

Premier’s Teachers Mutual Bank Indigenous Education Scholarship

Aboriginal students engaging within Hospitality VET courses involving a high level of Aboriginal culture and understanding improves engagement in all delivery models

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# Introduction

Motivation and drive to improve education for Aboriginal students was the propulsive force in the research conducted. These words from The Aboriginal Education Policy developed in response to the Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education 2004, in collaboration with Aboriginal communities and key partners, inspired the project conception. The Aboriginal Education Policy objectives in its policy statement states commitments the NSW Department of Education (DoE) will adhere to, ensuring the best engagement and educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. These three commitments stated below were the basis for the research.

*1.1.1 The NSW Department of Education is committed to improving the educational outcomes and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students so that they excel and achieve in every aspect of their education.*

*1.1.3 The department is committed to increasing knowledge and understanding of the histories, cultures and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the First Peoples of Australia.*

*1.1.8 These commitments affirm the inherent right of Aboriginal students to fair, equitable, culturally inclusive and significant educational opportunities so that all students obtain a high quality education as a platform for enriching their life chances and achieving their full potential.*

These three commitments in Aboriginal education have been the incentive to improve Aboriginal students’ education opportunities particularly in Vocational Education study in Hospitality. This was the inspiration for my research project to widen my knowledge of successful projects within Australia in particular the Northern Territory with reference to nationally accredited Aboriginal programs at Singleton High School (SHS).

As a key driver of Aboriginal Education at SHS we have been recognised as achieving best practice in the Australian Dare to Lead Principals Award for our Aboriginal Education Programs in 2010.This Ka Wul Aboriginal Education program and facility has continued for twelve years and is continuing to grow. Many educators seek advice and inspiration from what we are achieving at SHS. The scholarship has provided an outstanding opportunity to seek out further programs achieving at best practice standard to inspire and drive further improvements in Aboriginal Education in the field of hospitality within the NSWDoE.

Aboriginal Education is core business for all staff and when best practice is developed for students within schools and communities, successful outcomes will be evident. As stated in the Aboriginal Education Policy, the department in partnership with the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) Inc. and Aboriginal communities and organisations will:

*1.5.5 Incorporate the cultural contexts, values and practices of local Aboriginal communities into the mainstream delivery of education.*

"Aboriginal Education is everyone's business" NSW AECG Inc.

By 'Australian Aboriginal ' I mean, a person of Aboriginal descent, albeit mixed, who identifies himself/herself as such and who is recognised by the Aboriginal community as Aboriginal. From here on my reference is to use the term "Aboriginal". Reference to Indigenous Australians are the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia.

# Focus of Study

The purpose of this study tour was to examine and compare the education and training of Aboriginal students specifically in relation to hospitality. Particularly relevant was the need to ensure knowledge of pedagogy relevant to teaching Aboriginal students and an understanding of Aboriginal Culture was embedded in to the delivery mode of the Hospitality Vocational Education Training (VET) Course. This scholarship is then part of the commitment from the NSW DoE stating "The department will provide appropriate and relevant training and resources to assist with the implementation of this policy in line with the key focus of achieving improved educational outcomes in Aboriginal education".

The study tour, consisting of twenty eight days, allowed me to visit vocational colleges (private and public), schools, and on the job training centres in Northern Territory. I observed and discussed best practice in hospitality training courses and Aboriginal students’ specific educational programs. I also interacted with students and staff members to compare their experiences with those of students studying similar courses in New South Wales. The study tour allowed me to observe education programs and consider how they may be implemented in my programs and support other teachers to improve Aboriginal students’ outcomes within their specific school environment.

From Darwin to Yulara the variation of programs is as diverse as the country side. All programs have been designed and created to meet the needs of the Aboriginal students and their communities. . However, this has come about through research and an independent review by Bruce Wilson that was commissioned by the Northern Territory (NT) Government. The 2013 review informed understanding of the impact of programs and initiatives and to make recommendations to optimise education and training outcomes for Indigenous students and A considerable amount of resources, both Territory and Commonwealth, have been committed to improving Indigenous education. (Northern Territory Department of Education 2013) One of the major conclusions from the review found literacy and numeracy outcomes of remote and very remote Indigenous students remain well below those of non-Indigenous students and also below those of Indigenous students in other jurisdictions .

The Indigenous Education Strategy has been designed as a 10 year plan and to be put into effect in three stages, with the first stage of implementation from 2015 to 2017. The strategy comprises five elements, however, the three elements involved specifically with the research are:

* *pathways* – Indigenous students complete schooling well equipped to take up employment, training and higher education opportunities
* *engagement* – Indigenous children at all stages of schooling attend school regularly and are supported in their education by their families and community
* *workforce* – Indigenous student outcomes are improved through a consistent system-wide approach to providing highly skilled and motivated educators and leaders

This new direction in education was formative for my research to see how the evaluation of the NT education system has changed their direction to improve Aboriginal Education within the NT. As my focus is VET Hospitality seeking out various Hospitality services and Registered Training Organisations (RTO) and independent Aboriginal education facilities provided very good insight in to the systems in place for Aboriginal students.

