The most important reform

Position Paper

An agenda for complementing 'learning demand' side reforms effected by the Cape York Welfare Reforms with 'teaching supply' side reforms, through the establishment of a specialist K–7 remote schools provider under the aegis of a statutory board led by Noel Pearson which has legislative delegation within the Queensland public schools system to provide education where parent communities support alternative provisioning

Noel Pearson
Bernardine Denigan
Jan Götesson

June 2009

"We are determined to ensure that our younger generations achieve their full potential, talent and creativity and have the confidence and capacity for hard work so that they can orbit between two worlds and enjoy the best of both"

Cape York Indigenous Education Vision

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to acknowledge the elders, families and children of the Coen community who pioneered the *Computer Culture* and *Every Child Is Special* projects with Cape York Partnerships, which enabled us to hammer out the reform thinking set out in this position paper. In particular we wish to acknowledge the leadership of Ann Creek who put education at the front of the Coen community's priorities. We hope that the dreams of the late elders, particularly Sunlight Bassani and Margaret Sellars, for a better future for their grandchildren and great grandchildren, will be realised when we get *The most important reform* in place.

We also wish to acknowledge the contributions of the many staff and volunteers at Cape York Partnerships, from our corporate and philanthropic partners and from the Australian and Queensland governments.

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Some typygraphcial errors in the first printrun of this paper have been corrected for this reprint.

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About this paper

The plans proposed in this position paper are the culmination of nearly ten years of Cape York Partnerships' work on Indigenous education in Cape York Peninsula. During this period the authors have been involved in the full range of policy discourse around the Indigenous education under-achievement crisis, the decline of Indigenous cultural transmission, and the social, economic and cultural context of these problems. The authors have led and overseen Cape York Partnerships' development of innovative education programs and social programs.

The central recommendation – that effective instruction by teachers of their students be established as the central organising principle of education reform – is evidence-based. In particular we have been inspired by the achievements of Kevin Wheldall in Australia and Siegfried Engelmann in the United States. This paper recommends that explicit instruction methods be used to remove the achievement gap in remote Indigenous education. The evidentiary foundations of explicit instruction in primary school are well established.

There is also evidence that educational racial gaps can be closed: we have been inspired by the "No Excuses" school movement in the United States as documented by Abigail and Stephan Thernstrom in their landmark book, *No Excuses: Closing the racial gap in learning*.[1] Similarly, Helen Hughes has been an Australian voice against attributing Aboriginal students' under-achievement to Aboriginal people themselves.

There is little scientific literature to guide educators in relation to the relationship between Indigenous cultural imperatives and mainstream education imperatives. But cultural issues are crucial, and developing successful approaches to them will have a great bearing on how well core instruction succeeds. Cultural issues left unresolved and unclear, will undermine the objective of closing the educational achievement gap.

There are therefore policy views behind the plans proposed in this position paper. They represent the convictions of Noel Pearson and other leaders in Cape York Peninsula. Where intellectual analyses and policy choices are contested then policy decisions have to be made. The decisions underpinning the plan proposed in this paper are made by Noel Pearson as a leader from Cape York Peninsula, who has gained much experience of what the issues are and what works and what doesn't, and is well versed in the literature and policy debates around education reform. The plan and the policies underpinning it represent a vision held by Noel Pearson and other like-minded reform leaders for the children of Cape York Peninsula: that they can achieve the capabilities "to orbit between two worlds and enjoy the best of both".

[1] Abigail Thernstrom and Stephan Thernstrom, *No Excuses: Closing the gap in Learning*, Simon and Shuster, New York 2003.

Executive summary

This paper firstly analyses the problems of primary education in Cape York Peninsula. Secondly, it presents the results of Cape York Partnerships' education reform trials and CYP's development of education reform concepts. Finally, this report presents a plan for a new model of provisioning of early childhood and primary school education in Cape York Peninsula.

The chronic educational under achievement in Cape York

Indigenous students in Cape York Peninsula are performing well below the levels of both their Queensland and Australian peers on measures of reading, writing and numeracy. Most students cannot make the transition to high-expectation secondary education.

The failure of primary education in Cape York is not primarily caused by social class, culture or disadvantage. Remote schools are often failing schools per se, which have no prospect of closing the gap.

Indigenous parent communities must have the ability to stop failing school provision to their children

Attempts to reform education in Cape York Peninsula have amounted to repetitions of "Groundhog Day": a cycle of public revelation and consternation about failure followed by a new policy framework and a new commitment. It is not credible that this process will transform Cape York education. There are no signs that education in Cape York is in a phase of incremental change that will ultimately lead to significantly improved outcomes.

Cape York parent communities must be provided with the right to call in an alternative provider of early childhood and primary school education where current provisioning is failing.

Key reform concepts

The principles underpinning the reform suggested in this position paper build on the experiences of schools in Australia and the United States that have been successful in their efforts to close the educational achievement gap of disadvantaged students. These principles include:

- *"No Excuses"*: School leaders, teachers, parents and students reject any explanations or excuses for persistent low achievement that are based on students' cultural, social or racial background, or any disadvantage they have experienced.
- *Effective instruction as the starting place and the central organising principle*: Effective instruction has the single most profound effect on a student's learning in

the classroom. It is critical that students are taught with a methodology that is scientifically proven to achieve learning for all students regardless of the demographic group they represent, or the nature of their learning difficulties.

Cape York education reform needs to have a wider scope than instruction reform and school culture reform

It is no certainty that reform of instruction and reform of school culture are sufficient to completely close the achievement gap for a severely disadvantaged group. A reform agenda for Cape York needs to widen the definition of schooling to include out-of-school hours that students currently spend in the family and community domains. The reform agenda must also aim to reform living conditions of families to enable children to turn up to school ready to learn. Reform principles aiming to achieve these goals include:

- Early childhood academic program
- Creating a domain for enriching extra-curricular activities
- Creating a domain for cultural transmission separate from the primary instruction domain
- Providing for special needs

Early childhood academic program: An early childhood program should be delivered as a part of the school, not by a separate institution. An early start with an academic program is particularly important for Indigenous children because they can be expected to be behind in their English language development.

Creating a domain for cultural transmission separate from the primary instruction domain: Indigenous cultural transmission should not compete with Western education for classroom time. Organised cultural transmission activities need to take place in a separate, government-supported cultural domain.

Creating a domain for enriching extra-curricular activities: Classroom Instruction and extra-curricular activities interact to accelerate children's development and learning. Cape York children lack the opportunities of mainstream children for enriching activities. Since Cape York communities lack a strong voluntary and professional sector that can satisfy children's needs for organised activities, the public education provider must organise a domain for "concerted cultivation".

Providing for special needs: Students should have access to regular health checks that determine what health issues they have and ensure they are receiving appropriate treatment. Health clinics should collaborate with the schools to establish a plan to follow up all child illnesses related to absences.

Partnerships in the supply of education are not workable

Cape York Partnerships has many years of experience seeking, negotiating, securing and managing a partnership between CYP through its *Every Child Is Special* program and Education Queensland. This experience has shown that partnerships in the supply of Indigenous education are not workable. The party responsible for the supply of education needs to implement its preferred philosophies and approaches, provided that proper mechanisms of accountability are in place.

Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy

This paper proposes that a new primary education provider, The Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy, is created within the Queensland public schools system. An independent statutory body, the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy Board would be appointed and given authority by the *Education (General Provisions) Act (Qld)* to govern the new provider.

The Academy would consist of a Central Academy, equivalent to a State College, and Local Academy Campuses that would be located in communities where the parent community has called in an alternative provider. The schools would remain part of the Queensland public schools system: The facilities will continue to be owned by the Government and staff will be Education Queensland employees.

The Academy Board would be composed of Indigenous community representatives, independent educational and business representatives, and a representative of Cape York Partnerships. It would be chaired by an Indigenous representative. The Chair and Queensland Minister of Education would jointly appoint the Board members.

The Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy would start running two Local Campuses in 2010 and then expand by two campuses every two years once the model's effectiveness is proven.

Three domains: Class, Culture, Club

The Local Academy Campuses of the Cape York Academy will administer three teaching domains: Class, a domain for mainstream primary instruction in the mornings and early afternoons, and Culture and Club for cultural transmission and extra-curricular activities in the afternoons. The missions of the three domains are:

> **Class** – to close the gap in literacy and numeracy without delay.
>
> **Culture** – to enable Cape York children to become knowledgeable of and literate in their cultures and in Indigenous Australian languages.
>
> **Club** – to give Cape York children access to enriching activities of the same quality as children of urban families.

The activities of the Club domains will be extra-curricular activities such as music and sport. The Culture domain will teach culture and Indigenous languages with the same academic rigour as the mainstream subjects of the Class domain. The involvement of the communities in the Culture domain is expected to secure family and community support vital to the success of a "No Excuses" school.

Connection between the proposed reform and Cape York Welfare Reform

The proposed reform is closely connected to, and a complement to the current government-sponsored Welfare Reform trial in Cape York Peninsula. Welfare Reforms addressing education demand side issues such as school attendance and parental responsibilities are under way in Aurukun, Coen, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge. This position paper proposes that these reforms are matched with supply side reform in early childhood and primary education.

The proposed plan for Indigenous education reform is premised on the institution of certain minimum welfare reforms. In the four Cape York Welfare Reform communities, the focal point of welfare reform is the Family Responsibilities Commission, which intervenes when children do not attend school or are neglected and not school ready.

The alternative school provider however is intended to be offered to all Cape York communities. In communities that are not within the jurisdiction of the Family Responsibilities Commission but wish to participate in the proposed reform, minimum policies for school attendance, school readiness and child protection will need to be put in place.

Alignment with government policy

The proposed reforms support Queensland and Australian Government education policy goals, general as well as Indigenous-specific. The Academy's program fulfils all Queensland curriculum requirements: Key Learning Areas that are not completely covered in the Class domain are met in Culture and Club. The program also supports the Queensland Government's recently published strategy "Closing the Gap" for the future of Indigenous education.

In relation to professional development for teachers, the Cape York Academy's teacher training and coaching programs will align with the Commonwealth government policy *Australian Government Quality Teacher Program (AGQTP)*.

The focus on explicit instruction recommended in this paper is supported by the report of the Australian Government's *National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy* which found that for children to be able to link their knowledge of spoken language to their knowledge of written language, they must first master the alphabetic code and must therefore be taught explicitly, systematically, early and well.

The increase in learning time and the integration of cultural and extra-curricular activities into the school day are aligned to Education Queensland's proposed strategy "1000+ Hours of Learning", which was developed by the Far North Queensland Region of EQ. Points of accord between the Cape York Academy's program and the 1000+ Hours strategy include:

- an additional 2 hours of structured sports or cultural activities in the afternoon
- improved professional development for teachers
- promotion of Cape York as a rewarding teaching location

Irrespective of the future of the 1000+ Hours trial, the similarities between EQ's strategy and this position paper demonstrate that there is an emerging consensus on key issues among people dedicated to improving education in Cape York.

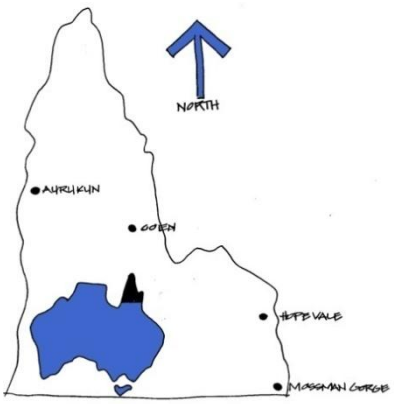
Introduction

The achievement gap in Cape York Peninsula

The facts of failure

Cape York students are performing well below their Queensland and Australian peers on measures of reading, writing and numeracy

In recent years, data have been available that make it possible to perform accurate analyses of the academic achievements of Indigenous students of Cape York Peninsula. These analyses confirm what has been obvious for many decades now: that Cape York students are performing well below the levels of both their Queensland and Australian peers on measures of reading, writing and numeracy.



Two sets of data will be presented in turn. The first set of data is the 2007 National Assessment Program (NAP) results for Indigenous Cape York schools. NAP assessments were conducted annually by States and Territories prior to 2008. The second is the data collected through the National Assessment Program: Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), which was implemented for the first time in 2008.

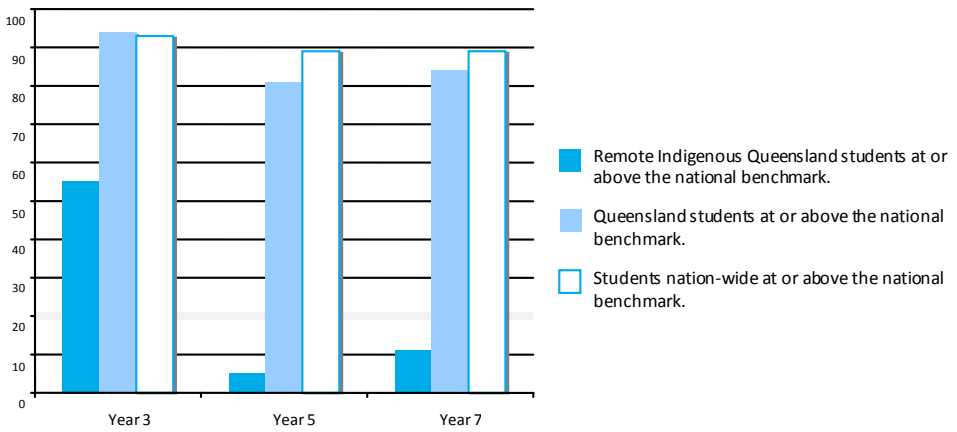
The testing programs of the states and territories came about after state education ministers agreed to set a national goal of students achieving benchmark levels of proficiency in reading, writing and numeracy for years 3, 5 and 7 that are necessary for students to progress through school.[2]

Figures 1 to 3 show the proportion of students, enrolled at Indigenous Cape York schools,[3] who achieved these benchmarks in 2007. The Cape York students performed well below the state and national average on measures of reading (Figure 1). Fifty-five per cent of Year 3 students met or exceeded the benchmark whilst the national average was 93 per cent. Only 5 per cent of Year 5 students and 11 per cent of Year 7 students achieved the national benchmark. In stark contrast, the national percentage of students achieving the reading benchmark was 89 per cent for both Year 5 and 7.

[2] Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), *National Report on Schooling in Australia (ANR)*, 2007.

[3] Cape York schools with an Indigenous population of at least 90 per cent were included. These schools are: Coen, Hopevale, Kowanyama, Lockhart, Pormpuraaw, Western Cape College – Aurukun, and Western Cape College – Mapoon.

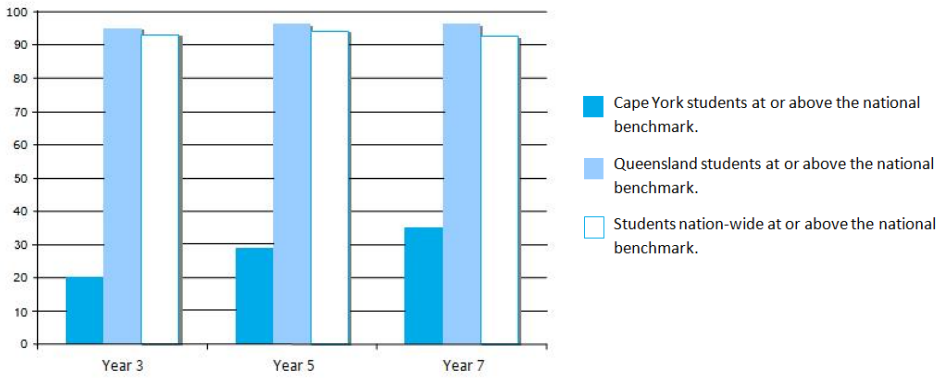
Figure 1: Proportion of students achieving reading benchmarks in 2007



the vast majority of Year 7 students in the 2007 cohort were probably unable to successfully transition to Year 8 in a high-expectation school … In several of the schools none of the Year 5 or 7 students achieved above the national benchmark

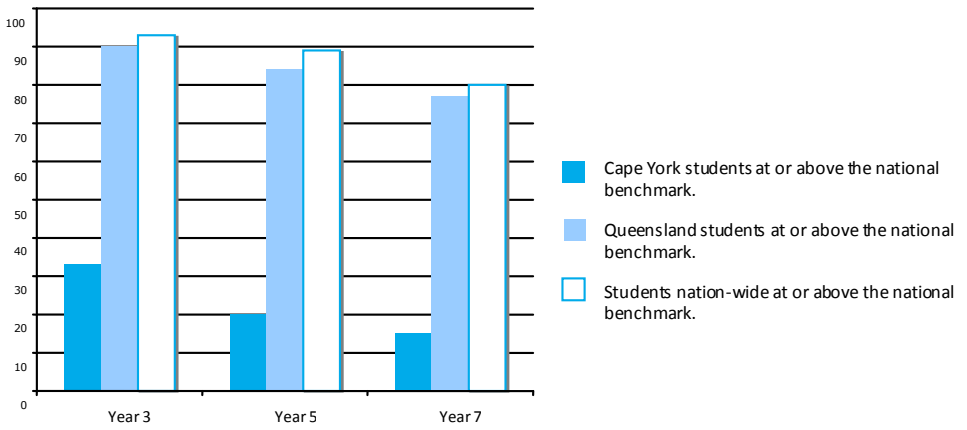
The writing results of Cape York students in Indigenous schools were equally alarming (Figure 2). In Year 3, only 20 per cent of the Cape York students met the minimum standards for writing. The results for Year 5 and Year 7 were marginally better. However, the vast majority of Year 7 students in the 2007 cohort were probably unable to successfully transition to Year 8 in a high-expectation school.

Figure2: Proportion of students achieving writing benchmarks in 2007.



In numeracy, the percentage of Queensland students achieving the benchmarks was five times higher than the percentage of Cape York students achieving the benchmarks (Figure 3). Across Year 3, 5 and 7 an average of 18 per cent of Cape York students achieved above the benchmark in comparison to the 87 per cent of students nationally who met the benchmark. In several of the schools none of the Year 5 or 7 students achieved above the national benchmark.

Figure 3: Proportion of students achieving numeracy benchmarks in 2007.



remote Indigenous students are further behind in grammar and punctuation than in other basic skills

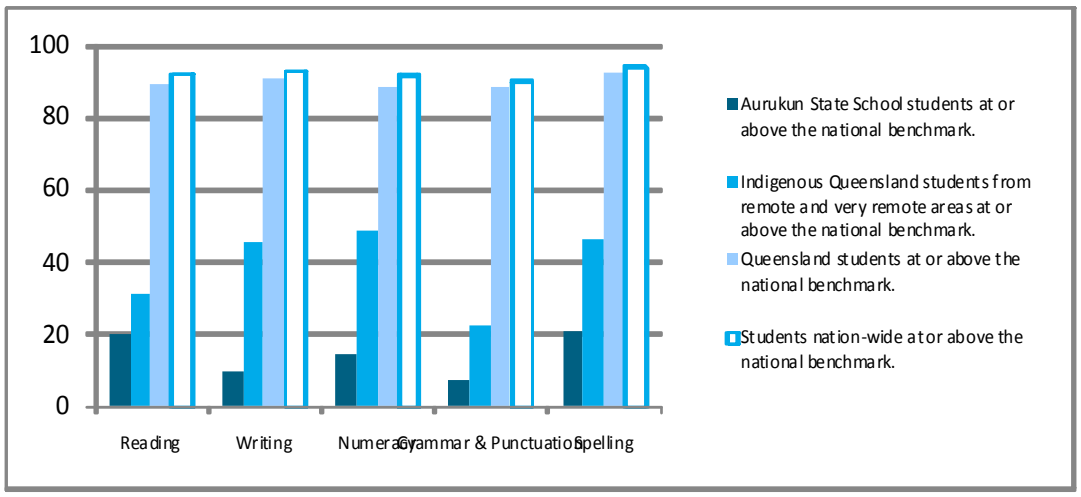
In 2008, Australian schools switched from state-wide assessments to the nation-wide NAPLAN assessments. The student populations presented in Figure 4 are not exactly the same as those in the 2007 state-based tests presented above. The remote Indigenous cohort in Figure 4 includes students from all very remote and remote Indigenous communities in Queensland. Cape York students however constitute a very large proportion of this population.

The NAPLAN results confirm large discrepancies between the results of Queensland Indigenous students from remote locales and those of their Queensland and national peers. An average of 31 per cent of Year 3, 5 and 7 Indigenous students from Queensland met or exceeded the reading minimum standard; the national average was 92 per cent. Non-Indigenous students in Queensland outperformed their Indigenous peers with an average of 89 per cent of students in grades 3, 5 and 7 achieving or exceeding the national minimum standard. The 2008 writing results showed a similar pattern of lower outcomes for these Indigenous students with an average of only 45 per cent of students across Year 3, 5 and 7 at or above the national minimum standard.

Only 49 per cent of Year 3, 5 and 7 Queensland Indigenous students from very remote areas performed at or above the numeracy minimum standard in comparison to the national and Queensland averages of 92 per cent and 89 per cent respectively.

In addition to testing of reading, writing and numeracy, NAPLAN introduced testing of spelling and grammar/punctuation. Results for spelling are approximately the same as the result for writing, but the tests revealed that remote Indigenous students are further behind in grammar and punctuation than in other basic skills: 23 per cent achieved the benchmark compared to the national average of 90 percent.

Figure 4: 2008 NAPLAN results for remote and very remote Indigenous Queensland students compared to Queensland and national results.



The most alarming NAPLAN results from Cape York were the results of Aurukun students (Figure 4). In all areas excepts reading, the proportion of students at or above national benchmarks in Aurukun was less than half of the average in remote Indigenous Queensland schools.

Failing schools cause the gap between Year 7 in remote schools and mainstream high schools

the achievement gap is attributable to governments' failure to implement equitable school policies in remote Indigenous communities

The learning outcomes of students in Cape York schools and other remote and very remote parts of Queensland, are well below par and demand immediate attention. This urgency is underscored by the indications that the gap in key learning areas is largest in Year 7 which renders impossible a transition to high-expectation secondary schools for most students. Between the Year 3 and Year 7 cohorts of 2007, there was a difference of 44 per cent (from 55 per cent to 11 per cent) in the percentage of Cape York students achieving the benchmark in reading. Nationally there was a difference of only 4 per cent on reading measures indicating that the gap is widening for Cape York students at a significantly faster rate.

A recent paper[4] by Helen Hughes and Mark Hughes sets out a similar account of failure in the Northern Territory. In their view failing schools, not ethnicity, causes the achievement gap. According to this view, the achievement gap is attributable to governments' failure to implement equitable school policies in remote Indigenous communities.

Hughes and Hughes arrived at this conclusion by comparing the educational results of Indigenous populations in areas such as the Australian Capital Territory with remote peoples. There are most likely problems specific to remote communities and external to government education policy that affect children's learning. Nonetheless, the thesis of Hughes and Hughes – that the educational gap is mainly caused by non-performing schools – should be taken as the starting point for reform policy.

[4] Helen Hughes and Mark Hughes, Revisiting Indigenous Education (CIS Policy Monograph 94), The Centre for Independent Studies, Sydney 2009.

this position paper addresses primary school education in Cape York Peninsula

The late Indigenous academic Maria Lane identified two diverging Indigenous populations: one welfare-embedded population which tended to remain in remote and rural areas or in outer suburbs, and one mainstream-oriented, significantly out-marrying, population which is performing well in the areas of Year 12 completions and tertiary participation.[5] Teaching the children of welfare-embedded population to mainstreams standards poses additional challenges, but it should be achievable. State schools in remote areas across Australia currently fail to do so.

This paper addresses failing primary education in Cape York

Lane's observation that Indigenous educational under-achievement is not only a question of remote versus urban is consistent with the perspective of Steve Dinham from the Australian Council for Education Research that disadvantaged education has two manifestations; disadvantaged schools per se and pockets of disadvantaged students within otherwise mainstream schools.[6]

No doubt Dinham is correct about the second manifestation of educational disadvantage. The problem of disadvantaged students within mainstream schools might certainly be relevant for Cape York students attending schools outside Cape York. Some of the programs described in this paper, for example Student Education Trusts, are aimed at supporting Cape York students' secondary education as well as their primary schooling. Within the Cape York reform agenda there are specific programs for secondary and tertiary students, for example the Higher Expectations programs which were developed by the Cape York Institute.

However this position paper addresses primary school education in Cape York Peninsula. Because we are dealing with discrete remote communities with failing primary schools this paper does not deal with the problems of Indigenous students within otherwise functional schools.

A Groundhog Day of failed reform

There is a predictable cycle of public revelation and consternation about failure

The Indigenous education achievement gap is a history of failure that has defied reform attempts for three decades now. There is a predictable cycle of public revelation and consternation about failure followed by a new policy review, a new policy framework and a new commitment. This Groundhog Day seems to occur every three to five years.

The Indigenous educator, Dr Chris Sarra of the Indigenous Education Leadership Institute at the Queensland University of Technology, chaired a sub-committee of the Queensland Ministerial Advisory Council on Education Renewal (MACER) which produced a *Report on Indigenous Education*[7] in 2004. This report laid out a list of successive reform initiatives over the past twenty years (see Table 1) stating "there has been no shortage of advice to government about how to address the imbalance in outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students". The report referred to the Aboriginal Education Policy endorsed by all Australian governments in 1989, which

[5] Maria Lane, "Two Indigenous Populations? Two Diverging Paradigms?", unpublished 2007.

[6] Steve Dinham, How to get your School Moving and Improving, ACER Press, Melbourne 2008.

[7] Ministerial Advisory Committee for Education Renewal (MACER), *Report on Indigenous Education,* Queensland Government, Brisbane 2004.

"set out 21 long-term goals with the objective of achieving educational equity for Indigenous Australians by the year 2000". The report went on:

> *Other major reports and strategies on Indigenous education have reached similar conclusions about the systemic failure of education systems and the need to take urgent action to improve outcomes for Indigenous students in the interests of communities and the State. For whatever reasons, the exhortations to act and the numerous strategies and government supported programs have failed to convert the rhetoric into a reality that Indigenous communities can value.*

Table 1: Indigenous Education Reform Initiatives identified by MACER Report on Indigenous Education, Queensland Government, 2004

1985	Report of the Committee of Review of Aboriginal Employment and Training
1988	Report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Taskforce, Department of Employment, Education and Training
1989	National Aboriginal Education Policy
1990	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy
1990	Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Program
1991	Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody
1993	The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs National Review of AEP
1995	National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples
1996	National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996-2002
1996	AESIP funding following the *Indigenous Education (Supplementary Assistance) Amendment Act (Cth)*
1997	Introduction of new IESIP funding quadrennium 1997-2000. DEST publishes *What Works*
1998	Indigenous School to Work Transition
2000	National Indigenous Education Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, MCEETYA
2000	Achieving educational equality for Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, MCEETYA Taskforce on Indigenous Education
2002	*What Works:* explorations in improving outcomes for Indigenous students
2003	Second National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training
2003	Dare to Lead Coalition
Queensland	
2000	Review of Education and Employment Programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Queensland
2000	*Partners for Success:* Strategy for the Continuous Improvement of Education and Employment Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Queensland
2003	*Partners for Success School Information Kit 2003-2005* *Partners for Success Action Plan 2003-2005*

...national targets have shifted from "fix the problem in four years" to "fix half the problem in 10 years"

In their recent paper, Hughes and Hughes set out a similar catalogue of successive Indigenous education reform commitments (see Table 2). They paint the same picture as MACER's *Report on Indigenous Education*, but they also point out that since the publication of the MACER report, national targets have shifted from "fix the problem in four years" to "fix half the problem in 10 years".[8]

Table 2: Indigenous education targets 1989–2008. Based on Hughes and Hughes, Revisiting Indigenous Education.

1989	The MCEETYA Hobart Declaration on Schooling included "Agreed National Goals for Schooling": a. the skills of English literacy, including skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing b. the skills of numeracy, and other mathematical skills
1995	Following its consideration of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Taskforce's report at the December 1995 MCEETYA meeting, Council agreed ... to set as an objective that literacy and numeracy outcomes for Aboriginal People and Torres Strait Islanders will be similar to those of non-Indigenous Australians and agreed to review progress towards this objective by the year 2000
1997	MCEETYA stated: That every child commencing school from 1998 will achieve minimum acceptable literacy and numeracy standards within four years
1998	The MCEETYA discussion paper reviewing the Hobart Declaration listed "Agreed National Targets": Increase proficiency of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Standard Australian English and numeracy By the year 2002, education and training systems/providers demonstrate significant increase in the proficiency of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Standard Australian English to levels comparable to mainstream Australian children Education and training systems/providers were to demonstrate significant increases in the proficiency of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in numeracy to levels comparable to mainstream Australian children
1999	The MCEETYA Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century included as goals: Attained the skills of numeracy and English literacy; such that, every student should be numerate, able to read, write, spell and communicate at an appropriate level Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have equitable access to, and opportunities in, schooling so that their learning outcomes improve and, over time, match those of other students
2008	November – COAG meeting agreed to halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade December – The MCEETYA Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians includes: Australia has failed to improve educational outcomes for many Indigenous Australians and addressing this issue must be a key priority over the next decade

When Cape York Partnerships began in 1999 the Queensland Government released its new Indigenous education framework *Partners for Success,* based on a review

[8] Helen Hughes and Mark Hughes, op. cit.

The problem with the long succession of policy statements and documents in Indigenous education is that they never grappled with the challenge of implementation

undertaken by its education department. Broadly, this framework moved Queensland policy out of its previous mire, and, if its implementation could have matched its intentions, was promising. However Noel Pearson and Cape York Partnerships witnessed the implementation failure during the first five years of the new framework. For example, the policy proposed that school-community "partnership compacts" would be developed and executed across relevant schools. These compacts were proposed to cover a wide range of subject matter – including commitments on staffing, curriculum and parental engagement – but ten years later not one such compact had materialised. The MACER Committee's observations told the story accurately:

The latest Indigenous education policies outlined in Education Queensland's Partners for Success strategy have the potential to achieve the outcomes desired. Notwithstanding this, on the basis of historical precedent for policies in Indigenous education, the sub-committee notes that Partners for Success is at risk of becoming another sound strategy that achieves few worthwhile outcomes, unless the notion of individual and system accountability is addressed.

The problem with the long succession of policy statements and documents in Indigenous education is that they never grappled with the challenge of implementation. Even where policy documents are sound, implementation failure reduces them to yet another instalment in the Groundhog Day sequence. If an education "strategy" results in implementation failure then it could not have been a true strategy. A proper strategy is not something which has good policy content and intent – it must set out all of the requirements for successful implementation.

Perhaps in acknowledgement of the lack of traction with *Partners for Success* after its first five years, the Queensland Government then launched its second iteration in 2007, *Bound for Success.* Again, at a broad level its content is mostly unobjectionable – but it is not compelling. It doesn't convince one that it will achieve reform – and that implementation will ensue. Three years later and nothing has happened to change this assessment. It is just another chapter in the Groundhog Day of Indigenous educational reform.

Lights on hills: "No Excuses" schools

In Australia the under-achievement of disadvantaged students and disadvantaged schools has been intractable for as long as it has been considered unacceptable. It is not that the problem is unrecognised – it is. It has been subject to many improvement efforts. But educational disadvantage has been impervious to improvement. The Indigenous Australian education disaster is a subset of this wider problem of persistent failure in attempts to fix the achievement gap.

The suggestion in the MACER *Report on Indigenous Education* that educators and policy-makers have developed a sense of resignation to Indigenous failure, is not an isolated observation:

> *…as a system, Education Queensland has demonstrated a tendency to readily accept Indigenous underachievement in schools. Accordingly, it seems there is an underlying assumption that Indigenous underachievement is somehow "normal"*

or "given". Disturbingly, there has been little outrage form within the system about dramatic and continuing levels of underachievement.[9]

There is a fundamental issue here: can educational disadvantage be overcome without overcoming broader socio-economic disadvantage? In other words, will there be educational disadvantage as long as there is broader social and economic inequality? Assumptions to this effect probably underpin the resignation to the ongoing problem of under-achievement amongst disadvantaged children.

Djarragun has achieved a normalisation in terms of attendance, behaviour and expectations, which sets the scene for a closure of the educational gap

The idea that educational improvement can take place despite ongoing socio-economic disadvantage may have few supporters. Failed analyses and policies have turned an educational problem capable of solution into an idealistic dream.

