

Indigenous Students Aspirations: An In-Depth Analysis of Indigenous Students' Career Aspirations and Factors that Impact on their Formulation

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This study was commissioned by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) under its Education Innovation Program (EIP). This paper reports on aspects of the qualitative component of the study. The aims of this component of the study included to: 1) identify Indigenous secondary school students' aspirations; 2) identify Indigenous students' perceptions of the relevance of their current studies and of further education to achieve their aspirations; 3) identify Indigenous students' preferences for further education in regard to vocational education and higher education; 4) identify the key sources of and quality of career advice Indigenous students have received; 5) identify the ability of Indigenous students to differentiate between desirable and attainable goals and understand prerequisites on achieving said goals; 6) elucidate Indigenous students' perceptions of any barriers they may face in attaining their aspirations; and 7) Identify and elucidate what parents of Indigenous students perceive as the value of further education and training. Whilst all students had similar life goals Indigenous students were: more likely to identify lower levels of educational and training aspirations, identify more barriers to achieving their aspirations, have less knowledge about further education and training, were less likely to formulate alternative preferences or strategies to achieve their aspirations, and less of an understanding on the relevance of academic choices as it pertains to further education and training. The results also identified that Indigenous students were more likely to want to work in areas that are beneficial to their communities and identified more altruistic reasons for career choices. Parents of Indigenous students indicated that education systems and schools were more accommodating of Indigenous students today but still needed reform to cater for Indigenous students. Parents also indicated at feeling frustrated in their ability to provide adequate academic and social support for their children whilst also recognizing the significant barriers impacting on and impeding their child's abilities to make informed decisions and to attain their aspirations. Indigenous students also indicated that they were less likely to seek advice about career choices and subsequently lacked the appropriate knowledge and understandings of academic choices and their impact on their overall aspirations. Careers programs whilst trying to assist all students seems to lack resources to adequately cope with Indigenous students' needs. The findings in this component of the project supported and enriched the findings of the quantitative component of the study whilst also providing a significant insight into the mindset of Indigenous students and parents about their dreams and nightmares.

Introduction

The following paper reports a summary of findings of phase 2 of a larger study (Craven, Tucker, Munns, Hinkley, Marsh, and Simpson; in press) based upon data generated by student and parent focus group interviews, and interviews with career advisers. The paper then highlights the barriers that Indigenous students believe will hamper or stop them from achieving their

aspirations. This is followed with comparison of Indigenous students' responses to responses from participating non-Indigenous students who served as a control group.

Background: Aspirations and Indigenous Students

As Lowe and Tassone (2001) in their project overview of the Aboriginal Career Aspirations Program rather aptly suggested the development of aspirations for students was a crucial component of the program and seen as a "positive vehicle in which to build knowledge, self-esteem and identity" (p. 1). One of their main findings highlighted the need to address four key areas of Career Education. Firstly, learning about self in relation to work; about the world of work; how to make career plans and pathway decisions; and learning about the skills required to implement career decisions and manage the work from study transition (Lowe and Tassone, 2001, p. 2). The outcomes targeted by this project recognised the need to include the school, the community as well as the Indigenous students to accomplish correcting the inequity currently recognised between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in career path attainment and achievement. Not surprisingly, the list recognised the essential components of self-concept, their right to make choices regarding career paths and the need for higher education as determinants to aide in turning around the inequity experienced between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students educational and career aspiration outcomes.

Findings of the pilot Aboriginal Career Aspirations Program highlighted critical areas, which need to be addressed. Firstly, the program highlighted the need to disseminate information, knowledge and understanding regarding the inequity experienced by Indigenous students compared to non-Indigenous students in relation to the labour market, is not fully recognised at all levels. Secondly, there was a critical gap in the development of self-esteem/identity and again training in the way in which to give Indigenous students the knowledge and understanding on how to manage the transition between work and school. Thirdly, there was a very clear need for involvement by the local Indigenous community and Indigenous parents in the program (Lester, 2000).

As Lowe and Tassone suggested in their overview of the program, that the "degree to which individuals have agency in fashioning their own future, within a wider socio-economic environment enables them to work towards giving reality to the achievement of these goals".

One of the ways that Aboriginal people are restoring their pride and identity as a group is through becoming economically independent and empowered. Research clearly indicates that students' achievement values are significant predictors of academic performance as well as their intentions to take future courses and subsequent enrolment in those courses (Anderman, Eccles, Yoon, Roeser, Wigfield & Blumenfeld, 2001, p. 92).

