

## Indigenous Education and the Ladder to Prosperity

Marcia Langton and Zane Ma Rhea

**The small number** of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at school — 147,181 — belies the complexity and magnitude of the failure of the national school system to ensure that they are educated. Only half the schools in the education system have Indigenous students — 4,800 of the 9,202 schools in Australia. This ratio — one could argue — lessens the necessity of the education system to engage in capacity building to address what education needs might exist for Indigenous students. In organisational terms, this represents a significant difficulty in achieving ‘buy-in’ in a system that already faces competing pressures for resource allocation and attention. By way of example, in Victoria there are 2,211 primary and secondary schools and about 900 of these schools have Indigenous students enrolled. There are about 40 schools that have reasonably large cohorts of Indigenous students. For the other 860 schools, the number of Indigenous students enrolled ranges from 12 to a single child.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has made a commitment to ‘close the gap’, that is, to reduce the 17-year life expectancy gap between Indigenous people and other Australians. A longer, healthier life expectancy for Indigenous people will not eventuate without attention to their economic circumstances. We are in the midst of a crisis that is barely understood and, while education is a key ideological battleground in debates about how to address Indigenous disadvantage, there is alarm-

ing evidence that the lack of capacity in mainstream education to educate Indigenous children will continue to keep Indigenous families and communities in poverty. In 2004, Professor Marcia Langton warned:

Despite a few positive developments, the education status of the Australian Indigenous population is catastrophic. Closing the education gap is essential to capacity building in the hundreds of dysfunctional Aboriginal communities whose plight is manifestly unnecessary in a wealthy developed nation. Education is the key to creating the Aboriginal leaders, teachers, professionals, and self-sufficient individuals of the future. It is capable of expanding opportunities for full social, political, and economic participation (Langton, 2004, p. 1).

However ‘closing the gap’ is proving elusive, with deep professional and ideological disagreements fracturing a coherent response to this problem. Recent national data across a range of education issues (ABS, 2006, 2007; NAPLAN, 2008; MCEETYA, 2004-2007; SCRGRSP, 2006, 2007; TIMMS, 2008;) shows that in some states, Indigenous children have, for example, done worse rather than better as a cohort at national benchmark testing over the last three years. There are incremental improvements, for example, in the retention data for Indigenous students at Years 11 and 12 but overall, the education system seems unable to significantly accelerate education trends in literacy and numeracy, as the foundations of educational achievement, in a positive direction. The present federal, state and territory governments, schools, teachers, Indigenous parents, caregivers, and the Indigenous community are all asking why most Indigenous children are underperforming in national benchmark tests for literacy and numeracy.

### **Key issues**

This chapter first discusses a number of key issues: poverty within the Indigenous families is, by far, the biggest negative impact on children’s academic achievements; there are some distinct demographic characteristics in the Indigenous student

cohort that must be considered. The traditional stand-off in the financial arrangements between Federal and State education jurisdictions and default position of education policy — special, separate and experimental programs for Indigenous students — the ‘bolt-on’ approach to Indigenous education — are harming the provision of coherent, high quality education services to Indigenous people. We argue for a planned, organisation level response focusing on quality education outcomes; we argue that such an approach must be at the forefront of any response to this education crisis, with measurable, legally binding undertakings made and enacted. These issues, we argue, are key elements for the whole system of education to address with urgency over the next five years in order to deliver on the oft-quoted ‘closing the gap’ strategy.

Over the past 10 years there has been a growing body of empirical data globally that demonstrates that social justice imperatives cannot be sustained in poverty (see, e.g., World Resources Institute, 2007). The Cape York Institute, under the leadership of Noel Pearson, has published a series of studies and papers that culminate in a sustained argument for the reform of Indigenous communities that have become dependent on welfare payments from the government (CYI, 2007). In straightforward terms, he and others have argued that welfare dependency creates a false economy that operates largely outside the mainstream economy. The call for welfare reform has, as an essential ingredient, the improvement of education outcomes for Indigenous students who currently lack the skills required to create vibrant, sustainable economies in their communities. This work, while focused on the Cape York communities, highlights the insidious impact of poverty on many Indigenous families, whether they are living in metropolitan, provincial, remote, or very remote locations. A sobering fact, and one that must be addressed before all others, is that a working estimate for 2008 across Australia is that 48% of Indigenous people in Australia fall into the bottom 20% of the population in terms of income. This means that in 2008, almost half the Indigenous working-age population earned an estimated average weekly income of \$294 per week or less as

