

About the project

The Remote Education Systems project aims to find out how remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities can get the best benefit from the teaching and learning happening in and out of schools. It is doing this by engaging with members of communities, schools, government agencies and other end users who want to find ways of improving outcomes for students in remote Australia.

Previous project updates can be found on the Remote Education Systems pages of the CRC-REP website: <http://crc-rep.com/remote-education-systems/project-updates-and-map>. The project is now about halfway through its five year period. At this point, with quite a lot of data already in and analysed, our focus is shifting towards applying the learnings from our research into policy and practice. This project update provides just a few of the many highlights that are emerging from our project.

Sidney Myer Rural Lecture 3: Red Dirt Curriculum



About 80 people from across the NT squeezed into the Corkwood Room at the Desert Knowledge Precinct in Alice Springs to hear three Anangu educators, Karina Lester, Katrina Tjidayi, and Makinti Minutjukur, along with RES project researcher, Sam Osborne (pictured above) speak about the practical implications of what they described as a 'Red Dirt Curriculum'. The lecture was part of the annual Sidney Myer Rural Lecture series, and promoted through the Sidney Myer Chair of Rural Education and Communities, based at Flinders University.

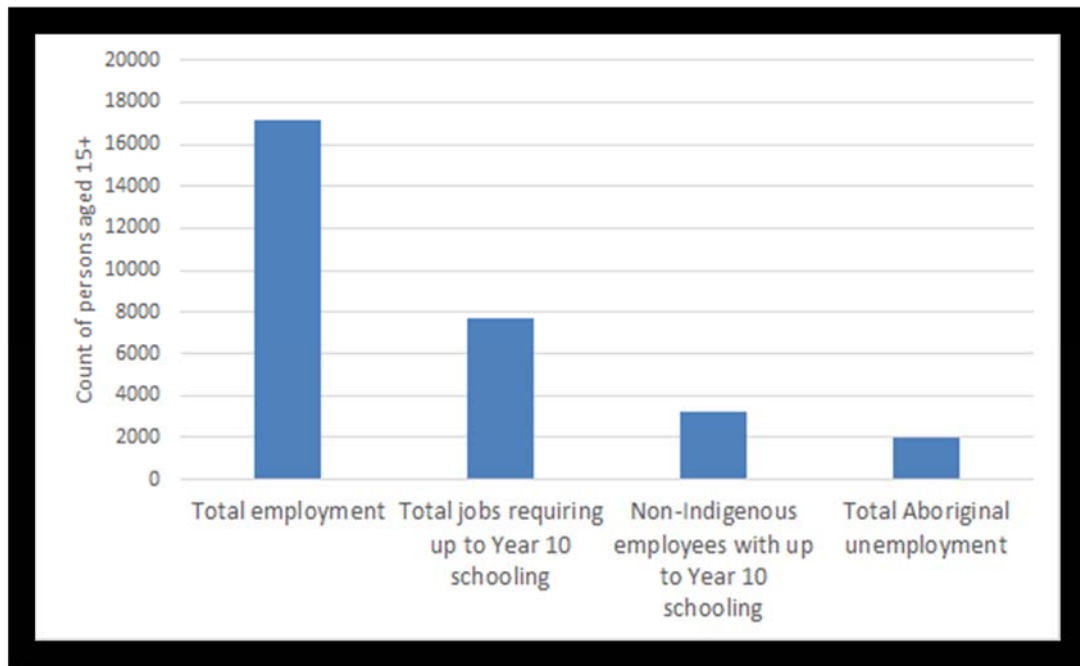
In this lecture, the four speakers posed the question, "what knowledge matters for young people in the remote APY (Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara) lands of the remote north-west corner of South Australia?" and, "What would a contextualised, 'red dirt' curriculum look like if we were to re-imagine the core elements of a remote education?" This lecture attracted considerable media interest, but perhaps more importantly, it has helped a number of educators rethink the way they teach to make education more relevant for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

You can watch the full lecture on Youtube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5xLtnYbV6uc>

Findings: Education, training and remote economic participation

Following a successful Thinking Outside The Tank session held in Perth during July focused on the question **Can remote schools prepare Aboriginal kids for a future in the resources economy?** we decided to interrogate the 2011 Census data to see what it could tell us about schooling, certificates and employment. Figure 1 below highlights some employment data from Very Remote Northern Territory to illustrate one of the interesting findings. Total employment in all industry groups in Very Remote NT stood at 17189 on Census night, 2011. Of these jobs, 7702 were taken by employees with schooling up to Year 10. Of those, 3197 were non-Indigenous employees. There were 1957 Aboriginal people described as unemployed, the majority of who have up to Year 10 schooling. It is often assumed that the key to economic participation is completion of schooling to Year 12. These data do not support that assertion, at least in Very Remote NT, where more than one-third of all jobs are held by people with only basic levels of schooling. Nearly one-third of the non-Indigenous workforce have not had schooling beyond Year 10. In theory there are more than enough jobs for Aboriginal people who have achieved similar levels of schooling.