One area that requires immediate attention regarding the future aspirations for Indigenous Australians directly links with the comparative high attrition rate prior to completion of Year 12. Compared to non-Indigenous Australians with an unemployment rate of 10% in the Destinations 2000 report (ECEP, 2000), the unemployment rate for Indigenous Australians was nearly double at 19%. It was disseminated in the Destinations, 2000 report for the participants within their study that the highest unemployment rates correlated directly with students who did not complete

their secondary certificate. The report also reiterated the fact that “those who leave school with no qualifications are more likely to be excluded from the labour market” (ECEP - Watson, 2000, p. 12).

During the crucial period of early adolescence the adolescent is struggling with issues of identity. Through the process of self-categorization, identification (Stets and Burke, Stets, 2000) incorporating both the social and cultural roles an identity is formed. An important aspect of identity is the confidence one has about their desired goals and aspirations and in essence their future identity and “Indigenous Australians appear extremely vulnerable to negative communications from the mainstream” (Groome, 1996, p. 6). Early adolescents begin to explore various career and educational opportunities, and they begin to consider seriously targets for the future (Anderman, Anderman and Griesinger, 1999). Their choice of future career and educational opportunities relate to the construction of prospective self representations in terms of their hopes and fears regarding different life domains, thus providing a basis for setting goals, planning, exploring options, making commitments, which ultimately guides the person’s developmental course (Nurmi, 1991). A person’s heuristics serve as the cognitive representation to guide one’s behaviour and process information about oneself (Chan, 2002). Identity formation is a complex cognitive-motivational structure. Its motivational properties draw from the needs, value of expected behaviour outcomes and the appraisal of internal (ability and effort) and socio-cultural factors for satisfying personal needs. Empirical studies have shown that the cognitive representation of the prospective self is further shaped by gender (Seginer, 2000), age (Seginer and Halabi-Kheir, 1998) and cultural settings (Seginer, 2000). Exploration and commitment during adolescence lay the ground for continuing the work into adulthood (Marjoribanks, 1991, p. 829). Adolescents have the capability of forming self-perceptions in relation to particular contexts or situations and roles (Byrne, 1996, p. 125). At this time the role of parents and the home environment continue to strongly impact on their educational goal setting and thus their career paths (Slaughter-Defoe, 2001). Given adolescence is a period of developmental change, challenge and potential, it is the optimal time to identify and address the formation of Indigenous Australians academic self-concept with assistance and encouragement to go forth and achieve.

Aboriginal students’ lack of attendance at school also gives rise to concern and indicates a lack of identity in connection with formal state schools (Gool and Patton, 1999, p. 26). The element of choice and change was highlighted in the Aboriginal and Islander Tertiary Aspirations Program (AITAP) in 1996. In this research the conclusions saw the AITAP program as an agent of change. Whereby integral to maintaining one’s cultural identity, yet still having the freedom and the choice to work towards further and higher education without abandoning or forsaking one’s cultural heritage or identity (Nasir, 1996, p. 9).

The research presented in this paper was designed to further elucidate Indigenous students aspirations in relation to their career choices and understandings of the requirements needed to attain their aspirations.

Aims

This component of the project was designed to further elucidate the aims of the project in the context of the following research questions:

- What aspirations do Indigenous students from urban and rural communities have in relation to education, training, employment and life goals? ;
- To what extent do Indigenous students consider that their current study and preferences for further education are useful for attaining their aspirations? ;
- What preferences do Indigenous students have in relation further education, both higher and vocational and the basis of their preferences? ;
- What are the key sources of career advice for Indigenous students and what is the quality of the advice they have received from these sources? ;
- Do Indigenous students distinguish between desirable and attainable goals and is there is an understanding of the prerequisites required in achieving said goals? ;
- What do Indigenous students perceive as barriers that impact on their completion of school, undertaking further education, and employment prospects? ;
- What do parents of Indigenous children perceive as to:
 - What is the value of vocational and higher education to their children's later employment and community life?
 - What are the sources and quality of career advice that their children receive?
 - What are some of the barriers they perceive to their children's success?
 - To what extent their own experiences of education serve to impact upon their children's aspirations? .

