

**Path+Ways:
Towards best practice in
Indigenous access education**

Final Report

Bronwyn Fredericks, Susan Kinnear, Carolyn Daniels,
Pamela CroftWarcon, Julie Mann

Prepared for the
National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education



Recognition Statement

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We acknowledge and pay our deepest respects to Elders past, present and future throughout Australia. In particular, we pay our respects to the peoples on whose Country this research was carried out.

Produced by: Office of Indigenous Engagement, CQUniversity, Australia

Location: CQUniversity, Australia
Bruce Highway
North Rockhampton, Queensland 4702

Contact Details: Professor Bronwyn Fredericks
+61 7 4923 2045
b.fredericks@cqu.edu.au

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Foreword

In Australia, regional and remote Indigenous students are under-represented in both higher education and vocational education and training. Access (or *enabling*) education programs are important in lifting participation rates and potentially in encouraging mobility between the sectors. However, there is a clear lack of evidence underpinning their development.

This report summarises a 12-month research project which sought to explore current practices in Indigenous access courses, particularly in the context of regional, dual-sector universities. This project aimed to understand the practices and experiences of Indigenous access programs, with a view to designing a best-practice framework and implementation statement.

The research sought to explore how Indigenous learning journeys can respect and grow cultural identity while simultaneously developing study skills, particularly in the context of studying at a regional university. It also aimed to investigate how interpretations of 'success' can be considered from the perspectives of the student, their community and the institution. This research particularly focuses on access education programs. In doing so, it acknowledges that, while access education is only a small slice of the lifelong education journey, it is a critically important one for many Indigenous peoples.

This research builds on the work of Cajete (1994), who wrote about pathways in relation to Indigenous education. Cajete's work has much relevance in exploring Indigenous access education, with its concepts of 'path' and 'way'. The 'path' in this context is the well-thought-out structure on which the curriculum is developed combined with the landscape of the university (or other learning institution). The 'way' refers to the process for students as they navigate their educational institution as part of their learning journey. This may also involve some transformation within the inner Self. For a successful access education experience, we contend that both these elements must knit together to form the student's own learning 'path+way'.

In developing a best-practice conceptual framework for Indigenous access programs, we consider pedagogy, curriculum and mode of delivery, superimposed by the institutional ethos and drivers for implementation, and framed by local, regional and national Indigenous perspectives. In future work, these issues will be deliberated upon in conjunction with these research outcomes to develop further approaches for Indigenous access education. Support structures for staff will also be considered. Ultimately, the strengthening of access education for Indigenous Australians is seen as an excellent platform for offering Indigenous students the best chance of 'success' – recognising that 'success' is a multi-layered concept that includes issues of participation (for the institution), reaffirming personal identity and confidence (for the learner) and broader community and indirect benefits.

- Bronwyn Fredericks, Susan Kinnear, Carolyn Daniels, Pamela CroftWarcon and Julie Mann

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*'That's what we do in education ...
We make people get on this little narrow "path",
They fall off the cliff
And that's the last we see of them, as they disappear down there.
Whereas a "way" suggests a more flexible approach.'*

— Interview participant

'The bridging program has definitely helped to expand and strengthen my identity, my confidence and my values as an Indigenous student and a person.

... each assignment that I do, each piece of knowledge that I've learnt ... builds that confidence, my identity ... and my history as that Indigenous person.'

— Interview participant

Executive Summary

Access education programs are designed to provide pathways into higher education. They are particularly important for remote and regional Indigenous students, who remain under-represented in both higher education and vocational education and training. While there is widespread acceptance that access programs help to lift participation rates and encourage mobility between the sectors, there is a lack of evidence underpinning their development.

This report summarises data collected through a research project funded by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education and presents a conceptual model intended to encourage a national conversation about best practice in Indigenous access education. The research was designed to explore current practices in Indigenous access programs, particularly in the context of regional, dual-sector universities.

Project aims

This project aimed to develop a conceptual model for best practice in Indigenous access programs, with a particular focus on regional, dual-sector institutions. The research was designed to explore how access programs vary (in structure, mode of delivery and ethos of offering) and how these variations influence Indigenous student participation and attainment. As part of the project, the research team wanted to understand how Indigenous learning journeys can respect and grow cultural identity while simultaneously developing study skills, and consider interpretations of 'success' from the perspectives of the student, their community, the institution and the government.

