading (roads), housing (building and maintenance) and solar power installation. The group spoke also of work 'at home' and how their training feeds into community welfare issues. There were also suggestions that more students could be trained to teach others in English speaking, writing and reading. The consensus was that training provides strong community-based outcomes, rather than employment outcomes as is generally expressed.

When talking to the Anangu education workers it became very apparent that language is a major issue, not only because of their reservation in communicating with the research team whose members spoke only English, but as a major issue in education in the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands schools. All instruction is given in English, and a major role of the Anangu education workers in the classroom is to act as interpreter between the English speaking teacher and the children, for whom English is their second language after Pitjantjatjara. The Anangu education workers group had therefore introduced weekly classes for the children in their first language, but it was not clear to what extent these were supported, successful, or continuing. It was also noted that even though a teacher might have spent 16 years teaching in schools on the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands, they may not necessarily pick up any of the local language during that time.

Iwantja arts centre responses

When the research team visited the Iwantja arts centre at Indulkana, they found it was open to all women within the community. Although 30 people were registered on the centre's roll, only a few

at a time in various age groups regularly attended short workshops. They are not TAFE-accredited. However the art centre is economically viable and it was pointed out to researchers that, with appropriate funding, the art centre could offer a range of opportunities in developing skills in marketing, organisation, and various art-based capabilities. A small number of Anangu people have gone to Alice Springs and earned $50 000–$60 000 each year as artists, but appear to have had no training in administration to consolidate their successes.

Regional sites

Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE, Murray Bridge

Context

Murray Bridge is a large town located some 55 km from Adelaide on the main Adelaide–Melbourne route and situated on the banks of the Murray River. Murray Bridge is considered to be a highly accessible area in the accessibility and remoteness typology and, according to that index, is regional rather than rural. However, Indigenous respondents at Murray Bridge consider that they have similar issues of attachment to land and have to encounter similar concerns of leaving family as do Aboriginal populations on the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands. Comparative distance and factors of regionality developed in Western terms do not translate easily into this context.

The total population of Murray Bridge last census was estimated at nearly 16 000 people, of whom approximately 600 identified themselves as being Aboriginal. The majority of the local Aboriginal community are members of the Ngarrindjerri people.

According to their promotional literature, the Aboriginal education area of the Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE offers courses 'designed to prepare Aboriginal people for employment in specific industries, entry into higher-level studies or development of self-management skills' (TAFE SA 2004).

Murray Institute of TAFE, Berri and Loxton

Context

Berri is a large rural centre situated some 250 km from Adelaide on the banks of the Murray River. Berri rates at 4.4 on the accessibility and remoteness scale, making it moderately accessible and more rural than regional in relation to Murray Bridge. As with Loxton, a smaller town only 25 km distant and with the same rating, Berri is in an area that benefits from an extensive irrigation scheme from the river resource. This has allowed a rich horticultural and agricultural industry to be built up in fairly recent times and the area has been settled by a vigorous, mainly European, migrant influx that now influences much of the local industry and economic base of the region.

The total population of Berri at the last census was estimated at nearly 7000 people (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997). Census data indicate that approximately 600 people in the region identify as Aboriginal. According to their promotional literature, the Aboriginal education area of the Murray Institute of TAFE at Berri offers courses that 'focus on developing language, literacy and numeracy skills, and provide training for Aboriginal people to work in their own communities, enter mainstream courses or university' (Murray Institute of TAFE 2004).

Following interviews with a group of students at the Berri Campus, staff directed the researchers to the smaller Loxton Campus where a number of the students who had agreed to take part in the research were located. We were informed that the groups of students interchanged frequently between the two areas, hence we have included Loxton within this section.

Student responses

Subjects and courses

In the main, the majority of Indigenous learners at Murray Bridge TAFE are involved in Aboriginal community management courses. The courses run for 12 months, although some students prefer to attend for only half of the year. Learners interviewed at the Berri/Loxton campuses of Murray Institute were taking a variety of subjects: Aboriginal Community Management Certificate III, Arid Lands Management Certificate III and Office Skills and Procedures Certificate II. These subjects are generally the learners' first choices, although one indicated a preference for more health-related options.

Skills acquired through VET

There was general agreement that the skills gained through the VET courses have wider application than being merely employment-directed. The knowledge and confidence acquired from being part of a group in a course increases confidence and wellbeing. Learners spoke of courses giving them opportunities to assist other members of the community and their friends in regards to dealing with government and other infrastructures. They also note situations in their own homes—such as those with homework and other social issues their children face—and during meetings, which are being more easily accomplished once taking part in VET courses.

Only a minority of learners in the regional localities were working at the time of interview, but they did consider their VET courses had helped them find employment. Being involved in a course and with the TAFE organisation, however, assisted all in other 'social, personal and community' ways. The talk was about 'helping the children, teaching them some of the skills that I have learnt', or of an agricultural course, helping 'do up my garden and backyard and beautify my community'. There were also suggestions that encouraging others in communities to take on landscaping might help to create jobs. Learners spoke of the VET course being used towards understanding the problems in the area; that the courses gave insight into the help available when conflict occurs and to 'deal with problems, and all the services that are available to help all Aboriginals in the area'. Better communication skills, beyond aspects of literacy, were seen as the most crucial aspect of the courses these learners had undertaken. In one way or another, all cited raised awareness of opportunities that could be available to them if they could acquire more skills and qualifications.

Further training or other courses available

Only four students out of the three group interviews in rural locations discussed the possibility of going on to other courses in 'mainstream' TAFE and university. The majority did aspire to further study, although would only do so if they could remain within the Aboriginal education area and not move into mainstream areas where they felt they could not compete. Learners named quite a number of courses they would participate in if the subjects were available in the Aboriginal education area: mechanics, book-keeping, typing and computing, butchery, hair-dressing, art, accountancy, fashion design, zoology and hospitality. One student has been involved in a mainstream certificate III course, but the literacy requirements had been beyond her abilities at the time. None of the learners were prepared or felt confident enough to access any of the 'mainstream' classes being offered through the TAFE institutes.

