

QIECC

Queensland Indigenous Education
Consultative Committee

Thursday Island Community Forum Focus on Transitions

Wednesday 28 November 2007

The QIECC, first and foremost, has to

“Consult with Indigenous people to hear the range of views on education”,

and then,

“provide expert advice to Education Ministers”, “promote constructive dialogue and engagement”, and “promote public awareness”

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Caution:

These materials could contain references to deceased Indigenous people from diverse cultural backgrounds and communities. This could be upsetting to some people.

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Acknowledgements

Ms Stephanie Savage who conducted a welcome to country and a welcome prayer.

TSIREC members from the outer Islands who participated.

QIECC members and Secretariat staff for their facilitation of the break out groups.

The QIECC Membership for their time and expertise.

All the community members who attended and actively participated in the day's proceedings.

The staff of Gab Titui Cultural Centre for their service and goodwill.



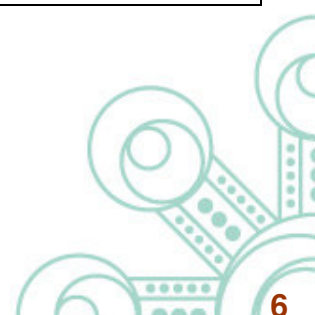
AGENDA

- 12.00pm Community Forum open
Arrivals, refreshments, social introductions
- 1.00pm Welcome Prayer
By Mrs Stephanie Savage
- 1.10pm QIECC Membership introductions
Commenced by Ms Gina Archer, Chair
- 1.15pm Introduction and presentation of committee members
Ned David
Des Crump
Tracey Harbour
Uncle Albert Holt
Beresford Domic
- Absent: Jane Ceolin, Ron Weatherall, Darran Kennedy, Joann
Schmider, Penny Tripcony
- 1.30pm Introduction of transition areas, breakout group facilitators and
breakout questions.
- 1.40pm Breakout Discussion begins
Facilitated by QIECC members and Secretariat staff
- 3.00pm Close of forum



Participant List

Althea McKeown	C&K - Horn Island
Taum Nona	Tagai State College
Robyn Adams	Education Queensland - Horn Island
Kate Richards	Department of Communities - Cairns
Francis Loban	Department of Education, Science and Training, Thursday Island
Agnes Fox	Thursday Island - Child Care
Anne Holden	Department of Education, Training and the Arts (DETA)
Omer Yezdani	Department of Education, Science and Training, Brisbane
Cathy Foster	Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA)
Stephanie Savage	Tagai State College
Vivian Baker	Torres Strait Island Regional Education Council (TSIREC)
Jesse Sagaukaz	Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA)
Jacinta Morseu	Queensland Health – Thursday Island Hospital
Simon Keoles	Queensland Health - Townsville
Ella Bavie	Queensland Health
Allan Redu	Torres Strait Island Regional Education Council (TSIREC)
Tala Nona	P&C Tagai, Badu campus
John Morsby	Yorke Island Council
Thecla Sabatino	Indigenous Support Services Unit
Olive Bann	P&C Pres Tagai, Warraber campus
Alo Tapim	Mer Island



Statement of Facilitation

After Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome Prayer, the introduction of the QIECC membership, and the formal introduction of the transition areas, participants formed into 4 separate groups to begin discussions.

The forum theme “transitions” was consistent with the QIECC Annual Forum which took place in October 2007.

Transitions sub - themes description:-

1. **Home to school** - the stage where a child transitions from a home and/or childcare environment to formal early childhood education
2. **Primary to secondary** - focuses on the end of the primary years and the earlier years of secondary school
3. **Junior secondary to senior secondary** – from year 10 into the senior years of schooling (Years 11 and 12).
4. **School to work, training, higher education** – pathway from high school to further education and training or employment.
5. **Remote and rural to urban** – physical relocation from a remote or rural geographic location to an urban location, to undertake education, training or employment.

The forum was facilitated by QIECC members and Secretariat staff, working in pairs with each of the four breakout groups. The breakout groups were linked to each sub-theme.

For the purposes of the breakout groups, three questions were posed:-

1. What Is Happening?
2. What are the Issues?
3. What do you see as solutions?

Whilst the focus was on the sub-themes, and the three questions posed, community members had the opportunity to voice general issues or concerns relating to Indigenous education in their region.

All contributions were scribed for collation into a report. For the purposes of this report, each of the breakout groups discussions are included to enable readers to note specific issues and suggested solutions/recommendations from each of the breakout groups.

Please note that the common themes and suggested solutions are summaries of the information provided by participants of the Community Forum.

Note that the views expressed in this report, do not necessarily reflect the views of the QIECC.