The principal research questions were:

1. Using insights from both theory and practice, what are the key components of best practice in preparing regional, rural and remote-based Indigenous students for entry to comprehensive educational pathways?
2. What are the determinants of success for access education in an Indigenous context? How should 'success' be interpreted, considering institutional and governmental goals, as well as the ability of Indigenous peoples to pursue their own learning goals?

Methods

This project adopted an interdisciplinary, qualitative approach and a case-study methodology to explore both the socio-cultural and educational aspects of access programs. The research involved (a) a literature review, (b) a desktop data scan, (c) a national roundtable discussion with stakeholders, (d) a comparative case study based on individual interviews, (e) data integration and analysis, and (f) research translation to develop a conceptual model.

The case studies involved qualitative, individual interviews at three regional, dual-sector universities in Australia: in central Queensland (CQUniversity), regional Victoria (Federation University Australia¹), and the Northern Territory (Charles Darwin University). Staff and students at each location were involved in the research. Additional data were collected from key stakeholders.

¹ Previously known as the University of Ballarat

Key findings

The review of literature highlighted eight main themes relevant to Indigenous access education:

1. Education has a key role in addressing Indigenous disadvantage, yet it remains poorly understood
2. If educational targets for Indigenous peoples are to be met, there is a need for ‘fresh thinking’
3. Access education has a special role to play in the widening participation agenda
4. The evidence on best-practice teaching in access education is scant
5. Indigenous approaches to teaching and learning must be recognised
6. There needs to be more discussion about what constitutes ‘success’ in Indigenous access education
7. Pursuing best practice will require a comprehensive, holistic perspective
8. Policy and positioning are both important in the widening participation agenda.

The desktop data scan confirmed that, despite decades of government reporting on Indigenous education attainment, very little information is available about the success of access education.

The case study interviews provided rich documentation of the lived experiences of those participating in access education – including students, teaching staff and stakeholders. Key themes emerging from the research clustered around the central category of ‘*Indigenous culture in course content*’, which was regarded as building strength, increasing identity and developing a sense of place. A lack of cultural understanding within some access programs appeared to constrain learning. Linked to this is the recognition of Indigenous people as ‘*yarners*’ and ‘*story tellers*’ and the value of incorporating ‘*both-ways*’ methodologies when developing curriculum for access education. Within access education programs, a sense of belonging, strength, resilience, confidence and self-esteem produced feelings of success, allayed fears, increased self-acceptance and improved feelings of self-worth; these were attributed to a supportive teaching environment. Participants described Indigenous access programs as an ‘*important*’ and ‘*exciting journey*’ that brought about transformation of the inner Self through the building of ‘*resilience*’, ‘*strength*’, ‘*confidence*’, ‘*self-esteem*’, ‘*self-worth*’, ‘*cultural understanding*’ and ‘*identity*’. Success was experienced across multiple dimensions of students’ lived experience, including ‘*cultural identity*’, ‘*voice*’, self-realisation, self-acceptance and ‘*pride*’. Staff suggested that access programs impart an ‘*underlying layer of skills*’ to students.

The research team acknowledges that the findings of this project are context specific and situation specific, and care is needed in extrapolating these results beyond the regional, dual-sector university settings from which the data were sourced. Further work on this topic is needed to examine experiences at larger institutions and develop a broader view. This area is fertile ground for further research.

Policy and practice implications

This research was designed to inform practitioners (staff running access programs), policy makers and prospective Indigenous students from communities in regional, rural and remote locations. The key outcomes of this project include:

- The profiling and promotion of Indigenous needs and learning styles in a way that will support students to affirm their Indigeneity while participating in tertiary education
- Creation of a conceptual framework to guide the development of Indigenous access programs, especially for delivery by regional, dual-sector universities
- New data about Indigenous access education that will support the effective allocation of money for Indigenous support programs, aligning with government targets for participation and student outcomes. Policy implications include a whole of university approach and cross-cultural engagement, achieved through system-wide awareness and Both-ways understanding
- A strengths based approach and Both-ways philosophy are required as foundational support for Indigenous enabling programs
- Indigenous units operating within university systems require effective support to begin to address systemic issues