Employment in the locality

A small number of course participants had been able to obtain part-time or volunteer work, either in private industry or the local art gallery, or with the Community Development Employment Program. Those not in paid or unpaid employment believed that some work is available in their immediate locality in terms of short-term options, such as fruit-picking or labouring, but various problems associated in accessing such work were identified as:

✧ difficulties with transport—the Riverland area has little in the way of public transport, and most of the students could not afford to either own or run a car

◇ lack of knowledge and experience

◇ concern over leaving young children at home.

However, the most consistent response from learners in the rural sites was that 'being Aboriginal' made it hard to get the sort of work they aspired to. Some of the students had been able to access seasonal work, such as fruit-picking and general farm work, but several of the students noted that they had to confront the issue of race whenever applying for local jobs. They would get an interview, but would not be appointed when, in their view, 'they see we're black and don't want to know any more'. One student had done a week-long induction course, but 'the others—white fellas—got the jobs; they didn't want me'.

One respondent who had previously worked in a local industry cited attitudes towards Aboriginals as one of the major barriers to local employment:

> The first thing they said [was] that they don't employ Aboriginals. I said 'Why not?'. This is what he said, 'Because they don't stay'.

The groups interviewed discussed their reactions to employment application forms that asked them to state whether or not they were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. The general consensus was that 'you've got more of a chance if you say that you are not Aboriginal. Now that's wrong'.

Of the 'better' jobs available via government or industry traineeships, the fierce competition from others who also want to access the few traineeships available to Indigenous applicants had stopped many learners from aspiring to make the transition to this area.

The majority of these interviewees were aware of employment related to their studies. They were less sure about how to make the transition from study to learning; to use their skills in the workplace, and their aspirations seemed limited to the area of the Aboriginal study units.

Willingness to move away

Learners who were already in some type of casual or part-time employment felt more comfortable about the prospect of a move away from their local area to access work than those who had not worked. In general, approximately half of the learners in the Riverland group were willing to make the step away from their home base if they were offered worthwhile employment elsewhere. However, without exception, all respondents cited leaving family and community as being the most important issue they would face by leaving the immediate vicinity. Many have concerns about taking their children away to a different environment, others have specific community obligations on community councils. Dealing with the availability of transport and finding accommodation are also highly problematic issues that become impediments to moving. A fear of the city (Adelaide) was also apparent as respondents generally agreed that it was not a secure place to live—'You can walk around the corner and get bashed'.

In one of the group interviews at Murray Bridge, it was made clear that the Ngarrindjeri people were equally committed and attached to their land as the Anangu people and had the same issues to consider if they were to leave for reasons of employment.

Staff responses

VET programs

Aboriginal students were undertaking VET courses at Murray Bridge separated from mainstream classes. Aboriginal staff understand this separation is an important facet of the way in which Aboriginal participants learn. The staff talked about issues of understanding Aboriginal society, learning styles within Indigenous society, use of language within classes and of students having their 'own place' that offers a non-threatening learning environment. Such a place was deemed valuable given the extra preparation that staff suggested students needed in regards to accessing TAFE

courses. Despite this facility, attendance and retention rates were issues noted as impacting on both delivery of, and successful outcomes from, the courses.

As with Murray Bridge and Adelaide, the groups of Aboriginal students at Berri/Loxton were not studying in any mainstream courses. A lack of confidence and the need to develop skills that would facilitate mainstream learning were cited as the major factors. The VET courses available at the Aboriginal Education section in TAFE were populated in the main by mature-age learners. Staff agreed that as most apprenticeships and traineeships existing within the local industry are for younger people. The Aboriginal students undertaking TAFE courses are often overlooked or considered doubtful material by local industry. Yet, in this locality, staff believed a more positive attitude towards Indigenous community development was occurring, and was most likely due to an increase in the number of Aboriginal learners accessing the courses available.

Student outcomes

Little interaction seemed to be taking place between local business or industry and the Indigenous TAFE group. Work experience opportunities and work placements were not currently available—or at least had not been negotiated with the wider community. The staff viewed traineeships with some doubt and considered student expectations of job opportunities to be very low. The TAFE courses were viewed as important in building up self-esteem and having a significant flow-on effect into the Aboriginal community in terms of encouraging other members to take on some form of study.

As with other regions, staff noted the strong links between TAFE study and the Community Development Employment Program. Many of their learners consider the Community Development Employment Program to be a 'real' employment option with many learners not moving on from the organisation into the wider employment area. Over the past 12 months, one campus had been working closely with their employment referral officer to set up more links with both government and private industry. Staff acknowledged that certain elements of racism within the community work against their efforts to find their students work. They also believed that Indigenous community members, too, have difficulty in making the transition from a 'safe' environment to the mainstream.

Although students in the regional locations rarely face traditional initiation, by Year 10, many are nevertheless subjected to peer pressures that discourage them from continuing school or undertaking other study. Given this pressure, TAFE does encourage Indigenous students into the traineeship system, although as one staff member noted:

> We've had Aboriginal students that have come through here that have gone out to our steel factories and factory industry and they don't seem to last too long because of particular issues—the gender, race or whatever, and this has upset some of the people and they've left.

A larger percentage of women than men from nearby Gerard Mission were attending TAFE at Berri and Loxton. A strong push for further education by women appears to be arising from social concerns for family and community wellbeing. Also, issues of status and shame appear to be less emotive for the women than for the men. Hence they aspire to courses and outcomes that can be used to help their children.

