

## **Community education for social change: the development of driver licensing educational strategies in north Queensland Indigenous communities**

**Malcolm Vick**

**School of Education, James Cook University**

There is a pressing need for road safety and driver licensing education in remote Indigenous communities to address high levels of incarceration and road trauma resulting from unlicensed driving. This paper outlines a program to identify, educate, resource and support community members to be road safety and driver licence educators and coordinators. The program is developed on a community-by-community basis through negotiations between government agencies and self-selected communities. It works towards integrating each community's licence education program with the community's aspirations and other programs, and towards financial autonomy. Self selection and negotiation are designed to ensure community ownership, and the linkages between the program and community economic needs and development potentials are crucial to ensuring sustainability of the program in each community. Community ownership is crucial to ensuring that the program is not dismissed as just another government imposed development. The program has potential to contribute to social change by enhancing community capacity, including increased capacity to take advantage of employment opportunities, and by the reduction of disruptions to family and community life through incarceration and road trauma.

### **Introduction**

There is a pressing need for road safety and driver licensing education in remote Indigenous communities. In these communities licence-holding levels are low, averaging around 33% (but ranging as low as 22%) of eligible persons, in comparison with a state-wide rate across the total population of around 85% (Rumble & Fox, 2006).

Contributing factors include service delivery and access issues, including the distance from Department of Transport or other 'one stop shop' government offices, reluctance to seek licensing through the local Police, problems with providing legally adequate evidence of identity, and difficulties in paying for the licence once all other barriers are overcome. Education-related factors include low levels of Standard English literacy and the literacy demands of official information on how to obtain a licence and of the learner licence test itself, and lack of knowledge of the need to obtain a licence, keep and renew it, or recover it after suspension, and of how to do so. Yet mobility is high and crucial to social life, and transport infrastructure extremely limited in these communities and regions. As a result, large numbers of Indigenous people in such communities drive, often long distances, unlicensed (CARRS-Q & Qld Transport, 2003; Rumble & Fox, 2006).

The consequences of driving unlicensed are serious for both individuals and communities: the only research that has investigated the matter showed that 57% of Indigenous people in North Queensland gaols were there, solely or in part, because they had been caught driving unlicensed. (CARRS-Q & Qld Transport, 2003). Moreover, official figures indicate that unlicensed Indigenous drivers are involved in road crashes at six times the rate of the total driving population (and up to 13 times in some communities) and that such crashes are much more severe, on several measures<sup>1</sup>, than crashes across the whole driving population (Rumble & Fox, 2006). Such figures significantly underestimate the real situation (Styles & Edmonston, 2005; c.f., ATSB, 2004; Cercarelli, 1994; Cercarelli, 2002; Legge, Gavin, & Cercarelli, 2005).

Such outcomes of unlicensed driving entail massive disruption to social life among Indigenous communities, with loss of population (whether temporarily or permanently), disturbance to family and other relationships, travel to hospitals or incarceration centres (located a considerable distance from most remote communities), financial costs associated with travel, treatment, loss of employment and income. The combination of low levels of licence holding, and the facts that police are both responsible for enforcement, and the principal

<sup>1</sup> Measures include: proportion of crashes resulting in fatality &/or hospitalization; and number of fatalities &/or hospitalizations per fatal &/or serious crash.

agents through whom licences can be obtained, constitutes a barrier to obtaining a licence, and a continuing source of tension between Indigenous people and police. Apart from incarceration and road trauma, not holding a driver's licence is a serious barrier to employment, which compounds the social and economic disadvantage that characterises such communities. Less tangibly, but not thereby less importantly, it marks out Indigenous people and communities as 'other' and lesser and contributes to an ongoing and continuously renewed sense of traumatised hopelessness in at least significant sections of many Indigenous communities (CARRS-Q & Qld Transport, 2003; Rumble & Fox, 2006).