# Significant Learning

Throughout the tour I sought further knowledge and skills to improve the education for Aboriginal students within schools’ VET system. The tour provided time to review students / staff educational programs, facilities, study of Aboriginal culture, and integration of Aboriginal culture into educational programs and inclusion of native bush tucker in Hospitality VET courses and in NT restaurants. This study involved visiting Hospitality VET in Schools; purpose built Hospitality Education facilities including TAFE and private RTOs as well as restaurants within Darwin, Katherine, Alice Springs and surrounding districts in Northern Territory Australia.

Meeting one of Australia’s well renowned Aboriginal Artists, Les Huddleston, on the Main Street of Darwin was the start of an injection of culture that continued the entire scholarship tour. Ending the tour with meeting Mark Olive, renowned Aboriginal celebrity chef was an honour but that was not as big an honour as meeting local Aboriginal Elder Aunty De who explained every piece of artwork in the Mimi Gallery in Katherine. One of the major differences in lifestyle from NSW to the NT is the presence of Aboriginal culture everywhere in comparison to many communities in NSW.

The Vocational Education and Training curriculum in the NT is the same as NSW as all Certificate II & III Commercial cookery and Food and Beverage are VETAB Accredited through Department of Education, RTOs. The hospitality courses are being delivered through the secondary school system and Charles Sturt University. One of the schools showing best practice in delivery of hospitality is Taminmin College. This comprehensive rural school caters for students from Years 7 to 12,offering a range of VET courses and has a 75ha mixed product farm. The school operates the courses on full day timeslots, two days a week for Certificate II and one day a week for Certificate I. The Commercial cookery facilities are of the highest standard ensuring the students meet all course competencies.

The staff utilise a paddock to plate philosophy with the school providing many resources from the school agriculture facility. The school has a diverse population and the hospitality courses integrate cookery ingredients and methods of cookery that respond to the multicultural fabric of Darwin ensuring many cultures are embedded within their programs. The hospitality program does not embed any specific Aboriginal cultural programs but follows the Department of Education’s policies as required. The school's hospitality facilities are extensive and the courses are funded by the NTunder the VET in Schools funding arrangements through the Industry, Engagement and Employment Pathways (IEEP) unit. Training and assessment take place at the Hospitality Skills Centre at Taminmin College Campus and include work experience at various restaurants and hotels. This program has been very successful due to the passionate and dedicated staff that teach and drive these courses within the school.

The private provider that showed best practice in my research was Karen Sheldon Training which is a division of Karen Sheldon Group and operates as an RTO offering nationally accredited and non-accredited training in a wide variety of industry sectors. The staff are highly qualified trainers and deliver courses that are locally developed and informed by many years of practical experience. The qualified trainers tailor training programs to suit individual Aboriginal student needs. Variation in teaching styles including hands on methods and storytelling assist the students who may speak three to four languages to gain deeper knowledge required to be competent in the course. The relationship building and student confidence in the trainers is a major contributor for the success of these programs. This private RTO is working towards Closing the Gap on Indigenous economic disadvantage by inspiring, training and mentoring Indigenous jobseekers to take their true place in the Australian economy.

Specialising in working with Aboriginal young adults, the company is continuing to develop innovative ways to support people through their transition from a life of disparity to a life of purpose and abundance. The Future Stars Program was first developed in 2008, focusing on life skills and personal development to assist people in most need of support, training and guidance to achieve sustainable employment. The Future Stars Program is a NT Vocational Training Employment Centre (VTEC) federally funded initiative that connects Indigenous job seekers with guaranteed jobs and brings together the support services necessary to prepare job seekers for long term employment. The guarantee of a job before job-specific training starts is the key feature of VTECs. The Future Stars Program model is unique as it takes a holistic approach to the multiple barriers to employment faced by our participants by integrating social service and employability skills training into the work preparation and employment phases. It ensures:

* vocational or job-specific training is directly related to available jobs
* employers can recruit Indigenous job seekers with the right skills for specific jobs
* job seekers are responsible for opting into available jobs
* the commitment of job seekers is rewarded with guaranteed employment.

Charles Sturt University delivers the Hospitality/Commercial cookery – Kitchen Operations, Food and Beverage Certificate courses throughout itscampuses and each campus has its purpose designed and built training restaurant to suit their delivery modules. I was a guest at the Karawa Training Restaurant in Palmerston and had an excellent experience, from the atmosphere, menu and service the students ran the dinner service at the highest level. Unfortunately, due to timing I was unable to be present at the Dessert Lantern Training Restaurant in Alice Springs. Both sites have excellent commercial cookery and food and beverage facilities with up to date industry standard equipment and technologies. The student outcomes from these courses include:

* training for real life experiences
* high expectations and meeting fine dining standards
* recognition of students in the community due to exposure in the restaurants
* students feelingadult and responsible in the positions during service.