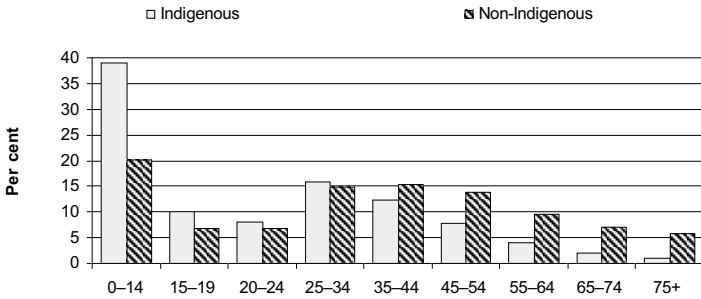
compared with the individual average weekly income of \$1,145.

The problem is far worse because, in many Indigenous communities in Australia, the average equivalised gross household income for Indigenous persons was 62% of that for non-Indigenous persons (ABS, 2004). On average, after adjustment for household size and composition, the household income of Indigenous persons is much lower than the income of non-Indigenous persons (in 2001, this gross household figure was \$364 per week compared with \$585). In very remote areas, where Indigenous persons account for nearly half of the total population, the income for Indigenous persons was only 43% of the income for other Australians.

The fact of poverty experienced by a significant proportion of Indigenous families will have a direct impact on the ability of children from these families to take advantage of the opportunities promised by access to education. Adding pressure to this situation, the latest ABS schools data (*ABS Schools 2007*, Table 10) shows that there is a greater than average participation of Indigenous children in both primary and secondary levels of schooling by proportion of population. While Indigenous people in Australia account for at least 2.5% of the total population (*ABS Year Book Australia*, 2008), the overall school enrolment rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) children is 4.5%. In primary schools, it is 5% and in secondary, it is 3.7%. As Langton (2004) argued, the Indigenous population has a significantly different structure to the non-Indigenous population. It tends to be younger, with 39.3% of the Indigenous population being 14 years or under, compared to 20.4% for the non-Indigenous population (see Figure 1).

Demographically, the largest number of Indigenous students is found in metropolitan and provincial centres (see Figure 2).

However, differing from the non-Indigenous Australian population, a much higher proportion of Indigenous people live in remote and very remote areas: 26.4%, compared to 2.0% for non-Indigenous people. This means that there will be



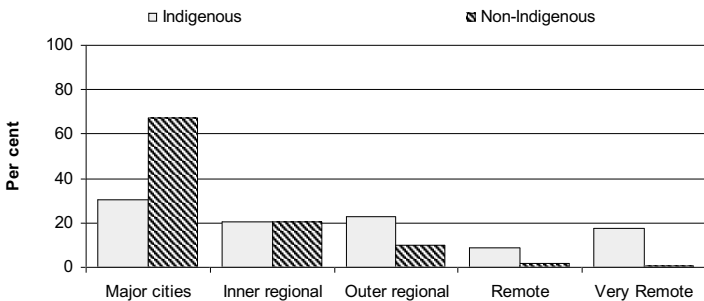
**Figure 1**

Proportion of the population in each age category, 2001.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001, *Estimated Resident Population*; Table A.5.

more schools in remote and very remote places that have majority Indigenous student enrolment, a significant anomaly in the education system (see Figure 3).

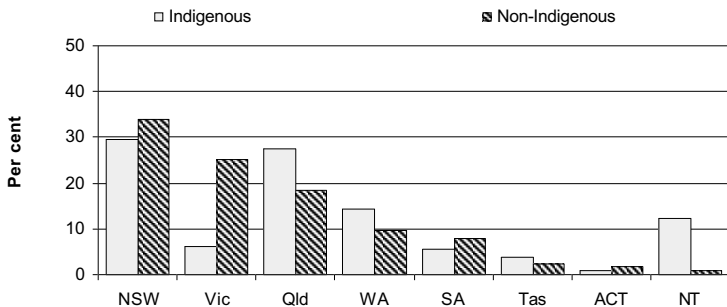
Further, the Indigenous proportion of the population also differs across jurisdictions. The highest proportion of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations live in New South Wales than other states (29.2% and 33.5% respectively). This means that the national preoccupation with the problems of educating Indigenous students in remote locations often hides the fact that, by proportion, the largest number of Indigenous students in the education system reside in New South Wales



**Figure 2**

Proportion of the population in each remoteness area, 2001.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001, *Estimated Resident Population*; Table A.6.