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Abbreviations used in this report

AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ASQA	Australian Skills Quality Authority
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
CDU	Charles Darwin University
CQU	Central Queensland University
EFTSL	Equivalent full-time student load
FUA	Federation University Australia
ITAS	Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme
NAIDOC	National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (now, this term refers to NAIDOC week celebrations)
NCSEHE	National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education
OIE	Office of Indigenous Engagement
MCEETYA	(Australian) Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
TEP	Tertiary Entrance Program (CQUniversity)
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
VET	Vocational Education and Training

Definitions for key terms used in this report

Access or enabling programs: courses that provide a pathway for people wishing to gain entry to higher education (typically at the bachelor-degree level), by providing one or more courses focussed on foundation and/or preparatory skills. Many Australian universities offer access courses free of tuition fees, and many include online learning. Some universities include course credits for undergraduate programs, however enabling itself is not recognised as part of the Australian Qualifications Framework. Loading for enabling is included in the Commonwealth Grants Scheme, which makes funds available to universities to help prepare students for higher education. For vocational education providers, 'access education' may also refer to non-assessed modules (for example, literacy, numeracy and employee skills).

Bridging education: these are courses that assist students to meet course entry requirements and/or are offered as remedial courses to help address skill gaps. For example, this might include short/intensive courses in biology, chemistry or mathematics, in order to satisfy prerequisites for undergraduate programmes.

Special or alternative entry: in Australia, the two dominant pathways into university are applications through a tertiary admission centre (state-centralised) or applications direct to the university (AIHW 2014). Special or alternative entry is used by those students who do not transition directly from high school and/or those who lack an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) score.

1 Introduction

In Australia, regional and remote Indigenous students are under-represented in both higher education and vocational education and training (VET). Access (or *enabling*) education courses are important in lifting participation rates and potentially in encouraging mobility between the sectors. However, there is a clear lack of evidence underpinning their development.

This report presents the findings of a research project funded by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, titled 'Best practice bridging: facilitating Indigenous participation through regional dual-sector universities'. The project aimed to develop a best-practice framework for Indigenous access education programs, emphasising regional and comprehensive education settings.

This report does not provide detailed statistics regarding Indigenous access, participation and success within the Australian higher education sector; this information is broadly available and effective summaries of the key trends have been prepared in the recent past (e.g. AIHW 2014; Behrendt et al. 2012). In addition, this report does not seek to establish nor explain the barriers to university enrolment faced by Indigenous students; these have also been well established, most notably in two comprehensive government initiatives (the *Review of Higher Education* led by Professor Denise Bradley in 2008, and the *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* led by Larissa Behrendt in 2012). Recent work examining the transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education has also been conducted for the Office of Learning and Teaching, led by Professor Lyn Henderson-Yates and authored by Kinnane et al. (2014).

Rather than duplicate existing work, this research seeks to explore – in a more qualitative sense – new data exploring how Indigenous learning journeys can respect and grow cultural identity while simultaneously developing study skills. It also investigates how interpretations of 'success' can be considered from different perspectives: the student, their community, the institution and the government. This report presents the findings of the qualitative research conducted for the project and presents an approach for best practice in Indigenous access education.

2 Background to the research

2.1 Addressing disadvantage through higher education

The value of higher education in addressing disadvantage manifests at several levels, from the individual, to community and society, as well as institutionally and across different tiers of government. Gaining post-secondary education is linked with a range of social and economic benefits, which may be realised in both private and public terms (Deloitte Access Economics 2011).

