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Indigenous Education Action Plan Draft 2010-2014 Consultation

The Faculty of Education welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Indigenous Education Action Plan Draft 2010-2014. ACU is very supportive of the plan and the Faculty has sought advice from our Indigenous staff in preparing this response.

This response has two sections – a general response and one that focuses on leadership.

General response

The IEAP draft is a clear statement of the six government targets set within six priority domains. As an institution ACU is impacted though indirectly in terms of these targets. ACU has a clear role in terms of pre-service training and in the six target areas of early childhood education, schooling, health, economic participation, healthy homes, safe communities and governance and leadership. In the target areas our role is impacted in terms of the development of appropriate and relevant curriculum and practice as well as in research.

The approach of the IEAP is clear and well intentioned. The language of 'collaboration', 'genuine partnerships' and 'building stronger connections' is refreshing and a significant move away from the more passive language of past government policies, a welfare-based approach to policy involving Indigenous education that addresses Indigenous disadvantage. It is also good to see the work of Chris Sara on high expectations penetrating the language and intent of the document.

Dodson stated in 1993

A welfare-based model relies largely on government initiatives and government discretion to identify priorities, formulate policy and deliver programs. It is essentially a model based on a benignly intentioned but destructive paternalism which underpinned past assimilation policies.^[1]

The targets, building blocks, priority domains and principles are appropriate and a shift in policy direction but they remain embedded in a welfare-based, deficit model of reform. The notion of closing the gap, addressing disadvantage is in itself limiting as a building block. It would be more useful to look at a decolonizing approach to educational reform.

^[1] Dodson, M., 1993, First Report Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, AGPS, Canberra, p.7.

ACU as an educational institution is embarking through the Faculty of Education on a decolonizing approach to the Indigenisation of curriculum across the Faculty for all students. This does not involve simply a tailored history lesson or two, teaching about dot paintings, Dreamtime stories which like fables have morals attached to them. A decolonizing approach involves privileging Indigenous Knowings; it means centering Indigenous Knowings rather than the western institutional frameworks of schooling; it is a direction embraced in countries like Canada. The IEAP would benefit from such refreshing discourse and stronger Indigenous philosophical underpinnings. It would be strengthened and nourished from connection with the international discourse on decolonisation and Indigenous peoples. This foundation will then nourish and strengthen the outcomes, targets and performance indicators.

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Response focusing on Leadership

The focus of this comment is on 'Leadership, quality teaching and workforce development' with specific reference to Indigenous education in remote contexts.

While there is a vast body of knowledge and research on educational leadership per se, there has been limited research into Indigenous educational leadership, particularly in remote Indigenous communities. *Linking Worlds*¹ project (d'Arbon, Fasoli, Frawley & Ober, 2009) investigated Indigenous educational leadership in remote settings and aimed to frame the unique 'worlds' within which Indigenous educational leaders operate, and to determine the skills, knowledges and attributes required to be an effective leader. Put simply, the worlds in which Indigenous educational leaders operate are intercultural/both ways ones, and to work in these intercultural educational worlds, one needs to strengthen certain capabilities. Significantly, the onus does not rest on Indigenous educators alone, but is applicable across the educational system and requires Indigenous and non-Indigenous 'working together' as intercultural educators. Leadership in the intercultural/both ways sphere of influence focuses on building an 'even understanding' with the system. The concept of 'both ways' (Ober & Bat, 2007) is interchangeable with interculturalism in that both are concerned with the intersection and linking of cultural 'worlds'; the 'space' in which the overlap occurs; and, the teaching and learning that takes place within this space. Like the 'both ways' focus of the interaction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds, interculturalism 'is an idea that proposes an encounter between cultures that take place from fundamental characteristics, matrices, and unique aspects of each individual culture' (Coll, 2004, p. 27). To be engaged in an intercultural process "is a releasing experience for each of the cultures involved leading to an awareness of the limits that are inherent to our own cultures and worlds" (Coll, 2004, p. 28). From this basis meaningful dialogue can occur in order to shape and negotiate the development of the intercultural space.

Linking Worlds found that schools in remote Indigenous communities are influenced and shaped by local cultures, location and the personnel who work there. Remote schools are contexts in which clashes of understanding are common. Language and cultural differences often impede mutual understanding and the ability of people to take action. Cultural views around the meanings and purposes of the country, land and education are frequently at odds with each other. The learning that has to occur *on both sides* is significant. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff need ongoing support from within and beyond the community in order to develop as leaders. Everyone working or participating in the school must engage with a mainstream education system whilst also engaging with a local Indigenous cultural reality. Each school context is different, and skills, knowledge and operational models need to respond to these differing social and cultural dynamics.