The Berri/Loxton campuses had two Aboriginal teaching staff, a factor cited as part of the reason for the recent successful graduation of eight students. These staff were able to work closely with Gerard Mission and had been encouraged by the gradual change in attitude, resulting in higher numbers of people each year being confident enough to aspire to access courses in the town.

The lack of transport, however, is a significant issue for participants and frequently prevents Aboriginal learners from either accessing courses or attending work experience and work placement. Obviously, this is also as a major issue in regards to accessing employment opportunities.

Issues in VET delivery

At Murray Bridge, most Aboriginal students are Ngarrindjerri people, and language use has become an important facet of the way in which learning takes place within their VET units, especially if the tutor is also Ngarrindjerri and able to facilitate in that language. The Management for Aboriginal Communities courses at Murray Bridge are similar to those run at the Noarlunga campus of Onkaparinga Institute and Adelaide Institute of TAFE, but modified to encompass the local Aboriginal community and its particular needs.

At the time of the site visits there were no programs in place that provided structured workplace learning for participants in the Aboriginal education courses. Yet many of those same participants were involved with the Community Development Employment Program placements for two days a week. TAFE staff were concerned that the two days did not tend to get participants into any mainstream areas and therefore did not give the learners the opportunity to discover or experience what they consider to be 'real' employment situations. A small number of the learners had been involved in the cultural awareness programs offered in the mainstream schools. This involvement was addressing some of the issues they have with language use and feelings of being intimidated within the non-Indigenous community.

Limited course options within Aboriginal education can also have a detrimental effect on learners. Those who wanted to move on to other options or who had already reached certain levels experienced high levels of boredom and were frequently discouraged from attendance and completions. The popular courses had waiting lists which resulted in some learners repeating work they had already done while waiting for places. A number of courses lacked the flexibility that Aboriginal students would find helpful during an adjustment period. Such flexibility would perhaps, decrease the sense of boredom. Strategies such as offering literacy and community courses on alternate days with other art/craft/practical units in between would be a positive step in keeping attendances up.

Suggested VET courses and subjects

Staff noted that participants do talk about wanting other courses, such as cookery, music, travel and tourism. Staff also suggested that courses in childcare, health and nutrition would prove valuable in strengthening the community. A major issue for staff was the difficulty in building up both confidence and qualifications in the Aboriginal students to the level where they feel confident enough to go into mainstream courses. At the same time, there was some concern among Indigenous staff that, because many of the teaching positions in TAFE are held by non-Aboriginal people, the students think that perhaps it's not worth the effort trying to get better qualifications because 'we can see the writing on the wall as far as the Aboriginal people picking up on employment'.

Urban sites

Adelaide Institute of TAFE and Maxima Training

Context

According to the last census, the City of Adelaide accommodated some 1.05 million people, of whom a little over 8 000 identified as Aboriginal (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997). The Adelaide Institute of TAFE in central Adelaide offers Aboriginal education courses in Primary health care, Business administration, Community services, Women's education and Introduction to vocational education. The majority of courses are offered on a part-time basis with some limited capacity for full-time students.

Student responses

Subjects and courses

The primary emphasis for Aboriginal students studying at Adelaide TAFE is community studies—Certificate III in Community Services, Certificate III in Youth Work, Certificate IV in Community Management, as well as the Introduction to Vocational Education (IVEC). This last course is also often offered to new applicants for the Aboriginal Primary Health Care course. The learners interviewed were at differing stages of courses and had differing completion dates. In addition to the community-based courses, learners are now able to access a pre-vocational Indigenous course in hair and beauty.

Skills learnt in VET courses

The interviewees in this urban locality believed that their VET study has added value in areas other than paid employment. The benefits that arise from undertaking vocational studies extend beyond ideas of work, and the general agreement could be summed up by the response: 'I'm doing OK'.

More than 'OK' are the apparent side benefits from study not directly related to learning a new skill: 'I'm doing pretty well, happy in what I'm learning. I've changed in myself and my attitude to other people' and, 'this course is giving me a good dose of self esteem'.

Other benefits identified were problem-solving and awareness-raising, and networking to discover help for social issues and where support groups could be located. Beyond being involved with study, learners had found that attending classes and the interaction with other students and staff also provided benefits in their community through helping 'family and friends with information they may need'. As well as the focus on community, self-help issues were frequently mentioned: 'It helps around the home' and 'also my own goals as well', and as another student said: 'it has helped me deal with situations with my two teenage children and problems they are facing'.

The learners spoke of the intrinsic value in attending VET courses. They felt they could 'pass on knowledge and information to family and friends'. Other ways of benefiting from the course were in 'helping relatives and friends and supporting women's groups' or 'everyday life in general' and 'Even if I never get work, I am personally growing'.

Further training or other courses available

Of the learners interviewed, more than half expressed a desire to go on to further education at university level, or to branch into other types of training at a higher level. A minority of learners expressed an interest in other courses at similar levels to their present training course. Generally, while this group had aspirations for follow-up training or study, they must also deal with issues of access, due to either class size or their levels of literacy.

Participants in this urban sector were far more vocal about their options for study than were the learners encountered in the regional and remote locations. Less than half of these learners had taken community services courses as a first choice. Reasons for being in this type of course varied greatly from lack of literacy levels to undertake a different course, through to difficulties with public transport and access to another TAFE institute. Several courses that could have fitted in with the work aspirations are not available within the urban areas.

Employment in the immediate locality

None of the participants interviewed was currently working, although all hoped they would have the opportunity to work, either part time or at the completion of their courses. Other than a learner who wanted to find work in a landscaping area, aspirations were centred around becoming community workers of some sort. The learners nominated various areas of youth work, family support services, aged care and prison support, and it appeared that most aspired to be working with Aboriginal, rather than mainstream, services.

The main difficulties in accessing employment lay in a lack of qualifications. Lack of writing skills, general education and experience of other work or the workplace, added to the difficulty in finding employment in nominated areas of choice.