**Figure 3**

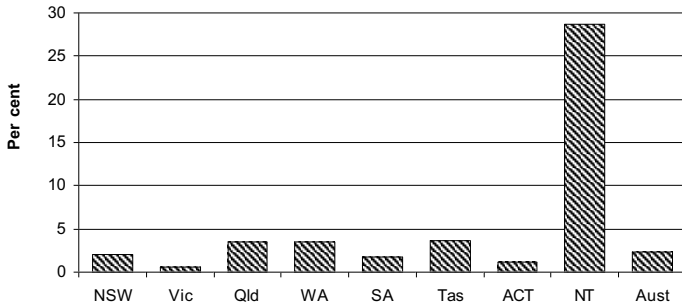
Proportion of the population in each State and Territory, 2001.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001, *Estimated Resident Population*; Table A.5.

and Queensland, and statistics demonstrate that these students are also being failed by mainstream formal schooling. A relatively high proportion of the Indigenous population also lives in Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory (see Figure 3), but as was noted previously, only half the schools in Australia have any Indigenous students enrolled.

Also, as a proportion of the population within each state and territory, the Northern Territory has the highest proportion of Indigenous people (28.8 per cent), with Victoria having the lowest (0.6 per cent; see Figure 4). This means that apart from the Northern Territory where the education needs of Indigenous students will be more obvious, as a result of their majority proportion in the system, it becomes apparent why the issues facing Indigenous students and their families are so often neglected; they are invisible where the Indigenous proportion of the population, especially the school population is miniscule.

The proportion of the Indigenous population living in different remoteness areas also varies across jurisdictions. The ACT has the highest proportion of its Indigenous population living in major cities (99.8%) and the NT has the highest living in remote and very remote areas (81.2%; see Figure 5).

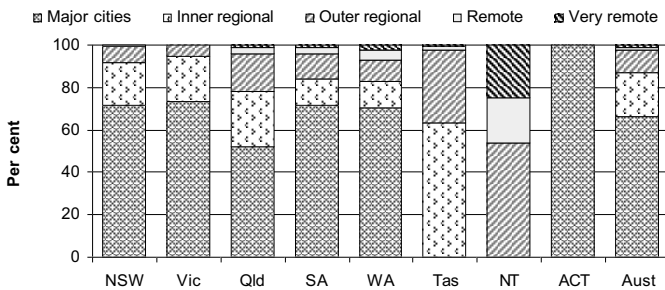


**Figure 4**

Proportion of the population who are Indigenous by State and Territory, 2001.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001, *Estimated Resident Population*; Table A.5.

The discussion above highlights that while Indigenous students overall are underperforming in national school benchmark testing when compared to their non-Indigenous peers, there is a range of demographic factors that make the situation far more complicated for policy makers and departments of education. These demographic facts have variable impacts, including on the potential of an individual child to succeed academically. It is also the case that some Indigenous students are performing very well academically, for an equally diverse range of reasons. The problem is to clearly identify



**Figure 5**

Indigenous population across remoteness areas, 2001.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001, *Estimated Resident Population*; Table A.6.

what of the myriad factors are causal, which are correlational, and which are irrelevant to successful academic achievement.

There is no 'quick fix, one size fits all' to this problem and it is exacerbated by an historical 'stand-off' between the federal government and the state and territory education jurisdictions. The jurisdictional conflict concerns the allocation of responsibility: whose responsibility it is to ensure that the education system provides appropriate education services to Indigenous students, with their widely different needs and aspirations? Under the arrangements agreed at Federation, States, and subsequently, Territories were allocated control of education. Only after the 1967 Referendum did the federal government become involved in offering financial incentives to the states to pay additional attention to their Indigenous students over and above their usual activities. Over time, this came to be interpreted that if anything special was to be done in the provision of education services for Indigenous students that it was a federal responsibility. Thereby, many education initiatives have been brought into the main work of education as special arrangements, or 'bolt-ons,' to the larger system. An outcome of this strange arrangement has been that the fortunes of the provision of appropriate education to Indigenous students has been dependent on a complex mix of politics, cap-in-hand begging by the federal government, and the willingness of variously engaged state and territory departments of education to address Indigenous education challenges. Added to this mix, there has always been a Christian missionary involvement, and more recently, philanthropy and businesses have made their voices heard and their money available to governments, non-government agencies and in some cases, directly to Indigenous communities and community-controlled organisations under a range of conditions and favourable taxation arrangements.

