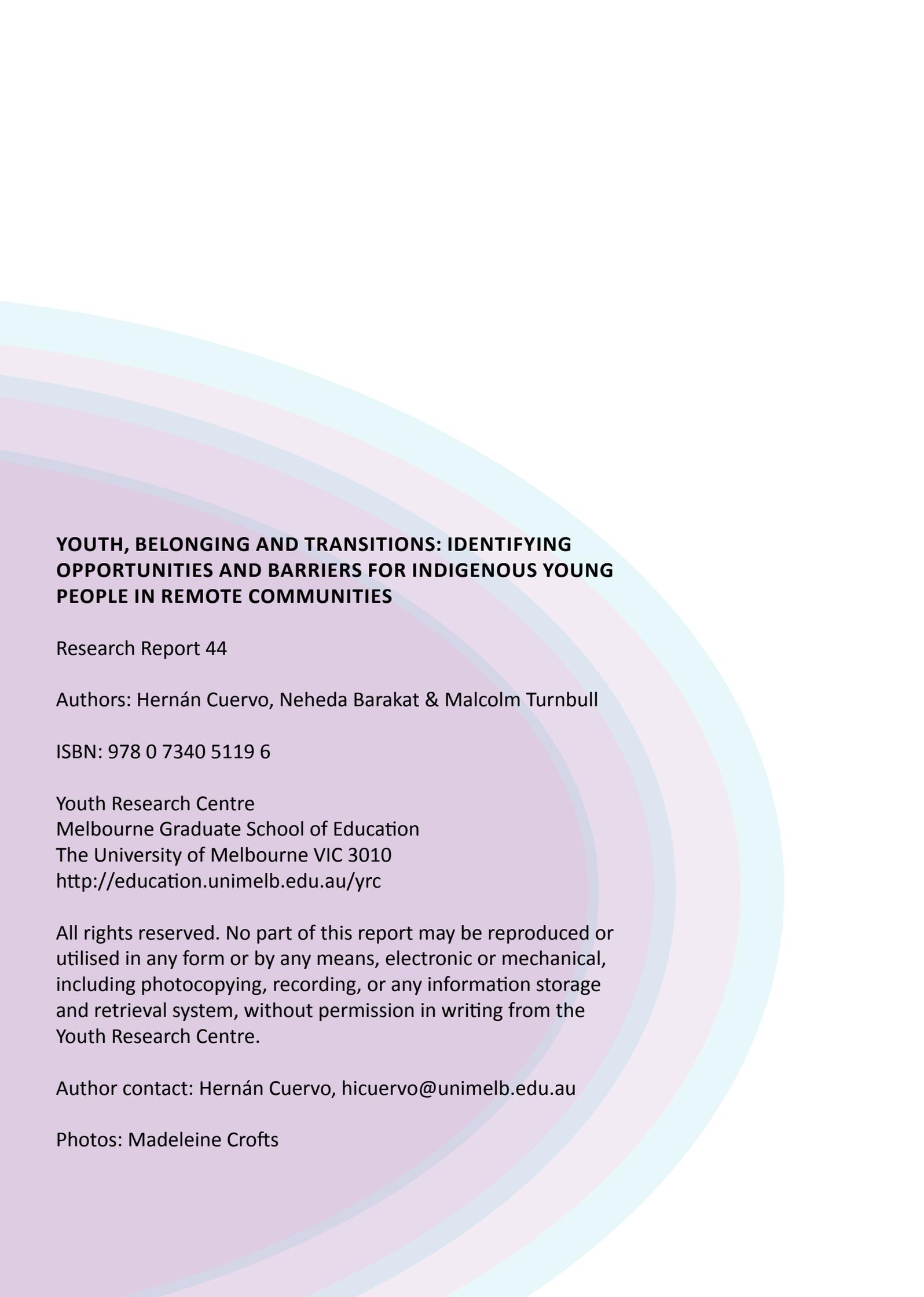# Youth, belonging and transitions: Identifying opportunities and barriers for Indigenous young people in remote communities

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YOUTH, BELONGING AND TRANSITIONS: IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS FOR INDIGENOUS YOUNG PEOPLE IN REMOTE COMMUNITIES

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

As a key and dominant theme within the multi-disciplinary arena of youth studies, the concept of transitions has generated a substantial and extensive international literature in the past quarter-century, much of it from Australian perspectives (e.g. Andres & Wyn 2010, Bessant, Sercombe & Watts 1998, Dwyer 1995, McLeod & Yates 2006, te Riele 2005, White 1990, Wyn & White 1997). Australian researchers in the field of youth studies now have a prominent place in research spaces and have become driving forces in the development of theory. Recent writing from Australian researchers has focused increasingly on the complexity of young people's school-to-work experiences (Stokes 2012, te Riele 2004), the relationship between youth and belonging (Cuervo & Wyn 2014), youth and time (Threadgold 2012, Woodman 2012), youth and place (Cuervo & Wyn 2012, Farrugia 2014), and youth and life "choices" (e.g. Blatterer 2007, Coffey 2013, Harris 2004, MacLean 2011, Watson 2011) within context of the sweeping social changes experienced within this country over the past half-century; and frequently in relation to gradations of socio-economic disadvantage or marginalisation.

Likewise, the experiences and situation of Australia's Indigenous populations (specifically Indigenous children and youth) have attracted enormous scholarly attention within a multiplicity of academic disciplines (e.g. education, geography, anthropology, criminology, health). Some researchers have described the sector as 'arguably the most researched' of any disadvantaged group in Australia (Flamsteed & Golding 2005: 25). There are, however, strong reservations within both academia and Indigenous communities themselves as to the overall worth of much of that investigation and analysis, and strong perceptions that much of it is/has been flawed and culturally suspect. Of key importance to the current research is the belief that there are also significant gaps and short-falls within the evidence base. Toombs and Gorman (2010) have specifically underlined a general paucity of research that focuses on Indigenous students' pathways or transitions to higher education. Indeed, our analysis of the literature in the burgeoning field of youth studies (where the authors of this research report are located) shows that of the four main journals in the field (i.e. Journal Of Youth Studies, Youth & Society, Young, and the recently defunct Youth Studies Australia) less than 2% of the articles published since the year 2000 have dealt in any way with Indigenous youth in Australia. (If one takes out of the equation Youth Studies Australia, this percentage falls below 0.5%.)

The paucity of research on Indigenous issues in youth studies in Australia, and (one would argue) in youth studies internationally, makes it timely to begin a conversation by mapping the research landscape. In surveying the body of research that has informed analysis and assessment to date of (a) the factors that impede Indigenous young people's transitions and (b) the strategies, philosophies and approaches that have demonstrated success in enabling or assisting young people to overcome these barriers, we have drawn on a range of materials across the academic disciplines of sociology, education, health, anthropology, geography and business studies. While passing attention has been paid to international sources that provide comparative or contextual learnings, the primary focus of the review has been on material that relates specifically to Australian indigenous experience and, in particular, that of young people in East Arnhem Land.