Other than the placements with government-based organisations, learners on the whole did not appear to be highly focused on what work opportunities might be available following completion of study. They aspired to gain employment but based their assumptions about opportunities around obtaining a qualification that would set them on chosen pathways. Some considered that TAFE should be helping them to obtain employment. The general consensus was that paid work in their area of training does exist within this locality, but many learners did not know how or where to look for work. At the same time they named areas or industries where they would seek employment. Most cited the Aboriginal Family Support Services, Nunkuwarrin Yunti and the Parks Community Centre as areas or industries where Indigenous people get work.

There were few aspirations in regard to self-employment or business involvement. However, one of the interviewees did suggest that setting up a community program where Indigenous people could discuss issues of study, employment and life experiences with other Indigenous learners would be useful, 'so they don't fall into similar traps'.

Willingness to move away

Nearly all of the learners interviewed in this locality were prepared to move from the Adelaide area should they be able to find a position elsewhere. This was perhaps not surprising as many had originally come from non-metropolitan localities including the Riverland, and so were prepared to relocate back to where they had some family or connection. However, all stressed that, apart from issues of salary and conditions, the types of jobs they considered to be worthwhile moving for would have to be in the work they were being trained for. Moving away from their immediate area for just any type of employment was not an option.

Regardless of a preparedness to move from the Adelaide area for work, other issues have to be dealt with before being able to move elsewhere. As with the other localities, there were mature-aged learners with children of their own who were concerned about moving them away from school, family and friends and into environments where they may not fit. Accommodation and transport were also important issues related to accessing work outside of this immediate locality.

Staff responses

Issues in VET delivery

Delivery of courses to Indigenous learners in this locality offers some of the challenges faced at other localities. Resources here were considered to be as generally difficult to obtain as in any other region. Retention and attendances were also issues noted as major concerns for the successful outcomes of the participants in the Aboriginal education section. In addition, the Community Services Training Package was viewed as 'wishy-washy' by staff. Other strategies have been developed with learners in issues-based approaches, for example, using smoking, domestic violence and community interactions as areas that the participants could more easily relate to. Students were also taken to visit various government departments and attended conferences to experience a more realistic curriculum than contained in the training package. In other strategies, learners were helped to aspire to completion of courses by shaping their work and training into a more project-based and practical style. Instructors felt more staff development needs to be available for those teaching in the Indigenous programs. Although the majority of instructors were well qualified in their particular areas, they considered that greater provision of focused professional development would be of benefit to the learners in this locality.

Student outcomes

Staff sensed there are ongoing difficulties for learners who are frustrated about not getting jobs. Students either start a new course or do further study to increase their prospects, but often at the completion no work becomes available. The inference is that much of the study creates unrealistic expectations for employment prospects and learners become disheartened and lose interest in following up their training. During interviews with the students, where they were asked about access to courses, a lecturer sitting in observed that, 'not everyone gets into a course they want—they [TAFE] don't want to set them up for failure'. While the less qualified learners are recommended to the introductory vocational education courses, even these tend to raise unrealistic expectations.

As with other localities, learners here were generally reluctant to make the transition into mainstream courses. Beyond what is assumed to be a culture-based reluctance, cost factors are a major hindrance to the Indigenous learners making the transition to the mainstream. Adelaide TAFE is attempting to address this through the offer of funding that would subsidise 75% of fees for certain of the Indigenous applicants applying for mainstream courses. As a result, a small number of Indigenous learners have gone into tourism, information technology studies and business studies. Another successful strategy was a pre-vocational health and beauty course that resulted in two participants going into mainstream Certificate III level and five gaining apprenticeships with salons in the urban areas.

Links are developing with industry and community-based organisations for work-based projects that can involve urban Indigenous trainees. These include the Aboriginal Elders Village, the Mile End Community Centre, Child and Youth Health and Warriappendi School. While links are in place with community and government organisations, little has yet been done in relation to developing contacts with private industry that would encourage Indigenous participation.

Other than the employing bodies within the Aboriginal community organisations, some training and employment opportunities are occurring through alliances with private registered training organisations. For example, Maxima Training is working with Adelaide Institute of TAFE to train and place Indigenous participants. At the time of collecting the data for this project, Maxima Training had 20 Indigenous trainees undertaking workplace training with local councils, some of whom had been referred through Adelaide TAFE. The company had another 30 or more aspiring trainees on their books out of an estimated pool of approximately 300 Indigenous people able to qualify for the training and work placement programs they were offering.

As a registered training organisation, Maxima Training has a mix of Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants in its various programs, but receives additional targeted government funding to train the Indigenous groups. While TAFE refers some aspiring Indigenous trainees on to Maxima, all applicants must be registered with the Community Development Employment Program in order to apply for and obtain one of these traineeships. All training is based upon the training packages current for the various areas of industry to which learners are attached. Unlike the TAFE-based training programs or VET in Schools courses, these traineeships are based in actual jobs available in industry, and trainees are taken on only when positions are available to be filled. The current training for Indigenous learners ranges across areas such as horticulture, office administration, driving and mechanics. Participants are all based in the urban locality, although some have come down from regional areas to take up residence with family members now living in urban Adelaide. It is not known how many of these relocated participants stay on in the urban areas, but indications were that some do find the time away from home too stressful and move back to their home regions.

Many of the older trainees come into these traineeships having gone through a number of courses, often without completing enough modules for a qualification, or being able to gain employment. Because of the additional funding for the traineeship programs, trainees are given more intensive, individualised support focused on module completions within time frames as well as further

support within their workplace. A system of interacting with the employers has been implemented so that cultural, work and community issues may be negotiated with all stakeholders.