This paper outlines an initiative to identify, educate, resource and support community members to be road safety and driver licence educators and coordinators. This initiative (which I will label the Community Based Educator [CBE] initiative) – presently in its very early stages of development - is one component of a more comprehensive program, the Queensland Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples Driver Licensing Program. This program involves a number of government agencies (Police, Justice and Attorney General, Emergency Services, Corrective Services, Education and Training) working together with non government organisations such as Catholic Education and external advisers and contributors from James Cook University and the Centre for Accident Research and Road Safety - Queensland [CARRS – Q] at QUT, under the leadership of Queensland Transport, to raise rates of licence holding among Indigenous people, with anticipated flow on reductions of incarceration and road trauma (Steering Committee, 2006b).<sup>2</sup>

The program pursues this aim through a combination of improved service delivery and education. Improved service delivery has achieved largely through the development of two Mobile Indigenous Licensing Teams (MILTs); one, based in Brisbane and serving the southern regions was led by Qld Police; the other, based in Cairns and serving the northern regions of the state is a unit within Queensland Transport. The educational 'wing' of the program embodies a highly diverse array of strategies and activities, and addresses a large number of issues. The issues addressed reflect the different points in what the program terms 'the licensing cycle', from recognising a need to obtain a licence, preparing to pass the written learner test, providing evidence of identity, resolving other barriers to obtaining a licence (such as outstanding legal liabilities), being able to make payment, preparing to pass the practical driving test, maintaining, renewing and where necessary recovering the licence. The overarching strategy is to document and evaluate existing educational programs and materials, identify gaps, and initiate and develop (or stimulate others to initiate and develop), licence education programs and resources that are sensitive to cultural and literacy issues. The CBE initiative is one element within this broad educational strategy; it aims to create licence educator and coordinator positions within remote communities and to identify, prepare and support members of the communities to fill those positions (Education & Training Committee, 2006a).

Before discussing the CBE initiative it seems appropriate to make three things clear. First, I am not a disinterested researcher-observer of this program. Rather, I am a highly interested and actively involved participant in the program at the levels of broad strategic planning, program development, and 'on the ground' negotiation and engagement with communities to bring this and other educational initiatives to life. Second, what follows blends an account of a model for implementation, and a description of what is already actually in place or is currently being put in place. And, third, much of the documentation of the program is in the form of unpublished materials produced within the program, either as confidential administrative and planning documents, or as unpublished informative materials for circulation among those involved, or potentially involved in aspects of the program. I have referenced these, even though they are not publicly available, to indicate the documentary basis of my information as a step towards transparency in a paper where there are almost no means for readers to check many of the factual claims made. Where such materials are not confidential, I am happy to supply copies on request. I have also discussed the issue with the Regional Manager of Queensland Transport (Northern Region), the person charged with oversight and leadership of the program,

<sup>2</sup> For accounts of other aspects of the program, or of the program as a whole, see Fox & Rumble 2006; SBS 2006; Vick 2006; Vick & Avery 2006.

who concurs with this arrangement and has expressed his willingness to confirm directly, the factual claims made in this paper.<sup>3</sup>

### **Community Based Educators: aims, roles and principles**

From the point of view of the committee coordinating the educational initiatives within the overall program,<sup>4</sup> the establishment of community based educators has three principal objectives. First, to provide ongoing licence and driver education activity within communities with what we identified from both official statistics and community information were high levels of need. Second, to enable licence and driving related education to be adapted to local circumstances, needs and interests. Third, to encourage a high degree of community ownership of both the issue and the program (Education & Training Committee, 2006a). Together, these are designed to support the mobile licensing teams (MILTs) by ensuring that people presenting for licence testing are well prepared in sufficient numbers to ensure maximum benefit from the MILT visits (Brolga Consulting Service, 2007a).

From the initial research (CARRS-Q & QT, 2003) and ongoing discussion and negotiations, it appears that communities involved in establishing community based licensing and road safety educators and education programs are doing so for reasons that are highly congruent with the program's aims. Broadly, they see CBEs as enhancing their capacity to make use of the opportunity the MILT offers to address problems flowing from low licence holding rates. Beyond this, they appear to see CBEs as having potential to build community capacity and enhance and complement other existing programs by their integration into wider range of community education and development initiatives. They also appear to consider that establishing CBEs will demonstrate a commitment to local self improvement that will give leverage in negotiating for other services within the prevailing 'shared responsibility' and partnerships policy framework (Notes of meeting, 2006a; Notes of meeting, 2006b; Notes of meeting, 2007a; 2007c; 2007d; c.f., OIPC n.d.a; OIPC n.d.b; c.f., DATSIP, 2005; Vick, 2006a). Their aims in establishing such positions are, thus, both directly related to the immediate purposes of licensing, and indirectly related to their wider aims and aspirations for their communities.