As the study aims also emphasise the need to compare and contrast Indigenous students' perceptions with non-Indigenous students' perceptions to identify commonalities and differences, this comparison was used as a basis for interpreting the above research questions and presenting the findings pertaining to each of the aims. Hence this component of the project makes a significant contribution to elucidating further, 7 of the key aims of the project which are specifically conducive to qualitative research methods.

Participants

From this initial student participant pool a total of 148 students, volunteered to participate in phase 2 of the study by undertaking a 1 hour focused group interview. Parents of Indigenous students (n=37) and career advisors (n=6) also participated in phase 2 of the study. The range of students interviewed ensured that responses were varied and was influenced by the geographical location and the socio economic circumstance of the community. See Table 5.1 for in-depth breakdown of interview participants by state, geographical classification and numbers by interviews.

Table 1: Breakdown of participant pool for focus group interviews by State and location

Region	Participants	NSW	QLD	WA	Totals
Rural	Indigenous Students	12	21	10	43
	Non-Indigenous Students	12	18	11	41
	Parents of Indigenous Students	8	8	5	21
	Careers Advisors	1	2	0	3
Urban	Indigenous Students	14	14	12	40
	Non-Indigenous Students	8	8	8	24
	Parents of Indigenous Students	5	6	5	16
	Careers Advisors	1	1	1	3
Totals		61	78	52	191

Procedures

The same Indigenous researcher (the first author) conducted focus groups with students and parents of Indigenous students, and all interviews with career advisers. This procedure ensured that internal validity for this component of the study was strong.

Structured questions comprised the schedules for focus group discussions and interviews. Each key question was posed and prompts in relation to each question were only utilized when unstructured discussion of the key question did not result in these issues being raised. Focus groups and interviews were undertaken in a school location determined by the school.

Results

Aspirations for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students

Common aspirations shared by Indigenous and non-Indigenous students did not vary in overall goals but more in how these goals would be attained. Indigenous students in comparison to non-Indigenous students were more likely to have a preference for going to TAFE rather than university, were less likely to have identified a second preference for post-schooling options, and were more likely to want to begin having a family earlier in comparison to non-Indigenous students. Shared goals included: completing high school, undertaking some form of post schooling training and/or education, obtaining employment, having some form of long term relationship and a family, acquiring a house and acquiring other forms of material assets.

Indigenous students' aspirations include generally, having a family, keeping in contact with immediate and extended family for personal, financial and cultural support reasons and obtaining some form of employment. Indigenous students were pessimistic about completing high school and seemed to rely on external locus of control whereby it was perceived external forces would largely determine their futures. Skilled labour or semi professional careers were the more likely choices of Indigenous males with females more likely to identify semi-professional to professional careers. The latter also seemed more pronounced for male students who resided in rural areas. It is of concern to note that the majority of Indigenous students could not identify a

second preference in terms of post-schooling options. Interestingly, Indigenous students identified their rationale for wanting to work as being based on altruistic reasons that would result in helping their own, other Indigenous or the broader community.

Hence these comparisons elucidated that Indigenous students in contrast to non-Indigenous students were less likely to have some form of structured plan to undertake further education and training, and have alternative preferences for career choices. Indigenous students in comparison to their non-Indigenous peers were more likely to: be motivated to work for altruistic reasons as opposed to financial rewards, enter into serious relationships and have children at a younger age, return to their communities after undertaking post-school options, and have a cultural attachment that is actively maintained through continued contact with their communities. Indigenous students were also less likely to have a plan or some form of strategy to work towards achieving their goals.

Relevance of Schooling and Further Education to Attaining Aspirations

All students were able to identify and recognise the relevance of their education in relation to their aspirations. Students were also able to identify the relevance of some subjects in relation to their particular career choices. All students had difficulty in understanding or identifying the relevance of at least some of the school subjects they had chosen to their future careers.

Whilst many Indigenous students were aware that there are requirements for university and TAFE programs and courses and were able to understand the basis of the requirements a significant proportion were not aware of why, or the relevance of specific school subjects as it pertains to their further study and career choices. Whilst the penchant of Indigenous students to undertake TAFE training programs and courses is reflective of their aspirations they were keen to undertake some form of education that they could identify as overtly relevant to their ambitions. Indigenous students lacked basic knowledge about requirements for particular ambitions and many students reported that they did not know at all how to go about achieving their goals.