This research report aims to identify the personal and structural resources, the barriers and the motivations that facilitate or hinder successful transitions by Indigenous young people in remote communities, particularly within East Arnhem Land, into further and higher education and employment. The research speaks to current policy initiatives that aim to improve transitions for young Indigenous people to further education, training and employment (COAG 2012). It also fills a research gap in the youth studies literature by mapping the evidence-based data on factors that impact on Indigenous youth transitions in remote communities. In this vein, we conclude by examining the usefulness of the concept youth-as-transition (a key theoretical tool in the analysis of young people's lives in the field of youth studies) for Indigenous youth in remote communities. We propose that it is timely for research on youth, and particularly Indigenous youth, to take seriously the conceptual framework of belonging – not as an alternative to the notion of transitions but as another theoretical tool that facilitates awareness of 'the nature and quality of connections between young people and their worlds' (Cuervo & Wyn 2014: 905). The concept of belonging enables a clearer understanding of the efforts made by young people to remain connected to people, places and issues that matter to them, as well as their relationship to the times in which they live. It also renders visible how social change impacts on which ways of being are possible to Indigenous youth. We draw, then, on the concept of belonging to examine which issues can positively affect Indigenous youth pathways and to highlight how, by bringing together the fields of youth and Indigenous studies, the concept fills an important gap in the sociology of youth.

RESEARCH & METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

While characterising Australia's Indigenous population as 'endlessly researched', Flamsteed and Golding (2005: 25) cite widespread cynicism about the actual value, applicability or resonance of that research. At one level, they lament the apparent frequency with which research reports are tabled only to be 'shelved' and their recommendations often ignored or (at least) not implemented. At another level, they cite frequently-iterated concerns at the pertinence to indigenous contexts of mainstream research that has been undertaken by non-indigenous researchers. Gunstone (2009) criticises a frequent failure by non-Indigenous academics to engage appropriately with Indigenous communities and organisations during development and delivery of research projects, while Doohan (2006: 39) highlights reluctance within the community of Australian academics conducting research into Indigenous issues even to engage 'with each other's substantive work'. Most significantly there has been a glaring lack of Indigenous research actually conducted by Indigenous researchers (Biddle & Cameron 2012). While Indigenous people compromise 2.2% of the overall Australian population, the Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People asserts that only 1.4% of students enrolled in Australian universities, and only 0.8% of all full-time equivalent academic staff and 1.2% of general university staff, are Indigenous (Universities Australia 2014). Further, beyond the quantity factor in tertiary education institutions, Rudolph (2013), drawing on Gunstone (2009), points at the dominance of 'whiteness' attitudes, governance, norms and values in universities that undermine Indigenous studies and researchers.

Toombs and Gorman (2010) have conceded, pragmatically, that an acute shortage of Aboriginal academics has meant that blanket rejection of research undertaken by non-indigenous agencies or individuals would make it impossible to develop any evidence-based strategies or policies. (This sentiment echoes the views of Tuhiwaii Smith 1999.) Likewise, there has been a shortage to date of longitudinal data that might facilitate analysis of such related questions as the impacts of early childhood experiences on young Indigenous people's later educational choices or connections between Indigenous young people's educational outcomes and their sense of well-being or happiness at school (Biddle & Cameron 2012). One exception has been

the development and implementation of the longitudinal study Footprints in Time: Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC) (2008 – 2011) which broke new ground in its commitment to community engagement and interviews conducted by trained indigenous Research Administrative Officers (RAOs). As Dodson and colleagues (2012:73) have observed: 'Readers may not realise how radical… [this approach] was, but this unprecedented initiative (for a large-scale survey) has been responsible for the impressively high rates of ongoing participation in the survey that surprised many …'.

In part, according to Dodson and colleagues (2012), this shortage of data simply reflects the reality that longitudinal research per se is a recent phenomenon in Australia. They note that the HILDA [Household, Income, Labour Dynamics in Australia] survey was first implemented as recently as 2001 and that the biennial Longitudinal Study of Australian Children [LSAC] (aka Growing up in Australia) first collected data in 2003. The two-decade longitudinal study conducted by the Youth Research Centre, Life Patterns, started in 1991 but has a very low percentage of Indigenous participants in its sample. (Given the small size of the Indigenous sub-samples on Life Patterns, HILDA or LSAC, none of these surveys has provided any real scope for the specialist researcher.) Such gaps in the literature, argues Griffiths (2011), with specific reference to the development of effective Indigenous education programs, together with inconsistencies in approaches to program evaluation, have resulted in the scarcity of an adequate evidence base on which to build further initiatives. Griffiths emphasises the inherent futility of 'working towards best practice standards' without the benefit of co-ordinated research (p.74) while Dodson and colleagues (2012: 69) have observed that lack of longitudinal data constrains the possibility of building robust evidence-based policy.

INDIGENOUS YOUTH: A SOCIAL GROUP AT-RISK?

Research to date overwhelmingly underlines Australia's Indigenous population's disadvantage on every social scale compared to the non-Indigenous population and rates recognises them as among the country's most socially and economically under-privileged population sectors (Bandias 2013, Flamsteed & Golding 2005, Price & Dalgleish 2013, Productivity Commission 2011, White & Wyn 2013). Government statistics repeatedly confirm high and widely generalised incidence within the sector of low levels of life expectancy, significant health problems, high levels of unemployment, low attainment in formal education, high incidence of unsatisfactory housing and infrastructure, and high levels of arrest, incarceration and death in custody (ABS 2008, 2012, Productivity Commission 2011). According to Price & Dalgleish (2013), Indigenous youth constitutes a particularly 'high-risk group' for emotional and/or psychological problems. Indigenous young people are over-represented in child protection and youth justice statistics; have higher rates of suicide and risk of suicide than other Australian youth; experience poorer outcomes than other Australian youth in the areas of neglect and abuse, health, education and social development; and are disproportionately exposed to risk factors such as grief, loss and discrimination.

Education is commonly posited as critical to redressing the disadvantages and inequalities experienced by Indigenous youth. (see Karmel et al. 2014). The Australian and international education landscape, however, is saturated with high stakes testing comparisons, measurements of progress and deviance by particular social groups, and blame games as to who is responsible for students' failure. In terms of educational attainment, PISA results are often utilised as a means of comparing Indigenous and non-Indigenous educational progress. These and other results indicate that Indigenous Australians characteristically have considerably lower numeracy and literacy levels than the non-Indigenous population, significantly higher school absenteeism rates, and significantly lower school completion outcomes (Bandias et al. 2013). According to Pegg and colleagues (2007), the situation is compounded by a general decline in the quality of education beyond the major metropolitan centres (i.e. the more 'rural' the location, the lower the educational achievement), where a significant number of Indigenous people reside. As Gunstone (2013: 79) has observed: 'The outcomes are significantly worse in rural and remote communities', while Banks (2009) concurs with Pegg that remoteness contributes to increasing the level of educational disadvantage for Indigenous children

and youth. According to Helme and Lamb (2011: 4), for instance, 'school completion rates for Indigenous students are very low compared with almost every other demographic group in Australia, and more than 30 percentage points below the rates for non-Indigenous students'. Further, they note that this problem is exacerbated if one takes into account remoteness, with 'the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous completion [being] greatest in very remote locations: more than 50 percentage points'.