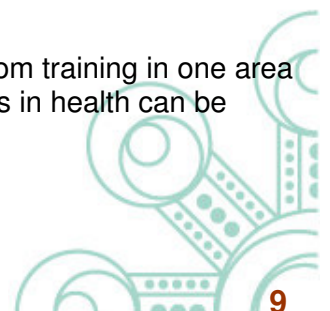
Common Themes:

- Boarding schools don't visit Islands, therefore, families not making informed decisions about what schools their students attend. (Historically based decisions rather than based on the support and services the school provides)
- Transport costs to and from education institutions between Islands
- Students experiencing home sickness whilst away at school
- A high level of suspensions and expulsions, leading to extended absences and/or students not returning to education therefore become disengaged or further disadvantaged due to extended absences
- Students coming home for holidays and not returning to school
- Communication breakdown between schools, boarding facilities, parents and students
- Young mothers are not able to access boarding facilities
- Very little genuine engagement of parents and families
- Cultural perspectives in schools, particularly early childhood settings, which include language considerations
- Children who've been in a formalised early childhood structured setting move more smoothly into prep than those who haven't
- Lack of services on the Islands, even Thursday Island, particularly as they relate to apprenticeships and traineeships
- Local community are not engaged or employed in education settings therefore are disappointed when people who are not local fill vacant positions
- Facilities and resources for early years is confusing – the bureaucracy around the programs creates confusion at a local level
- School leavers without basic literacy/numeracy
- School based trainees (SATs) are used as workers, rather than properly trained
- Funding for SATs not sufficient, particularly for Cert I and Cert II



Recommended solutions:

- More mentors need to be accessible to help guide students through home sickness and to achieve greater success
- Full time tutor from the school of distance education in Cairns could assist with the interruption that weather and other factors causes to students' education
- Government and non-government organisations to work together to build capacity of parents
- Schools to develop local policies around valuing parents, Elders and community eg offering PD such as Cert III
- Career education as opposed to career expos
- Growing local teachers – Exploring options for training and growing capacity for Community teachers and assistants interested in specialising in the early years
- Education institutions to visit communities as a means of information sharing to provide advice about services and support that are offered covering academic, cultural and pastoral so that parents understand what schools offer and schools gain an understanding of where the students are coming from.
- HR – Systems to be put in place that reduce turnover of school staff
- Commonwealth programs such as Indigenous Youth leadership Program (IYLP) and Indigenous Youth Mobility Program (IYMP) to be more widely advertised
- TAFE on Thursday Island currently offers limited courses and needs to be revamped
- Develop ways of actively involving parents such as open days/cultural days/working bees/cultural corners where parents are invited to talk about their culture or to have input into activities such as supervisors on excursions
- Prepare children for Prep, eg children attend one day per week in final term from home or from a child care centre
- Teachers and other staff transferring to the Islands should have interview question related to cultural knowledge and also their commitment to embracing cultural awareness and understanding
- Streamline funding process so that it is not as confusing for local community
- Support families to support students to understand message and complete SET Plans
- Promote multiple pathways of SATs, ie skills learned from training in one area can lead to career in other areas eg administration skills in health can be translated to education



THE BAMBOO ANALOGY

The Bamboo Analogy was shared by members of the break out group who considered the early childhood topic “home to school”. It provides a summary of the importance of early childhood education from a Torres Strait Islander perspective.

The Bamboo Analogy

Torres Strait Islander Traditional Rationale

The bamboo is an important material in the life of Torres Strait Islanders. It provides many uses from gardening to hunting. The bamboo is best when it is straight and strong. To ensure the bamboo grows straight and strong it is tendered to from its' early stages as a young shoot. This requires regular monitoring and maintenance for a healthy growth and minimises any crookedness.

The application of this principle to children as an analogy is straightforward. The child is the future and most important member of the Torres Strait community. The child is best when she/he is straight and strong. To ensure the child has the best opportunity to succeed and grow into a strong and healthy member of the community the child must be tendered to from its' infancy.

The bamboo tends to develop a warp or recurring bends through its' shaft when neglected or not regularly attended to throughout its' growth. This would require many hours of hard work to straighten it by using unhusked dry coconuts, fire and water. Generally this also means the bamboo is not guaranteed to be strong or as straight to meet its' requirements.

The analogy highlights the potential risk for a child to develop negative traits or bad behaviour if she/he is not nurtured appropriately from infancy. This will result in extra work in later years to remedy.

The education context relates to the early phase of a child learning journey. The system must provide a strong and robust programme to guarantee success for a child full education development in his/her early years.