Wiltja Program at Woodville High School

Context

Students from the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands who aspire to education beyond Year 9 have the opportunity to attend the Wiltja program which is the Anangu Education Services urban annex of the secondary programs offered by schools in Anangu communities. Wiltja provides a link to mainstream secondary education for Anangu students who wish to complete further education, but do not have access to appropriate schooling in their communities. These learners attend classes at the Woodville High School and as VET is one of the major offerings within the Wiltja program structure, they participate in the VET in Schools program offered through Woodville. A boarding facility that provides a culturally aware environment is available for the students within the Anangu Education Services Northfield complex.

Researchers obtained permission from the Anangu Education Services to conduct short interviews with staff and students who were in residence at Wiltja Northfield. Although the students interviewed were all from the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands communities, their urban base resulted in these responses being placed in the urban section of the study site reports.

Student responses

Along with their other subjects, these learners from the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands take a variety of VET-based units that include motor mechanics, photography, information technology studies and retail selling. The students were non-committal about the idea that their VET studies will take them towards future employment. However, when prompted, the female learners indicated some aspirations for either nursing or teaching opportunities, including being an Anangu education worker, and one of the males expressed interest in photography as a career. At the time of interviewing, some encouragement from one of the Adelaide football clubs had seen one of the male students consider whether to stay down in Adelaide during the summer holidays to begin pre-season training for a junior football team. However, this was a difficult decision, as all the students commented that they found it hard being in Adelaide as they missed their homes and families, despite Wiltja being a better learning environment with 'more space, more kids' and more opportunities for things like computers and English as a second language. There were also more opportunities for work experience in industry—the girls had spent some time in retail at The Body Shop and the boys in the automotive, air-conditioning and information technology industries. Other pathways beyond the VET studies at Wiltja range from further studies with TAFE or other registered training organisations through to specialised university courses, such as the Anangu Education Worker program within the University of South Australia.

Staff responses

As with the Anangu learners who remain on the Lands, language barriers continue to be one of the major disadvantages for some learners continuing their VET studies and participating in the Wiltja program. Without the use of English in their homes, nor a consistency of attendance in English literacy programs, the difficulties in acquiring the language facility needed for further study persist. Staff consider learners in the Wiltja program with stronger English skills appear to gain more successful outcomes from the courses.

The support that learners receive at Wiltja provides them with encouragement to remain away from their communities while participating in training and education, but the majority of learners return home early, or as soon as they obtain any sort of qualification. Once back in their own community however, these learners still face the same limitations in employment and further training options as everyone else.

Other cultural factors impact upon Wiltja learners' aspirations. Along with the crucial issue of attachment to land are issues within gender and family relations, which influence participant aspirations arising from their training; for example, traineeships within the police force which have been offered but not taken up due to such issues.

Tauondi College, Port Adelaide

Context

The suburb of Port Adelaide is situated at the western end of Adelaide's metropolitan area. Its mixed multicultural population last census was estimated to be 37 559, of whom some 700 persons identified as Aboriginal (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997).

Staff responses

Two days prior to the researchers' appointment to meet and interview learners at Tauondi, advice was received that the Tauondi Council had withdrawn permission for the conduct of immediate research at the college. Further discussions were required and several meetings proposed, but it was not expected that researchers would be able to visit until some time much later in the year, if at all. An agreement was reached whereby information about the project would be distributed to individual Indigenous learners and it was hoped that some would then agree to take part in a written survey. However, despite such arrangements, no surveys were ever returned. The following information regarding Tauondi's Indigenous learner environment and the aspirations of participants were made available to the research team by management.

In 2000, the 27 full-time and 10 part-time staff had contact with 386 Aboriginal learners at Tauondi College. Tauondi would like to attract more Aboriginal teachers and tutors as the majority are currently from the non-Aboriginal community. All courses offered are nationally accredited and run across seven different industry areas. The college also offers 22 certificate or advanced diploma courses. The college maintains a focus on Aboriginal cultural studies as well as presently developing a training package that includes Indigenous culture and tour guiding.

Entry-level, or foundation studies as they have been known, form a large part of the programs offered and are seen as integral to building self-confidence and self-esteem among the learners. The learners come from various language groups and the only language used for teaching purposes at the college is English. This strategy is viewed as promoting learner abilities and their aspirations for further study or traineeships, rather than dividing the student body.

Tauondi is involved in efforts to promote its learners to local industry and a small number of local industries are sympathetic towards the idea of taking Indigenous learners into training or work experience programs. At the time of writing, Port Power, a local football club, was showing interest in aspiring trainees from the hospitality area. Moreover, several art students provide their work to national parks, the zoo, and the botanical gardens. The college is negotiating with the Department of Tourism on the placement of Aboriginal people and several graduates currently work in the Aboriginal community services area—health and community development. However, no records have been made available to the researchers to follow up student completions.

An important issue impacting on Aboriginal aspirations at Tauondi is that of their understanding of what studying and being a formal learner entails. Given that many Aboriginal students leave school as early as Year 8, these participants in particular need more time to settle into the routine of being a learner or trainee. They have gaps in their learning time and must also cope with very large gaps in relation to changes in technology. If the mainstream adults have problems with computers, 'how far behind are we? How far behind are the people that haven't been to Year 10 or 9 or 8?'

Training packages currently in use at Tauondi do not necessarily match local needs. The success rate for students finding jobs following graduation is not high and there continues to be resistance in the

wider Port Adelaide area to employing Indigenous graduates. Tauondi is currently concentrating on closing the gap between industry needs and the type of training offered at the college.

Successful outcomes at Tauondi do not always equate with employment in the wider community. However, other equally positive and economically sound outcomes are eventuating: 'That person may well be a person that is off the grog. Not beating up on his wife. Staying out of jail. Having the kids fed and doing art'.

How does locality count?

The study has endeavoured to address the following questions:

✧ What differing issues and factors specific to the settings do these learners encounter that impact upon employment opportunities during or following VET courses?

