



**Batchelor
Institute**

Red Dirt education leaders' perceptions about what is important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education

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Setting the scene



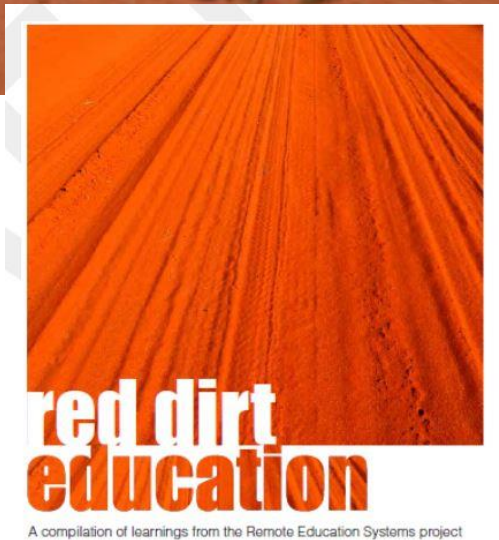
If we talk about success, it needs to be holistic, it needs to involve the community. Too often, remote community schools... set themselves up as islands and they set themselves up as the institution that is going to resolve the issue with Indigenous people when in reality that's not the case.

Remote Aboriginal Principal

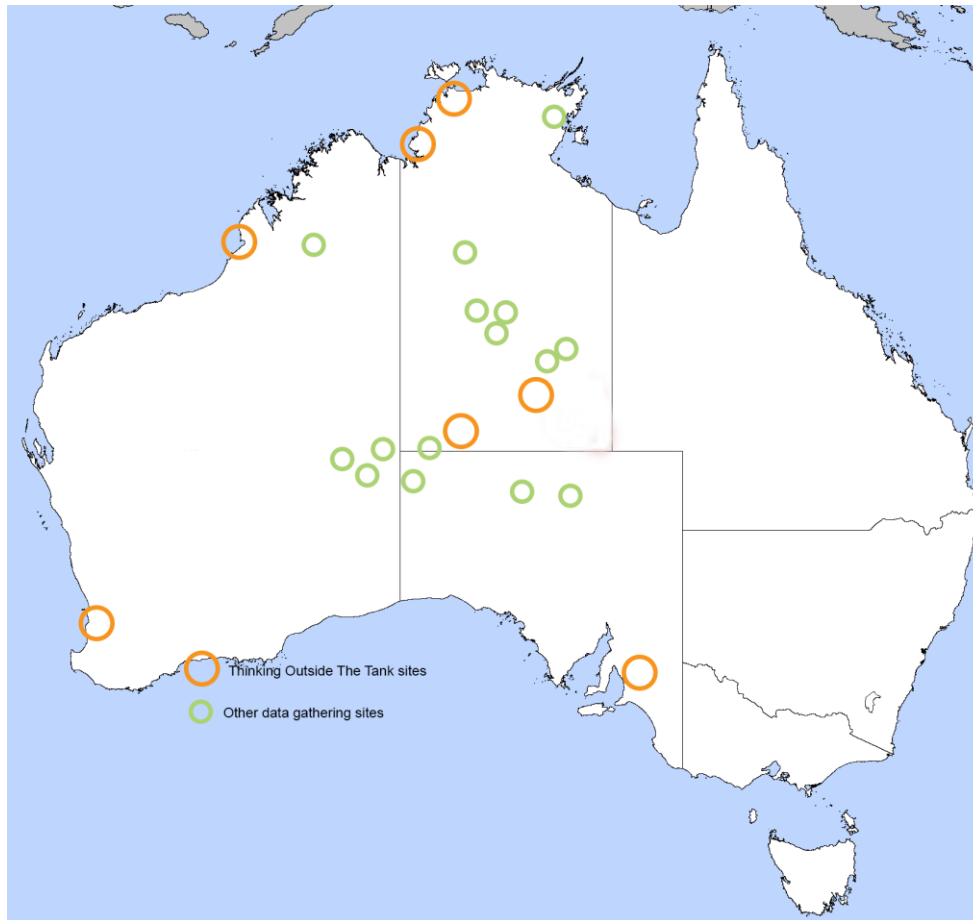
CRC-REP Remote Education Systems project



The Red Dirt Thinking Journey



Remote Education Systems project



RQ1 What is education for in remote Australia and what can/should it achieve?