Place, then, plays a particular role when it comes to educational participation and achievement. The isolation of remote communities and their inability to access mainstream services only exacerbate entrenched disadvantage (Bandias et al. 2013, Helme & Lamb 2011, Productivity Commission 2011). For instance, despite increase in the Indigenous population in remote areas – East Arnhem Land specifically – researchers argue that there remains a critical shortage of early education options or schools (Biddle & Cameron 2012). With specific reference to the residents of East Arnhem Land, O'Meally and Barr (2005) and Pearson and Helms (2013) have underlined both the scope of social problems they are facing and the complexity of the indigenous groupings within the region (or statistical division). Some 14,000 people, within three broad tribal groupings (Yolgnu, Groote Eylandt and Nhunggabuyu), are spread across 80,000 square kilometres. The largest population sector, the Yolgnu people, comprise   more than 28 clan groups, speaking more than 16 major languages, including dialects of the main language Yolgnu Matha. They are highly dependent on welfare and strongly under-employed in mainstream jobs. Although some researchers have indicated that mining companies such as Rio Tinto are beginning to take 'a more pro-active approach to indigenous engagement' in the region (Pearson & Daff 2010: 368), the overall lack of labour market opportunities within the remote Northern Territory only aggravates the unemployment situation (Giddy, Lopez & Redman 2009, Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 2008). (The closing of the Rio Tinto Aluminia processing plant at Gove in 2014 has only further narrowed possibilities for direct and indirect Indigenous training and employment.) Researchers have stated that a high proportion of Yolgnu people live in sub-standard living conditions that enhance their susceptibility to epidemic diseases. There are high levels of substance abuse and mental health issues; self-harm and suicide rates are greater than the national average; and there is a higher incidence of smoking-related lung cancer than in any other indigenous community. Further, interactions between Yolgnu communities and 'white people' (ngapaki) are coloured by frustration at the repeated failure by policy-makers to accommodate the kin-based networking characteristic of Indigenous culture, or the failure to acknowledge that aboriginal people operate within cultural contexts and social norms that differ greatly from those of non-indigenous society (Morphy, 2012, O'Faircheallaigh 2002).

A plethora of researchers have identified indicators of disadvantage, or constraints, that can be seen to act as barriers to educational opportunity and achievement for Indigenous youth (Bandias et al. 2013, Biddle & Cameron 2012, de Bortoli & Thomson 2010). These include: a greater proportion of Indigenous students living in single parent families or living with a carer; fewer Indigenous students having a parent who has completed a university degree; fewer Indigenous children attending pre-schools due to location, transport difficulties and socio-economic factors; and a lack of access by Indigenous youth in remote and rural areas to adult role models who have completed a higher education degree.

Some critics, however, have affirmed that these disadvantages continue to characterise Indigenous youth (and Indigenous people generally) as 'abnormal' and needing to change their social particularities (Barakat 2011, Rudolph 2013). In a similar vein to the critiques by by Barakat and Rudolph, the recent Review of Indigenous Education in Northern Territory Draft Report (Wilson 2014) has been criticised for its lack of any procedural consultation with Indigenous communities, particularly those communities that might be affected by the report's recommendations (White 2014). Furthermore, White, a veteran of more than three decades teaching in East Arnhem Land, expresses concern at the report's views on 'bilingual education' and its dismissal of Yolngu culture in the construction of identity and wellbeing for children and young people in East Arnhem Land. While the report is attentive to some equity issues that need improvement, White believes that it takes an overall 'deficit' perspective that largely presents Indigenous schooling as failing its students. Barakat, Rudolph and White all point out a need to rethink social justice approaches to Indigenous youth, i.e. a shift of mindset from the politics of redistribution to a politics of recognition and participation that enables positive affirmation of cultures and values beyond the Anglo-metro norm.

Indigenous educational disadvantage has also been understood – and analysed – as the clash of two worlds or cultures. In other words, government and societal fixation with poor educational outcomes for Indigenous students has failed to understand that, historically, the values and norms of the education system have been rooted in an Anglo-centric tradition that denies the relevance of any other world-view, including that of Aboriginal people (Dunn 2001, Freeman 2008, Malin 2003, Nakata 2007a, 2007b, Sarra 2011). In this sense, as in much of the critical youth studies tradition (Cuervo 2014, Cuervo & Wyn 2011, Kelly 2006, MacLean 2011, Watson 2011, Wyn & White 1997), the focus has shifted from an implicit policy of individual blaming to an emphasis on institutional bias and discrimination towards certain social groups. Not surprisingly, efforts to 'close the gap' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students continue in part to fail due to a lack of systemic and institutional change and a lack of cultural awareness or knowledge of different life-worlds and diverse social groups. As with other social groups (e.g. rural youth) that are 'removed' from the daily gaze of metropolitan authorities and commentators, relating educational failure to a 'norm' serves the purpose of perennially constructing institutionally disadvantaged groups as at-risk or in terms of deficit.
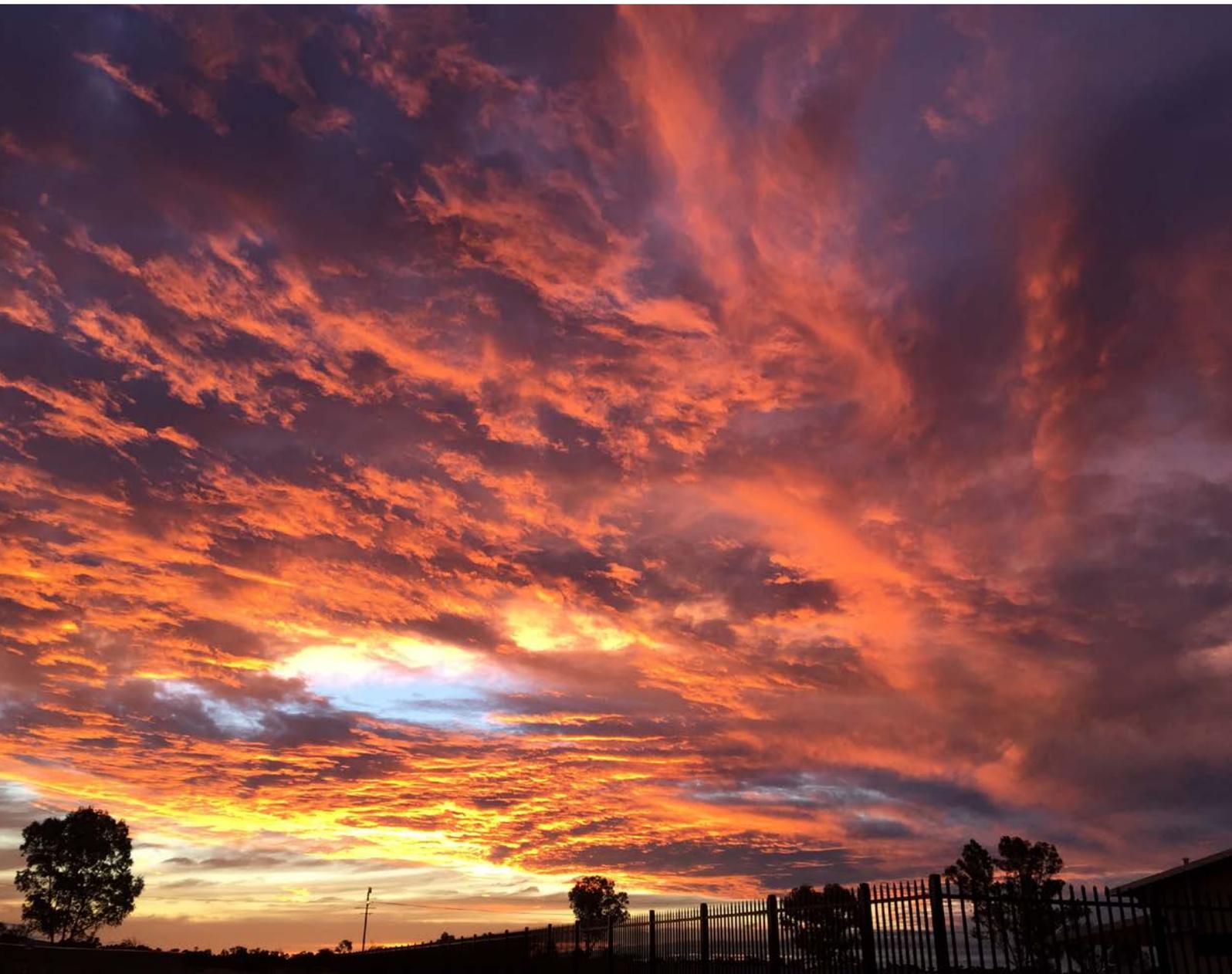
PERSONAL & STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO INDIGENOUS YOUTH TRANSITIONS