For both government and community leaders, an additional interest in the development of CBEs and of defined, robust and sustainable educational programs under their aegis lies in the potential for such programs to provide diversionary sentencing options for magistrates dealing with community members charged with driving related offences – options that can remove the basis for subsequent unlicensed driving offences or address the likelihood of repeat offences for other forms of dangerous and/or illegal driving, and which a number of magistrates strongly advocate with equally strong support at the highest level within the magistracy (Notes of meeting, 2005; Notes of meeting, 2006c; Safe4Life, 2004; Safe4Life, 2005; Steering Committee, 2007).

The Community Based Educator role is defined according to the specific community context, and the expressed interests and priorities of community leaders. Consequently, it varies from one community to another. However, across local differences, CBEs have two broad responsibilities: education, and coordination.

Their educational role involves providing community members with both the factual and procedural knowledges they need to obtain and keep a licence, and an understanding of the importance of holding a licence and of a range of road safety issues. Factual knowledge includes knowledge of the road rules, of evidence of identity and payment requirements for obtaining a licence, conditions of licence holding, and the entitlements to drive associated with different classes of licence, and the need to periodically renew the licence. Procedural knowledge includes knowledge of how to apply, how to prepare for the learner and practical driving tests, how to secure evidence of identity, how to regain their licence after suspension or disqualification and, more generally how to deal with relevant government agencies, and obtain information and assistance from them. More broadly, their role includes developing understandings of legal, health and safety issues related to driving, vehicle purchase and maintenance, including support and advice available through a range of government departments and other agencies for issues arising across the licensing cycle and a driving career (Education & Training Committee, 2006a). With the introduction of new regulations for licensing of young drivers, it seems likely that CBEs may also take some responsibility for the supervision of at least part of the 100 hours of logged supervised driving which will be required. A likely extension of CBEs'

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<sup>3</sup> Contact details available from author.

<sup>4</sup> The program as a whole is led by Qld Transport and coordinated through a Whole of Government Coordination Committee; within that framework an Education and Training Committee is responsible for overall planning and coordinating of education initiatives.

educational role might involve recruiting and inducting other community members into the work of driver and road safety education, especially with the increase of demand associated with the addition of driving supervision to their role (Education & Training Committee, 2007; Vick, 2006b; Young Drivers - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education, Log book Model, 2007).

The extent to which a particular CBE takes on the full scope of such educative work is determined, in part, by other provisions in the community. In one community, for instance, the regional TAFE college already has a low literacy program in which literacy teaching is built around driver licensing and road safety requirements and through which many community members successfully prepare to pass the written learner licence test (Avery, 2006; Notes of meeting, 2006b). In another, the local High School is in process of introducing a driver education program which will include learner licence preparation for its senior students (Notes of meeting, 2007b). In yet another, there is a proposal under development to secure funding for the training and resourcing of a local qualified driving instructor (Holm, 2006; Scott, 2006). Clearly, CBEs will not duplicate such provisions, but in these contexts will focus on other aspects of the licensing and road safety education. The roles of specific CBEs is also being determined by community social structures and the desirability of appointing, and capacity to support, more than one CBE, as well as by the educational attainments, and other commitments, of the individual appointed.

The second CBE role is co-ordination. Externally, CBEs have an important role coordinating local processes, and local applications and applicants, with the licence testing and issuance process. This means, for example, negotiating with Qld Police or Qld Transport the timing of visits by the MILT. Internally, it means coordinating local applicants and the processes preparing them for the visit of the MILT. This is multi-dimensional, involving timing to coincide completion of learner or practical preparation, availability of money, evidence of identity with the arrival of the MILT. In some instances, CBEs will have a role monitoring licence expiries and renewals. Where there are complementary educational programs within the community, they will also coordinate their own educational activities with those other programs. And, as educational programs are developed they will have a coordinating role with local police, courts and magistrates and Community Justice Groups in the offering and use of educational diversionary sentencing options for community members charged with driving offences (Court Diversion Information, 2005).

