Best Practice and Benchmarking
in
Aboriginal Community-Controlled Adult Education

A Project Report

to the

Australian National Training Authority

from the

Federation of Independent Aboriginal Education Providers Ltd
(ACN 072950228)

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DEDICATION

IN MEMORIAM

Part way through this project, one of the major participants, IAD's manager of its remote areas training programs, suffered a heart attack and died. This young man, only 32 years old, had already made a major contribution to adult education in his community. His death is a sad loss to his family and to all who knew and worked with him. In accordance with the protocols of the peoples of Central Australia, he is not referred to by name in the Report, but his presence is most certainly there. The Federation wishes to dedicate this Report to his memory, and to acknowledge the inspiration and commitment he has given us in our movement for community-controlled Aboriginal education.

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Executive summary

Aboriginal community-controlled providers represent a distinct type of adult education provision whose importance has long been acknowledged in research findings and policy development. However, the work of these providers has rarely been the subject of empirical investigation.

This study reports on the findings of an action research project conducted by the Federation of Independent Aboriginal Education Providers, funded by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) under its Adult Community Education Program, to investigate the nature of 'best practice' in the Aboriginal community-controlled sector, and to develop guidelines to assist providers to benchmark their practices.

The researchers completed an exhaustive survey of the literature of research and policy development in Aboriginal adult education, from which they developed a discussion paper on the nature of best practice in this sector. They also designed and co-ordinated a series of interviews which were administered by the independent Aboriginal community-controlled providers to a small selection of their own staff, students and community members. The discussion paper and the survey results were then presented and discussed at a workshop held over three days on the campus of one of the providers, and attended by FIAEP Directors, senior staff from several of the colleges, students and community representatives. The workshop proceedings notes, the survey results and the initial literature review were then subjected to further analysis, to produce a detailed draft report and a draft set of best practice guidelines. These were considered at another meeting of the Aboriginal Directors of the Federation, which made further revisions before approving the final report and guidelines for submission to ANTA.

The literature review, revised and incorporated into the final report, identifies six major themes which were relevant to the investigation, namely the contested nature of 'best practice' definitions, competing views of the nature of Aboriginal education equity, the relevance of international standards, the connection between adult education and community development, the specific role and importance of indigenous organisations, and the connections between Aboriginal culture, identity and pedagogy. By exploring these themes through an analysis of the survey results and workshop proceedings, the report presents what the providers and their clients consider are the elements of best practice, under the four headings of self determination through community cultural control; Aboriginality, identity and diversity; personal, family and community development; and Aboriginal pedagogy. The more detailed narrative treatment of these elements is then distilled and summarised into a set of Best Practice Guidelines for the sector in the form of a series of benchmarks or standards.

Introduction

The Federation of Independent Aboriginal Education Providers Ltd (FIAEP) is a national Aboriginal organisation established in February 1996 to represent the rights, needs and interests of Aboriginal community-controlled adult education[1]. Its foundation members are five Aboriginal community-controlled adult education institutions:

- Tranby Aboriginal College, Sydney
- Tauondi, Port Adelaide (formerly the Aboriginal Community College)
- Institute for Aboriginal Development, Alice Springs
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Skills Development Association, Sydney
- Aboriginal Dance Theatre, Sydney

In February 1997, the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) contracted the FIAEP to undertake a research project on *Best Practice and Benchmarking in Aboriginal Community Controlled Adult Education*, and to produce a report on its investigations and a set of guidelines to be used by providers working with communities to benchmark their practices. Under the agreement, ANTA provided $32,000.00 towards the project costs, from its Adult and Community Education (ACE) National Program, a decision based on advice from the ACE Taskforce of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), which supported this project as one of several aimed at improving participation levels in adult and community education by targeted groups. The Project began in March 1997 and was completed in November 1997. An Interim Report was provided to ANTA in May. This is the Final Project Report, including the Best Practice Guidelines.

The report begins with a brief description of the methodology used in the study. It then discusses some of the issues involved in defining best practice in Aboriginal adult education, drawing on material collected during the literature review stage of the project. The third section analyses the data from this study, while the final section proposes a set of guidelines against which providers and others can benchmark practice in the future.

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[1] Adult education, in the context of the FIAEP's work and this project, covers all the so-called sectors of post-compulsory education and training. Commonwealth and State/Territory agencies sometimes use this term to refer only to the 'adult community education' or ACE sector, but the FIAEP includes in its programs this as well as so-called vocational education and training (VET) and also higher education programs.

Methodology

The authors of this Report, FIAEP's Project Workers Bob Boughton and Deborah Durnan, co-ordinated the research from the organisation's Canberra Secretariat, located in the national office of the Australian Association of Adult and Community Education (AAACE). We employed an *action research* methodology which had proved successful in previous projects with the Federation and its individual members (e.g. Tranby 1994; Durnan 1996; FIAEP 1997), and which allows maximum input from, and control over the research by, the Aboriginal participants.

For this project, we used a research design of five separate but connected stages, as follows:

a. Identification and review of research and policy documents relevant to Aboriginal community-controlled adult education provision, and preparation of a background discussion paper. (This paper was revised for submission to ANTA in May as part of the Interim Project Report, and its findings have now been further revised and incorporated into this Report);

b. Design and distribution of an open-ended questionnaire-type survey of the independent providers which was administered verbally under guidance by their staff, and which aimed to draw out the views of appropriate stakeholders, namely students, staff, and community members represented on their boards of management. (A copy of this survey questionnaire is attached, as Appendix 1.);

c. A workshop, held at Tauondi, facilitated by the researchers, at which representatives of the providers and their 'client' groups, namely their students and the communities and community organisations from which they come, together reviewed and analysed the results of the survey and the literature review;

d. Preparation by the researchers of a draft report, including the 'best practice' guidelines, based on all the data collected, i.e. the findings of the literature review, the survey questionnaire forms, and detailed notes on the proceedings of the workshop;

e. Finalisation of guidelines and this report, in consultation with the FIAEP's Aboriginal Directors.

During March and April, each of the FIAEP's five member colleges appointed a staff member to administer the survey/interview designed by the researchers to representatives of their student bodies, their teaching staff, and their communities, including the Aboriginal organisations which are the employers of the majority of their graduates, and sit on their Boards of management. The questions addressed the specific ways in which providers were implementing 'best practice' as they defined it, within an overall framework derived from the research undertaken to date. The researchers

provided advice where requested to individuals to assist them to complete the surveys. A total of 16 records of these interviews/discussions were completed, and provided to the researchers. Some providers simply presented completed survey forms, while other also provided summaries informed by their own analysis.

This material was then fed into the workshop, which was held over three days in Adelaide at Tauondi College on May 7th - 9th 1997. The workshop also included a presentation by the researchers of some of the material gleaned from the literature review, which is summarised in the next section. Participants then presented summaries of the findings of their own investigations in the consultation phase. The providers were represented by senior Aboriginal teachers and managers, while students and community representatives also participated in the discussions. On the basis of the material presented and the discussions which ensued, the workshop participants began the work of developing a set of draft 'best practice' guidelines. Detailed notes were taken by the researchers of the discussions during the workshop. Apart from the two researchers, all workshop participants were Aboriginal people.

This project, and the report which follows, should be seen as one stage in an evolving research program drawing on the expertise of the independent Aboriginal community-controlled adult education providers, the results of which now form a growing literature of relevance to all who work in Aboriginal adult education, whether or not they are directly part of the "independent" sector, as it defines itself. The list of references at the end of this Report serves as a guide to some of this literature, and those with an interest in this area should also consult the FIAEP's web pages maintained by Koorinet,[2] where further research, submissions, papers and other relevant documents are posted from time to time. Readers should also note that while research into Aboriginal community-controlled education in Australia is in its infancy, there is already an extensive literature internationally which documents similar work being done, for example, in Canada, the United States and New Zealand. Adult education and training policy-makers and practitioners in Australia have barely begun to engage with this work or with the growing international attention to the education rights of indigenous peoples[3]. Hopefully, as the United Nations International Decade of Indigenous Peoples moves into its second half, and as the UN Human Rights Commission Indigenous Working Group prepares for its scheduled 1998 debates which are focused specifically on the issue of education, the relevant research and funding agencies in adult education will become more aware of the need to support the development of this key area of adult education provision.

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[2] At http://www.koori.usyd.edu.au/FIAEP/
[3] The Declaration of Confintea V, the UNESCO-sponsored Fifth World Conference on Adult Education held in Hamburg July this year, included for the first time in the fifty years since such conferences began a specific mention of the adult education needs of indigenous peoples.

