

Education is the key, but do we need to change the locks?

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Abstract

This paper examines the nature of educational and employment outcomes for Aboriginal people in very remote Northern Territory. In particular, the differences between those (according to Australian Bureau of Statistics definitions) who speak a local language at home and those who speak English are considered. The analysis is based on a review of 2011 Census data.

The purpose of the analysis is to assess the impact of cultural alignments on participation in mainstream economies that exist in very remote parts of the Territory. It also questions to what extent the demands of industries are aligned to higher level schooling and post-school qualifications. Does education open the doors we expect it to?

The findings add to qualitative and quantitative analysis already undertaken as part of the Cooperative Research Centre for Remote Economic Participation's Remote Education Systems (RES) project. They shed light on the use of constructs such as 'Indigenous disadvantage' and policy initiatives designed to close 'gaps'.

At the end of the presentation, a number of alternative strategic and experimental models will be outlined that emerge in response to the challenges arising from these and other findings from the RES project. The intention of these models is to promote alternative approaches to education policy and practice, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from very remote communities.

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Introduction

During the 2013 federal election campaign, Tony Abbott made a commitment that will see “indigenous Australians receive practical training with a guaranteed job at the end of it”. While the issue of training for so-called real jobs is something of an ‘old chestnut’, in the light repeated attempts to ‘close gaps’ and end ‘Indigenous disadvantage’, it is perhaps worthwhile revisiting what the evidence tells us in terms of the links between education, training and employment, particularly for those living in very remote Australia. This paper is an attempt to present analysis and draw out implications, based on the data for very remote Northern Territory, from the 2011 Census.

The analysis presented considers the relationship between education, training and employment in that context. The tables and charts presented have been prepared using the Australian Bureau of Statistics Tablebuilder Pro tool (ABS, 2012) and are based on ‘place of enumeration’ counts.

The Cooperative Research Centre for Remote Economic Participation’s (CRC-REP) Remote Education Systems (RES) project is midway through a five year research process. The project aims to identify strategies that will improve outcomes for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners. Beyond the analysis of datasets, the research team has generated a significant amount of qualitative data. This helps to unpack the reasons for the findings that are based on numbers as well as potential ways forward in response to the issues that the data raises.

Hence, rather than simply provide an interesting set of numbers, we (the RES team) are able to offer some suggestions—based on our findings—about how education might be configured differently to better meet the needs of what is a very different context when compared with the rest of Australia. The models and strategies outlined are not intended as magic bullets that will fix the apparent problems of education and economic engagement. Rather, they are designed to stimulate discussion and action in a space that despite the effort of the last six years has produced very little change.

Data limitations and definitions

The analysis presented in this paper is based on ‘place of enumeration’ (POE) data from the 2011 Census. The difference between ‘place of usual residence’ (POUR) and ‘place of enumeration’ in very remote Northern Territory is significant. Of a total population of 46, 523, the 2011 Census records 34, 103 (73 per cent) as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, based on place of usual residence. However, the population, based on place of enumeration is 53,482. The difference is explained in part by overseas visitors (1,757) and visitors from other areas of Australia. The latter group could be tourists, fly-in fly-out workers or other workers who are staying in the Very Remote Northern Territory on Census night. One problem with POE data is that it counts the employment status of visitors, regardless of whether they are working or not. Place of work (POW) datasets are not available for remoteness areas. A problem with POUR data is that it fails to take into account workers who are employed in a remote location and live in another. None of the available datasets take into account fully workers who spend part of their time working in a remote location. These could be consultants, contractors, fly-in fly-out workers who may be based in a non-remote location but who derive significant income from their work in remote locations. While the POE data includes visitors such as tourists—and in the Northern Territory, the tourist population at Census time is quite large—it does count those who are based temporarily in very remote locations. It does not count fly-in fly-out workers who are at home, and therefore away from work. These data limitations and complexities are understood in this analysis. It is therefore accepted that the analysis should be treated with some caution.

A significant part of the analysis that follows is based on a division of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory who are classified as speaking English at home and those who speak ‘Australian Indigenous Languages’ (ABS, 2011a). It is recognised that these classifications are somewhat crude in the sense that many Aboriginal people speak multiple languages. However, the basis of this division is an assumption (which could be contested) that those who speak an Australian Indigenous language at home are more likely to see themselves as belonging or identifying with the culture of the community they live in. Language is an important vehicle through which a culture is maintained and the knowledge transmitted from one generation to the next (Battiste, 2000; Hallett et al., 2007; Lee, 2009; Taskforce on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures, 2005).

Very remote Northern Territory

Figure 1 maps the remoteness structure of the Northern Territory (NT), based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Remoteness Classification Structure (ABS, 2011c). Beyond Greater Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs, most of the Northern Territory is classified as ‘Very Remote’.

Figure 1. Remoteness areas of the Northern Territory, Source: (ABS, 2011b)



Table 1 represents the population of Very Remote NT on Census night, 2011, in terms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status and language spoken at home. Just over one-third of the population speak a ‘Northern European Language’. While it is accepted that there will be some non-English speakers in this group, this analysis takes this group to be predominantly English speakers (though they may also speak another language other than English). Just over half of the population speak an ‘Australian Indigenous Language’. Not surprisingly, almost all of these are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders. A little over 10 per cent of the population are either ‘Overseas visitors’ or have not stated the language they speak at home. Looking at the population in another way, setting aside the overseas visitors and ‘not stated’ categories, there are three main groups: Non-Indigenous people, of which over 90 per cent speak English (or another Northern European language), Aboriginal people

who speak English as a first language (a little over 10 per cent of the Aboriginal population) and Aboriginal people who speak an Australian Indigenous language at home—about half the total population of the region. There is a diverse array of ‘Indigenous’ languages spoken in Very Remote NT which are not reflected in the detail at this level.