The educational model informing the work of CBEs is grounded in a number of principles drawn from research-based theories of types of learning, adult education, quality teaching and culturally and contextually appropriate pedagogy (Education & Training Committee, 2006a; c.f., Vick & Avery, 2006). From general learning theory and taxonomies it draws the recognition that learning takes place at varying levels from highly specific acquisition of information to deep learning (Jarvis, Holdford & Griffin, 2003). From adult education and lifelong learning it draws the principle that learning, in general, should recognise prior knowledge, existing skills and interests and the responsibility and educational decision making of the learner, and the active involvement of the learner in the shaping and assessment of their learning, and makes use of distributed rather than single site provision, and both formal and non-formal approaches (Chapman & Aspin, 1997; Jarvis, 2004). On the basis of understandings of quality teaching it seeks to encourage and enable learners to relate learning to their contexts, make connections between different learnings, and apply knowledge and skills to different issues and contexts, and seeks to make creative and customised use of existing training packages and assessment procedures (Hill & Vick, 2007; Lovat, 2007). It draws on theories of culturally appropriate pedagogy, to incorporate both oral and hands-on practical instruction, with both community language, and English language literacy, as appropriate, supported by contextually appropriate examples and [resources, and responds to community cultural values as well as those derived from 'external' or 'mainstream' Australian culture \(DETYA, 2000\).](#)

In the process of preparing community members for licensing and safe road use, this approach seeks to encourage and facilitate three broad community capacity building outcomes which extend well beyond enabling drivers to obtain a licence. First, it seeks to encourage lifelong learning and the recognition of the value of lifelong learning to both individual and communities. Second, it seeks to enable community and individual [learner ownership and control](#) of the content, purposes and means of education. And, third, it seeks to support learners to adjust to a changing society and equip them to participate more fully in the paid employment, community governance and the wider social life of the mainstream communities in which they might spend parts of their lives (Vick & Avery, 2006).

The development of CBEs and the activities they support, co-ordinate and articulate to in the community is also based on a number of social principles, drawn largely from theories of community development (Vick & Avery, 2006). Thus it seeks to develop CBE roles directly in relation to communities' own expressed needs,

and is precisely tailored to each community's specific needs, priorities, preferred strategies and arrangements, rather a 'one size fits all' set of programs and resources (Queensland Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples Driver Licensing Program, 2007; Queensland Driver Licensing Education Committee, 2005). It aims to ensure that each community's program is fully embedded in community aspirations and the full range of programs within and without the program that support those aspirations. It seeks to ensure community ownership is not seen as just another government-imposed program, both as a value in its own right, and as a means to ensuring that the positions and work of the CBEs is sustainable. As an integral part of this, as well as in recognition that full or even substantial ongoing government funding is extremely unlikely, the development of CBE positions are being based on sustainable local funding and linked onwards to community economic needs and employment and development potentials (Education & Training Committee, 2006a).

### **Community Based Educators: the process**

The program is developed on a community-by-community basis through negotiations between government agencies and a small number of communities (Queensland Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples Driver Licensing Program, 2007). The number of communities is limited, by the program's capacity to commit the time and resources to an extended and intensive process of negotiation across a large number of sites (Brolga Consulting Service, 2007b). Initially, the Education and Training Committee determined that an initial group of five communities would be identified on the basis of statistically demonstrated need (i.e., low rates of licence holding), the possibility of rapid and substantial gains, and self-selection by communities (Education & Training Committee, 2006a). Through the program of MILT visits over the previous two years or more, communities were already aware of the program as a whole. Through the Chair of the Education and Training Committee, community leaders were advised of the educational initiatives being developed, and invited to initiate further discussions towards developing educational activities in their communities to better prepare community members to undertake licence tests (Vick, 2005). Coincidentally, five communities, or clusters of communities – the number we considered we could adequately respond to - have initiated such discussions.