Preferences for Further Education

Whilst all students were able to identify a career choice and at least the further education path (eg university, TAFE, etc.) they had significant problems recognizing the actual requirements for entry into further education courses. Whilst Indigenous students overwhelmingly identified the need to undertake some form of further education and/or training the preference was significantly in favour of non-university education or training. Students demonstrated a disturbing penchant to utilise the CDEP as a waiting strategy until an opportunity presented itself. Students were unable to demonstrate any knowledge of alternative strategies to assist them in attaining their goals. Significantly some Indigenous rural students identified the CDEP as the only option available in their regions.

In summary, whilst non-Indigenous students identified secondary preferences or alternative entry pathways, Indigenous students did not seem to have developed a viable alternate strategy if first preferences were not attained. Whilst it is important to recognize the important role of TAFE in providing significant training and further education opportunities for Indigenous students, the continued penchant to choose TAFE-based further education and training programs has the

potential to create overrepresentation of Indigenous people in skilled labour and semi professional professions. This in itself may not be a cause for concern but if this trend continues then the likelihood that Indigenous people will continue to be under-represented in university trained professional careers is high.

Source and Usefulness of Career Advice

Significant unemployment has meant that a number of young Indigenous people 'don't see the point' in trying to obtain information about careers or in being motivated to set never alone achieve goals. However, many students were keen and motivated to undertake further study and training and to obtain employment to work towards their life goals. It is also apparent that career education strategies utilized by schools are often perceived as either irrelevant or inadequate by Indigenous students. Whilst written forms of communication are a historically accepted communication strategy between schools and parents, over-reliance on written communication strategies has not proven to be a successful form of communication between schools and Indigenous parents. It seems that a number of career education programmes have not been designed to take account of cultural differences and therefore meet the needs of Indigenous students.

In summary, whilst non-Indigenous Australians are able to be more proactive in their approach to obtaining information relevant to their career choices Indigenous Australians do not have the economic base, historical tradition, or human capital to draw upon. Furthermore, many Indigenous Australians see their employment prospects as being limited due to a racist industry sector, which for some has resulted in de-motivating career education efforts. In addition, the lack of effective communication strategies between schools and Indigenous communities contributes to the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous attitudes towards obtaining appropriate advice at an appropriate time. Consequently Indigenous students are less likely to obtain the relevant information at the relevant time to make relevant academic choices to contribute to attaining their career goals. It also seems that a number of career education programs may be weak and not structured in a sophisticated enough manner to make an impact on Indigenous students. Some programmes seem to solely rely on students approaching the career adviser for advice rather than being devised to be a broad and informative career education programme. Also perceived levels of racism and systemic bias coupled with historical dispossession and oppression in the employment system has contributed to some Indigenous students' perceiving that it:

Doesn't matter what ya do man, they don't care and the only time they are 'appy is when we're not 'round.

Views in Relation to Discerning Desirable and Attainable Goals

There seems to be two disparate and maladaptive goal setting approaches adopted by most Indigenous students. Many Indigenous students set unattainable goals. Given that Indigenous students seem to be largely unaware of the requirements of specific courses this is not surprising. In addition, many Indigenous students also set goals at the other end of the extreme, goals that are clearly attainable but not commensurate with their academic potential. Students also report that they have low academic self-concepts. This is problematic in that adaptive self-concepts serve to drive academic striving behaviours and the attainment of realistic goals. Given that non-

Indigenous students in the teeth of experiencing the possibility of not being able to achieve their goals in an adaptive manner – by trying harder – and given that non-Indigenous students academic self-concepts seem higher than Indigenous students' academic self-concepts, it is postulated that good self-concept is a vital key in setting and attaining aspirations commensurate with human potential.

Parents' Perceptions

Many parents indicated that they wanted their children to succeed at school but had no real idea how to assist them. They all stated that careers advice should begin earlier and be made more relevant for their children. Whilst parents perceptions about the lack of proactive careers programs is of concern it must be stated that this does not necessarily mean the school does not have a strong programme but that perhaps parents and Indigenous students are not aware of the programme and as such prevented from capitalizing upon it.

Significantly parents of Indigenous students did not feel that their past experiences impacted on their child's education and career goals. However it is significant to note that parents did state that due to their past experiences they felt inadequate in providing advice and support to their children in relation to academic and career achievement.