Table 1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status and language spoken at home, Very Remote NT, 2011

Language spoken at home	Non-Indigenous	Aboriginal	Torres Strait Islander	Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	Not stated	Overseas visitor	Total
Northern European Languages	14915	3586	46	136	122	0	18805
Southern European Languages	207	3	0	0	10	0	220
Eastern European Languages	92	0	0	0	0	0	92
Southwest and Central Asian Languages	31	0	0	0	0	0	31
Southern Asian Languages	94	0	0	0	0	0	94
Southeast Asian Languages	237	3	0	0	5	0	245
Eastern Asian Languages	162	0	0	0	0	0	162
Australian Indigenous Languages	96	27268	25	321	102	0	27812
Other Languages	146	31	0	0	0	0	177
Supplementary codes	21	76	0	0	0	0	97
Not stated	308	1889	16	20	1756	0	3989
Overseas visitor	0	0	0	0	0	1757	1757
Total	16309	32856	87	477	1995	1757	53481
Proportion of total population	30.5%	61.4%	0.2%	0.9%	3.7%	3.3%	100.0%

Source: (ABS, 2012)

The very remote NT labour force

Table 2 shows labour force status for the three main groups identified above. The largest group in the labour force are non-Indigenous workers who are employed full time. The data shows that of about 15 000 resident workers, about 60 per cent are non-Indigenous, almost seven per cent are Aboriginal people who speak English at home and about 30 per cent are Aboriginal people who speak an Indigenous language at home. The category ‘Employed, away from work’ is problematic. On the surface the label suggests those who are employed elsewhere, but the category includes those who did not record hours worked. Regardless, one of the key messages that comes through this data is that there are plenty of ‘real’ jobs in very remote NT, but despite being a minority of the population, non-Indigenous workers make up a majority of the labour force.

Table 2. Labour force status for non-Indigenous and Aboriginal people, Very Remote NT, 2011

	Employed, worked full-time	Employed, worked part-time	Employed, away from work*	Unemployed, looking for full- time work	Unemployed, looking for part- time work	Not in the labour force	Not stated	Not applicable
Non-Indigenous	8021	1191	1233	114	52	3078	386	2234
Aboriginal: English speaker at home	725	319	150	112	33	797	129	1322
Aboriginal: Australian Indigenous Languages speaker at home	2047	2466	655	1376	400	10294	907	9125
Other Aboriginal: (inc. language not stated)	40	64	26	25	10	360	690	788
Other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Not Stated	160	57	42	16	7	237	1561	482
Total	10993	4097	2106	1643	502	14766	3673	13951

Source: (ABS, 2012) *The category "Employed, away from work" includes persons who stated they worked and did not state the number of hours worked.

Why is this so? A number of commonly held views run counter to this data. The first is that there is no real economy in remote communities. The second is that in order to get 'real' jobs, young people have to attend school (every day) until they complete year 12 and then they need to get post-school qualifications. And so we see commentary such as the following:

In education, tougher rules around school attendance and participation in good remote primary schools must be enforced. No excuses. (Tudge, 2011)

Curtisha has completed preschool – she knows how to hold a pencil, listen to the teacher, and adapt to the formal routines of the day. She's ready for school. Ready for the future. The mistakes made in one generation are being repaired in the next. The gap is being closed.(Gillard, 2013)

"All of the good jobs with lots of money go to people who have gone to school," Mr Abbott said, instructing the children to attend school every day. (Elks, 2011)

...in indigenous communities, no less than in every Australian community, the kids should go to school, the adults should go to work...(Abbott, 2013)

The most effective way to get people out of poverty is to get them into a job. For that they need an acceptable level of education and they need to live in a real economy. Many Indigenous people don't (Mundine, 2013).

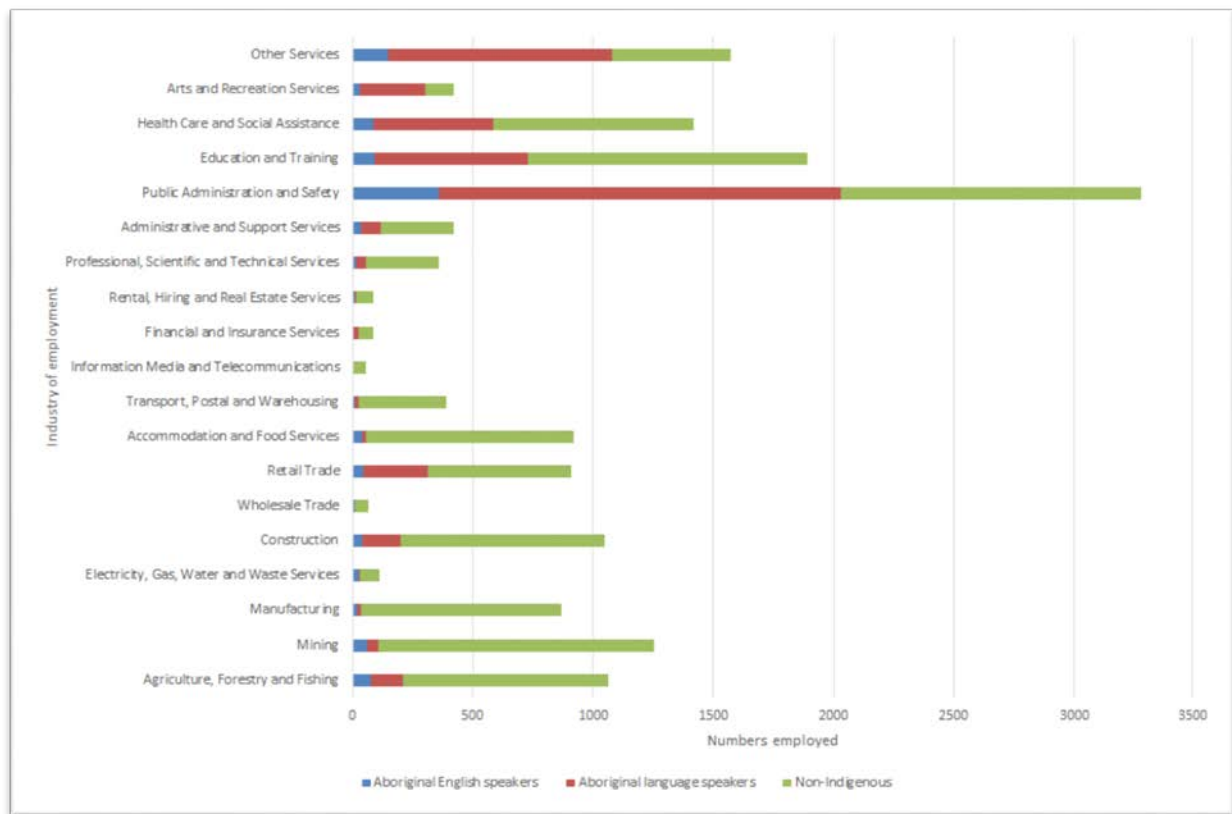
The pithy solutions suggested in the above are underpinned by some serious problems in the thinking behind them. The problem is not with the importance or the value of education, but rather with the tacit assumptions about the absence of jobs or a 'real economy' and the connection