In relation to Aboriginal students within the hospitality course the following enables successful outcomes for Aboriginal students:

* changes in focus in course delivery to be mindful of Aboriginal culture
* ensuring practical hands on experiences prior to theory for better understanding.
* – ensuring use of English as a Second Language (ESL) strategies regarding the use of plain English language
* theory being rewritten for needs of the Aboriginal students
* programs being developed in a cluster arrangement to streamline the theory components
* redesigning teaching the theory using practical based learning approaches
* Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for local people must be in a non-confrontational and culturally sensitive manner
* teaching of Indigenous students requires patience at times – to ensure successful outcomes are t achieved
* ensuring students are treated as adults in an adult environment
* use of student mentors from older years is valuable tor the students.

Successful Delivery model *includes:*

* taster courses in middle school to provide good basis for students e.g. week block tasters of barista training / basic food cookery / business and retail
* Year 10 Certificate I Cookery.
* Year 11/12 Certificate II Commercial Cookery – Kitchen Operations linked to the restaurant / Higher School Certificate (HSC) course.
* Certificate IV Hospitality after school pathway.

Training is adjusted however*:*

* never water down standards
* not fully completing competencies to the highest level is not doing students any favours
* all students need to earn their successful jobs which are suited to their training and capabilities
* help and support is given to ensure pride and achievement in their competencies.

Best practice for delivery to Stage 3 and 4 school students is the program researched through the Michael Long Learning and Leadership Centre (MLLLC). Based on Australian Football League (AFL) this centre aims to improve education for Aboriginal students who show promise and sporting ability in the field of AFL. The MLLLC has a focus well beyond football and provides a unique sporting and education program for Indigenous students from remote areas. The MLLLC education program improves student leadership and engagement in education through a 15week community based program and a one week leadership camp at the Centre. The passionate teaching staff have developed a well researched delivery model to motivate the students and engage in their learning. The staff in the community run the incentive program in school and the community to improve attendance at school. The school allocates a lesson a week to the program, then selected students come to the centre for the week long program. The engagement in the week long program includes the following strategies for successful learning:

* Elders are filmed in language to welcome the students to the centre
* local Aboriginal language is used throughout the centre
* tactile learning and use words to suit.
* experience learning in structure
* clear steps and directions given
* word economy
* connect students with mind and body
* bring culture into the room.

One of two highly successful businesses for Aboriginal employment and training that I researched as best practice is the Nitmiluk Tours and Cicada Lodge. The traditional owners of the land are the Jawoyn people of Katherine / Nitmiluk – the place of the Cicada dreaming. The vision for the business is to create authentic and unforgettable holiday experiences, sharing and sustaining the ancient cultures and stories of the Jawoyn people. This company are leaders in driving Aboriginal tourism growth being proactive and strategic in its approach to promoting the destination and the Northern Territory in its cultural context. Through sustainable and culturally sensitive business practices these businesses are working closely with Elders and the local communities to employ and up skill local Aboriginal staff within the Hospitality and Tourism industry. Working with the local school, the company has school based trainees that are employed and supported for many fields of work including food and beverage , housekeeping,chef,reservations,grounds keeping,river guides at Cicada lodge. On the job training and support is provided to the trainees to get birth certificates, drivers licences, accommodation and uniforms as well as any other personal support required to assist to maintain and complete their traineeship to gain fulltime employment.

I also researched the largest hospitality Aboriginal employment program is the Ayres Rock Resort with its National Indigenous Training & Employment (NITA). As part of the acquisition of Ayers Rock Resort, the Indigenous Land Council (ILC) established an Indigenous Training and Employment Strategy with the aim to employ 100 Indigenous trainees at the Resort each year and to work towards 50% Indigenous employment by 2018. To help achieve this, the ILC established an Indigenous Engagement Team, responsible for the Indigenous Traineeship Program and work closely with Human Resources to provide specialist services in recruiting and retaining Indigenous people. Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia is a subsidiary of the ILC and operates Ayers Rock Resort on its behalf. Voyages are committed to building and sustaining an Indigenous workforce through training, employment and economic development.