In summary, parents of Indigenous students had similar aspirations as you would expect all parents to have for their children. All parents of Indigenous students also stated that they wanted to ensure their children strengthen their cultural identity and remain in contact, wherever possible, with their 'mob'. The majority of parents felt that they did not have the knowledge and experience to ensure their children had an opportunity to attain their goals.

Parents' generally identified peer pressure and issues such as pregnancy as their major concern for their children. Whilst parents did identify racism in the work force as a major obstacle to overcome they generally felt that their children had a better chance today.

Careers Advisors' Perceptions

Careers Advisors agree that generally Indigenous students have careers' aspirations similar to their non-Indigenous counterparts but have not made appropriate subject choices to match their ambitions. Indigenous students seem to make their decisions based on what their peers are doing and can have unrealistic goals in mind. Indigenous students have to be approached as very few seem to be proactive in obtaining advice. Careers advisors also indicated that parents of Indigenous students do not necessarily provide appropriate advice and support for their children to the point where they contribute to the child's unrealistic careers choices and expectations. Whilst it is interesting to note that the majority of Careers Advisors interviewed indicated that they tried to do the best for Indigenous students with the limited support and information they had some Careers Advisors were overtly prejudicial towards Indigenous students.

Careers advisors consistently identified unrealistic career choices, low ambition and a lack of knowledge and support as major issues when providing advice and support for Indigenous students. This extends to discussions with parents. Peer pressure seems to be symptomatic across all interview responses. Indigenous students on the whole did not have career strategies in mind at the same age as their non-Indigenous counterparts and were much more likely to be dissuaded

from attempting to work towards their goals. There are exceptions to the norm but on the whole this attitude was the most prevalent.

Careers advisors stated that Indigenous students were more likely to have no alternative strategies and were receiving inaccurate and bad advice if advice was received at all. Careers advisors also indicated that they had to approach Indigenous students in the main and decisions seemed more likely to be made up on the spot instead of really working through the issues.

All careers advisors indicated that more support and resources were required to adequately address the shortcomings they may have in their knowledge and ability in dealing with Indigenous students.

Perceived Barriers to Attaining Aspirations

The overwhelming theme identified by participants as the most significant barrier preventing students from completing high school and undertaking further study or training is poor school achievement. This theme was also identified as to why students leave school prior to the completion of secondary schooling.

If your marks are rubbish then there is not much you can do. So you either leave or stay at school and do nothing. If you are in Year 11 and your grades are bad no-one expects you to do any good so they sort of not care about what you do.

Students also identified social issues (e.g. peer pressure to leave school with friends, being in trouble with the school or other authorities, substance abuse, family concerns in relation to dysfunctional practices and behaviours) as barriers to completing secondary schooling or undertaking further education and training.

Sometimes things happen at home and you don't do well at school. But do they care? Nah! All they care about is your grades and making sure everybody is being good. They don't care about what happens when you are not at school even when what happens out of school stops you from getting good grades.

Too many kids get into drugs and stuff. That really stuffs them up. Mainly it is booze I think. Every weekend so many kids get drunk and get into trouble.

Most of me mates 'ave left. They 'ang 'round outside of school and stuff during the day and they tell ya to, you know' 'ang wif em. Trying to get ya to leave an' stuff.

Sometimes ya just get into trouble for 'anging 'round town at night. Ya know. An' the cops chase ya and next thing ya know they're at the school and ya get dragged.

Each of these issues would have an impact on the achievement of any student whilst they are attending school.

Surprisingly all students identified the lack of appropriate and timely careers' advice as being a barrier that may hinder or stop them from achieving their goals.

By the time Ms. _____ or Ms. _____ speak to you have already chosen your subjects. Then you find out you made the wrong choices.

By the time you speak to the careers teacher you have already made some decisions about your subjects. If it hadn't been for mum and dad then I would have probably made the wrong decisions.

A significant factor in this section of the focus group interviews was that there was no marked difference between rural and urban students responses in relation to barriers identified as responsible for preventing students from attaining their goals. Rural students did state that a lack of services in their regions would not inhibit them from attaining further education or training.

When I finish school I am going to uni to do law. I have to leave home to do it but that isn't going to stop me. Most of us think like that. If we have to leave then we will.

Hence, all students were able to identify at least academic achievement and a number of social barriers that may hinder them in pursuit of their goals.

