

Assignment Two

Schooling Reform Initiatives – Structures and Programs

by

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for

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ETL302 Secondary Schooling Operations and Practices

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Table 1. Commonalities from Middle to Senior School and Indigenous Education.

Recommendation Focus Area	Work Like the Best (Zbar, 2014)	Future Directions for Secondary Education (Ramsey, 2003)	A share in the future (Wilson, 2013)
Student and Teacher	Learning environment based on Positive Behaviour Support; students feel a teacher knows and cares for them.	Meeting needs of young people.	Review curriculum within secondary schools for Indigenous students. All schools have a consistent positive school wide behaviour policy.
	Access to rich, engaging interdisciplinary projects.	Capacity and capability.	Raise quality of remote teachers, principal and assistant teachers.
	Consistent assessment to enable system and school monitoring of student achievement.	Collect relevant data.	Measuring achievement against strategic goals depends on good data and evidence.
Leadership and Organisational	Systemic leadership and support.	Develop quality leadership in schools.	Provide training for school leadership.
	Role of VET; future pathways.	Improve VET delivery; Transition to higher education and career pathways.	Trial and evaluate Employment Pathways in regional and remote schools.
Community and External		Improve service delivery to urban and regional schools.	List schools based on factors of disadvantage and need.
		Establish WoG and Commonwealth interagency groups.	Establish inter-agency working groups.
	Engaging parents in the school.	Work with schools and home communities to improve Indigenous student retention and achievement.	Engage with Community. Negotiate with Indigenous bodies. Maintain Families as First Teachers (FaFT).

WORK LIKE THE BEST. Review of middle schooling in the Northern Territory. (Zbar, 2014).

Zbar (2014) outlines recommendations to improve the performance of middle school within the Northern Territory through a number of methods. Key areas of focus are the student, the educators and leadership, the organisations and partnerships.

The recommendations of the Middle School review are designed to be pragmatic, strategic and aligned with the, then, current Government and Department of Education Policies. This approach is likely, designed to be most accepted to the Government, Department of Education and other stakeholders.

Attendance

The Zbar report (2014) shows data regarding attendance rates from 2010 to 2013 to draw a conclusion that the attendance rate was not affected by the transition from the previous 8 to 12 secondary schooling to separate middle and senior secondary schooling. However, no data is presented in the report to compare the school attendance rates prior to 2006, when the Northern Territory transitioned to the new secondary schooling model, and the current attendance. The breadth of reasons that cause absence from school is vast and the individual is likely to fall into any number of categories and/or reasons for this (Reid, 2008). Notably, school structure or organisation was not listed in this. The closest relatable factor was transitioning, which may cause anxiety among students when they are required to move between schools, which often breaks routine, friendship groups, et cetera. As such the extra transition required by students as they transition between middle school and senior secondary, may cause unnecessary change and stress on students. Attendance is also closely related to the proximity of the school to larger population centres.

Teacher, Leadership and Staff Recommendations

Leadership coaching is recommended specifically for Middle School staff in leadership roles, such as Principals and Assistant Principals. This seeks to improve and develop leadership and culture within the specified Middle School setting. Gu et al., (2018) identified that Principals of schools that either maintained or achieved outstanding school status, did so by utilising new policies to effect change within a school with the aim of improving or developing staff, curriculum and culture. Leaders at these schools ensured that there was open communication with staff and supported their needs. School leaders, at all levels of schooling, are critical to the culture, development and improvement of a school, and active development and training of Middle School leaders is a key action that may lead to better outcomes for students.

Literacy and numeracy as the base

Literacy and numeracy are identified as the foundation for students to develop in all areas of education and learning. This report recommends that there be specific specialised training to improve teachers' capacity and capability to improve student literacy and numeracy. This report also recommends an expert panel be established to encourage these improvements, which would be centralised within the Department.