between schooling and those jobs. The analysis that follows shows that the apparent 'problem' in very remote NT communities is not because of an absence of jobs or because of low educational attainment. Rather the problem is related to non-Indigenous people providing services and arguably the 'problem' (if it can be called that) is about the kinds of employment choices Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make in remote communities.

Very remote NT industries of employment

Figure 2 shows how employment opportunities are shared among non-Indigenous and Aboriginal workers in very remote NT. The latter group are divided into English speakers and Aboriginal Language speakers on the basis of ABS definitions. The profiles for the three groups show some similarities and differences. Firstly, the biggest employer for each group is 'Public Administration and Safety'. Secondly, the preferred industries of employment for both Aboriginal people who speak English at home and Aboriginal Language speakers are similar: 'Public Administration and Safety', 'Health Care and Social Assistance', 'Education and Training' and 'Other Services'. Thirdly, Aboriginal workers are largely absent from industries such as Mining, Manufacturing, Accommodation and Food Services, and 'Transport, Postal and Warehousing'. Non-Indigenous workers make up well above 90 per cent of the workforce in these industries. Together, these industries provide nearly 3 500 jobs. Less than 250 of these jobs are taken by Aboriginal people. Fourthly, while 70 per cent of the Aboriginal workforce is clustered in four industry groups, the non-Indigenous workforce is spread fairly evenly across the range of industry categories. Finally, Aboriginal workers who speak English at home are proportionally more likely (at least in the order of 2:1 as a proportion of total employment for the group) than Aboriginal Language speakers to engage in 'Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing', Mining, 'Accommodation and Food Services', and 'Administrative and Support Services'. Aboriginal Language speakers, on the other hand are at least 30 per cent more likely to be employed (relative to total employment for the group) in 'Retail Trade', 'Education and Training', 'Arts and Recreation Services', and 'Other Services'. The analysis demonstrates that employment patterns differ depending on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status, but also status on the basis of language spoken at home.

Figure 2. Industry of employment for non-Indigenous and Aboriginal workers, Very Remote NT, 2011



Source: (ABS, 2012) based on place of enumeration

There is a view is that most Aboriginal workers are engaged in CDEP, which are not 'real jobs'.

If CDEP is excluded from employment figures, after thirty years of the CDEP program, the percentage of Indigenous people in 'real' employment in ghetto, fringe, and remote areas is only 17%. (Hudson, 2008, p. vii)

The Census shows that for this region, about two-thirds of the Aboriginal workforce is not engaged in CDEP. Table 3 explains to some extent that CDEP is 'responsible' for a large proportion of jobs in 'Other Services' and 'Public Administration and Safety'. It is difficult to assess the type of work this is, particularly in the 'Other Services' category. The ABS describes 1340 jobs in this category as 'Other Interest Group Services nec'. Regardless, it should be noted that over 1700 non-Indigenous people are employed in the 'Public Administration and Safety' and 'Other Services' industry groups. Few would suggest that their work is not real.

Table 3. CDEP participation, Very Remote NT, 2011

Industry of employment	Participant worker in CDEP
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	40
Mining	0
Manufacturing	0
Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services	23
Construction	39
Wholesale Trade	0
Retail Trade	23
Accommodation and Food Services	6
Transport, Postal and Warehousing	0
Information Media and Telecommunications	0
Financial and Insurance Services	0
Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services	0
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	3
Administrative and Support Services	51
Public Administration and Safety	800
Education and Training	76
Health Care and Social Assistance	140
Arts and Recreation Services	80
Other Services	651
Inadequately described	0
Not stated	195
Total	2127