Linking Worlds defined effective leadership as being strong in identity, resilient and confident and, most importantly, as being able to make the intercultural connections necessary for educating children and advocating for others. Effective leadership requires interaction and interdependence through

teamwork to share the workload and is not an individual effort. The role of an Indigenous education leader is multi-faceted requiring multi-dimensional responsibilities. On the one hand, Indigenous education leaders are expected to be cognisant of educational, management and administration policies required in the day-to-day running of a school, while on the other, to be the source of all things Indigenous. Indigenous communities see their educational leaders as being strong advocates for the children and the community in terms of education, but also as a key source of support to community members with other issues and challenges. Indigenous educational leaders are expected to be a balanced and upstanding member of the community and to take on numerous cultural roles and responsibilities. They are required to listen, and learn from others, to be humble, to remember who they are and be strong in their identity.

Linking Worlds considered the implications of its research for future leadership and practice for educational leadership in remote Indigenous communities. An *Intercultural Educational Leadership Framework (IELF)* has been constructed for future leadership scholars and practitioners to use to guide their work and on which policy formation, professional development activities and tertiary leadership courses for practising and aspiring leaders can be based. The *IELF* is informed by two principles which can inform leadership practice and leadership development. These are for education systems to:

- i. engage in a changed perspective on Indigenous education that encompasses an intercultural understanding of Indigenous education; and,
- ii. expand and enrich educational leaders' intercultural capabilities.

The *IELF* emphasises the need for non-Indigenous staff to learn to be intercultural teachers and leaders as well as the needs of the system to work interculturally for both Indigenous and Western outcomes. Both Indigenous and non- Indigenous people must be willing to step into this intercultural world (the intercultural space) where new leadership practices can be learned and are required.

The *IELF* consists of a set of intercultural capabilities for educational leadership in remote Indigenous schools and takes as a starting point educational leadership capabilities already identified in mainstream contexts: personal, relational, organizational and professional capabilities (FCAL 2007). By adding an intercultural dimension, new capabilities are signalled that enable educational leaders to bridge the gap, from both sides of the divide. Intercultural capabilities are about possessing the competence and confidence to work from a social, cultural and professional position and rely on the establishment and strengthening of relationships amongst key stakeholders, both within and beyond the communities. They enable work around difference and discontinuity to be made explicit rather than ignored or disregarded. They open up an intercultural space between mainstream and local culture where both Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators are required and equipped to negotiate educational practice in the best interest of the children and families they serve. All educators in remote school settings require these intercultural capabilities.

The focus on intercultural capabilities rather than competencies is important (Duignan, 2006). Understanding the fundamental differences between leadership capabilities and leadership competencies leads to new understandings of the nature of educational leadership, an understanding particularly pertinent to the complex, dynamic and unique intercultural contexts found in remote indigenous community schools. As Duignan (2006) has argued, a focus on leadership competency concerns present performance whereas leadership capability draws in the future and ability to imagine and then bring something new into being. Competent leadership assumes a shared understanding of what is needed - which as this study has shown is not the case - and emphasises the capacity to control and manage. In contrast, capable leadership recognises the dynamic nature of the leadership context where there is an assumption that we do not know exactly what is needed thus requiring the capability to learn and develop. Finally, leadership competency emphasises fitness for - usually other people's purpose, while - leadership capability is about judging fitness of the purpose itself. This final distinction clearly addresses the complexity of remote indigenous leadership contexts where the cultural and mainstream purposes of education are clearly still being negotiated.

The full *Linking Worlds* report and the *Intercultural Educational Leadership Framework* are available by contacting Dr Jack Frawley email: Jack.Frawley@acu.edu.au

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ⁱ In response to the lack of information about Indigenous educational leadership in the Australian context, discussions between the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, the Centre for Creative & Authentic Leadership at Australian Catholic University (ACU), along with the Collaborating Organisations – Catholic Education Office, Darwin, Northern Territory Department of Education and Training, and Principals Australia – led to the development of a project that explored the nature of Indigenous educational leadership in remote settings. The four-year project entitled, *Linking Worlds: Strengthening the leadership capacity of Indigenous educational leaders in remote education settings* - was funded by the Australian Research Council.



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