SUMMARY OF BREAKOUT GROUPS

Transition Area: Home (early years) - School

Importance of this transition area

- Basic literacy needs to be achieved early
- The importance of education needs to be emphasised to parents so that they can begin the process of involvement, encouragement and support in the early years of learning
- First entry into formal Education – structured days
- Get grounding – foundation of learning
- Testing, introduction to the language of school

3-5 Key Issues/Themes

- Encouragement for education comes from people like Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) through their message “Education is the Key” but what does this really mean to parents? This needs to be broken down and communicated in a way that is meaningful and has value
- Unfortunately in a lot of cases the first time children have exposure to English literacy and numeracy is through Western TV. Childcare and pre-school are necessary options to get literacy and numeracy skills in the early years
- Big gaps exist in attempts at Parent-School-Community partnerships. Parents are invited to schools however they are not actually involved in the running of any activities. Almost like a “token” invite
- Learning through play needs to be a consistent approach across Torres Strait
- Children who’ve been in a formalised early childhood structured setting move much more smoothly into prep than those who haven’t
- Sense of disappointment when seeing the attention given to attracting international students. “Plant your own seed before you plant new/different ones” – focus on all of our own children first then attract the international students
- LOTE program needs to be really looked at. The whole concept of translating from English back to their language to process the information, then to formulate a response in their language and translate back in English is a big task at any age.
- Leadership in all senses (eg parents, community, teachers, principals, admin staff, district/regional/central offices)

5-7 things systems should put in place

- Parent Involvement
 - Parents need to be involved and engaged in the early childhood structure so that it is not viewed as just a “babysitter” situation. Early structured settings are a safe environment for learning, not a drop off centre for kids. In one organisation, parents who are working are given priority.

- Develop ways of actively involving parents. Establish the parent's interests and then get them involved on that level.
- Trial open days/cultural days/working bees/cultural corners where parents are invited to talk about their culture or to have input into things like excursions and come along as "supervisors"
- Ask parents the hard questions about why they are really putting their children into an early structured setting. What are their aspirations for themselves and their children?
- Bridging the gap that exists of children who haven't been in an early structured setting or those that have parents who work or don't work
- Children
 - Prepare children as early as possible for the whole upheaval process that happens each time they "transition" to the next school environment, both emotional and physical relocation. The physical relocation can have both positive and negative effects, some may enjoy the change, and some may not adapt so well to change. Need to cater for both.
 - Program was running where children attend prep (from childcare or from home) for 1 week at the end of the year before the year they were to be enrolled. Helped with the behaviours associated with not wanting to go to a big scary new place.
- Community
 - Community has to be involved through all of the schooling stages so that there is consistency and the community input is maintained and supported. Embedding the standard that community must be involved right from the beginning all the way through
 - Provide an outreach program for playgroups where a qualified group leader and assistant are provided to support parents. Parents may eventually take over or take ownership of the playgroup
 - Local community not engaged or employed in education setting therefore they are disappointed when outside people are brought in to fill the positions. How to address that situation.
- System
 - Facilities for early years and funding needs to be a priority for all departments responsible for early years. Bureaucracy around OATSIP funding applications is a struggle even for people with high education, let alone community groups. Process takes too long, 1 situation currently taken 12 months with no outcome.
 - Teacher/workers coming to Torres Strait should have one of their application/interview questions about what is their current level of cultural awareness ie it is then recognised if any prior training has been done, if they have attempted to look into any cultural information and to get a sense of if they are committed to embracing cultural awareness and understanding
 - Cultural program to run in conjunction with early years curriculum program/early learning program
 - Growing out own
 - Community Teachers and Assistant teachers who are interested in specialising in early years
 - Exploring options for training and growing capacity to be front line people



Importance of this transition area

- Engagement important at this stage as most students from the Islands relocate to urban environments as no secondary education on out Islands.

3-5 Key Issues/Themes

- Transport costs to and from education institutions between Islands are issues for families
- Students are failing to meet subject requirements due to lack of attendance, so there is a need for further investigation into flexibility of assessment and curriculum with the schools and teachers
- Communication campaign around parents encouraging the retention of their children at schools needs to be implemented across the Strait
- Students are experiencing home sickness whilst at school and are unable to cope with being away from parents. Through centrelink (Abstudy/AIC) the students are entitled to one return trip home per year, however they are not returning to school once they arrive home

5-7 things systems should put in place

- It was recommended from community members that the QIECC revisit and review the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between TSIREC and private schools. It was alleged that private schools are still taking funding from abstudy when students are enrolled, but have not returned from the islands to study. These circumstances arise due to weather, parents no longer wanting their children to continue with education or students are too home sick
- More mentors need to be accessible to help guide students through home sickness and to achieve greater success
- Some parents are promoting the idea of their children finishing school at year 5
- More support needs to be given to teachers to help administer the value of education
- Torres Strait Council needs to play more of a part in schools
- There needs to be more accountability in Governance structures around schools and their outputs
- A full time tutor from the school of distance education in Cairns could help to solve the problem of the interruption that weather causes to students accessibility to education



Importance of this transition area

- Important for future of young people to be actively involved in Community, family and work.