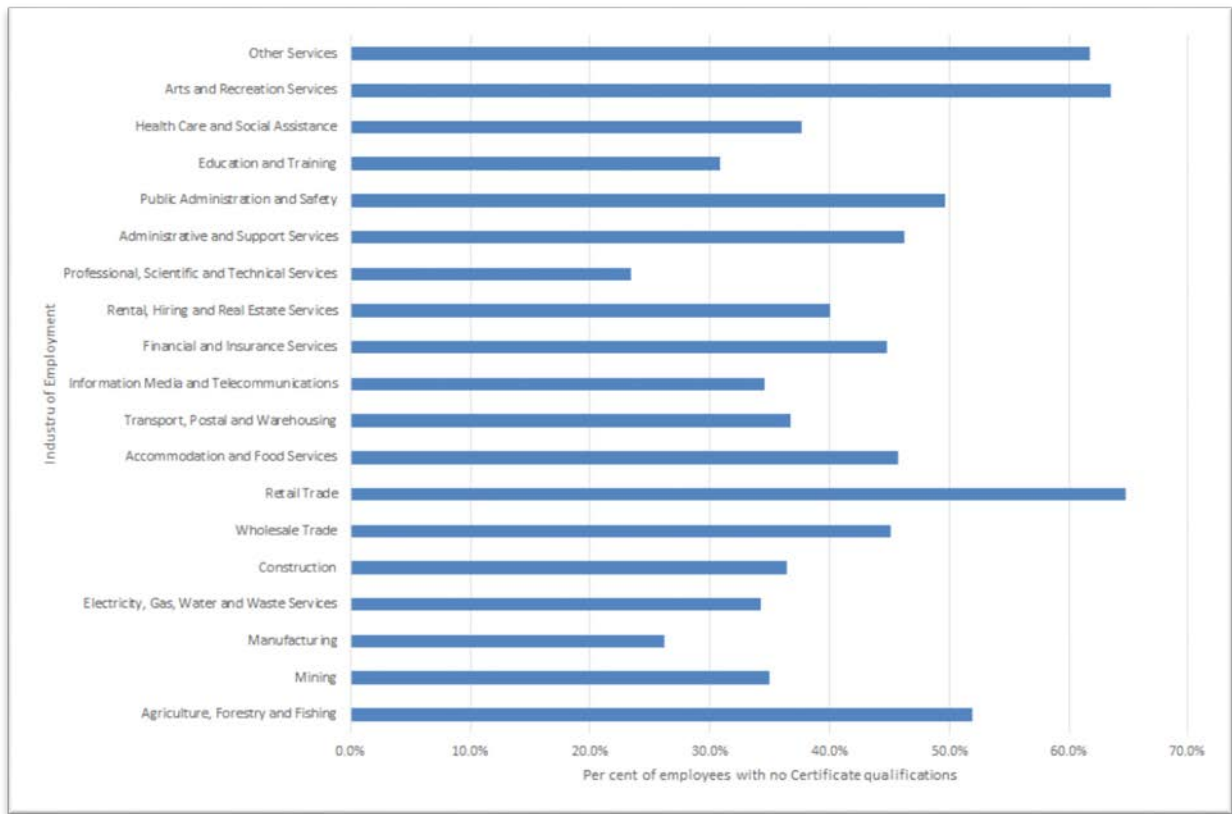
Source: (ABS, 2012) based on place of enumeration

Very remote NT qualifications and industries of employment

I return now to the question posed earlier in relation to the labour force statistics shown in Table 2: Why do non-Indigenous people make up such a high proportion of the workforce? If engagement in education and attainment of certificates is a precondition to employment, it could be expected that a high proportion of the non-Indigenous labour force was highly trained and attained year 12. Certificate III is increasingly seen as the minimum standard for economic engagement (Council of Australian Governments, 2012) and the trend of increasing qualification levels means that in practical terms those without a post-school qualification will have great difficulty finding a place in the workforce (Buchanan et al., 2010)—a Certificate III is ‘considered an entry-level qualification for many industries’ (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2013, p. 43). Figure 3 summarises, for each industry group, the proportion of employees who have not completed a certificate qualification.

A number of industry groups would appear to demand little in the way of qualifications. For all employees, 50.7 per cent had not completed a certificate qualification. For non-Indigenous employees, the figure is 34.8 per cent—3629 jobs required no certificate qualification (A summary of the CDEP and qualification data is shown at Appendix 1, page 19). The answer to the question ‘Why do non-Indigenous people make up such a high proportion of the workforce?’ then, is not because non-Indigenous people are highly skilled.

Figure 3. Proportion of employees with no reported Certificate or higher qualifications



Source: (ABS, 2012) based on place of enumeration

Very remote NT schooling levels and industries of employment

Perhaps then, the answer lies in schooling.

