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Paper for PEER REVIEW

Paper title: A School based co-ordination and delivery model of remote Indigenous

Teacher Education

Abstract

For the past two years Indigenous Educators in certain regions of the Northern Territory of Australia who have achieved a three year teaching qualification have been supported to upgrade to a 4th year qualification by receiving onsite course delivery and Academic English support. This program is called the Indigenous Teacher Upgrade Program (ITUP). Through undertaking this program in schools it became apparent that a more effective delivery model would be one that embedded the training and course work of the Indigenous teachers in a whole school professional learning cycle. This ensures that the staff becomes a community of learners focused on the needs of improving student outcomes and working together to achieve this. By integrating the up-skilling of the indigenous educators into the same 'community of learners' process then the learning of the indigenous teachers becomes understood and supported by the whole staff. At the same time this type of approach supports the development of cross-cultural competence which is a known determinant of school and student success in remote schools. This paper will look at one such pilot program currently happening in Central Australia.

Part 1 – The needs and challenges of remote indigenous education and training

i) **Past Teacher Education models for remote Indigenous populations**

The concept of delivering indigenous teacher education on-site in remote communities is not new. Many similar programs exist to this day in remote regions of Australia and other geographically challenged areas in countries such as Canada and the United States.

In the Northern Territory (NT), Australia, there was the Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) Program (Osborne, 1982, p.1). This program revolved around teacher education lecturers and tutors being based in remote schools and in communities in the NT and was based on a strong partnership between the local

school and Batchelor College. The South Australian version of this type of program, the Anangu Teacher Education Program (AnTEP), was set up to provide a different model of teacher education for the Anangu people of the APY lands in northern South Australia. One of the keys to the programs success has been a close collaboration with local decision making bodies and with education service providers such as the Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Education Committee (PYEC), Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) and Anangu Educaton Services (AES). In the geographically remote area of far north Queensland (Australia) there was the Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP), which aimed to provide teacher education *'at the remote locations where people live and work'*. Once again the success of the program has been largely dependent on the fact that it was a joint initiative between Education Queensland and a number of Tertiary and community based institutions.[1]

This type of remote, community based, teacher education is not limited to the remote regions of Australia. Other countries facing the same challenges of isolation and remote communities have developed models of teacher education to cater for these needs. The Brandon University Northern Teacher Education community-based Program (BUNTEP) in Manitoba, Canada 'presents a real alternative to traditional campus-based teacher training.' The rationale for the program is very similar to the rationale for similar Australian programs namely that,

'Many residents of Northern Manitoba are unable to attend a university campus, largely because of location, lack of financial resources and/or educational preparedness'[2] Similar Canadian based remote indigenous teacher education programs can be found in other regions of Canada such as the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education program (SUNTEP), the Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (ATEP) of the University of Alberta and the Northwest Territories Teacher Education Program. In remote and rural regions of Alaska we also see similar issues being faced in terms of Alaska Native teacher training and programs such as the University of Alaska's 'Alaska Native Teacher Preparation Project (ANTPP)' have been developed in response to these needs.[3]

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[1] *Information sourced from* http://www.learningplace.com.au/deliver/content.asp?pid=39520
[2] http://www2.brandonu.ca/academic/education/buntep/buntep-1.asp
[3] http://www.uaf.edu/educ/other/antpp/index.html

ii) The shift to more workplace based learning

The emergence of communication technology as the primary means of social, economic and political exchange has dramatically reshaped the world we live in. This means that the world of work has to fundamentally change as well, and with it our ability to learn new things to keep pace with the changes. Burns (2002, p.11) states that 'Only lifelong learning can guarantee that individual Australians will be prepared for change'. Globalisation has forever altered the type of work being done in Western nations. No longer are they the home of goods that are 'mass produced in long production lines' (Burns 2002, p.11).

This shift from an 'old approach' workforce to a new modern workforce equipped with increased 'technological skills' greater 'operacy – the ability to make things happen' and more of an ability to learn new skills and 'adopt and operate within new work practices' presents a huge challenge to an educational system that is largely stuck in an industrial age mentality. Whereas once people trained for a job or became qualified for a profession and did that job for their entire career now the maximum shelf life of a degree is 10 years with some degrees estimated to only be relevant for a year (computer science) (Burns 2002, p.10).

These "shifting sands" of tertiary education have brought into sharp focus the question of 'where' and 'how' this learning best happens. Is a decontextualised classroom on a university campus still a valid location to locate learning, or should the academy form meaningful partnerships with industry to more closely align what is being taught with the needs and realities of those doing the learning?