With the philanthropic sector showing increasing success in their endeavours to overcome state failure, the provision of education services to Indigenous children has become a lightning rod for contemporary humanitarian aspirations in Australia. The philanthropic sector has been guided by the



principle that Indigenous Australians have the ‘right to a good life,’ and premise humanitarian activities on the very visible connection between education and the ladder to prosperity.

### **The way forward**

#### *The right to a good life*

Going to school, whether a child likes it or not, lays an often taken for granted foundation for the rest of their life. Building on that foundation, most children go on to further study or the world of work, get married or find a partner, maybe have children, go on holidays, face a life of mortgages, school fees and other debts, enjoying what in Australia we call the ‘good life’.

Despite examples of Indigenous people succeeding to the highest level, education has failed far too many Indigenous young people, failed them at that very important foundational stage in their lives, and the rest of educated Australia does not know what it is like not to have that foundation.

For the Indigenous citizens of this country, the problem is twofold. First, missionary or state education has historically been forced on Indigenous people. Second, the standard of education available to many Indigenous children has not been what most other Australians would have experienced. Apart from notable exceptions, it was, and continues to be of such poor quality that there is now a crisis spanning three generations of education failure in many places. We would argue that there is a fundamental inability among well-educated Australians, both non-Indigenous and Indigenous, to understand this problem.

We want to draw attention to the work of educators like Dr Chris Sarra, Director of the Indigenous Education Leadership Institute, and Noel Pearson, Director of the Cape York Institute, and schools in major cities — for example, St Joseph’s in Sydney, Trinity Grammar, Loreto, Melbourne Grammar, Melbourne Girls Grammar, Presbyterian Ladies College, Methodist Ladies College, and Scotch College in Melbourne — who are working with Indigenous communities across Australia to avert this crisis.

We also mention the 30-year relationship which Mt Evelyn Christian School has had with the Yuendumu community, Monivae College with a number of distinguished Indigenous alumni, the inspiring independent Indigenous-controlled schools such as Yipirinya and Yirrkala Community Education Centre, and companies such as Rio Tinto, which lead the way in showing how reform can be achieved with dignity and respect.

Given these examples of changing the education paradigm in Australia in order to engage Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike, what would this change be like?

#### *A legally binding framework*

The United Nations Development Group Guidelines on Indigenous People's Issues (2008) recognises the pivotal importance of the International Labour Organisation's Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. It is 'the foremost internationally legal instrument which deals specifically with the rights of Indigenous and tribal peoples, and whose influence extends beyond the number of actual ratifications' (ILO, 2003. p. i). Australia is not a signatory to this Convention.

The International Labour Organization, founded in 1919, became the first specialised agency of the United Nations (UN) in 1946. The ILO is the only 'tripartite' United Nations agency in that it brings together representatives of governments, employers and workers to jointly shape policies and programs. This unique arrangement gives the ILO an edge in incorporating 'real world' knowledge about employment and work. The ILO is the global body responsible for drawing up and overseeing international labour standards. Working with its member states, the ILO seeks to ensure that labour standards are respected in practice as well as principle. The member states of the ILO meet at the International Labour Conference in June of each year, in Geneva. Two government delegates, an employer delegate and a worker delegate, represent each member state. Technical advisors assist the delegations, which

are usually headed by cabinet ministers, who take the floor on behalf of their governments.

Employer and worker delegates can freely express themselves and vote according to instructions received from their organisations. They sometimes vote against each other or even against their government representatives.

The Conference establishes and adopts international labour standards and is a forum for discussion of key social and labour questions. It also adopts the organisation's budget and elects the governing body. The governing body is the executive council of the ILO and meets three times a year in Geneva. It takes decisions on ILO policy and establishes the program and the budget, which it then submits to the Conference for adoption. It also elects the Director-General.

The ILO Governing Body is composed of 28 government members, 14 employer members and 14 worker members. States of chief industrial importance permanently hold 10 of the government seats. Government representatives are elected at the conference every three years, taking into account geographical distribution. The employers and workers elect their own representatives respectively.