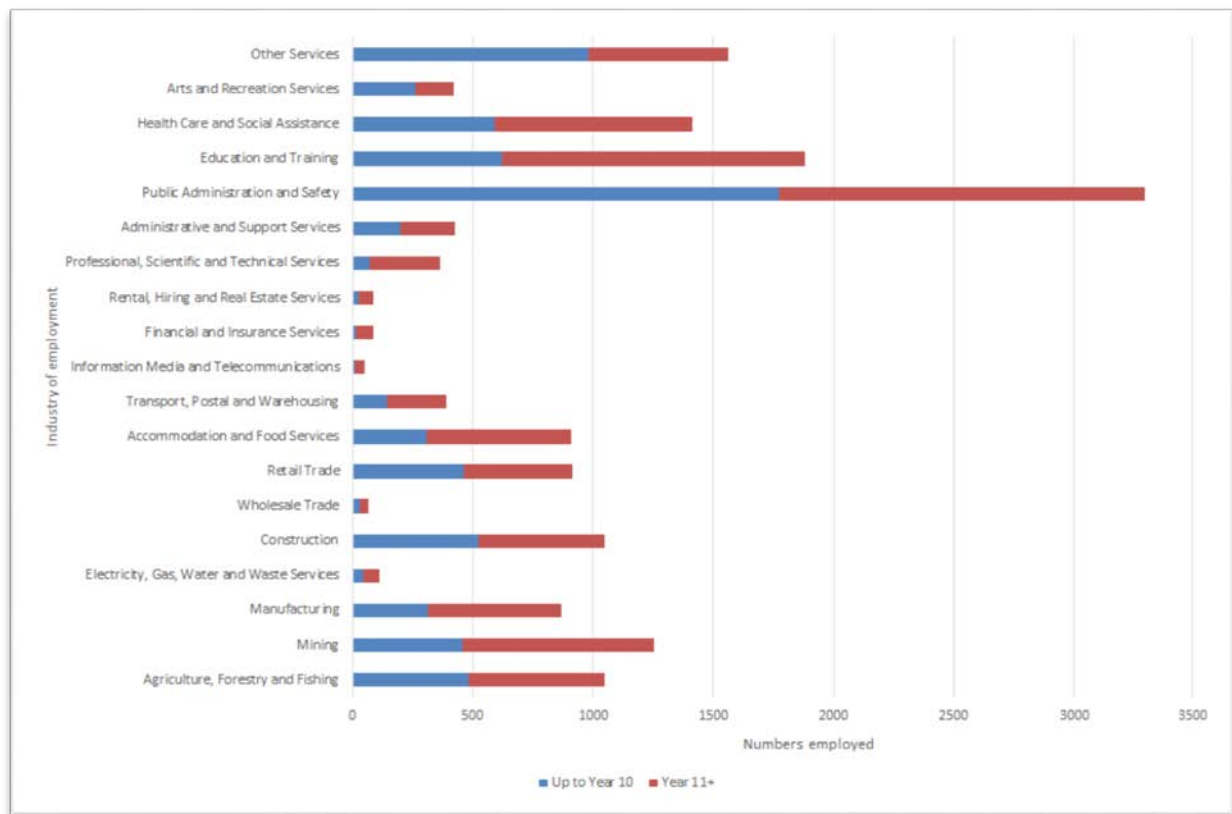
A good education is the key to wider participation in Australian society and the economy. (Australian Government, 2012, p. 6)

Education is the key to making peace, poverty alleviation and sustainability both a reality and a success. (Maclean, 2013)

Literacy is the key to education. Education is the key to escaping poverty. (Aboriginal Literacy Foundation, 2012, p. 1)

As before, it could be expected that the reason for the high proportion of non-Indigenous participation in the labour force was due to high levels of education. Figure 4 represents the Census data for all employees showing the relative proportion of employees who have attained up to Year 10 and those who have attained Year 11 and above.

Figure 4. Highest level of schooling attained for employees by industry, Very Remote NT, 2011



Source: (ABS, 2012) based on place of enumeration

A number of points stand out from this analysis. First, three of the four the preferred areas of work for Aboriginal people ('Public Administration and Safety', 'Education and Training' and 'Health Care and Social Assistance') require relatively high schooling levels. In these three industries of employment, the overall proportion of workers with Year 11+ schooling is 54.7 per cent. If we take four of the least preferred industries of employment ('Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing', 'Construction', 'Retail Trade', and 'Accommodation and Food Services'), the proportion of workers with Year 11+ schooling is 54.9 per cent. Even Mining, which offers significant employment opportunities throughout the region (and is potentially understated by the POE data), has a large pool of workers with no more than Year 10 schooling (36.5 per cent). An overview of school attainment data is shown at Appendix 2, page 20. In summary, schooling explains some of the employment preferences of Aboriginal people, but not all. In other words it may be a key which unlocks doors to some forms of economic engagement for some people but it is not *the* key on its own.

If education is the key, do we need to change the locks?

The statement, 'education is the key' is a simplistic solution without a foundation in the reality of the very remote context. The school and vocational education and training systems do provide opportunities for many—but not all—people in very remote contexts. This is evidenced in part by the statistics shown above, that identify 'Education and Training' as a preferred industry of employment for a large number of Aboriginal people in very remote Northern Territory—about one in nine Aboriginal people employed, work in this industry.

A 'key' question arising from the Cooperative Research Centre for Remote Economic Participation Remote Education Systems (RES) project is about what role educators have to play to inspire aspiration in young people—and what that aspiration should be for. If it is true, as this analysis suggests, that there is something of a disconnect between education, training and employment opportunities perhaps there needs to be a rethink about the purpose of education in remote communities (or for students from remote communities). If the purpose of education is largely about preparing people for work and further education as it arguably is in other contexts, then it is only achieving limited success. If on the other hand it is about providing locally relevant choices and opportunities for engagement in a range of meaningful livelihood opportunities then the application of national curricula and standards, along with testing regimes should be challenged. There are no simple solutions here, and this is an issue the RES project team is grappling with. What we do know from our research is that the commonly held assumptions about: what makes a good education (Guenther & Bat, 2012); the apparent importance of attendance (Guenther, 2012); discourses of advantage and disadvantage (Guenther et al., 2013); as well as aspiration and success (Osborne & Guenther, Forthcoming), seldom apply as they would in non-remote Australia.

We would argue that cultural alignments play as much of a role in determining education and employment choices as do schooling and post-school qualifications. In other words, those who would align themselves to the values and philosophical underpinnings of a western economic system are more likely to take hold of the range of opportunities it offers (McRae-Williams & Guenther, 2012). Similarly those who align themselves to the values and philosophical underpinnings of a local Anangu/Walpiri/Yolngu/ Arrernte (or any other people grouping) economic system will take hold of the opportunities it offers them. It is a question of which system one belongs to (Bat & Guenther, Forthcoming). If, as is argued earlier, that language is an important indicator of cultural alignment and identity, the above analysis suggests that belonging to a more traditional Aboriginal culture makes a difference to the kinds of choices people make about work and economic engagement. The question then remains: is the key being used in education the right one for the very remote context?