NITA delivers accredited training to Ayers Rock Resort's Indigenous trainees in partnership with William Angliss Institute and Charles Darwin University. In addition to the traineeship program, the engagement team also works to foster strong relationships with the local communities, deliver training opportunities to local Indigenous residents through the Real Jobs program and to develop opportunities for local Indigenous entrepreneurs to supply goods and services to the Resort. The Indigenous Traineeship Program commenced in October 2011 and offers trainees the opportunity to graduate with a Certificate II and Ill in Hospitality or Tourism

TNITA delivers the enterprise based training model that provides an industry based approach to training people on the job. The trainees are placed according to their preference in positions across the Resort including housekeeping, retail, porters, food and beverage, landscaping, maintenance, trades, laundry, administration and reception. The Kaluta Academy cafe is one of excellent hospitality examples of best practice at the Resort supporting the trainees. The training for the trainees is a flexible training model to suit individual learning needs and offers intensive support and mentoring, and assistance in numeracy and literacy. All graduates are offered full­ time employment with Ayers Rock Resort or are assisted with finding employment in the tourism and hospitality sectors across Australia.

The resort educational program for Aboriginal employees has created many opportunities.At the end of October 2016, Ayers Rock Resort celebrated employment of 318 Indigenous staff, which includes: 81 Trainees, 237 Employees including real jobs staff; a milestone of 37% Indigenous Employment at the resort of which 6% are Anangu. Additionally, Voyages regularly engages another 11 Anangu for daily guest activities. At the end of 2016, a total of 233 Trainees graduated from the National Indigenous Training Academy. For the next 12 months, working towards 100 new employee commencements and 100 new trainees and to building the intake of Anangu into the program. Their aim is to train and develop more Indigenous staff, enabling them to secure employment in the hospitality industry across Australia

# Conclusion

Aboriginal based programs that have been successful in the NT have been highlighted in this research. However, after researching these programs the successful criteria are due to the following components:

1. involvement with Elders of Aboriginal communities in the future education of their students
2. Aboriginal community being proactive in supporting education
3. changes in learning styles to suit Aboriginal students. Utilising the "8 Ways of learning" and integration into general practice within the classroom and programs. This practice is embedded at SHS
4. listening to advice provided by the hospitality industry and business to what "is" or "is not" working in the training areas – listen to advice and pursue excellence in the field
5. strong Aboriginal cultural background knowledge supports program engagement and understanding to support students in courses
6. urban, rural and remote course delivery differs greatly due to the contact the students have with western society, the trainers change delivery styles and requirements to suit the communities
7. ensure school to VET work placement transition is successful – remember support and the placement suits each student's personality and capabilities
8. include Aboriginal bush tucker when possible in menus/food dishes in for courses to widen knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal culture
9. ensure Aboriginal language is supported and embraced
10. continuous feedback and updates are provided and discussed with the local Elders and community.

It will enable students to benefit through:

* development of initiatives and programs to be extended to schools to increase and improvestudents’ competition rates in course
* ensure the programs have suitable learning styles through quality teaching for Aboriginal students
* support to all Aboriginal hospitality students to be well prepared for related businesses or specifically offering an authentic cultural experience for guests/visitors
* enable growth in jobs and career opportunities or Aboriginal people at all skill levels
* enable Aboriginal students to be involved with Aboriginal cultural tourism (businesses offering experiences involving the customs, social structure and art of an Aboriginal culture)
* training needs to keep up with current practice, responding to changing technologies, emerging new markets and different business models. Currency of skills and knowledge provided to students is crucial to the success of the hospitality industry.

The scholarship has enabled many mutual relationships to develop. The benefits have been two fold enabling the best practices from SHS Aboriginal education programs and hospitality and best practices of the NT programs to support each other and take features of each to be embedded and develop new strategies. The future of Aboriginal Education in NSW and in particular in hospitality has confirmed that what is in place at SHS is best practice. Empowering new staff and developing practices and knowledge of Aboriginal culture is of the utmost importance to ensure Aboriginal students gain the best educational outcomes. Utilising the 8 ways of Learning strategies brings a common ground for all staff to engage Aboriginal students in their learning. Also embracing and knowledge of Aboriginal culture, engaging with Elders and the local community and use of bush tucker in practical hospitality lessons supports and increases engagement leading to successfully trained and employed Aboriginal adults.

# Acknowledgements

I wish to pay my respects to Elders past and present and acknowledge all Aboriginal persons who have assisted with the production of this paper. I value the traditional customs and culture of the Aboriginal people whom I have met and supported my learning throughout this magnificent journey. I have been injected with culture from a region that oozes with tradition and learnt so much from everyone whom I have engaged with during this experience.

Thank you to the Premier of New South Wales, the Honourable Gladys Berejiklian and past Premier Mr Mike Baird, the NSW Department of Education and to NSW Government for making this study tour 2017 Premier's Vocational Education Scholarship possible. I have both enjoyed and appreciated this professional development experience and would like to acknowledge the support from the staff at Premier's Scholarships Secretariat and the staff at Singleton High School and the Singleton Aboriginal community for supporting my application and work with the Aboriginal Community in Singleton. My personal thanks must also go to my family for their continual love and support. Most importantly I would like to acknowledge all the persons that assisted with my research throughout this journey.

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