In the social domain, extensive research supports the concept that education is central to the well-being of society and that education directly correlates with higher levels of social capital. Education imparts knowledge and information, and strengthens an individual's cognitive skills; in doing so, education also strengthens socio-emotional capabilities, such as conscientiousness, social skills and self-efficacy, which encourage individuals to pursue healthier lifestyles and participate in civil society. Higher education is linked to better and higher levels of health and well-being (World Health Organisation 2008). It is also linked with better health conditions, lower incidence of criminal activity

and higher levels of societal engagement (OECD 2010). Higher levels of education have been linked with increased social networks and community participation (AIHW 2014) and, in turn, this contributes to creating tolerant communities that appreciate diversity. Research suggests that education helps individuals to make competent and informed decisions and, therefore, enhances social outcomes in general. Baum & Ma (2007) report that adults with higher levels of education are more likely to participate in volunteer work and live healthy lifestyles. It is likely that the positive impacts of education are not simply realised by the learner, but are transferred throughout their family and social groups. For example, Williams (2011) noted that improving the performance of Maori students in university settings allows for a trickle-on improvement for the students' extended families and wider society.

In the economic domain, research suggests that higher education 'boosts an individual's employment prospects, earnings, status and personal development' (AIHW 2014: 2). Consistent employment, which is made possible through formal education, reduces dependency on public income, raises taxes and lifts productivity. In addition, there is evidence that all employees earn more when the labour force includes employees with university degrees (Baum & Ma 2007). Throughout OECD countries, strong incentives exist for individuals to gain higher education qualifications, as these lead to higher salaries and more desirable employment conditions and prospects (OECD 2012). Modelling by Deloitte Access Economics (2011) reveals that 'closing the equity gap' for Indigenous peoples and those with disability, through access to VET, could increase the real Gross Domestic Product by over \$12 billion by 2020.

The social and economic trends demonstrate that encouraging access to higher education for people from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds can provide a wide range of benefits. It is not surprising, then, that social equity in relation to higher education has been part of the national policy discourse in Australia since 1990 (Cuthill & Jansen 2013), with a focus on providing education to socially and economically disadvantaged cohorts. Furthermore, as higher levels of education correspond with lower poverty and lower unemployment, universities and vocational training institutions have a considerable capacity to act as vehicles for social mobility (Avis 2007).

2.2 The widening participation agenda

The 'widening participation agenda' has emerged from research about the value of higher education in addressing social and economic disadvantage. From the perspective of Indigenous participation in higher education, the last two decades have witnessed increased global interest and awareness of the importance of increasing access and participation for Indigenous peoples. The overwhelming under-representation of Indigenous students in mainstream university settings is recognised at national and international levels (Hunter & Schwab 2003; Mendelson 2006; Williams 2011). Improving access to education has the potential to incrementally increase socio-economic capital across generations of Indigenous peoples. It is a strategy for addressing social disadvantage and, in the Australian context, has the capacity to prepare Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for leadership roles within their communities. It is also a strategy for closing disparities in the health, education and economic outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (Cuthill & Jansen 2013).

In Australia, the increased interest and effort in the widening participant agenda has been coupled with modest increases in enrolments of Indigenous students and numbers of Indigenous academic staff in higher education. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to be significantly under-represented in higher education. For example, while Australia as a whole features secondary and tertiary attainment statistics that are higher than the OECD average (OECD 2013), the participation rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in higher education remain well below that of the broader Australian population. Recent statistics for Indigenous education outcomes led Pechenkina and Anderson (2011) to declare a state of 'crisis'. This under-representation contributes to, and may exacerbate, the high levels of social and economic disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians. It is thus an imperative that all stakeholders identify ways to increase the access of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to higher education (OECD 2013).

The Australian Government recently initiated a substantial review of Indigenous issues and higher education. The review was established to develop a strategic framework to enable the Government and the higher education sector to collectively address access and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, with a priority on reducing gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and staff across a range of outcomes. In conducting the review, Professor Larissa Behrendt visited every public university in Australia, to consult with vice-chancellors, senior university representatives and, most importantly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, graduates, staff and communities. The review identified key priorities, actions and opportunities for the Government and the higher education sector in a seminal work generally referred to as the 'Behrendt Report' (Behrendt et al. 2012).

The Australian government has a target of achieving at least 20% of university undergraduate enrolments being students from low socio-economic backgrounds by 2020 (Bradley et al. 2008). Combined with the national widening participation agenda, this will require a tangible shift in practices as tertiary institutions attempt to cater to a more diverse student body (Leese 2010). Devlin (2013) has called for fresh thinking and leadership to respond to the changes facing the sector and to identify 'what works'.