Examples of different locks

The analysis presented here for the Northern Territory shows that even without increasing school retention or increasing training opportunities, there are plenty of jobs that Aboriginal people in very remote Northern Territory can take over from non-Indigenous people. The data shows that there are more than 3000 jobs held by non-Indigenous people who have either no certificate qualifications or not gone beyond Year 10 at school. There are of course complexities associated with a simple transfer of employment, which I would not want to deny. However, to argue that there is no 'real economy' that Aboriginal people can engage in, is to start from a false premise. As noted above, the question is do they want to... and indeed should they have to engage? There are a number of existing examples where the education key is being used to open up a different kind of lock.

Altman has for some time argued for a 'hybrid economy' (see for example Altman, 2010). There are now several examples of what this hybridity might look like. Altman cites examples of 'caring for country' rangers (p. 273) and visual artists as evidence of the potential for hybrid economies—meaningful activities that connect work with land and culture. While the idea of 'hybridity' is perhaps a useful term to describe economies from a non-Indigenous, non-remote perspective, in reality for many people in remote communities, the economy is what it is. That said, there is an increasing number of examples where 'learning on country' is being used through schools to prepare young people for the work of caring for their country (Fogarty, 2012; Fogarty & Schwab, 2012; Marika et al., 2012).

There are more though. Enterprise Learning Projects (see www.elp.org.au), for example, is an organisation that is committed to providing people new opportunities to engage in microenterprise where the focus is not on providing a service or accredited training or recreating something from an urban context.

In the space between community development and education, a relatively new initiative called *Children's Ground*, working with Mirrar people in West Arnhem, is tackling education from a position where community is in control, and where education is premised on an assumption that learning should take place in first language.

Children's Ground invites visionary philanthropists to join the partnership in this long term approach, that will work with every child and every family across the region over the next 25 years, to provide the very best in learning, wellbeing and economic development, celebrating first nations knowledge and global knowledge systems. (Children's Ground, 2013)

Another model of alternative work, is that being developed by Ninti One Limited through its 'Aboriginal Community Research' network (Ninti One, 2013). The idea here is to build capacity in communities through employment opportunities generated from research, evaluation and service delivery projects. At one level, employment is very much 'mainstream'; at another it is rooted in local culture, language and traditional knowledge.

In the health services field of work, the kind of approach taken by Miwatj Health with its Raypirri Rom Wellbeing program (see <http://miwatj.com.au/what-we-do/community-programs/raypirri-rom-wellbeing/>) is an effective way of working in this space between cultures (see Wearne et al., 2008). Another example in a similar field is found in the way that the Akeyulerre Healing Centre, based in Alice Springs, works. An evaluation of the program (Arnott et al., 2010) found that the combination of traditional healing, intergenerational knowledge transfer and interface with mainstream services proved effective. Non-indigenous stakeholders at the interface found it difficult to describe how Akeyulerre worked. Akeyulerre is rooted in traditional Arrernte values and employs people in work that would not be seen as valuable in the so called real economy, but which has value as a vehicle for cultural maintenance.

In the field of justice, Blagg (2008) talks about these hybrid initiatives (such as circle courts, community patrols and family healing centres) as being in a 'liminal space' (pp. 54-55) located somewhere between the non-Aboriginal domain with its typical structures and the Aboriginal domain, with its ceremony, kinship, cosmology and law. He suggests that these hybrid initiatives 'are important in the sense that they do not colonise Aboriginal domain but construct an ensemble of new spaces' (p. 53).

The challenge for the education and training system is to adapt to these emerging post-school opportunities in liminal spaces—which are of course learning spaces. That said, if education is about providing choice and opportunity, then it also needs to find ways of supporting those who want to, to engage in employment where there are financially lucrative opportunities, such as mining and construction.

Possible additional ways forward

To a large extent the examples cited above have developed independently of the education system. Our concern in the RES project is to see the system respond in ways that reflect the intent of the above initiatives—providing opportunities that reflect the importance of language, culture, law, land

and sea Our concern is also to see education structures and processes develop that connect to the real world of work in remote communities, as opposed to the ‘unreal’ world of work in the so-called real economy. The following ideas then—emerging from the qualitative findings of the project—provide opportunities for a different kind of response—a new key for a new lock. We do not pretend though, that any of these suggested strategies are somehow magic bullets that will solve the problem of remote education or economic participation.

[Anangu Academy](#)

The idea of Anangu Academy is drawn specifically from our work in the APY Lands of South Australia and the southern part of the Northern Territory where Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara speakers, who call themselves Anangu. The concept could be transferred to other locations and people groups. Anangu Academy can be thought of as a structure that brings together a number of elements discussed below into a system that privileges Anangu knowledge systems, languages, aspirations and expectations for economic participation and would be built around what we call a ‘Red Dirt Curriculum’.

[Short term intensive boarding school experiences](#)

Our research tells us that boarding schools play an important role for many students in remote communities. We also know that current models do not work for the majority of students, partly because being away from home for a term or year is too much. We therefore propose a boarding school experience that is short term (no more than a month at a time), intensive and inclusive—immersing students in a rich cross-cultural experience and promotes learning in a space where students are attached to mentors that can act as guides in the learning experience.

[Knowledge exchange partnerships](#)

A flip-side of short term intensive boarding experiences is the reverse for non-Indigenous students. Students (most likely secondary) from urban settings would engage in an intensive learning experience in remote communities where local young people would act as the mentors. Remote schools would partner with urban schools to effect this kind of knowledge exchange relationships. There are already some schools doing this to some extent, though the proposal here is to formally recognise this kind of arrangement. Another element of knowledge exchange is built into the concept of Anangu Academy. Expertise outside of school would be brought into the Academy from other members of the community. It does however include recognised and credentialed teachers.