Defining Best Practice in Aboriginal Adult Education. An Overview of the Literature

Good practice needs to be informed by good theory and good research. A major problem for independent Aboriginal community-controlled adult education is that its providers have to work within 'mainstream' systems of 'vocational education and training' (VET), 'adult community education' (ACE) and 'higher education' (HE) provision in which both the overall policy context and the administrative and funding arrangements still operate with little reference to over two decades of research and policy debate into Aboriginal education and its relationship to Aboriginal development (See Schwab 1995, for an overview of Aboriginal education policy debates since 1975).[4] As a result, many policy makers and practitioners in adult education see programs for Aboriginal people simply as an 'add-on' to existing systems of provision, a matter of solving a 'participation' or 'access' problem.

This study demonstrates that this is not the case, and that the design, delivery and evaluation of quality Aboriginal adult education programs is a highly-specialised area. For this reason, neither local providers nor state ACE & VET systems are likely to experience much success if efforts to improve Aboriginal participation in or outcomes from adult education are restricted to including a few 'Aboriginal' courses in their profiles. This becomes immediately obvious once one begins to identify some of the relevant literature, which at the very least includes:

∗ Government policies and policy reviews specific to Aboriginal development in general, and Aboriginal education in particular[5], namely
  - the 1988 Report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force (AEP Task Force 1988)
  - the 1989 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs Report, A Chance for the Future (HRSCAA 1989)
  - the 1989 Joint National Policy on Aboriginal Education (Commonwealth of Australia 1993)
  - the 1994 Review of Aboriginal Education (Commonwealth of Australia 1995a)
  - the Commonwealth Response and the MCEETYA Task Force National Strategy (MCEETYA 1995), both developed following the above Review

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[4] For a more detailed discussion of this point, see our Education for Self-Determination (FIAEP 1997), especially *The problem of the two policy 'discourses'*, pp.54 ff.
[5] The capacity of the ACE & VET systems, and of providers within these systems, to deliver 'best practice' Aboriginal adult education depends to a considerable extent not only on developing a much better understanding of this overall policy context, but also on developing knowledge of and skill in accessing a raft of government programs established at Commonwealth and state level to support these policies, such as AESIP, Abstudy, ATAS, VEGAS, CDEP, TAP etc.

- the Miller Report (Commonwealth of Australia 1985)
- the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy (AEDP)
- the Review of the AEDP (Commonwealth of Australia 1994)
- the 1990 Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC 1990) and the National Response to it jointly produced by Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments
- the 1992 Council of Australian Governments' <u>National Commitment to Improved Outcomes in the delivery of Programs and Services to Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders</u> (COAG 1992)
- the Annual Reports of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's (HREOC) Aboriginal Social Justice Commissioner, the office established to monitor the implementation of the Royal Commission recommendations, and Australia's observation of international covenants
- research findings, consultation papers, policy documents and statements from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), such as <u>The Job Ahead</u> (Taylor & Altman 1997) and <u>Recognition, Rights & Reform</u> (Commonwealth of Australia 1995b)

∗ Reports on research in the area of Aboriginal adult education and learning, most especially research which documents Aboriginal peoples' own perspectives and preferences, e.g. Harris (1988); Henry (1991); McIntyre et al (1996); Martiniello (1996); Schmider (1991); Teasdale & Teasdale (1996); Tranby (1994).

∗ Research into the relationship between Aboriginal education and other factors in Aboriginal development, such as employment e.g. Foley & Flowers (1990); Schwab (1995), (1996a), (1996b), (1997); Hunter (1996)

∗ The small but growing number of studies of 'best practice' in Aboriginal adult education e.g. ACE North Coast (1996); AhChee (1997); Batchelor & Logan (1996); Cranney (1994); McPherson (1994) & (1997); Murkins (1996).

∗ The policies and reports of governments and their agencies charged with the management and coordination of adult education generally, because Aboriginal adult education operates inside these systems, and so must take account of what they say is best practice. These include the ACE National Policy (MCEETYA 1997), two Senate Inquiries into Adult Education (Commonwealth of Australia 1991 & 1997), ANTA's policies in relation to VET in general (ANTA 1994), and to access and equity in particular (ANTA

1996a, 1996b, 1997) and its commissioned research e.g. Butler & Lawrence (1996), Schofield and Associates (1996)

∗ Indigenous and non-indigenous views on the issues of land and native title rights, self-governance and constitutional reform, which especially in the wake of the 1992 High Court Mabo decision, have increasingly called into question the whole framework in which relations between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians have to date been worked out, a debate which inevitably flows over into questions about Aboriginal education and the best forms of its provision e.g. Jull (1996); Langton (1997); Dodson (1997).

The task is further complicated by the fact that in Australia, education and training for adults is usually seen as being provided in three distinct sectors, namely Higher Education (H.E.), Vocational Education and Training (VET), and Adult Community Education (ACE) and each of these sectors has its own research literature and policy 'discourse', including in the area of Aboriginal education. However, the distinctions and boundaries between the 'sectors' are often quite blurred, and there are also different approaches to defining the differences among them. Some writers and policy makers, for example, focus on program content and objectives to make the distinction, while others focus on provider type. Neither of these ways fits comfortably with the actual practice of Aboriginal community-controlled education, which have their own distinct identity as a 'type' of provider, and also their own ways of defining the content of their programs. The Aboriginal providers are not universities, even though some are providing HE courses and doing significant research normally associated with that sector.[6] Neither are they public VET providers, though historically there have been strong links between some of them and their respective TAFE systems[7]. Nor are they simply private VET providers[8]. Finally, the range of programs they offer, across VET, HE and ACE, as well as their unique management structures and lack of formal connections with State and Territory ACE authorities, puts them to some extent outside the boundaries of what is normally considered Adult Community Education[9].In the course of this project, therefore, we have had to consider literature related to all three sectors, while at the same time trying to maintain a perspective which acknowledges the unique character of Aboriginal community-controlled education.

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[6] The Institute for Aboriginal Development, for example, has an impressive record of research and publication in the areas of Aboriginal languages and history.
[7] Until very recently, some of Tranby's teaching staff were employed through the NSW TAFE, and taught programs owned and developed by that system provider; and Tauondi began its life as part of the SA TAFE system.
[8] Though all but one have been registered as such in their respective State and Territory VET systems.
[9] None of the NSW members of FIAEP, for example, receives support from the NSW Board of Adult and Community Education, nor are they represented on the Board or on the NSW Regional ACE Councils.

Obviously, it was not possible in the space of a small project such as this one to cover in detail all this literature. However, we reviewed a good sample of it, in our effort to identify a framework in which to define and assess best practice, as it occurs within the Aboriginal community-controlled providers. From this review we identified the following six themes which are particularly pertinent to this study:

- definitions of best practice are always contested and controversial, and vary according to what are defined as the most desirable outcomes, and who is doing the defining;

- though there is unanimous agreement that increased educational equity for Aboriginal people is a major goal in each of the sectors of adult education, there remains significant debate about how equity itself should be defined, between those who champion statistical equality on quantitative measures such as access, participation and outcomes, and those who argue for more qualitative, more 'rights-based' and less 'culturally-bound' criteria or 'benchmarks';

- there is substantial evidence that the outcomes which many if not most Aboriginal people seek from education include better health and improved living standards in their communities and a greater control over their own lives, and there is growing awareness that none of these necessarily flow from education and training programs developed to suit the different aspirations, needs and previous educational histories of non-Aboriginal clients;

- a recurring theme in the research and policy literature of indigenous development, both in Australia and internationally, is the key role of indigenous peoples' own organisations in improving the situation of their communities, in health, education, employment, land and resource management and economic independence, but there is almost no Australian empirical research documenting or evaluating the significant contribution these organisations make to Aboriginal education and training;

- in the move towards a more 'rights-based' approach to equity, there has been an increased focus on the importance of international standards, which are now regularly cited as the appropriate 'benchmarks' against which not only education provision should be measured, but many other aspects of service provision to indigenous peoples in Australia;

- there is a growing awareness among researchers and policy makers of education and training as 'cultural' processes, which suggests that adult education practitioners and policy makers risk being both ineffective but also unjust if they fail to take account of the complex inter-relationships between education, learning, identity and the maintenance and reproduction of cultures.

Defining best practice

The definition of 'best practice' in Aboriginal adult education is extremely complex and highly contested, because it first has to answer the

questions 'Best for whom? or 'Best for what?' These are basically questions about stakeholders and their expectations, i.e., what they want from the system, and different stakeholders have different expectations and goals. To say that best practice strikes the right balance among the needs of different stakeholders still begs the question as to what is the *right* balance. It should not be forgotten that the term 'best practice', and its associated terminology, such as 'benchmarking', 'quality', and 'adding value' has been adopted in the course of fairly recent attempts to introduce private and public sector business management methodologies into the planning and management of education services, principally so as to promote economic development objectives such as efficiency, productivity and economic growth (Flowers 1997). None of this is unproblematic for Aboriginal people, who have already spent over two hundred years experiencing what were for them the disastrous effects of non-indigenous notions of economic development on their own indigenous institutions and cultures (Dodson 1994 & 1997; Langton 1997). One serious gap in the literature of Aboriginal education, with some few notable exceptions (e.g. Lane 1984), is an historical understanding of the extent to which the education system itself was and still is implicated in the destruction of Aboriginal society.