RQ2 What defines 'successful' educational outcomes from the remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander standpoint?

RQ3 How does teaching need to change in order to achieve 'success' as defined by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander standpoint?

RQ4 What would an effective education system in remote Australia look like?

RES Qualitative data sources

Document source	All sources	All coding references*	Remote Aboriginal references*	Number of unique participants
Interviews and focus groups	45	2501	523	250
Field notes and observations	12	111	0	0
Secondary sources/reports created by or for RES	10	856	603	~800†
Butchers papers and whiteboards	20	197	0	0
Total	87	3665	1126	

Construction of school leader roles

- Leaders 'make a difference' (Dare to Lead)
- Set directions
- Develop people
- Manage organisations
- Improve instructions
- Leadership for partnership (Auerbach 2010, Department of Education and Training 2015)
- Three kinds of engagement: Targeted; Mutual Benefit; Symbiotic engagement (Guenther et al 2016)

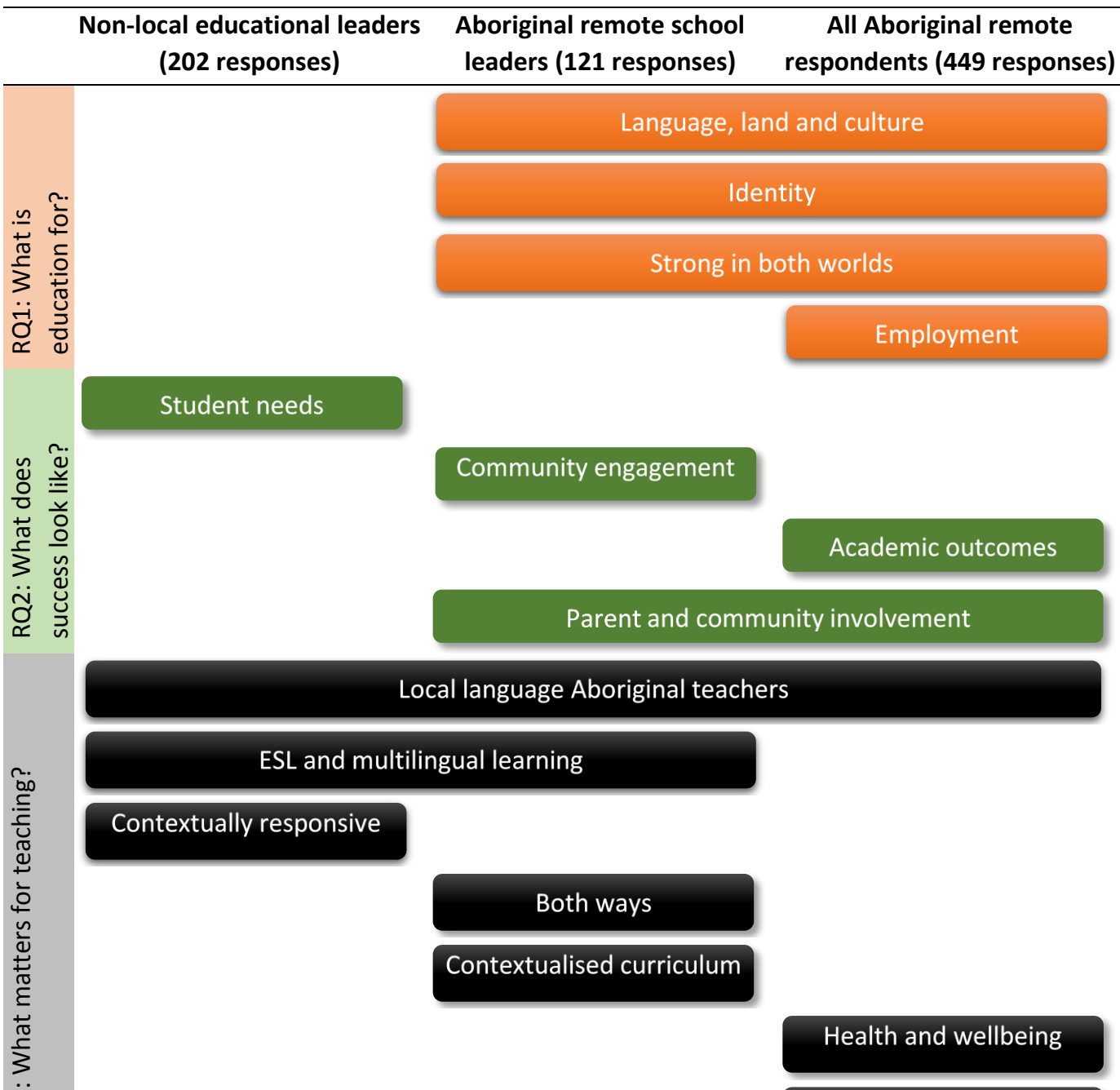
Leithwood et al. 2004,
Sun and Leithwood 2015
Mulford and Silins 2011