✧ To what extent do the learners intend to continue their engagement in learning?

✧ What aspirations do these learners have with regards to employment or further study following their VET courses?

✧ What types of outcomes can be achieved and how different are they for Indigenous VET learners across the different settings?

In this chapter, the research questions are discussed and analysed using the data from the study in light of the literature review.

Settings

The unemployment rate for Indigenous populations in 1997 was 38%, 4.5 times the national average (Spicer 1997). While there are factors associated with locality and the contexts in which Indigenous learners seek employment opportunities, it is acknowledged that this disparity also results from far wider social and political causes beyond the ambit of this project, such as entrenched racist attitudes and prejudice towards Indigenous workers. However, the study would appear to reinforce the fact that employment opportunities for Indigenous learners do become more critical the further away they are from larger metropolitan centres.

In the urban locality, learners have a number of opportunities to access the various Indigenous agencies, government health agencies, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services, and Indigenous-focused education, not only for employment reasons, but also to provide a meaningful vocational context for their studies and a practical site for work experience. In relation to wider community opportunities, local government councils, sporting clubs, tourism facilities, hospitality and business organisations are often willing and enthusiastic to employ or offer further training to Indigenous VET graduates.

Programs in urban locations seem to have been more successful in terms of employment outcomes for Indigenous participants than the other locations in this study. Not only does the urban locality offer wider industry opportunities, but also the participants come from an array of backgrounds, having often already completed other courses in other areas of learning or other localities. In addition, learners from the urban localities have more opportunities for interactions with the mainstream community and are more comfortable about taking on training positions that locate them within that mainstream. Urban learners are typically less concerned about issues of safety than regional learners, have less difficulty with suitable transport and have a wider choice of accommodation near to possible workplaces.

Although regional and remote learners in this study who are registered with the Community Development Employment Program could access programs offered in the urban context, they

would need to relocate in order to participate. A small number of participants do come from regional areas, but it would seem that they generally have relatives with whom they can stay. Relocating for study or employment purposes emerged as a significant issue for Indigenous learners from regional and remote contexts due to their strong attachment to land and community. This factor appeared not to be such an issue for urban learners, consistent with data in the national Student Outcomes Survey that suggest rural Indigenous graduates are less likely to be employed after exiting a VET course (NCVER 2001). In addition, the literature paints a general picture of depressed labour markets and diminishing employment opportunities in rural and remote centres (Phan & Ball 2001; Teasdale & Teasdale 1996).

Largely due to strong local agricultural and horticultural enterprises in the regional areas surveyed, there were more opportunities for Indigenous people in these locations to take on seasonal work and become involved in local industry than for those in either remote or urban localities. But to a certain extent, that availability has a negative impact on the learner's opportunities and attitudes towards gaining longer-term employment or taking career-oriented training options. Although some Indigenous learners are keen to become part of the seasonal labour force, they cannot always manoeuvre work commitments around training requirements, so either leave their course, or their employment. Tensions between pay for work, unemployment benefits and Abstudy payments are also factors that must then be taken into account by the learners looking at seasonal employment in this locality.

In the remote context, learners face particular problems that do not appear to be such a crucial factor in either urban or regional localities. The first of these relates to language use. Pitjantjatjara is the main language in the remote communities studied and English is often their second language, which is usually acquired only after they go to school. Secondly the lack of employment opportunities for Anangu learners militates against successful VET course completions in the communities. Because students cannot actually foresee outcomes in terms of employment, they find it quite difficult to connect VET to the notion of gaining work in their locality or finding work elsewhere.

The role of the Community Development Employment Program here is critical. This program is not only a major source of employment opportunity but also an opportunity to facilitate transfer to other employment. Yet across all of the locations, the link between this organisation and training was not being utilised to its full potential, partly due to a perception about the role of the Community Development Employment Program as expressed by personnel involved, and partly due to funding. The last review of the program found that the scheme 'is not sufficiently funded to provide training for participants or undertake the individual case management often required to secure employment' (Spicer 1997). With funding and other support, the potential is there for the Community Development Employment Program organisations to become not only training providers but also employment placement agencies.

Finally, recent developments in the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara lands have seen the Pitjantjatjara/ Yankunyjatjara Education Committee, in conjunction with Anangu Education Services, form the Community Education and Training for Employment Program. This training organisation will target senior secondary school students, school leavers and the Community Development Employment Program participants through collaboration with Anangu Schools and 'give ownership of further education and training to the people of the AP [Anangu-Pitjantjatjara] lands region' (Burton 2003). This is seen as a positive and constructive step towards combining administrative, training and employment functions in a disparate and sometimes unconnected region, and will go a long way towards addressing some of the issues raised in this research study about VET provision in remote settings.

Aspirations

As with employment prospects, urban learners have more choices available for access to further training and education opportunities, including more examples of successful role models from the Indigenous urban community. Adult learners have positive aspirations to continue and widen their learning, as well as expectations of gaining employment in the field in which they have been studying. Options such as university study, apprenticeships and higher-level mainstream courses are acknowledged as potential pathways, although the tendency to remain within the relative security of an Aboriginal studies program is clearly strong. This has a lot to do with the awareness of different cultural needs and the level of support from dedicated Indigenous teaching staff, as well as the support the learners give and get from each other as a group. These elements were identified by McIntyre et al. (1996) as the *cultural process* of Indigenous participation in VET. Urban learners also benefit from the general wider community acceptance and recognition of Indigenous issues such as reconciliation, health and welfare in the more cosmopolitan setting of the city.