Figure 1. Analysis of Very Remote Northern Territory employment and schooling (2011 Census, based on place of enumeration)



Some other interesting facts from our analysis of Census data across Very Remote Australia (excluding Tasmania):

- Of more than 22,000 jobs in Mining, just 191 are taken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who speak their own language at home.
- About 94% of more than 50,000 jobs in 'Manufacturing', 'Transport, Postal and Warehousing', 'Information Media and Telecommunications', 'Professional, Scientific and Technical Services', 'Mining', 'Accommodation and Food Services' and 'Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing' industries are taken by non-Indigenous people.
- 70 % of the Very Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce who speak an Indigenous language is clustered in four industry groups: 'Public Administration and Safety', 'Education and Training', 'Health Care and Social Assistance', and 'Other Services'.
- 44% of all Very Remote employees had not completed a Certificate or higher qualification: 46,505 jobs required no certificate qualification.
- Similarly, 41% of all Very Remote employees had not gone beyond Year 10 at school. The mining industry has a large pool of workers (36%) with no more than Year 10 attainment.

Our take on these data are that there is more to economic participation than completing Year 12 and getting certificates that are linked to jobs. Certainly, there is no shortage of what some would describe as 'real' jobs—and it would seem there is no educational reason why many Aboriginal people could not engage in the economies that do exist in very remote Australia. So why is there an apparent lack of engagement in many industries which are predominantly populated by non-Indigenous workers? We suggest that there are factors such as individual choice and the importance of staying connected to family, community and country (and potentially exclusionary work practices) that govern whether or not a remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student will progress to complete Year 12 and then go on into some form of economic participation. If you'd like to read more about these and other findings, contact John Guenther, john.guenther@flinders.edu.au or call 0412 125 661.



New partnership with the Nulungu Research Institute



In July, CRC-REP General Manager Steve Blake and RES researcher John Guenther (pictured) visited the University of Notre Dame's [Nulungu Research Institute](#) at Broome. It soon became clear that Nulungu's research interests and ways of working were very much in line with the CRC-REP's approach to research. In particular, their focus on building local Aboriginal research capacity and a commitment to community engagement through respectful, trusting relationships resonated with us. Our discussion led to the formalisation of a partnership between Ninti One Limited and the Nulungu Research Institute. We anticipate that there will be many mutual benefits from this partnership, particularly for our research interests in education.

People update



In July the RES team enjoyed the company of *Siegi Edward*, who came from Melbourne to work with us for a fortnight as a volunteer. Siegi is an architect, artist, sculptor and painter. Her interest in education is about supporting learners find meaning through creative expression and interacting socially in the space where the arts and education meet. She came to Alice Springs to learn more specifically about the remote education context in preparation for a PhD she is intending to start in

2014. The PhD will look at the developmental processes of young people in education when they engage in creative work using a variety of mediums.



Phil Townsend (pictured left) did the RES project proud in Canberra at Ninti One's 10 year anniversary event where he won the best five minute student presentation competition. His presentation, based on his PhD, which considers the use of mobile technologies in the training and professional development of Aboriginal teachers in remote communities, earned him an iPad. We think that's an appropriate reward for Phil's efforts.



We welcome *Jillian Miller* (pictured left) to the team of post-graduate students working with the RES project. Jillian's PhD research will consider Aboriginal student success and the best practices that enable Aboriginal students in rural and remote areas to complete their SACE studies. She commences her studies with Flinders University in March 2014.

Jillian is a Mirning woman with family ties to the west coast of South Australia. She has worked as a teacher, been part of education task forces and was the inaugural chairperson of the Senior Officers National Network of Indigenous Education (SONNIE). She was the Indigenous member of the University of South Australia Council and is currently a member of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council for the Federal Minister responsible for Higher Education. Her research interests include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander inclusion within organisations and the academy as well as the retention and success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students within education systems.

Publications, presentations, TOTTs and workshops

The RES team has worked hard to pull together a suite of eight papers for a special edition of the **Australian Journal of Indigenous Education**. The series features a series of papers on 'red dirt thinking', flagged in the last project update, along with one paper that reports on analysis of NAPLAN data, one that reports on a mental health and well-being program in schools, and two that challenge conventional wisdom about what an education is for in very remote Australia and what a remote education system should look like. Papers can be downloaded from the journal's website: <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayJournal?jid=JIE>

Thinking Outside The Tank sessions have now captured the perspectives of more than 150 remote education stakeholders. In the second half of the year we held sessions focused on Early Childhood Education, Education for the Resources industries, Red Dirt Curriculum (pictured below), Technology overcoming the tyranny of distance, and Teacher quality. The spin-offs from these sessions are enormous as we consider the implications from the findings and explore them more deeply. One example of this is the kind of analysis discussed in the 'Findings' report, above.



With all that's coming out of the research, we are now reporting back more at conferences and in targeted seminars. In September, John Guenther presented a paper titled *Education is the key, but what door does it open?* at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) seminar series in Canberra. Building on this theme, he developed the paper further at the North Australia Research Unit (NARU) seminar series in Darwin. This paper, *Education is the key, but do we need to change the locks?* along with the CAEPR paper draw on 2011 Census data to argue for more appropriate school-to-work pathways in remote communities. In October, Samantha Disbray presented at the Australian Linguistics Society (ALS) Conference in Melbourne, with a paper titled: *Evaluating the NT Bilingual Education Program: Pass or Fail?* The paper will be available from the [ALS website](#) soon. John Guenther, Sam Osborne, Samantha Disbray and Phil Townsend presented a series of papers and presentations at the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) conference in Adelaide. John's peer reviewed paper *An analysis of 2012 NAPLAN data--what does it tell us about remote education in the last five years?* is available now on the [AARE website](#).

Contacts

If you have questions about anything in this update, please contact any of the senior researchers listed below.

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