Urquhart (2009) locates the factors that contribute to low school retention (or that influence educational outcomes) of Indigenous youth within three main domains: school factors, family variables and individual or personal factors. Firstly, school factors encompass teacher quality and turnover, relevance or otherwise of curriculum to Indigenous culture, the level of understanding of Indigenous culture and ways of learning in the school, assessment frameworks and the extent of racism or prejudice within the setting. Secondly, family variables include low literacy levels within the home, domestic violence, socio-economic factors and the value placed by parents on learning. Thirdly, at the level of the individual, factors include the young person's health and well-being (including the high risk of clinical emotional or behavioural issues), speech difficulties, substance use and adolescent pregnancy. Urquhart (2009: 2) expresses particular concern that barriers identified as impeding academic success in the 1960s remain much the same 50 years later.

Similarly many of the contemporary strategies recommended for overcoming these barriers are comparable to those in the literature 30 years ago. This is an unanticipated revelation given the abundance of research undertaken in the area, the numerous strategies and program that have been developed, and the increased funding being directed at improving education for Indigenous students. It is possible that these barriers and recommendations continue to surface because the recommendations fail to be appropriately implemented thus making evaluation difficult. Another explanatory factor is the possibility that the recommendations neglect to address the underlying causes of poor educational outcomes…

In Urquhart's view, the solution must lie in collaboration with Indigenous communities on developing practical and workable strategies – an issue we will develop further below. Similar barriers are identified by Toombs and Gorman (2010) where, in addition to family variables and lack of indigenous curriculum content, they highlight the impact of relationship problems, dissatisfaction with particular courses of study, homesickness and self-esteem issues. Pechenkina and colleagues (2011) focus on low levels of academic readiness, financial hardships, health considerations, low aspirations, cultural cleavages and racism. Meanwhile, Buckskin (2001) has highlighted the traumatic nature of primary to secondary school transition, in large part because it necessitates young people moving away from home within the context of educational institutions that often do not see themselves as part of a coherent youth transition system.

In seeking to shed some light on the process of indigenous education participation and attainment, Biddle and Cameron (2012) highlight the significance of gender and support the finding that traditional gender roles constitute the biggest impediment to indigenous young women's pathways. (Remoteness and the accessibility of mainstream subjects notwithstanding, the inescapability of traditional roles is identified as the main obstacle to further education.) Senior and Chenhall (2012) underline the impacts of arranged marriage, pregnancy, and excessive supervision by parents or male siblings on young women's schooling options. Other researchers point to the high incidence of domestic violence in East Arnhem Land, describing it as 'quickly becoming the dominant result of the many underlying social problems' faced by the inhabitants of the area (O'Mealley & Barr 2005: 9, 15). (Included here is recognition of the potentially harmful effects and impact on behavioural, emotional and psychological development of children witnessing domestic violence). Price and Dalgeish (2013) and White and Wyn (2013) have identified the high risk of emotional and/or psychological problems among Indigenous youth, at the same time that young people in remote areas may well be hampered in seeking help by lack of Internet accessibility, perceived or real discrimination, low literacy or a lack of awareness of services. White and Wyn have argued that some young people are reluctant to access services because they question the agency's confidentiality. Concern that they may be misunderstood or might run the risk of intervention by the authorities would seem to be a residual reflection of entrenched 'colonialism'.

A number of sources examine the impacts of pedagogy and teaching on retention rates. In assessing the success over its lifetime of the Community Employment Development Projects scheme (CDEP), for instance, Misko (2004) has concluded that such impediments to training completion as lack of access to resources or support, inadequate telecommunications, or conflicting cultural responsibilities and obligations, have frequently been compounded by the utilisation of teachers who have not shown appropriate cultural awareness and sensitivity to students with low level literacy. Lea and colleagues (2011) have described teachers in remote Aboriginal schools as often less experienced than their peers and less likely to have easy access to relevant professional development. In calling for teachers to be appropriately familiar with aboriginal languages and ESL, Rigney (2011: 64) expresses strong reservations at the capacity for inadequately-prepared or trained teachers to successfully negotiate the challenge of teaching in remote and rural Aboriginal areas.

CULTURAL & INSTITUTIONAL CONTROVERSY: *CLOSING THE GAP* POLICY

According to Urquhart (2009), little lasting success/progress has emerged out of the plethora of Government policies and initiatives that have focused to date on Indigenous education. He attributes this lack of success to a range of both primary and secondary factors that include (a) the tendency to employ a 'one size fits all' to an extraordinarily complex issue, (b) the inevitable inconsistency engendered by changes of government and bureaucratic changes, and (c) a lack of community consultation (see also Helme & Lamb 2011, Holcombe 2010, Ma Rhea 2011, Rigney 2011).   A particular target of criticism has been the Federal Government's 'Closing the Gap' policy, dismissed by some researchers and commentators as a homogenous approach to Indigenous issues that has been developed and implemented by government departments that are disconnected from the realities of the situation (see also Holcombe 2010).

A number of researchers have critically examined 'Closing the Gap'. Introduced in March 2008, and aimed at achieving equity in health status and life expectancy between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians by 2030, the policy identified three educational targets, i.e. demonstrated improvements in (a) Pre-school access, (b) literacy and numeracy, and (c) Year 12 completion. Pholi et al (2009) argue that the initiative is not new and that, like previous (unsuccessful) policies, it makes the mistake of looking at change through the lens of statistics. Other critiques of 'Closing the Gap' include Biddle (2011: 4) who questions the tendency of Government to approach Indigenous education from a human capital perspective (i.e. on the assumption that students make life decisions based on comparison between 'their future income streams with or without education') and Altman and Fogarty (2010) who query the conventional wisdom that closing the gap in education improves socio-economic outcomes. According to Cruz (2012:62, 64), at its most basic the construction of the policy neglects community consultation and relies on benchmarking outcomes to mainstream norms 'that continue to ignore what indigenous people are saying'. Finally, like Rudolph (2013) and White (2014), mentioned above, Griffiths (2011: 74) bluntly links failures in Indigenous education to 'misguided or wrongheaded educational philosophies' that include the continued use of mainstream assessment tools that fail to match the way that Indigenous students learn, or to take their culture and language into account.