The role of the ILO in reducing poverty by using international law has, in many instances, been effective in removing the discrimination against and the abuse of the labour rights of Indigenous and tribal people. The ILO work is predicated on the fact that poverty remains deep and widespread across the developing world and some transition countries, with an estimated 2 billion people in the world today, live on the equivalent of less than USD2 per day. In the view of the ILO, the main route out of poverty is work.

The ILO Convention No. 169 is concerned with Indigenous and tribal peoples who constitute the poorest segment of the societies where they live and who are disproportionately represented among the victims of human rights abuses, conflict, discrimination as well as child labour and forced labour. Indigenous women face additional gender-based marginalisation. The focus of this Convention on improving their social and economic situation is predicated on achieving

broader development objectives such as respect for human rights, democracy, good governance, and poverty reduction. The Convention covers a wide range of issues, including land rights, access to natural resources, health, education, vocational training, conditions of employment and contacts across borders. Convention No 169, at Article 2 (c) provides that governments should act with measures for ‘assisting the members of the peoples concerned to eliminate socio-economic gaps that may exist between Indigenous and other members of the national community, in a manner compatible with their aspirations and ways of life.’ It provides safeguards for such groups at Article 4:

1. Special measures shall be adopted as appropriate for safeguarding the persons, institutions, property, labour, cultures, and environment of the peoples concerned.
2. Such special measures shall not be contrary to the freely-expressed wishes of the peoples concerned.
3. Enjoyment of the general rights of citizenship, without discrimination, shall not be prejudiced in any way by such special measures.

Articles 20 to 22 are concerned with recruitment and conditions of employment and vocational education and training. As standards of international law, they are sorely needed in Australia and their elevation in the conceptual framework developed by Indigenous leaders as matters of human rights would serve Indigenous people well as the economic problems that beset us become more evident and more detrimental to living standards.

ILO Convention No. 169 was criticised for insufficiently including Indigenous peoples in the drafting, and excluding self-determination and decision-making power. Nonetheless, it is a unique example of a human rights-based instrument that dually recognises collective and individual rights, distinctive and common rights, over a broad range of areas, to be enjoyed by Indigenous peoples, and the importance of their cultures, practices, languages and systems to the world community.

As we have already noted, Australia is not a signatory to the ILO Convention No 169, and thus these formal human rights are not available to Indigenous people in Australia as legal standards. As Joonas (2006) has observed, this Convention has its limitations because as of now it is only ratified by 20 countries. It is our contention that the ratification of ILO 169 by this Australian government would provide a clear framework for discussing the development of an improved provision of education services to Indigenous peoples within the formal, binding economic rights that the ILO Convention No. 169 offers.

*A guiding framework for education*

In particular, ILO 169 provides clear guidance with regard to the provision of education services to Indigenous people. Articles 26–31 are as below:

ARTICLE 26

Measures shall be taken to ensure that members of the peoples concerned have the opportunity to acquire education at all levels on at least an equal footing with the rest of the national community.

ARTICLE 27

1. Education programmes and services for the peoples concerned shall be developed and implemented in co-operation with them to address their special needs, and shall incorporate their histories, their knowledge and technologies, their value systems and their further social, economic and cultural aspirations. They shall participate in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of plans and programmes for national and regional development which may affect them directly.
2. The competent authority shall ensure the training of members of these peoples and their involvement in the formulation and implementation of education programmes, with a view to the progressive transfer of responsibility for the conduct of these programmes to these peoples as appropriate.

3. In addition, governments shall recognise the right of these peoples to establish their own educational institutions and facilities, provided that such institutions meet minimum standards established by the competent authority in consultation with these peoples. Appropriate resources shall be provided for this purpose.

#### ARTICLE 28

1. Children belonging to the peoples concerned shall, wherever practicable, be taught to read and write in their own Indigenous language or in the language most commonly used by the group to which they belong. When this is not practicable, the competent authorities shall undertake consultations with these peoples with a view to the adoption of measures to achieve this objective.
2. Adequate measures shall be taken to ensure that these peoples have the opportunity to attain fluency in the national language or in one of the official languages of the country.
3. Measures shall be taken to preserve and promote the development and practice of the Indigenous languages of the peoples concerned.

#### ARTICLE 29

The imparting of general knowledge and skills that will help children belonging to the peoples concerned to participate fully and on an equal footing in their own community and in the national community shall be an aim of education for these peoples.