[Non-indigenous credentialing for work in remote communities](#)

There is a commonly held view that a minimum qualification requirement for work is a Certificate III, as suggested earlier (page 8). It may be true though that in order to be prepared for work in a particular field of expertise there are minimum sets of knowledge and skill that are needed. However, for non-Indigenous people working in remote communities there is often no requirement for the skills and knowledge need to work effectively in that space. There are some models of teacher preparation that include non-formal approaches to learning. These are important for effective teaching practice and for retention. We are proposing a similar system be set up for a range of occupations that are filled by non-Indigenous people in communities. We see the Anangu Academy structure as the vehicle for this kind of credentialing.

[Red Dirt Curriculum \(RDC\)](#)

The idea of RDC (for more detail see Osborne et al., 2013) comes from a recognition that much of what is taught using the Australian Curriculum struggles to find relevance in the remote community context. We are proposing that a more relevant curriculum be developed grounded in the red dirt of

remote Australia. We see the need for variations in curriculum design, developed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders themselves, that include red dirt history, red dirt politics and red dirt economics. In particular, the need for topics such as land rights, local histories, Native Title, digital literacies, along with learning in and through own language and carrying out own language documentation and description are foundationally important. RDC would connect learning with emerging livelihood options and could be thought of as an extension of 'learning on country' models discussed earlier (page 11).

Redirecting punitive strategies to ones that build capacity

Our research findings indicate that punitive strategies, or strategies with punitive labels (such as truancy officers and measures designed to link welfare payments to attendance) do not achieve the desired outcomes in remote communities. Short term compliance may be achieved but as the intervention recedes, 'normal' behaviours return and little is gained. We propose that resources be redirected to capacity building initiatives that employ local people and that are badged with more positive branding, for example from 'truancy' to 'family support'. The good intentions of many of these programs around encouraging families and building local capacity can then be promoted.

Informal, out of school learning spaces

Our research indicates that a lot of learning happens outside of school, particularly for those young people who do not attend. Our findings also suggest that young people are increasingly engaging with digital literacies, particularly as infrastructure rolls out in remote communities. Internationally the rise of technology assisted learning is recognised for its importance. 'Hole in the wall' type technologies are increasingly significant. We propose that that the school be the site for a roll-out of free wireless infrastructure that allow mobile devices to connect to the outside world.

Strengthening local governance structures

Good governance is important for the management of schools. This is an area that often remains a significant challenge for remote schools, particularly where there are dispersed campuses across a large area (for example Utopia homelands in the NT). Community engagement is similarly a challenge. We are proposing that more research and investment is needed to build contextually relevant governance structures for schools and communities.

Separate learning spaces for young men and women, away from 'school'

Our research suggests that one of the reasons for disengagement of students in the high school years is the stigma associated with being in the same place as children. School is for kids but it is often not seen as an option for young men and women. Different spaces need to be available for young adults to learn in, particularly those who have been through cultural initiation. Further, from the point of initiation there could be a need for separate learning spaces for young men and women, depending on the context. We are calling for the development a digital arts academy or a dance academy to engage different people in activities as learners.

Aboriginal assistants as Red Dirt Educators

Few would disagree that local assistant teachers can play a vital role in the classroom. Further, as noted earlier (page 6) education is an industry of choice for many people living in remote communities. However, there is often a 'but' after that statement (coming from the non-Indigenous teacher perspective) with reference to issues of apparent commitment to the job, professional development, literacy and numeracy abilities, reliability, employment status, mobility, health, family priorities or community constraints. Consistent with the ideas of an Anangu Academy, Red Dirt Curriculum, non-Indigenous credentialing, knowledge exchange, capacity building and stronger local

governance structures, we see a new role for ‘Red Dirt Educators’ (RDEs)—local people committed to education within a structure that allows for learning which caters for local needs. RDEs would have a direct role in the development of RDC. Credentialing and pay scales would need to reflect local knowledge and expertise, not necessarily AQF standards of certification. RDEs would necessarily be incorporated into school governance structures.

Conclusions: challenges for education and training providers

The analysis which forms the basis of this paper has raised questions about the education and training system’s current ability to move Aboriginal people in very remote Northern Territory communities from positions of perceived economic disadvantage into one of mainstream economic participation. The data from the Census shows that there *is* a real economy in very remote Northern Territory—one that is populated more or less by non-Indigenous workers across the full range of 19 ABS industry categories. In contrast, the preferred industries of employment for many Aboriginal people are limited to five industry groups. The analysis shows that the work non-Indigenous workers do, does not necessarily require high levels of school education or certificate qualifications. To some extent then, there is no educational reason why those in remote communities cannot engage more fully in the broader range of industry options available in very remote Northern Territory. But rather than being helpless and powerless, young Aboriginal men and women are powerfully expressing their agency by choosing which hegemonic structures they wish to engage in. By and large, they are not ‘buying the whole package’ offered by the so-called ‘real economy’. Whichever way we look at it, the education key, which is currently offered for young people is either not being taken, or is not opening the right locks. Part of the reason for this relates to cultural alignment and whether or not the education, training and economic systems allow young people to belong. The examples of ‘different locks’ cited (page 11) have one thing in common: they allow those engaged in learning and work to remain aligned to the values and philosophies they know are true.

The big challenge for training providers, funders and the education system more generally is how to ‘deliver’ knowledge and skill services into remote communities without them being either irrelevant, or just another vehicle of the so-called ‘Aboriginal industry’ (Stone, 2008) and so inflating the number of non-Indigenous people employed in communities but not fully contributing to the local economy. It is suggested here that education needs to tap into the lived experiences and real worlds of remote communities and the emerging opportunities that are arising from the value(s) that come from living on country—land and sea that has value, not just for its owners, but for those who perhaps wish to exploit its resources, or those who wish to explore its natural and cultural richness as tourists or consumers of art. This may mean that those of us who are educators and educationalists may need to seriously think approaches that currently assume education can be turned into a universal, one size fits all service with national curriculum, national professional standards for teachers, and national testing regimes—all of which tend to be divorced from what those of us in the Remote Education Systems project call the ‘red dirt’ of remote Australia. To this end, ‘red dirt’ thinking on curriculum, aspiration and success, and new models that better engage young people in meaningful learning fit for a purpose necessarily different from what is required in non-remote Australia, need to be considered.