This project takes as its starting point the view that the pre-eminent goal of Aboriginal adult education provision should be to improve educational equity, a position which has enjoyed the support of all Australia governments since the 1989 adoption of the Joint National Policy on Aboriginal Education, commonly referred to as NATSIEP, or the AEP. Best practice, on this view, is defined as that practice which moves the situation of Aboriginal people most quickly and effectively towards greater educational equity.

What is equity?

The goal of equity implies the existence of its opposite, inequity; or, as the authors of the recent ANTA Equity Stocktake put it, a system which *dis*advantages some people at the same time advantages others (Golding and Volkoff 1997: 2). Because of this, best practice from the point of view of Aboriginal equity may well be in conflict with best practice from an industry standpoint, or a national economic development standpoint. As one recent study notes:

> "There exists in Australia a significant tension between the nature and definition of government goals of education, which are substantially economic, and the essentially social goals of Indigenous people" (Schwab 1997)

The different values or goals come into play around the definition of equity itself. The 1989 Joint Policy (NATSIEP) defined it in terms of four objectives:

- Involvement of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in educational decision making
- Equality of access to educational services
- Equity of educational participation

- Equitable and appropriate outcomes[10]

Almost as soon as the Policy was announced, however, Aboriginal organisations, government-appointed inquiries and a number of educational researchers and commentators began pointing to the apparent tension between definitions of equity determined through quantitative measures and the more qualitative issues of culture and control. This point was made strongly, for example, by Dr. H.C. Coombs, who wrote that

> ….. the authors of the ..NAEP apparently cannot understand why Aborigines are not pleased with a policy which offers them equality - equality of access, of continuance and of performance in relation to education provided by mainstream providers … - when what they seek is authority to design, administer and deliver an education based upon and compatible with the values and purposes of their own society (Coombs 1994: 71)

Coombs went on to say that the NATSIEP resource agreements amounted to "financial sanctions to ensure the acceptance of *assimilationist education*" (ibid:73; our emphasis). His views received some endorsement in the National Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC 1990) and the Review of Aboriginal Education (Commonwealth of Australia 1995a). Though it endorsed the National AEP as the overall policy framework, the Royal Commission said that it had to be recognised that "the aims of the Policy are not only to achieve equity in education for Aboriginal people but also *to achieve a strengthening of Aboriginal identity, decision making and self-determination*" (RCIADIC 1990: Recommendation 299; our emphasis).

The issue was also dealt with at length in one of the few major studies of Aboriginal participation in vocational education and training (Teasedale and Teasedale 1996), and considered further by the recent Senate Inquiry into Adult and Community Education (Commonwealth of Australia 1997). Finally, ANTA's own Stoctake of Equity Reports and Literature added its weight to this argument, pointing out that "the notion of equitable access, participation and outcomes … requires consideration of Indigenous cultural attitudes to the terms themselves" (ANTA 1997: 26).

The same report questions "the widespread assumption … that approaches to access and equity are independent of provider type", and notes that most research has focused on TAFE. It is certainly the case that few studies have examined the views of the independent sector, even though its importance was highlighted by the Royal Commission, specifically in relation to the views put by Dr. Coombs (RCIADIC 1990: v.4, 345-352; FIAEP 1997: 58-59). From the evidence collected both in this project and FIAEP's RCIADIC study, it is clear that the Aboriginal students, staff and community people involved with the independent community-controlled sector believe that the more qualitative Coombs-style definition of equity should prevail when it

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[10] These four areas are further specified in twenty-one goals, many of which apply directly to Aboriginal adult education provision, and in themselves constitute benchmarks for good practice.

comes to establishing benchmarks of good practice, and that equity means something quite different from simple statistical equality. At the same time, a number of the AEP goals help to benchmark best practice, most especially Aboriginal involvement in educational decision making and the employment of Aboriginal teachers, managers and support staff.

Education and development

Best practice Aboriginal adult education cannot be seen in isolation, as something pursued simply for its own sake. It is apparent from the evidence and submissions put to many of the inquiries we reviewed that the importance that Aboriginal people attach to getting better education stems from its potential contribution to overcoming the extreme disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal communities relative to the population as a whole, in areas such as employment, health, rates of incarceration and so on.[11] For many Aboriginal people, including students currently studying within the independent sector, education is literally saving their lives. At the community level, education is seen as a key to empowerment, and to the achievement of better outcomes such as increased employment, and better health. The 1991 Senate Inquiry concluded from the evidence it heard that

> "It is abundantly clear that the main purpose for which Aboriginal people seek education and training is to assist them to take control of their own communities, to develop and manage those communities in ways consistent with the aspirations of their members" (Commonwealth of Australia 1991).

Aboriginal people themselves have been saying for years, and governments now agree with them, that education must base itself on an understanding of the nature of these problems,[12] and contribute to their solutions.

In agreeing to the Joint National Policy, NATSIEP, Commonwealth, State and Territory governments intended that it would operate "in harmony with employment development policy" i.e. the AEDP, to "enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to pursue their own goals in community development, cultural maintenance, self-management and economic independence." (Commonwealth of Australia 1993: 2, 5). The 1994 Review of the implementation of this policy found that

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[11] We did not think it necessary re-state in this report all the appalling statistics on the extent of Aboriginal disadvantage, which are the subject of an Annual Report to parliament, Social Justice for Indigenous Australians. At different places in the Report, we have quoted some such statistics as part of the wider argument, e.g. on the question of employment.

[12] This requires policy makers, providers and educators involved with Aboriginal adult education having a good working knowledge of the actual conditions which exist in Aboriginal communities, and the extent of the disadvantage Aboriginal people experience. Obviously, Aboriginal people themselves and their organisations already have such knowledge, which is why they say they are the ones best placed to design and deliver the most appropriate and relevant adult education programs.

> "Much needs to be done in other areas, such as health, housing, infrastructure and economic development....(and) Education is essential to progress developments in these areas" (Commonwealth of Australia 1995a:3).

A recent study by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research which analysed the results of a national survey of over 170,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults provided compelling evidence of the strong connection between better education provision and improvements on other social indicators, concluding that:

> "Education is the largest single factor associated with the current poor outcomes for Indigenous employment. Indeed the influence of education dwarfs the influence of most demography, geography and social variables." (Hunter 1996:12).

It also found that taking part in an education or training program significantly reduces the likelihood of arrest or incarceration. As recently as August this year, the Ministerial Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs underlined "the importance of education for the economic and social well-being of the indigenous people" (MCATSI, 15 August, 1997).

What this suggests is that best practice Aboriginal adult education is defined not simply according to its contribution to *educational* equity, but also by how well it contributes to overcoming disadvantage on a whole range of fronts, such as in health, employment, infrastructure provision, levels of arrest and imprisonment and so on. This is a question about outcomes and aspirations, about what 'clients' expect to get from their education. Once again, it is clear that simple statistical equality on measures such as 'skills' gained, competencies achieved, modules completed or qualifications received do not begin to capture the range of aspirations and expectations that different groups of Aboriginal students, let alone their families and communities, bring to their education. Both Schwab's work and the Teasedales' study suggest that Aboriginal students make different choices and pursue different outcomes, and that one of their most preferred 'pathways' is to get an education so they can work in their own communities, in areas like health care, teaching, and other service provider jobs. This is also corroborated to some extent by analyses of employment patterns. A comprehensive analysis of indigenous employment completed by the Review of the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy (Commonwealth of Australia. 1994) showed that indigenous people have a very low participation rate in the mainstream labour market, and that this is not changing, despite massive programs of government intervention. Most importantly, it showed that when indigenous people are employed, they are most likely to be working in and for their own communities. In other words, there appears to be specific indigenous labour markets, which 'feed into' an indigenous 'industry' which is much less urban-based, and much more community service-focused, than the mainstream industrial structure of non-indigenous Australia (See also Tranby 1994, for further discussion of the implications of this for VET). These figures have now been confirmed in the most recent study of Aboriginal employment, commissioned by

ATSIC (Taylor and Altman 1997), which verifies the importance of community employment, and argues that the employment situation of Aboriginal people far from improving is in fact deteriorating, relative to the population as a whole.

Another factor which comes through both in the evidence collected by government inquiries and by specific research studies is that there are significant local and regional variations in Aboriginal employment and development needs and aspirations, and therefore that what is an appropriate mix of education and training programs in one area will not necessarily suit the needs of another. Partly, this is about acknowledging the diversity of Aboriginal Australia, and recognising not only that Aboriginal people and communities have different needs and aspirations from the non-Aboriginal mainstream, but also that there are major differences within Aboriginal Australia, differences of history, language, culture and aspiration. Best practice education programs therefore need to be informed by regional Aboriginal economic development analysis and strategies, such as have been done for central Australia and the Katherine region in the N.T. (Crough et al 1989; Pritchard & Gibson 1996) and for the Kimberley region in W.A. (Coombs et al 1989; Wolfe-Keddie 1996).