#### ARTICLE 30

1. Governments shall adopt measures appropriate to the traditions and cultures of the peoples concerned, to make known to them their rights and duties, especially in regard to labour, economic opportunities, education and health matters, social welfare and their rights deriving from this Convention.

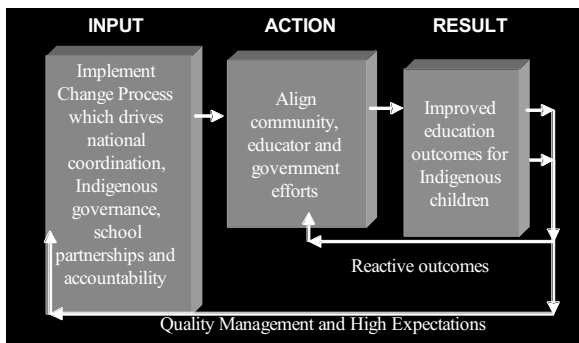
2. If necessary, this shall be done by means of written translations and through the use of mass communications in the languages of these peoples.

#### ARTICLE 31

Educational measures shall be taken among all sections of the national community, and particularly among those that are in most direct contact with the peoples concerned, with the object of eliminating prejudices that they may harbour in respect of these peoples. To this end, efforts shall be made to ensure that history textbooks and other educational materials provide a fair, accurate and informative portrayal of the societies and cultures of these peoples.

#### *System level change process*

The ratification by Australia of ILO 169 would significantly strengthen current attempts to develop a partnership model between all stakeholders. As discussed above, the Australian education system is large, and the accountabilities have been weak in the Indigenous education area. ILO 169 gives focus to the link between education and the eradication of poverty through work and ensures that the economic rights of Indigenous people can be embedded within education systems (see Figure 6).



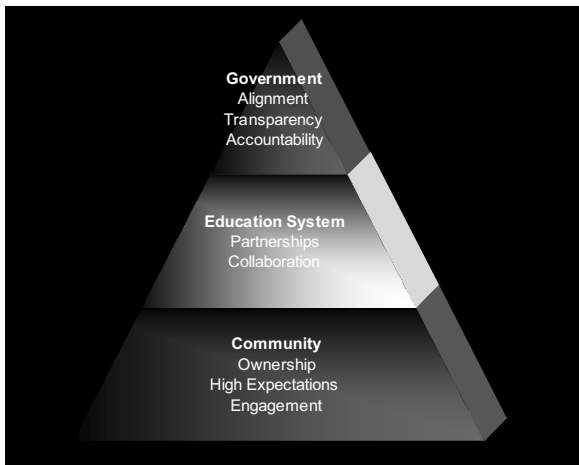
**Figure 6**

System level thinking for change.

In Australia, this would require a systems approach to change which clearly identifies inputs, actions required, and expected outcomes as well as incorporating a quality assurance cycle and maintaining high expectations of success. Like any systems level problem, issues facing communities, educators and governments in the provision of education services to Indigenous people, can appear overwhelming and insoluble. We do not share this view.

There are three levels of coordinated action required to solve this problem (see Figure 7).

The community level, the foundation for the pyramid, involves the local Indigenous community and, most important, the parents and caregivers of the Indigenous children in these communities. It also involves the wider Australian community, including individuals, community service, corporate, industry, and philanthropic organisations. The second level, the Education System, includes local schools, high performing state and independent schools, TAFE and universities. The third level includes governments and bureaucracies responsible for the provision of education services to Indigenous communities.



**Figure 7**

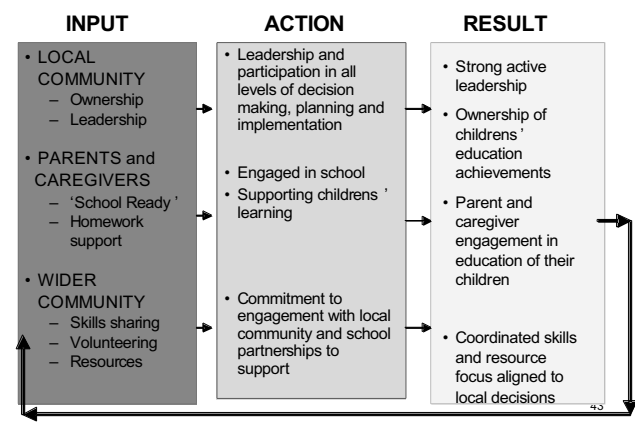
Three levels of coordinated action.