Researchers have also queried the validity or philosophical soundness of government data collection processes, contending that current measurement tools are so intrinsically weighted/unbalanced that comparisons between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cohorts inevitably result in failure and simply reinforce notions of victimhood (Cruz 2012, Dodson 2012, Griffiths 2011, Sarra 2011). Pholi and colleagues (2009: 7, 9) query the objectivity of much quantitative analysis to date (not least the recording of outcomes for the 'Closing the Gap' initiative), contending that a statistical approach inevitably represents Indigenous Australians as individuals within a population rather than as a society, and sees the impacts of racism (for example) as an individual problem rather than a broader issue to be addressed. They further argue (a) that the collection of statistics in itself is 'a cultural artefact, with its roots in white/western ideals of scientism', and (b) that emphasis on statistical equality proceeds from the viewpoint that something is 'wrong' with Indigenous people and that action needs to be taken to 'fix' the situation: 'success is defined by the extent to which Indigenous Australians conform to a set of pre-determined, measurable characteristics of the non-Indigenous ideal'. Clearly, there is concern here at both assumptions underlying quantitative research in this context and at the value or relevance of research that simplifies the situation by monitoring performance and looking for measurable outcomes. (Instead, Pholi and colleagues (2009: 5) stress the need to rectify structural power imbalances and 'increase Indigenous Australians' sense of control over their circumstances'.) While the use and manipulation of quantitative analysis can contribute to presenting Indigenous students as powerless (and thus further disempower them), researchers involved in this kind of analysis might argue that no serious policy analysis and strategy can be conducted without evidence-based information – including the construction and maintenance of large longitudinal data-base sets.

In relation to the 'one size fits all' approach, a number of writers focus on the innate 'whiteness' or ethnocentrism that underpins educational outreach in this country and that proceeds from the assumption that Indigenous and other ethnic groups have to make adjustments in order to operate in the Anglo mainstream (Barakat 2011, Lea et al. 2011, Rigney 2011). By way of example Misko (2004) cites vocational training exercises where students were counselled on how to 'sell themselves' in an interview (notwithstanding acknowledgement that self-promotion is not generally practised within Indigenous cultures). Other writers take the argument further. Biddle and Cameron (2012: 23) suggest that the 'role of formal education [is still seen] as being one of civilizing or Christianising the Indigenous population' while Cruz (2012) argues that the colonialist mentality that has traditionally influenced Australia's race relations continues to influence policies that are mainly developed for Aboriginal people by the non-indigenous political system and governments. This shows a failure by state and federal governments to 'recognise the importance of the history of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations in

Australia in relation to Indigenous education' (Gunstone 2013: 79) and a fundamental tension between the reality and diversity of Indigenous societies and neo-paternalist goals that emphasise homogenisation (Altman & Fogarty 2010). There is feeling, then, that such government initiatives as the 'Closing the Gap' policy merely re-hash previous policies and that, at the core of the problem, is lack of consultation with the community.

In looking specifically at the field of Further Education, Toombs and Gorman (2010) and Lea, and colleagues (2011) point to the incapacity of educational institutions to fully understand the complexities that form a culture and speculate as to how this affects studying in a milieu that differs significantly from the individual's own culture and environment. In their view, Australian universities are products of – and steeped in – a Western paradigm, the bias and ethnocentrism of which influences their functioning. In this regard, Dockery and Colquhoun (2012: 17) highlight the cleavage between the mainstream equation of 'mobility' with school 'truancy and absenteeism' and the argument that mobility is essential to traditional enculturation, whereby young Indigenous Australians learn about people and places, their culture and history and, plant and animal species, among many other things, by 'moving through the landscape' and undertaking participant learning with Elders. Other commentators highlight the 'white' focus on 'retention' (by government and institutions) rather than focus on cultural inclusiveness and 'two way schooling'   (MacGill 2012, Urquhart 2009, White & Wyn 2013). Finally, on a different vein, Justman and Peyton (2014) suggest that the failure of policy programs to link welfare assistance with school attendance in the Northern Territory has resulted from a lack of "punitive" consistency (e.g. where withholding welfare payments from truant families is not applied rigorously and consistently). Beyond the validity and rigorousness, or not, of program implementation, it remains an unchallenged assumption as to what kind of school and knowledge is appropriate for Indigenous children and youth.

Taken a step further, it is clear that educators and policy-makers, specifically those focused on youth transitions, need to look beyond the 'one size fits all' approach to the divide between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians and embrace understanding of both the spatial city-bush dichotomy and the multiplicity of cultures which constitute the Indigenous sector of this country.   As Flamsteed and Golding (2005: 22) note, 'urban, regional and remote contexts are qualitatively different learning and working environments for Indigenous people and… the provision of accredited VET programs becomes most problematic in the most remote communities'. Dodson likewise emphasises the diversity of indigenous cultures: 'They are radically different … analysis cannot be generalised to the Indigenous population at large'.

Indigenous activist Noel Pearson believes that some structural categories that disadvantage certain social groups (e.g. race) can work, in themselves, as an excuse for low educational performance and non-school attendance (Pearson 2009). In his essay, Radical Hope, Pearson distances himself from Indigenous educator Chris Sarra (2011) by extending the 'no excuse' argument (for low educational achievement and school attendance) to parents (raising the possibility of a connection between welfare payments and school participation). While both Sarra and Pearson are in favour of challenging the low expectations customarily placed on Indigenous students, the latter considers that is time to put aside the issue of race when justifying low educational performance and to demand more emphasis on 'seriousness' and personal responsibility in tackling poor educational outcomes. Indeed, Pearson has also been a strong advocate of accountability in schools – which in communities experiencing profound disadvantage it might appear as a natural reaction. Rudolph (2013), however, while understanding Pearson's position, sees as problematic that a homogeneous and market-oriented approach to schooling for Indigenous youth can continue to entrench assimilationist views of what counts as valuable knowledge. Finally, Nicholls (2009), in responding to Pearson's essay (2009) points to a lack of visibility in intergenerational relations that can make a difference in schooling, and in the latter naïve and simplistic approach to education driven by one system, and argues the need to tackle several social issues (e.g. housing, health, employment) if any success in schooling is to be achieved. Beyond any analysis of where the truth lies, it is important to acknowledge that Pearson establishes interesting arguments around the need for Indigenous people to be able to live in both worlds (cultures) (including his strong work in favour of the rights and cultural recognition of Indigenous people in Australia). We look at this argument in the following sections.

SEARCHING FOR OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIGENOUS YOUTH

In a study that draws comparisons between Indigenous educational practices of four 'cross settler Countries' (Canada, NZ, the USA and Australia), Griffiths (2011) cites the success of a number of culturally responsive policies in improving school outcomes for under-achieving Maori and Native Hawaiian young people. Implicit in his findings is the view that similar approaches may be productive in Australia. Griffiths, nonetheless, takes particular issue with what he terms 'deficit theorizing' whereby lower achievement has traditionally been associated with intrinsic deficits within the student (or the student's cultural background) rather than with flaws or limitations within the school and educational system. According to Biddle and Cameron (2012), there is an imperative for schools to become more accommodating of difference – specifically Indigenous differences.

The culturally irrelevant nature of much school curricula has been identified as one contributor to low retention rates (Pearson 2013, Urquhart 2009). Accordingly, there has been some recent emphasis on the potential value of engaging community elders to overcome this obstacle. While direct engagement by government, academia and business with Indigenous communities on policies and programs has largely been neglected (Cruz 2012, Dodson 2012, Doohan 2006, Gunstone 2009, 2013, Urquhart 2009, Wallace et al. 2009), a growing number of writers have focused on the concept of Two Way Schooling and its capacity to empower indigenous youth, particularly young people in remote geographical areas (Griffiths 2011, Toombs & Gorman 2010, Tuhiwai-Smith 1999). As White and Wyn (2013: 88) have argued, 'community elders want their kids to move across cultural domains, to experience education in Western schooling and in traditional lore and custom and be capable of switching and crossing cultural zones'.