Participants in the regional localities put forward positive attitudes about continuing their learning as well, but for factors different from those of the urban group. One is that with the lack of available employment, further training on Abstudy is a soundly viable alternative. Apart from its actual content, participation in a course provides wider access to knowledge and services that might not be so freely available through registration for unemployment benefits or involvement with a Community Development Employment Program. More importantly, regional TAFE centres serve as places for Indigenous people to group together in a safe and supported environment where socialising and learning can be combined with access to resources and facilities—although these are often quite minimal. The environment provided by VET study also allows learners a space to plan action to help themselves, their families and communities.

While urban and regional learners might have opportunities and role models to inspire them to further study, remote learners appear to have different types of cultural and peer pressures influencing their aspirations for further training or employment. Within the remote communities there is less compelling social necessity for vocational learning, as other traditional learning often takes precedence and is seen as being more important in this societal setting. Young people, especially the males, are highly mobile within the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Lands area and travel frequently among the various community homelands, a practice which affects the continuity of attendance required for formal learning.

In urban and regional localities some continuity within modules and units of training is available across different TAFE institutes/campuses and other registered training organisations where trainers have a level of similarity in qualifications. This is not the case in remote areas where the VET in Schools unit is generally dependent upon the staff member who has set it up within the particular school, or where one of the few TAFE trainers is available to offer a course in a particular community and to establish rapport with learners. Learners' aspirations are therefore linked to the influence of particular individuals who come and go according to the vagaries of contract employment or for personal reasons. This lack of consistency in personnel is the major reason why training programs or courses, successful in the past, have not continued in remote locations.

However, the main differences in aspirations for learners in the three localities can be linked to the fundamental differences in the types of VET courses available. Urban and regional adult learners were enrolled in accredited VET programs such as the Certificate in Aboriginal Community Management and the Certificate III in Community Services, courses which are relevant to Indigenous students who want to get into community work and youth work in their particular region. They are also nationally recognised training packages that give Indigenous students a qualification that is transferable and has 'portability'. The certificate III articulates into a primary health care degree at university, and while TAFE admits it is not good at tracking the post-course destinations of its students, at least these courses provide a basis for something to aspire to. The

popularity of courses in education, health and community services is consistent with the literature which notes the over-representation of Indigenous learners in these areas compared, for example, to business and hospitality (Robinson & Hughes 1999).

This is in contrast with the courses available or offered in the remote areas, which include bicycle maintenance, chain saw handling and filling out forms. One of the few courses leading to accreditation is the Certificate II in Community Radio, which a number of students had completed modules in, qualifying for a unit towards the South Australian Certificate of Education, the state's senior secondary qualification. While this accredited training package also provides relevant occupational opportunities and pathways to further training or employment in radio broadcasting, it stands alone as a learning area with wider application and transferability beyond the immediate community.

Outcomes

Employment and further education

This research has indicated learning and employment outcomes achieved by Indigenous learners across the localities have both similarities and differences. All participants across the localities are able to undertake VET courses in one form or another at a rate higher than the proportion of Indigenous people in the general population (NCVER 1998). However, the level at which they interact with VET alters from locality to locality, the context of which impacts upon the types of outcomes achieved.

In the urban regions, learners have access to a wide range of courses in both Aboriginal and mainstream training sectors and the number and diversity of teaching staff is also greater. Hence, while not all learners achieve positive outcomes in terms of course completions or actual employment, the learning outcomes they are able to achieve can subsequently open more avenues of training or increase the range of employment options (McIntyre et al. 1996).

In the regional localities participants are able to achieve learning outcomes from individual VET courses, but are limited by the smaller numbers of organisations able to offer structured workplace training and by the types and variety of courses available. Most learners move into Aboriginal health and community management areas of training where the competition is very high, so outcomes in terms of employment might not relate strongly to outcomes achieved in terms of successful course or module completions. Where learners do achieve successful course outcomes, their access to further training tends to be limited by a reluctance to move into mainstream courses. Post-course destinations of employment or traineeships are limited by the local labour market, reservations about moving away from the area, and the often negative attitude of the mainstream community towards employment of Aboriginal workers.

Learning outcomes for VET students in the remote regions are poor by generally accepted standards, mainly due to a difficult staffing situation, their low functional English literacy and irregular attendance circumstances brought about by the requirements and history of their traditional context. However, indications are that, while the outcomes are poor by comparison with other localities, what is achieved becomes important in terms of outcomes for that locality and its context. Gaining understanding and access to communication technology such as telephone, fax and email, as well as local radio operation are valuable outcomes in themselves. Filling in driving licence applications and using power tools and machinery are vital to further work with the Community Development Employment Program. For the females, access to computing skills and improving their art technique can provide outcomes that may lead to training as Anangu education workers or earnings from sales of artwork.

Personal and community

This research has revealed there are other successful outcomes that emerge from Indigenous involvement in VET. Successful outcomes do not necessarily mean the successful completion of a unit or course, or acceptance into a higher level of training, or employment in some form—the generally accepted indicator of success.

The majority of learners who enter an introductory vocational program in both regional and urban areas are mature-aged, hence outcomes in relation to apprenticeships and traineeships are generally not an option. However, while both staff and learners do view the courses as a preliminary to further study or access to work where it is available, there is also consensus that advantages gained from increased skills in literacy and numeracy have other, less tangible benefits for participants. These research findings bear out the earlier reference to the argument that preconceived notions of outcomes from VET do not leave room for different ways of measuring levels of success and value to the learner (Boughton 1998; Durnan & Boughton 1999).

In both the regional and urban localities, Indigenous participants note that involvement with VET courses gives them increased satisfaction with themselves as well as more control over what is happening to them. Whether or not they complete courses, learners undertaking the Introductory Certificate in Vocational Preparation for example, take new opportunities at a time in their lives when they are more able to acknowledge the value of literacy. This in turn provides them with an increased ability to make informed choices for themselves based on their own knowledge and understanding. The value of this type of outcome is not confined to each individual involved in a VET course, as further outcomes are achieved through the participants' interactions with immediate family and their communities.