Leadership in remote schools

Community, parent, staff and student engagement in the context of:

- ‘The trouble with hearing’ (Osborne 2014)
- Working with different differing ontologies, epistemologies, axiologies and cosmologies: Indigenous standpoints (Philips and Luke 2017)
- Power-laden dialogue (Osborne 2017), power and privilege (Osborne and Guenther 2013)
- Robed in ‘chameleon images’ (Kamara 2017)
- Cultural distance (Yunupingu 1995)
- Cultural interface (Nakata 2007)

What do 'red dirt' leaders think is important?



Common ground: local teachers

You could see the mentoring going on...There are some real workforce strategies you can put into place and yes there are so many people who want to be experienced, ongoing, career AIEOs. (Non-local school leader)

We need local Indigenous teaching staff, training and mentoring for the next generation of teachers, as many who trained in the 1980s have or will soon retire. (Remote Aboriginal school leader)

- Shared recognition that local language Aboriginal staff make a significant difference to the school and outcomes.

Systemic priorities

*We can only do what we've got a statutory responsibility to do which is to provide kids with education. We've got an international responsibility and human rights agreements to make sure Indigenous people get the same opportunities as non-indigenous people... what we're equipped, skilled and qualified to do, and charged to do by our ministers and the people who fund these services, and how we can negotiate the **outcomes that everybody is trying to get to.***

(Non-remote educational leader)



Caught in the middle

One way that we have tried to get our people and our knowledge into the schools is with that curriculum. Well me and [non-Indigenous academic] worked on the curriculum, getting everything from the elders, because they wanted language and culture to be taught in the school... And it's in that curriculum, that's just been sitting on the shelf, which is so rich.

(Remote Aboriginal educational leader)



Implications

- Mutually exclusive priorities?
 - Local staff may act as a bridge.
- How can community voices make themselves heard?
 - Absence of Territory-wide Indigenous education advocacy bodies makes this harder.
 - Self-organising strategies: e.g. Yothu Yindi Foundation
- What can non-local educational leaders do to hear the voices of community members?
 - Local staff recruitment, school councils, charters, engagement strategies that are at least mutually beneficial



In summary

- Non-local education leaders prioritise systemic needs
- Remote Aboriginal education leaders are caught in the middle, but what's important to them aligns more closely with community aspirations for education
- All agree that local staff are important for better educational outcomes and for improved community capacity
- Non-local leaders must learn to 'hear' what communities say is important



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