There are some good examples of programs that aim to create this kind of multiple knowledge or cultural understanding. (One has to be also mindful that some of these programs are at a very small scale and that there are important differences between and within social groups, such as Indigenous youth.) For instance, the Smith Family's Schools program (cited and described by Lea et al. 2011) has taken a holistic 'village square' approach to the provision of schooling with instruction augmented by family engagement and involvement that encompasses assistance with translation   and completing forms, provision of shelter and limited cash, and health assistance. Wallace and colleagues (2009: 109) have demonstrated the success of a similar approach in increasing participation in VET, i.e. by rendering instruction 'culturally appropriate by

ensuring Indigenous community culture and knowledge are completely integrated and the relevant community has control over all aspects of VET delivery', while MacGill (2012) has highlighted the positive potential (within a two-way schooling approach) of pedagogy that provides the conditions for transitions students to engage in 'cultural remapping', and incorporates the skills of Aboriginal Community Education Officers (ACEOs).   According to MacGill (2012: 184), ACEOs, otherwise known to students as 'uncle or aunty', are tertiary qualified and registered liaison officers who, by co-ordinating interactions between government services, school and parents on behalf of the student,   provide a transition platform within the 'ethics of Indigenous care [or extended family] paradigm'. By outlining the rules, regulations and expectations of schools, the ACEO assists the student to switch from one culture to another. The role responds to increasing Indigenous migration from remote and rural communities to semi-rural and urban communities over the past decade, a 'loss of communality' which Krieg (2009 cited by MacGill 2012:184) contends has caused collective trauma.

While there is some debate over the extent to which attendance and school completion statistics correlate to the employment of Indigenous teachers (Pechenkina et al. 2011), Lea and colleagues (2011: 64) strongly recommend that government mandate that teachers working with geographically remote students be familiar with Aboriginal languages before placement, that training in Aboriginal education be a core requirement for Teacher Registration, and that training be required in the particular complexities of ESL in remote communities. Particular stress is placed on the need for 'pedagogical expertise'. These sentiments have been echoed by Rigney (2011) who argues a mandate for teacher familiarity with Aboriginal languages and ESL (a familiarity that distinguishes between strategies needed within remote, very remote, urban and metropolitan situations). Implicit in both this argument, and the ACEO concept, is recognition that culturally sensitive teaching needs to be bilingual.   Griffiths (2011) cites Tuwahi-Smith's (1999) argument that the inclusion of bilingualism in programs and policies is (a) more effective than non-bilingual approaches, and (b) improves retention rates, language skills, confidence, pride and self-esteem and, surprisingly, maths and English skills. While it should be noted that this view diverges somewhat the claim by Noel Pearson's (2009) that a great deal of culturally responsive education is 'an excuse for under-achievement', Griffith suggests that the claim simply reflects Pearson's bias towards Western education. It needs to be noted that Pearson (2013) has otherwise expressed the hope that 'mainstream Australians, who have a whole sovereign state working for their interests and supporting their culture, understand that survival of Aboriginal language and culture is core to Aboriginal people…'.

Altman and Fogarty (2010: 110) also assert the need for cultural attentiveness in education and society at large:

> Education needs to be tailored to serve the livelihood aspirations of Indigenous people participating in a hybrid and intercultural economy…. Rather than providing mainstream education for futures in the market (sometime called the 'real') economy, consideration also needs to be given to educational innovation to meet diverse vocations needs in the hybrid economy.

Based on an examination of the effectiveness of a series of VET projects, undertaken by Indigenous owners in Northern and Central Australia (in partnerships with industry and RTOs), Wallace and colleagues (2010: 109) lobby for a re-configuration of the VET model. They stress that, in order to construct meaningful opportunities for indigenous youth, training systems need to (a) be driven by client demand rather than suppliers' interests, (b) take a holistic approach to education/training within an Indigenous paradigm, and (c) ensure cultural appropriateness by integrating community culture and knowledge into curricula. They further argue the need for training to be 'embedded into community and community business', preferably delivered by Indigenous trainers, and emphasise that the relevant community have control over all aspects of delivery.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIGENOUS YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Another way forward to increase the opportunities for training and work for Indigenous youth is supporting Indigenous business. Hunter (2014), looking into employment for Indigenous people in Queensland, found that businesses owned by Indigenous people were more likely to employ Indigenous people than those that were owned by non-Indigenous people. Most importantly, Hunter refers to another problem raised above, i.e. the need for further research and collection of data on why non-Indigenous micro-businesses are less likely to employ Indigenous workers.   In reference to indigenous training and employment within the Northern Territory mining industry, Pearson & Daff (2010) highlight the success of one VET project, delivered as a partnership between Charles Sturt University's ALERT program and the Nhulunbuy refinery. Aimed at addressing under-representation of Indigenous workers in both Vocational Education & training and at the mining operations, the initiative enabled five participants – four males and one female – to attend a residential week at the site, undertaking training for work in the resource sector, followed by a placement and two year training plan. Pearson and Daff (2010: 57) state that 'despite a disparate range of obstacles, the VET programme was instrumental in enabling five Indigenous people to pathway to a better future by melding their customary heritage with the dominant Australian market economy'. Our preliminary analysis of the data, collected in semi-structured interviews and focus groups with educators and youth workers in Nhulunbuy, raised some concerns about the validity of these programs. While they were acknowledged as important attempts to create pathways to work for Indigenous youth, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth workers signalled that important cultural barriers still persisted between companies and organisations and Indigenous young people. They stressed that more cultural awareness and linkage programs should be put in place by companies and institutions in order to create a stronger and more fluid connection between the organisation and its members and Indigenous youth.

Reference should be made to a small number of other studies that are of contextual value or relevance to the current research topic. These include Dockery's quantitative literature review which provides significant insights into the interrelationships between Indigenous Australians' engagement with vocational education and training and their connections to traditional culture (Dockery 2013: 43). While the research demonstrates 'no evidence that Indigenous Australians in remote areas, or with stronger cultural

attachment, lack the incentive to participate in vocational education', he concedes that this is not the case in very remote communities where there is no formal labour market.   Some policy reports have argued for Indigenous students to engage with work not just after finishing school but during their schooling years (e.g. DSP 2009).

Pearson and Daff (2013) assert that outcomes of vocational education and training 'remain unfavourable' (p. 51) and note that representation of Indigenous workers remains low at 2.5% despite a high Indigenous population at 60% in the region. Beyond the success, or not, of the program, Pearson and Daff are also alert to the difficulties posed by spatial and cultural issues to the success of work-training schemes. Gray and Hunter (2005) assert that higher rates of arrest and police harassment, lower levels of social capital and civic management, and poor health impact negatively on Indigenous employment possibilities. Elsewhere, Pearson & Helms 2013 examine Aboriginal business enterprise based on the successful development of the Gumatj Clan (part of the Yolgnu clan) hybrid model in East Arnhem Land. The authors argue that Indigenous social entrepreneurship can be successful provided it combines Indigenous cultural practices with business development models. They warn, however, against taking too narrow a view (citing, for instance, failures of tourism & art pathway initiatives to engender a significant increase in Indigenous employment), and they concede that existing discrimination or unconscious bias towards Aboriginals remain   contributing factors to Aboriginal attaining economic independence (p. 52).

This latter issue of discrimination has been explored by a number of different studies, among them an online survey by the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition and Reconciliation Australia (AYAC & RC 2012) that has provided interesting feedback on young peoples' attitudes to reconciliation and related issues of concern to Australian youth. Drawing on the views of 740 young people, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, the AYAC survey findings highlighted Indigenous concerns about racism and discrimination and identified relationships and trust as primary factors in removing barriers. Ninety per cent of respondents described the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous as important; however, only 35% regarded the relationship as good, and only 16% felt that there was trust between the two sectors. (While the survey neglected to distinguish between nations and clans, or to identify geographical remoteness or otherwise of the respondents, it provided a framing on the issue of relationship and trust).