What this research and policy literature tells us is that best practice Aboriginal adult education providers should be sensitive to and able to accommodate these distinct and also diverse Aboriginal aspirations and needs, rather than be locked into a restricted view of what constitutes 'legitimate' educational outcomes; and that at the very least, best practice involves contributing to both personal and community development goals, as the individuals themselves and the communities define them.

The community-control model

It is because of its capacity to be sensitive to these different aspirations and needs that Aboriginal community-controlled adult education is able to meet a specific need within Aboriginal communities, which is not met through the mainstream system. Community-controlled Aboriginal adult education includes a wide variety of formal and non-formal education and training programs provided directly to Aboriginal people by organisations run by Aboriginal people themselves. These organisations provide a model for educational provision to Aboriginal people and their communities which is an alternative to participation in programs established for and managed by non-Aboriginal organisations and providers. The importance of this alternative was signalled in the 1988 Commonwealth Government report which led to the adoption of a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP):

> Perhaps the most challenging issue of all is to ensure education is available to all Aboriginal people in a manner that reinforces rather than suppresses their unique cultural identity. The imposition on Aboriginal people of an education system developed to meet the needs of the majority cultural group does not achieve this. (AEP Task Force 1988:2)

The 1994 National Review of Aboriginal Education reiterated this, claiming that the Aboriginal community-controlled model provided an alternative view of what constituted 'equity' in provision, to the idea that this simply meant creating more Aboriginal places in mainstream education. Rather, the Report said :

> "it suggests that an individual's or community's performance can only be assessed against a set of particular educational outcomes if those outcomes are defined by the community. Thus, different outcomes are not only appropriate but *the opportunity for Indigenous communities to define them as such is essential.*" (Commonwealth of Australia 1995a :5; our emphasis)

However, the Report concluded, there was little systematic information or research about such provision, and called for "research and analysis of the immediate and long-term complexities of building community-controlled education". (ibid: 26) In particular, there have been virtually no detailed studies of what this sector actually does, at the level of practice.

Nevertheless, a growing number of studies and government reports now argue that the Aboriginal community-controlled adult education providers play a crucial role in meeting needs not catered to in the 'mainstream' sector. Schwab (1995) showed that the need for such a model has been a recurring theme in government investigations of Aboriginal education need over two decades. The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, the most comprehensive inquiry into Aboriginal disadvantage and its underlying causes made this point, specifically recommending that "Governments support Aboriginal-community-controlled adult education institutions and other institutions which provide a program of courses which have the support of the Aboriginal community" (RCIADIC, Recommendation 298). The Schofield Inquiry into the ACE-VET interface called the "local & regional capabilities of community-based Aboriginal organisations .... an invaluable resource which needs to be nurtured and supported." (Schofield & Associates 1996: 27). The 1997 Senate Inquiry also endorsed the work of community-controlled providers, on the basis that they expressed Aboriginal peoples wish to be self-determining (Commonwealth of Australia 1997: 54-55).

International standards and the UN Draft Declaration

The willingness and capacity of countries to provide quality education for all their citizens is one significant measure of their adherence to international standards of human rights protection. The 'benchmarks' in this area include general human rights instruments, such as the UN Charter, the Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic and Social Rights, and the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, all of which make some reference to education as a right. There are also a number of international declarations, such as UNESCO's 1990 Jomtien Declaration, Education for All, which do not have the same legal force in international law but are nevertheless indicators of basic standards to which all countries in the

international community are expected to aspire[13]. There are also some, not many, specific instruments in relation to indigenous peoples rights in particular, the most important of which is the International Labour Organisation's Convention 109; and some mention of indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights which have a bearing on education provision in the World Heritage Conventions.

Possibly the most important international standard is the <u>UN Draft Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples</u> In 1994, indigenous peoples accepted the current text of the Draft Declaration as the final expression of the <u>minimum international standards</u> for the protection & promotion of their fundamental rights. While the Draft Declaration has yet to find its way through from the Working Group to endorsement by the UN Human Rights Commission, and eventually by the General Assembly, it currently stands as the most widely endorsed set of standards, developed by indigenous peoples themselves:

> "All indigenous nations, peoples and organizations present regard the draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as currently drafted, as the minimum standards for the promotion and protection of the fundamental rights of indigenous peoples." Global Indigenous Caucus, Geneva 1996. Quoted Netwarriors (1997)

For this reason, it is beginning to receive some attention from adult educators and agencies internationally[14].

Article Three of the Draft Declaration states very simply, in words which echo the UN Charter, the indigenous right of self-determination:

> Indigenous peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic social and cultural development.

It is important and significant that Article 15, which deals expressly with education, is preceded by a series of Articles relating to indigenous cultural, spiritual and linguistic identity. Educators have long been aware that identity is central to learning. To deny someone's identity is to deny them their right to learn from within their own experience, their own culture; their right *to read the world*, as Freire called it, with one's own framework, rather than one imposed from outside. Article 12 asserts, in part, that "Indigenous peoples have the right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures…" Article 13 refers to indigenous peoples' right "to manifest, practice, develop and *teach* their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies (our emphasis), and Article 14 asserts peoples right "to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and

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[13] See also the Confintea V Declaration, mentioned at fn.2, above.

[14] On a resolution moved by the FIAEP, the draft declaration was endorsed by the General Assembly of the Asia South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE) held in Darwin, December 1996.

literatures". The educational implications of all these are clear, and they lead straight into Article 15, which declares the right of indigenous peoples

> to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.

It also calls on states *"to take effective measures to provide appropriate resources for these purposes."* This point was reinforced by FIAEP President Jack Beetson in his evidence to the Senate Inquiry into ACE:

> We have a fundamental right to access our own education systems under many international charters and documents that specify that, particularly UN documents. The Draft Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples refers quite specifically to that fact that indigenous people should have the right to access their own systems and that governments should resource Aboriginal people to do that. (Transcript of Evidence, Senate EET References Committee Hearings, 7 February 1997)

The importance of these international standards is that they provide an external set of criteria for evaluating programs for indigenous peoples, including education programs, which are independent of the policies of the government of the day, and they assert that indigenous rights are not simply bestowed by governments. These rights exist, in other words, whether or not governments recognise them and work for their achievement. The Aboriginal Social Justice Commissioner made a similar point, when he wrote:

> "The historical origins and the present existence of disadvantage motivate for special measures to redress past injustices. But the fundamental rationale for current policies of social justice should not rest on the past absence of rights or on plain citizenship entitlements. It should rest on *the special identity and entitlements of indigenous Australians by virtue of our status as indigenous peoples.*" (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commission 1993:9, our emphasis)

Most recently, Teasdale & Teasdale (1996) underlines the key importance of the rights approach, and in particular the right of self-determination.

What flows from this international perspective is the view that best practice in Aboriginal adult education should encompass creating space for indigenous people to exercise these rights, including through their own institutions, if that is what they choose. The 1994 Review endorsed the relevance of international standards when it said that

> "For Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders, self-determination in education is essential; it creates the framework which allows Indigenous Australians to be themselves and *puts them on an equal footing with other national and international communities.*" (Commonwealth of Australia 1995a:3; our emphasis)

The Review's second recommendation suggested a clear benchmark, when it said that "the work of all bodies developing policy and/or providing educational programs or services which impact on Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait

Islanders" should be based on the principle of "self-determination in education - *putting the authority to make decisions in the hands of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders*" (our emphasis). In other words, the principle of self-determination requires that best practice includes Aboriginal people playing the major role in identifying their own education and training needs, and acting to meet them.

The Role of Aboriginal Organisations

The 1990 Royal Commission attempted to outline what self-determination meant in practice, paying particular attention to the importance of the existing networks of Aboriginal-controlled organisations. "The elimination of disadvantage," it said, "requires an end of domination and an empowerment of Aboriginal people; that control of their lives, of their communities must be returned to Aboriginal hands." It said that Aboriginal organisations were the key to Aboriginal empowerment and the recognition of Aboriginal peoples right to self-determination, because they demonstrated the "first pre-requisite for the empowerment of Aboriginal society, namely, the will (of the people themselves) for renewal and for self-determination." These organisations could not achieve empowerment on their own, they needed assistance from government and the wider society; but this should be based on "adherence to the principles of self-determination", which meant "people having the right to make decisions concerning their own lives, their own communities, the right to retain their culture and develop it." (RCIADIC 1990: v.5, 15-19) The relevant recommendations included ensuring there was negotiation and consultation on all policies and programs; relying on Aboriginal organisations to 'do the job' wherever possible; simplifying and streamlining funding arrangements; using performance indicators decided by communities; and providing Aboriginal staff and committee members with training in management and administration as well as the opportunity to do their own long-term planning (FIAEP 1997; see also COAG 1992). All these recommendations are relevant to establishing guidelines and benchmarks for best practice Aboriginal adult education.