The agenda laid out in this paper is one which returns to the classic ideal: that educational improvement for disadvantaged people can be achieved. We do not have to fix all the social and economic parameters to achieve educational parity. Indeed the educational parity is a condition precedent to overcoming broader social and economic disadvantage.

But where in the world is the classic ideal proven in practice?

It has ever been the case that individual students from disadvantaged backgrounds overcome social and economic disadvantage. The onus falls on those of us who believe in the classical ideal to show that educational reform can produce broad-based social transformation amongst disadvantaged students, and not just a transformation for a few individuals.

There are lights on hills which confirm that schools operating under proper reform parameters can indeed produce broad-based uplift of disadvantaged students. Models for optimism come from some Australian schools with Indigenous students such as Djarragun College, and from the best of the American charter school movement as well as some stand out public schools in the United States.

Djarragun College

Djarragun College near Cairns is a P–12 independent college connected with the Anglican Schools system, which offers day and boarding schooling to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders from the Cairns region and remote communities in Cape York Peninsula and the Torres Straits. Under the leadership of Principal Jean Illingworth Djarragun has become, within the seven years of its existence, an effective educational institution.

Djarragun has achieved a normalisation in terms of attendance, behaviour and expectations, which sets the scene for a closure of the educational gap. Djarragun has not yet closed the gap between the academic achievements of its students and the national average, but has made significant progress.

The circumstances of Djarragun's origins are peculiar: it arose out of the ashes of a previous religious college servicing mostly Indigenous students which had collapsed, and the Anglican schools system had reluctantly decided to invest in the construction of a new school entirely. Their choice of principal was their most fortuitous decision,

[9] Ministerial Advisory Committee for Education Renewal (MACER), op. cit.

and Jean Illingworth has now developed with her leadership team, a "No Excuses" school characterised by the following features:

- None of the parents of the children attending the school could afford high fees, and the great majority of students come from disadvantaged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds
- Djarragun therefore charges significantly lower student fees than comparable schools, even though it is a private college
- The school primarily operates on public funding. It also seeks funds from philanthropic and corporate contributors
- The principal is only answerable to a board which comprises a mix of community, business and educational representatives. There is no massive educational bureaucracy sitting on top of the school
- The principal has complete powers to hire and fire staff and to determine all aspects of the school's curriculum and pedagogy

Though it is publicly funded, Djarragun is autonomous from the public schooling system and has a rare autonomy within the Anglican schooling system. This has enabled its extraordinary leader – the very embodiment of an educational social entrepreneur – to find and determine (and test) solutions to the challenges that have faced her school.

It is worth setting out here the three success factors underpinning Djarragun's progress as identified by Jean Illingworth in her 2008 valedictory address:

> *First, we believe in discipline. We have strict codes of behaviour – not just for students but for staff as well. Our policy of tough love actually does work Students feel safe in an environment where they know exactly what the boundaries are and how far they can push those boundaries. A disciplined environment makes it possible to actually get on with teaching instead of spending an inordinate amount of time on trying to discipline an unruly class.*
>
> *Second, we insist that everyone at Djarragun treats everyone else with respect and love. Again, trite words but loaded with meaning for students and staff alike. If you show respect to all and treat everyone with love, no energy will be wasted on negative pursuits that detract from achieving real goals.*
>
> *Third, we believe in speaking the truth. We tell the story as it is. Failure is not something to be worried about or something to hide but something that happens to everyone at some stage of life and from which we learn. Students who fail a course, who fail to comply with set down rules or who fail to attend school regularly know exactly where they have failed. They also know they are not condemned. Djarragun is the school of twenty chances and if you use up your twenty chances we will no doubt give you twenty more. Too often in Australia today Indigenous people continue to be treated with a degree of paternalism that is a subtle but sure way to disempower and keep subservient. Mediocre work is praised to the heavens, poor behaviour is excused as a cultural thing and slack attitudes are explained away with some other euphemisms. We don't do this at Djarragun. Students know where they stand and parents know exactly what their children are doing and how they are travelling. We do not use clichés and mumbo jumbo to disguise poor work or bad attitudes; we do not excuse slack attitudes*

and disrespectful behaviours. Students are encouraged to reach higher and further and to keep extending themselves to go beyond what they thought they were capable of.

The American charter school experience

a significant minority of these charter schools have succeeded in closing the achievement gap for racially and socially disadvantaged students

Charter schools are publicly funded schools that are provided independence from the constraints of the public school system of the state in which they operate, whilst being held accountable for achieving results, which are set out in the school's charter. Starting in Minnesota in 1991, 40 states in the United States now have legislation governing the establishment, funding and accountability of charter schools. Whilst there are today over 4000 charter schools in America, they represent a small percentage of the total number of publicly funded schools in that country.

Two broad conclusions can however be asserted in relation to charter schools. Firstly, there have been failures as well as successes. One estimate is that of the 4000 schools that were spawned, only 25 per cent of them are any good.[10] Clearly there are lessons to be learned from the experience of opening up public school provision to applications at large. The risk of "Boys and Girls Own Adventures in Schooling" ending in tears is real.

But the second conclusion is that a significant minority of these charter schools have succeeded in closing the achievement gap for racially and socially disadvantaged students. The most successful of these schools are now scaled up to franchises, spread out across the country.

Some of these standout franchises were investigated for the purpose of this report (see Appendix 1). They are:

- The Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) franchise which operates 66 schools in 19 states[11]
- The Aspire Public Schools franchise which operates 21 schools in California[12]
- The Ascend Learning franchise which operates 2 schools in New York[13]
- The Green Dot Public Schools franchise which operates 18 schools in California[14]

These franchises are distinct and they adopt different educational philosophies and practices, as well as having different aspirations for wider educational reform. For example, KIPP Charter Schools operate with additional funding from philanthropic and corporate sponsors, whilst Aspire has the explicit aim of demonstrating that educational reform can be achieved at equivalent state school funding levels. Many charter schools are new start-ups, whilst others such as Locke High School in Los Angeles operated by Green Dot, are former state schools; the Green Dot network aims to show that failing public schools can be turned into successful schools.

[10] Steven Wilson, "Success at Scale in Charter Schooling", American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, <www.aei.org/publication/publD.29571/pub_detail.asp> 2008.

[11] Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP), <http://www.kipp.org/>.

[12] Aspire Public Schools, <http://www.aspirepublicschools.org/>.

[13] Ascend Learning, < http://www.ascendlearning.org/>.

[14] Green Dot Public Schools, < http://www.greendot.org/>.

Public schools can close the gap

There are also examples of public schools in the United States that have solved seemingly intractable problems of under-achievement while remaining within the public school system. The Gering Public Schools district in Nebraska has a large proportion of students from Hispanic backgrounds. Of 25 school districts in Nebraska, Gering had the worst literacy test scores in 2004 but had the 7th highest average in Nebraska in 2008.

We will not allow other people to use the fact that our children are Indigenous as an excuse for educational failure

Of particular interest in the Gering Public Schools district is North Field Elementary school with a proportion of Hispanic students of 60 percent and 43 per cent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch – a commonly used indicator of disadvantage. In 2004 the school was failing in literacy with only 36 per cent of Year 3 students meeting the benchmark.

The main driver of Gering Public Schools' progress in literacy has been the efforts of an educator galvanising reform from the middle. Andrea Boden, Director of Assessment in the Gering district, convinced the district superintendent and the district board that explicit literacy instruction was needed to turn the situation around. She has also given principals, teachers and parents of the district a sense of ownership of the reforms, a feat reminiscent of Jean Illingworth's achievements with Djarragun.

Schools which close the achievement gap are "No Excuses" schools

There is a common feature of this group of successful schools that are closing the achievement gap of disadvantaged students: they are "No Excuses" schools. The socio-economic background and personal circumstances of their disadvantaged students are not excuses for under-achievement. As well as not allowing students and parents to make excuses, "No Excuses" educators do not allow themselves as education providers – their franchise, their school, their school leader and their teachers – to rely on excuses.

The term "No Excuses" originated in American education debate. Steven Wilson, author and CEO of Ascend Charter School gives the following definition of "No Excuses" schools:

> *Highly educated, driven, and generally young teachers lead their students in a rigorous academic program, tightly aligned with state standards, that aims to set every child on the path to college. The approach has been dubbed "No Excuses" schooling because founders and staff steadfastly reject explanations from any quarter for low achievement, whether district apologists' appeal to demographic destiny or a child's excuse for failing to complete an assignment.*[15]

[15] Steven Wilson, op. cit.

Cape York's explanation of "No Excuses"

In our work in Cape York Peninsula, we quickly came to understand the centrality of the "No Excuses" philosophy to overcoming educational disadvantage. Inspired by Abigail and Stephan Thernstrom's book *No Excuses: Closing the racial gap in learning*[16] the Cape York Partnerships' *Every Child Is Special* education program and Indigenous community leaders developed this explanation of "No Excuses" for Cape York:

> *Indigenous Australian culture is a culture of responsibility and reciprocity. Ours is a culture of law and learning. Ours is a culture of transmission of knowledge. Our culture is our strength.*
>
> *We will take our responsibilities to our children. We will not allow other people to use the fact that our children are Indigenous as an excuse for educational failure.*
>
> *Our children have their own culture and languages, other children have other cultures and languages. No culture or language predisposes children for educational failure.*
>
> *The fact that some of our children come from disadvantaged, and even dysfunctional backgrounds, will no longer be an excuse for educational failure.*
>
> *We will understand and be sensitive to the difficulties facing our children and we are going to find every support to deal with them, but we will not allow these difficulties to be an excuse for educational failure.*
>
> *It will not be an excuse for the children.*
>
> *It will not be an excuse for the parents or community.*
>
> *It will not be an excuse for the principal and the teachers.*
>
> *It will not be an excuse for the education system and all of us who say we are committed to Indigenous education reform.*

Educators are the most important target audience for the "No Excuses" nostrum. Whilst parents and community members will rely on excuse-making, the parties who are most susceptible to making excuses based on the disadvantage and dysfunctional circumstances of lower-class students, are their principals, teachers and education department bureaucrats who make social and economic disadvantage excuses for failure.

[16] Abigail Thernstrom and Stephan Thernstrom, *No Excuses: Closing the gap in Learning*, Simon and Shuster, New York 2003.

Critique of "No Excuses"

The "No Excuses" philosophy has however been subject to critique. A thorough analysis of the claims of the "No Excuses" movement has been performed by education researcher and former education columnist of *The New York Times* Richard Rothstein in his book *Class and Schools* from 2004.[17]

Rothstein questions whether networks such as KIPP can be anything other than boutique operations

The critique of researchers such as Rothstein is not directed against "No Excuses" schools' emphasis on hard work, effective instruction, engaged and well-trained teachers or increased time for instruction and extra-curricular activities. Rothstein recognises that most of the aspirations of "No Excuses" schools must necessarily form part of any serious attempt to close the educational gap. He notes that there is no *a priori* reason why excellent schools could not offset class differences, but he argues that the claims of the "No Excuses" school movement do not stand up to scrutiny.

Does "No Excuses" have a sound evidence base?

Rothstein's first line of argument is that the decades-long emphasis on basic skills in public debate has, Rothstein contends, led schools to teach to goals that are most easy to measure, such as basic literacy and numeracy. It has been shown, Rothstein agrees, that lower-class students and students from racial minorities can make great progress in the kind of skills that are measured by standardised tests. It is however uncertain how well these gains translate into later educational success and upward social mobility. It is a common pattern according to Rothstein that "an artificial bump in early test scores" brought about by an "over-emphasis" on phonics and explicit instruction is followed by declining scores for the same students in upper-grade tests when conceptual thinking is required to pass tests.

He further argues that many of the celebrated examples of schools that "beat the demographic odds" are spurious. For example, most of the high achievement, high poverty schools identified by the conservative Heritage Foundation[18] to support the "No Excuses" thesis did not meet the criterion of being fully non-selective.

Are "No Excuses" schools scaleable?

Rothstein questions whether networks such as KIPP can be anything other than boutique operations because they are creaming the teacher pool: the approach requires the highest-achieving teachers. Even if new high achievers are recruited to teaching, the average school will never have teachers as able as the ones KIPP recruits. Rothstein's point is confirmed in a 2008 analysis by the leading charter-school advocate, Steven Wilson.[19] So the question remains: KIPP may be a proven boutique, but is it scaleable? There are now a little over eighty KIPP schools and perhaps 1000 good charter schools across the United States. But there are more than 80,000 public schools – most of them larger than the average charter school. Rothstein suspects that

17 Richard Rothstein, Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic and Educational Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap, Economic Policy Institute, Washington DC 2004.

[18] Samuel Casey Carter, *No Excuses: Lessons from 21 High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools*, Heritage Foundation, Washington DC 2000.

[19] Steven Wilson, "Success at Scale in Charter Schooling, Education Sector, AEI Future of American Education Project", <www.aei.org/publication/pubID.29571/pub_detail.asp> 2008.

the general public accepts unrealistic policy prescriptions – such as providing large numbers of students with teachers from the 90th percentile in terms of aptitude – because of the public's unfamiliarity with statistical concepts.

Rothstein's also argues that KIPP's students are not representative of student populations in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. He suggests that In effect KIPP schools are taking the cream of the ghettos. KIPP leaders resist this charge: statistics show that KIPP students are only somewhat less disadvantaged economically than students in comparable regular public schools, and that literacy levels among incoming KIPP students are close to those of regular public-school students.

Even if KIPP students are not economically better of than other children in their neighbourhoods, it might be the case that parents of KIPP students are more motivated than typical parents of disadvantaged children. It is true that parents make an active choice to enrol their children in KIPP schools. However, KIPP students are on average significantly behind their peers before they start in KIPP schools. Their results generally improve significantly only after enrolment. It appears likely that the school makes the difference, because typical parents of KIPP students are obviously not able to make any major contribution to their children's academic development, and KIPP itself does not expect this.

Offsetting social disadvantage with education policy is very hard

At a more fundamental level, the question is to what extent the education system can defy the determinative power of social class. In his provocative book *The Trouble with Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality*,[20] Walter Benn Michaels argues that policies for diversity – racial, gender, cultural or otherwise – serve to hide the fact that class differences by and large reproduce themselves through the education system.

Family wealth, according to Michaels, is overwhelmingly the main determinant of educational achievement from early childhood to university. Since the entire school system is structured to enable the rich to out-compete the poor, the proposed solutions to the exclusion of poor people (including various kinds of financial assistance) are irrelevant when students from lower social strata cannot get into the prestigious universities:

> …as long as the elite schools are themselves open to anybody who's smart enough and/or hardworking enough to get into them, we see no injustice in reaping the benefits. It's OK if schools are technologies for reproducing inequality as long as they are also technologies for justifying it. But the justification will only work if … there really are rich people and poor people at Harvard. If there really aren't; if it's your wealth (or your family's wealth) that makes it possible for you to go to the elite school in the first place, then, of course, the real source of your success is not the fact that you went to an elite school but the fact that your parents were rich enough to give you the background and preparation that got you admitted to the elite school.

[20] Walter Benn Michaels, *The Trouble with Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality*, Metropolitan books, New York 2008.

The differences between children of different social classes in size of vocabulary and other variables of language development are very large by the time children begin kindergarten or preparatory school

Assuming that it were possible to provide all disadvantaged students with high quality education from early childhood, Richard Rothstein still questions whether school reform would indeed close the larger part of the educational gap. He contends that "No Excuses" advocates – not only from the political right but also from the left-of-centre – underestimate social class as a main determinant of education outcomes: "the influence of social class is probably so powerful that schools cannot overcome it, no matter how well trained are their teachers and no matter how well designed are their instructional programs and climates."

He points to the sheer improbability that the accumulated burden of early-onset disadvantage factors – from genetic via prenatal to early childhood factors – can be compensated for during disadvantaged students' kindergarten and primary school years. There are medical developmental risk factors prevalent such as prenatal exposure to alcohol and low birth weight that disproportionally affect lower-class children. In addition there are non-medical disadvantage factors including limited exposure to spoken language. The differences between children of different social classes in size of vocabulary and other variables of language development are very large by the time children begin kindergarten or preparatory school.

Rothstein finds it highly likely that early childhood experiences of children of different social classes give rise to a gap in non-cognitive skills as well as cognitive. Unfortunately, Rothstein continues, the easily measurable objectives that are most prominent in primary education debate – literacy and numeracy – overshadow an important but more difficult debate: Is there a class-determined gap in the non-cognitive skills that are difficult to measure but probably more important determinants of social and economic uplift – resilience, perseverance, self-confidence, ability to cooperate – and if so, what policies are needed to reduce this gap?

A reform program beyond "No Excuses"

Rothstein proposes that two broad reform agendas be added to improved instruction. First, social and economic policies must enable children to turn up to school ready to learn. Second, the definition of schooling needs to be widened to include out-of-school hours that students currently spend in the family and community domains.

Such policies would include:

- Reduce income inequality and achieve low unemployment
- Achieve stable and adequate housing provisioning
- School-community clinics which can prevent the health problem that impede disadvantaged students' learning
- Early childhood education
- After-school programs
- Summer programs

Some of Rothstein's policy goals amount to a heroic economic and social transformation of the national economy and the social redistribution system which for political reasons cannot meaningfully be discussed as part of school. Many of Rothstein's suggestions however appear to be co-requisites for successful education reform in Cape York communities, since disadvantage is so entrenched in many families.

Our reform work in Cape York Peninsula 1999–2009

The time is however now right to move to more substantive and comprehensive education reform, which builds on and includes Welfare Reform, but also aims to reform the supply of education

The agenda set out in this report is the culmination of developmental work undertaken within Cape York Partnerships, a Cairns-based organisation led by Noel Pearson and founded in the wake of the publication of his monograph *Our Right to Take Responsibility*.[21] The Queensland Government, led by then Premier Peter Beattie, committed to support partnerships with Indigenous leaders and regional organisations in Cape York Peninsula, in response to Noel Pearson's critique of passive welfare policies and his call-to-arms about the failures of traditional government service delivery including education. Cape York Partnerships was formed to put a stop to the Groundhog Day of policy renewal followed by stasis.

During the last nine years Cape York Partnerships, in partnership with other regional organisations, governments and private and philanthropic organisations initiated innovative programs around a number of key areas coming under the rubric of "welfare reform". These include welfare reform policies that are now legislated and are being subject to a trial in four communities in the region.

The education initiatives now forming part of Welfare Reform in Cape York Peninsula have their origins in the educational research and development work undertaken by Cape York Partnerships. The education-related programs within Welfare Reform primarily attempt to increase community demand for education and remedy failed literacy instruction delivered by existing education providers. The time is however now right to move to more substantive and comprehensive education reform, which builds on and includes Welfare Reform, but also aims to reform the supply of education.

This chapter describes the work of Cape York Partnerships and the insights that have informed the education initiatives within Welfare Reform. The following three chapters outline bodies of though that were developed during the period (in relation to supply/demand in education, accountability and the purpose of Indigenous education) but warrant separate chapters.

These four chapters form the background to the comprehensive reform proposal outlined in the latter part of this position paper.

[21] Noel Pearson, *Our right to take responsibility*, Noel Pearson and Associates, Cairns 2000.

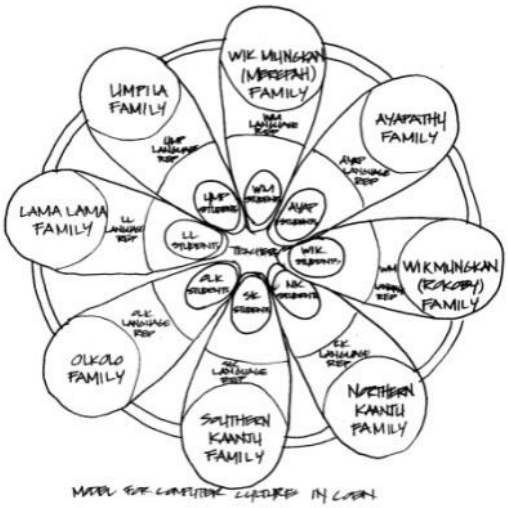
Research and development of education reform concepts

Cape York Partnerships began its education reform work with *Computer Culture* (renamed in 2006 the *Every Child Is Special* project). The trial was sponsored by the Queensland and Australian Governments. A project management office led by Bernardine Denigan was established in Cairns and a trial site was established in the community of Coen and the Coen State School, a small primary school of 50 students.

The project team included external education and business professionals. Over five years the project was championed by community leader Ann Creek and 16 local women who were employed on 18 month traineeships as tutors. These women were the primary interface between parents, students and the school staff.

2001–2003: Five essential steps

The starting point of our research and development work was to gain an understanding of the fundamental strategic challenges facing Indigenous education as seen from the point of view of a remote community. This resulted in the articulation of the following five steps which continue to underpin our thinking about education reform.

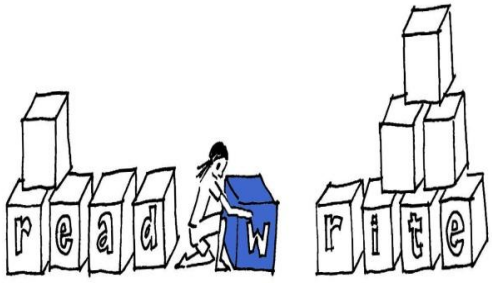


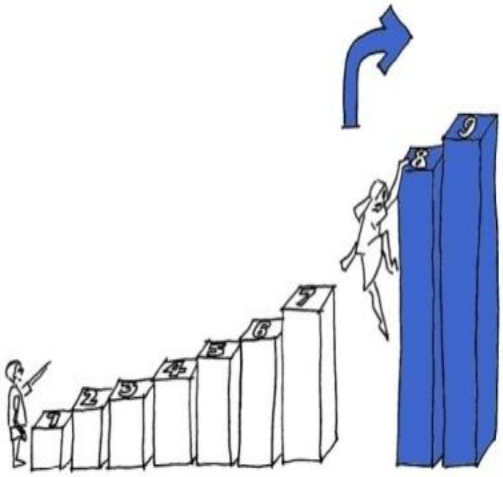
Step 1. Build demand for education through family and community engagement

Families have to understand the importance of education, have a vision for their children's future and support their children's participation in education. Strong family and community demand or education puts a focus on the Government's supply of education.

Step 2. Put the building blocks of literacy and numeracy in place by the time children start walking and talking

Literacy and numeracy starts in early childhood. Year 1 is too late. Parents should be supported to inculcate a love of books from the earliest age. Early childhood education must particularly address the language development of Indigenous children.



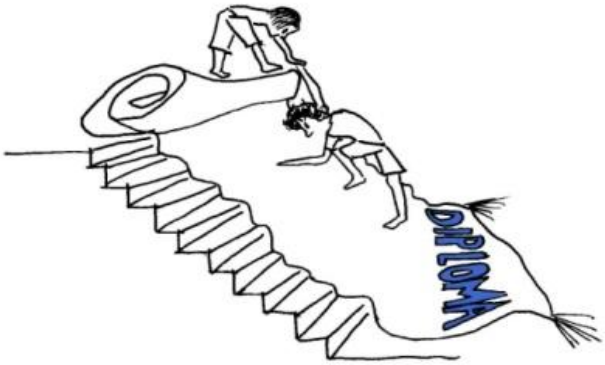


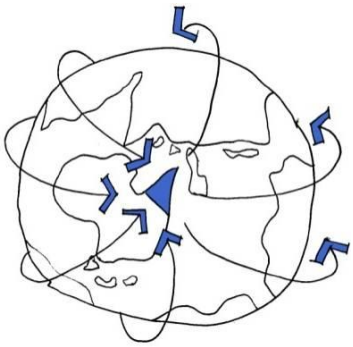
Step 3. Close the gap between Year 7 in Cape York and Year 8 down south

Cape York primary schools need to produce Year 7 graduates equal to mainstream school standards and close the current 3 or 4 years achievement gap. This requires fundamental school reform.

Step 4. Scholarships to high quality, high expectation secondary schools down south

The aim is not to attempt reform or make provision for secondary schooling in Cape York. Cape York students should attend high quality, high expectation secondary schools.





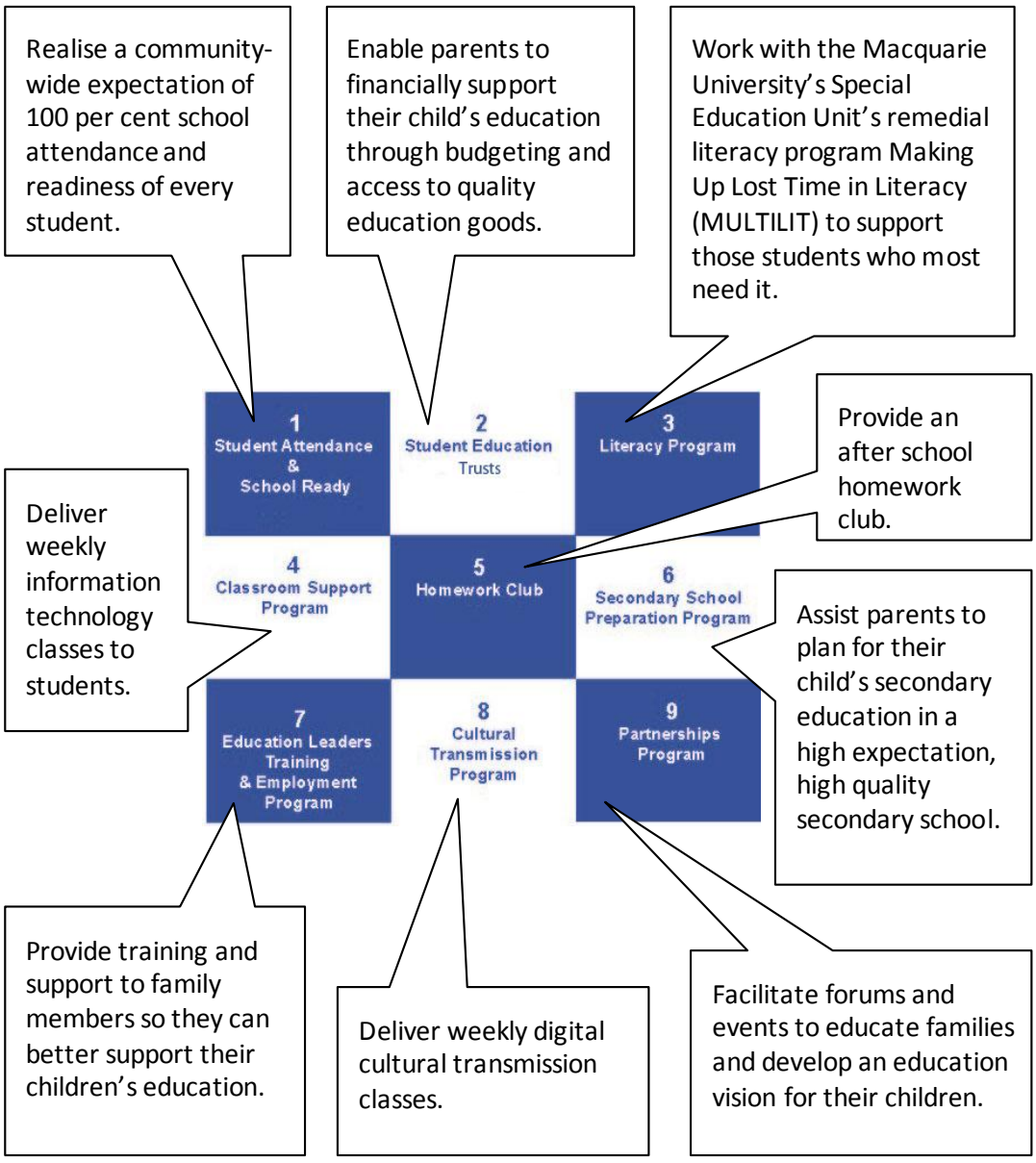
Step 5. Education, employment, sporting and artistic orbits to the wider world and back home

The ultimate objective is to enable Cape York students to achieve their full potential and have the capacity and confidence to be mobile and to orbit between two worlds whilst enjoying the best of both.

2003–2006: Nine reform programs

The next stage of Computer Culture was a set of programs to give effect to the some of the challenges being identified. The primary focus was on community demand for education. Nine programs were conceived and given a trial in the Coen school (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Cape York Partnerships programs in Coen in 2003–2006.



2006–2007: The attempt to move from programs towards school-wide reform

The legacy of Cape York Partnerships' education work in Coen is a high level of family engagement, which has resulted in:

- All students participating in remedial literacy support showing significant gains
- Improvement in every child's school attendance
- Every child having at least one parent attend parent teacher nights
- Every student wearing a school uniform
- Every child having a Student Education Trust and their parents and families saving and spending more on their child's education expenses

However, increased family engagement cannot close the gap in student learning. These achievements in the level of family engagement and responsibility are necessary but not sufficient for education success. The most significant factor is the curriculum content and instruction in the classroom. In Coen this required school-wide reform.

In 2007 Cape York Partnerships sought to consolidate its programs into a formal school-wide reform plan (Figure 6). The project worked with the school principal and the community, represented by community leader Ann Creek, on this plan.

The plan was not implemented by the school. Although the project had the correct "No Excuses" objectives, the Every Child Is Special project lacked institutional authority.

Figure 6: Proposed reform plan for Coen State School 2007–2010

Cultural transmission and education

Cape York people are ending up poor in Western education and knowledge and poor in their own culture and knowledge

When Cape York Partnerships first began thinking about education failure, it was obvious that education failure in Cape York Peninsula was entangled in cultural issues. Culture and education was the first area where Cape York Partnerships had to get the thinking straight.

Digital cultural transmission

The focus of our concerns in the beginning was the problem of inter-generational cultural decline in Indigenous communities in Cape York Peninsula. Anxiety about cultural and linguistic loss had long been evident. Various attempts at countering the decline (such as language maintenance programs) had been made over the previous decades, but no-one was doing anything that was steadying the process of loss, let alone reversing it.

Cape York Partnerships argued that new technology now provided a bridge between the ancient culture of Indigenous Australians and the modern world, which earlier forms of communication and knowledge recording and sharing did not. Digital technology now provided the means by which cultural transmission could be revitalised between generations. In his 2002 letter to then Minister for Education, Anna Bligh, Noel Pearson wrote:

> *With each generation in Cape York there is a loss in cultural knowledge and languages. The loss is very marked between each generation. All communities in the Cape are heading down the familiar road of loss: knowledge is not being transmitted between generations and what is being transmitted is increasingly thin. The social problems consuming the communities compound this process of cultural pauperisation.*
>
> *The problem that has emerged is that young Cape York people are ending up poor in Western education and knowledge and poor in their own culture and knowledge. They have not mastered their own languages and they are illiterate in English as well.*
>
> *This rate of cultural loss is massive and is mostly occurring silently. Attempts at Aboriginal language maintenance have not worked in my perception.*
>
> *There is one thing that I am convinced of: that the long-term maintenance of Aboriginal languages and culture is completely dependent upon education. Without a high level of competence in literacy, it is not going to be possible to maintain Aboriginal languages in the long term.*
>
> *There are three discontinuities in the Aboriginal cultural transmission and learning process that we have never properly confronted.*
>
> - ***The change from oral transmission to multi-media transmission***
>
> *In classical Aboriginal society cultural transmission and learning was orally based. Since colonisation much of this oral knowledge has been recorded by missionaries, colonists, government and anthropologists in the form of*

the way forward is to achieve a complete bi-cultural capacity

written documents, books, journals, photographs, film, tape recordings et cetera.

Oral transmission is no longer viable for cultural maintenance in the long term. It is not possible to teach and learn culture and languages through oral means. We have to face up to this discontinuity: our contemporary lifestyles and our immersion in a broader multicultural society with its diversions and pressures means that oral transmission is simply insufficient to maintain our distinct cultures.

We have to move decisively to the use of multi-media methods of cultural recording and transmission.

- ***The change from traditional lifestyle to our contemporary lifestyle***

Classical cultural knowledge and its transmission was very intimately related to the land. Living on country and walking over the country, experiencing the country, was essential to the process of cultural knowledge transmission. The intimate relationships with the land and environment that underpinned the traditional lifestyle are now past.