*Community: ownership, high expectations, and engagement*

The evidence is clear that nothing happens in Indigenous communities unless there is local ownership of any change process. A common complaint heard across Australia is that outsiders are like seagulls that fly in, do their business, and fly out again. Very little may have changed in the community but the relevant ‘consulted with the community’ box can be ticked. For each community to own the education achievements of its children rather than perceiving education as someone else’s responsibility changes peoples active engagement in leadership and decision making (see Figure 8).

Outsiders need to recognise that local issues are important to people and need to be addressed alongside other matters. Children participating in ceremonies and gathering bush food at the right time are part of learning. Recognising and teaching Indigenous languages at school means a great deal to local people. Languages spoken at home are a core part of individual, family and community identity and meaning-making cultural apparatus. The right to maintain local languages and to educate children using local languages in instruction is recognised in Articles 27.1 and 28.3 in ILO 169.



**Figure 8**

Communities: ownership, high expectations, and engagement.

Parents and caregivers have specific responsibilities over and above their community level involvement. They must be the ones held responsible for their children attending school. Children must also be ‘school ready’ to borrow a term from Noel Pearson. They need to be safe at night. They need to be properly nourished. They need help with their homework. But the single most important responsibility is finding ways to get their kids going to school because we know that children who do not attend school, or don’t go often enough are the ones who are failing.

Communities and individual families are approaching high performing schools across this country precisely because they want their children to receive a good quality education. Outsiders need to understand that this is not creating a new generation of stolen children. This is Aboriginal people actively seeking to improve their childrens futures.

So what of the involvement of the wider community? In this new education paradigm, framed by ILO 169, it will be much easier to direct the wider community to become involved in meaningful change where their skills and resources will be targeted for success.

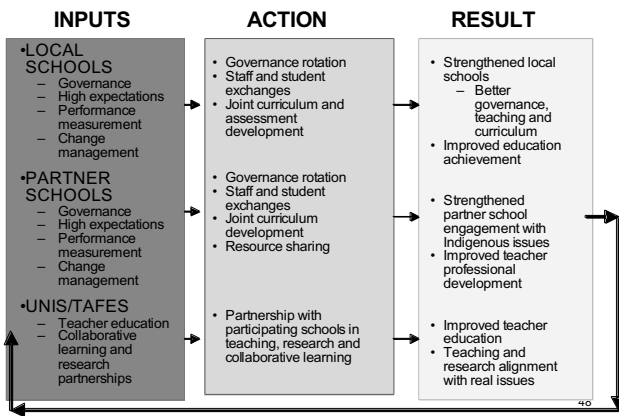
*Educators: partnership and collaboration*

Indigenous people across the country are really very concerned about the academic standard of their local schools. As opportunities increase for young Indigenous children to take up school places in high performing schools, and becoming involved in programs such as Clontarf in Western Australia, families are getting a better sense of the academic level of their children. Many have expressed shock that the reports from their local school bear little resemblance to the child’s actual academic level when they start at a boarding or day school in a capital city. They rightly ask how this could happen. And it is not only remote schools where this occurs. Many Indigenous children in cities and rural towns are being advanced in their school grade level without gaining the age appropriate level of academic achievement. As one principal

in a remote area school said: ‘... we’re resourced to cope, not to succeed’.

We would like to see outcomes formalised, including what some communities and families are already doing by proposing a plan whereby Indigenous communities and families would be trained and funded to actively approach their local school, or a high performing state or independent local or interstate school and work with them to find the right ‘fit’ (ILO 169, Article 27.2). Within the partnership, they might want to start a community primary school or work with their local government or church school to collaborate with such a high performing school (see Figure 9).

Importantly, in these partnerships, the exchange would be both ways: rotation of governing bodies, staff and student exchanges, joint assessment, curriculum development, and networking with other partnered schools to develop regional transition colleges. In Pitjantjatjara this is called ngaprtji ngapartji (give give). It represents a departure from the conventional deficit welfare dependency model of thinking to a partnerships approach required to achieve the aspirations of Indigenous people for their children and grandchildren. Such



**Figure 9**

Educators: partnership and collaboration.

close collaboration would support the intentions of Article 31, so that the non-Indigenous parties would have the opportunity to learn about Indigenous lifeways and ensure that their curricula accurately included the histories, achievements, and ideas of Indigenous people.