Recent studies indicate that in the sphere of teacher education and professional learning some of the best results are coming from projects that are based in schools. Yost et al (2010, p. 410) detail a 'site based, collaborative approach to teacher development' that they have trialed in schools in the United States recently. This project, named "Project Achieve", used a model of distributed leadership to work toward teacher quality with the aim of improvement of student outcomes. It was based on the 'strong belief that teacher quality results in enhanced student learning' (Yost et al, p. 413). It drew on the theories outlined in Robert Marzano's 'Dimensions

of Learning' (Marzano, 1992), specifically in the areas of attitudes, knowledge application, extension of knowledge, using knowledge and habits of mind. It saw a 'Teacher Leader' placed in a school whose role included 'coaching, in-service and mentoring of teachers' (Yost et al, p. 414).

While this study was based in an urban middle schooling context, the student population was linguistically and culturally diverse and students 'resided in low income homes' (Yost et al, p.417). The schools involved faced many of the challenges faced by remote indigenous schools including a high turnover of teaching staff. In terms of their results they found the most significant improvement happened with new and mid level teachers' (Yost et al, p.429), and they saw not only significant improvement in student outcomes in Literacy and Numeracy but more teachers indicating enthusiasm to stay at their school for longer. The authors highlight the important role of the Teacher Leader stating that,

> *Teacher leaders, due to their presence and instructional focus, were able to foster a learning community atmosphere in their school. The teacher leaders synergistically elevated the attention of everyone – the leadership team, teachers and students – to focus on the goal of increasing student learning and achievement (p.429).*

One of the reasons for the success of this project was that it utilized current theory about adult learning which 'should be situated in the context of the teachers' work and that mentoring and coaching increases learning to a significant degree (Yost et al, p.429). Adult learning needs to approach learning from the perspective of what Knowles (1980) termed 'Andragogy'. It is commonly agreed that adult learning should:

- ➢ be learner centred not teacher or content centred, based on more of a humanist approach to learning.
- ➢ focus on broad lifetime of experiences of the learner and be based around the expectations of independence and self –direction
- ➢ involve planning and evaluation that is a joint venture between teachers and students, and where the teacher is more of a facilitator who is respectful and

inclusive of the experience of their learners. It should be about creating a community of learners.

- ➢ have minimal emphasis on authority, formality and competition
- ➢ provide motivation through meeting learners at their point of need and being clear about the purpose or use of what they are learning
- ➢ have a curriculum structured around problems and sequenced according to the logic of the learner not that of the subject matter

These aspirations often stand in stark contrast to the methods and behaviours traditionally utilized in universities, where Burns suggests that the priority is more often the 'organisational imperatives of instructional efficiency and resource conservation' (Burns, 2002 p.142). Sadly if universities do not change to adapt more flexible and diverse course and delivery modes they may well find themselves redundant in the Knowledge Era. However, if they are brave enough to embrace change, all sorts of creative partnerships could be possible.

Part 2 - The Ntaria Pilot:

i) The context:

Ntaria is a remote community located 125kms west of Alice Springs in Central Australia. Unlike many communities it has a sealed road all the way to the community and is accessible as a day visit location. There has been a strong history of site based delivery of teacher education in the community, but in more recent years the delivery options have been limited and indigenous teachers undertaking training have been required to attend centralised workshops in either Alice Springs, or more usually Darwin. The participation of two indigenous teachers from Ntaria in the ITUP program which brought back on-site delivery, led to a broader conversation about different levels of training for all of the indigenous staff. There was a desire from the school leadership to develop a strong sense of local training pathways so that students coming through the school could see an education and training future for themselves. There was also a recognition that knowledge about and involvement in the training program would also help the non-indigenous teachers to work more effectively with the indigenous educators in the school.

Most classes have one classroom teacher and one indigenous Assistant Teacher (AT). There is one fully qualified Indigenous teacher at the school who has recently completed the Indigenous Teacher Upgrade Program and there are four Assistant Teachers who are undertaking Bachelor of Education Teacher training. There are also eight other Assistant Teachers who are beginning their training journey at a Certificate III level.

ii) The program: Phase 1

The intention of this program was to build a culture of whole of school professional development through the provision of a weekly program of workplace study and teaching team planning for the Assistant Teachers enrolled in a range of teacher education courses from VET to Higher Education. It was collaboration between the local Department of Education and the locally recognised Registered Training Organisation (RTO), Batchelor Insititute. A team of lecturers, tutors and curriculum officers worked with ATs on a range of activities including: classroom based tasks; ESL teaching; planning for lessons; planning for groups of students; individual and group study activities; preparation of presentations; documentation and collation of evidence for assessment. The team also provided strategic professional development at a whole school level to support all teaching teams.