Once we have responded to the initial invitation we have corresponded with elected community councils, but also with community justice groups and in some instances other key community organisations and government agencies. Visits have been arranged to suit local convenience, allowing from three to six days at a time for extended discussion and shared decision making with communities. These visits have been approached with very open, flexible agenda, ranging from informal participation as guest and contributors to a regional community event (the Gulf Biennial Festival, Mornington Island) to provide information to participants from all communities represented at the Festival, and establish informal contacts with a variety of community members. In another instance, the agenda was set by the regional coordinating council, who invited program representatives to make a formal presentation outlining the program, with informal follow up discussions with leaders of self-selected communities to discuss possible developments in particular communities (Avery, 2007; Notes of meeting, 2007a). In yet a third instance, the agenda included a formal presentation to the community Council, and informal contacts with the Community Justice Group, TAFE and Police. The presentation to Council in this case demonstrates the openness of the agenda, and the commitment to eliciting and responding to local concerns, expressed needs, and suggestions. It consisted of introducing ourselves, explaining the scope and development of the licensing program as a whole, and signalling the possibility of establishing a community based educator position. The bulk of discussion involved Council members sharing their concerns, identifying related needs, and discussing possible strategies for addressing those through or in conjunction with the Program. It also involved tabling, by both council members and the program representatives, of a range of possible roles and activities that might attach to a CBE position, possible relations between such a position and other community organisations, and strategies for supporting such a position. The meeting concluded with an agreement about follow up tasks for both community and program representatives, a timeframe for completing those tasks, and a date for a follow up meeting (Notes of meeting, 2006b).

This process of self-selection and extended negotiation has been undertaken to ensure community ownership. Such engagements are far from simple or easy; rather, they are extremely complex and challenging, with issues of credibility (compounded in practice by delays resulting from organisational problems within the program and incidents such as funerals or other community issues resulting in cancellation of scheduled visits), cost and logistics (including balancing needs for flexibility to respond to communities, with the difficulties of coordinating the schedules of individuals with a range of commitments beyond the program itself), and political issues within communities themselves (ranging from generic issues of division within communities to specific issues of community anger at government over specific incidents unrelated to the program). However, our

experience suggests that there is, on the part of community leaders, considerable goodwill and commitment to support and sustain the process.

In this context, the government and other agencies will provide limited but important resources to communities. Crucially, they will provide formal training for identified community educators develop skills and knowledge they need in order to carry out their roles. Such knowledge includes knowledge of the licensing cycle, from securing evidence of identity, through recognising the importance of holding a licence, understanding road safety issues and knowing the road rules, to successfully sitting the learner licence test, learning to drive competently and passing the practical driving test, to maintaining and where necessary recovering their licence. Training is also scheduled to involve developing pedagogical skills beyond mere passing on of information to engaging learners to develop a rich understanding of social and health issues around driving. Further, it will involve developing an understanding of the issues of coordinating various aspects of licensing in their community – from working with police, magistrates and Community justice Groups to facilitate diversionary sentencing for community members charged with driving offences, to arranging visits from the MILT and ensuring that applicants are prepared for the test, and with documentation and money to obtain their licence, and learning skills to undertake such coordinating roles (Education & Training Committee, 2006b). The personnel involved in negotiating development of CBE positions and appointment of persons to fill them will also provide both resources, and information about other resources and programs that communities might wish to borrow from and adapt as part of an expanding smorgasbord of possibilities communities might selectively take up and adapt (Education & Training Committee, 2007).

The program has also committed an initial small amount of ‘seed’ funding to each community or cluster appointing a CBE as both an incentive and a direct support while other sources of funding are established (Community Drivers Licensing Education Program, 2006). Additional organisational support from the program is envisaged to include assistance in seeking and securing other external support, in the form of corporate sponsorship – a matter the Education and Training Committee is actively pursuing (Edmonston, 2007; Wragge, 2007). Program representatives are also engaged in assisting communities and others associated with them to contribute to the development of aspects of licensing and road safety education and training and to identify and secure other forms of local or regional support (Education & Training Committee, 2007). Thus, in one community, the program is assisting a local Indigenous driving instructor, a TAFE low literacy driver education teacher and an Indigenous employment agency to develop a proposal for a community projects fund to purchase a driver instruction vehicle and help train and employ a community member as an accredited driving instructor (Holm, 2006; Scott, 2006). Elsewhere, it is envisaged that the establishment of an Indigenous driver training business might service a number of towns and communities within the region.