3-5 Key Issues/Themes

- 60+ youth not in local or southern high schools - alarming for
- Children in outer islands having difficulty with the physical transition to southern schools and even Thursday Island high school.
- Suspensions and expulsions
- Young mothers not able to access boarding facilities
- Northern Peninsula Area still experiencing significant issues of disengaged children even when parents are encouraging or forcing them to go to school. Suspected reasons include the children having a hard time at school over various issues and parents “forcing” children to go (rather than encouraging) is showing a lack of understanding of the benefits of school from parents

5-7 things systems should put in place

- Parents need to be encouraged to properly research schools that offer school based apprenticeships as not all schools (including boarding schools) have this option as well as the particulars of the apprenticeship
 - Example of Rio Tinto offering program however once the child has finished school and was doing the apprenticeship full time, there was no accommodation available in the town where the apprenticeship was to be completed.
- Indigenous Youth Mobility Program (IYMP) is not known widely known by parents or even bureaucrats
- Queensland Apprenticeships Service (QAS) was good service as it supported, negotiated and got accommodation for the child however its office is not on Thursday Island anymore and the level of support is not there.
- A number of training group come in to the Torres Strait offering apprenticeships however they don't have offices/officers on Thursday Island and don't offer that close support
- TAFE on Thursday Island offers limited courses and needs to be revamped.



Transition area: School to work, training, higher education

Importance of this transition area

- Build capacity of people to move into employment and higher education

3-5 Key Issues/Themes

- SET planning
- School based, here to take a lot of support from and for family
 - School leavers without basic literacy/ numeracy
 - after 12 months
- Trainees used as workers
- Trainees coming from Thursday Island
- 5 trainees each year
 - 4 or 5 stayed on after 5 years
- Turn away 7 health – workers trainees due to funding
- School leavers to outer islands, see CDEP as answer therefore just cruise through school
- SAT's student and Health team- school not involved from years 11 & 12
- Systems links to curriculum e.g. areas of health
 - Sustainability
 - Array of competencies for a range of occupation transferability
- Acknowledge and recognise

5-7 things systems should put in place

- Systems should have schools as part of SAT agreement
- School accept responsibility for students undertaking a SAT
- Tighten up SET plan process
- Support for families to support students and to understand message and complete SET plans
- Very little funding- not enough to cover wages of SATs and not supported for other responsibility
- Bonus only for Cert 3 & 4
- Bonus to go back into trainees (all trainees)
- Promote multiple pathways in fields e.g. education (law, technology, policy admin) and promote skills usage in alternate fields



Transition area: Remote and rural to urban

Importance of this transition area

- Majority of students from Torres Strait, particularly outer islands have to attend boarding school, therefore will move into urban environment

3-5 Key Issues/Themes

- Students go to schools where other students go, rather than because of what the school can offer and the type of support that is provided.
- Students coming home early and not going back to school
- Communication between hostels and school
 - eg a student suspended from hostel but not school; school did not suspend nor know child was suspended from hostel, therefore student missed a full term of school. (School should ring parents when extended absences)
- Communication between all parties

5-7 things systems should put in place

- Schools to visit communities to give information to parents/ community about services that are offered and support, academic, cultural and pastoral that the student will receive. Added benefit is that school staff gain an understanding of where the students are coming from.
- Hostels and schools to work together, eg Joe Mc Guinness hostel in Cairns and Trinity Bay High School
- St Patrick's school in Townsville
- Community to see what support mechanisms are in place
- HR - principals and teaching staff – systems to be put in place that reduce turnover of school staff
- SAE – clarity around department's language policy
- Understanding for parents of schools programming etc
- Cultural presentation – Jeff Waia
- Reignite values of cultural identity



STATEMENT OF OUTCOMES

As a consequence of the Community Forum on Thursday Island, it is anticipated that it will have a number of positive impacts to influence the work of the QIECC and its feedback to government to have a level of influence on policy and also for the engagement of Community.

As part of its Terms of Reference, the Committee is to obtain views from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders in relation of Indigenous education matters, in order to represent community views at a Ministerial level. Outcomes of the Forum will be relayed to both the State and Commonwealth Ministers of Education. The report will also be posted on the QIECC website.

Additionally, QIECC will report outcomes back to Torres Strait Island Regional Education Council (TSIREC) as the peak education advisory body representing the Torres Strait Islander community in the Torres Strait Islands.