iii) The goals

Prior to commencing the program the school leadership was asked to identify a priority area related to improving student learning outcomes that the whole staff could focus on. The two areas identified were 'Writing' and 'Team Teaching'. This worked nicely as one was focused on 'content' or one 'discipline area' while the other was more of a pedagogical focus. In response to this the support team devised a series of unit enrolments that were specifically targeted to focusing on these areas. The Higher Education level ATs were enrolled in two units, each focusing on Literacy development. The VET level ATs were enrolled in modules that had either a writing/literacy or a team teaching focus. The main goals of the program were to:

- Give Indigenous staff time and support with their training/study on site, rather than having to go away for workshops
- Model ways of working as a team in a cross cultural setting
- Give classroom teams extra time and support to plan and teach together

- Give everyone a chance to learn new things, try new things, ask for help, reflect and share their success with the whole staff

- Change the conversation in the school to a more collaborative discussion about working together to improve student outcomes and support team teaching

iv) The measures

In order to meet these goals we developed a program driven by the support team, and in consultation with the school leadership. This program consisted of:

- Whole school professional learning sessions - one information session, three whole school learning sessions and one whole school evaluation session

- Weekly Tutorial support for indigenous staff who were studying – for this ATs were divided into Higher Ed and VET level groups with a tutorial of about 2 hours being run once a week for each group. ATs were released from class duties for this period.

- Weekly classroom based team support and help with gathering evidence for portfolios

We were also concerned about the delivery mode and it was important to keep the same support team coming out each week to minimise disruption to the school program and to ensure continuity, trust and strong relationships with the school staff.

v) The results

In the space of one semester (effectively 14 weeks) we were able to produce the following results

Quantitative data

In the Higher Education group (4 staff members):

- One teacher was supported to complete her final unit, which in fact meant that she had completed all the units and requirements and is now eligible to graduate with her Bachelor of Education, fourth year.

- Three of the Higher Ed ATs have all completed two units each towards their B.Ed this semester, whilst working full time.

In the VET group (8 staff members):

- One AT achieved competencies in all 3 units; Another AT achieved all competencies in one unit out of 4.
- The ATs attended 7 tutorials and 3 whole school professional learning sessions which covered the content of the units they were enrolled in (attendance varied between 2-8).
- Teaching teams collected evidence of ATs work in classes (1 team collected everything).
- The evidence folders were assessed at Batchelor, to ascertain who met competencies in which modules – while other ATs did not complete full units they met individual competencies within a range of units.

At the Whole school level:

We ran:

- 1 x whole school information session
- 3 x whole school professional learning sessions
- 1 x whole school evaluation session

Attendance varied between 15 and 24 participants.

Qualitative data – staff feedback

In the evaluation session there was a range of feedback, overwhelmingly positive. Some of the comments from staff were:

vi)   Evaluation of the delivery mode

In the evaluation of the delivery mode done by the support team itself there were three main areas: positives, challenges and ways in which this program has been a catalyst for change.

Positives

Learning on-site has immediate benefits to the classroom teams and students largely because it is directly related to what the school is trying to achieve. The NT DET/BIITE team collaboration worked reasonably well, in terms of sharing information and communicating – despite being on different computer networks. Three-way partnership between School, DET and BIITE met both the schools needs

and the training needs reasonably effectively. It proved to be good to have the same delivery team coming out to the school each week to support the program. The delivery team and the local staff worked very well together by the end of the semester. Through our program a space was created for some teaching teams to have a shift in power in the team working dynamic and for almost all teaching teams, even if there was not a shift in behaviour there was a shift in attitude, from team teaching and supporting training being an 'expectation', to being something teachers want to be involved in.

Challenges

1. *Not enough front end planning*

BIITE felt they did not do enough to prepare ATs for the expectations of study at the beginning of the VET program. More work needed to happen at the start of the program to find out who was committed and just enrol those ATs. Failure to do this resulted in inconsistent attendance and therefore not as many competencies met. The Higher Ed students also needed more preparation for study and this did not happen largely because we did not allow for preparation time. Courses were not ready for on-site delivery and were being continually developed. This led to uncertainty and some confusion.

