

**From:** von Oertzen, Tom  
**To:** [Committee, Indigenous Affairs \(REPS\)](#)  
**Subject:** House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs submission  
**Date:** Saturday, 19 November 2016 12:19:00 PM

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Dear Madam and Sir,

My name is Tom von Oertzen, I am a senior Partner and Managing Director at the Boston Consulting Group in Sydney. I have been an active supporter of Indigenous communities for the past 15 years and have led the Boston Consulting Group's longstanding commitment to gap closure initiatives and our very active participation in the Jawun Indigenous Corporate partnership program, through which we have seconded more than 120 of our staff for 3 months+ each or more to help with indigenous community projects (50+ man-years of support). I have also regularly visited communities in Cape York, the East Kimberley's and Arnhem Land to better understand what impact our people were having in the communities and what other initiatives and program were effective in the community. In 2013 my family and I volunteered for three months at the Garma festival in North East Arnhem Land. We lived for the majority of our time in the Gunyangara community (ski beach), just 10 km outside of Gove and had the privilege of experiencing many aspect of the indigenous culture first hand as well as getting a grass root understanding of many of the complex issues facing Indigenous Australians.

Through the Jawun volunteering program I got involved in business building efforts, institution building efforts (such as the Cape York Institute), the welfare reform initiatives and trial, the health reform initiatives, the empowered community initiative and, from the very beginning, the school reform efforts and the introduction of the direct instruction teaching program which then developed into the Good to Great schools program.

Our firm (BCG) has over the years provided more than 10+ volunteers and staff members (5+ man years) to help shape different aspects of the program. I had the privilege of seeing the very first trial at the Hopevale primary school, by spending a day in the classroom with the kids, the teachers, the instructors and the parents in 2009/10. It was one of the most memorable days in my life and such a stark contrast to indigenous schools I had visited before and since then that have not had the benefit of this teaching appraoch. The kids were beaming with excitement, they were all very actively participating in the lesson, the teachers were totally focussed on teaching and keeping the kids engaged and the parents (especially the mothers and Grandmothers) were delighted that the kids finally were excited coming to school and were making progress at a rapid rate. Apart from the happy and engaged kids, I also saw very committed teachers and instructors who put all their effort in helping the kids progress and learn. I wish all teachers were that motivated and excited about their important role in our society – these teachers were exceptional. While they admitted that it took them some time to get used this teaching method, they were simply blown away by the learning results the students achieved and really learned to appreciate that the teaching method allowed them to focus all their attention on the teaching. The other benefit that was noticeable was the discipline in the classroom, which had not been easy to re-establish. The Principals told us the story of the first six weeks, were the children had to be re-educated about the new rules in the class room and violations often ended up with time in the "sin bin". At times there were more children in the sin-bin than in the class room, but it did not take long for the kids to learn what the new expected behaviour was and they loved the nurturing care, the engaging teaching and the learning they received alongside it. The principal also showed us the statistics about school

attendance (from 30% to over 90%) and the learning progress (one year of progress made in four months) which were astounding.

Just a few weeks ago I went to an update briefing on Good to Great schools in Sydney. I was so pleased that the program had been rolled out to 40 schools now, that the teachers and principals at the event continued to be very enthusiastic about the success and that the learning outcomes were simply astonishing. One school improved all year 3-6 student from lowest quartile Naplan results to well above average results, demonstrating that the kids had closed the 3-5 year learning and knowledge gap to their Australian peers in less than two years. Attendance at schools that have adopted direct instruction is also much higher than in other schools. There is undisputable evidence (backed up by plenty of research) that the direct instruction method is a very effective teaching method, especially in disadvantaged communities where the children often come from dysfunctional families and households, have no parental support, often face less than ideal learning environments and attend schools that are very low on the popularity rankings for the countries best teachers.

My own children (a girl now 15 and boy now 13) face none of those disadvantages and have enjoyed strong parental support, a great schooling environment and teaching by some of the countries brightest and most motivated teachers. Despite those advantages, we have made use of a "quasi" direct instruction teaching method to help them improve their numeracy, literacy and comprehension. For over two years while they were at primary school, they both attended a very popular after school tuition program called "Kumon", where they had to complete pre-scripted learning sheets within a set time period (15 minutes). Once a week this occurred at the Kumon centre, for the rest of the week the sheets were completed and scored at home. If few mistakes were made in the allocated 15 minutes, the sheets for the following week would be a step forward. If there were too many mistakes, the sheets for the following week would be a step back until that level was mastered. While there was no teacher involved in this method, it was based on repetition and measurement of results – very similar to the direct instruction method I observed in Cape York. And the learning outcomes for our kids were spectacular! Not only did they advance in literacy and numeracy by more than a year ahead of their primary school peers, it set them up to be top of the class students in maths and English at high school. Their mental arithmetic skills are still well ahead of mine and they are both looking to choose Maths as one of their HSC subjects.

The Kumon method, just as Direct Instruction, is a very well-structured and integrated approach to learning, spanning multiple years. The frequent measurement of progress means that the content can be tailored to each child and allow them to advance at the right pace for them. This keeps the child motivated and it provide the teacher with instant feedback on progress. The Direct Instruction method has the added benefit of very active teacher involvement. The way I see it, the teacher really can play the role of coach and motivator and ensure that every child is fully participating in the learning process. The intensity of teaching is so much higher in this method and it is no surprise that student advance so much quicker when taught this way.

I ask the enquiry to spend time with teachers, principals, students and parents in remote and disadvantaged communities that have experienced the direct instruction teaching method – I trust that you will see what I saw: this is a program that produces extraordinary results. It is one of the best investment we as a society can make to close the gap of indigenous disadvantage. If the next generation has a good education and can read, write and speak with confidence we will

have laid the foundations for a brighter future. This program should be rolled out as a national priority to all schools – at least those that face disadvantage in some way. America made the mistake of not adopting this approach across the board when it was first developed in the 60's and is paying the price for that today. Let's not make the same mistake here – let's look at the evidence of learning outcomes and let's accelerate the roll-out to cover 1000 schools.

I would only be too happy to be interviewed or appear at a committee hearing to share my experience in person. Please don't hesitate to call me on \_\_\_\_\_ or email me on \_\_\_\_\_ so I can assist your process in whatever form is most useful.

Best regards

Tom von Oertzen

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