The Royal Commission recommendations were directed largely towards governments, and this raises the important point that the achievement of 'best practice' Aboriginal adult education is not determined solely by providers, but depends also on the practice of governments, especially in relation to program development and funding arrangements, and the nature of the relationships between the providers and the government agencies with which they deal. The Aboriginal Social Justice Commissioner's First Report pointed out:

> "The recognition that social justice is about the enjoyment and exercise of human rights establishes the framework in which indigenous peoples cannot be regarded as passive recipients of government largesse but must be seen as active participants in the formulation of policies and the delivery of programs." (Aboriginal Social Justice Commissioner 1994:7.Our emphasis)

What this suggests is that best practice Aboriginal adult education requires a particular kind of relationship to be developed between on the one hand, governments, which have overall responsibility for education, and, on the other hand, the people themselves, such that they are "active participants" rather than "passive recipients" in the design and delivery of programs, but also in the formulation and implementation of policy. Dodson has further recently argued that indigenous interests simply cannot be subsumed within non-indigenous institutions and that this ultimately comes down to questions of power and control (Dodson 1997).

An inescapable conclusion from this is that best practice Aboriginal education providers will be need to be *political*, and to engage actively with government as advocates of Aboriginal rights and interests, not solely on education issues, but across the whole range of Aboriginal development needs. Once this is acknowledged, it is also clear that the capacity of non-Aboriginal institutions to provide this kind of an education is limited, since they do not have the mandate or the representative structure to assert the specific interests of the Aboriginal community, <u>if and when these are in conflict with non-Aboriginal interests</u>.

While this connection between Aboriginal education and Aboriginal politics has not received much attention in the Australian literature, with some exceptions (Foley and Flowers 1990; McCann 1993; McDaniel and Flowers 1995), there is an extensive international literature which is relevant. This includes the seminal work of Paulo Freire (e.g.1972) on education and empowerment, and contemporary accounts of the practice this work inspired (e.g. Shor 1987; Faraclas 1996). Perhaps more importantly, there are also detailed accounts of the work of indigenous organisations in general (e.g. Blunt and Warren 1996), and of Aboriginal education organisations in other countries (e.g. Haig-Brown 1995). These studies are important because they give theoretical and analytic 'weight' to a view of 'best practice' which many might otherwise dismiss as being 'political' or 'ideological,' and therefore not about education at all.

Aboriginal culture, identity and pedagogy

Much of the literature specifically about 'practice' in Aboriginal education focuses on questions related to culture and cultural appropriateness. Among the things that are said is that Aboriginal people have their own specific 'learning styles', or preferred ways of learning; that personal relationships are crucial; and that people have very different attitudes to knowledge and its transfer from those of western-style education philosophy. MacIntyre et al's study of Aboriginal programs in TAFE, one of the most recent and exhaustive studies puts all this together into an argument that education and training with Aboriginal people is "cross-cultural communication", and that teachers, providers and programs need to become much more sensitive to the complexities involved (McIntyre et al

1996). Similar work has been done in relation to universities (e.g. Bourke et al 1996) and there are also a growing number of studies of individual programs at all three levels of ACE, VET and HE.

For the Commonwealth's 1994 Review of Aboriginal Education, Bin-Sallick et al (1994) reviewed the literature for evidence of progress towards the AEP goals in each of the sectors of education provision. They found that there was active support of indigenous advisory structures in all sectors, but that "the power and status of these structures ...varied from one of significant and real influence to that of a mere token nature." They also described "patchy progress towards achieving the specific goal of increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in teaching, management and curriculum development positions " while noting that in TAFE and adult education, "the literature reports a dearth of formally trained ATSI adult educators..." (ibid: 3). However, almost all of this literature is focused on the problem of how to make existing education providers, namely mainstream schools, TAFEs and universities more 'Aboriginal-friendly', as it were. Schwab (1996) takes the analysis of 'user-friendliness' one step further, by arguing that access, participation and outcomes in education are influenced by what he calls "cultural capital". Nevertheless, he remains focused on the problem of attracting students into 'mainstream' higher education, and therefore on how to offset their lack of appropriate cultural capital.

While all this is a legitimate and important concern of Aboriginal education research and practice, it should be obvious from what has been said so far that it does not begin to exhaust the options for developing 'best practice', because it ignores the possibility that Aboriginal people might prefer to develop their own education institutions, rather than focus on making the existing institutions more 'user-friendly.' The problem is partly a hangover from the past, when, in an educational version of the now discredited notion of "terra nullius", Aboriginal peoples, as peoples with their own pre-existing institutions and cultures, were simply ignored, deemed not even to exist in the educational landscape. The problem is not overcome, either, by arguing that while people *once had* their own institutions, these were destroyed by settlement, and the best that can be done is to try to make non-Aboriginal institutions more welcoming, or 'culturally-appropriate'. As Dodson has pointed out, this approach perpetuates a number of fallacies, including the view of people as passive victims, who had no effective resistance to this process, and also the idea that 'culture' is maintained 'somewhere else', and simply visits the dominant institutions "on its day off." (Dodson 1997). Put slightly differently, where is the Aboriginal culture coming from that people are said to be bringing to MacIntyre et al's "cross-cultural" situation of education and training? Or to use Schwab's terminology, how do Aboriginal people maintain and reproduce there own *Aboriginal* cultural capital? The answer must surely include through their own educational practices, which they themselves control and seek to maintain, often *in the face of* and *in*

opposition to the dominant educational practices which push them in another direction.

This is not an easy area to write about or analyse, though both indigenous authors, Nakata (1993) and Martiniello (1996), and a few non-indigenous writers like McCann (1993) have attempted to do so. Schwab, too, has indicated some awareness of this, when he writes that "independent institutions (and he is referring to IAD, Tauondi and Tranby)are critically important in that *they make cultural sense* to a large number of Indigenous people: they are Indigenous institutions, controlled by Indigenous people, with an Indigenous community focus and an Indigenous approach to teaching and learning." (Schwab 1997; our emphasis). However, this is still seen as a good thing mainly because it encourages "participation" in education generally, by which he clearly means the 'real' education' of mainstream schools and universities. It does do this, certainly, and many people do go on to study in other non-Aboriginal institutions. But the small amount of research and theory which is available on these questions would suggest that this is because independent Aboriginal community-controlled education, among all forms of provision, has the best grasp of the complex connections between education and learning on the one hand, and the maintenance and strengthening of Aboriginal identities and cultures on the other. As McCann puts it, these institutions are "opening up new space" in the educational landscape, one in which Aboriginal people have a chance to learn and be educated without first have to give up the very things which make them Aboriginal in the first place. If this is true, then they are clearly establishing a new and exciting benchmark of 'best practice.'

The next section of this Report presents the findings of the empirical research we conducted, via the surveys and workshop. It attempts to establish what the independent providers do which is distinct and different, and to test from within the theoretical framework we have constructed from the our analysis of the literature, their claim to be best practice providers of adult education in their communities.

The Elements of Good Practice. Survey and Workshop Findings

In presenting the material collected through the surveys and the workshop we have used, as much as possible, the direct words of the Aboriginal participants, while at the same time trying to frame this evidence according to some of the issues identified in the literature review. What we have produced, therefore, is our summary account, based on the evidence we collected, of what constitutes 'best practice' within Aboriginal community-controlled adult education institutions, as they themselves define it, on the basis of their own theories or pedagogy.

We have grouped the evidence and analysis around the major themes the review identified, namely self determination, culture, control, power, identity, community, family, and development. We then link our discussion of these themes to the various stages or 'moments' in the education process:- needs identification, curriculum development, staffing issues, delivery, assessment, and support services. However, we are acutely aware that *Aboriginal* education does not always sit comfortably within these categorisations, which have emerged from *non-Aboriginal* traditions of knowledge and analysis of education. Many participants said that their education is *holistic*, and cannot easily be segmented and broken up in these ways, even for analytic purposes, because in the process, something is lost.[15] One particularly pertinent example is the idea that the concepts of 'education', 'culture', 'self-determination' and 'development' can be analytically separated and understood in isolation from each other, when in reality each 'nests' as it were inside the other. In the end, they are simply different ways of talking about the same thing.