Governance of CBEs and the educational initiatives they will be responsible for necessarily operates at two levels. At one level, they involve shared responsibility commitments between government agencies (principally Qld Transport) and the Community Councils, documented in the form of Memoranda of Understanding. These MOUs as they are currently being negotiated appear likely to cover both licence testing and issuance, and education and training (Memorandum of Understanding, 2007). In relation to testing and issuance, they are likely to spell out commitments to make mutually agreeable arrangements for organising community visits by the mobile licensing team, and the parameters for such arrangements, including frequency and timing of visits, preparation of applicants (including the compiling of required documentation), and payment for licences, and accommodation for the visiting licensing team. In relation to education they are likely to spell out roles of CBEs, the number of CBEs to be established, resourcing commitments by both Qld transport and the community and lobbying for or provision of other related services desired by the community (e.g., road signage and other traffic infrastructure). One community, for instance, has signalled that as part of such an agreement it would seek an undertaking by QT to lobby for servicing of the local government vehicle fleet to be conducted in the community instead of outside it (Notes of meeting, 2006b). Another community has tabled its interest in having a range of government services consolidated in a single service organisation capable of delivering a wide range of services to all communities in the region (Notes of meeting, 2007a).

The other level of governance is internal to each community. In so far as community based educators are developed, resourced and sustained by communities themselves, the issue of local governance is, strictly, not within the provenance of government agencies. However, in so far as the provision, effectiveness and sustainability of such positions is crucial to the delivery of government services, in the form of costly visits by the MILT, government agencies such as QT certainly have an interest in local governance arrangements; even more obviously, insofar as the Driver Licensing Program is contributing directly to the costs of establishing and providing material resources to CBEs, it has a legitimate and direct interest in community governance of them and their work. The approach being taken involves carefully attending to governance issues concerning the

actual establishment and filling of concrete CBE positions in discussions with duly elected and constituted Community Councils (Notes of meeting, 2006b). In one case, to date, the community decision to establish the role of community based educator as part of an existing Training Officer position within the local Council directly addresses the issue of governance through the normal procedures and structures for local government (Notes of meeting, 2007c).

This attention to issues of governance between program and communities reflects our recognition that many programs have been experienced by communities as alien if not oppressive impositions, and that the relations between government and communities have been built around massive power differentials (Bond, 2004; Calma, 2005a; DATSIP, 2005). The attention to issues of governance within communities reflects our recognition, based strongly on the observations and expressed concerns of Indigenous leaders and commentators, about histories of inefficient and unaccountable local government, and divisions within communities leading to unequal access to whatever services and resources are provided, across family and other groupings within those communities (Cronin, 2003, p. 3).

Our approach to both the development of CBEs and issues of governance also reflects our understandings of community capacity to develop and sustain such programs independently. While such an understanding might readily be seen as paternalistic it is firmly grounded in Indigenous leaders' own accounts of an historically produced lack of capacity (Ah Kit, 2003; Cronin, 2003; Djayhurrnga, 2003; Dodson, 2003; Williams, 1996), on the one hand, and a poststructuralist understanding of the role of government in building capacity at both individual (Lemke, 2002) and community (Curtis, 1988; Hunter, 1988; Hunter, 1994) levels, on the other.

### **Normative and theoretical underpinnings**

In part the development of community based education in the ways I have described reflects the grounding of those directly involved in normative understandings of social justice and human rights. This involves recognition, first, that 'historically, governments have failed to deliver services that adequately meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders' and, second, that 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples rightly expect the same service quality, outcomes and opportunities as other Queenslanders, along with an affirmation of their unique cultural identity as the Indigenous peoples of Queensland. They expect to have the same rights and obligations as all other citizens' (DATSIP, 2005, p. 9). Tom Calma Australia's Indigenous Human Rights Commissioner sets this expectation in the context of a human rights based approach in which human rights principles should 'guide all programming in all phases of the programming process, including assessment and analysis, program planning and design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation' (2005b, p. 2).