Overwhelmingly Indigenous students identified low grades at school as the most significant barrier in attaining their goals. Alarmingly a strong theme amongst Indigenous students is the notion that as a group within society they are not as intelligent as their non-Indigenous counterparts.

All the blackfellas are in the lowest classes. So most of us don't get the marks we need to go good at school. As me mum said all the dumb blacks are in together.

Everyone says that the blacks are not as smart around 'ere as everyone else.

This grouping of students in the lowest classes therefore seems to fuel low academic self-concepts amongst Indigenous students.

Indigenous students were all very much in agreement that home life and obligations had a significant impact on their achievements at school. Issues in the home such as looking after siblings, domestic violence, substance abuse, no place to do homework, and overcrowding were identified as significant.

You know the worst thing. Everybody wants ya' to do well but ya' come home and everyone is sitting around on the grog. They yell and scream all night, ya' can't get a feed they end up having a fight and you end up not going to sleep for most of the night. Then they tell ya' to do good in school.

Every pension day is the same. Ya' 'ave to stay 'ome and look after your little brother and sisters so ya' can't go to school. Ya' end up sitting outside the club while they get pissed and gamble all the money. Then what? Ya' get in trouble with the school 'cause ya' can't turn up.

I tell ya'. Last night mum and her boyfriend had a punch up. So I snuck out and 'ung around with me mates. We got pissed and we slept at another blokes' 'ouse.

These findings imply that whilst parents of Indigenous students desire for their children to do well, a number of family environments are so dysfunctional that they fail to provide Indigenous students with even appropriate basic support to succeed. It is also important to note that these family issues were more prevalent in discrete communities where Indigenous Australians lived in a segregated setting rather than in integrated settings where Indigenous people lived within the same community with non-Indigenous people.

Indigenous students identified peer pressure as a key reason that many of their counterparts left school. Every Indigenous student in every interview identified some form of peer pressure that contributes to: leaving school; taking drugs; getting into trouble with the law; and fighting.

Yeah, I'm leavin' school soon. All me mates 'ave left. I 'll 'ook up with 'em and do what I want.

Most of me mates 'ave left. They left before they finished Year 10. They just 'ang out and do nothin'. They try and talk me into leaving but I won't go. I tell 'im that I don't want to end up just 'anging around. I want to do somethin' with my life.

The first time I smoked some yarndi was because me mates 'ad some.

Sometimes ya just 'any 'round with your mates and everyone gives ya a 'ard time. So ya end up getting into trouble and leave school.

Indigenous students from rural areas also identified many of the same problems as their urban counterparts with the added issue of a concentration of dire social problems in a more identifiably discrete community such as 'missions' and more traditionally orientated homeland communities that were in segregated settings. The scope and seriousness of these issues is encapsulated in the following comments:

It's just so much shit! You can't walk down the street because of the rubbish and broken glass. At nights they just get pissed and have big blues. Young kids go around and break into places.

I started sniffing petrol when I was 7 and I stopped when I was 14. Now I just get pissed and wasted. We all do that. Nothin' else to do.

The police are too scared to come out to _____. So when my sister was 14 and she got raped by these two 18 year old blokes we got pissed and kicked the c--t out of 'em.

I can get any drug around 'ere that you can get in the city. The pigs don't care as long as we stay on _____ mission they don't give a f—k.

You only have to walk onto the mish to see all them girls 13 and 14 and older being pregnant, getting' pissed and on the smoke.

Pregnancy amongst Indigenous youth was identified as a significant barrier in achieving success and remaining at school. This was a shared theme between rural and urban students.

Ya' know what the big problem is? Al them girls get pregnant. They don't care. They f---k their lives up but they don't care. Then ya' sees their little sister get pregnant because big sister leaves school and gets the pension. How f---ed is that? I'm not gonna be like that.

'Getting into trouble' with any authority type figures be they police, school authorities or community services was another significant issue identified as a barrier. This was rated as a higher concern amongst urban Indigenous students than their rural counterparts as the city or major centre is seen as 'having more things to get into trouble with'.

Too many of our mob get into trouble. They join gangs and break into places, get into fights, take drugs or get pissed. They just sleep at anyone's 'ouse. Next thing ya' know is the cops banging on doors trying to catch 'em.

Another significant theme identified by Indigenous students is cultural obligations. Attending funerals, cultural celebrations and family gatherings was seen as a barrier to attend school let alone achieve desired results.