Self determination through community cultural control

Underlying the practice of the independent Aboriginal community-controlled providers is a complex understanding of the interconnections between culture and control. The Aboriginal right of self-determination is institutionalised in the management and decision making processes, not simply by Aboriginal people making the majority of decisions, but because in these organisations, people feel it is possible for them to make those decisions according to the rules and norms of their own cultures, customs and laws. This includes both the kinds of decisions that are made, and the ways that they are made. One often cited example was that decisions about what staff and students should (not can) take leave to do included ceremonial and other cultural duties, such as attendance at funerals, but also to attend meetings of other Aboriginal organisations in which they are involved. The institution thus encourages its members, be they staff or students, to see participation in the social and cultural life of their community as an integral aspect of their education, not as a separate 'outside' obligation which interferes with or interrupts that education.

Another example cited was the presence of students on governing bodies, at staff meetings, and in other decision making areas. This was not simply a way of giving students some power, but it was also seen as an *Aboriginal* way for younger people to learn about power and how to exercise it, because they would be expected to behave on those committees in certain ways, respecting the presence of older and more experienced people, who had specific relationships to them, people from the community who were their 'mentors' or educators according to Aboriginal custom. It seems to us that this is a clear example of the

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[15] Canadian Indian educators at the Vancouver Indian Education Centre use the same term, *holistic*, to describe their practices (Haig -Brown 1995: 255)

way the right to self-determination and the right to an Aboriginal education are two sides of the same thing.

As to the processes of decision-making, these are also complex, and depend on different rules. Apart from the fact that simple majority voting is not a common practice, and that methods of reaching consensus are preferred, there is also the question of who should make what decisions, and whose views should be given priority in different kinds of discussions. What was said is that people make "Aboriginal decisions"; or that they decide things in the "right way", according to their own cultural rules, *which are rarely made explicit*; rather, it is something people simply know how to do, by virtue of being Aboriginal, but which they can only do in settings in which they have real power. "Consensus, Aboriginal values and protocols dominate <u>naturally</u> (in a way) not possible in a non-Aboriginal institution.", it was said by one survey respondent (emphasis in original). It is also acknowledged that not everyone will always agree about what is the 'right way' to make such decisions, but this too must be negotiated. Some "protocols" which were identified to us were giving precedence to the views of 'elders' and of people who are 'entitled' to speak, because of relationships to people or country (i.e. land and/or resources) affected; not discussing people in their absence; and getting the 'right' people, according to kinship relationships, to speak to or about others.

These issues of *cultural control*, as it was described in the workshop, do not extend simply to decisions made by managers or at meetings of staff or governing bodies, but also apply in classrooms and learning settings where, if Aboriginal students and/or teachers and guest speakers feel they are in control, they observe these protocols and behave in these ways. The ability to do this freely is a benchmark, therefore, of good Aboriginal education practice.

Another example which helps distinguish Aboriginal ways of exercising power from others is the way that at least some members of management committees or governing bodies, not necessarily just the chairperson or office bearers, are quite involved and hands-on in their approach to their roles, not simply attending monthly meetings, but visiting the colleges much more regularly, sometimes daily, getting involved in formal and informal discussions with staff and students. It seemed to us that this reflects an Aboriginal notion of the connection between education and leadership, in which the two are not seen so separately as they are in non-Aboriginal society. Community leaders are expected to be educators, and vice versa, rather than the functions of teaching being delegated by leaders to specialist professionals, as they are in our society. It also compared with our own experience of management committees and boards in mainstream colleges and universities, which are expected to keep a much greater distance from day to day management, to the point where real power is more in the hands of the full-time management staff, whose decisions are simply reviewed and usually endorsed by committees and boards.

Our analysis leads us to conclude that in an Aboriginal community-controlled provider, people are *empowered*, not because they have been *given* power, but more because power itself is being exercised according to the norms and rules with which they have grown up. This is not something that can be 'benchmarked' by a simple statistical measure, such as the number of Aboriginal people on a governing body, nor is it something that can be assessed by someone from outside the culture. It is happening when people say it is happening, and that is the beginning and end of the evidence. Outsiders may seek elaboration, and more complete descriptions, but they are not in a position to say "No, that's not what is happening", or that it is not important or relevant. This is because there is no 'universal culture', from which the standards or values of individual cultures can be assessed. Cultures create their own standards and values, and their validity is internal to themselves. Behaving as if this were not the case is really just imposing one culture's standards on another.

Self-determination, we would also argue, is oppositional; it is opposed to determination-by-others. Peoples have a right of self-determination <u>vis a vis other peoples</u>, who might otherwise seek to restrict their right "to freely determine" their futures. Likewise, 'culture' tends to define itself in opposition to, or as different from, other cultures, in this case non-indigenous cultures. Self-determination and cultural autonomy or freedom are thus always seen as aspirations, something to be struggled for; and education is part of the process through which this struggle occurs and is resolved. It is therefore quite wrong to see Aboriginal (or any) culture as static or fixed by 'tradition'. On the contrary, it is always evolving dynamically, in interaction with the cultures of other peoples, including the 'dominant' culture (or cultures).[16] The value of the independent colleges derives from the contribution they make to making this struggle a more equal one, one in which people may interact with the dominant culture more on their own terms, in their own ways, at their own pace.

One example of "cultural control" cited which lends itself more easily to external validation or measurement was the presence of Aboriginal-specific clauses in industrial awards and agreements, such as provision for ceremonial leave or for extended bereavement leave. This was seen as part of 'Aboriginalising' positions and jobs, which means something more than simply putting an Aboriginal person into a job previously done by a non-Aboriginal person. Rather, it includes the idea that the job itself will be 'Aboriginalised', and able to be done in a more Aboriginal way. Significantly, also, some colleges apply exactly the same conditions, e.g. for ceremonial or bereavement leave, to both staff and students.

Many people compared self-determination in this cultural sense with self-management, which is a much 'weaker' term, meaning that Aboriginal people occupy decision making positions, but are required to make the decisions in ways

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[16] A similar point has been argued in relation to Aboriginal culture and health services provision in Rowse (1996).

determined by the norms, rules and procedures of non-Aboriginal culture(s). It was said to us that this is usually the case on advisory committees set up by non-Aboriginal institutions. The point was also made that when people participate on such committees, they are not genuinely or fully accountable to their communities, because they are also accountable to the institution or the Minister or some other non-Aboriginal authority, which expects certain kinds of behaviour.

Aboriginality, identity and diversity

> Perhaps the most challenging issue of all is to ensure education is available to all Aboriginal people in a manner that reinforces rather than suppresses their unique cultural identity. (AEP Task Force 1988:2)

There is an extensive literature in adult learning theory about the relationship between identity and learning, much of which also connects with theories of identity as something which is acquired culturally. Some of this has been drawn on in accounts of Aboriginal learning styles[17], most of it based on research and observation of children in schools. It is often said is that Aboriginal education programs have to acknowledge Aboriginal ways of learning, and this point was made by a number of participants in this study. But the more important point, it seemed to us, was that best practice Aboriginal education should reinforce and build on the students' Aboriginal identities. The fact that these were identities, plural, was emphasised strongly. What often happens, it was said, in non-Aboriginal classrooms and programs, is that the one or two Aboriginal students have to be *the Aborigines*, whereas they actually have their own unique Aboriginal identities, which are all different. One gains one's identity through affiliations to country and kin, and through the specific history one has had, as well as one's family. Aboriginal people, it was said, have a way of 'sorting this out' among themselves, through asking questions to determine the nature of relationships and so on, and they understand, value and respect the diversity of their own people. They also know that some people are struggling to *regain* their Aboriginal identity, because of past assimilation practices as documented in the Stolen Generations Report.

"We can only learn from within our own identity", was the way one student respondent put it, while another said that she was at the college to learn about her identity, which had been taken from her. A teacher who had studied in a non-Aboriginal college spoke of always being expected to put the Aboriginal view, as if there was one Aboriginal view and he had the authority

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[17] Identity and learning styles are the focus of much work in the Gestaltist tradition of educational psychology, such as the work of Jerome Bruner. Interestingly, this is also said to be a more *holistic* theory of learning, by comparison, for example, with behaviourism.

to communicate it, both of which were culturally-inappropriate expectations and made it harder for him simply to be a student, to take on that 'identity'. A student said that at the independent college, "you are the rule, not the exception." An Aboriginal teacher and manager said that "Identity, language, law and the authority of 'elders' are the centre from which (our) practice is built."

In an Aboriginal 'classroom' or learning space, to summarise some of what we were told, students have the right and the power and the time and the freedom to negotiate their learning among themselves and with their teachers, on the basis of their different affiliations to land, their different networks of kin and family, their different ages, status and gender, and their different personal and family histories. They are also able to manage these differences and any conflicts and contradictions that they cause in a way that is "culturally-appropriate". So many of the student responses to the interviews repeated these themes, and spoke of the providers being "our place", "safe" places, where they felt "proud, not shamed", because things were done "Aboriginal way."