Our people's lifestyles have changed. We now live more sedentary lives in the communities, where people have jobs and kids need to attend schools et cetera. Also more of our people are mobile and spend more time in urban centres and working in other locations. The opportunities to live out on the country and to therefore transmit cultural knowledge have become increasingly limited.

Our contemporary lifestyle and living arrangements do not facilitate cultural knowledge transmission. The loss of intimacy with and experience of country is causing a loss of cultural transmission.

We have to confront the reality that our modern lifestyles work against cultural transmission in the old style. And we have to confront the reality that our people will not return to the classical traditional lifestyle.

- ***The change from our traditional knowledge and culture to the Western knowledge and culture***

Of course our Aboriginal societies are now immersed in a broader Western (and increasingly, global) culture and knowledge. Our traditional society, culture and knowledge are enclaves within a broader multicultural society – inescapably affected by this broader culture.

The external culture is of course powerful and the threat of loss of our own distinct identities and cultural diversity – is an anxiety that is foremost in Aboriginal minds. The overwhelming force of the external culture and its capacity to destroy our native cultures and identities, makes engagement in the wider culture a matter of great uncertainty and psychological trepidation.

My own view is that the way forward is to achieve a complete bi-cultural capacity. That is, for young Cape York people to be completely fluent in their

own culture and the wider culture – and to move with facility and capacity between the two worlds. Even as we start to take the real actions that will preserve and maintain our distinct cultures for the long-term (and there are no actions that are seriously doing this at the moment) we should see the external culture as our right and inheritance: it is a world heritage.

By getting our thinking (and therefore our policies) clear on a vision for a bi-cultural future, we can then embrace and engage with the wider Western knowledge and culture with greater confidence and certainty.

There has been a longstanding cultural hesitation about embracing and engaging with the wider Western and global inheritance (of knowledge) – and this hesitation has informed the quality and level of Aboriginal engagement in education in the past. This understandable cultural hesitation became an ideological resistance that has been counter-productive for our people, and this problem continued because we did not get our thinking straight and we did not confront the reality of our people now being irrevocably located within a multi-cultural world without walls.

Computer Culture

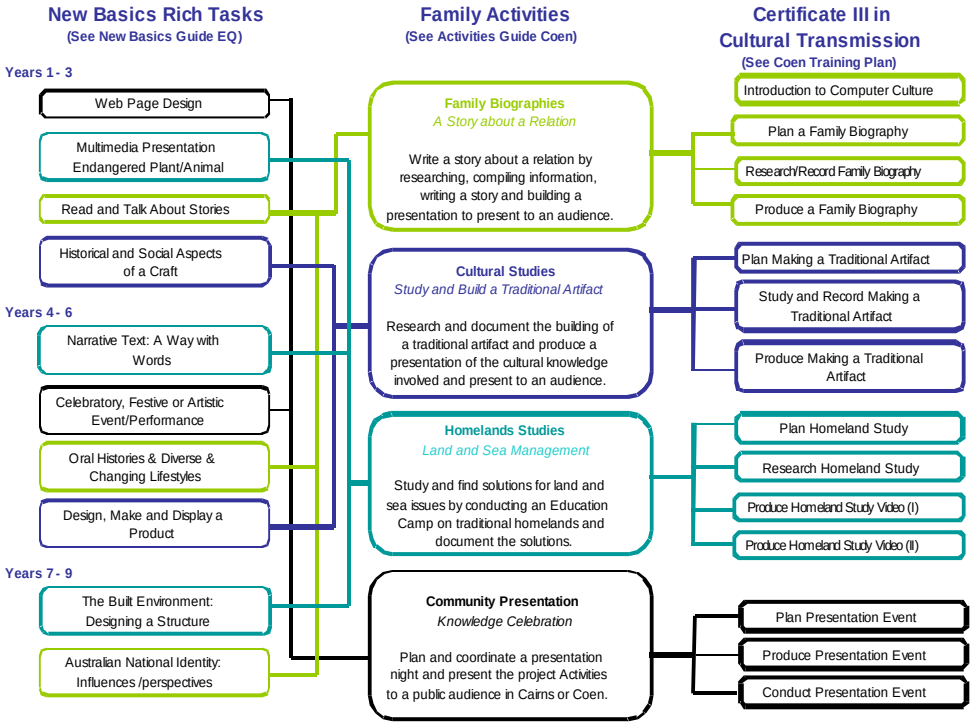
Cape York Partnerships' thinking around culture and education was integrated into the trial project *Computer Culture*. One of the objectives of Computer Culture was to subject to trial various ways in which children, young adults and families could engage in recording and presentation projects utilising culture and digital technologies. The project coincided with the Queensland Government's introduction of the New Basics[22] curriculum to a number of schools in the state, including schools in Cape York Peninsula such as Coen.

New Basics provided the organisational frame for the "digital culture" components of Computer Culture's Cultural Transmission Program. The ill-fated New Basics venture – now discontinued – is more fully discussed in the next section. However Figure 7 below gives an indication of how Computer Culture formed linkages between three components:

- The themes of the New Basics Curriculum
- The training provided to young adult tutors from the community, and
- Family activities involving digital culture

[22] Education Queensland, *New Basics Research Report,* Brisbane 2004.

Figure 7: Curriculum links to cultural transmission activities in Cape York Partnerships' Computer Culture project.



The then Indigenous principal of the Coen school, Cheryl Cannon, once described culture as "the hook" by which parents and families became actively engaged in the education of their children

This integration of cultural transmission using digital technology with the education curriculum was implemented for a limited trial period of three years but was discontinued with the demise of New Basics. Lessons have been learned in relation to the difficulties facing the integration of mainstream education objectives with cultural education objectives (lessons which inform the recommendations of this report) – important innovations and templates for the use of digital technology in cultural education were achieved through the Computer Culture experience.

The clearest insight gained from Computer Culture was the fundamental role of culture in the concerns of Indigenous families and community members. Culture was both a source of hesitation and of motivation. It underpinned hesitation when it came to families supporting and fully embracing mainstream education because of their anxiety about assimilation. But culture could be a source of motivation for families to take an active interest in the education of their children. The hypothesis that cultural transmission could be the starting point for engaging families and community members in the education of their children emerged early in the Computer Culture trial:

- Digital technology now provides part of the solution to the Aboriginal cultural transmission problem (the currently declining rate of transmission of culture and language between generations)
- Cultural transmission (and the decline that currently exists) is of primary importance and interest to Aboriginal people, especially family and community

members. Family and community members will be engaged in cultural transmission

- Cultural transmission provides a platform for education of children and youth, because it engages Aboriginal culture and knowledge at a "rich" level – computers, digital technology, literacy, numeracy, ethnography, society, history, geography, science et cetera
- The engagement of family and community members in the education aspects of cultural transmission will lift family responsibility for and interest in education and have benefits in terms of engaging families in homework and educational activities and resolving attendance, behaviour management and school readiness

This hypothesis was validated in the Computer Culture trial at Coen. Families and community leaders became engaged in their children's education through cultural transmission. It was the basis upon which trust and common endeavour was built around the education of children. The then Indigenous principal of the Coen school, Cheryl Cannon, once described culture as "the hook" by which parents and families became actively engaged in the education of their children. It was an engagement process which would underwrite family and community support for subsequent reforms introduced by Cape York Partnerships, in particular welfare reforms relating to school attendance and readiness, the setting aside of money for children's educational needs, and the introduction and trial of a literacy intervention program.

The New Basics curriculum trial

The New Basics curriculum project was developed in 1999 when Cape York Partnerships was launched. Its chief architect was Professor Alan Luke, then Dean of the education faculty at the University of Queensland, who was brought into the Queensland education department to develop the new "futures" oriented curriculum for what he dubbed "new times".

In 2000 a three-year trial of New Basics was commenced in 38 Queensland schools. Cape York Partnerships advocated for the inclusion of two Cape York schools, Aurukun and Hope Vale, in the trials. As explained in the previous section, Cape York Partnerships considered that the New Basics curriculum offered an opportunity to integrate its ideas about digital cultural transmission with the "Rich Tasks" of New Basics.

New Basics was discontinued following the trial. There were two principal problems with the New Basics curriculum trial in our experience.

The fraught relationship between Key Learning Areas and the New Basics' Rich Tasks

First there was confusion on the part of those charged with implementing New Basics – the teachers and principals – as to the relationship between the Queensland education department's Key Learning Areas (KLA) curriculum, and the New Basics Rich Tasks. The Rich Tasks were intended to be the assessable results of three years' work. The Rich tasks of New Basics organise "a futures-oriented curriculum into four categories, each of which has an explicit orientation towards researching, understanding, and coming to grips with newly emerging economic, social and cultural conditions."[23] Key Learning

[23] ibid.

Areas on the other hand are outcomes that students are expected to achieve at certain stages.

The challenge confronting teachers was hence as follows:

> *[Teachers] were finding it extremely difficult in practice to let go of the KLAs and were, therefore, working within two conceptual frameworks simultaneously. As if the original KLA framework (with its hundreds of outcomes) was not complicated enough (and they were given permission to ignore it), and as if coming to grips with a new framework (even though it had only 20 outcomes) was not hard enough, by working with both, teachers imposed a double burden on themselves.*[24]

The double burden was the result of the sheer heroic challenge posed by the New Basics idea: that a teacher would be able to juggle the requirements of higher-order thinking embedded in the New Basics Rich Tasks with the requirements of basic learning as defined in the KLAs, over a three year timeframe (the Rich Tasks were to come together for assessment in Years 3, 6 and 9).

The lesson from the New Basics experience was that critical literacy and high competence in multi-literacies can only be built on the foundations of the Old Basics

Literacy, critical literacy and multi-literacies

The second problem with the New Basics curriculum was that it failed to confront the longstanding and continuing failure of Cape York schools to succeed in teaching children basic literacy and numeracy. The aims of higher-order thinking implied by the Rich Tasks of New Basics were laudable and legitimate as for children who were literate and numerate, but unrealistic for Cape York children.

We need literacy before critical literacy. Whilst New Basics was premised upon an equivalent importance of the "old" and "new" basics, and appeared to be founded on the premise that these various literacies could be developed together, illiteracy and innumeracy of Indigenous students needed first priority.

Our argument in relation to multi-literacies is different from critical literacy. Rather than there being a staging issue with multi-literacies there is rather an issue of focus and priority. Children who are developing basic literacy and who have access to new forms of communication technology will contemporaneously develop multi-literacies. The argument is two-fold:

- Concern with multi-literacies should not obscure an absolute focus on literacy and children's acquisition of multi-literacies will not be retarded by this priority
- Children will develop multi-literacies in any event but their competencies will be determined by their literacy.

The lesson from the New Basics experience was that critical literacy and high competence in multi-literacies can only be built on the foundations of the Old Basics.

The second area where Cape York Partnerships had to contend with the foundations of Indigenous education was that of instruction. The problems with Indigenous student literacy were obvious. Nothing occurring within Cape York schools was fixing the problems. A common observation on the part of community leaders was the superior literacy of older community members educated in the church mission schools on Aboriginal Reserves compared to that of their grandchildren.

[24] ibid.

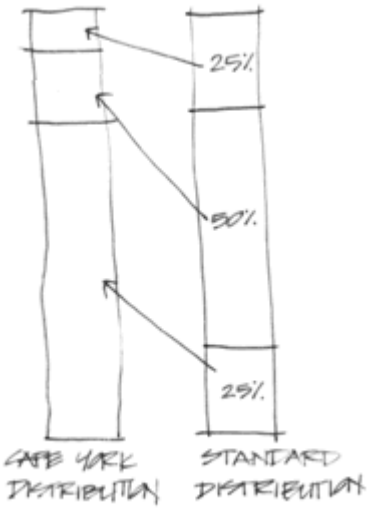
Indigenous students are over represented in the bottom 25 per cent of children who will only learn to read through a phonics-based direct instruction teaching program

Cape York Partnerships became aware of the debates on the teaching of reading in which Professor Kevin Wheldall of the Macquarie University Special Education Centre was a chief advocate for explicit instruction.[25] Cape York Partnerships was convinced of the explanation and arguments of the "phonics" camp as it resonated with the experience of reading decline within remote communities of the region.

The 25-50-25 analysis

For Cape York Partnerships, the most compelling analysis in favour of the phonics camp was what we have come to call the 25-50-25 analysis as explained by reformers such as Kevin Wheldall. In a normal cohort of students, the top 25 per cent of students can be expected to learn to read no matter how they are taught, or how competently they are taught. A middle 50 per cent will learn to read by whatever teaching method provided that they are competently taught. The bottom 25 per cent of students will not learn to read without a phonics-based approach which is competently taught. This bottom quartile will comprise children with innate or acquired learning difficulties and children from low-literacy backgrounds. Children from low socio-economic backgrounds and non-English speaking backgrounds are likely to fall within this bottom quartile.

A phonics-based approach which works for the bottom quartile will also work for the remaining 75 per cent of the students, provided that the more able students can proceed at their relevant learning levels.



Cape York Partnerships identified the class and ethnic implications of this analysis: Indigenous children are by virtue of their backgrounds over-represented in the bottom quartile. The relative distribution of Cape York children compared to mainstream cohorts is very much skewed.

Mainstream schools teach to the middle and institute remedial programs for the (relatively few) stragglers. In mainstream schools, where students are distributed according to Wheldall's 25-50-25 model this strategy produces more or less satisfactory results. The bottom 25 percent however need direct, phonics-based instruction,.

In Indigenous communities, the approach to literacy must be qualitatively different because the majority of students are in the bottom quartile on national benchmarks – it is not sufficient to modify the mainstream formula. Explicit, phonics-based reading instruction is imperative for Indigenous students, because it will provide a reading instruction solution for all students.

[25] Jane Cadzow, "War on words", *Good Weekend*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 October 2003.

Partnering with MULTILIT

Contact was made with Professor Kevin Wheldall who had developed MULTILIT. MULTILIT has consistently demonstrated its capacity to help low-progress readers make substantial gains in reading and related skills.[26] It encompasses all five facets of effective literacy instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension.

Cape York Partnerships proposed to trial MULTILIT in the Coen community as part of Computer Culture. Cape York Partnerships staff Ann Creek visited the MULTILIT Centre at School Wise in Ashfield, Sydney hosted by The Exodus Foundation. Australian Government funds were secured for a trial and with the support of the Executive Director of Schools, Don Anderson, Education Queensland endorsed its trial in the Coen State School.

This section outlines the results of the initial MULTILIT trials at Coen and its subsequent implementation as part of the Cape York Welfare Reform project.[27]

2005–2006: First MULTILIT trial

The first trial aimed to demonstrate that Indigenous students in the Coen school could make gains in reading and related skills when offered non-categorical, intensive skills-based daily instruction.

A MULTILIT tutorial centre was established and staffed by two trained instructors. All available students were assessed by research assistants using tests measuring aspects of reading and spelling. The data available for the 24 older students in Years 4, 5, 6 and 7 showed that this group, whose average age was 10 years and 10 months, were typically over three years (40 months) behind their age peers in reading accuracy and nearly four years (46 months) behind in reading comprehension.

During Terms 3 and 4 in 2005, ten Year 6 and 7 students received 16 weeks of MULTILIT instruction between initial and final assessments. Similarly, during Terms 1 and 2, 2006, eight Year 4 and 5 students received 18 weeks of MULTILIT instruction between initial and final assessments (two students having dropped out from the program in Term 1). All students were assessed prior to commencement and re-assessed after two terms. A modified version of MULTILIT, Meeting Initial Needs In Literacy (MINILIT) was offered to groups of younger students in Years 2 to 3 for one hour per day.

The ten low-progress readers comprising the first intake into the MULTILIT program were, on average, aged 11 years and 6 months and were about four years behind in both reading accuracy and comprehension at commencement. Attendance in the program averaged 75 per cent which was reflective of school overall attendance. In 16 weeks, these ten students made average gains of:

[26] Kevin Wheldall and Robyn Beaman, "An Evaluation of MULTILIT ('Making Up Lost Time in Literacy')" Macquarie University Special Education Centre (MUSEC) 2000.

[27] The presentation of MULTILIT relies on three papers prepared for the project by Kevin Wheldall and Robyn Beaman. The papers are: Liz Langstaff, "MULTILIT in Coen Phase 2 Trial 2007: A embedded approach to MULTILIT intervention", Macquarie University Special Education Centre (MUSEC), 2007; Wheldall, Kevin and Robyn Beaman, "A Year of MULTILIT in Coen, 2005–2006: A report of a pilot project to increase the literacy levels of aboriginal low-progress readers in a small remote community", Macquarie University Special Education Centre (MUSEC) 2006; and Macquarie University Special Education Centre (MUSEC), "A proposed Model for Instruction in Schools Serving Disadvantaged Populations" unpublished 2007.

- 14 months in reading accuracy
- 4 months in reading comprehension
- 12 months in single word recognition
- 24 months in phonic decoding
- 16 months in spelling
- 43 per cent more words read correctly per minute

The second intake of eight low-progress readers had an average age of 10 years 6 months and were over three years behind their grade peers in terms of reading accuracy and four years behind in reading comprehension, at program commencement. Attendance in the program for the second intake averaged 67 per cent. In 18 weeks, these eight students made average gains of:

- 15 months in reading accuracy
- 8 months in reading comprehension
- 15 months for single word recognition
- 25 months in phonic decoding
- 11 months in spelling
- 50 per cent more words read correctly per minute

Various students joined and left the school during the course of the year and all of the Year 7 students left for high school at the end of 2005. Of the original 24 primary-aged students, 15 were present for the whole year and were assessed in the middle of 2005 and re-assessed in the middle of 2006. These 15 students made average gains over the year of:

- 21 months in reading accuracy
- 11 months in reading comprehension
- 19 months for single word recognition
- 26 months in phonic decoding
- 23 months in spelling
- 75 per cent more words read correctly per minute

Whereas this group of students was typically three and a quarter years behind their average age peers in reading accuracy in mid 2005, they were only two and a half years behind by mid 2006.

The unequivocal finding was that Indigenous low-progress readers will improve their literacy skills substantially when offered effective programs of instruction such as MULTILIT. These gains were achieved in just three hours per day of MULTILIT instruction for two terms with poor attendance rates (75 per cent and 67 per cent for the two intakes).

2006–2007: Second MULTILIT trial

The first trial involved the standard MULTILIT remedial intervention. Cape York Partnerships and MULTILIT discussed the desirability of proper literacy instruction being embedded within the normal school classrooms. The rationale was that rather than continuing to provide remedial literacy intervention to children who were not

progressing appropriately, teachers should be taught to deliver effective instruction and so reduce the need for remedial intervention.

The second trial aimed to embed MULTILIT instructional methods and programs directly into classrooms. Teachers were trained by a MULTILIT consultant and supported by a MULTILIT instructor. Components were introduced sequentially across the four school terms and delivered by classroom teachers.

Despite ongoing attendance problems, the Years 4–7 cohort showed similar substantial gains to those in the previous trial. In particular there was remarkable progress on all measures of decoding and spelling.

The combined results for two groups across the school year (ten months or about 32 weeks of MULTILIT instruction) is:

- 15 months in reading accuracy
- 8 months in reading comprehension
- 20 months in single word recognition
- 22 months in spelling
- 33 months in non-word reading
- 69 per cent more words correctly per minute

Reading comprehension

Indigenous literacy under-achievement is a function of students commencing primary school significantly behind their mainstream peers. This disparity widens over the course of their schooling. The challenge of remedial intervention is not only to achieve a ratio between learning progress and duration of the intervention of 1:1 but to increase this ratio significantly above 1:1 for the students to catch up. The ratio of learning progress to duration of intervention has been better or significantly better than 1:1 in relation to all facets of literacy other than reading comprehension. This means that students have been making up lost time in literacy. However, learning progress on reading comprehension has not been as good – 5 months reading comprehension was gained by the 4-7 Year cohort in 5 months of remedial instruction and 8 months was gained in 32 weeks by the entire cohort of students. Reading comprehension has thus been identified as an issue requiring particular attention.

Embedding MULTILIT in the classrooms

The training of teachers and the embedding of the program into regular classrooms was less successful. High teacher turnover compromised implementation. The decision to discontinue the adjunct tutorial centre meant that there was no ongoing demonstration of exemplary practice to influence the classrooms. In retrospect the project partners agreed that it would have been beneficial to maintain the tutorial centre as the demonstration site.

The difficulty of implementing education reform through partnerships – where the proponents of reform do not have authority over implementation – was a significant reason why the embedding of MULTILIT in the classrooms had limited success.

School leadership support was not entirely forthcoming and was prone to arbitrary and capricious changes to the instructional program based on personal preference rather

Indigenous literacy under-achievement is a function of students commencing primary school significantly behind their mainstream peers

than proven practice (what Kurt and Siegfried Engelmann term "premature elucidation").[28] Leadership truculence also affected the attitude of the teachers. Instead of seizing the opportunity to gain skills to improve their performance and lift the poor learning outcomes of their students, too often teachers viewed the program as "interfering" with the regular school program and often only grudgingly accommodated it. Teachers were able to influence what elements they wanted to take on and what they didn't, which undermined the overall effectiveness of the trial.

2008: Cape York Welfare Reform trial

The Student Attendance and School Readiness project developed by Every Child Is Special as part of the Coen trial, provided for a case management approach targeting all students and their families. It became clear that in addition to case management and the incentives scheme administered by the program, a "bottom line" would be needed for the hardest cases (those parents who refused to fulfil their responsibilities to support and ensure their children's attendance at school). Cape York Partnerships adopted the view that welfare reforms were needed to mandate basic parental responsibilities, particularly concerning school attendance. Advocacy for this particular reform commenced with the Coen trial.

Cape York Partnerships worked with the Cape York Institute on the design of welfare reform proposals and conducted the community engagement. The following education projects were proposed:

- **MULTILIT in Cape York Schools** aims to embed sustainable high quality literacy instruction across a school and improve student literacy outcomes. It establishes a MULTILIT tutorial centre in each school to develop sustainable quality literacy teaching. Activity involves training quality MULTILIT teachers, providing direct support to low progress readers, embedding the MULTILIT methodology in regular classrooms, and operating a reading club for parents to read with their child and engage in their learning.
- **Attendance Case Management Framework** aims to establish a community wide expectation of 100 per cent school attendance. Attendance Case Managers work with students, parents, schools and the broader community to set and meet the expectation of 100 per cent attendance. Attendance Case Managers are based in schools in each Welfare Reform trial community and visit parents if a student is late or absent from school, make referrals to services, support parents in meeting their obligations and engage with all community partners and service providers.
- **Student Education Trusts** (SETs) enables parents to support their child's education and development financially from "birth to graduation". The SETs program works with parents and families to manage funds to meet their child's education needs.

These three projects were endorsed by the Australian Government as core components of the Cape York Welfare Reform trial with the enactment of the *Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment (Cape York Measures) Act 2007 (Cth)*. The Queensland Government then legislated the establishment of the

[28] Siegfried E. Engelmann and Kurt E. Engelmann, "Impediments to Scaling Up Effective Comprehensive School Reform Models", Chapter 4 in *Expanding the Reach of Education Reforms: Perspectives from Leaders in the Scale-Up of Educational Interventions*, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica 2004.

Family Responsibilities Commission in 2008. There was now a clear "bottom line" mandating certain basic parental responsibilities including school attendance in the communities of Aurukun, Coen, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge.

Early signs of progress

Implementation of the education stream of Welfare Reform commenced in January 2008.[29] Although implementation is at an early stage, there are early signs of progress and families and community members understand and actively support the reforms.

Parental responsibility norms concerning school attendance are changing

Student Education Trusts

The setting aside of money in Student Education Trusts is extremely encouraging, and given that it is voluntary and families make these contributions with a conscious view of their children's educational needs, indicates the importance families place on their children's education. When Indigenous parents are provided with the opportunity to support their children they readily do so.

Coen had Student Education Trusts for some years and therefore now has 100 per cent participation. The other sites are on track for comprehensive take up (Table 3). Particularly encouraging are the figures for Aurukun, where implementation commenced later (August 2008) than in the other sites. Aurukun parents and family members commit to budgeting funds towards their children's education needs and participate enthusiastically in book and educational fairs. If there is anything that contradicts the pervasive cynicism about remote communities, it is the response of parents in Aurukun to making financial commitments to their children.

Table 3: Participation rate and amounts saved in Student Education Trusts as at end of June 2009.[30]

	Number of children signed up	Percentage of students signed up	Total balances ($)	Average balance for each child ($)	Projected annual average savings for fully funded SETs ($)
Coen	115	100	187,652	1,632	1,044
Hope Vale	85	31	40,406	475	1,356
Mossman	74	24	70,152	948	1,608
Aurukun	84	23	63,875	760	1,502
All four Welfare Reform communities	358	34	362,085	922	1336

[29] Implementation of two education programs, Attendance Case Management Framework and MULTILIT in Cape York Schools, was a year behind schedule in Aurukun. Their implementation commenced in March 2009 while Student Education Trusts started in August 2008.

[30] The Projected annual average savings for Student Education Trusts is based upon the average monthly savings of SETs that are paid in full or sponsors meet their agreed contributions for the first quarter of 2009. The average savings in Coen are smaller because most of the children are signed up on the original, lower contribution scheme.

When Aurukun, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge later joined the scheme, the original level of contributions to SETs had been superseded by the higher Silver and Gold level (the Gold level being common in Mossman Gorge). In Aurukun the average age of children with SETs is a bit higher, which increases the level of payments.

School attendance

Two sets of data are available for school attendance in Queensland Indigenous communities. These data sets are difficult to compare because they employ different interpretations of polices for recording attendance.

First, Cape York Partnerships data,[31] available for Hopevale, Mossman Gorge and Coen from July 2008 and for Aurukun from April 2009, employed a rigorous definition of school attendance in line with the Family Responsibilities Commission's School Attendance Guidelines.

Second, Queensland Government's data,[32] available from January 2006 for all Queensland communities are based on less rigorous tracking and reporting of absences. However schools' practices appear to have tightened over the 2006–2009 period.

Cape York Partnerships data for the three Welfare Reform Mossman Gorge, Hope Vale and Coen students show that school attendance has been at a high level from Term 3 2008 to Term 2 2009. In Hope Vale case managers have recorded a significant increase since Attendance Case Management commenced work. Consistent with these data Queensland government data show a high level of attendance or a slightly positive development in the three communities.

If there is anything that contradicts the pervasive cynicism about remote communities, it is the response of parents in Aurukun to making financial commitments to their children

In the vast majority of non-Welfare Reform Indigenous communities with no case management, according to government data school attendance has declined in 2006–2009 according to government data.[33] This could be due to the tightened definition of attendance or a real decline, or both.

It appears that the communities where case managers are active have resisted the overall negative trend detectable in other communities. But even if this negative trend is a statistical artefact resulting from tightened practices, Welfare Reform communities still compare favourably since no decline in attendance has been reported.

Evidence suggests a shift in attitudes in Welfare Reform communities with a noticeable change on the part of parents advising schools when children are absent. One school principal stated that there was a "50% improvement in the rate of parents contacting the school to confirm the reason for a student's absence."[34] Parental responsibility norms concerning school attendance are changing.

In Aurukun classroom data are actively collected for a priority list (at first comprising 91 students, at the time of publication of this report 107 students) in line with the Attendance Case Management Framework's phased approach in Aurukun. Results of case managers' work in Aurukun are more preliminary than in the three other Welfare Reform sites. However it should be noted that in the third week of the Attendance

[31] The statistics of Cape York partnerships are partly dependent on classroom rolls but CYP's case managers have the capacity to form their own judgements.

[32] Queensland Government, Quarterly report on key indicators in Queensland's discrete Indigenous communities. October– December 2008.

[33] ibid.

[34] Cape York Partnerships, "Every Child Is Special: Student Attendance Case Management Frameworks (ACMF) Progress Report 4th Quarter 2008" unpublished 2008.

Case Management Framework's efforts, 80 of 91 students prioritised by case managers were present at the weekly school assembly, and the attendance at the weekly school assembly increased from an average of 35 in Term 1 2009 to 120[35] according to the count of Cape York Partnerships's case manager.

According to preliminary case management data there has been a continued increase in the attendance of Aurukun priority students during Term 2.

Literacy

Over the course of 2008, students in all three sites attending the MULTILIT tutorial centres within their schools made excellent average gains, especially compared with the progress they had previously been making. As an example, we may consider the performance of students who received MULTILIT instruction in the first semester and who were assessed at the beginning, middle and end of the year. The figures cited below refer to the gains made over the whole year.

In Coen, MULTILIT students improved as follows:

- 11 months in reading accuracy
- 7 months in reading comprehension
- 11 months in single word recognition
- 15 months in spelling
- 129 per cent more words correctly per minute
- 10 months in receptive vocabulary
- 14 months phonological recoding

In Hopevale, the MULTILIT students made average gains as follows:

- 15 months in reading accuracy
- 13 months in reading comprehension
- 21 months in single word recognition
- 7 months in spelling
- 53 per cent more words correctly per minute
- 12 months in receptive vocabulary
- 25 months phonological recoding

In Mossman, MULTILIT students made average gains as follows:

- 28 months in reading accuracy
- 10 months in reading comprehension
- 19 months in single word recognition
- 13 months in spelling
- 68 per cent more words correctly per minute
- 15 months in receptive vocabulary
- 41 months phonological recoding

[35] Aurukun school authorities have disputed this figure, claiming 90 students were present.

The progress being made with the education programs that form part of the Cape York Welfare Reform trial demonstrates the effectiveness of these initiatives. However, on their own they are not sufficient to close the gap in Indigenous educational under-achievement. More fundamental reforms on the teaching supply side are needed.

Teaching supply and learning demand

An heuristic model for analysing education

In the early years of Cape York Partnerships' work on education, it became obvious that the interaction between demand for education and government supply was key to improving education in Cape York, but there were no useful analyses available.

A model for analysing education was adopted based on the concepts of "teaching supply" and "learning demand".

The key elements of teaching supply were:

- High quality teachers
- Reform in school leadership
- Reform of school governance, school curriculum and facilities

The key elements of learning demand were:

- School ready students keen and curious to learn
- Supportive parents who fulfil their responsibilities and demand a good education for their children
- Community that values education and provides a good neighbourhood for children

There is a dialectical relationship between supply and demand. Improvements in demand can cause improvements in supply, and improved supply can in turn generate increased demand. In markets, including the private education sector, the relationship between demand and supply is direct: the providers have a direct incentive to be sensitive to the expectations of fee-paying parents. In the public education system, demand is only indirectly related to supply. The question is whether shifts in learning demand will generate shifts in supply.

In the public education system, demand is only indirectly related to supply

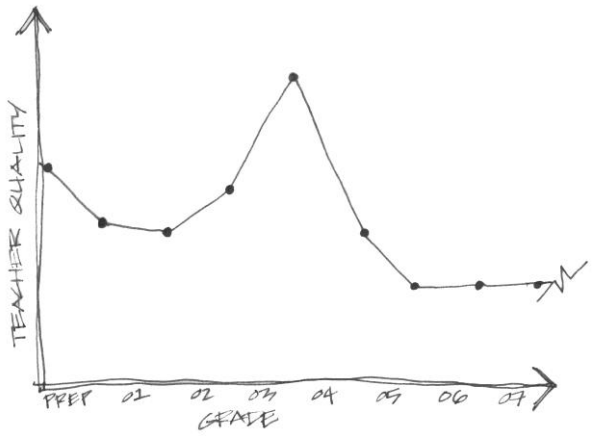
The experience of Cape York Partnerships with education reform is that the virtuous tension between supply and demand which ratchets positive shifts on both sides is negligible because the relationship between the two is indirect. Even though much progress has been made on the demand side, it has not led to concomitant progress on the supply side.