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Appendix 1: Very Remote NT workforce and qualifications

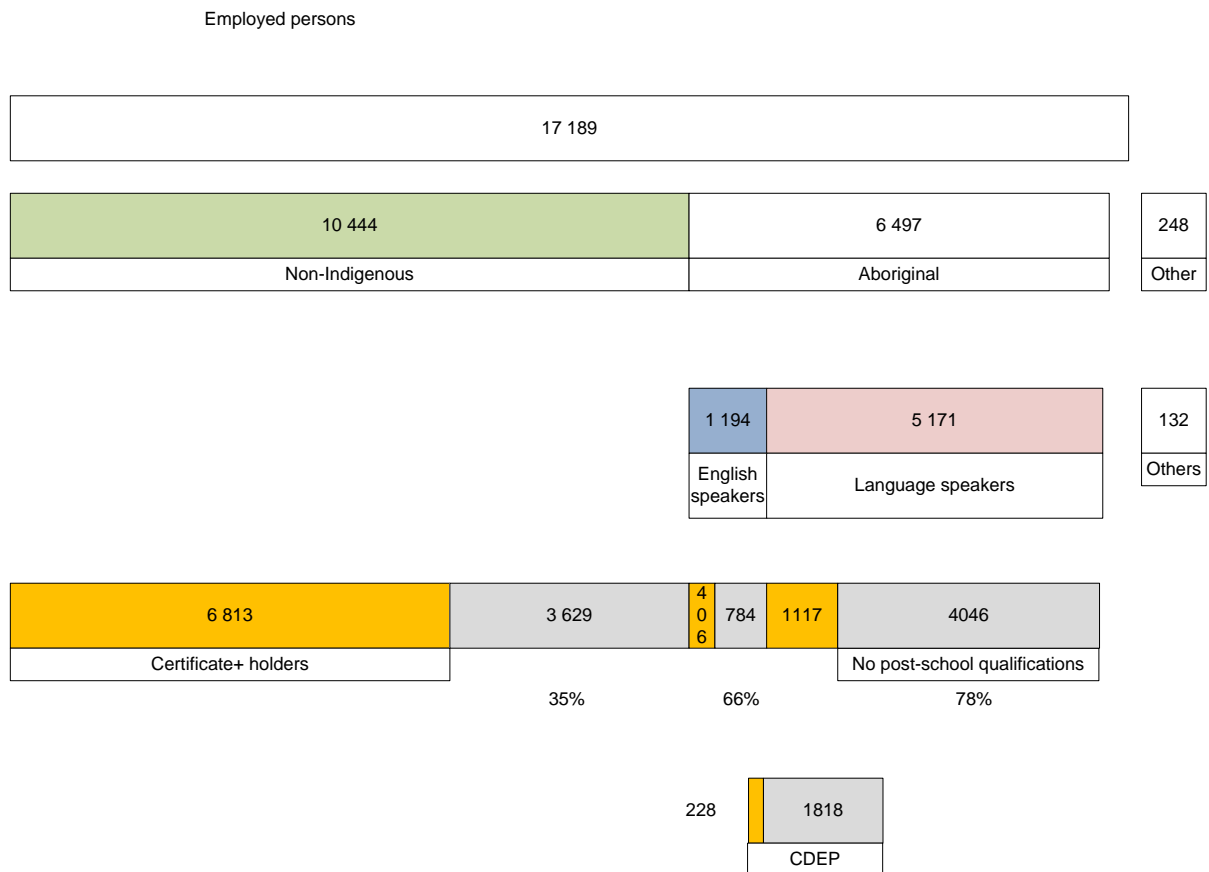
The following diagram shows how the labour force at the time of the 2011 Census is divided into various groupings.

The total employed labour force of 17 189 is comprised of 10 444 non-Indigenous workers (shaded green), 6 497 Aboriginal workers (unshaded) and 248 others (including those not stated, Torres Strait Islanders and both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders)

The Aboriginal workforce is comprised of 5 171 workers who speak an Indigenous language (shaded pink) and 1 194 Aboriginal English speakers (shaded blue).

The next row shows those who hold Certificate or higher qualifications (shaded yellow) and those who do not (shaded grey)—35 per cent of non-Indigenous workers do not have any post-school qualifications, 66 per cent of Aboriginal English speakers do not hold a qualification, and 78 per cent of Language speakers do not hold a qualification.

Of the 2046 Aboriginal CDEP participants, almost 90 per cent had not post-school qualification.



Appendix 2: Very Remote NT workforce and schooling

The following diagram shows how the labour force at the time of the 2011 Census is divided into various groupings.

The total employed labour force of 17 189 is comprised of 10 444 non-Indigenous workers (shaded green), 6 497 Aboriginal workers (unshaded) and 248 others (including those not stated, Torres Strait Islanders and both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders)

The Aboriginal workforce is comprised of 5 171 workers who speak an Indigenous language (shaded pink) and 1 194 Aboriginal English speakers (shaded blue).

The last row shows those who have achieved Year 11 or higher (shaded yellow) and those who have achieved up to Year 10 at school (shaded grey)—32 per cent of non-Indigenous workers stayed at school up to Year 10, 62 per cent of Aboriginal English speakers stayed at school up to Year 10, and 73 per cent of Language speakers stayed at school up to Year 10.