Also of some interest is a cross-sectoral study of impacts of racism on health and well-being among young Indigenous people in the Northern Territory (originally conducted in 1987-90 and followed up in 2006) that broke new ground as the first such Australian study to take a youth perspective. Among other findings, the study confirmed high incidences of anxiety, depression and mental health issues within

the cohort, underlined the effects of psychological distress caused by racism 'as an impediment to achieving life goals', and 'provided empirical support for the need to overcome racism as a contributor to existing disparities in social and emotional outcomes experienced by young Aboriginal people' (Priest et al. 2011: 548-9).

Another significant problem is the inconsistency in policies that results from with change of governments as well as the clash between the state and federal agencies and governments on Indigenous policies (Pearson & Helms 2013: 49). The problem of programs being discontinued due to political views or state/federal differences has also been treated by Altman (2008) in his defence of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) against Federal Labour's intentions to remove/alter that initiative in regional and remote Australia. (At the time, Altman calculated that, without the employment provided by the CDEP, Indigenous unemployment would have been sitting at 40% rather than 16.8%.) While Altman acknowledged some important shortcomings in the program, he also lamented the ferocious attacks it had received from interest groups (indigenous and non-Indigenous) with significant access to media and public opinion, a reflection once more of the extremely polarised state of Indigenous affairs.

Pearson and Helms (2013) also highlight the important variable of Clan specificity when it comes to examining Indigenous issues and developing policies. Any analysis, and any effective research into Indigenous issues, needs to be location, nation and clan specific, and to take into account cultural variance. Having compiled a literature review on the topic of Indigenous mobility, Dockery & Colquhoun (2012) concede the importance of specificity, and with the aim of increasing the understanding of future researchers, they shed useful light on region or clan-specific nomadic patterns and their connections with sacred geography, kinship networking, subsistence and traditional learning/cultural transmission. The issues asserted and identified by Dockery and Colquhoun and by Pearson and Helms are critical factors to take into account when considering school-to-work transitions for Indigenous youth.

In the next section we look at the field of youth studies and the concepts of transition and belonging in relation to Indigenous youth. We hope to clarify the relevance of this concept for Indigenous studies and to make initial inroads into what we see as a key conceptual alliance to explain youth lives.

INDIGENOUS YOUNG PEOPLE & THE FIELD OF YOUTH STUDIES

Youth-as-transition has been one of the quintessential conceptual tools used to analyse the life of young people in the field of youth studies. Youth transitions have been commonly described as 'pathways', 'trajectories' and 'routes' from one life event to another (Furlong 2009). These descriptions depict a journey that places emphasis on the starting and ending points (e.g. school to work) rather than on the social processes occurring between these points. (Needless to say, within this focus on pathways and trajectories, there is an important distinction between transitions and cultural frameworks – see Furlong, Woodman & Wyn 2011.) Cuervo and Wyn (2012, 2014) have argued that over-emphasis on the relationship between education and work in youth transitions reduces the interests and needs of young people. The strong focus in youth policy and research on education and work, and its relationship, has relegated 'to the backburner' other spheres of life that are relevant in young people's lives. What has emerged is a normative view of transitional progress that tends to construct a youth binary of 'on track' and 'at-risk' that responds to a view of young people as transitional beings in search of attaining responsible, productive and legal adulthood (Talburt & Lesko 2012). An obsessive focus on transition markers, such as obtaining a tertiary education degree or getting a full-time job, obscures what happens between these markers (Hall et al. 2009). Hall and colleagues argue that it is between these markers that life is built and lived, and, we will add, where the idea of belonging contributes to bringing the constellation of spheres of life together to assemble a better understanding of youth.

Further, other youth researchers have argued that rigid policy approaches that continue to view transitions as linear processes through a set of stages and markers are based on frameworks of measurement that construct those not being able to sustain this pathway as 'at-risk' or abnormal and in need of policy intervention (Cuervo & Wyn 2011, France 2007, te Riele 2004). Wyn (2014: 8) correctly argues that this reification of transition through frameworks of measurement sustains policy approaches 'to closing the "gaps" between conforming and nonconforming' youth but fails to 'acknowledge the conditions that create inequalities and marginalisation'.

We agree with Hall and colleagues (2009) and Cuervo and Wyn (2012, 2014) and argue that the concept of belonging enables researchers and policy-makers to better capture what happens between these destinations and sheds light on the choices, decisions and actions of young people. In this sense, it opens the possibility of taking a broad and particular look at youth lives beyond narrow policy measures. Belonging, then, expands the youth agenda from the policy emphasis on education and employment participation into issues of social relationships, health, wellbeing, place, culture, and inter-generational relations. While there are several studies in the youth studies literature (e.g. Cuervo & Wyn 2012, Henderson et al. 2007, Kenway, Kraack & Hickey-Moody 2006, Tilleczek 2010) that use the framework of belonging, rarely has this approach been used to explore Indigenous youth in remote communities in Australia.

The idea of belonging refers to, but transcends, the narrow policy focus on social inclusion that is based exclusively on participation in education and employment (Cuervo & Wyn 2012, 2014). We argue for an understanding of belonging as a relational and multi-dimensional concept, with its spatial, relationships and temporal dimensions, interconnected and at play at a particular space and time. The disciplines of sociology (Cuervo & Wyn 2012, 2014, Savage et al. 2005, May 2013), education (Hayes 2012), geography (Antonsich 2010, Hopkins 2010, Vanderbeck & Dunkley 2004) and anthropology (Hage 2015), to name just some, have engaged at different levels with the notion of belonging. For instance, belonging in a spatial sense, where young people's belonging to place, a sense of rootedness or a form of place attachment impact on their everyday decisions (e.g. to stay or leave a community, place). Belonging is also expressed or materialised in young people's relationships to people who matter to them, their (intergenerational) interactions with family, peers and other members of a community which have the capacity to generate a bond and intimacy, and shape the decisions and choices they make. Further, attachment to place and to relations feed each other to generate the phenomenological feeling of being 'at home', at ease with oneself and one's environment. Belonging can also be understood in a contextual-temporal sense, that is, how young people managed to build a life in a time of rapid social and economic change (Leccardi 2012). Indeed, youth as a relational concept is linked to social, economic, political, cultural and ecological currents that form the consciousness of a generation (Wyn & Woodman 2015). Belonging can 'act as a kind of barometer of social change' (May 2013: 3), enabling researchers to understand the continuities and changes in youth lives by identifying and understanding the ways they belong to their times (e.g. within context of precarious labour market, rise of credentialism, multiplication of risks) and how they strive to connect and build to 'modes of being' (Probyn 1996: 19). In sum, belonging offers researchers interested on young people's

lives an avenue through which to gain an understanding of the strategies and processes that youth put in place to stay connected to the people and places that matter to them, as well as to stay engaged, healthy and active in the issues that matter to them. Further, it enables researchers to understand the resources (e.g. family, friends, education, and culture) young people mobilise to make their lives work (Cuervo & Wyn 2012, 2014).

