Transforming Indigenous Education through the Arts

Executive Summary

educational
transformations

the
song
room

Engaging Young People
Through Creativity

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Terminology

Australia has two broad cultural groups of original inhabitants – Aboriginal peoples who are the original inhabitants of mainland Australia, Tasmania, and some of the other adjacent islands and the Torres Strait Islander peoples who are the original inhabitants of the Torres Strait Islands. Within these two groups, are found many diverse languages and cultures.

In this report, the term 'Indigenous' refers to people who are of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples. We acknowledge the distinctiveness of each cultural group.

Introduction

Creative Arts Indigenous Parental Engagement (CAIPE) was funded by the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) as a Parental and Community Engagement (PaCE) project. The Song Room (TSR) is a not-for-profit organisation in receipt of grants from public and private sources that conducts free programs in the arts in schools. The CAIPE Project was situated in three trial sites in urban, regional and remote settings in Queensland. TSR implemented three program elements of the CAIPE project:

1) The Song Room In-School Workshop program
2) Early Literacy Storytelling program;
3) Creative Community program

Methodology

The study focused on students from Grades three, four and five, as parental involvement was seen to exert the greatest effects on student outcomes in younger rather than older children. The effectiveness of CAIPE in encouraging active Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander parental engagement and improved student outcomes was assessed in the three trial sites through an active Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander parental engagement survey, student outcomes [attendance and literacy (English grades and NAPLAN results)] and in-depth ethnographic case studies, which included an investigations of the local nature of the project).

Eight schools were involved in the research, with a total of over one thousand students, including 155 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students. The student outcomes data [attendance and literacy (English grades and NAPLAN results)] were collected centrally from The Department of Education and Training, excepting School 8 which was from the Independent School sector and thus data collection was undertaken at the School. The data were considered within the theoretical framework of the multifactorial model where multiple factors play a part.

School Attendance

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in the regional trial site showed significantly increased attendance on a TSR day in comparison to a 'normal day' in the same week and significantly increased attendance when all three TSR days were compared to three 'normal days'. Regional Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students showed the highest increase in percentage of students with zero days absent with 8.1 percent semester 1 2011 in comparison to semester 1 2010, with all sites and urban Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students showing an increase of 5.7 percent.

Literacy

All regional students showed significantly increased English grades in 2011 in comparison to 2010. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students from regional and remote trail sties showed higher grades in English in 2011 in comparison to 2010, which were significantly higher for the remote students. The gap between achievement in NAPLAN literacy results for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in comparison to non-Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students was seen to decrease from significantly different in 2010 in the domains of reading, spelling and grammar and punctuation to no significant difference in 2011. Regional Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students showed a decreased percentage of students below the national minimum in 2011 in comparison to 2010 in all literacy domains, with the largest decrease observed for reading, with 26 percent less students below the national minimum in 2011. Remote Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students showed a decrease in the percentage of students below the national minimum in 2011 NAPLAN in comparison to 2010 in three of the four literacy domains, with the largest decrease observed for reading with 16 percent less students below the minimum. Urban students showed a smaller magnitude of change in the percentage of students below the national minimum in comparison to the other trial sites, with the largest change observed for spelling with 13.6 percent decrease in students below the national minimum in 2011 in comparison to 2010 percent. The increased gains in literacy results (NAPLAN and English) grades within the regional cohort may have been driven by the changes observed for student attendance (significantly increased attendance observed on TSR days and increased percentage of students with zero absenteeism).

Students from the regional trial site showed the greatest magnitude of impact of the trial CAIPE program in comparison to the urban and remote cohorts with significant differences identified in NAPLAN results (gap between Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and Non-Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students), English grades and attendance.

Parental engagement

Significantly increased agreement was identified for 11 of the 12 statements for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander parents from all trial sites when the responses to the active Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander parental engagement survey at the beginning were compared to responses for the end (completed one month from the end of the program) survey. Urban parents showed significantly increased agreement with two of the 12 statement which related to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff and inclusive environment. Parents from the regional trial site had significantly increased agreement with two of the 12 statements which related to the success of children and the presence of an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander statement (response to the following statement 'The program has at least one formal written statement or formal policy related to the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community'). Parents from the remote trial site showed significantly increased agreement with five of the 12 statements, which included the presence of an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander statement, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff members, safe environment, parental input and parental leadership. The parental response to the statement related to higher expectation, which was significantly different when all trial sites were grouped, is of particular interest considering that parent expectations have been shown to have an effect size of d = 0.8 which is equivalent to an increase in student achievement of at least one year (Hattie 2009).

The identification of a significantly higher agreement for parents within the regional trial site to the statement 'All Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children have experienced success through the program' triangulates to the significantly improved outcomes of the regional students in comparison to the other cohorts discussed above. The diversity of the parental responses within the different trial sites reflects the differences in the application of the CAIPE program within the Urban, Regional and Remote settings.

The frequencies of the various events indicated that the key component of the CAIPE program was the In-School Workshop program, with the regional trial site having the highest percentage of creative community programs and the remote site having the highest percentage of the Early Literacy Storytelling. The highest level of parental participation in the CAIPE program for the two key parental engagement elements of the Creative Community program and Early Literacy Storytelling program was observed for the regional trial site. The regional trial site had 65 and 11 participants in the creative community program and the Early Literacy Storytelling program respectively. The remote trial site had 38 and 30 parents participate in the Creative Community program and the Early Literacy Storytelling program respectively. The urban trial site had 67 and one parent/s participate in the Creative Community program and the Early Literacy Storytelling program respectively. The higher number of parental participants in the Creative Community Program and the Early Literacy Storytelling program (total of 76 participants) within the regional trial site in comparison to the other trial sites (urban and remote 68 participants) may have influenced the increased student outcomes observed within the regional Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students.

The elements important to the engagement of parents were identified through the case studies of the In-School Workshop Program, Creative Community program and Early Literacy Storytelling program, as listed below:

- Local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Teaching Artist
- Local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Parental Liaison Officer actively involved
- Local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison Officer actively involved
- Local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander culture within the program
- Provision of transport
- Activity for parents/children directly proceeding or after engagement with TSR
- Creative Community program located within the school grounds

Representation of Local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Culture

The representation of local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander culture within the program was found to be influenced by the background of the TA. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander TAs could draw from their own culture, and if they were a community member they could incorporate local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander culture. One TA had considerable experience working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from diverse locations including the Northern Territory, Torres Strait Islands and within the local regional community. The abovementioned TA was able to provide a program in a regional setting which enabled an in-depth exploration of local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander culture, and all the participants' (children, students and parents) culture was skilfully employed as a resource for the program. This program was highly regarded by all stakeholders and provided an environment which was able to engage at risk students and improve outcomes for the involved students including significantly increased attendance (on a on a TSR day and increased percentage of students with zero days absent in Semester 1), literacy outcomes (English grades and NAPLAN results) and increased empathy and self identity as reported by key stakeholders.

Considering the key findings of the evaluation, it is recommended that the In-School Workshop program could be employed by the TSR to establish links to the parents in the schools, by drawing on the cultural knowledge of the parents. The program content should be heavily embedded in local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander culture, requiring the presence of an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander TA, preferably one from within the community to facilitate links with the community.