Progress in one year is followed by unravelling the next

Poor supply – inconsistent teacher quality and inconsistent school leadership quality

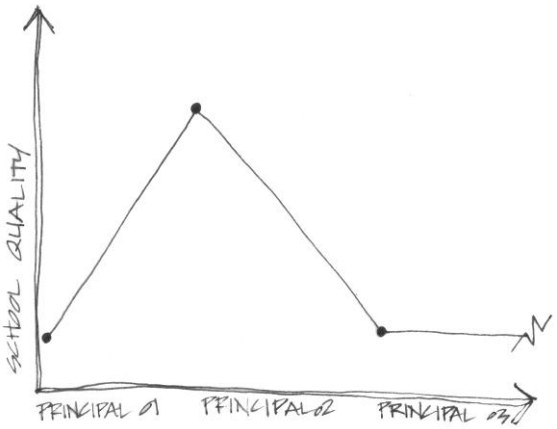
The supply of teaching to Indigenous children in remote communities is poor. There are dedicated and competent suppliers of teaching – teachers, school leaders and administrators. There is however a disproportionate amount of inexperienced teachers which is chiefly the result of the teacher recruitment challenges facing remote areas. These communities are hardship postings and are attractive to a limited pool of prospective teachers, and they are by definition places where teachers spend a limited period of their careers.

The teacher recruitment system provides incentives for inexperienced graduate teachers to go to remote areas before earning credit to teach at their preferred locations on the eastern seaboard and urban centres. Without it there would be recruitment problems. With it inexperienced teachers are the recruitment reality. The problems caused by this could be ameliorated by opening up recruitment outside of the state, the establishment of new teacher pathways, and more concerted marketing of Indigenous education as a vocational choice. Success with education reform will enhance this marketing effort.



The historical and present contributions of dedicated and competent suppliers of teaching are cancelled out by the overwhelming story of perfunctory and poor practice. A typical student's primary school years in a failing school is characterised by variable and inconsistent teacher quality. Progress in one year is followed by unravelling the next.

The inability of principals in the public system to replace unsatisfactory teachers means that even where the problem is acknowledged, little can be done about it.



As well as inconsistent teacher quality there is the problem of inconsistency in the quality of school leaders over time.

In the past 9 years the small Coen State School has had 6 principals, two recruited with the assistance of Cape York Partnerships and the remainder recruited by Education Queensland. There is not enough institutional scale in a small school like Coen for the gains made by good school leaders to be sustained when there is a change of principal.

...disadvantaged class backgrounds have become an excuse or alibi for under-achievement

Demand factors in disadvantaged class backgrounds have become an alibi for poor supply

In failing schools demand factors sourced in the socio-economic and class backgrounds of students have become an alibi for poor outcomes. They have become an excuse for failure and not just an explanation of the challenge.

Educators leading and teaching in failing schools, and system administrators presiding over such schools, put under-achievement down to factors outside of the classroom. The problems are on the demand side, not on the supply side.

Chris Sarra's central critique is addressed to this very phenomenon: how educators and educational systems have placed responsibility for Indigenous student under-achievement at the feet of Indigenous student backgrounds – rather than at the feet of those responsible for teaching them:

> *It has seemingly been easier for education authorities to hold Indigenous communities culpable for failing to engage with schools for the purposes of education. If this culpability carries weight, it is also the case that the Queensland education system has failed to engage with Indigenous communities in a meaningful way that encourages, fosters and maintains appropriate levels of Indigenous education outcomes.*
>
> *It is easy to describe Indigenous communities as a complex social and cultural context and to attribute student failure as a direct consequence of the context. However, the professional challenge for classroom teachers and their support infrastructure is to reflect inwards and evaluate the effectiveness of their own teaching practice and ask what it is that they are doing or not doing as a teacher that contributes to Indigenous student failure.*[36]

[36] Ministerial Advisory Committee for Education Renewal (MACER), *Report on Indigenous Education,* Queensland Government, Brisbane 2004.

The strategic reasoning that led us to focus on learning demand first

Cape York Partnerships first focused its education reform effort on the demand-side factors contributing to poor education. The organisation led the advocacy for Alcohol Management Plans, the aim being to restore order to communities racked by the chaos caused by substance abuse. Children were absent from school or attended school tired or hungry and unable to learn because they were not able to sleep at night and not safe. Epidemics of alcohol and drug abuse, and the large amounts of family incomes being sucked up by these epidemics occasioned these conditions. The strategic reason for the priority placed on learning demand strategies was this: unless these basic issues of school attendance and school readiness were fixed, those responsible for teaching supply would always have an alibi.

Once there was progress around demand-side factors, the spotlight could be fully turned on the supply problems.

Sarra's views conflict with Pearson's views in relation to the latter's insistence that demand-side factors need to be tackled as well, and that welfare reform is critical to the solution of these demand-side factors

Demand and supply are both indispensable for Indigenous educational advancement

Chris Sarra has played a major role in drawing attention to the poor supply in Indigenous education. There is much common ground between the views of Noel Pearson and Sarra on Indigenous education reform, and there are also fundamental divergences.

Chris sarras views on welfare reform and education demand

A major problem with Chris Sarra's policies is that his strong and correct insistence that governments take responsibility for supply of education – and his pioneering criticism of governments' use of Indigenous students' disadvantage as an excuse for poor outcomes – appear to have led him to underestimate the importance of demand.

Sarra is a proponent of what this report calls a "No Excuses" approach to education – in that he is strongly insistent that social, racial and economic backgrounds of Indigenous children not be allowed to become excuses for low expectations and low attainment. There is no doubting Sarra's clarity on this and the correctness of his view.

Perhaps the difference between Pearson's concept of "No Excuses" and that of Sarra is that Pearson believes that as well as educators having no excuses, nor should parents and Indigenous community members.

Sarra's views conflict with Pearson's views in relation to the latter's insistence that demand-side factors need to be tackled as well, and that welfare reform is critical to the solution of these demand-side factors, including at a basic level, parental responsibility for school attendance. Sarra wrote as follows in *The Australian* in 2008:

> *The notion of linking welfare payments to school attendance has never made sense to me. I am an advocate for respectful partnerships, not punishment.*
>
> *In my six years as principal of Cherbourg state school in Queensland, I visited many homes of parents who were struggling to get their children to school. I*

remember very well visiting a grandmother to say, "Your grandson is missing a lot of school and I am very worried that if he doesn't get with it he is really going to struggle at high school." As she holds one baby in her arm, tries to hush two little ones fighting in the kitchen, and reaches over to stick a bottle in the mouth of a child lying on a couch, she says to me, "I've been sending him along!" And I believe her absolutely.

Here is a woman who needs support, not punishment. Imagine what cutting welfare payments would do to her household.

As the community's school principal in this circumstance, I do not need to go to something like a family responsibility commissioner to get the stick out. Like all school principals, I have the authority to report her for breaching the Education Act[37]*, which makes schooling compulsory for all children. I have exercised this authority on other occasions but it just didn't seem right here.*

Instead I thought to myself, "I am paid taxpayers' money to be in this relationship with you. I do not control what happens in your household and I should never seek to. I do have authority to control what happens in our school, though, and I have to reflect on my practice and the practice of my colleagues, to consider ways of getting your child to make the decision to come to school himself."[38]

Sarra miscomprehends the welfare reform scheme which operates in the Cape York Welfare Reform trial.

a grandmother struggling to look after four small grandchildren, is the very kind of case which the Commission has been established to provide support to

Firstly, the scheme does not deny individuals and families their welfare income: no money can be taken from recipients by the Family Responsibilities Commission. Where welfare recipients continue to fail to fulfil their responsibilities, the Family Responsibilities Commission has power to instead redirect income intended for the benefit of children to another responsible adult, or to make a "conditional income management" order which requires the money to be spent in accordance with a budget that meets the needs of the individual and his or her family. So no money is lost to the family.

Secondly, the example illustrated by Sarra, that of a grandmother struggling to look after four small grandchildren, is the very kind of case which the Commission has been established to provide support to. The strong likelihood is that the parent or parents of these children are either drinking or gambling. The strong likelihood is that the parents of these children are using their children's income in these pursuits. The strong likelihood is that the grandmother's money is being used to feed and care for the children. Under the Cape York welfare reform scheme these parents would be held to account for their responsibilities and their income would be directed to the grandmother, or placed under a conditional income management order administered by Centrelink. In a circumstance like this it is impossible for the Commission to place any sanction on the grandmother. The Commission would instead – for the first time – provide some solutions for her. After all there are two senior members of the

37 Education (General Provisions) Act (Qld)

38 Chris Sarra, "Smart approach to learning", *The Australian* 15 November 2008.

community who sit as Local Commissioners on the Commission, who consider these cases and make decisions according to their local knowledge and authority.

Thirdly, Sarra misapprehends the role he believes a Principal is entitled to play and the role which is played by the Commission under Cape York welfare reform model. The FRC Local Commissioners are senior members of the community, who have been – for the first time – given clear authority to counsel their community members in relation to their responsibilities, and to take decisions where individuals fail to carry out their responsibilities.

Fourthly, Sarra cites the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 (Qld)* as a mechanism for dealing with poor attendance. The problem though is that the steps provided in the legislation for dealing with ongoing absenteeism are entirely punitive, namely, fining parents – which would definitely reduce their income – or incarceration in the event of non-payment of fines. Whilst Sarra indicates that he is prepared to do this in appropriate cases, the fact is that action under this legislation has rarely been taken. One anecdotal account was that there have been only half a dozen proceedings under the legislation over the past decade. It is unknown whether Dr Sarra's invocation of this procedure has ever resulted in the commencement of proceedings by the Director-General of the department. The problem with the Education (General Provisions) Act procedure is that in the absence of any other viable alternatives, principals just decide to do nothing and the child's absenteeism is not addressed and their educational failure is inevitable.

in the absence of any other viable alternatives, principals just decide to do nothing and the child's absenteeism is not addressed and their educational failure is inevitable

Fifthly, the measures taken under the welfare reform procedures ensure that every absence is taken up by a Case Manager who is trained to work with families, to resolve the issues behind a child's unexplained absence or lateness, and develop strategies to avoid reoccurrences. Case Managers also refer parents to support services such as a budgetary service – Family Income Management – or alcohol addiction support services as required. Such immediate responses reduce the incidence of parents being called before the Family Responsibilities Commission. Case Managers publicly and privately acknowledge 100 per cent attendance. They also work with schools to limit disruptions and maximise student core learning time, and work with the wider community to help them develop strategies to support the 100 per cent attendance expectation.

Dedicated Case Managers allow principals to focus on running the schools which is especially helpful in communities where attendance problems are chronic. Principals are regularly provided rigorous reporting data from Case Managers that includes a summary of communications with parents and what was discussed and agreed. Far from being punitive this ensures every case of absenteeism is addressed and that families have the support they need to address the problem. It is only after three absences that school principals are obliged to notify the Family Responsibilities Commission.

Case Management allows Indigenous families and leaders to take responsibility for improving student attendance. It incrementally reduces support levels as individual responsibility increases and attendance improves.

Pearson's view is that if there were no opportunities to reform the social context that results in low school attendance and a range of other background problems that make the education of Indigenous children such a great challenge – then Chris Sarra's

insistence on educators adopting what this report calls the "No Excuses" approach, is correct. However where background problems can be addressed through the marshalling of welfare reform efforts then the fixing of demand-side problems can only enhance "No Excuses" efforts on the supply-side.

To be clear: Noel Pearson does not disagree with Sarra's central insistence that educators must take the children as they come through the door and make success out of them notwithstanding where they have come from. However action is needed, Pearson believes, on both sides of the supply-demand nexus.

"Strong and Smart" and the question of racial pride

The "Strong and Smart" philosophy of Indigenous student esteem and identity is the centre-piece of Chris Sarra's approach to education. Using the terminology employed in this paper, the aim of Sarra's philosophy is to build Indigenous demand for education. "Strong and Smart" may therefore be seen as Sarra's alternative to Cape York's policies for building demand.

At first blush Sarra's approach appears attractive and sensible. The identification of indigeneity with low expectations and low achievement – and the wounds to esteem that these identifications imply – are a real and central issue in Indigenous education. This is a pervasive cultural problem for Indigenous people in Australian society.

However, although Noel Pearson strongly agrees that the nexus between low expectations and Indigenous education must be broken, Sarra's approach is problematic. It is especially problematic in the public sphere. Educators invite many problems of identity politics when they make race the basis of pride and self-esteem. While the public promotion of Aboriginal racial pride might seem on its surface unexceptionable, indeed laudable, consider whether the public promotion of English or Anglo-Saxon, Greek, Arabic or Japanese racial pride would be well advised – even in an all-Anglo school, in the case of Anglo-Saxon pride.

Just because the problem is perpetuated on the grounds of race does not mean the solution must be promulgated on the same basis

While it is appropriate to celebrate diversity, Pearson doubts whether the promotion of pride in specific racial identities is appropriate for our public life. He makes the following points.

First, the Reverend Dr Martin Luther King's dream, when he confronted the problem of white racial supremacy in the United States, was "that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character." Just because the problem is perpetuated on the grounds of race does not mean the solution must be promulgated on the same basis. The fact that the problem of negative self-image has its basis in racial denigration does not mean that the solution lies in the promotion of its opposite: the explicit promotion of a positive racial identity. The positive solution lies in shifting individual estimation from race to character.

Secondly, the promotion of racial or ethnic pride is a tricky issue in a plural society: when does such consciously cultivated pride become chauvinism? In any event, the cultivation of such pride should be a matter of intra-group business – the business of the "cultural hearth," as Pearson has described it – rather than something promoted in the public square. Pearson challenges the assumption that institutions of the state – public schools – are appropriate places for the cultivation of racial esteem.

Thirdly, Pearson recognises that the promotion of racial or ethnic pride may have immediately palpable effects on individual student and group consciousness, resilience and confidence. However, he queries how long resilience and determination will last which has its source in the jingoistic promotion of racial self-esteem. There comes a point at which a more substantive basis is needed.

Fourthly, there is a danger that the promotion of pride in membership of a particular racial or ethnic group and its association with the positive qualities of being strong and smart (putting aside whatever equivocations one might have about these two qualities) ends up selling Indigenous students an illusion. Racial identity, no matter how confidently held, cannot guarantee success. The surest basis for esteem in education is effort and achievement. It's not who you are or what claims you make; it's what you do and whether you have given your best effort.

The problems stemming from educators being commandeered into the task of fixing problems of identity-based esteem become clear when one examines Sarra's prescriptions for how low self-esteem among Indigenous students may be addressed. One step in the process Sarra envisages is that teachers ask two questions of their Indigenous students. They are:

Helping Indigenous children contemplate some hard questions:

- *To what extent do you truly believe you can be as good as anyone in this classroom?*
- *To what extent do you believe being Indigenous is something to be proud of?*

There are also problems with interrogating children on the extent to which they believe they are as good as anyone else in their classroom

For a child grappling with identity ambivalence or immaturity – or indeed the very lack of confidence which is assumed to be the problem – these questions are not just hard, they may be uncalled for. And not just for non-Indigenous educators to try to help children with. The questions turn on the degree of belief or pride ("extent"), and what is a child's answer supposed to be? I am half-proud, or I am mostly proud? Of course the politically correct answer, according to the identity politics underpinning this question, is that one is 100 per cent proud! And one dare not show any ambivalence or ambiguity.

But what if, like the artist Tracey Moffatt, one wants to be acknowledged as a great artist who happens to be Indigenous, rather than a great Indigenous artist? What if one wants to win a literary prize because of one's writing, not because one has produced good writing for an Indigenous sub-category?

There are also problems with interrogating children on the extent to which they believe they are as good as anyone else in their classroom. Academic and other aptitudes vary in humans, whether they are Indigenous or non-Indigenous. Therefore it is misleading to make aptitude a correlate of membership of an identity-group. There will be perfectly confident and proud Indigenous students who are nevertheless average students. Challenging Indigenous students to compete with students from other backgrounds is proper – but how this is done without provoking simplistic identity politics and without selling illusions requires much more subtlety and careful, critical thought than Sarra's approach. Otherwise it just ends up being a jingoistic exhortation to racial pride. Role models are probably a surer way of supporting

Indigenous children to deal with and challenge race-based problems of esteem than Sarra's attempt to create an identity-based pedagogy.

the distance between good and bad policies is most often very fine – not poles apart

Disadvantaged class backgrounds need to be taken into account, but rather than being accommodated they must be transcended

The problem of educating disadvantaged children is an instance of the general principle, articulated by Noel Pearson, that the "distance between good and bad policies is most often very fine – not poles apart."[39]

This paper contends that disadvantaged class backgrounds are taken into account in order to justify teaching failure. An alternative approach is to ignore class backgrounds entirely. An example of this may be a private school with small numbers of Indigenous students that makes no distinction in its expectations and approaches to education from that of all of their other students.

If excuse-making and (wilful) blindness to class were the only alternatives, an Indigenous student would be better off attending a school which strictly ignores her class background, than one which takes full notice of it and therefore adopts differential expectations and approaches to education.

It is however not practicable nor desirable to ignore Indigenous students' background when we set ourselves the task of providing quality education to all Indigenous students. Sensitivity to such issues is necessary and correct – in principle. It is in the formulation of such policy that subtle distinctions have to be comprehended and made.

Educators have to understand the disadvantaged class backgrounds of Indigenous students, and to take them into account for the purpose of transcending and overcoming the effects of disadvantage – rather than bending to the effects of disadvantage, or accommodating (and accepting) the effects of disadvantage.

Pedagogical approaches that are prone to bending to, accommodating or accepting the effects of disadvantaged class backgrounds prescribe categorical approaches to Indigenous teaching and learning. Categorical approaches are those which differentiate among students according to cultural and racial affinities and learning abilities that are said to justify differentiated teaching. Indigenous education is littered with categorical approaches to education, often responding to alleged "Indigenous learning styles"[40] based on scant evidence.[41] Indigenous education is a small market and the volume and quality of educational research in this area is thin, many of the categorical approached in Indigenous education are not subjected to the scrutiny that educational research demands in the mainstream. If there has been a problem of

[39] Noel Pearson, "White guilt, victimhood and the quest for a radical centre", *Griffith Review* Edition 16 2007.

[40] Stephen Harris, *Culture and Learning: Tradition and Education in Northeast Arnhem Land,* Northern Territory Department of Education, Darwin 1980.

[41] Martin Nakata, "Some thoughts on literacy issues in Indigenous contexts", *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* Vol. 31 2003.

insufficient peer review of research in mainstream educational policies in recent decades[42], the story is even more dismal in Indigenous education.

Functional and dysfunctional cultural differences

The ultimate reason for the corruption of Indigenous social norms – classical as well as modern – is the immersion of Indigenous communities in passive welfare, which has removed much of the economic basis for functional, reciprocal interpersonal relationships

A distinction needs to be drawn between culturally-based differences that are functional and culturally-based differences that are dysfunctional. Functional cultural traits are elements of culture that reflect purposeful economic activity or beneficial social arrangements – examples are traditional sharing of the yield of hunting and reciprocal assistance among poor community members. Such economic activities and corresponding behaviours among Indigenous people need not be strictly classical – a range of strategies for sustenance and subsistence have been developed since European colonisation.

Functional elements of culture may also be retained as a matter of choice, when the economic rationale is no longer present. It is not uncommon for Indigenous groups to preserve parts of their culture as a marker of identity.

Dysfunctional cultural traits on the other hand are those that serve destructive behaviours, often driven by substance abuse or process addictions such as gambling. Such behaviour represents perversions of traditional custom – exploitation has insinuated itself into traditional culture.[43]

The ultimate reason for the corruption of Indigenous social norms – classical as well as modern – is the immersion of Indigenous communities in passive welfare, which has removed much of the economic basis for functional, reciprocal interpersonal relationships. Many aspects of Indigenous cultures are affected by the problems occasioned by passive welfare. Cadging stealthily changes into humbugging; traditional child-rearing practices are one thing, dumping children onto grandparents whilst parents abandon their responsibilities is another thing. To the extent that the latter child-rearing practices are "cultural", they are dysfunctional. More controversially, practices related to attendance at funerals that are part of Aboriginal tradition are one thing – but the invocation of cultural obligations to attend funerals resulting in children missing out on large tranches of school time are another thing. Such disregard for children's life prospects that can only be explained by parents having internalised a passive welfare outlook.

There are grounds for educators to acknowledge and respond to culturally-based differences of Indigenous children in terms of behavioural and pastoral support issues, provided that the cultural traits that are respected are functional, and that they do not entail lower or different expectations from other students. Strategies for inculcating a culture of high achievement in Indigenous students should be culturally responsive, but the expectations should not be any different to those expected of mainstream students.

Dysfunctional (allegedly) culturally-based differences on the other hand should not be accommodated. They cannot be ignored, but educators must unequivocally confront

[42] Kevin Wheldall, "When will we ever learn?", *Educational Psychology* Vol. 25 2005.

[43] Noel Pearson, *Our right to take responsibility*, Noel Pearson and Associates, Cairns 2000.

them, without fear of being labelled racist. Chris Sarra has correctly denounced the inclination to accommodate dysfunction by conflating it with cultural difference:

> *Sometimes we think we are being receptive to culture when we are just colluding with low expectations. A teacher who backs off when a child says: "You're picking on me because I'm black"; a teacher who doesn't set homework because they don't think it will get done … the principal who never has a hard conversation with a family about why a child is missing every Thursday and Friday … all collude with beliefs about the restricted learning potential of Indigenous children.*[44]

When it comes to pedagogical questions, culturally-based differences do not justify any differential approaches. We subscribe to Kevin Wheldall's experience-based maxim that "effective instruction is effective instruction is effective instruction" – which holds true for a wider range of differences between students than cultural differences.

Cultural respect, sensitivity and inclusivity are unambiguously correct policy. But functional culture is conflated with class disadvantage and cultural dysfunction. The accommodation that should rightly be afforded to cultural difference on the basis of respect and sensitivity, is also afforded to class disadvantage and cultural dysfunction. Once entrenched, such accommodation of dysfunction will be hard to reverse because the attempt to challenge dysfunctional behaviour will be met with the retort "you are not respecting the cultural background of these students".

"effective instruction is effective instruction is effective instruction"

The problem of culturally appropriate education

The point being made here is a subtle one. And perhaps the most challenging expression of the problem under discussion is the notion of "culturally appropriate education". In the very earliest days of the Cape York Partnerships enterprise, Noel Pearson and the *Every Child Is Special* project first expressed the contention that culturally appropriate education is a problematic concept and Cape York Partnerships proposed the concept of cultural engagement as a better way of describing the intercultural zone where the global world and Western education meet the Indigenous world and culture. A culturally engaged education was one which embraced Indigenous culture but did not prescribe what was appropriate and what was not. Most importantly, it rejected the idea that a certain *nomenklatura* could cast judgment on what was appropriate and what was not.

In a letter to then Queensland Minister for Education and now Queensland Premier, Anna Bligh, Noel Pearson in 2002 proposed the concept of culturally engaged education as follows:

> *'Culturally engaged' education means that the relevance of Aboriginal culture is brought to the full benefit of education, and respect and recognition is accorded. But there is no arbitrary prescription about what form the engagement should take and importantly, what should be the results of the engagement. The results of a full cultural engagement are not to be predetermined and no judgments made about what is "truly Aboriginal" and what is not. I believe that it will be at the frontiers of this kind of engagement that the true potential and creativity of our people will be unleashed.*

[44] Chris Sarra, "Indigenous education needs magic bullet", *The Australian* 26 February 2009.

We have gone through and are still in the throes of the "culturally appropriate" education era. But, if the intention was to ensure respect and recognition of Aboriginal culture and to make education sensitive and relevant, it became an alibi for anti-intellectualism, substandard educational programs and ultimately an excuse for poor achievement. Whenever the words "culturally appropriate" are invoked it is invariably in defence of some poor standard – the words are never associated with something that is excellent and better than those things which are presumably culturally inappropriate.

Many disastrous policies and programs have been tried under the banner of cultural appropriateness. Many of them are still around. It became an ideological catch-cry for the Aboriginal educational professionals, black and white, who used it to carve out an area of expertise and unaccountability for standards.

My main problem with the concept centres on the word "appropriate", because this implies that someone is to make a judgement about what is and what is not, culturally proper. And this power to censor and prescribe was ready for abuse. It became a tool of anti-intellectualism – people were being told what was "truly Aboriginal" and appropriate and what was not. Arbitrary and political rulings could be made which could curtail creativity and ultimately limited the possibilities of what Aboriginal education could mean.

social relevance in education has been by itself a major reason why Indigenous education has for so long been mired in low expectations and under-achievement

The problem of socially relevant education

The problem of culturally appropriate education is a derivative of another more universal phenomenon: the educational fad which arose internationally as well as in Australia, under the banner of "socially relevant education".[45] Social relevance in education sought to confine the content of education curricula to the particular social circumstances and backgrounds of students: so they could recognise and identify with the world alluded to in their schooling. Therefore it disfavoured higher culture orientations for students of the lower classes (the principal victims of this gimcrack concept) in favour of keeping kids in the social and cultural world of their origins. But it did not just eschew Shakespeare in favour of popular culture, it also infected assumptions about what educational aspirations of lower class children were socially relevant. It would be hard to imagine a more stunning instrument for lower class confinement than the notion of socially relevant education.

As well as being the precursor to the notion of culturally appropriate education, social relevance in education has been by itself a major reason why Indigenous education has for so long been mired in low expectations and under-achievement.

[45] Kevin Wheldall, Robyn Beaman and Elizabeth Langstaff, "Mind the gap': Effective literacy instruction for indigenous low-progress readers", *Australasian Journal of Special Education* 2009 (in press); Elizabeth Langstaff, Robyn Beaman and Kevin Wheldall, "How might we solve the problem of Aboriginal literacy?", MULTILIT Research Unit, Macquarie University, Sydney 2009.

Accountability

Accountability mechanisms when education is a private good and when it is a public good

We have described in this report the supply-demand model for analysing education that has informed our policy thinking in Cape York Peninsula. We are aware that this model invokes the controversial market analysis which is rejected by many opponents of market-oriented education policies. We are also aware of the view that school choice is not a panacea for reform. Nonetheless, we believe the model is at least useful for heuristic purposes.

It is not the purpose of this report to rehearse – let alone attempt to settle – the debates about education markets and school choice (and Milton Friedman's longstanding proposal for school vouchers[46] that is now adopted in that bastion of social democracy, Sweden, and which has been proposed for the vocational training sector in Australia).[47] A summary of Cape York organisations' view on school choice was presented by Noel Pearson in his speech to the Sharing Success Conference in 2004:

> *My analysis of success in schools is the familiar market one of supply and demand. I am currently thinking about the Indigenous education predicament in these terms: the supply of teaching and the demand for learning. This may be too crude or simplistic, but in the absence of any more compelling framework for understanding why it is that our public education system in Cape York Peninsula consistently fails our children, I have adopted the supply and demand analysis.*
>
> *I will insist on this analysis for the present time because I wonder why the schools that supply education to the most privileged classes in our society provide much higher quality education and achieve better "outcomes". Private schools supply good teaching because they have a strong demand on them. That demand is fee-paying parents. The fact that parents pay good money for their kids to get a good education, and they have the option of choosing an alternative school if they feel they are not getting their money's worth, provides the demand on private schools to supply good teaching*

[46] Robert C. Enlow and Lenore T. Ealy, *Liberty and Learning: Milton Friedman's voucher idea at fifty*, Cato Institute, Washington DC 2006.

[47] Denise Bradley, Peter Noonan, Helen Nugent and Bill Scales, *Review of Australian Higher Education. Final Report*, Australian Government 2008.

services and facilities. The supply-demand nexus in private schools is direct. The fee-paying parents demand and the enrolment-keen school supplies.

This market relationship between parents and the school in the private system is absent in public education. The source of demand in the public system has traditionally been government – as the guarantor of free public education to all citizens. In the public system it is governments, through its education departments, that have placed the demand on its schools to supply quality teaching. Government developed mechanisms to ensure that quality education was provided and maintained. School inspections, universal tests and other devices were developed to ensure standards and to make suppliers accountable. The government, in the case of public schools, was the de facto parent – who looked after the interests of parents and communities in ensuring that quality education was available for their children.

There is increasing indication that the traditional mechanisms of demand in the public education system have been eroded. It is not enough nowadays to rely upon government to fulfil its responsibility to provide your child with the education she is entitled to and which she deserves. You would be a fool to leave your education to a public school provider in this day and age – without making sure that the school you are sending your child to is indeed offering a high quality, high expectation supply of teaching services.[48]

Pearson's view is that education is provided in two distinct but related contexts. Firstly education is provided *as private goods* in the private education market – and the supply-demand analysis is apt because market forces apply, albeit in a market where government interventions play a significant role. Secondly education is provided *as public goods* in the public education system – where the supply-demand analysis is less apt because market forces only have indirect application. The drift of students from public to private schools in Australia has caused much consternation on the part of public school providers. The fact that parents have choice between public and private schools, does exert indirect pressure on the supply of public education.

The public system therefore relies upon strong systemic accountability for good education. The problem is that *the system has to account to itself* – and there are limits to the efficacy of this approach

Pearson therefore believes that accountability for good education is driven by demand-side market forces in the private system and by supply-side forces in the public system. Demand by parents in the public system is only indirect, by virtue of the citizen's ability to influence governments to provide good education to their children. This indirect demand can be school specific – especially in middle-class locales where parents are active in pursuit of their citizenship entitlements. However this form of indirect demand as Pearson calls it, is diffuse and nowhere near as decisive as direct, supply-driven accountability. The public system therefore relies upon strong systemic accountability for good education. The problem is that *the system has to account to itself* – and there are limits to the efficacy of this approach, especially when traditional accountability mechanisms have been removed and not replaced with effective alternatives.

[48] Noel Pearson, Address to the Sharing Success Conference, Cairns, unpublished 2004.

The MACER Report's Accountability Matrix

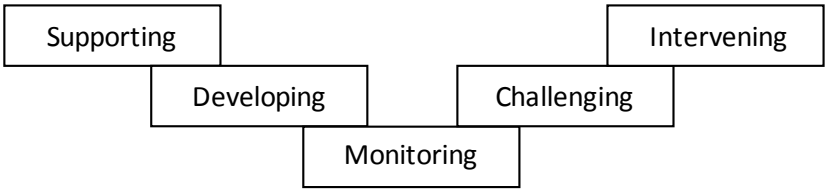
Whilst the Indigenous education problem was well described by the MACER Committee's *Report on Indigenous Education*[49] in 2004, its recommendations were not compelling. The report has not precipitated any positive changes to the dismal situation it had described.

This report asserts that the main reason for the MACER Report's lack of impact was that it did not move beyond the current paradigm where the public education system effectively is accountable only to itself. The absence of accountability in the public system concerning Indigenous student achievement was identified as the key problem:

> *Members of the sub-committee articulated a frustration with a system that communicates a sense of "no consequence" for poor outcomes in Indigenous education. Put simply, if a teacher resides over a classroom with continuing Indigenous underachievement, there is often no consequence. If a principal resides over a school with continuous Indigenous underachievement, there is often no consequence. In Education Queensland, if an Executive Director (Schools) resides over a district with continuing Indigenous underachievement, there is seemingly no consequence. If senior officers reside over policy and program areas with continuous Indigenous underachievement, again there is seemingly little or no consequence.*

The central recommendation proposed by MACER – and accepted by the Queensland Government – was the adoption of an Accountabilities Matrix. The Accountabilities Matrix was adapted from Chris Sarra's doctoral dissertation entitled "The role of schools in reinforcing Aboriginal perceptions of being Aboriginal".[50]

> *The sub-committee developed an Accountabilities Matrix ... which outlines what can reasonably be expected at various relationship levels within an education system. It is worth emphasising that the matrix is not about enforcement and compliance per se. It is about developing relationships. The matrix attempts to provide some direction in shaping these relationships in the interests of achieving education policy outcomes.*
>
> *The Accountabilities Matrix identifies and locates important performance responsibilities and accountabilities that lie in an education system. It identifies responsibilities and accountabilities for officers according to five categories of action to improve student outcomes, namely:*



[49] Ministerial Advisory Committee for Education Renewal (MACER), *Report on Indigenous Education,* Queensland Government, Brisbane 2004.

[50] Chris Sarra, "The role of schools in reinforcing Aboriginal perceptions of being Aboriginal", doctoral thesis, Murdoch University 2005.