Best practice provision thus provides space in which the diverse identities of Aboriginal students are acknowledged, affirmed and strengthened, and treated as the essential building blocks from which their education proceeds. It is because of this, in the words of one Aboriginal educator, "people stand a far better chance of making it", i.e. of completing their studies, because they "are holding on to their Aboriginality. Their identity, their values, their philosophies hold true." Another teacher wrote that "we have to build up that (Aboriginal) identity and then it becomes a tool to strengthen skills and knowledge."

Part of understanding identity and building from there is also learning to understand and analyse one's place in existing society. The identity of an Aboriginal person is constructed inside a colonial society, which can be a very painful and difficult place to be. Students come to these places, we were told, with "lots of social baggage", experiences which come with being dispossessed, marginalised, and poor. "This has to be dealt with, outside of the academic stuff." These 'negative' aspects of Aboriginal experience and identity are also important as building blocks of learning, especially of learning to become less disempowered. Students talk of their college "changing my life, who I am", of "blossoming in this setting." A student with an acknowledged drug problem wrote of being with "people who understand me and drugs", another of "writing our own stories." "There's a space here," we were told, "for the most traumatised" learners. But not only is there a space; these lived experiences of the students become the subject matter of their learning. "We assist students," a senior teacher said, "to understand and make sense of where and why they are placed in society, and how to change that."

There is an obvious interconnectedness between these 'themes', of identity and Aboriginality and diversity, and those of self-determination, community, culture and control, discussed in the previous section. On a simple and practical level, because the staff and the 'bosses' are part of the community, not separate from it, they know who their students are, who they are related to, where they come from, and what their problems are. They can also help students understand their own lives, and the history that has made them who they are, through drawing on and making available the community's own memories, rather than having to rely on what they have been told by non-Aboriginal society.

Personal, family and community development

The literature review suggested that best practice Aboriginal adult education should have strong links with Aboriginal community development goals and strategies. The surveys and the workshop provided plenty of evidence of the way this occurs through the independent community-controlled providers, but also of the way personal, family and community development were all seen as interrelated.

An Aboriginal manager's presentation to the workshop spoke of the need to "promote the importance of community and family values as opposed to individualism and competitiveness", values which were also part of the identity issue dealt with above, because they "enhance the sense of belonging" that the college's programs give people. While "the individuals' needs and aspirations" were "central to (its) operations", they also represented "opportunities for people … to be active participants at all levels of community activity." "Individual development", it was said, needed to be "supported by community development", and vice versa. "Personal growth and achievement equals community growth and achievement."

It was regularly said that the independent providers were not separate from the community, but "an extension" of it, part of it. This has a number of aspects. Staff, students and board members are all involved in other organisations and activities within the community, from football clubs to land claims, and so the 'life' of the community permeates the life of the college. Individual Aboriginal staff described being "always on duty", talking to students and their families on weekends, in the street, at the supermarket. At the same time, as *Aboriginal* organisations, the independents are part of a network of community-controlled organisations which include the Aboriginal legal and medical services, the housing associations, the community and land councils, the pre-schools, all of them involved in development *by* the people, rather than delivering services *to* the people. Individuals employed by one

organisation are the board members and/or clients of another, and so all know each other's "business."

Colleges are also community resource places, providing other services besides formal and non-formal education & training programs, e.g. interpreter services, bookshops, publishing, research, cultural centres, language centres, dance companies, and libraries. It is "normal and natural" for the colleges to be used for a whole range of activities by community members, e.g. to hold ASSPA meetings, or meetings of Deaths in Custody Watch Committee, or meetings to discuss changes to the land rights legislation; to print a poster or a leaflet; or to run a raffle for a sporting team. These other activities locate the education and training programs in an overall context of development work, and contribute to the 'hidden curriculum', "the things we do instinctively" where education and learning are integrated with the wider struggle for self-determination. The education and training programs are 'nested' inside the community's own development processes, each informing and contributing to the other. Another way of saying this is that the independent providers are located in "an Aboriginal domain", rather than, as for TAFE annexes or Aboriginal programs in mainstream agencies, located in a non-Aboriginal domain.

One particular example of this "community resource" function is particularly compelling. All the colleges spoke of the regular presence on their campuses of "non-students (who) just hang around", joining in some activities, e.g. meals, even sitting in on classes, or "watching from outside, through a window." So long as these people do not actively try to disrupt the college programs, they are encouraged to stay, and some eventually join the structured programs. This is another aspect of the colleges belonging to the community, being their places where they are entitled to drop in. They thus become "refuges" for people, especially those who are experiencing the "outside world" as an alien or hostile place. The importance of this function will not be lost on anyone acquainted with the evidence uncovered by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. This kind of work gives meaning to the claim by the providers that they "are helping to keep people alive." It is a concrete example of the way the colleges are there, as was said in the workshop, "to help the whole community, not just the students".

Aboriginal Pedagogy

We use this term to describe both the theory and the practice, the philosophy and the practical ways of doing curriculum development, teaching, assessment and educational management and administration, which flow from the context we have described above. We think the evidence collected in this study supports the claim that the independent providers exhibit a distinct Aboriginal pedagogy, which is a hallmark of their best practice ways of doing adult education.

The first example was the way the processes of program and curriculum development were described to us. It is commonplace now for providers of education programs to Aboriginal people to speak of the need for consultation, even negotiation, with Aboriginal communities, about their needs and the objectives and content of programs. In contrast, when the independent providers speak about their practice, they emphasise the way 'the community' is already 'inside' their institutions, directly expressing its needs through students, staff and board members. Their consultations and negotiations occur, they say, according to Aboriginal rules and protocols, talking to "the right people, according to customary law." They also say this has to be done directly, personally, *by* the right people, and not by surveys or more formal-style methodologies. This is about consultation, but it is a specific kind of consultation, one which depends on, but also is part of reinforcing and strengthening, key relationships amongst the people within the communities in which the providers are working.

It was also emphasised that 'best practice' requires specific Aboriginal curriculum, not just the customisation of non-Aboriginal curriculum. The community ideally should be actively involved at every stage of the curriculum development process through to accreditation, implementation and evaluation. The capacity to do this work, which is very time-consuming and resource intensive, is limited at present by funding constraints. Ideally, also, it was said, curriculum should be accredited not by external bodies, but by the community itself. [18] There was also a strongly-put position that the knowledge contained within and communicated through Aboriginal curriculum comes from and belongs to the community, and that "the providers hold copyright or ownership in trust, as the representatives of the community from which this knowledge is derived."

Another aspect of Aboriginal pedagogy is the process by which teachers are selected. The importance of Aboriginal teachers was constantly emphasised, because they shared the experiences of the students, and knew "where they were coming from." Aboriginal teachers are also part of the

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[18] There are a series of detailed case studies of community-controlled curriculum development which further illustrate this in a study done for the Institute for Aboriginal Development by one of the authors (Durnan 1995).

community themselves, related to students, other staff, board members, staff in other organisations and so on, to they help to weave the college, the students and the program into community life, reinforcing the sense that education and community life are not two separate things. However, there are still plenty of non-Aboriginal teaching staff, and it is significant that the participants in the study emphasised that these staff are also important, and spoke in detail about how they selected them. Interview procedures are used which encourage people to talk at length about themselves, not just their professional experience, but the "kind of people" they are. Selection criteria mentioned included a demonstrated personal commitment to Aboriginal self-determination, a sympathetic understanding of the history of the people and the region, and a capacity to develop good personal relationships. Participants stressed that a good teacher, one that can "survive in a community organisation", has to "work from the heart" and "identify with peoples' struggles."

A lot was said also about the particular nature of delivery and assessment processes, about the need for these to be "flexible" to meet the needs both of students and the community. Many examples were cited of student work for assessment needing to connect to community and family goals, so that the learning was made relevant to these. Assessment tasks should be negotiated, both with students and with their communities and/or organisations. This included students being encouraged, as part of their learning, to participate in other organisations e.g. as members of their boards, to be included in delegations to government, or to represent their community at conferences. The community, and in particular specific people with "the right knowledge," had to be involved in delivery and assessment. This gives real content to the phrase "Aboriginality is a genuine specialist qualification" for teaching and assessment, which is increasingly being included in curriculum documents, not without some resistance being encountered from accreditation authorities.

A feature of 'best practice' pedagogy which like the Aboriginal curriculum is time- and resource-intensive, and therefore currently more restricted than people would like, is the ability to deliver off campus, in other community settings, whether this be on an outstation, in another organisation, or in some other setting "away from base." The benefits of this way of delivering as they were described to us are that people can study without leaving their families and communities, who can therefore also have more direct input into the education process; and that it brings the learning process into a more direct relationship with the experiences of daily life, which should be the real subject matter of education. This relates to the earlier point, that community involvement, including mentoring of students and the role of 'elders' in passing on knowledge, is not an "optional extra" or a nice idea, but is rather an integral feature of genuine Aboriginal education.