Last month I went to me uncle's funeral. I was away from school for 2 weeks and that's the third time this year. All up I was away for 7 weeks in the first 'alf of the year.

Sometimes no-one from the mish goes to school because we 'ave a big funeral or sometimes our mob 'as to do stuff, ya' know cultural stuff, and we don't go to school for a week.

We 'ave lots of days off because we 'ave to do stuff with our mob.

Again this was seen as a more of a concern for discrete Indigenous communities and homeland students than for Indigenous students from urban centres.

One theme identified by rural students that was not raised by urban Indigenous students was the demarcation between more traditionally orientated students from more remote or homeland communities and Indigenous people that resulted in angst between Indigenous groups and racial stereotyping of both groups by some non-Indigenous people.

These blacks from _____ come 'ere and think they are better then us. They don't talk to us, they start blues, call us names all 'cause we don't speak our language.

In this school there is 'ardley any trouble between whites and blacks. 'Cept for the traditional ones. They look down on us because we don't speak our language and we haven't got our lands. They call us names like yella fella or half caste or town niggers.

Ya' know what else? They don't mix with us, there the ones that sit in the park and get pissed and 'ave fights. The white fellas in town start calling us the 'alf castes and say we cause the trouble. But you go and ask them fellas sitting in the park over there, go on, and they will tell ya' that they aren't from 'ere.

Racism was identified by all Indigenous students as a major barrier that will prevent them achieving their life goals.

'Ow are we goin' to get anywhere! The 'ole town is racist! Not one local black fella has a job in town. Not one!

School's good and they deal with the racism but when I did work experience I 'ad to go to 'nother town to get a placement because no-one wants local blackfellas working 'ere. You check if ya' don't believe me.

Schools try man, they really do. That Mr. _____, the Principal he's good man. But when ya' leave the school what can 'e do? Nothing!

What chance 'ave I got? Even if ya' get all the education ya' need unless ya' get a job with an Aboriginal organisation or with government who else is going to give ya' work?

No-one wants to employ blacks.

Alarmingly, these statements were confirmed by a number of sources within the school and community. For many Indigenous students this is perceived to be the situation in both rural Australia and major urban centres. Whilst no research was undertaken by the team to ascertain the extent of this practice past employment indicators would confirm that this is the norm and not the exception. It is also important to note that within rural Australia, CDEP is the largest employer of Indigenous Australians, and it also needs to be noted that this is a training programme as opposed to a long-term employment programme. Overall the sector that employs the majority of Indigenous Australians is government followed by Aboriginal organizations. This situation does not seem to be reversing itself.

Racism amongst Indigenous and non-Indigenous students whilst identified by some as an issue was not considered a major concern amongst the majority of students. Whilst this is true it is important to recognize that for many, if not all, Indigenous students racism was felt to only exist if someone overtly discriminated against them. Systemic bias and institutionalised racism is far more subtle and complex and would not necessarily be identifiable and labelled as such by younger Indigenous people.

It is important to note that whilst non-Indigenous students viewed education and training as a right, a Indigenous students saw further education and training as more of a privilege or reward for good behaviour.

Ya' have to be good man. They don't want blackfellas around so they use any excuse. You 'ave to get as good a marks as everyone else. That's not the problem. Ya' 'ave to behave as twice as good as any white fella to get into uni or whatever.

I just got back from being suspended for fighting. But the white guy who started the fight didn't get suspended he only got detention. That's the first time I have been in trouble in over a year and _____ is always in trouble.

Ya' 'ave to be as good as the white fellas to get anywhere. And I don't just mean good marks.

This suggests that Indigenous students in at least some schools are being stereotyped and subjected to racism as a result. This would be a form of institutional racism.

Alarminglly an emerging theme amongst Indigenous interviewees was the notion that sometimes 'your own mob' impacts on the success of students at school.

I got bashed by my own mob 'cause I want to go to uni. They accuse me of thinking I'm too good for 'em.

If ya' get good grades then ya' get called an uptown nigger.

Me own cousins threatened to bash me.

Me aunt told me that I shouldn't leave the mish to go to uni because they will only turn me into a coconut and no-one would want me to come back.

These findings suggest that at least in some discrete settings students are actively discouraged from both having and achieving their aspirations by members of their own community.