2. *Achieving a whole school approach*

It was still difficult being visitors coming from the outside rather than being a school based coordinator. Ideally there needed more school buy in and commitment to a whole school approach and the delivery team needed a better way to communicate with classroom teachers about what was happening in the tutorials. The delivery team would also have benefitted from more time in the classrooms, modelling, collecting evidence and observing. There was some reticence to having visitors in the classroom, perhaps from a perception of feeling judged. In the existing school structure there was no planning time for teams. This project tried a couple of ways to overcome this but was largely unsuccessful. Ultimately the school needs to timetable this into its program. Initially it was very challenging to know how to help people see the difference team teaching can make for their teaching, especially if they have had no experience of it before. There was a shift in this by the end of the semester however, once certain teams were able to share how they had achieved this.

3. *Resourcing and time*

The lack of a dedicated adult learning space and resources for studying such as access to computers was an issue. If ESL learners are expected to get through two Higher Ed units per semester then the complexity of the learning tasks need to be recognised and appropriate time allocated especially in view of the language requirements of these units.

Catalyst for Change

The different type of delivery has led to some important changes in terms of the way BIITE is thinking about its courses. This may not change immediately but it will come into play over the next few years. There has been a positive development of the leadership in the school, which was highlighted in the Principal's speech at the evaluation session. The program was able to meet some of the Assistant teachers at their point of need. The ones who experienced the most success are the ones who are at the point of readiness for more. The AT who completed all tasks is a good example of this: he was ready and committed, he was well supported by his team teacher and the biggest change in practice and attitude happened in this teaching team. Even those teachers who were resistant to the program throughout the semester demonstrated change in attitudes by the end of Phase 1 of the program. Hearing the stories of other teaching teams freed them up to admit that while they wanted to do more, they found it challenging to know how. The program for them has led them to a point of readiness to change.

The program: Phase 2 – a continuing story
Changes and progress

In 2011, one of the team members transferred to the school full time to teach as well as continue the work as 'mentor' or 'coach' for the on-site delivery and support model begun in 2010. At the same time another team member moved from working for the NT Department of Education to Batchelor Institute and was allocated Ntaria school as one of her sites. These changes in fact enabled the team of people working with the school to remain relatively unchanged and minimised the disruption of the program delivery. In a context where personal relationships are vital for a strong working

relationship this has proven crucial. The cohort of students at both the Certificate III and BEd 2nd year have remained largely unchanged.

Two out of the four B Ed students have postponed their studies for personal reasons and one has come back to study after having some time off. The two undertaking studies this semester have both completed one unit towards their B Ed, with course delivery off site on the Batchelor Campus and follow up work done at the school site.

There have been some minor changes to the younger staff members undertaking the VET level studies, but the core group have remained the same since 2010. We have managed to keep the routine of two afternoons per week the same with one session being a Cert III Tutorial and the other focusing on Higher Ed support. The course itself is much more 'ready' this year than it was in 2010 and the students are working their way through a workbook with some clear supplementary teaching activities that they need to plan, teach and evaluate. Having a support person on site full time has had benefits in terms of regular follow up and everyday support for students. It is certainly meeting their 'point of need' learning much better. The other staff also feel as though they have 'someone' they can go to to ask for advice about supporting the indigenous staff members they work most closely with and many have remarked how they have seen a shift in confidence and initiative being shown by the younger assistant teachers. The indigenous staff themselves are seeing themselves more and more as a support for each other and hold each other very accountable for taking both their work and study seriously. They are growing more confident to share what they are doing in their classrooms with each other. The majority of the cohort should complete the 5 units they are enrolled in this semester. The recent addition of a new 'Tutor' who visits most weeks on a Tuesday is helping to assure this.

Challenges

A change in school leadership this year has impacted on the importance being placed on this program. The new leadership in the school immediately questioned the role the 'mentor' or 'coach' would play and whether playing this role would interfere with what she considered to be 'core business' for the school. The main difference is that the whole school Professional Learning sessions are no longer happening which means that the sense of a 'Community of Learners' is rapidly diminishing. This is

quite a blow to the original program, but in order to maintain something like that, time and human resource allocations need to be prioritised. Regular interruptions due to illness, public holidays and community events have also presented a challenge to continuity of the tutorial program. Insufficient infrastructure such as access to computers, printers, scanners and email continues to be a problem and attendance at tutorials tends to fluctuate with between 3 and 7 attending the VET Tutorial on any given Tuesday.

Conclusions

Despite these challenges we have just tried to 'get on with it' and this approach seems to be working with all Indigenous staff participating in the program showing signs of increased participation and commitment to their work. This type of approach to Professional Learning combined with Indigenous teacher education is innovative and contextually responsive. The results of this program could have far reaching impacts for the future delivery modes of teacher training in Australia and for how schools with diversity challenges can develop the cultural competence of their staff.

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