Support services are seen as crucial, including the provision in the case of some colleges of daily meals. All colleges provide some form of transport service or bus runs for students, and also help with ensuring students (and staff) have access to appropriate child care services. It is fairly common for students and staff to have their youngest children on campus with them, at least some of the time. Special arrangements or at least teacher sensitivity are also required to deal with some health issues. Drug and alcohol abuse has already been mentioned, but there are other issues including hearing loss, which is very common among Aboriginal people, and sight problems, which are also very common. Students social needs have to be incorporated into programs, also. One example given was the inclusion in timetables of sufficient time on "cheque days" or "pay days" so people can do their own and their family business. The importance of this derives from the fact that Aboriginal communities are impoverished, with average incomes half or less of those in non-Aboriginal communities, so when money comes in, it is important to get things done. But it is also part of the social life of communities which students are expected to be part of, fulfilling their responsibilities when they have money to others in their family and kin networks. So this is part of building the education program around the students' lives, itself an expression of what Haig-Brown called the "life as classroom" approach of indigenous people to education, and what indigenous educators worldwide call "holistic education."

Best Practice Guidelines

> These guidelines reflect what the independent Aboriginal community-controlled adult education providers consider to be the 'benchmarks' for best practice *in their sector*. They do not argue that all providers of adult education and training to Aboriginal people should necessarily aspire to these, nor even that they could. Rather these are their own benchmarks of best practice *Aboriginal adult education*, which they say is something different from 'mainstream' education provided *for* Aboriginal people.

β The provider is an independent Aboriginal community-controlled organisation, i.e.:
- its governing body is subject to Aboriginal community control;
- it is recognised as such by the communities in which it works; and
- it is non-profit

β The organisation aspires to achieve to the maximum degree possible the right of Aboriginal self-determination in education, as expressed in the United Nations Draft Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and it actively advocates for this position in relation to non-Aboriginal education authorities

β Members of the Aboriginal community are actively involved in the management of the organisation at all levels and all aspects of its work, and in all positions of authority where decisions are made, including:
- on the governing body
- at senior management level
- at program co-ordinator level
- in teaching positions
- in support services
- in administration
- on course advisory and development committees

β Decision-making at all levels within the organisation follows Aboriginal processes and protocols, recognising the need for respect, time to reflect, and consensus.

β The organisation is a resource place for Aboriginal peoples and maintains an 'open-door' policy towards all Aboriginal community members.

β   Education and training programs are provided according to community needs, as identified by the community, to achieve outcomes to which the community aspires, including personal, family and community development.

β   Education is provided in a holistic manner which affirms Aboriginal culture(s) and identity (ies) as the core components of the curriculum.

β   The design, delivery and assessment of education and training programs occurs always in ways which respect Aboriginal law and custom, and the diversity of Aboriginal students' experiences and aspirations.

β   Community members are involved wherever possible in teaching and assessment, in recognition that the community is where the real knowledge and expertise lies in Aboriginal education.

β   The organisation seeks to develop Aboriginal curriculum, not just to adapt or modify non-Aboriginal curriculum.

β   The organisation supports and advocates for the right of self-accreditation of Aboriginal adult education programs by Aboriginal communities, according to standards set by Aboriginal communities.

β   The organisation respects and affirms the community's right of ownership over the knowledge transmitted through the curriculum, which it holds in trust for the community.

β   Teaching, learning and assessment are integrated to the maximum extent possible with the social and cultural life of the community and its struggles.

β   Industrial awards and agreements covering staff, and policies in relation to students, take account of family, community and cultural obligations, as a legitimate and important part of Aboriginal education.

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Appendix 1. Survey Questionnaire

GOOD PRACTICE IN ABORIGINAL ADULT EDUCATION
The design, conduct and ownership of this research is under the Aboriginal community control of the Directors of the Federation of Independent Aboriginal Education Providers.

QUESTIONNAIRE INSTRUCTIONS

This questionnaire was designed to STIMULATE people to talk about the benefits and methods of Aboriginal community-controlled adult education.

THERE ARE NO RIGHT ANSWERS. The questions are simply to stimulate people to talk in their own words about issues involved in teaching, learning and managing Aboriginal adult education. PEOPLE DO NOT HAVE TO ANSWER ALL THE QUESTIONS UNLESS THEY WANT TO

READ THROUGH THE QUESTIONS BEFORE YOU CONDUCT YOUR INTERVIEWS. If any are confusing, discuss with your Director, or else ring the Federation secretariat. Once you understand the question yourself, it will be much easier to explain if the person you are interviewing is confused. You might need to rephrase the question in non-jargon language.

Before you start asking the questions, EXPLAIN why the independent providers are doing this research, pointing out especially that it is to help the Aboriginal-controlled education bodies to put a stronger case for funding and other support.

The interviews are CONFIDENTIAL. There is no need to record peoples' names, though we do need to know what 'category' they come from, i.e. whether they are a student or staff member or manager or Board member or community person.

Use a SEPARATE FORM for each interview
Good luck, and ring me if you have any queries.
Deborah Durnan
Federation Secretariat
Ph: 06 251 7785 or 06 247 5747

Questionnaire Form

Date of interview:

Provider: (circle)
 IAD   Tauondi   ADT   NAISDA   TRANBY

Category: (Circle one or more)
student   staff   manager   Board member   community person
other

1. Deciding what is needed

- How does your college decide what education & training programs are needed in your community?

- How is the community consultation process used by your college different from ones used by 'mainstream' providers (e.g. TAFE)?

- What are the main community needs & how is your college meeting them?

2. Developing curriculum & courses

- What are the main reasons for involving the community in course & curriculum development?

- How does your college go about doing this?

- If your college uses curriculum & courses developed by other agencies, how do you make sure they fit your own needs?

- How does your college make curriculum & courses culturally appropriate?

- How does your college deal with the question of <u>ownership</u> & copyright of your courses?

- How does your college ensure Aboriginal ownership & control is not lost when accrediting a course?

3. Aboriginal-controlled teaching & learning

- Why is it important to have Aboriginal teachers?

- How does your college ensure your learning space & college environment reinforce Aboriginal ways of learning and identity?

- How do you create a <u>safe</u> place for your students?

- Why is it important to use members of the community as guest speakers/teachers/mentors/supervisors within the learning programme?

- How does your college encourage students to learn the Aboriginal way, i.e. in ways which support your language, culture & identity as Aboriginal?

- Are there other things about teaching & learning in an Aboriginal community-controlled college that should be highlighted as 'good practice'?

- What sorts of things do students say are important to them about studying in an Aboriginal community-controlled college?

- What sorts of support does your college give to students?

- The community-controlled providers have described their education programs as
- "holistic"
- "with a community development focus, not just an individual advancement goal"
- "life affirming"
- "based on an Aboriginal world view".
Do these descriptions describe your college? Can you give examples to illustrate?

- How are language issues dealt with?

- How are literacy & numeracy issues dealt with?

4. Aboriginal decision-making

- How does your college put Aboriginal self-determination into practice?

- Who makes the key decisions?

- How do Aboriginal staff & students influence policy & programs?

- In what ways is the decision-making processes at the college an <u>Aboriginal</u> process?

5. Flexibility in Delivery & Assessment

- In what ways is the college flexible in its delivery of courses (accredited & non-accredited) to take account of student needs including cultural & family obligations & responsibilities, social & economic realities, geographic locations, languages, entry requirements?

- Why is flexibility in assessment strategies & methods important? (e.g. on-the-job/community assessment, involvement of elders, community members in the assessment method, non-written presentations, provision of interpreters, group work)

- What evidence do you have that flexible delivery & assessment results in improved learning outcomes? (e.g. participation & retention rates)

6. Aboriginal Community-Controlled Education

- What do you understand by the term Aboriginal community-controlled education?

- In what ways is Aboriginal community-control expressed at your college?

- Why is it important?

7. College Outcomes

- What are some of the outcomes of Aboriginal community-controlled education that are different from the outcomes of 'mainstream' education?

- List some of the achievements of your college in terms of student outcomes that illustrate this

- List some other outcomes eg in areas such as staff development, program development, increased Aboriginal community involvement and support

- What would happen to your students and the community you serve if they were not able to access Aboriginal community-controlled programs

- Are some of your college's outcomes hard to measure? Give examples

8. Education & Self-Determination: The 'Big Picture'

- How does Aboriginal community-controlled education assist the struggle for self-determination?

- What does your college do in practice to support communities to achieve self-determination?

- Give examples of how your college gets involved in the struggles in your community

- Give examples of ways your college's educational programs assist and work with other community-controlled organisations

- How does your college support staff & students to become activists & leaders in the Aboriginal community?

- How do your college programs contribute to current local and national issues around which Aboriginal people are campaigning? e.g. land rights, native title, funding cuts, deaths in custody, health, etc etc.

9. **Other Comments**

Are there any other comments you want to make about your college which will help us to explain why they are 'best practice' providers of Aboriginal adult education