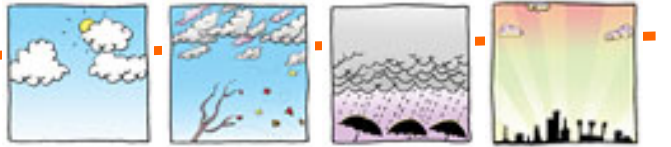


four seasons in one day –

literacies in changing climates

Adult Literacy Conference ■ Melbourne ■ September 10-11, 2004



Building Skills for Indigenous Governance

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The Learning Workshop

Introduction

To date 2004 has been a year of significant structural and political change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia.

On the 15 April 2004 the Federal Government announced its intention to close the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Commission (ATSIC) and its delivery service, arm, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS) on July 1 2004.

On July 1 2004 the Queensland government transferred governance of Aboriginal Community Councils from the Community Services Act to the Local Government Act resulting in the closure of the peak body, the Aboriginal Coordinating Council. Aboriginal Community Councils will now operate within the broad framework of mainstream local government.

Legislation currently before Federal Parliament proposes significant amendments to the Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976 which many indigenous services utilise to legally incorporate their organisations. Suggested reforms to the Act include modernisation of the regulatory framework and accountability standards, a higher level of protection for funding bodies and creditors and greater flexibility in the design of organisations through their constitutions.

These and other initiatives reflect trends in federal and state politics to shift the delivery of services to indigenous people to more mainstream agencies and regulatory structures. There will be increasing use of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) as a means of facilitating more effective delivery to indigenous people. The federal government are proposing the establishment of a range of advisory mechanisms as a means of addressing indigenous service delivery needs and concerns. Responsibility for federal management of indigenous affairs will be transferred to the Department of Immigration and Multi-Cultural Affairs.

Issues of Governance

Dodson and Smith (2003)¹ in their paper *Governance for sustainable development: strategic issues and principles for indigenous communities* propose key ingredients for sustainable economic socioeconomic development for indigenous communities. Many indigenous communities experience low levels of control over their external environments (including political jurisdiction, market and development opportunities, distance from markets and access to capital) but have moderate to high control over their internal assets and development strategies. Dodson and Smith indicate that indigenous people can experience high levels of control over local governance arrangements providing the opportunity to develop sound, stable, culturally appropriate governing arrangements to meet the needs of their communities. Effective governance training is a key ingredient in supporting this control.

¹ Dodson and Smith, *Governance for sustainable development: strategic issues and principles for indigenous Australian communities*.

The Certificate 1V in Business (Governance)

The Business Services Training Package endorsed the BSB 40901 Certificate IV in Business (Governance). It was designed to meet the needs of Indigenous Governing Committee members, to support self management and assist with organisational capacity building.

There are no qualifications below Certificate IV in Business (Governance) for Indigenous Governing Committees who are often characterised by varying; ages, literacy, numeracy levels, geographical locations (ranging from metropolitan to remote), levels of exposure to formal education, information technology skills levels and governing committee experience.

Indigenous Governance Literacy and Numeracy Practices

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (2002) indicated that economic disadvantage, social marginalisation, health problems and geographical isolation negatively affects indigenous participation in education, resulting in educational disadvantage. The educational disadvantage experienced by indigenous Australians is evidenced through minimal formal education and low levels of literacy and numeracy.²

Against a background of educational disadvantage, negative schooling experiences and low literacy levels Indigenous adults are increasingly required to undertake formal accredited training in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector.

A key issue in acquisition of formal qualifications is the effective engagement of indigenous adults in VET, in a system primarily designed to meet the needs of an industry driven training framework,³ linked to economic rationalism⁴ and focused on development human capital⁵.

Indigenous value systems, including values relating to education and learning generally differ to the values held by mainstream society. Mainstream society values education for its ability to develop human capital or the ability to develop individual skills and facilitate economic outcomes. Indigenous people generally value education and learning for its ability to develop social capital or community capacity. Learning is valued if it is part of the social and cultural framework and goals of the community. Learning is valued as a means of developing social capital owned by the individual and residing in the relationships of the community⁶

Motivation to learn including motivation to develop literacy and numeracy skills increases when the learning is seen as personally and or socially meaningful. Personally and socially meaningful learning is linked to the roles and responsibilities existing in a community. It is learning that builds social capital of the communal whole.⁷

² Schwab and Sutherland, *Building Indigenous learning communities*.

³ Campbell 2000 in Kral and Falk, *What is all that learning for?* Indigenous adult English literacy practices, training, community capacity and health.

⁴ Marginson in Boughton *Alternative VET pathways to indigenous development*, Review of Research

⁵ Schwab 1997 in Bob Boughton, *Alternative VET pathways to indigenous development*.

⁶ Kral and Falk *What is all that learning for?* Indigenous adult English literacy practices, training, community capacity and health

⁷ Kral and Falk 2004 *What is all that learning for?* Indigenous adult English literacy practices, training, community capacity and health

Kral and Falk (2004) suggest that Indigenous adults are more likely to move from a basic level of functional literacy to a higher level of purposeful, autonomous engagement with written text if their *role* and responsibilities within the community context demands high-level literacy competence.”⁸

Increased motivation to engage and succeed in VET may result from training programs closely related to the ‘Aboriginal domain’ or the ‘real business’ of the community. The ‘Governance domain’ like the ‘Christian domain’ described by Kral and Falk (2004) may be viewed as a meaningful activity in both the personal and community sense and provide motivation for adults to improve and use higher level literacy, numeracy skills.⁹

Kral and Schwab (2003) in their study of literacy and numeracy practices in a remote Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory suggest that in order for literacy and numeracy to contribute to community capacity building, the social and cultural contexts of the learner needs to be addressed and valued. The development of “situated” literacy and numeracy skills within the context of governance training is then “linked to meaningful roles and responsibilities in the community”¹⁰.

The development of Certificate 1V in Business (Governance) supports one of the key domains that indigenous people participate in and value in their communities. Successful customisation of this qualification can provide the opportunity for skill development that reflects roles and tasks that are meaningful to indigenous community learners and communities. Literacy and numeracy skill development can be integrated into the individual and group tasks that Board members must accomplish to successfully manage their community organisations.

Building Skills for Indigenous Governance

It is against this background that the literacy, numeracy support tool ‘Building Skills for Indigenous Governance’ was developed. ‘Building Skills for Indigenous Governance’ is a flexible, interactive tool supporting BSBATSIL402A: Use the constitution, BSBATSIM407A: Plan for organisational needs and BSBATSIL408A: Manage a board meeting, from the Certificate IV in Business (Governance). The literacy numeracy activities contained in the resource were designed to promote effective learning in the Aboriginal domain. The support tool was designed to:

- deliver literacy, numeracy learning within a socially and culturally relevant framework increasing social and community capital through the development of individual literacy skills
- enhance community well being through increased understanding of community responsibilities related to indigenous governance
- provide meaningful literacy, numeracy learning activities within the indigenous governance domain
- address indigenous educational disadvantage linking to mainstream VET qualifications through supporting competencies from Certificate IV in Business

⁸ Kral and Falk *What is all that learning for?* Indigenous adult English literacy practices, training, community capacity and health

⁹ ANTA 1998 in Kral and Falk *What is all that learning for?* Indigenous adult English literacy practices, training, community capacity and health

¹⁰ Kral and Schwab *The realities of Indigenous adult literacy acquisition and practice: Implications for capacity development in remote communities*

(Governance) developing human capital as a by product of developing community capacity and social capital

- meet Federal Government accountability requirements for members of Indigenous Governing Committees to undertake accredited training

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