The CQUniversity context illustrates Australia's changing higher education sector. CQUniversity's national campus footprint includes 25 full-service campuses and study hubs that service regional, rural and remote Indigenous peoples (including coastal populations and an increasing reach into north and western Queensland). In mid-2014, CQUniversity made the transition into a comprehensive institution that offers both higher education and vocational education; this has added another layer of both challenge and opportunity to the University's structure. CQUniversity has now joined Charles Darwin University (CDU) and Federation University Australia (FUA) as regionally based, dual-sector institutions. Collectively, the three institutions account for approximately 5,000 enrolled Indigenous students. There is a clear need for these universities to consider how to meaningfully deliver education to diverse and geographically dispersed students, while maximising their ability to deliver on government participation targets.

2.3 Factors influencing participation in higher education

Levin (2003) outlines three common factors that influence participation in higher education:

- Dispositional factors: relating to an individual student's motivation and sense of efficacy, including the ability to draw on role models
- Situational factors: including the student's living situation with regard to competing priorities for family care, paid employment and proximity to the learning institution
- Systemic factors: relating to the formal settings within learning institutions; this may include various policies, procedures and/or the conditions by which universities and/or vocational institutions admit, teach, assess and graduate students.

These factors are frequently relevant for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who seek to enrol in higher education. For example, Hunter and Schwab's (2003) discussion paper identified several issues that impact on Indigenous participation in education and training, including family and cultural issues. These can include housing (such as housing quality and overcrowding), engagement with the legal system (such as the number of people in the household who have been arrested) and cross-cultural misunderstanding (particularly misunderstanding between schools and Indigenous families). These factors contribute to inter-generational negativity towards education (and towards Western institutions more broadly). Similarly, living in a household with someone who has had a positive experience with education and Western institutions, and living with someone who has an educational qualification, are a positive influence on the household.

2.4 The role of access education

Access education programs (also called enabling programs and bridging programs) provide an alternative pathway into higher education and VET programs. Through access education, students develop study skills designed to help them successfully transition into formal study. Throughout this report, we adopt the term 'access education' for consistency, recognising that institutions and authors use a variety of terms; in direct quotes from authors and research participants, we retain their preferred term.

Research on access education is in its infancy, with little evidence to guide the development of effective programs (Lum, Bradley & Rasheed 2011; Nakata, Nakata & Chin 2008), and almost none that is specific for Indigenous Australian students. Most existing research is limited to course-evaluation-style approaches, which tend to focus on students' perceptions and/or experiences, rather than on attainment or capacity-building outcomes.

In addition to the lack of evidence about access education, there is a lack of solid evidence regarding best practice for fostering greater participation and attainment by Indigenous students (Kinnane et al. 2014). Access education can be a vital bridge for Indigenous students who have aspirations to enrol in post-secondary study. Although many universities direct considerable effort toward access education, there is a dearth of research-based evidence on the impact of these programs on student participation and attainment, and on student mobility between VET and higher education.

The massification of higher education brings with it the need for new models to support and retain students who enter education from diverse backgrounds and through various pathways (Leese 2010). One assumption of access education programs is that many students who have historically

been excluded from higher education, and are therefore entering via an access program pathway, will be 'non-traditional' in terms of preparedness. This cohort includes students from many different backgrounds, both socially and geographically (Dawson, Charman & Kilpatrick 2013). This is important because, as Devlin (2011) argues, the cultural capital of students is critical to understanding their experiences in education. Cultural capital – which can be defined as the combination of mannerisms, skills base, preferences, values and objects such as clothing – is acquired through membership of a social class. The sharing of cultural capital creates a sense of group power, group position and collective identity. Lacking cultural capital, therefore, can act as a major source of social inequality. This means that sharing cultural capital must be an important consideration underpinning the design and delivery of access education.

In 2003, Hunter and Schwab suggested that changing Indigenous demography would, by around 2013, place considerable pressure on educational expenditure, as younger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people entered post-compulsory schooling, training and higher education. This pressure is now being felt by services, organisations and institutions. There is increasing recognition that, in order to achieve parity in education participation and attainment, substantial additional expenditure on Indigenous education is required. This expenditure must be accompanied by a broader understanding of the factors that impact on educational attainment and the meanings of success.