Transition Programs into Middle Schooling

The recommendation to develop Year six to seven transition programs highlight the stress and anxiety that student encounter when entering a new school. The new environment, new social groups and the loss of old ones, coupled with the biological changes occurring create a need to provide opportunity for students to grow accustomed to a new school. This is enacted by transitioning programs that introduce students to a new school and staff. As a result, this is also expected to occur between Middle and Senior Secondary School. Yecke (2006) also recommends that Year six be used as a transition period to enable students to move into upper years of education, however, the broader recommendation is to transition schools to K-8 as primary level of education. Further, engagement with families is also critical to the successful transition of students into secondary education, however, has declined. (Mac Iver et al., 2015)

Report on Future Directions for Secondary Education in the Northern Territory.

(Ramsey, 2003).

Attendance

Attendance rates and completion rates have lifted somewhat, however, this may also be a product of increasing requirement of higher education and qualification requirements for employment and employability. (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2020). Further, the attendance rates are still well below national averages for senior secondary school.

Meeting the needs of young people

Schools across the Northern Territory are consistently committed to delivering education pathways that meet the diverse and individualised needs of young people, now and in the future. Whilst this is regularly the intent, it is often not sustained and further, due to the highly transient population of the

Northern Territory, needs of individuals are unable to be identified and met within a suitable timeframe to allow for efficacy.

Another issue that disadvantages the unique student population in the Northern Territory, is the remote locations that students expect to receive a quality education. For example, only a limited number of schools are able to deliver on-site secondary education in remote areas of the Northern Territory and the primary delivery method is through online and remote learning methods, which does not suit many students for a variety of reason. Due to these factors, student retention is lower than the national average into senior secondary education and beyond into tertiary education.

Indigenous Issues

Whilst many of the difficulties related to remote localities applies to Indigenous students, other factors compound the barriers receiving a quality education. As discussed above, ability to receive the education, through the technology requirements poses a barrier that many are unable to breach. However, this is often coupled with a language and literacy gap that prevents students from being able to engage appropriately with the content. This results in poor outcomes through attendance and retentions, and achievement by Indigenous students.

Building Capacity and Capability

The report specifically identifies and recommends the development of the core staff within the education system, being teachers, leadership and staff within the Education Department. The requirement for effective leadership at schools is particularly important, especially during periods of substantial change. By developing and investing in the whole school leadership, not only principal and assistant principals, but the school culture can also meet the changes necessary to meet the needs of the students.

A share in the future. Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory.

(Wilson, 2014).

As with the two other reports, the Review of Indigenous Education's recommendations are pragmatic and do not attempt to address every issue with Indigenous education but prioritise effort to affect the greatest benefit. Much of the recommendation is toward early childhood, for example, through the Families as First Teachers program and development of early literacy programs and phonological training to support teachers

in early language development (Ferguson, 2018). Further, the report discusses how many factors, such as malnutrition, drug and alcohol use, housing, physical and mental health, which are more prolific in remote Northern Territory compared with other states, are not within the area of responsibility of the Department of Education. These issues must then be resolved by one or more government departments and non-government agencies.

Recommendations in Secondary Education

Many of the issues identified by this report couple Indigenous education with the issues of remote and very remote education. Factors such as attendance and enrolment create a situation where a limited number of secondary school students, around ten students, attend on any given day, which does not allow a school the ability to deliver a comprehensive curriculum or employment pathways, in the form of Vocational Education and Training. Beside some uniquely successful schools, the delivery of secondary education is only successful in large population centres, where school enrolment, staff and, therefore, resources reach a critical mass. The report then recommends that most secondary education be focused schools within Darwin, Taminmin, Palmerston, Alice Spring, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy, whilst trailing alternative employment pathways beyond these areas.

Attendance

Many measures have been introduced to remediate poor attendance levels of Indigenous students in the Northern Territory. These measures include:

- Support through 46 School Attendance and Truancy Officers,
- Enrolment and Attendance Officers,
- Data Officers,
- School Enrolment and Attendance Measure, and
- Remote Schools Attendance Strategy.