Establishing a scheme for iterative and systemic exhortation and down-the-line accountability is not a convincing solution to fixing up the state of poor education supply

It is hard to reconcile the MACER subcommittee's frustrations with the absence of consequences for ongoing student under-achievement, with their statements that "[i]t is worth emphasising that the matrix is not about enforcement and compliance per se. It is about developing relationships" and "[i]t is worth reiterating that, the accountabilities nominated by the matrix do not represent additional duties, but simply articulate the duties of their position". Establishing a scheme for iterative and systemic exhortation and down-the-line accountability is not a convincing solution to fixing up the state of poor education supply. Reform premised on the system accounting to itself without having to be responsive to demand-side forces, will not achieve the required improvements.

New Australian Government education reforms

Recent initiatives and statements by the Australian Government indicate that policy-making is moving towards accountability through empowering of external, demand-side forces in education. As part of the Australian Government's commitment to an "education revolution" the Commonwealth Minister for Education, Hon Julia Gillard MP, has outlined a three-part agenda:

- quality teaching
- overcoming educational disadvantage
- increased transparency and accountability[51]

The third part of the agenda mainly concerns parents' rights. Of the parties involved in children's education, parents received the least information on the performance of their child on state-wide and national measures. It has been a long-standing bone of contention that schools receive more detailed reports on individual student performance on these measures than parents.

The Minister called for greater transparency and accountability in the following terms:

> *Much information is already produced by schools and by different school systems. But after a year as the national Education Minister, I absolutely know that the full range of information we need to be at our fingertips and at the fingertips of parents and teachers is not there. I know that national testing is controversial. And I know that publishing information about student test performance out of context can be misleading. But there is a basic principle which, for many different reasons, we have not grasped in Australian schooling up to now. The principle is that, where information exists about the nature of students' learning, it is not appropriate that it should be held by some – professionals and administrators – and not available to the wider community. We need a revolution in transparency. I absolutely reject the proposition that somehow I am smart enough to understand information and parents and community members are somehow too dumb.*[52]

[51] Julia Gillard, Address presented at the Education Forum, Melbourne, Australia, <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Speeches/Pages/Article_081128_133646.aspx> 2008.

[52] ibid.

As a result more information about individual student performance and school performance will be available.[53]

In addition to being given access to all available information about their child, parents will benefit greatly from access to school performance data. In order to make informed choices about their child's education they also require information about other schools in their area and similar schools across the country. The publication of individual school results, on nation-wide measures, such as the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), will ensure that comparisons could be made on a consistent basis. Informed parents are better able to assist their children and make educational decisions.

What happens with consistently failing schools?

The Australian and Queensland Governments now need to answer the question: What is to be done about failing schools in remote communities?

Noel Pearson views school choice as the most important force for accountability where true markets exist. The empowerment of parents through school choice is potentially powerful, however limitations to what Amartya Sen called the "capabilities to choose"[54] makes choice for the most disadvantaged classes no guarantee of success.

The new reforms being implemented by the Australian Government together with the States and Territories are welcome. However the most obvious next question is: what happens to consistently failing schools?

Indigenous schools in remote communities in Cape York Peninsula are, even without the information that will be provided through the new accountability reforms, already known to be failing.

The Australian and Queensland Governments now need to answer the question: What is to be done about failing schools in remote communities?

This issue is particularly important in remote Indigenous communities because there are no alternative providers of education. In urban areas, transparency will increase choice for the vast majority of parents; working-class and lower middle-class parents may not be able to afford private school fees, but most are able to transport their children to a state school further away from their home and they do have the capabilities to choose.

This paper notes the views of reformers such as Siegfried Engelmann and Kevin Wheldall that the problem is that school choice advocates see it as a magic bullet for educational reform – whereas these authorities see instructional method as decisive.

Nonetheless, Cape York Partnerships has come to the conclusion that choice needs to form part of the solution to Cape York's education crisis: *Educational reform can be delivered as a public good provided that parents can choose to stop accepting their children being serviced by failing public schools.*

This paper proposes an alternative public school provider option for parent communities whose children are attending consistently failing schools to choose.

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[53] Julia Gillard, Address presented at the ISCA Parliamentary Forum, Canberra, Australia, <www.isca.edu.au/html/PDF/Gillard%20Speech%20September%202008.pdf> 2008.

[54] Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999.

The purpose of Indigenous education

A further dimension to the debacle of Indigenous education, is the longstanding and continuing lack of clarity about what should be the vision and purpose of Indigenous education – especially for remote communities. Intellectual confusion and sheer wrong-headed policy thinking has arisen from poor answers to the following issues:

- What does it mean when Indigenous people from remote communities are entitled to choose whether to pursue a more traditional orientation or to integrate into the wider society and economy?
- How are remote communities going to be socially, culturally and economically viable into the future?
- What is necessary to maintain traditional languages and cultures into the future?

These issues have been analysed by Cape York Partnerships and the Cape York Institute over the last nine years.

The right to choose

How can an Indigenous child with poor health and poor education be truly said to be in a position to choose?

The analysis from Cape York is that the policy of allowing remote Indigenous communities to choose their orientation, which became official policy in the 1970s, was misconceived. In the light of Amartya Sen's insights about the critical importance of "capabilities" in order to enable individuals to "choose lives they have reason to value",[55] the disaster of Australian Government policy of the past four decades is plain to see. How can an Indigenous child with poor health and poor education be truly said to be in a position to choose? The kind of life she will lead in a remote community will not be for her a matter of choice, it is a matter of no choice. For Indigenous people in remote communities to have choice, then they require a full and proper education as one of the most fundamental capabilities that will enable each of them to choose their future.

The education vision developed by *Every Child Is Special* was unequivocal about the importance of a mainstream education for Indigenous children in Cape York Peninsula:

> *We are determined to ensure that our younger generations achieve their full potential, talent and creativity and have the confidence and capacity for hard work so that they can orbit between two worlds and enjoy the best of both.*

[55] Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999.

The viability of remote communities

A leadership failure is involved when people from remote communities are left to think that their desires and ambitions can be met whilst living in remote areas

On the question of viability of remote communities Cape York's analysis has been unequivocal about the necessity of Indigenous people from remote communities engaging in the wider Australian and global economy and society. Rather than enclaves disengaged from the wider economy and society, remote communities must be vibrantly connected to the outside world with a sizeable expatriate community orbiting out into the wider world and maintaining their connections to their homelands and returning home for longer or shorter periods or retirement.[56] The Cape York view is based on the reality that many people from remote communities have desires and ambitions for themselves and their children that go beyond the horizons of their home communities. The realisation of these desires and ambitions are not all possible within these communities. Higher education, higher incomes and career ambitions are not available and will not be available in these communities. Indeed employment is limited and is likely to remain so in remote areas. A leadership failure is involved when people from remote communities are left to think that their desires and ambitions can be met whilst living in remote areas – and all that prevents their realisation is policy failure or unfairness.

The Cape York Institute undertook a project in 2005 in conjunction with the Australian and Queensland government treasury departments examining the viability of four remote communities in Cape York Peninsula (Aurukun, Coen, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge: the four communities that are involved in the Cape York Welfare Reform Trial). This study[57] concluded that on even the most optimistic future scenario of local and regional economic development and local labour import replacement, none of these communities were economically and socially viable. A significant proportion of the individuals in these communities need to be mobile in pursuit of employment if these communities were to be viable.

This is why the concept of orbits is critical to the vision for the future of Indigenous peoples from remote areas like Cape York Peninsula. It is a vision about how these remote places can still be *home* to its peoples, whilst enabling its members to move out into the wider world and return according to their own choices. Rather than a one-way ticket out, the concept of orbits imply that expatriates maintain their connections to their homelands and to their people, whilst pursuing employment, education, artistic and other endeavours in the wider world.

This is how the leader of the Aurukun community, Mayor Neville Pootchemunka, puts it:

> *"I want to see the day when young Wik people are living and working in Beijing and on the Blackberry phone talking to their grandfather in Wik Mungkan – telling him "Hey old man, I'll be coming back for holidays next month and we'll go camping out on our outstation!"*[58]

[56] Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership, *Can Cape York Communities be Economically Viable?*, <http://www.cyi.org.au/> 2005.

[57] ibid.

[58] Neville Pootchemunka, unpublished letter, 27 February 2009.

Cape York Partnerships' and the Cape York Institute's dissemination of the ideas of orbits, bi-culturalism and bi- and multilingualism over recent years has assisted many community leaders to develop the kind of vision Neville Pootchemunka articulates – ideas which some Cape York people have been mulling all their lives, but have not until now articulated into a political program. The purpose of education is therefore clearer in Cape York than perhaps in other remote regions in the country, where education (and the mobility that it implies) is assumed to be antithetical to the maintenance of traditional cultures. A full mainstream education is seen as assimilationist.

The absence of philosophical clarity around questions of assimilation and integration, cultural maintenance and economic development, greatly contributes to the confusion around the purpose of Indigenous education. For a long time government policy promulgated and reflected this confusion and hesitation. To the extent that there was any policy direction, education centred on enabling Aboriginal people from remote areas to fulfil employment functions necessary for their communities. Government education policies therefore set lower expectations and limited horizons for remote students – couched in the concepts of culturally appropriate education – and the remnants of these assumptions still haunt Indigenous education policies.

Perhaps one of the most telling betrayals of this prevalent thinking was set out in a letter to the editor of *The Australian* by Jon Altman, Director of the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) at the Australian National University:

> *But the crucial issue … is that of curricula. Too much emphasis is being placed in the current debate on providing opportunity for Indigenous kids in very remote Australia for imagined futures as "lawyers, doctors and plumbers" (as suggested by Amanda Vanstone) and too little for futures as artists, land managers and hunters living on the land that they own.*
>
> *If we are serious about providing meaningful choices in the modern world, as [Kirsten] Storry suggests, then these choices must be for futures both inside and outside home communities. Rather than just seek mainstream education solutions to complex non-mainstream Indigenous circumstances, we should develop curricula relevant to local settings and new enterprises and then see what impact this might have on attendance.*[59]

CAEPR is the most prolific Indigenous policy generator in the country, including much research and policy prescription concerning education and the future of remote communities. Altman's view therefore reflects a widespread view of many people in Indigenous policy and advisory circles. Never mind the critical need for doctors and plumbers in remote communities!

One observation may be put forward about this lack of clarity and hesitation about the purpose of education amongst Indigenous peoples from remote areas. Individuals, parents and families often have clear ambitions for their children – supporting them in their education, sending them off to boarding schools, wanting them to attend universities or gain other qualifications that will enable them to have good jobs. Whilst they are a minority, they are not a small minority. It is at the community level that there is much more equivocation and confusion about what is considered to be the purpose of education. Unlike Neville Pootchemunka, community leaders are often

[59] Jon Altman: "Curricula the crucial issue" (Letter to the Editor), The Australian 13 June 2006.

Only through education and high levels of literacy will cultural and linguistic diversity be maintained

agnostic about education policy or worse, tend to express the hesitations and confusions that Altman expresses. Culturally appropriate education as an ideological concept reified in officialdom and in mainstream indigenist academia, has sunk deep into the consciousness of Indigenous peoples.

Maintaining cultural and linguistic heritage

A further source of this confusion is over the question of the maintenance of cultural and linguistic heritage of Indigenous peoples. Rather than seeing education as antithetical to cultural maintenance and transmission, Cape York Partnerships has argued that education – including, vitally, literacy in Indigenous languages – is indispensable to long term cultural survival.[60] Only through education and high levels of literacy in Indigenous languages will cultural and linguistic diversity be maintained in the future. Reliance upon oral transmission is not a long term solution. In his letter to Anna Bligh from 2002, Noel Pearson wrote:

> *We have been talking about the concept of "orbits" as a solution to the "will we lose our culture and identity if we embrace Western education" question that our people harbour. That is, we want to show that it is possible to be completely bi-cultural and successful, and that Cape York people can embark upon orbits of their own choosing – according to their own talents, interests and desires – but they can maintain their identities, culture and links with their home base.*
>
> *Therefore the pursuit of high quality education is not to be seen as people launching out into the wider world, never to be seen again and losing their links with their land and their people. Rather, education enables people to succeed at home and in the wider world – and will allow people to return home regularly. Educated young Cape York people can go out into the world without the fear of "losing" their identity and their connection with our people.*
>
> *The concept of orbits confronts the fact that most opportunities for jobs, income, careers et cetera will lie outside of Cape York. In the wider Cape York region, elsewhere in North Queensland, elsewhere in Queensland, elsewhere in Australia, elsewhere throughout the world.*

This report is unequivocal about the purpose of education. It is to equip Indigenous students from remote communities with a fully bi-cultural education, that will enable them to move between their home worlds and the wider Australian and global worlds with maximum facility, according to their own choices. The aim is for Indigenous students to enjoy the best of both worlds. There is no hesitation about Indigenous students engaging to the fullest in Western and global education, and no limitation on the nature and results of this inter-cultural engagement is prescribed. Identity politics around what is properly Indigenous and what is culturally appropriate is completely rejected. It is up to each individual to determine the terms and ambitions of their own inter-cultural engagement.

[60] Cape York Partnerships and Apunipima Cape York Health Council, "Cape York Peninsula Substance Abuse Strategy", <http://www.capeyorkpartnerships.com> 2002.

An optimum approach for Cape York Peninsula

Features of the situation in Cape York Peninsula

The success of "No Excuses" schools shows that schools and school networks can develop education formulae that overcome the learning challenges faced by disadvantaged children and make significant inroads towards closing the achievement gap.

This raises the question as to what extent could such formulae be applied in remote schools across Cape York Peninsula to achieve similar results with Indigenous children. Table 4 identifies the salient features of the situation in this region. With the exception of, remoteness, Cape York children's the home life conditions largely replicate those of experienced by very disadvantaged children in urban areas. Across the spectrum, these children are at a distinct disadvantage in terms of their language and cognitive development, literacy and social skills development and their primary health. It is therefore reasonable to assume that a "No Excuses" formula, with some customisation to accommodate local conditions, could, if applied with the same rigour, get similar results.

Table 4: Salient Features of the situation in Cape York Peninsula

	FEATURE	SUMMARY DESCRIPTION
1	Remoteness	Cape York Peninsula is located in Far North Queensland, Australia. It encompasses an area of approximately 137,000 km² and is sparsely populated by about 18,000 inhabitants, a majority of Indigenous people. Most economic activity is concentrated in the mining town of Weipa and the regional centre, Cooktown. Welfare dependency across the region is very high. Most roads in the region are unsealed and many communities are often inaccessible by road during the wet season.
2	High proportion of children with special needs	Children and families in Cape York are more likely to experience homelessness, mental health problems, poor diet and irregular eating, effects of substance abuse (including a high prevalence of foetal alcohol syndrome (FAS)), violence, neglect or abuse. Many children's needs often compete with other interests and access to daily basics like food and shelter are not guaranteed. As a result such children are much more likely to come into contact with child protection or law enforcement agencies. Many families have few material possessions and are often in debt and

	FEATURE	SUMMARY DESCRIPTION
		finances fluctuate between "feast" and "famine" cycles. Many families are transient between communities and children often attend two or more schools within any year, and miss weeks of school in between. Not surprisingly, many children have learning difficulties and require specific specialist learning support.
3	Limited academic exposure in early childhood development	In their interactions with their children, many Indigenous parents have and use a limited English vocabulary which reflect their own poor education and their non-English speaking backgrounds. As with other disadvantaged families, Indigenous parents are less likely to engage in academically stimulating discussions and are more likely to use discouraging, rather than encouraging statements to their children. The limited exposure to English language in the home means that children have a limited vocabulary and are less likely to be intellectually stimulated in areas such as memory recall.
4	Literacy poor home environments	The majority of parents of school-aged children in Cape York had limited education and bear the legacy of under-achievement in their own education. As a result there is a limited culture of reading and most homes have few, if any, books. A small minority of parents read to or with their children and there is limited recreational reading. Homes also do not have other educational resources such as computers and internet access, furniture and quiet space suitable for study. Many parents lack the skills or habits to assist their children with reading or homework.
5	Minimal concerted cultivation	"Concerted cultivation" has been defined by sociologist Annette Lareau as the type of childrearing that middle-class parents practice: parents organise their child's after-school activities and provide them structured, often daily programs. They generally have a better education themselves and try to impress the importance of education upon their child on a daily basis. Parents teach their children things that are not taught in school, that will help them to perform better and get better grades on tests and ultimately do better in school. The main advantage of this type of childrearing is that children are taught lessons through organised activities that help prepare them for a white-collar job and the types of interactions that a white-collar worker encounters. Some examples of this type of parental teaching are engagement in critical thinking such as asking challenging questions and the use of advanced grammar. Cape York families, like many disadvantaged families, engage in limited concerted cultivation to encourage curiosity and learning and improve their children's practical and social skills. There is a limited amount of organised activities available in remote communities to make up for the lack of any family traditions of enriching pursuits for children. In an Australian context, "mainstream" is probably a better term than "middle-class". "Middle-class" perhaps has connotations that are more exclusive than the broad range of sports, music and other activities that the majority of Australian parents engage their children in. In Cape York communities, students usually do not have access to the activities of lower middle-class and working-class children in the mainstream.
6	Local languages and cultural transmission	Communities across Cape York have various traditional languages that are still in use to varying degrees. However, the number of speakers and extent of language transmission between generations is in rapid decline. Some languages are not spoken and some have only a few elderly speakers

	FEATURE	SUMMARY DESCRIPTION
		remaining. For many Indigenous groups the maintenance of traditional knowledge, practices and languages remain a major ongoing concern. There are two dimensions to the culture and traditional language situation. Firstly, there is the community's concerns for their children to learn their culture and language. Secondly, there is the relationship between the aim of mainstream educational attainment and the first goal of cultural transmission. How these two dimensions are conceived and approached is a critical challenge.
7	Limited Kindergarten services	The Kindergarten services in the region are not operated by Education Queensland but by agencies based outside the region and chosen by the local communities. The centres are generally sited in separate locations and do not always adjoin school property. Services across the sites vary with most children accessing only a few hours of Kindergarten a week. Kindergarten programs are not connected to the schools. The lack of school readiness on the part of the majority of children when they first present at school is a key challenge that needs to be addressed.
8	Small primary schools and no competition	Education Queensland operates fifteen primary schools in communities and towns in the region. Remoteness and community size rule out alternatives to state provisioning of school services. The state schools service between 25 and 250 students in each community in years Preparatory to 7. The smaller schools are multi-year class schools. The student population at the two largest schools of Weipa and Cooktown is a mix of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students while the community schools are majority or exclusively Indigenous.
9	Limited secondary school options	There are two public high schools in the towns of Weipa and Cooktown. Most other communities are too far from these sites for daily travel so the majority of students in Cape York attend boarding schools outside of the region for their secondary schooling, or they attend boarding facilities attached to the high school at Weipa.
10	Poor attendance	Student attendance in Cape York is well below state and national averages and is a significant factor in the under-achievement of Cape York students. Data indicates that the average remote primary school Indigenous student could spend as little as half the amount of time in school as the average Australian student.[61]
11	Less time spent in school with a shorter school year	The school year in Cape York is one week shorter than other Queensland public schools to allow teacher more travel time when on breaks. In addition, students often miss days of school due to participation in officially endorsed festivals, sporting or other events. Including travel time, students may be absent from school for at least one week per event. Formal teaching rarely occurs on such trips.
12	Local community teachers	Indigenous adults can study teaching in their communities through the Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP), which is delivered out of Cairns by the Tropical North Queensland Institute of Technical and Further Education and James Cook University. Graduating teachers are awarded a Bachelor of Education and are able to be registered and teach in Queensland public schools. The quality of RATEP graduates is mixed,

[61] Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership, *Teach for Australia: A proposal to get great teachers into remote schools*, <http://www.cyi.org.au/> 2007.

	FEATURE	SUMMARY DESCRIPTION
		with some meeting mainstream teaching standards and some significantly below par. Because teachers tend to stay teaching in their home communities, the ability of schools and Education Queensland to replace community teachers who may not be competent – is virtually impossible.

Principles of Cape York education reform

The most fundamental of the principles underpinning the reform suggested in this position paper build on the experiences of school we have labelled 'No Excuses" schools. These principles are:

- "No Excuses" school culture
- "No Excuses" accountability for student learning achievement
- Effective instruction as the starting place and the central organising principle
- Teacher quality defined by instructional needs
- School leadership as instructional leadership
- Increased school time

However, this paper recognises the validity of the critique by Richard Rothstein and others of the notion that Instruction and school reform alone may not be sufficient to close the achievement gap for an entire disadvantaged class or social group. This is probably especially true in remote Indigenous Australia where social disadvantage is more severe than anywhere else in the Western world. "Increased school time" mentioned above is a feature of many "No Excuses" schools but is also a key principle of an agenda that aims to move beyond instruction reform and i) widen the definition of schooling ii) reform living conditions of families to enable children to turn up to school ready to learn. Reform principles informed by this school of thought include:

- Early childhood academic program
- Creating a domain for cultural transmission separate from the primary instruction domain
- Creating a domain for enriching extra-curricular activities
- Providing for special needs
- Parental engagement in education

"No Excuses" school culture

School culture is, together with explicit instruction, the most important consideration for Cape York Schools.

There is a great diversity of philosophical approaches to school cultures across schools that work successfully with disadvantaged students. However four strong themes have been identified as key planks for school cultures:

- Strong Boundaries and Discipline
- No Excuses
- Hard Work and No Shortcuts
- Aim for tertiary education

However, as David Whitman explains, the key to "No Excuses" policies "is not the behavioural requirements themselves but the monitoring and assistance provided to people to help them meet those expectations and, ideally, change their lifestyles for the better."[62]

Strong Boundaries and Discipline

The strong approach to behaviour management, personal responsibility and mutual respect was a universal characteristic of these schools, and it is worth repeating Jean Illingworth's description of the culture at Djarragun as exemplary of approaches across the range of schools:

> *First, we believe in discipline. We have strict codes of behaviour – not just for students but for staff as well. Our policy of tough love actually does work. Students feel safe in an environment where they know exactly what the boundaries are and how far they can push those boundaries. A disciplined environment makes it possible to actually get on with teaching instead of spending an inordinate amount of time on trying to discipline an unruly class.*
>
> *Second, we insist that everyone at Djarragun treats everyone else with respect and love. Again, trite words but loaded with meaning for students and staff alike. If you show respect to all and treat everyone with love, no energy will be wasted on negative pursuits that detract from achieving real goals.*

No Excuses

A school culture must be ever-vigilant against explanations becoming excuses

The "No Excuses" culture permeates the entire school culture: no-one is permitted to allow the disadvantaged background of students to stand in the way of educational attainment. A school culture must be ever-vigilant against explanations becoming excuses. Explanations may be correct, but rather than inducing resignation to certain realities they should instead spur greater commitment and renewed strategies aimed at defying and overcoming these realities. Resignation to failure or under-achievement is anathema to a "No Excuses" school culture. A "No Excuses" school culture is based on the conviction that poverty and social background must never be allowed to become destiny.

Hard Work and No Shortcuts

If you are way behind in your education then you need to work harder to catch up, is their relentless message to students and parents. This means more effort, more time, harder work. Developing a culture of perseverance, deferred gratification, respect for effort – is key. Otherwise there are two alternative approaches. Firstly, everyone can accept explanations as to why disadvantaged children are so far behind their

[62] David Whitman, *Sweating the Small Stuff: Inner-City Schools and the New Paternalism*, Thomas B. Fordham Institute Press, Washington DC 2008.

even as Djarragun services the very basement of the student educational market, they have built a "pedestal" that stands above the basement. They may receive students from the "sink", but they do not operate a "sink school"

advantaged peers and how this happens – and resign ourselves to this "reality". Secondly, we can promise children (and their parents) that achievement gaps can be closed through current levels of effort and shortcuts: and this will be a lie. By definition, children who are behind have further to travel and will have to work harder if the aim is for them to catch up.

Aim for tertiary education

The goal of charter schools like KIPP is unequivocally clear: all of their students are heading to "college". In other words all of their students are heading to tertiary studies. This aim is such a central feature of the school cultures that no-one – not the students, not their teachers and not their parents – harbour any lesser expectation than the aim of preparing students to go on to tertiary study. In fact this aim is such a universal expectation, that anyone who might be proceeding on a different assumption will need to answer why. The "we're going for tertiary" culture means that everyone understands that tertiary university and vocational qualifications are absolutely essential tickets to overcoming disadvantage.

Every Child

There is a fifth principle of strong school cultures, which is inherent to many of the admirable "No Excuses" schools, but which has been brought into more explicit relief by our work in Cape York Partnerships: that is the commitment to Every Child. The commitment to Every Child is especially important in a context where the wastage of Indigenous lives through poor education is a tragedy. Poor education and poor health leads to poor incomes, high incarceration rates, overwhelming social problems – and ultimately, premature death. Until we make a commitment to Every Child then this cycle of disadvantage will not be broken.

Disadvantaged schools need not be sink schools

The Indigenous students whose educational prospects are the subject of this paper, are at the very bottom of the Queensland education system. There are no students whose circumstances are more disadvantaged, and no schools that are more disadvantaged. And yet strong school cultures can avoid such schools being "sink schools" or "residual schools" where students who can find no other opportunity for an education, are dumped. Noel Pearson believes the example of Djarragun College demonstrates that schools servicing disadvantaged students need not be sink schools. Pearson contrasted Djarragun with a similar school in another regional city which serviced the same Indigenous student clientele as Djarragun. The schools are almost identical except that one is failing and the other is inspirational. The difference Pearson argues is in the school cultures which their respective educators have developed. Whereas one college has all of the hallmarks of a ghetto school, the other is its opposite.

Pearson explained that, even as Djarragun services the very basement of the student educational market, they have built a "pedestal" that stands above the basement. They may receive students from the "sink", but they do not operate a "sink school". They have constructed a school that has built its own foundations rising high above the basement.

An Indigenous "No Excuses" school will not jettison its students

Djarragun's approach is to create a disciplined environment where clear and strong boundaries are established, and children are given every support to grow within this community. However, the building of a platform above the sink does not depend on the ability to jettison the most difficult children. As Jean Illingworth says:

> *Students who fail a course, who fail to comply with set down rules or who fail to attend school regularly know exactly where they have failed. They also know they are not condemned. Djarragun is the school of twenty chances and if you use up your twenty chances we will no doubt give you twenty more.*

"No Excuses" accountability for student learning achievement

A fundamental principle of "No Excuses" schools is the key commitment to accountability for all. That means that the performance of the school, the teachers, the students, their parents and the community are all measured by reference to one thing: student learning achievement.

Currently, a school's performance can be measured by the "annual report card" on student achievement in the national literacy and numeracy benchmark testing (NAPLAN). When the majority of students in disadvantaged schools fail to reach even the minimum requirements on such tests (as is routinely the case in the majority of Cape York schools) it raises the question as to why they are allowed to continue to operate. Clearly, failing school provisioning cannot continue *ad infinitum*. Parents and communities have the right to insist that alternative education delivery be made available when the existing provisioning is failing.

Every teacher should be held accountable for their student's performance through assessment regimes. Students should be tested regularly to ensure that those who are failing to make the required gains are promptly given additional support and do not move on until they have mastered specific skills. When classes show ongoing failure across the cohort, teachers should be given the right support to improve their practice. Instructional failure should not be allowed to continue.

Every student should be held accountable for their behaviour and their commitment to learning. The expectations parents and teachers have should be positively reinforced to students and consistent consequences should apply. Families should be accountable for ensuring their children are at school every day and are school ready. Parents should be supported to fulfil their obligations with school attendance and school readiness. There need to be consistent consequences for non-compliance, including the sanctioning of welfare benefits to ensure money is used directly for children's welfare.

Effective instruction as the starting place and the central organising principle

The most important insight from America is that effective instruction has the single most profound effect on a child's learning in the classroom. It is critical that students are taught with a methodology that is scientifically proven to achieve learning for all students regardless of the demographic group they represent, or the nature of their learning difficulties. The high turnover of teachers, the strong likelihood that they have not been fully equipped to deliver effective instruction, and the high prevalence of inexperienced teachers will be unavoidable realities for Cape York schools – therefore,

to the greatest extent possible, the method of instruction must be capable of success notwithstanding these realities.

Teacher quality defined by instructional needs

The measure for teacher quality is the capacity to deliver effective instruction. Disadvantaged students especially need teachers who are well trained and committed to delivering effective instruction and ensuring that all children learn to mastery a set of skills that are needed for the children to succeed in secondary school.

Cape York is perennially challenged by its remoteness, which has three relevant implications. Firstly, it makes teacher recruitment a challenge. Secondly, it means that externally recruited teachers can only be expected for limited periods (more than three years would be better than expected). Thirdly, teachers untrained in the delivery of effective instruction will require effective professional development support. And the instructional program must be capable of being picked up by teachers through brief professional development programs, assuming relatively regular teacher turnover.

School leadership as instructional leadership

Principals need more capacity to recruit their own team and select teachers based on their capacity to show commitment to the school's instructional and school model. Principals need to make a dedicated commitment to both instructional leadership and leading accountability and high expectations.

School time

As noted above, the school year is currently shorter in remote schools. This policy should be reversed. The origin of this practice was to allow extra time for teachers to relocate to and from demanding postings in remote communities. However, student learning should not be compromised to make remote postings more palatable. Instead, the school year in remote communities needs to be longer, for two reasons. First, to catch up, remote students probably need, at least initially, a combination of the increased efficiency of instruction and the approach of organisations like KIPP (increased time spent in school). Secondly, absences from school for legitimate reasons (such as funerals) will possibly be of slightly longer duration for geographic and cultural reasons, even if school attendance policies are strictly implemented.

Early childhood academic program

Closing the learning gap between Cape York Indigenous children and their peers in the Australian mainstream will require an academic program for early childhood learning ensuring that Cape York children can receive the same learning development opportunities as their peers. While much more needs to be done to ensure that Indigenous parents can access parenting programs and learn how to better support their young children, there is also a practical education response. The American experience indicates that parents are comfortable with their children starting school and participating in formal learning from three years of age. The exact number of hours needs to be resolved but a minimum of three hours per day for three year olds is showing significant results in American schools. It is critical that this is delivered as a part of the school, not a separate institution, so that the child's development is aligned and tracked to enable them the smoothest and most successful transition into later years.

An early start with an academic program is particularly important for Indigenous children because they can be expected to be behind in their English language development – a pre-requisite to reading. Where the aim is not to displace traditional languages from the home environment (and in the village environment), there is a particular need to focus on English language development in the Early Childhood phase. Otherwise Indigenous children will start primary schooling far behind their peers.

Creating a domain for cultural transmission separate from the primary instruction domain

Indigenous culture should not compete for class time with Western education. Communities should be supported to harness their cultural transmission activities in a separate, government-supported cultural domain. Such an approach would provide the valuable family engagement vital to the success of a "No Excuses" school. There may be some overlap with the primary school domain, but the core learning hours need to be reserved for the attainment of basic academic skills.

Creating a domain for enriching extra-curricular activities

Cape York children lack the opportunities of urban mainstream children for enriching extra-curricular activities. No doubt there is considerable positive feedback between the learning of basic skills in school and such activities. The learning development of Cape York Indigenous children will be significantly advanced the more opportunities they have available to them. Until Cape York communities have developed a stronger voluntary and professional sector that can satisfy children's needs for organised cultural and sports activities, public school provisioning needs to step in and take responsibility for this domain.

Providing for special needs

Every Indigenous school-aged child should have access to regular health checks to determine what health issues they have and ensure they are receiving appropriate treatment. Health clinics should collaborate with the school to establish a plan to follow up all child illnesses related to absences. Welfare reform programs such as the nutrition program should be linked in to schools to increase opportunities for the improvement of children's health.

Parental engagement in education

The primary role of parents in schools is to ensure children are prepared for schools, attend regularly, are on time and have completed their homework.