Crucial to the development of Indigenous communities in general is the example of the learners who are now able to help their children with homework and school learning. Giving such help not only provides parents with the satisfaction of knowing they now have a skill that enables them to assist, but their help also impacts upon their children's attitude to school and achievement, this in turn increasing the likelihood of young Indigenous students remaining at school for longer. Hence this outcome from VET has longer-term effects rarely measured in terms of immediate outcomes for each individual participant.

Participation in VET also has outcomes that translate into a multiplier effect within communities. By gaining knowledge of how to deal with government organisations that oversee Aboriginal concerns, learners subsequently possess the ability to assist other members of their community. Though their interactions with learning institutions, participants gain the confidence to deal more comfortably with aspects of mainstream society. They know more about how to approach various organisations to get help or information for themselves or others, and although many Indigenous learners are reluctant to move into mainstream learning, they are nevertheless exposed to it through their long-term attendance at classes and through the project work they undertake during their courses. This study suggests that such exposure has longer-term positive outcomes both for themselves and for the other members of communities who become encouraged to also take up VET inspired by the examples of the learners.

In the remote context, Anangu women spoke of their Anangu education worker training going beyond traditional aspects of classroom work to providing help for them and their families 'in the home'. Although they did not elaborate on this aspect, it is useful here to go back to the literature that comments on the value of unpaid community work and how Indigenous people see unpaid cultural or voluntary community work and looking after family as an occupation, rather than something that is done while being unemployed (Durnan & Boughton 1999). If aspirations of a positive employment outcome are not always specifically tied to the paid labour market area, it is certainly credible for VET learners in Aboriginal communities to be recognised as gaining positive outcomes from their training which strengthens community wellbeing. Formal acceptance of a

strengthening of community wellbeing as a positive outcome of VET provision could be acknowledged through development of explicit policy, as well as through increased resourcing, ideally through the Community Development Employment Program and particularly 'on a regional basis, measured against clearly defined regional goals and plans' (Spicer 1997, p.7).

Conclusions and implications

Contexts

The research team concludes that exploring locality has been a worthwhile perspective from which to examine the impact of context on Indigenous vocational education and training aspirations and outcomes. However, while it has produced significant insights into the similarities and differences in the experiences of Indigenous VET learners from the three localities studied, it must be stated that urban, rural and remote social and educational contexts are defined and distinguished by such a myriad of factors that it is virtually impossible to make objective and equal comparisons.

Context not only determines the type of learner involved in VET and their aspirations, but also the opportunities for employment, work experience and choice of accredited study programs, which diminish with distance from the metropolitan centre of Adelaide. The insights from this research are that increasing *accessibility* as defined by the accessibility and remoteness index is directly related to *opportunity* and *choice* in relation to educational and employment outcomes for Indigenous people. However, each context has its own issues, and while there are wider state and national policies to be considered, it is suggested that strategies for addressing improved outcomes must begin at the regional level.

Community Development Employment Program

The Community Development Employment Program has emerged as a significant factor in the provision and potential further provision of employment opportunities in both regional and remote localities and as a major influence in relation to Indigenous aspirations for employment. As program participants are considered to be employed and are therefore not included in unemployment statistics, the program has a responsibility to deliver meaningful employment outcomes for Indigenous communities. In some sites the Community Development Employment Program is obviously doing this; in fact the 1997 review of the program considered that 'without it, some remote communities would simply not exist' (Spicer 1997, p.1). However, the review also considers that more possibilities could be opened up for training as a feature of Community Development Employment Program delivery, which could then contribute to local community members eventually becoming trainers, managers, employees and operators of businesses and services in their own communities. For this to happen, the Community Development Employment Program not only needs higher levels of recurrent funding, but also stronger links with training and education providers at a regional and local level.

Links with employers and industry

Beyond the Community Development Employment Program, the links between training and education providers and wider industry and employer bodies is another significant factor impacting across all of the localities in this study. In urban settings, strong and established links between training providers and relevant organisations and enterprises have been shown to contribute directly to successful employment outcomes, as well as to meaningful learning experiences. For example, the

opportunity for work experience in a government organisation or business enterprise appropriate to the accredited program of VET study is an important factor in creating the links between vocational learning and work, yet in regional and remote locations these links are inconsistent and appear to be dependent on the attitude of the general community and on their relationship with training providers. In remote locations there is almost a complete lack of businesses and services to provide such links, as well as a culturally exclusive attitude towards work experience. Again at regional and local levels these issues need to be addressed.

Making the transition to mainstream courses

As has been established, the provision of accredited VET programs becomes more problematic as remoteness increases and accessibility decreases. However, it has also been established that most Indigenous VET learners are undertaking programs which, although nationally accredited, are offered within a context of provision separate from the mainstream and generically labelled 'Aboriginal education programs'. While nearly all of the adult learners in these programs spoke of the positive support and secure environment among their own people that these programs provide, there was also a concomitant resistance to move beyond this comfort zone into programs offered through mainstream institutions and in settings away from home.

The research team concludes that further research would provide more insight into this issue, partly to establish what could be done to overcome barriers to transition into mainstream VET programs, and partly to determine whether this is a necessary or desirable outcome. TAFE institutes offer accredited courses within Aboriginal education programs which articulate into university entry, but does not track graduate destinations to determine how many students pursue this option, creating a case for further study into post-course destinations.

Outcomes

We conclude by reiterating the finding that has been responsible for this research project changing focus and direction over the course of the 12-month study—that an alternative approach needs to be formulated to take account of the value of work done in the home and within communities by Indigenous students undertaking VET programs, whether completed or not. The process for measuring the outcomes of VET participation by Indigenous learners needs to be reviewed to encompass a wider definition of 'outcome' than the mere measure of further training participation or employment destination. The outcomes viewed within this research are crucial both to the future of the participants and their communities.

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