The concept of transitions runs the risk of appearing problematic or not adequate for social groups that, from the outset, have to overcome several obstacles in order to achieve a normative policy transition from one marker (school) to another (work). Rudolph (2013), in her analysis of Indigenous education, believes that the perennial focus on school-to-work transition needs to be interrupted, arguing that participation in employment should not happen at the cost of an assimilationist curriculum and the sacrifice of the social and cultural particularities of Indigenous youth. Rudolph acknowledges that, parallel to the common perception of Indigenous education as 'deficit', there is a burgeoning literature that places emphasis on establishing and advocating for Indigenous knowledge, support for bilingual schooling and acknowledgement of Indigenous ways of learning and knowing that are strongly attached to place, people and culture (see also Calma 2009). Rudolph asserts that there is a growing body of knowledge about Indigenous ways of learning and relating to the social world that need respect and recognition, and this includes recognition of the need to question prescribed policy patterns of transition that do not reflect possible and meaningful choices for Indigenous youth. This growing Indigenous knowledge, when not absorbed uncritically or too hastily (as criticised by Nakata 2012), can contribute to rendering visible the partial and bias construct of 'youth at-risk' that, in most cases, works to demonise certain marginalised social groups. Together with an approach to belonging, it can shed light on institutional and systemic discrimination within some social groups and enhance an awareness of different social and cultural sensibilities, needs and particularities.

The notion of belonging through knowledge is taken up by Nakata (2007b) in his call for an education that allows those at the margins and oppressed to develop a consciousness that enables them to use education in both an instrumental way (e.g. to gain employment) and as a means of comprehending and resisting the social and political forces that are up against. (Nakata et al. (2012: 121) also caution against the simplistic decolonisation of Western knowledge in Indigenous Studies that occurs 'too hurriedly in some scholarly analysis and in lecture settings'.) Belonging through knowledge entails utilising education to read the social world from one's own particular view rather than from the impartial, universal and neutral standpoint that hat generally is constructed by

dominant groups (Young 1990). The notion also entails a recognition, and strengthening, of the above forms – such as a connection to land, relationships and acknowledgment of the past and the present towards the future. It is about identifying the strengths of the Indigenous way of life and its contribution to language, culture and perspective that plays an essential role in the wellbeing of Indigenous people (White 2014).

In his critique of Wilson's (2014) report, White (2014) argues for a 'both ways' approach to education that aims not to abandon Indigenous knowledge outside the school. (Even opposing arguments like those of Sarra 2011 and Pearson 2009 would argue that a 'both ways' approach should be sustained to construct healthy Indigenous youth lives.) In sustaining belonging as a useful tool to understanding and constructing youth lives, we want to pick up two important points made by White (2014). Firstly, the need to support the historical work that Homelands Schools has done in East Arnhem Land – building a 'both ways' approach and a positive image of Indigenous culture and knowledge that enhances the resilience, self-esteem and empowerment of Yolgnu youth. Secondly, the need to support the kind of programs that build robust and healthy Indigenous identities and connections to people and places such as the 'Learning on Country' program (see: http://www.dhimurru.com.au/learning-on-country.html). This program, conducted by Dhimurru Rangers and the Yirrkala School, aims to increase attendance of Yolngu children at school, create meaningful career pathways (including the possibility of seeking a career with the Rangers) and to strengthen future generations' connection to land. The program, which has been running successfully since 2013, is an example of educating 'both ways' and of meaningful teaching and learning beyond the standardised testing that is so prevalent in mainstream education.   Here, of particular importance is what Urquhart (2009) and others have cited as a critical mechanism to guarantee success of any Indigenous program: the need for collaboration between communities and institutions to develop workable strategies. Neo-paternalist government initiatives disconnected from reality on the ground risk becoming useless, or what is worse, being tools for assimilationist approaches that might do more harm than good their initial venerable intentions notwithstanding (see Altman & Fogarty 2010).

The different approaches to creating a culture and praxis of belonging are not meant to be understood or positioned as a new orthodoxy in youth studies that replaces the framework of youth-as-transition, but rather as a complement to the enhancement, empowerment and revitalisation of young lives – particularly those who are oppressed and at the margins of society. As White and Wyn (2013), Pearson (2009), Sarra (2011) and other educators

have affirmed, the idea is that Indigenous young people can move across both cultural worlds and pursue the pathway that wish to. To deny Indigenous youth the possibility of embracing a different pathway than their traditional one is as discriminatory as denying them the opportunity of belonging and embracing their own culture(s). On the one hand, the idea of belonging is rooted in enabling youth to perform at the best of their capabilities in an increasingly rapidly socially changing environment; the ability for them to belong to their times. On the other hand, it can be a useful tool to bring to the fore the importance of the history and culture of Indigenous people and their connection to the land and people, and to challenge normative policy assumptions of what a transition to adulthood means and/or should look like. This should include some of the issues raised in this report, such as the need to be attentive to Clan specificity when looking at Indigenous youth, the need for institutional and community consultation and collaboration, the need for affirmation of the validity of other ways of lives beyond what policies prescribe, the need for teachers trained to be pedagogically culturally attentive and responsive, and need for greater institutional cultural awareness and education in training and employment programs.

CONCLUSIONS

What is clear from the broadly critical nature of the literature on Indigenous youth transitions is a need for more research, particularly research from Indigenous standpoints that enables the collection of more robust and longitudinal evidence-based data. In relation to the process, , there are concerns (a) at the relevance of research undertaken by non-Indigenous researchers; (b) at the failure of non-Indigenous researchers to engage/consult with Indigenous communities (or, indeed, to engage with each other's' findings); and (c) at a glaring lack of indigenous research conducted by indigenous researchers. At a macro level, government policy remains outcomes-driven, disconnected from reality and reluctant to engage directly with the communities, and there has been a glaring shortage of research to date adequately articulating Indigenous voices.

We have identified several barriers that hinder Indigenous youth transitions, such as the tendency of Government to perpetuate a 'one size fits all' to tackling Indigenous issues and fundamental biases or flaws in government measurement and data collection processes. We have also pointed out the innate ethnocentrism characteristic of Australia's education systems (and, by extension, the incapacity of institutions to understand Indigenous cultural complexities) and its contribution to the all-pervasiveness of social disadvantage within Indigenous communities. It is also important to state that family variables such as domestic violence, literacy, poverty, poor health and well-being, gender or place of living all play a role in undermining the opportunities of Indigenous students. Finally, there is a need to be attentive to the impact on the education of youth of infrastructure issues related to geography, transport, Internet and resource access.

Against narratives of despair, we have also identified significant factors that facilitate transitions, among them: culturally responsive policies; accommodation of difference by schools; commitment to community consultation; and culturally relevant curricula (e.g. Learning on Country) and tailored and holistic educational innovations that are the result of direct engagement by government, schools, academia and business with Indigenous communities. It is true that there is a need to rethink the value and purpose of education, particularly for oppressed and marginalised social groups subject to assimilationist

policies and curricula, but there is also a need to be aware of what Nakata describes as propagation of hasty and simplistic decolonisation knowledge that does not contribute to either the building of meaningful transition pathways nor to robust belongings.

And it is here that we return to youth studies and our contention that the lack of engagement by the strong and vital Australian youth studies network with Indigenous studies is alarming. . It is our hope that, by succinctly mapping the literature on Indigenous youth transition we can start a broader conversation about the kind of contribution the sociology of youth field might make to Indigenous young people's lives. For this purpose, we have briefly touched on the key concepts of transition and belonging, not as a polarising exercise but, rather, with the intention of (a) shedding light on the challenges and opportunities that Indigenous young people face today, and (b) understanding patterns of continuity and change that affect Indigenous youth lives. While this report represents a drop in the ocean of Indigenous studies, we hope it makes at least a small contribution towards animating and engaging youth researchers with Indigenous studies and affairs.

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