These measures have been supported and funded by Northern Territory and Australian Government to improve attendance, whilst it is supported by the Youth Justice Act 2005 (NT) and the Education Act 2015 (NT), approximately 75% of issued fines had not been paid. The use of fines is not considered to be the primary solution to improve student attendance, rather options, such as alternative education or curriculum. However, the primary reason identified by education social workers for student absence was parents

condoning their children's absence from school (Reid, 2006). This perception is further supported by the lack in attendance change by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2003) and Dunn, B. (2009), which reports on attendance and enrolment rates from 1996 – 2001 and 2005 – 2007. Guenther & Bat (2013) suggest that the effort must be made to reorient the perception of schooling by families to improve attendance and retention, particularly in remote and very remote schools.

Community Engagement

Community engagement is well-known to be critical to the success of the education of Indigenous students within the Northern Territory and particularly within remote communities. Some barriers that typically hinder the success of community engagement programs are:

- Lack of direction by Department to school leadership about expectations,
- Lack of training and engagement by school councils and engagement committees,
- Lack of confidence in community engagement programs by staff and communities, and
- Poor training and ongoing support of staff in the execution of community engagement programs,

Greater training and education for school leadership and staff on local cultural practices and building capabilities around community engagement is recommended to improve the school's relationship with their communities. Further, delivering specific training for school councils is recommended to build the awareness around their responsibilities to the school and community. These deliverables are recommended to be provided by the Northern Territory Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET) and through their funding.

Commonalities and Differences in Report Recommendations

Leadership training and development is a common recommendation from all three reports. This training is specifically aimed at Middle School principals and assistant principals by Zbar (2014), most likely due to the unique nature of the middle and senior school structure and their predicaments in the Northern Territory. However, Wilson (2014) and Ramsey (2003) build further to recommend training and education for broader leadership positions and, in some cases, informal leaders.

Each report has identified that retention, enrolment and attendance within the Northern Territory are lower than national averages, which are exacerbated in remote communities and school contexts.

Table 2. Secondary Students, Apparent retention rates from Year 10 to Year 12, National

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Retention Rate (%)	77.0	76.9	77.2	76.5	76.1

Table 3. Northern Territory Government Schools, Attendance Rate 2005-2007

	2005	2006	2007
All	83.4	82.9	82.4
Indigenous	72.0	71.3	71.0
Non-Indigenous	89.1	89.0	89.1
Provincial	87.2	87.2	87.5
Remote	84.2	84.1	84.0
Very Remote	71.8	70.1	68.9

Whilst outreach programs that have been enacted to reduce truancy and improve retention are numerous and receive significant funding, attendance and retention rates across all demographics remains largely unchanged, as shown in Table 2 and Table 3. (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2020).

Teaching and Learning is a key recommendation from each of the reports. All identify that basic numeracy and literacy skills are critical to student performance and development. Critically, students with numeracy and literacy skills below their age or year level are more likely to be truant and not continue formal schooling beyond the legal requirement, in some cases they may not even meet those. Literacy and numeracy skills must be developed by classroom teachers but must also be contextualised to the students and their situation (Foreman & Arthur-Kelly, 2017). There are also many recommendations to provide teachers with advice and training from an expert panel, which adds to the professional development of practice by classroom teachers. As teachers are the largest variable of student outcomes, that can be improved, (Hattie, 2003) their training and professional development is key to the improvement of student outcome, by DEET.

Whilst the recommendations by Yecke (2006) and Palmer (2006) clearly criticise the transition to separate middle and secondary school establishments, the context in each situation is unique and therefore, should be treated as such. This could be through partnerships of opportunity with local industry, that may only be available within a specific local context. This opportunity further assists with reinforcing the community support and relevance of education. Case-by-case the current middle and secondary school structure will be effective in certain circumstances and ineffective in others, this should be identified through longitudinal collection of evidence and data that supports change for more effective educational delivery.

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