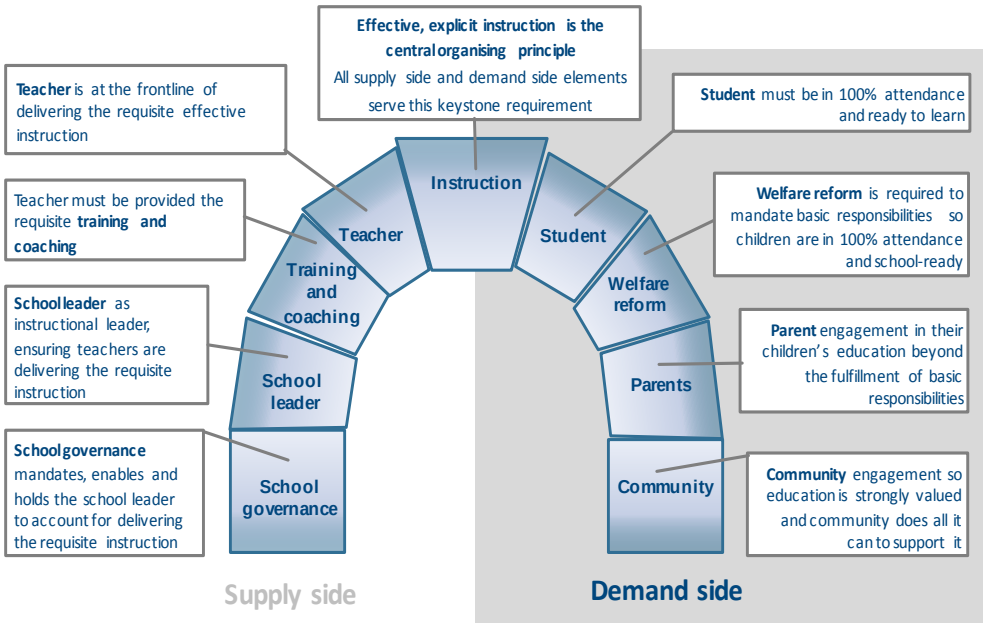
The main expectation of parents is that they commit to ensure their child regularly attends school all year including, assist their child with their homework, limit the time children spend watching television and doing other things not conducive to learning and discipline, and ensure their child complies with the dress code. Of course, schools should encourage parental participation in school activities as well.

Our plan 1: Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy

The elements of education reform

Our metaphor is that the entrance to educational success is supported by a stone archway where the building blocks of supply and demand have been manoeuvred into position (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: The elements of education reform



The keystone to this archway is not primarily the intrinsic qualities of the teacher, nor is it the characteristics of the student – rather it is effective instruction. Optimally all of the elements of the archway need to be in place.

Options for alternative school providers to failing schools in remote communities

There are a number of options for alternative school providers to failing schools in remote communities. These options are:

- To establish independent schools
- To invite church schools to operate schools in remote communities
- To make provision for charter schools along similar lines to the United States
- To establish a specialist provider within the public education system

Independent schools

There are a few independent schools in Queensland, such as The Murri School established in Brisbane in 1986, and the Wadja Wadja High School in Woorabinda established in 1984.

Whilst some independent community schools appear to have done well, it is a mixed bag. Community schools, whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous have a mixed history. They are particularly susceptible to "Girls and Boys Own Adventures in Education" ending in tears.

Whilst there are existing avenues to establish independent schools, this option does not lend itself to a scaled up solution for wider school reform

Whilst there are avenues to establish independent schools, this option does not lend itself to a scaled up solution for wider Indigenous school reform. This option is not proposed here.

Church schools

There is a possibility that Churches could be re-engaged in operating schools in remote communities. Or urban church schools could establish satellite campuses in remote communities. Since the 1960s Churches have largely retreated from operating schools in their former missions, with the public system taking them over. The example of St Andrew's Cathedral School establishing a satellite campus in Redfern, Sydney, is one example of this kind of model.

Whilst this is certainly an option, particularly for those communities that are affiliated with particular denominations, and with particular church schools, it is not likely to be a solution that could be scaled up for more than a few communities. This option is not proposed here.

Charter schools

There is no legislation enabling charter schools in Australia. The prospect of charter school legislation being promulgated in Queensland, or in any other Australian jurisdiction, we judge to be remote. It would require a significant and potentially protracted process of advocacy if such legislation were to become part of the Australian education scene. The limitations of the almost 20 years of experience with charter schools in the United States – that perhaps 20 per cent of the schools that were established achieved the ambitions of the charter school movement – would need to be taken into account in the event that a similar approach is taken in Australia. That charter schools invite educational adventurists, will be cited as a key risk with

repeating the American experience in this country. It can be expected that the same sources of resistance to charter schools in the public education lobby will be encountered in Australia as in the United States. The charter school option is not proposed here.

Specialist public school provider

We instead propose the development of a specialist school provider, the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy, under the aegis of an Academy Board, located within but with independent jurisdiction within, the Queensland public education system. This specialist public school provider would utilise existing public school facilities and (following an establishment phase which enables the introduction of key instructional reforms) would be funded on the same basis as other public schools for providing a mainstream education to Indigenous students. Additional resources for delivery of cultural and extra-curricular domains would be sourced from governmental and private sources. These three domains are explained later in this plan.

Such a specialist public school provider would be established under specific Queensland legislation. The legislation would carve out a specialist jurisdiction to enable Indigenous educational reform analogous to the Queensland and Australian Governments' establishment of the Family Responsibilities Commission under Queensland's *Family Responsibilities Commission Act*. Just as the Family Responsibilities Commission is a specialist jurisdiction which enables the operation of a special welfare regime that operates in respect of the four communities that come under its aegis, so too would the proposed Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy be a distinct jurisdiction within the public education system.

the public system would operate a parallel provisioning system: standard public schools and specialist schools

Schools operating under this specialist jurisdiction would have all of the same flexibilities – and accountabilities – applicable to charter schools, but would not need to operate outside of the public system. Instead the public system would operate a parallel provisioning system: standard public schools and specialist schools operated within the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy governed by the Academy Board.

The concept of a Cape York Academy

The following is a broad outline of the concept:

1. A Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy Board would be appointed and given authority by the Education (General Provisions) Act *(Qld)*. The Board would comprise a majority Indigenous community representatives with appropriate qualifications and independent representatives with educational and business expertise.
2. The Academy Board would be chaired by an Indigenous community representative with appropriate qualifications, who would agree with the Minister for Education on the appointment of the remaining Board members. The Chairperson would have similar jurisdictional coverage as the Regional Manager of an educational district within Education Queensland.
3. The Academy Board would operate a Central Academy – equivalent to State Colleges – to support a network of school campuses called Local Academy Campuses.

4. The Academy Board would have full jurisdictional control over the management of schools, including curriculum and staffing. It would have the capacity of full fiduciary school boards to determine the operation of schools within its jurisdiction.
5. Where Indigenous schools in remote areas are failing, then parent communities should have the right to request that the Academy Board provide an alternative supply of educational services to their community.
6. The Academy Board would operate two schools in 2010 and an agreed program for rolling out further schools would be negotiated with governments. The concept is aimed at enabling a scaling up of the proposed model as it is proven.
7. The performance of schools within the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy should be reported annually and a comprehensive and independent evaluation undertaken every five years. There would be clear criteria enabling a decision to continue or discontinue school provisioning every five years.
8. There should be clear legislative criteria requiring an evaluation after 10 years as to whether the concept of school provisioning by the Cape York Academy should be continued or discontinued.

Much detail remains to be developed in relation to the concept, which will be undertaken as part of a detailed feasibility study and business plan.

Reform in the supply of education cannot be achieved through partnerships

The key principles of the reform: independence of the Cape York Academy and parental choice

The two main differences between the current system for education provisioning in Cape York and the proposed reform are the establishment of the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy as an independent jurisdiction within Education Queensland and the introduction of the right of parent communities to stop provisioning of failing schooling. This paper contends that the history of education in Cape York provides a strong case for these two key changes.

Too many cooks: partnerships in the supply of education are too hard

It is now clear, after many years of experience seeking, negotiating, securing and managing a partnership between Cape York Partnerships through its *Every Child Is Special* program and Education Queensland, that partnerships – particularly in the supply of education – are too hard. Alignment and cooperation in the implementation of agreed partnerships is extremely effort intensive, and too much time and resources are required to both develop and implement partnerships.

Reform in the supply of education cannot be achieved through partnerships. Those responsible for the supply of education should be left to implement their preferred philosophies and approaches, provided that proper mechanisms of accountability are in place. Proper implementation of reform is hard enough for a single party to implement, without having to work with a partner whose preferred philosophies and approaches are divergent – and indeed, at odds.

the parents and carers in remote communities in Cape York Peninsula whose children are receiving a continuing supply of a failing education through failing schools must be able to choose to stop the ongoing failure

It is possible – as has been shown by Cape York Partnerships' introduction of the MULTILIT literacy intervention into the Coen State School and its subsequent rollout as part of the Cape York Welfare Reform trial – to achieve reforms in the supply side of education, through partnerships. However, the effectiveness of implementation is compromised because the constant efforts and resources required to build, maintain and mend abrasive relationships are too consuming and distracting.

Indigenous parent communities must have the ability to choose to stop failing school provision to their children

At the end of the day the parents and carers in remote communities in Cape York Peninsula whose children are receiving a continuing supply of a failing education through failing schools must be able to choose to stop the ongoing failure.

There are two responses which must be considered when parents and Indigenous community leaders confront the fact that the school provisioning in their community is failing.

The first response is "we now have new reforms which will fix up the failures of the past. We just need time for the reforms to yield success". This is the Groundhog Day policy response. This has been the response for at least three decades now.

The second response is "we are making incremental changes because we have been doing good things, and things are improving. We just need time for the gap to be closed." Only if there is evidence of decisive upward trends should this response be at all acceptable to the parents whose children's futures are at stake.

Leaving the current suppliers to continue to provide failing education to Indigenous children must come to an end.

Our plan 2: Welfare Reform supporting school attendance and child welfare

The plan for Indigenous education reform proposed in this paper is premised on the institution of certain minimum welfare reforms of the kind being implemented in the Cape York Welfare Reform trials at Aurukun, Hope Vale, Coen and Mossman Gorge. The minimum reforms needed concern parental obligations around school attendance and child protection – and a supervisory mechanism such as the Family Responsibilities Commission. Without such welfare reforms the education reforms proposed in this paper would be severely compromised.

For children whose parents are unable to or who do not see it as a priority to support them in their education, welfare reforms ensure that they are nevertheless assured that they have access to an education

Why welfare reform?

In the archway education model described in the previous section, we place "welfare reform" as immediately necessary in order to achieve student attendance. This is of a higher priority than parental and community engagement and support. It may seem wrong to place a higher priority on welfare reforms than parental and community engagement, so the following explanation is warranted.

In disadvantaged (and indeed dysfunctional) communities and neighbourhoods the challenges facing parental and community engagement will always be significant. Many parents and community members will be engaged from the beginning, and with good "demand development" initiatives many more can be readily engaged – however it is in the nature of poverty and disadvantage that there will be problems and challenges, and that the home lives of many of the students will impact negatively on their educational development. A welfare reform approach will ensure that every child has the minimum requirements necessary in order to succeed in education. For children whose parents are unable to or who do not see it as a priority to support them in their education, welfare reforms ensure that they are nevertheless assured that they have access to an education which gives them a chance for a better future. Rather than continuing the cycle in which their parents are trapped.

Welfare reform is about obliging every adult who receives income support from the Australian government to fulfil certain minimum obligations in return for that support. These minimum obligations concern school attendance and school readiness. This means that no matter what personal or social problems there are in the lives of adults, these do not excuse parents and guardians from their obligations to their children.

The cycle of disadvantage and dysfunction will not be broken without these reforms.

Minimum welfare reform requirements

The comprehensive Welfare Reform trial is currently taking place in four communities in Cape York. The alternative school provider however is intended to be offered to all communities, regardless of their participation in Welfare Reform and indeed regardless of the social state of the community; the proposed reform is envisaged to be able to carry all children over community dysfunction to secondary and tertiary study and working careers even if there is no wholehearted engagement by all parents.

However, certain central elements of welfare reform need to be effected one way or another. In Welfare Reform communities, the Family Responsibilities Commission intervenes when children do not attend school or are neglected and not school ready. The Commission also makes recommendations in relation to community members who are the subject of investigation by the Department of Child Safety. In communities that are not within the jurisdiction of the Commission but wish to participate in the Remote Alternative Public Schools reform, minimum policies for school attendance, school readiness and child protection will need to be put in place.

School attendance

certain central elements of welfare reform need to be effected one way or another

A linkage will need to be made between welfare payments and school attendance. This policy could be implemented via Centrelink. Second, a system of school attendance case management as stringent as the system currently being implemented by Cape York Partnership's Attendance Case Management Framework needs to be in place. Such a system would involve a tightening up of reporting and tracking systems, and could be managed by the specialist school provider itself and carried out by school employees.

School readiness

The minimum requirements of school readiness policies are that every child turns up to school, well fed, clothed and equipped, and well rested: ready to learn. One of the "triggers" for intervention by the Family Responsibilities Commission involves any notice relating to child protection and neglect. Service support through parenting programs and Family Income Management, as well as Student Education Trusts, can assist parents and families to make solutions for school readiness.

Child protection

The Welfare Reform Trial provides for additional mechanisms for protective intervention in cases where children are susceptible to abuse or neglect. By making child protection notices a "trigger" for intervention, there is opportunity for early intervention – particularly where, as in the great majority of cases, there is neglect of children. The safety and welfare of the children is an inescapable minimum requirement for successful education, and all measures must be taken to ensure it.

the essential core of the relationship between the teacher and the student is instruction and whether it is effective

Our Plan 3: Explicit instruction

Instruction as the keystone

The keystone to the reform plan proposed in this report is to get the instruction right. It is *an instruction method that works* that we place at the centre of our approach.

In our view the essential core of the relationship between the teacher and the student is instruction and whether it is effective. The essence of the teacher – student relationship is not its personal dimension (as important as that is), rather it is the effectiveness of the instruction.[63] A profound personal connection and pastoral diligence are not what is at the core of the requisite relationship, rather it is effective instruction. Personal connection and pastoral diligence are necessary but not sufficient. Without effective instruction they will not close the achievement gap.

Explicit instruction

Furthermore, Instruction is the one factor over which the school has complete control (whilst it has little or limited ability to influence social and economic disadvantage, cultural differences and student attributes). Explicit instruction is therefore the ultimate "No Excuses" approach to education. It is based on teacher and school accountability for learning outcomes, and on the principle that there are scientifically established methods of effective instruction which, if used with fidelity, will produce learning success. Whether a student learns is not only a question of teacher commitment or effort, but also of whether the teacher has employed effective methods of teaching.

Explicit teaching of reading was supported by the Australian Government's National Inquiry into the Teaching of Reading in 2005. The report of the Inquiry concluded that "the incontrovertible finding from an extensive body of local and international evidence-based literacy research is that for children in the early years of schooling to be able to link their knowledge of spoken language to their knowledge of written

[63] When people reflect on teacher quality there is a tendency to think of the small handful of teachers one has had in one's life with whom one had a special relationship or who had a particular influence on one's personal or intellectual development. The fact that there are exceptional teachers and that there are particular teachers with whom one has enjoyed a profound and rewarding relationship should not however overshadow a proper conception of what is a quality teacher. A quality teacher is foremost someone who provides effective instruction. The recipient of a good education, when reflecting on one's teachers, will often not remember the larger number of teachers who provided him or her with quality instruction, and tend to remember those teachers of exceptional talent or with whom one enjoyed a special relationship.

language, they must first master the alphabetic code … they must be taught explicitly, systematically, early and well."[64]

The main features of explicit instruction are:

- Evidence-based: Uses only scientifically evidence-based methods and materials
- Foundational skills: Focuses on literacy and numeracy
- Homogeneous grouping: Students are grouped and taught at their ability level
- Sequencing: Lessons are carefully articulated, with cognitive skills broken into small units, sequenced deliberately and taught explicitly
- Accountability: Programs are implemented with fidelity and students are regularly tested
- Data-driven decisions: Test results determine when students are moved to groups for instruction at their level
- Pacing: Material is neither too easy nor too difficult and teachers maintain student engagement by presenting information fluently
- Clear directions: Teachers maintain clarity by limiting directions to essential information
- Correction: Students are monitored daily and receive corrective feedback
- Mastery: Components of lessons are taught and retaught until mastery is achieved
- Remediation: Remediation is implemented immediately when required
- Positive reinforcement: Student behaviour is managed with positive reinforcement
- Professional development: Teachers and aides are trained and receive ongoing coaching

Misconceptions about explicit instruction

There is considerable resistance against explicit instruction in the education sector. This opposition is due to misconceptions. Explicit instruction is believed to be about rote learning and is not thought to develop students' creativity and comprehension.

Increased fluency and accuracy leads to improved comprehension as the student is no longer using all his or her mental energy trying to work out the most basic aspects of the material

However, explicit instruction lessons are highly engaging and require active participation from students to maintain their interest and attention. The programs provide students with more skills and information to use in a creative application and more experience. Comprehension skills are emphasised from the early stages of reading. Increased fluency and accuracy leads to improved comprehension as the student is no longer using all his or her mental energy trying to work out the most basic aspects of the material, such as the words of a text.

Another serious misconception is the notion that explicit instruction devalues the teaching profession and teachers' professional knowledge. Explicit instruction is said to leave little room for teacher creativity, and not allow teachers to use a variety of methods to address the needs of children with different learning styles and abilities. It is correct that teachers who implement explicit instruction are supported with scripted remarks, questions, and signals; however teachers present the script in their own teaching style and use their professional decision-making to respond to students' needs. Once students have mastered the basics, teachers can alter the sequence of instruction and expand students' learning experience through projects and activities.

[64] Australian Government, Department of Education, Science and Training, *Teaching Reading: Report and Recommendations*, National Inquiry into Teaching of Literacy, Canberra 2008.

In Australia, explicit instruction methods have been used successfully

Explicit instruction is equally effective with inexperienced teachers who require training and experienced teachers. The small-group, face-to-face instruction model makes it easier for teachers and assistants who have just learnt the method not to become overwhelmed. Explicit instruction programs are non-categorical and provide a systematic starting point for teaching nearly all children basic skills and knowledge. In addition, teachers who receive explicit instruction training are likely to learn teaching skills and classroom behaviour management techniques that they have not learnt in teaching college.

Successful explicit instruction programs

In Australia, explicit instruction methods have been used successfully. The implementation of MULTILIT and MINILIT programs (operated by Cape York Partnership) in Cape York has been described in this paper. Another example is the work of John Fleming in Victoria. When John Fleming at Bellfield Primary School implemented explicit instruction in 1996 85 per cent of his students were below the state wide benchmarks in literacy and numeracy. By 2005 it was one of the best performing schools in the state. John Fleming has now been hired to implement his explicit instruction approach in Haileybury College across all three campuses.

During the research for this position paper, Cape York Partnerships has been particularly impressed with the explicit instruction method "Direct Instruction". Developed by Siegfried Engelmann and colleagues of the National Institute for Direct Instruction (NIFDI) at the University of Oregon, Direct Instruction materials are published by SRA/McGraw-Hill and have been widely used in schools across the world – including in Queensland schools. Further detail on Direct Instruction is provided in Appendix 2.

Training teachers in effective explicit instruction

Whichever explicit instruction method is adopted for Cape York, training of teachers in effective instruction will be the key to success. The first issue that needs to be analysed is the relationship between teacher quality and quality of instruction.

Australian economist Andrew Leigh, who has produced important research on teacher quality and the decline in aptitude of contemporary teachers compared to decades ago,[65] has introduced to Australian debate the hypothesis that teacher quality is the most important determinant of student academic performance.[66] Thus much reform discussion is focused on how the best and brightest teachers can be recruited to the cause of educating the most disadvantaged students.

[65] Andrew Leigh and Chris Ryan, "How and why has teacher quality changed in Australia?", *Australian Economic Review* Vol. 41 2008.

[66] Steven Rivkin, Eric Hanushek and John Kain, "Teachers, schools, and academic achievement", *Econometrica* Vol. 73 2005; Jonah Rockoff, "The impact of individual teachers on student achievement: Evidence from panel data", *American Economic Review* Vol. 94 2004; Ronald Ehrenberg and Dominic Brewer, "Do school and teacher characteristics matter? Evidence from High School and Beyond", *Economics of Education Review* Vol. 13 1994.

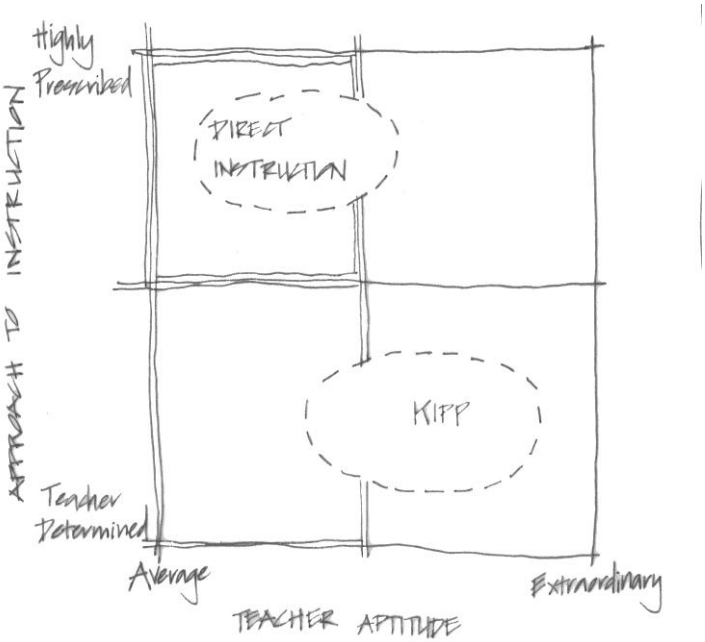
To close the achievement gap in Cape York, every teacher must necessarily deliver effective instruction all the time. This paper therefore recommends mandating an explicit instruction method

This reform plan agrees with the centrality of teacher quality. However what makes for teacher quality is not considered in isolation from instruction. Whether the teacher is equipped and able to deliver effective instruction is crucial to the question of quality. This is the formula upon which the reform plan set out in this report is premised:

$$T + EI = QT$$

Teacher + Effective Instruction = Quality Teacher

This is a different interpretation of teacher quality from those that focus on academic aptitude. For those who separate out instruction from the qualities of teachers (academic aptitude, experience) then academic aptitude will be critical. The view we have adopted is one which focuses on instruction as the key factor in determining teacher quality.



It is an interpretation of teacher quality that holds that teachers of average aptitude, if equipped to deliver effective direct instruction, are capable of high quality teaching. It also means that teachers of above-average aptitude who are not equipped to deliver effective direct instruction, are not guaranteed to deliver high quality teaching.

Among the surveyed approaches in the United States, KIPP Charter Schools on the one hand and schools implementing Direct Instruction on the other hand represented two contrasting approaches on the question of teacher aptitude. The Direct Instruction approach is premised on the proven fact that teachers of mediocre aptitude can achieve good results when they become proficient in prescribed teaching (and indeed when they are experienced and do not need a script in order to deliver effective instruction, although their effectiveness can be enhanced by using a field-tested, Direct Instruction program).

The KIPP franchise schools generally seek to hire teachers of high aptitude, but on the other hand afford teachers a high degree of autonomy.

To close the achievement gap in Cape York, every teacher must necessarily deliver effective instruction all the time. This paper therefore recommends mandating an explicit instruction method such as Direct Instruction which has demonstrated ability to turn teachers of average aptitude into effective instructors and teachers of basic academic skills.

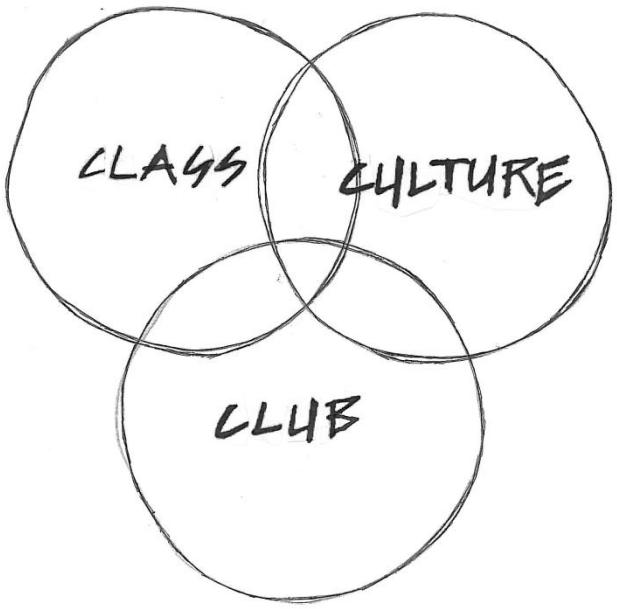
Our plan 4: The best of both worlds in culture and languages

Three domains: Class, Culture, Club

This position paper suggests the establishment of a reformed instruction domain solely dedicated to explicit instruction of basic mainstream skills, and two new domains for which the alternative public school provider would take overarching responsibility: a domain for cultural transmission and a domain for concerted cultivation.

We propose to call the reformed primary instruction domain and the two new domains Class, Culture and Club respectively. The missions of the domains are:

> **Class** – to close the gap in literacy and numeracy without delay. Cape York children who start school when the remote Indigenous schools provider commences work shall have achieved educational parity with their mainstream peers when they leave Year 7.



Culture – to enable Cape York children to become literate (particularly digitally literate) in their own culture and to support cultural transmission between older generations and these children, and to enable proficiency in Indigenous Australian languages.

Club – to give Cape York children access to enriching activities of the same quality as children of urban families who practice concerted cultivation.

The easy-to-remember alliterating names Class, Culture and Club were chosen to increase the likelihood that young students understand and internalise the underlying ideas and use the names: “What did you do in Class today?” and “I’m going to Club now” and “We will be working on Grandfather’s biography in Culture this week”.

these are the three areas of child development that need to be heavily structured and supported to lift the present and future generations of Cape York children from their disadvantage

The domains should not be thought of as spatially separate areas; the separation is largely temporal and conceptual. However, the main purpose of institutionalising the proposed structure is to establish the notion that these are the three areas of child development that need to be heavily structured and supported to lift the present and future generations of Cape York children from their disadvantage.

A one-sided effort in the area of elementary skills acquisition runs the risk of becoming yet another disappointment in Indigenous education. This paper argues that evidenced-based, rigorously implemented explicit instruction can make disadvantaged students literate and numerate to mainstream standards. But the introduction of a rigorous explicit instruction program, without engagement of the community in a dialogue about preservation of culture, the benefits of education and orbiting, and without concerted cultivation opportunities, would probably fail to build sufficient demand for education and therefore not achieve equitable life prospects for Cape York children.

Detailed policies need to be developed to afford remote Indigenous students the same opportunities as urban students. The organisation of these policies into three domains will facilitate a balanced implementation.

In remote Australia as much time as possible in primary school needs to be devoted to numeracy and English literacy

The case for Class – and English-language, explicit instruction domain

In remote Australia as much time as possible in primary school needs to be devoted to numeracy and English literacy.

For at least the next decade, each new year-group of students in Cape York will on average be at a disadvantage when they start school compared to mainstream students. It is not conceivable that Cape York students could close the achievement gap in basic skills unless all high-quality time – mornings and early afternoons – are devoted to instruction that is tailored to the needs and abilities of the students.

As discussed above, the instruction method for Cape York students needs to be an explicit instruction method. Explicit instruction can address the needs of the majority who would be low progress learners in a standard school. Provision for middle and top level learners can be made to progress at their relevant ability levels.

English is currently the language of instruction in all Cape York Peninsula schools. The enormous socio-economic gap between the peoples of Australia – unparalleled in the Western world – necessitates a continued and intensified effort to teach Cape York students Australia's majority language to mastery.

However, there is a tension between the Indigenous minorities' right to their own languages and their right to a fair share of our nation's wealth. Overseas it is not unusual for national minorities to receive all or some of their primary education in their

poor policy has made the large majority of students almost "non-lingual" in terms of their ability to read and write

own languages. But international examples of primary education in small minority languages (and sometimes even secondary and tertiary education as in the Basque areas of Spain) do not provide useful comparisons or precedents for the Australian situation. In places such as the Outer Hebrides in Scotland where small and – to put it crassly – economically irrelevant minority languages are the chosen media of instruction for the ideologically motivated purpose of making students bilingual, the minorities do not suffer the extreme disadvantage of Indigenous peoples in Australia. In the particular circumstances of Indigenous Australians, integration into the real economy is the paramount priority.

A further reason why most Indigenous languages of Cape York cannot in the near future be the main medium of communication in the Class domain is the Federal and State governments' historic and ongoing neglect of Australia's native languages. The literature – academic as well as popular – in and about the languages, the use of the languages in domains other than the domestic sphere, government agencies' use of the languages – all these vital areas of language policy are under-developed.

Primary school teachers in Cape York will not be able to develop the capacity to take responsibility for supporting transmission of language culture in the foreseeable future. Most teachers will be non-Indigenous people from southern regions with little knowledge of Cape York's cultures and languages.

Finally, English is the most suitable language in Cape York primary schools because the shift to (local varieties of) English is quite advanced among students; many children would today learn an Indigenous Australian language as a second language.

English a pragmatic choice

The above considerations are all pragmatic – not a fundamental judgment about the suitability of Cape York's languages as media of instruction, or the desirability of instruction in Cape York's Indigenous languages. Aboriginal languages have been and are the medium of instruction in some Australian schools where Indigenous children's grasp of English is so poor compared to their understanding of an Indigenous language that instruction exclusively in English would be detrimental to their academic progress. Helen Hughes and Mark Hughes of the Centre for Independent Studies – a think tank supporting conservative and liberal policies – did not in their recent discussion paper[67] rule out bilingual Indigenous schools, if parents demand such schools.

Hughes and Hughes's criticise bilingual education in Northern Territory bilingual schools because poor policy has made the large majority of students almost "non-lingual" in terms of their ability to read and write. The criticism of Hughes and Hughes is not aimed at the use of Aboriginal languages as such.

Low numbers of speakers, absence of a literary tradition, lack of a terminology to describe modern realities, declining transmission – none of these factors disqualify a language from being the main language of primary school instruction. Some of the languages of the Sami minority of Northern Europe are as small as Australian languages, and have a similar history of restricted use, but are nonetheless languages

[67] Helen Hughes and Mark Hughes, *Revisiting Indigenous Education* (CIS Policy Monograph 94), The Centre for Independent Studies, Sydney 2009.

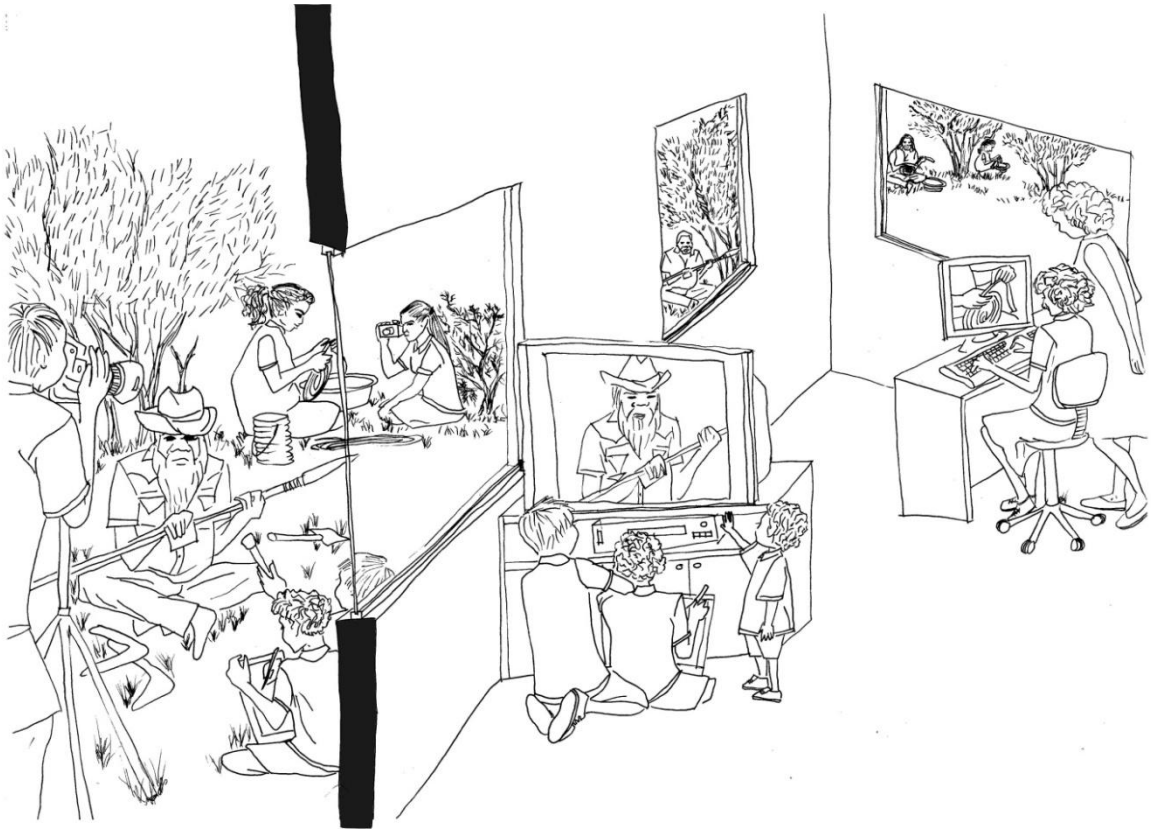
of instruction in public education. A member of the Swedish Indigenous Sami minority said:

> The main reason I chose the Sami school for my children is that they should have a sense of belonging and be secure in their identity. I went to school in the '70s when Sami language was not allowed in school … I feel that I lost part of my identity when I didn't learn the language. I am happy that my children are given the opportunity to learn the language…[68]

It is an indictment of successive governments that there is probably not one child of English-speaking Indigenous parents in Queensland who has been helped by government policies to reclaim his or her ancestral language. However, this historical neglect cannot be remedied within the domain of primary teaching in Cape York schools . It is doubtful that Cape York schools could achieve the goal of making orally bilingual students literate in English up to mainstream standards as well as literate in an Indigenous language within the limited hours of primary school instruction. A structured culture and language transmission domain for which government takes overarching responsibility needs to be established.

there is probably not one child of English-speaking Indigenous parents in Queensland who has been helped by government policies to reclaim his or her ancestral language

[68] Kristin Lindqvist, "Sameskolan stärker barnens identitet", http://www.skolverket.se 2007.