Having to leave home to gain further education and training was identified by rural Indigenous students as a concern. This included students from both discrete and integrated communities.

I don't know man. I want to get a better chance but that means I would 'ave to leave me mob and go by myself to the city.

I don't want to leave but I might 'ave to.

Ya' know my mum told me that she didn't want me to go 'cause I 'ave to 'elp 'er look after the kids.

My boyfriend wacked me last night because I said I was goin' to leave ____ after I finish school.

Hence not only the physical distance was difficult to negotiate cultural isolation was a key concern, family obligations were used to hold students back, and fragile and often violent relationships with the opposite sex also contributed to not leaving. Whilst this was a theme amongst Indigenous students it was by no means the most prevalent in relation to leaving their communities. What is interesting to note is that whilst many non-Indigenous rural students identified this theme as a minor inconvenience many Indigenous rural students stated they would leave but placed a limit of between 3-5 years being away from home before they returned.

Yeah I am going to leave to 'ave a 'oliday. Just get away for a few years then come back.

I just want to go to the city for about 3 or 4 years for a break.

Yeah, when I finish I am going to uni in the city and then I will come back.

Comparison of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Students' Perceptions of Perceived Barriers to Attaining their Goals

Overwhelmingly whilst all students were able to identify a lack of academic achievement as a barrier and at least one or two social problems Indigenous students were able to identify being subjected to a diverse range of barriers. Alarming these barriers were not presented as hypothetical issues but as real day to day issues in their lives. For example a juxtaposition of the following comments illuminates this point.

Maybe if you got pregnant. That would stop you for awhile at least.
Non-Indigenous student

My sister got pregnant when she was 14, 'bout 3 years ago. Now she 'as 2 kids and stays at 'ome on the pension.
Indigenous Student

In summary many young Indigenous Australians contend with multiple barriers that severely impede their achievement often on a daily basis. This is the norm for Indigenous Australians not the exception or the hypothetical.

You want to know whats' goin' to stop me. I'll tell ya! Because I get pissed most nights, get into blues, my girlfriends pregnant and me mum doesn't 'ave money to feed us - she drinks it.

Conclusion

Most Indigenous students have lower aspirations for careers and education and training as compared to non-Indigenous students. Subsequently their career choices generally reflect this

and Indigenous students also indicated that they expect to achieve their goals. Of the Indigenous students that set higher aspirations these are characterized as unrealistic as in relation to their current courses of study and expressed knowledge of pre-requisites required for entry into further training and education. In contrast, non-Indigenous students were better prepared, informed and confident about their career goals.

Careers programs are seen as *'mainly for the white fellas'* and alarmingly an avenue Indigenous students do not feel confident about. The belief that Indigenous students are told what careers they should choose to do is probably more an indictment about the lack of knowledge that Indigenous students have in relation to subject choice, relevance and attainment than any evidence of real malice or disregard by career advisors and their schools. Indigenous students were less certain of what was required for their career choice and subsequently chose academic pathways not congruent to attaining the pre-requisites needed. Consequently this lack of knowledge coupled with inadequate academic choices and achievements contributed to the perception that careers programs are *'mainly for white fellas'*.

All students agreed that they needed more knowledge about careers and academic and training prerequisites at an earlier stage of schooling. All students indicated that they had a preference for a career but non-Indigenous students were more likely to have a strategy and back up plan to work towards achieving their goals. Also it was apparent that Indigenous students did not have a real second preference and identified welfare or CDEP as the most appropriate alternative choice.

It is also a major concern that whilst non-Indigenous students were able to hypothesise and in the minority of cases actually experience some barriers the overwhelming majority of Indigenous students experienced multiple barriers on a daily basis thus entrenching a fatalistic attitude that contributed to them not achieving, or in some cases attempting to achieve their goals. To further compound and entrench the fatalistic attitude prevalent amongst Indigenous students interviewed was the notion that racism, at school or in the wider community will contribute to them not attaining their life goals.

Parents of Indigenous students overwhelmingly indicated that they only wanted what was best for their children. Parents also stated that they did not believe that they had adequate education and experiences to provide the most appropriate support required by their children in the areas of career choice and attainment.

The daily confrontation of barriers begins prior to schooling and continues long after the school day finishes. For many Indigenous students the dream is a reality already experienced by non-Indigenous students, whilst non-Indigenous students' nightmares are Indigenous students' reality.

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