The development of community based education on these principles is supported by State and Commonwealth 'partnerships' policies that 'recognise that communities are in the best position to identify and prioritise their needs and recommend how governments can best meet those needs' (DATSIP, 2005, p. 9) and acknowledge 'that successful strategies... empower Indigenous peoples by enabling them to take control of their lives, regain responsibility for their families and communities and to enhance individual and family wellbeing' (Calma, 2006).

The development of partnerships that secure human rights by involving Indigenous people in decision making on matters that affect their lives is, however, more complex than these principled statements indicate. First, there is the risk of self-deception and the unwitting use of partnership rhetoric to effectively co-opt Indigenous support for programs fundamentally geared to the goals interests of 'sponsors that are external to the community' (Seddon, Billett & Clemans, 2004, p. 133). Second, and more fundamental is what poststructuralist theory sees as the inescapability of power. Partnerships, and the work conducted within them, are predicated on and framed within legislative and regulatory frameworks over which none of those involved have control. Third, those of us representing the 'government side' of the program exercise 'parameter setting controls' through budget planning and setting of priorities, through deployment of personnel, the degree of open-ness in decision making, and the determination of who might be involved in decision making processes (c.f., Kicket, Klijn & Koppenjan, 1997, pp. 166-199; Schapp & van Twist, 1997, p. 63). Fourth, there are also important senses in which communities 'need' government services, pressing them to accept arrangements that might not fully reflect their preferences. More subtly, the very (government initiated) process of talking with communities to determine their own sense of need around driver licensing can be seen to have played a role in stimulating and shaping the very need it seems to 'discover', while the work of sitting down and talking in particular ways, variously constructed as 'identifying problems', 'identifying needs', 'planning strategies' and 'decision making', are all, as Clegg and McNulty (2002) argue, culturally specific choices, imposing a particular mode of engagement, inducting people into working within that mode.

This does not mean that such processes are inexorably damned as neo-colonial exercises of power. As noted already, Indigenous leaders themselves acknowledge limitations in communities' capacity for self determination and management, and poststructuralism sees the exercise of governmental power as critical in the building of such capacities. Further, the processes of negotiation outlined above can be seen to involve an extension of democratic possibilities, partly by broadening the decision making base (that is, through democratic participation) and partly through making delivery more responsible to those most directly affected (that is, democratic accountability) (c.f., Gewirtz & Cribb, 2002, p. 503; Seddon, Clemans & Billett, 2005, p. 37). Thus, I suggest, this process of negotiation, with communities playing a significant role in determining the scope of the responsibilities, institutional location, and financial sustainability strategies for community-based educator positions or roles recognises the importance of concrete (rather than ideological) self-determination at community level, partly to secure program goals and partly to address human rights and social justice issues that have historically bedevilled government initiatives 'to' and 'for' indigenous populations, communities and individuals.

### **Outcomes and benefits**

One easily documented outcome from the broader program is the increase in licence holding rates among indigenous drivers. Current estimates suggest that numbers of unlicensed drivers is probably of the order of 8000 (Rumble & Fox, 2006). The work of the Mobile Indigenous Licensing Teams during 2005-2006 resulted in over 1000 Indigenous people obtaining licences (Edmonston, 2006; Rumble & Fox, 2006; Steering Committee, 2006b). The direct benefit of this increase in licence holding is likely to be a reduction in incarceration and road trauma rates and their impact on communities and individuals.

Benefits from the development of the community educational components of the program include enhanced literacy levels, better understandings of the importance of a range of safer driving practices, improved access to employment, and a range of social flow-on effects of possessing a portable and legal evidence of identity that might be expected within a lifelong learning and community development framework (Kilpatrick, Field & Falk, 2003; Kral & Falk, 2004). More broadly, it might be anticipated to contribute to enhanced community economic viability (Filed, 2005; Murphy & Thomas, 2000; Vick & Avery, 2006). In an earlier discussion of the educational component of the program from the perspective of lifelong learning, my co-author claimed that from an Indigenous perspective, the potential benefits of the program could be seen even more broadly as making a contribution to the realisation of Indigenous aspirations to enable 'our communities to be strong and healthy, where individuals in communities feel empowered to identify their most important licensing needs and develop ways to build capacity and secure resources to address those needs'. Further, she claimed, the program was likely to contribute to 'the health and sustainability of our communities... and the removal of one common point of conflict between communities and Police' and thus 'contribute in a tangible way to a broader agenda of reconciliation, and a greater capacity to tap the benefits of Australian citizenship' (Vick & Avery, 2006, p. 334; c.f., Evans & Niemeyer, 2004; Schwab & Sutherland, 2003).