The case for Culture – a digitised cultural transmission domain

The preservation of Australia's Indigenous cultures is a goal in its own right – an indispensable aspect of reconciliation.

Indigenous culture and languages are being weakened at an alarming rate in Cape York Peninsula. This does not mean that Indigenous people are indifferent to their heritage. In the experience of Cape York Partnerships', one of the challenges facing school reform in Cape York is to overcome the fear that enrolment of Indigenous students in secondary schools outside Cape York will lead to assimilation and permanent migration of young people away from their home communities and ancestral lands – and a loss of cultural identity.

There is an apparent contradiction between these two contentions. On the one hand transmission of culture and language is said to be declining. On the other hand it is claimed that apprehension about assimilation is a widespread sentiment. Why would cultural transmission be at risk if people value their culture?

Cape York people's concern could be construed as a reluctance to accept demographic change, akin to the dejection felt by non-Indigenous rural Australians who witness their home regions being depopulated and economically depressed.

But in fact culture is central to Cape York people's thinking about the effects of migration and education. Despite problems with cultural transmission, attachment to the *Bama* way and the Islander way – modified to modern times as they inevitably will be – remains strong.

Cape York communities may take a *reactive* stance for their culture, but communities currently have limited capabilities to *proactively* maintain their cultures

A school leader in Far North Queensland related an account of a community's concern about cultural loss. A decision was made that teaching and educational activities would be conducted exclusively in Standard English in local primary schools. The community opposed the decision until the school allocated time and resources to local culture and the local languages.

Cape York communities may take a *reactive* stance for their culture, but communities currently have limited capabilities to *proactively* maintain their cultures. This is not to say that Indigenous people lack the will. However, to maintain a minority culture people need capabilities, and – as Amartya Sen has convincingly argued[69] – development of capabilities is a matter of equitable development, which requires the support of government policy. Cultural transmission requires a long-term government policy as well as determination of individuals and communities.

The weakening of cultural transmission is the result of three factors that have been beyond Indigenous people's control. First, the descent into passive welfare and substance abuse – and the ensuing chaos which disrupts any social or cultural efforts – is the result of policy mistakes during the past four decades.

Second, Indigenous people's disadvantage has deprived them of the knowledge necessary to maintain a minority culture in a globalised world. Informal, oral handing down of knowledge to younger generations no longer works for vulnerable minorities. Cultures shift from oralcy to literacy and digitisation must occur.

Third, Indigenous people are at a psychological disadvantage in relation to culture and language. The oppression of Indigenous culture and languages did not end with the abolishment of so-called protection in the 1960s; the governments' support for Australia's native languages is still minimal. Government inaction and the Australian mainstream's disregard for Australia's Indigenous languages act in concert to limit Indigenous people's cultural freedom.

If Indigenous culture is to survive in Australia, comprehensive reform of government policy is necessary. The key to cultural continuity lies in the experiences of children in their formative years – at home, with the community and in school.

It is unreasonable to expect Indigenous Australians to ensure cultural and language transmission is strong. The cynical suggestion that the maintenance of Indigenous cultures and languages is the responsibility of the Indigenous peoples themselves[70], to be pursued essentially without government support – in a fashion akin to the efforts of recent immigrant communities – is rejected. There is increasing international recognition that it is a government responsibility to support – and be competent in –

[69] Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999.

[70] Gary Johns, *Aboriginal Education: Remote Schools and the Real Economy*, Menzies Research Centre, 2006.

the country's native minority languages. Surprisingly, Australia – which considers itself to be involved in a soul-searching reconciliation process – is less progressive than the European Union in this respect.[71]

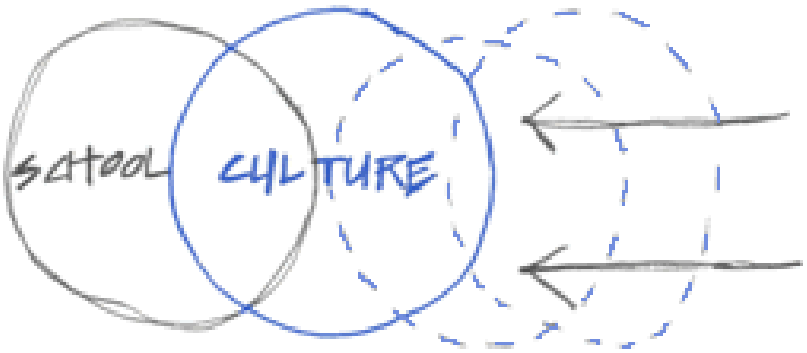
Because of the effects of historical and contemporary forces beyond their control, Indigenous peoples need assistance to re-establish the social mechanisms of cultural and language transmission, and to establish modern, digitised modes of transmission. Government support for Indigenous culture and languages would not be a concession to a minority interest, but a matter of equality; the English-language majority culture today receives more government support per capita than Indigenous cultures.

Transcending the tension between tradition and modernity

Cape York people want cultural survival as well as improved life prospects for their children. The support of parents and extended families for Student Education Trusts is testament to this.

However, a reform policy for primary schooling that aims not only to improve education generally but explicitly and unequivocally aims to set community children on a path to work and study in major towns and cities will likely necessitate a renewed dialogue with Indigenous people and with government: How to transcend the tension between Indigenous tradition and economic integration?

The tension between the imperatives of mainstream education and the culture of students and parents becomes apparent in Indigenous settings. In the absence of a separate Culture domain, some communities and government agencies have allowed cultural transmission to encroach on the primary education domain.



The imperatives of mainstream education and Indigenous cultural transmission must however not be a zero-sum contest for the same limited domain.

The precious hours of instruction in primary school is not necessarily the right domain for cultural and traditional language transmission for Cape York children. This paper recommends that the most effective hours of instruction – morning and early afternoon – be devoted to acquisition of mainstream skills in numeracy and English literacy.

But a new cultural policy for Cape York needs to be closely coordinated with the reform of primary education. A serious effort to support Indigenous culture will require the establishment of a cultural domain that does not encroach on the domain of mainstream primary school instruction.

[71] European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, Strasbourg 5 November 1992.

A strong program for cultural transmission is key to orbiting. It is key to the building of strong homelands with which educated young Cape York people would be able to retain a connection.

Partnerships with communities to create a strong cultural transmission domain would arguably increase parental and community support for high-quality Western education. An intense focus on Western education in local primary school and boarding in high-expectation secondary schools would not be perceived as imposed de-culturation if children's Indigenous identity is strengthened within a structured Culture domain.

Cape York children are at a severe disadvantage in terms of access to *the best* of European culture

The case for Club – a concerted cultivation domain

The goal of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians has been supported by Australian governments and the public in many ways: through symbolic acts, practical policies and public manifestations. The current focus of reconciliation is on "closing the gap". The seemingly intractable problems besetting many communities are forcing this concentration on basic socio-economic indicators such as health and housing.

However, it is universally recognised that the ethos which distinguishes reconciliation from benign assimilation policies is the recognition of the right of Indigenous people to walk in two worlds, to have the best of two worlds. It is commonly accepted that bi-culturalism and a vibrant Indigenous heritage is not only a right of Indigenous people but a treasure for the whole nation.

This ideal is far from being realised. The suggested Culture domain is intended to secure children's rights to Indigenous tradition. But it is equally true that Cape York children are at a severe disadvantage in terms of access to *the best* of European culture.

A concerted cultivation domain

This paper argues, following sociologist Annette Lareau, that children's educational and cultural development reinforce each other, and that cultural wealth is acquired through the process of "concerted cultivation".[72] Lareau contrasts the middle-class parenting style of "concerted cultivation" with the working-class and underclass

[72] Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California 2003.

parenting style of "accomplishment of natural growth". The concerted cultivation parenting practice involves parents stimulating their children's cognitive growth by enrolling them in extra-curricular activities – not only in high culture and fine arts, but organised sports and many other activities that, unlike children's spontaneous playing, require a structure and some guidance. Part of this parenting style is to engage children in an ongoing conversation that develops their ability to reflect.

To first introduce the Class reforms and wait with Culture and Club to a later stage would compromise the holistic nature of this plan

Concerted cultivation fosters in children a sense of entitlement, self-confidence and a familiarity with structured environments that gives them an advantage later in working life. Parental reliance on children's natural growth on the other hand does not prepare children for the norms and standards of societal institutions such as places of higher learning.

In mainstream Australia, a majority of parents engage in concerted cultivation with their children to some degree. "Mainstream" is therefore a better term than "middle-class" to capture these practices and parental attitudes.

The home and community environments in Cape York Peninsula are not conducive to concerted cultivation. Whilst Cape York Partnerships has had encouraging experiences of parental engagement in child development in the course of *Computer Culture* and *Every Child Is Special*, it is not possible to rapidly change the outlook of Cape York community members to the extent that Cape York Children are equal to urban mainstream students in terms of community and parent support. This change will be generational.

For the benefit of community children, a structure emulating parental concerted cultivation needs to be put in place. However, the solution does not lie in the establishment of an ambitious program of extra-curricular activities within the domain of primary education, which needs to be devoted to the learning of elementary skills. The correct solution is the organisation of a third distinct domain for the nurturing of Cape York children in their formative years.

Staging is not an option

The reforms proposed in this position paper represent challenges unparalleled in Indigenous education. Since the domains are separate, staging their implementation may seem to be a possible way to spread the challenges over a longer time period. But the arguments advanced above – for example that Culture can be a "hook" for community engagement and that the core hours of learning need to be free from distractions – constitute a case against staging the proposed reforms. To first introduce the Class reforms and wait with Culture and Club to a later stage would compromise the holistic nature of this plan in terms of child development.

Class needs to be recognised from the outset as a domain devoted exclusively to improved teaching of basic skills without any distractions; other activities need to be moved to a dedicated domain. The total number of hours in which Cape York children are engaged in structured work and activities therefore needs to increase.

Structure of the Culture and Club domains

We believe that corporate and philanthropic sponsors will be interested to support these enriching activities for Indigenous children

Acquisition of primary skills, which is the purpose of the Class domain, is a well-researched policy area. Our plans for the Class domain presented above are correspondingly detailed. It is however not possible nor desirable to lay down a detailed plan for the structure of the Culture domain or for the Club domain in this paper. Scheduled cultural revitalisation and concerted cultivation programs for Indigenous students will be the subject of a detailed business planning phase, subsequent to this paper.

In broad outline, it is obvious that the morning hours must be allocated to Class. In the morning the most efficient learning of reading, writing and mathematics takes place. Whether Class, Culture and Club should constitute continuous blocks of time, or perhaps Culture and Club activities may be interspersed in the ordinary school day – these are questions that require careful planning and deliberation. Most likely however, the best solution is to keep Class as a domain with strong temporal and spatial integrity. Perhaps late afternoons could alternately be dedicated to Culture and Club.

The content of Culture is to some extent predefined: rigorous language instruction and teaching of traditional knowledge will include many obligatory components that cannot meaningfully be omitted. Parts of the Culture domain will be similar to Class, because explicit instruction methods will be equally useful, for example in the teaching of Indigenous languages.

The contents of Club will perhaps be more variable. Understanding that it is not possible to offer the full range of extra-curricular activities that are available in urban centres, our aim is to offer a few high-quality, well-delivered opportunities that can best serve children in their later development, including music, sports and literature. This tentative list of club activities will to some people appear to be a statement about classical symbols of middle-class cultural aspirations and middle-class tastes. To some extent that is right; we do believe that Cape York children have the right to knowledge that is highly regarded in the mainstream. But our main point is not to buy into the debate about high culture versus popular culture and cultural relativism, or the importance of the classical cultural canon versus new culture and modern social and intellectual movements. Rather, our thinking is that if children in their early years are exposed to a tradition that is not part of their everyday experience (such as reading music and relatively advanced literature) the cognitive skills they develop are of universal application. A conservative choice of Club activities offered in a community will not determine children's future attitudes to culture and politics – it will enable them to freely develop their outlook. After all, intellectual path-breakers from Karl Marx to Edward Said stood on a solid ground of classical knowledge.

The Culture and Club domains will probably not be possible without non-government funding being made available. We believe that corporate and philanthropic sponsors will be interested to support these enriching activities for Indigenous children. Sports is one area where there are already many precedents of corporate sponsorship.

The abilities of adults in communities to lead Culture and Club activities need to be developed. There will need to be a program that teaches Indigenous adults how to share their knowledge, especially knowledge of language and culture. Developing

instruction methods for this and training Indigenous people to implement the methods, will be one of the big challenges – not to mention the development of suitable teaching materials.

The Club and especially the Culture domains will involve voluntary contributions by community members; they will constitute a meeting place between the school's service delivery and social and cultural capital building within the community. A possible means to include the entire community in students' development would however be to arrange a weekly gathering where students show their accomplishments to parents and relatives. The authors envisage that Friday afternoon would be set aside for a "Culture Club Community" event where the community internalises the ultimate goal of the suggested reform: making sure Cape York students have the same life prospects as their mainstream peers while retaining and strengthening their culture.

Postscript: Finding the radical centre in the dialectics of the education debate

Perhaps more so than any other arena of public policy (and academic discourse) the field of education is particularly riven with debates. Kevin Wheldall's observation that because we all were once students, we all consider our opinions to be expert and based on frontline experience, partly explains both the multitude of the views and the doggedness with which they are held:

> *It was in his "Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis", if I recall correctly, that Freud related the anecdote of a young woman being interviewed for the post of nanny who, when asked if she had had any experience with children, responded with words to the effect of, "Why yes, I was a child once myself!" So it appears to be with education. Everyone has been to school and so everyone fancies him- or herself as somewhat of an expert on education. While relatively few laypersons seem inclined to take up positions on preferred techniques for brain surgery, nuclear fission, or rocket science, society is not short of pundits on matters educational. How best to teach reading and how to maintain classroom discipline effectively are both educational issues upon which politicians, parents, and the person in the street all feel fully qualified to venture an opinion. A considered appraisal of the relevant scientific evidence is not seen as a necessary prerequisite to enter into this debate. Why should this be so? Is it perhaps connected to the fact that the education profession itself eschews such an approach?*[73]

Education is a key ideological battle-ground between old foes from the left and right. There are many debates in education that are intellectual in their substance, and indeed concern scientific and technical questions relating to teaching and learning. But the muddy waters coursing through these rigorous debates are the currents of ideological struggle.

we all consider our opinions to be expert and based on frontline experience

It is expected that readers will have their own views on the various aspects of the analysis and the agenda set out in this report. From his experience with Cape York Partnerships' work on the demand-side issues of Indigenous education and the attempts to influence the supply-side over the past 9 years – and experience with the debates concerning "old basics" and "new basics", "phonics" and "whole language",

[73]Wheldall, Kevin, When will we ever learn? Educational Psychology Vol. 25 2005.

"literacy" and "critical literacy", "literacy" and "multi-literacies" and so on – Noel Pearson's observation is that Western discourses on education centre around fundamental disagreements about emphasis, priority and method concerning five matters:

- skills
- knowledge
- creativity
- critique
- esteem.

As a generalisation, the warriors from the right of the ideological field prioritise the acquisition of *skills* and the accumulation of *knowledge* – and they range from carelessness to suspicion on the matter of *creativity,* and they harbour strong ideological aversion to *critique.* Their opponents from the left of the ideological field prioritise creativity and critique. Like their opponents, the left emphasise knowledge – but their aversion to skills has strong ideological animations. At best they pay lip service to skills, but actually they see it as rote learning, which kills creativity and critique.

On the matter of *esteem*, the two camps stand poles apart. The left have developed a panoply of theories and approaches to issues of children's esteem, whilst the right usually argues that effort and achievement are the source of true esteem.

Noel Pearson is concerned with articulating the radical centre in this turbulent discourse. The following summary sets out the synthesis that underpins the agenda set out on this report:

- The first priority for education must be the mastery of all foundational literacy and numeracy skills
- With the acquisition of skills, the process of acquisition and accretion of knowledge becomes possible. There is a dialectical (or mutually reinforcing) relationship between skills and knowledge
- Esteem is important, but it is effort and achievement – indeed mastery - that is its best source. Whilst racial confidence is important, esteem premised on racial identity is problematic. Dr Martin Luther King's dream was that his daughters would be "judged not by the colour of their skin, but by the content of their character". Esteem based on public promotion of racial pride returns social judgment to skin colour, rather than content of character and achievement
- Creativity involves a process of nurturing, encouragement and drawing out of talents and passions of individual students – but the acquisition of strong skills is not anathema to the maintenance and growth of creativity. Indeed the acquisition of many foundational skills through direct instruction and long practice is usually prerequisite to the maturation of creativity
- Skills and knowledge should have clear priority over critique, especially in the earliest years of education. Literacy is needed before critical literacy. The widespread implication that if critique is not promoted in the earliest years of education, it will harm the prospects of students developing critical capacities in their later development, is rejected. Full literacy gained through a formative focus

on skills, and a solid grounding in knowledge, can and will develop capacity for critique in higher education.

This position paper seeks to unite the best of the practices developed by "No Excuses" school with a perspective that recognises that social and economic change is a prerequisite for closing the achievement gap. It also attempts to transcend the polarisation of contemporary education debate. It is our hope that the reform proposal advanced in this paper will not fall victim to the ideological battles plaguing education policy but precipitate concerted effort by governments and Indigenous communities to expedite the most important reform in Cape York Peninsula, education reform – the reform which Cape York children need most to be able choose lives they have reason to value and walk in two worlds enjoying the best of both.

Appendix 1: Inspiration from the United States

Winston Churchill Fellowship survey of successful American schools

One of the authors, Bernardine Denigan, undertook a survey of a range of public and charter schools in the United States on a Winston Churchill Fellowship. The information gathered by Denigan[74] during this fellowship, as well as literature research undertaken by Denigan and her co-authors, has provided much of the inspiration for this position paper.

The most important result of Denigan's survey was a deepened understanding of the characteristics of "No Excuses" schools. This paper has made extensive reference to this concept, and indeed it is suggested to be established as a basic principle of Cape York School reform. This appendix presents a more detailed presentation of "No Excuses" schools.

Attributes of "No Excuses" schools

Following Karin Chenoweth,[75] Steven Wilson[76] has identified 15 attributes of "No Excuses" schools (Table 5).

Table 5: Attributes of "No Excuses" schools

DIMENSION		ATTRIBUTE	SUMMARY DESCRIPTION
1	Size	Small schools	Many schools open with just one grade and fewer than 100 students; at maturity, schools typically enrol between 200 and 400 students.
2	Faculty	Highly selective teacher hiring	Schools devote extraordinary attention to recruiting driven, intellectually capable teachers who are willing

[74] Bernardine Denigan, "Lessons from America: What 'No Excuses' Schools in the USA can teach us about reforming education for Indigenous children in Cape York Peninsula", unpublished 2009.

[75] Karin Chenoweth, *It's being Done: Academic Success in Unexpected Schools*, Harvard Education Press, Cambridge 2008.

[76] Steven Wilson, "Success at Scale in Charter Schooling, Education Sector, AEI Future of American Education Project", <www.aei.org/publication/pubID.29571/pub_detail.asp> 2008.

DIMENSION		ATTRIBUTE	SUMMARY DESCRIPTION
			to log long hours, can work collaboratively with their peers, and embrace the school's mission and beliefs.
3	Pedagogy	Teacher-led, whole-class instruction	Students are generally taught as an entire class using direct instruction methods, where concepts are presented explicitly and taught to mastery. Teaching is expected to be animated and interactive, but progressive pedagogies of inquiry and discovery learning are used sparingly.
4	Education standards and lesson planning	Lessons tightly and explicitly aligned to state education standards	The schools embrace state standards and all instruction is tightly aligned to them; teachers identify the specific lesson objective at the start of each lesson and teach to it. Lesson planning is seen as a science as much as an art.
5	Testing	Pro-testing; support rather than resist high-stakes state tests	High student performance is the unrelenting focus, and schools embrace standardised tests without apology as the objective measure of student attainment. Schools make frequent use of interim assessments to diagnose and adjust instruction.
6	Class size	Large class sizes	Classes are as large as 30 students; schools believe large classes can be highly effective and do not support claims of academic benefits from modest reductions in class size.
7	Discipline and school culture	Highly disciplined environment; achievement as key to discipline	Schools adopt explicit standards for student conduct, with tight discipline and uniform consequences for infractions. Staff "sweat the small stuff," like uniform infractions, to avert larger problems. Academic success fosters order, and vice versa. Schools deliberately and unapologetically shape students' values, teach effective habits, and promote long-term goals, including admission to selective high schools and colleges.
8	Technology	Education technology not an important component of the school	Schools make little use of educational technology except for assessment and school management.
9	School day and year	Extended day and year	The school day is longer than the district's, and Saturday classes and summer school are frequently offered, if not mandatory. The schools believe more time on task is needed for their students to catch up with their peers in affluent schools, for which there are no short cuts. Wasted time is avoided.
10	Expectations and accountability	Relentless pursuit of excellence; staff accountable for results	The principal sets ambitious goals for achievement and holds to them unyieldingly. Staff are held personally accountable for the learning of their students; there are consequences to individual teachers for failure and success. Teachers are frequently observed and assessed and work together to continually improve their practice.
11	Choice	Schools of choice,	The schools are schools of choice, not zoned schools.

DIMENSION		ATTRIBUTE	SUMMARY DESCRIPTION
		for students and teachers	Staff members choose to work in the school rather than being assigned to it by a central office. Children and adults choose to participate in the program and commit to put in the time and effort required to achieve success.
12	Parent contracts	Parents sign compact with school acknowledging expectations	Schools establish clear expectations for parents, including for getting their child to school on time.
13	Management	Strong and empowered school leaders	Schools benefit from strong, driven school leaders who have full power over personnel and budget, unlike at most district schools.
14	Unionisation	Not unionised	Schools are generally not unionized, with staff hired at will or on one-year contracts.
15	Organisational form	Charter schools	Schools are nearly always organized as charter schools.

Diverse features of "No Excuses" schools

The schools surveyed by Cape York Partnerships for this report are listed in Table 6. Most of them have in common that they are "No Excuses" schools that have had significant success improving education outcomes for disadvantaged groups in the United States.

Table 6: Schools in disadvantaged areas in the United States surveyed by Cape York Partnerships

	SCHOOL	LOCATION	YEARS	RACE/ETHNICITY	% FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH[77]
1	American Indian Charter School	Fruitvale, Oakland	5–8	10% Native American, 40% Asian, 25% Hispanic, 20% Black and 5% other	82.7%
2	Aspire, Clarendon School	Huntington Park, Los Angeles	1–4	100% Hispanic	98%
3	Brooklyn Ascend Charter School	Ocean Hill-Brownsville, Brooklyn, New York	K–2	100% African American	87%
4	Locke High School	Watts, Los Angeles	9–12	65% Hispanic and 35% African American	79.7%
5	Harlem Children's Zone Charter School	Harlem, New York	K–8	10% Hispanic and 90% African American	53.2%

[77] The percentage of students eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program provides a proxy measure for the concentration of low-income students within a school. For the purpose of this indicator, high-poverty schools are defined as public schools with more than 75 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

	SCHOOL	LOCATION	YEARS	RACE/ETHNICITY	% FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH[77]
6	KIPP Bridge Charter School	West Oakland, California	5–8	90% African American and 10% Other	70%
7	KIPP Infinity School	Spanish Harlem, New York	5–8	70% Hispanic, 28% African American and 2% Asian	84%
8	KIPP LEAP Academy Washington	Southeast Washington, DC	K3–K	85% Hispanic and 15% African American	80%
9	KIPP Raíces Academy	East Los Angeles, California	K	99 % Hispanic and 1% African American	90%
10	KIPP SHINE Prep	Houston, Texas	K3–3	80% Hispanic and 20% African American	91%
11	Nay Ah Shing School	Onamia Reservation, Minesota	P–4	100% Native American	100%
12	North Field Elementary,	Gering, Nebraska	K–5	60% Hispanic and 40% Other	43%
13	Oakland Charter Academy	Fruitvale, Oakland	6–8	99% Hispanic	90.3%

Schools other than 5 and 12 were surveyed because they fell within the description of "No Excuses" schools. The Harlem Children's Zone Charter School in New York was visited as part of a general look at the work of the Harlem Children's Zone. The Nay Ah Shing School was studied as an example of a Native American school. These two schools are not included in the following analysis of "No Excuses" schools.

The eleven "No Excuses" charter schools that were successful with disadvantaged minorities shared many of the key common attributes of "No Excuses" schools, but there are also some pointed differences in their approaches. Table 7 sets out a summary of our analysis of this diversity.

Table 7: Diversity in approaches among "No Excuses" schools

1	REFORM MECHANISM	
	Incremental reform in literacy instruction	**Gering School District** The Gering School District, with about thirty per cent disadvantaged, mainly Hispanic students, had among the lowest literacy outcomes in Nebraska. In 2005 Gering comprehensively reformed its literacy instruction without changing its governance structure or other sectors of its education program. In short time, Gering closed the literacy gap between Hispanic and white students, and achieved results above the state average. Their chosen method was Direct Instruction (DI), an evidence-based, explicit method that requires teachers to faithfully implement a scripted presentation of the prescribed DI teaching materials. DI is based on the principles that all children, regardless of their background, can learn when taught efficiently, and all teachers can be successful if given sufficient training in the DI technique.
	New school start up	**Aspire Public Schools, Brooklyn Ascend Charter School and KIPP network** In most states in the US, legislation allows state or local authorities to grant independent organisations licence to start new, publicly funded charter schools. The operators are freed from some government regulation but are accountable for producing certain results, agreed beforehand with the state in a charter. Under-performing charter school operators can have their charter revoked. Aspire, Brooklyn Ascend and Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) typically target low-income and minority students in urban areas and compete with local public schools for students. Many of their schools have long waiting lists for enrolments as parental demand for such schools far exceeds supply. Charter schools therefore are able to introduce comprehensive reforms because they are usually starting new schools.
	Existing school take-over	**Green Dot network** Green Dot is a high profile example of how the management of large failing inner city public schools can be handed over to school management organisations that successfully transform them into high-performing and safer schools. The majority of Green Dot schools are in Los Angeles. Green Dot assists the parents of children in such schools to organise political action, form parents' unions, and petition the school districts and governments to hand over schools to Green Dot. When an existing school is taken over by a charter organisation, the same ability to introduce broader-based education reform that new school start-ups have should in principle be possible.
	Whole school reform	**American Indian Public Charter School and Oakland Charter Academy** In 1996, American Indian Public Charter School (AIPCS) was founded by American Indian parents who were disaffected with public schools they felt were not celebrating Native American culture and which tolerated racism. In 2000, when American Indian Ben Chavis became principal, the school was among the lowest performing in the state and attendance was low. Chavis dismantled and then rebuilt every aspect of the school including school culture and expectations. The school went on to become one of the highest performing in the state. Oakland Charter Academy (OCA) took a similar path with Jorge Lopez converting the Spanish-focused program to an English focused-program and high expectations of the predominantly Hispanic student population. This path to school reform depends on the emergence of exceptional leaders.

2	GOVERNANCE	
	State controlled	**Gering School District** Public education in the US is governed by school district boards with jurisdiction over school curricula, funding, teaching and school policies. Board members are voted on by the community and tend to come from non-educational fields and are often well known business or community leaders. In an effort to reform poorly performing districts and schools, states offer fiscal incentives or impose sanctions like school closure or removal of the superintendent, the school board or school principal. Federal authorities administer targeted education polices and grants like the Reading First Program which requires only proven methods to be used in early reading instruction. This is how Gering funded its Direct Instruction reform (see above). The superintendent sought endorsement from their district school board who supported it despite opposition from a minority of teachers and parents.
	Single controlled charter	**Oakland Charter Academy** Charter schools are accountable for financial management and academic results to the chartering authoriser and the parents of attending students. Most schools operate through a school board that is responsible for recruitment of the school principal, school policies, contracts and the annual budget. The principal of OCA Jorge Lopez introduced reforms to lift the low student results including cleaning up the graffiti-riddled buildings, increasing school hours, fostering a culture of hard work and high expectations, zero tolerance of misbehaviour and teacher accountability. He was able to achieve this despite considerable tensions with members of the parent-controlled board who opposed many of the new reforms.
	Network controlled charter	**Aspire Public Schools** Charter Management Organisations are not-for-profit entities that operate networks of charter schools typically targeting low-income and minority students in urban areas. Many, like Aspire, rely on economy of scale to become viable. School networks usually have corporate management structures and use philanthropic funds to run their administrations. They all set key tenets which they require their member schools to follow but allow differing levels of school autonomy. Aspire is larger than many school districts and a single highly qualified board of directors oversee the whole network of 21 schools. The Board makes decisions about curriculum, budget allocations and school leaders. Aspire schools have Advisory School Councils (ASC) that decide on site-specific issues like budget priorities, school-based policies and parental issues.

3	ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS	
	Universally mandated testing	**All "No Excuses" schools** Public schools in the US, including charter schools are required to align their school testing to a national standardised testing regime. The tests scores provide an assessment of an individual's mastery of a domain of knowledge or skills. However, such assessments are not frequent and detailed enough for close monitoring of a student's progress. As a precondition of funding, schools in all states are required to develop and deliver a testing regime of student's basic skills. In the 1990s, most states and districts adopted some form of outcome-based education and performance-based assessment. While states have set curricula, it is left to schools to decide what methods and practices to use. There is no systemic way for the state to review the effectiveness of student progress monitoring and accountability structures.
	State oversight of charter school performance	**KIPP network, Aspire Public Schools, Green Dot network, American Indian Public Charter School and Oakland Charter Academy** State-funded charter schools exercise increased autonomy in return for greater accountability. The "No Excuses" schools surveyed for this report demonstrate that charter schools have the potential to deliver improvements for disadvantaged students, but the establishment of a charter school is no guarantee for improved education. Charter schools can be closed for failing to meet the terms set out in their charter, but in practice, this can be difficult and controversial. There are numerous examples where the state has attempted to close down a charter school due to poor outcomes but met with fierce resistance from parents who are concerned that their children will be forced back into unsafe public schools. About 500 of approximately 4000 charter schools in the US have closed for reasons ranging from district consolidation to failure to attract students.
	Network oversight of school performance	**KIPP network** A fundamental principle of KIPP is a strong commitment to accountability. The KIPP Foundation acts as a "franchisor" for their member schools which operate relatively autonomously. However, each school's performance is monitored through an annual review that focuses on student achievement using data gathered from both state tests and the Stanford Achievement Test which are administered to every student bi-annually. Any school that fails to live up to KIPP expectations could be expelled from the school network. KIPP is piloting an internal evaluation program to measure overall school health in areas such as student outcomes, leadership, and teaching. KIPP has commissioned a number of independent studies on how KIPP schools impact student achievement.