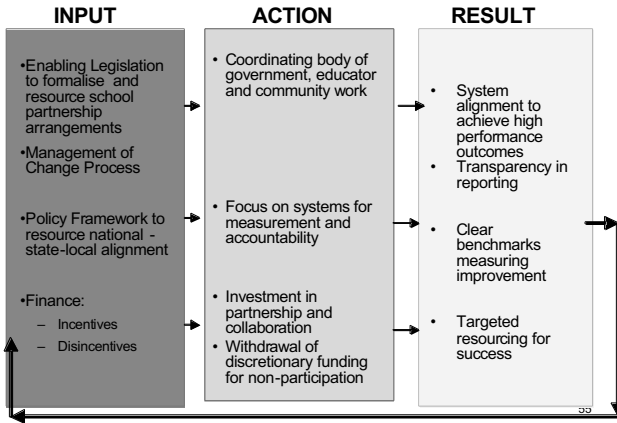
These partnerships would also integrate the work done in university teacher education programs and research. Universities and TAFEs would then work together with the partner schools facilitating, for example, student teacher placements, and giving pathway opportunities for students into further education as was recommended in the recent IHEAC Report (2006). Collaborative research partnerships would also drive an accountable evaluation framework for the whole change process.

Communities and partnered schools would form leadership groups that would also provide guidance to volunteers, philanthropists, and industry partners giving clear direction as to the skill and resource needs of each school community. For example, a group visiting a school for a week might read to the children, help with maths, then help at the homework centre after school. They might go on a trip to collect bush food. They might start learning the local language. There is already evidence that when schools and communities are working together this gives immediate support for the preservation and maintenance of the Indigenous languages of people involved (Article 28.3).

In this new process of partnering for change, strengthening the local school, and sending children to a transition or boarding school then forms part of a long term, sustainable education strategy led by the families and communities of these children. This is not the era of forced removal and forced assimilation. It is part of a broad strategy to educate the next generation of young Indigenous Australians.

*Governments: alignment, transparency, and accountability*

The role of the government and its bureaucracies then becomes very clear (see Figure 10). Their role is to ratify ILO 169, and develop enabling legislation to formalise and resource school

**Figure 9**

Governments: alignment, transparency, and accountability.

partnership arrangements and manage the change process within the accountability frameworks already emerging regarding improvements in literacy and numeracy results. This means matching federal and state level accountabilities for the provision of education services to Indigenous people. Bureaucracies would manage the alignment of local, state, and national level policies. Governments would also provide allocated Indigenous education funding to schools entering into partnerships with clear accountabilities and performance measures to ensure the quality management cycle delivers sustainable success. Allocated 'Indigenous education' funding would no longer be available to non-participating or low performing schools who were not involved actively in partnerships with Indigenous families and communities.

Over the past five years, the national benchmarking of literacy and numeracy has been very helpful in showing how poor the education outcomes are in many Indigenous communities. The national coordination of measurement and standards would continue to drive the performance measures across Indigenous education.

The past lack of coordination of approach to tackle the problem has led to a culture of low expectation in education bureaucracies and schools. There has been significant resource dissipation, constant experimentation, underfunding, and no agreement on the way forward. In particular, in the absence of a systemic approach to change, experimentation has been rife with special experimental programs, or, what are known as 'bolt on' programs, being constantly foisted on already under-resourced and understaffed schools.

The school partnership strategy would provide a structure to support successful schools and integrate success into the wider system, stopping the wastage and lack of proper accountability in the system. It would also overcome the problems associated with remoteness and inaccessibility of many small Indigenous communities by enabling high quality education provision, while increasing accessibility to information about successful local initiatives in education.

## **Conclusion**

It is a challenge to our education system to break free of the legacy of colonial education, enabling us to compete and thrive in the global market, and to secure the future of all of us, but most especially those Indigenous children who right here and right now have no 'good life' to look forward to.

Significantly, it is a change process which allows us to develop a mature education system which recognises the knowledge held by Indigenous people as important human knowledge.

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**Marcia Langton** is Foundation Professor of Australian Indigenous Studies at The University of Melbourne. She has worked as an anthropologist in Indigenous affairs with land councils, governments, commissions, and universities. She was previously Professor and Director of the Centre for Indigenous Natural and Cultural Resource Management at Charles Darwin University. She has published widely in books, academic journals and the media.



**Zane Ma Rhea** is a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Monash University. Her research interests include Indigenous education and traditional and Indigenous wisdom and knowledge in a globalised world.