Less tangibly, it is envisaged that CBEs will establish bridges and alliances between the community and government and other agencies operating in, or in relation to their community – an outcome which some network governance theorists see as a major benefit of 'partnership work' in such contexts (e.g., Rhodes, 1996, p. 663). On the community side, they are likely to help draw other members into more comfortable and productive relations with government agencies and services. Their work in licensing education is likely to complement that of other education and training providers and employers in identifying and enhancing access to meaningful training pathways linked to employment. Such work should contribute broadly to the development of local community capacity, by increasing the literacy levels, knowledge, responsibility, opportunities and wellbeing of individual members, and of the communities as a whole.

### **Conclusion: Driver licences, education, capacity building and social change in Indigenous communities**

The program I have described and discussed seeks, in the first instance, to increase the number of Indigenous drivers holding driver licences and, through reducing the level of unlicensed driving, to reduce incarceration and road trauma. The program has guaranteed funding for a period of five years, sufficient time to achieve very substantial gains in the number of Indigenous people driving licensed, with concomitant improvements in incarceration and road trauma rates.

Driver licences can easily appear a small, mundane, regulative device – one of the 'taken-for-granted' of contemporary life. In this context, not having a licence can seem little more than an inconvenience and at most of sign of some minor social aberration or lack of everyday routine competence. In the context of contemporary



Indigenous Australian social life, it signifies much more and has profound effects: its absence is directly associated with trauma, loss and social exclusion; its possession can reduce threats and increase opportunities to enhance personal and economic wellbeing for individuals, with important flow on effects in the form of reduced social disruption and community trauma and loss. Both licence holding and the experience of successfully negotiating with government agencies, including Police, to obtain a licence, on the part of increasing numbers of community members can contribute to better relations with Police and other government agents and increased competence and capacity to make effective use of government services. Together, these contribute to a range of social changes in relation to reduced differences in social benefits of citizenship in remote communities.

This suggests that, while it may appear an unglamorous and unspectacular initiative alongside attempts to reduce poverty, disease and violence, the attempt to increase the numbers of Indigenous drivers holding driving licences is in fact an important social initiative with potentially far reaching implications – an initiative worth careful, constructively critical attention.

The account of the program I have offered is, as I have noted, an insider account, although I have sought to stand back and scrutinise the program in light of historical critiques of other government programs and the power relations constituting them, and a range of critical frameworks derived from social justice, human rights and poststructuralist governmental theories, and by attempting to apply what Rorty (1989) describes as an ironic perspective on my own involvement. Further, whatever its potential, the program is still in its very early stages of formation. It has already produced demonstrable outcomes in terms of increased rates of licence holding, but it remains to be seen whether it can or will deliver on its promises, in terms of either processes or outcomes. This paper is, thus, simultaneously a description, initial auto-critique and an invitation to further critical inspection and discussion of the program.

### Postscript

This account accurately described the program as it stood a time of writing, in early 2007. It seems worth adding, at time of revision for presentation and submission for publication, in November 2007, that the program, and especially the education components (including the CBE strategy) has undergone considerable change. In keeping with a recognition of both its core business and its capacity to act as educational developer and sponsor, Queensland Transport has devolved responsibility for educational development to the Education and Training sub committee of the Whole of Government Coordination Committee and to focus its own involvement with communities to, first, negotiation regarding service delivery needs and arrangements and, second, the delivery of licence testing and issuance through the MILT. This simultaneously reflects the flexibility and ongoing development of the program, it also constitutes a major challenge to the more educationally focused partner agencies (in particular, Department of Communities, and of Education, Training and the Arts) to secure funding and develop their own strategies and procedures.

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