4	SCHOOL LEADERS – DEGREE OF SOVEREIGNTY	
	System subscribed power to lead	**Gering School District** Typical of all public school systems, the principal's authority to lead in Gering is largely subject to district and state level decision-making. Principals do hire teachers but have limited scope to independently determine curriculum or allocate resources.
	Power to lead within parameters	**KIPP network, Aspire Public Schools and Green Dot network** A principal's power in these network schools is only exercisable within parameters established within their particular network. For instance in all networks, the principals are required to embed the guiding principles of their network in their schools. Beyond this they have significant power to lead including the authority to independently hire and fire teachers and allocate resources. In other areas, like curriculum, this varies greatly. For instance KIPP and Green Dot principals can determine curriculum at a school level while Aspire mandate this across their network. KIPP grows its own school leaders "in a Petri dish" by largely selecting them from among their teaching staff who show promise and putting them through their tailor made program the Fisher Fellowship and sends them off to start up their own KIPP schools.
	Full power to lead	**Oakland Charter Academy** Principals in stand-alone charter schools like OCA are free from both system-wide and network restraints to set their guiding principles, curriculum and to hire and fire teaching staff. However, the extent of how passive or interventionist their board is, largely determines the scope of the principal's power to lead. The quality of the school is vulnerable to the variation in the capability of the principal and his or her relationship with the school board.

5	TEACHERS	
	a. Qualifications and experience	
	Working with existing mixed quality teaching faculties	**Gering School District** Public school teachers are hired by individual school districts. While principals can technically fire teachers or have teachers transferred, it is a cumbersome process that in practice only occurs in serious cases of misconduct. As a result, principals are burdened with poorly performing teachers, who remain in schools until they choose to transfer or retire. In Gering, the training provided as part of the implementation of DI proved an effective tool for improving poor performance and lifting overall instructional capacity. The benefits flowed beyond literacy as teachers applied their newly acquired instructional skills in other classroom settings. Only two teachers transferred as they were not happy with the program.
	Recruiting high achieving non-teachers into mixed quality teaching faculties	**Teach for America and The New Teacher Project** Teach For America (TFA) is a national not-for-profit that is "building a movement to eliminate educational inequity". They enlist outstanding recent college graduates of all subject areas, provide intensive training, and then place them in urban and rural public schools to teach for a minimum of two years. Many former alumni become education leaders in schools and education administrations. KIPP and Green Dot schools have TFA teachers among their teaching faculties. The New Teacher Project (TNTP) is a national not-for-profit "dedicated to closing the achievement gap by ensuring students have high achieving teachers". They recruit career changing professionals into the teaching profession and partner with school districts and states to implement scalable responses to their most acute teacher quality challenges. KIPP's Houston school has TNTP teachers among its teaching faculty.
	Recruiting maximum quality teaching faculties into start-up schools or existing schools	**Oakland Charter Academy** Start-up charter schools can recruit a team to best fit their school reform model. OCA uses the popular US website Craig's List, to attract teachers "with an edge"; these recruits often have no teaching accreditation but have postgraduate qualifications in science, mathematics or engineering. OCA attract such teachers by leveraging off their reputation for achieving remarkable results.

	b. Conditions, pay and incentives	
	Standard public sector conditions (i.e. union)	**Gering School District** Public school teachers are paid on graduated scales of income and experience. Salaries vary depending on the district or state and the grades taught. Many teachers supplement their income by supervising extra-curricular activities and enjoy benefits like health insurance and lengthy holidays. These teachers are represented by two main unions with considerable authority to proactively protect teacher conditions. Gering school teachers are a part of the Gering Teacher Association. A number of teachers in Gering school district were unhappy with the increased accountability that DI placed on them and sought the association's support to address this. In the third year of implementation of DI this resulted in limitations being placed on the amount of time teachers could spend in training prior to the beginning of the school year.
	Non-public sector conditions	**Green Dot, KIPP network and Oakland Charter Academy** There are a number of different configurations across states and districts to the charter school – teacher union dynamic, including (i) charter teaching staff being part of a school district collective bargaining agreement (ii) public schools converted to charters continuing to be bound by the existing contract (iii) new charters joining the district-wide master contract (iv) charter teachers voting to de-certify or establish a union. Many charters have the flexibility to require teachers to work longer hours generally commensurate with higher salaries. Green Dot is the only non-district public school operator in California that has unionised teachers. Almost all KIPP school teachers are paid at a higher rate and do not belong to unions. OCA teachers are subject to a collective bargain agreement.
	Schools with performance pay and incentives	**American Indian Public Charter School, Oakland Charter Academy and Aspire Public Schools** Performance or merit-based pay assumes teachers of disadvantaged students will be financially incentivised to teach better and work harder to get improved student outcomes. Besides the complexities of linking teacher bonuses to student performance, teacher unions are opposed to any selective financial incentives. Few states have yet embraced performance pay. AIPCS provides bonuses to teachers for increased student achievement on the state's standard tests and they earn, on average, $7,000 dollars more than district teachers. OCA pays lower amounts based on commitment and performance. Aspire schools have a merit based pay rise based on an evaluation of student test results, parent survey and leadership feedback.

	c. Training	
	Traditionally trained teachers provided with special training in effective instruction	**Gering School District** Prior to the implementation of the Direct Instruction program at Gering, teachers traditionally attended a variety of external professional development activities with little, if any, requirement to implement their acquired knowledge and skills. As a part of the DI implementation, teaching staff were provided 24 hours of pre-service training before and then received an additional 24 hours of training throughout the first school year. The training was provided by external experts from the National Institute for Direct Instruction (NIFDI) for four years. The Gering district then introduced a professional development program for each school which was led by the leadership team to support every teacher and paraprofessional.
	Non-teachers provided with accelerated training	**Teach for America** TFA Corps members initially complete about 30 hours of independent work and observation of experienced teachers. They also attend an intensive five-week training course where they teach in summer school programs, receive feedback from veteran teachers, and complete a regimen of seminars and practice sessions. During their regional orientation, corps members complete additional training on establishing clear goals for their students' achievements, planning for instruction, and preparing to use data to inform their approach. Once placed in schools they participate in a two-year program of support and professional development. They also complete coursework toward full teacher certification and a master's degree. Among the schools that were successful in improving disadvantaged students' results, KIPP and Green Dot schools have a significant number of TFA teachers in their faculties.
	Franchise provided teacher development	**KIPP network and Aspire Public Schools** Training and development varies across KIPP but schools consistently offer new teachers about three weeks of specifically designed training and orientation. Throughout the school year, teachers participate in development programs focused on specific instructional topics and attend the annual national summit for KIPP educators. KIPP is also working with a group of "No Excuse" schools and Hunter College's education school to create a new, two-year training program, provisionally called the Teacher YOU Training Institute, which permits new teachers to receive alternative certification from New York State and a master's degree from Hunter College. Aspire schools provide new teachers about three weeks of summer training, as well as individual instructional coaching, access to a support group and formal teaching observation and feedback sessions with the principal.

	d. Degree of teacher sovereignty	
	Teaching as instruction	**Gering School District and Brooklyn Ascend Charter School** Comprehensive instructional programs like DI, determine how particular materials should be taught. In Gering, teachers using DI are provided intensive training to become highly skilled in particular instruction techniques which they must implement with fidelity. Clear examples and consistent wording are most beneficial for disadvantaged students. Scripted presentations allow teachers to focus on student responses and ensure that students master all material presented. Proponents of DI also argue that this approach is particularly beneficial with inexperienced teachers who acquire from the program a valuable set of teaching tools which their teacher education most likely did not provide. Student performance with many experienced teachers has also improved dramatically with DI. Reduction of teacher autonomy in and of itself has however no predictable beneficial effect for disadvantaged students. It is the clear examples and consistent wording of a field-tested script that allows teachers to focus on student responses and ensure that students master all material presented.
	Teaching as leadership	**KIPP and Green Dot (Teach for America)** In KIPP and Green Dot school networks, teachers must adhere to the core principles of their network and be accountable for student performance through rigorous testing regimes. The testing is designed to highlight quickly where teachers are failing to make gains so that they can receive additional support and development. However, these school networks value teacher sovereignty highly and believe that the classroom teacher is best placed to assess the needs of their students. They do not promote any particular pedagogical philosophy and practices as they see that teachers should have the autonomy to innovate and develop practices. They do seek to provide guidance though, by providing pointers to good role models and best practices, and by providing extensive training focused on best practices. Teachers must spend significant time outside the classroom mapping state standards to the school and classroom curriculum plans and learning objectives. They must also develop their own teaching materials including diagnostics and assessments, pacing charts and lesson plans. While this may imbue a teacher with a sense of ownership, it probably does not guarantee quality, and the extended hours and intellectually challenging nature of the exercise are likely key contributors to teacher fatigue.

6	Curriculum	
	Set curriculum delivered with full fidelity	**Brooklyn Ascend Charter School and Gering School District** BACS uses a comprehensive school wide curriculum called SABIS which includes: a sequential, content-rich curriculum tightly linked to state standards and taught to mastery; instructional programs; prescribed teaching practices; placement tests and guides for class formation; frequent electronic assessments and detailed pacing charts. The system prescribes what is taught in each classroom each week, and the level of mastery of the concepts and skills that students must exhibit. It ranks concepts by importance and places them in a logical order. This approach seeks to maximise subject content coverage by pacing students through a set of curricula as rapidly as possible without sacrificing the expected level of mastery. However, teachers retain the freedom to develop and adjust their lesson plans. Gering's DI program is less dependent on teachers' inherent aptitude. It requires teachers to use scripted lessons and to provide direct and explicit instruction. The assumption underpinning DI is that a student's ability or failure to learn is determined by the quality of teaching instruction – its clarity and organisation. It sets out a series of instructional techniques that teachers are required to apply in every lesson. It also requires teachers to only use the required texts prescribed by the National Institute for Direct Instruction (NIFDI). The texts are tested and revised based on feedback to ensure they are effective with the full range of students.
	Set general framework curriculum at a school-wide level with allowance for local variation	**Green Dot network** The Green Dot network believes strongly in local control so it only recommends a set of guiding practices around curriculum and operations and supports this with training. Schools that choose not to follow a recommended practice must provide a plan that describes why they are not following that practice, lay out the new practice that they will employ, and provide supporting research and evidence that the practice has been successful in other schools. Should they then fail to meet performance expectations they are forced to use the recommended practice. This is monitored through a rigorous framework of accountability including site walkthroughs, standardised tests, interim assessments and stakeholder feedback surveys.
	Curriculum determined by individual teachers	**KIPP network** Schools share a common understanding of good teaching practices but teachers are free to devise curricula and pedagogical systems independently. In some schools this involves teachers mapping out their end-of-year learning standards and breaking down long-term goals into bundles of objectives. They then select teaching materials from the materials available or develop their own, create or obtain diagnostics and periodic assessments, create pacing charts, and devise lesson plans that align with objectives.

7	Funding (for education program, resources and faculties)	
	Rely on the state allocation	**American Indian Public School and the Oakland Charter Academy** Public schools are funded by property taxes, which vary depending on the value of property in an area. Disadvantaged schools in neighbourhoods with low property values therefore tend to receive the least allocations. American Indian Public School and the Oakland Charter Academy are deliberately frugal with their limited resources and believe the state allocation is sufficient to successfully educate disadvantaged children. In fact AIPS spends $2000 less than the $9000 state allocation. They believe that much of the public school dollar is wasted in schools on unnecessary facilities and teaching resources.
	Rely on state allocation with some fundraising supplement for start-up	**Brooklyn Ascend Charter School, Aspire Public Schools, and Green Dot network** These charter schools are attempting to develop a scaleable school model that could transform the entire public school system. They believe that scale can only be sustainable if the cost of running a "No Excuses" school equals the state budget allocations. But start-up schools and small school clusters can initially require a greater investment. Aspire and Green Dot receive philanthropic support but their business plans project that they will reach sustainability when they reach their growth target of 65 schools. Green Dot relies on philanthropic support for school projects but hopes that their endeavours will initiate wider reform.
	Rely on state allocation with considerable fundraising supplement	**KIPP network** KIPP do not see their role as developing an ultimate solution to public school reform and are primarily interested in continuing the proliferation of KIPP schools. Their school incorporates rigorous financial management and their primary focus is on classroom support of teachers, resources, and classroom learning programs. They spend much less on facilities that many public schools and more on teacher salaries. Their per-student allocation is often above state levels but they believe the state funding levels in many states are inadequate to meet student education needs. They raise funds at both a KIPP Foundation level but they expect schools to raise money at a local level as well.

8	School culture	
	A "No Excuses" culture	**All "No Excuses" schools** All the investigated schools that have achieved good outcomes for disadvantaged students have school cultures that promote high achievement by being academically rigorous, having high expectations, using more time and being accountable for student, teacher and the school outcomes through regular testing and evaluation. They follow James Q. Wilson's "broken window" theory that even the smallest infraction left unaddressed can quickly descend into chaos. They know that a disciplined environment increases learning time. They ensure their code of behaviour is visible within the school and parent community and are constantly reinforcing the rules and living them out in practice. They reinforce consistent, clear and predictable consequences for all behaviour – good behaviour is recognised and rewarded and sanctions are imposed for misbehaviour. Positive praise is a key feature of instructional practice with a ratio of four positives to one negative. Schools are not afraid to assert their moral authority to shape students' attitudes and values. Staff are trained to ensure consistent application so the culture is not eroded or undermined by misplaced compassion. The rules are highly prescriptive and children are constantly told to tuck their shirts in, not to run in the halls et cetera. They actively reject the negative values and practices of the neighbourhood by banning street language, tagging, gang-related clothing and swearing. They do not tolerate the chaos of student home life being used as an excuse for education failure.
	Paternalistic "No Excuses" school culture	**American Indian Public Charter School and Oakland Charter Academy** Both schools relentlessly enforce the rules through zero tolerance and are prepared to be confrontational with students and their parents over their actions. AIPCS students keep the school grounds tidy and are required to take turns in cleaning the bathrooms. At OCA in after-school detention, students must sit upright, in silence, for a full hour with nothing on their desks. There is also a Sunday detention at the principal's home which involves clearing his garden. These two schools are interesting because they cater for specific ethnic communities (Native American and Hispanic) and they are led by ethnic school reformers, who are prepared to be (and able to be) more paternalistic in their approach to school culture than other schools.
	Liberal "No Excuses" school culture	**KIPP network, Brooklyn Ascend Charter School and Aspire Public Schools** Aspire has a strong focus on support and counselling and uses student interns from California State University as counsellors. KIPP schools reinforce social norms by inculcating in children an appreciation of the need to "dress for success" and to understand that if they act appropriately they can earn privileges. BACS's curriculum has roles and practices embedded in it, like the reinforcement of cooperation, mutual respect and academic commitment with opportunities for students to be helpers, teachers and leaders. These schools embody what might have seemed a paradox or oxymoron: liberals prescribing no excuses.

9	Time	
	No additional time	**Gering School District** The Gering schools do not allocate any additional time to the school day, week or year but instead follow the normal school time of about 6 ½ hours a day, 32 ½ hours per week and 180 days per year. Schools prioritise the teaching of literacy through the Direct Instruction program and ensure that every school day, about 180 minutes are devoted to literacy. They vigorously guard this time and do not allow any infringement on this time by other subject areas or school activities.
	Moderate additional time	**American Indian Public Charter School and Aspire Public Schools** AIPCS has one extra hour each school day and three weeks in summer adding an additional 20 days to the regular 180 days. This school also increases instructional time in the day by cutting down on electives, shortening the lunch hour to 20 minutes, and reducing classroom rotation. Students on average are expected to do two hours of homework each night. Aspire does a full extra hour each day, an extra 10 days per year and also has Saturday classes.
	Additional time used as the main strategic means to make up for disadvantage	**KIPP network** KIPP strongly believes that in school as in life, there are no short cuts to success. With an extended school day, school week, and school year, students have more time in the classroom to acquire the academic knowledge and skills that will prepare them for competitive high schools and colleges, as well as more opportunities to engage in diverse extra-curricular experiences. There is variation across schools but on average, teachers and students are required to commit to very long days compared to a standard public school. Teachers tend to arrive prior to classes starting at around 7:30 am and continuing on to around 5pm. Students are expected to take homework on a nightly basis – about two hours in the older grades – and teachers are expected to be on call by pager or cell phone to take students' calls with requests for homework help. KIPP and other schools enrol children at a younger age than traditional schools. For instance KIPP SHINE and KIPP LEAP both commence with "K3" and "K4" classes with the number representing the children's age. Instruction for three year olds is three hours per day, five days a week. These schools both commented that they would increase these hours but their funding model does not allow it. Instruction is a combination of play-based and formal literacy instruction and social skills development. The four year old classes are for the same full day as other years.

10	Extra-curricular activities	
	No regular organised extra-curricular activities	**American Indian Public Charter School and Oakland Charter Academy** Both schools strongly focus on academic performance and do not have extra-curricular programs. They do a minimum of physical education activity, and this is usually a cost-effective, time-efficient exercise like running.
	Embedded into extended school day	**KIPP network and Brooklyn Ascend Charter School** All KIPP schools offer electives for about two hours per day as part of the normal school day, but subjects vary greatly across schools. Electives include diverse areas such as technology, foreign languages, physical education, music, chess, business 101, high school preparation, cooking, media and art and drama. Schools also offer fortnightly Saturday enrichment classes to develop academic skills, character and intellectual habits. Brooklyn Ascend Charter School offers world languages, art, music, health, physical education and computers as part of their core curriculum SABIS.

11	Languages	
	No high quality language program	**American Indian Public Charter School and Oakland Charter Academy** The leaders of AIPSC and OCA believe that the best skills and knowledge to impart to their disadvantaged, often Spanish-descent students are English language skills. They contend that students can gain exposure to Spanish and other languages in their home environment and don't believe it is essential to offer other languages.
	Regular minority or foreign language program	**Brooklyn Ascend Charter School and KIPP network** BACS incorporates Spanish classes as a core component of the school curriculum SABIS. It is taught with the same standard of academic rigour as all other subjects. Students work with the fundamentals of language structure, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, idioms and phrases in Spanish to develop competency in oral and written Spanish. In KIPP SHINE, Spanish is taught from Kindergarten onwards starting with 20 minutes per day. Some KIPP schools offer other languages. Aspire offers Spanish at secondary school.

12	Parent engagement	
	School readiness only	**American Indian Public Charter School and Oakland Charter Academy** Both schools discourage parental involvement and believe the role of parents in schools is to ensure children are prepared for schools, attend regularly, are on time and have completed their homework. They believe disadvantaged parents have more pressing commitments and therefore do not have time to be involved in school activities or voluntary work. They strongly believe that educators, not parents, are best placed to determine the academic program and schools operations and are wary of parental involvement in decision making and view parent committees as groups that erode academic excellence and discipline. They find that parents always want to relax their zero tolerance approach despite its proven effectiveness.
	Involvement in activities	**KIPP network, Aspire Public Schools and Brooklyn Ascend Charter School** KIPP and Aspire highly value parents being positively engaged in their schools. Their core expectation of parents is that they (along with the student and teacher) sign what KIPP call a "commitment to excellence contract" and what Aspire calls a "school-family-student compact" which sets out their responsibilities. Parents agree to ensure their child regularly attends school all year including summer sessions, assist their child with their homework, limit the amount of television their child watches and ensure their child complies with the dress code. Some KIPP schools do more to engage parents such as asking them to attend performances, participate in Saturday parenting classes with their young children, and chaperoning students on trips. Aspire also requires parents to attend half-day Saturday sessions at the beginning of the year with their children, offer reading support at home, and provide the right level of help with homework. BACS strongly promotes parental engagement in their children's education and recently got 99 per cent parental attendance at a parent teacher function.
	Parent influence	**Aspire Public Schools** Aspire schools ensure parent representatives sit on the Advisory School Council and the Teacher Hiring Committee.

Appendix 2: Direct Instruction

Direct Instruction pedagogy

Cape York Partnerships has researched Direct Instruction as a prime example of an explicit instruction method that has demonstrated ability to close the achievement gap of disadvantaged students and schools. This program is supported by more than four decades of scientifically based research[78] that demonstrates the program's unparalleled effectiveness in learning for all students regardless of the demographic group they represent. Direct Instruction is an explicit approach to teaching. It is skill oriented, and the teacher practices it implies are teacher-directed. It emphasises the use of small group, face-to-face instruction by teachers and teacher's aides in the first two levels of the reading program, after which instruction can take place with the whole class. DI uses carefully articulated lessons in which cognitive skills are broken down into small units, sequenced deliberately, and taught explicitly.[79] The detailed character of Direct Instruction derives also from a learning theory[80] and a set of teaching practices linked to that theory. The learning theory focuses on how children generalise from present understanding to understanding of new, untaught examples. This theory informs the sequencing of classroom tasks for children and the means by which teachers lead children through those tasks. The means include a complex system of scripted directions, questions, and signals, to which children provide individual and choral responses in extended, interactive sessions. Children in Direct Instruction classrooms also do written work in workbook or activity sheets.

There are eight major components of the implementation of this program that result in Direct Instruction's high level of effectiveness. The eight major components include:

1. *Homogeneous grouping*: All students are grouped and taught at their correct level of difficulty (instructional level)
2. *Teaching to mastery*: All students are provided with practice in a skill until the skill has been mastered
3. *Student engagement*: All students are taught with positive reinforcement at a pace that ensures student engagement
4. *Correction*: All students are provided corrective feedback when errors are made

[78] Gary L. Adams and Siegfried Engelmann, *Research on Direct Instruction: 25 years beyond DISTAR,* Educational Achievement Systems, Seattle 1996.

[79] James Traub, *Better by design: A consumers' guide to schoolwide reform*, The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation <http://www.edexcellence.net/library/bbd/better_by_design.html> 1999.

[80] Siegfried Engelmann and Douglas Carnine, *Theory of instruction: Principles and applications*, ADI Press, Eugene 1991.

5. *Professional development*: All students are taught by teachers and paraprofessionals that have received high quality and ongoing professional development in the DI methodology
6. *Research-based materials*: All students are provided instruction using only scientifically research-based materials that have been field-tested with students and revised based on student performance
7. *Data-driven decisions*: All decisions for students are based on current data on student performance in the DI programs
8. *Accountability*: Teachers are responsible for the performance of their students, and administrators are responsible for the performance of teachers and students; all programs will be implemented with fidelity

Direct Instruction curriculum

Direct Instruction programs have a strong research base when compared to all other available programs.[81] There is strong evidence for the correctness of the underlying theoretical principles of Direct Instruction as well as the teaching materials developed by the National Institute for Direct Instruction (NIFDI) on the basis of these principles including *Reading Mastery*.

Reading Mastery

Reading Mastery is the core reading program for students from preparatory school to the end of primary school. *Reading Mastery* materials provide a comprehensive reading program for all students based on extensive research.[82] This Direct Instruction program provides the materials to teach the five essential reading instruction components identified by the National Reading Panel in 2000.[83] The manner in which they do this is described below. This program also provides placement tests to determine which level students should be placed in so that all students receive instruction at the correct level of difficulty (homogeneous grouping). Lesson progress charts and mastery data also provide the needed information to ensure that students are always working at an appropriate instructional level.

[81] Research reports supporting Reading Mastery and the Direct Instruction programs include: Barak Rosenshine, and Robert Stevens, "Teaching functions" in Merlin C. Witrock (Ed.), Handbook of research on teaching, Macmillan, New York 1986; National Reading Panel, Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction <http://www.nationalreading panel.org> 2000; Gary L. Adams and Siegfried Engelmann, Research on Direct Instruction: 25 years beyond DISTAR, Educational Achievement Systems, Seattle 1996; Carl Bereiter and Midian Kurland, "A constructive look at Follow Through results", *Interchange* Vol. 12 1981; Marilyn Adams, Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print, MIT Press, Cambridge 1990; Wesley Becker and Douglas Carnine, "Direct instruction: An effective approach to educational intervention with the disadvantaged and low performers", *Advances in clinical child psychology*, Vol. 3 1980; Barbara R. Foorman, "Scientific Studies of Reading: Components of Effective Reading Intervention", *The Official Journal of the Society for the Scientific Study of Reading* Vol. 1 1997; Kame'enui, Edward J. and Deborah C. Simmons, "The effect of task alternatives on vocabulary knowledge: A comparison of students with and without learning disabilities", *Journal of Learning Disabilities* Vol 23 1990.

[82] Briggs, Kerri L. and Catherine Clark, *Reading Programs for Students in the Lower Elementary Grades: What Does the Research Say?*, Texas Center for Educational Research , Austin 1997.

[83] National Reading Panel, *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*, <http://www.nationalreading panel.org> 2000.

Phonemic awareness

Reading Mastery explicitly teaches phonemic awareness skills, which includes perceiving words as a sequence of various sounds, isolating and segmenting various phonemes, blending phonemes into whole words, and rhyming. These skills are not natural for many students and must be taught in an explicit manner. It teaches students to isolate, blend, and identify phonemes through clear modelling and by guided practice, thereby demonstrating exactly what students must learn.

Phonics

Reading Mastery provides systematically sequenced phonics instruction. Correspondences between letters and phonemes are taught in isolation based on high utility and frequency in print. Only the most common phonemes or phoneme clusters for each letter or letter combination are taught initially. *Reading Mastery* then aligns decodable text by presenting only the letter–phoneme correspondences already taught in previous lessons. Letter–phoneme correspondences are carefully sequenced to allow for meaningful words and stories to appear in print as soon as possible.

Fluency

Reading Mastery uses Direct Instruction to develop accuracy and fluency. Accuracy is the ability to identify sounds and words correctly, while fluency is the ability to read text with ease, efficiency, and expression. *Reading Mastery* includes techniques to develop accurate and fluent oral reading through the use of repeated reading and partner reading. In addition, students are timed and errors are recorded during rate and accuracy checkouts on specific passages. These checkouts are used to determine if students are making acceptable progress towards fluency goals.

Vocabulary

Reading Mastery uses a variety of strategies recognised by the National Reading Panel[84] as being effective in building vocabulary, such as directly teaching word meaning through the use of synonyms and examples before reading text to ensure that students understand and apply the new word to everyday language. Periodic review and application of key words and phrases reinforces students' acquisition of new vocabulary.

Comprehension

Reading Mastery incorporates strategies for reading comprehension that have been validated by research studies and presents them systematically in four important areas: vocabulary, literal comprehension, interpretative comprehension and reasoning. Reading Mastery builds background information in the upper levels of the program, which facilitates the development of higher-order comprehension strategies.

84 ibid.

Language for Learning / Language for Thinking

Language for Learning and *Language for Thinking* are research-based supplemental language programs[85] for all students from preparatory school through to Year 1. Research has also demonstrated that it is an effective intervention program for children with disabilities,[86] and effective as an early intervention program,[87] and for LEP (Limited English Proficient) students.[88] The purpose of *Language for Learning* and *Language for Thinking* is to provide all students with the language concepts needed to achieve in the classroom. They help children communicate and understand the thoughts of others and teach them to solve problems and engage in higher order thinking. They also help children bring understanding to what they hear and later read. This is important, as research has shown that early reading ability is based largely on good oral language skills.[89] If students demonstrate a need for extra support in the area of language they can be moved down a level.

Reasoning and Writing

Reasoning and Writing is a research-based supplemental program that helps students learn to integrate logical reasoning with comprehension and written expression. *Reasoning and Writing* materials from Levels A, B, C, D, E, and F correspond to year level 1 through Year 6. Level A focuses on pre-writing reasoning skills that include: directions, putting events in order, classification, and story grammar (traits of characters in stories). Level B focuses mainly on early writing and reasoning skills that include: classification and clues, sequence of events, deductions, directions, sentence writing, and rules of grammar. Level C focuses mainly on paragraph writing skills which at this level include: sentence analysis, mechanics of writing, editing, reporting, inferring, and clarity. Level D focuses on expository writing skills which at this level include: parts of speech, sentence analysis, clarity, sentence types, writing claims or arguments, and writing passages. Level E focuses on more sophisticated reasoning and writing skills which at this level include: retelling a passage, subject-verb agreement, differences between general and specific descriptions, parallelism in writing, deductions, clear pronoun referents, and misleading claims. Level F extends these reasoning and writing skills which at this level include: making inferences, inductive reasoning, comparing and contrasting, identifying contradictions or inconsistencies, discriminating between essential and non-essential information, using subordinate clauses, and essay writing.

85 Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley, *Meaningful Differences is the everyday experience of young American children*. Brookes Publishing, Baltimore 1995.

86 John Lloyd, "Direct Instruction: Effects on oral and written language comprehension", *Learning Disabilities Quarterly* Vol. 3 1980.

87 Phillip S. Dale and Kevin N. Cole, "Comparison of academic and cognitive programs for young handicapped children", *Exceptional Children* Vol. 54 1988.

88 Russel Gersten, "Structured immersion for language minority students: Results of a longitudinal evaluation", *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* Vol. 7 1985.

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Spelling Mastery

Spelling Mastery enables students to carefully build reliable spelling strategies and gives students the skills to spell thousands of words. *Spelling Mastery* interweaves three spelling strategies to maximise students' skill development. The phonemic approach helps beginning spellers to generalise the spelling of many words and word parts that follow regular spelling patterns and build a strong foundation of basic spelling knowledge. The morphemic approach is used to teach students to spell meaningful prefixes, word stems, and suffixes, and to combine words and identifiable word elements to form multisyllabic words. The whole-word approach is used to teach students at all levels to spell common, irregularly spelled words and memorise difficult words.

Connecting Math Concepts

Connecting Math Concepts is a core Direct Instruction program for math. It is designed so that all students will learn to compute, solve problems, and think mathematically. The rationale for the program is that understanding mathematics requires:

1. a thorough mastery of mathematical algorithms
2. making explicit connections between related mathematical concepts and
3. applying mathematical concepts to a wide variety of real-world situations.

The program ensures that the students understand these connections, and establishes relationships between concepts and their applications.

Training of teachers

Investing in high quality and ongoing professional development for all staff involved with the implementation would be critical to ensuring the fidelity of a Direct Instruction implementation. Implementation of Direct Instruction in Cape York would require partnership with an agency like NIFDI.

Pre-service training

It is more cost-effective in terms of time, resources, and student achievement to train teachers before students arrive. This can be resolved through pre-service training for all staff involved with the implementation. Ideally, pre-service would be about six hours each day over a six day period. The training would be provided by qualified trainers who have completed a Direct Instruction trainer of trainers course and each trainer would have a minimum of five years of successful experience teaching the Direct Instruction programs. Training would be provided for all of the programs each teacher would be expected to teach during the upcoming school year. For example, a teacher that was scheduled to teach *Reading Mastery I*, *Language for Learning*, and *Connecting Math Concepts* would receive training in all of these programs. The pre-service training will concentrate on task practice and the breakdown of the training time will involve 65% of the time being spent on practice versus 35% of the time being spent on trainer talk. Teachers would demonstrate readiness to teach the DI lessons by demonstrating the delivery of a lesson towards the end of the training. During the training teachers learn how to gather and report student assessment data that is built into the program and utilised to drive instruction.

Follow-up training

Follow-up training is essential to sustain a high level of fidelity to the implementation of the program. During the first three years of implementation it will be imperative to provide support to the schools via an external partner that can provide on-site support at the schools periodically as well as help with analysing data on a weekly basis. This data analysis would also include assistance with initial placement testing so that schools place their students at the correct level of difficulty. During the first three years when this support is being provided it will be critical to build local capacity to manage the program into the future and this will include providing an instructional coach at each implementation site. The role of the coach will be to become an expert in the Direct Instruction programs with regards to delivery, data analysis, problem solving, training, modelling lessons et cetera. The coach will play a critical role in helping provide a prescriptive model for professional development by offering teachers and teachers aides support in areas where they are struggling with implementation. The principal will assist the coach in identifying areas of the implementation where further training is needed.

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