2.4.1 Access education in the Indigenous context

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, participating in higher education is not a simple matter of deciding to attend university and then enrolling for the duration of the course. Anderson, Bunda and Walter (2008) note that even those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who successfully navigate their way past university entrance processes still face formidable barriers. These include high levels of socio-economic disadvantage, rurality and limited family and individual exposure to the benefits of higher education. Numerous other barriers exist, including:

... [a] lack of physical access to educational institutions; individual and cultural isolation and alienation; dissatisfaction with courses of study and educational delivery modes; inflexibility of higher education systems; unfamiliarity with and lack of confidence in academic requirements and skills; lack of access to educational resources; lack of family support; high rates of household crowding and family and personal disruptions; ... the personal, family and financial burdens of spatial relocation; and the pull of community and family commitments. (Anderson, Bunda & Walter 2008: 7)

This complexity of barriers hints at the requirements of access programs for Indigenous students. Institutions offering access programs must provide a teaching, learning and pastoral care model that responds to the complex barriers, the environment students face and the Indigenous individuals within it.

As Pechenkina and Anderson (2011) acknowledge, special entry or access programs are vital for widening participation in higher education for Indigenous Australians. Access education can offer Indigenous Australians a pathway to university programs that may not be available otherwise. Alternative access pathways are particularly important for students who do not directly enter university with an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) score from secondary school studies

(Behrendt et al. 2012). The majority of Australian universities offer foundation and access programs for Indigenous people (CSHE 2008).

Behrendt et al. (2012) noted that, in 2010, more than half of Indigenous students entered university through access programs, compared with only 17% of non-Indigenous students. The backgrounds of students who enter through access programs differ from other students in terms of their cultural, social and geographical backgrounds (Dawson, Charman & Kilpatrick 2013).

2.5 Defining success in Indigenous access education

‘Participation is not enough; one is also looking for success’ (Levin 2003:26).

At the simplest level, success in access education helps students to transition into and participate in further education in the university or VET sectors. However, success does not rest simply on the transition to mainstream education. Kinnane et al. (2014) provide a comprehensive discussion on what constitutes a successful transition into education, after examining the issue from Indigenous community contexts and the perspective of universities. They conclude that ‘success exists on a spectrum defined by individual (personal) and collective (community) terms, as well as a range of measures utilised by universities and government departments’ (Kinnane 2014: 9).

Notably, notions of success in access education often diverge from those used in standard education reporting (such as enrolment numbers and numbers of completions). Kinnane et al. suggest that these notions ‘do not always constitute a successful transition or a good experience’ (Kinnane et al. 2014: 45). In Kinnane et al.’s work, the concept of success is expanded to include failure: ‘success does not necessarily mean passing all units in the first year and can be about “sticking with it” even when a student initially fails units of work’ (Kinnane et al. 2014: 45). This demonstrates the difference between ‘student completions’ and the ‘ripple’ effect of many small successes.

What constitutes ‘success’ remains an important question that must be addressed from the different perspectives of the Indigenous student, the institution, the government and the broader Indigenous community. For example, AIHW (2014) describes some commonly used equity performance indicators, including measures of access, participation, retention, success and completion. In the AIHW discussion, ‘success’ is indicated by the ‘equivalent full-time student load (EFTSL) of units passed as a percentage of all EFTSL of units attempted’ (AIHW 2014: 8). This definition does not extend to specific levels of academic performance (for example, credit versus distinction). In the vocational training sector, achievement measures include the load pass rate and completions (Rothman et al. 2013). While these definitions are fit for some purposes, they are generally too simplistic: as Anderson et al. (1998) note, ‘it is necessary for universities to examine their own philosophies, policies and practices’ (p. 4) and ‘... take on the aspirations of Indigenous peoples as their own aspirations’ (p. xvi).

Success in Indigenous access education must also be seen from an Indigenous perspective. As Anderson et al. (1998: vii; referring to MCEETYA 1995) note, ‘providing an education which does not strengthen the identity and cultural values of Indigenous peoples is assimilationist’. This means that success in Indigenous access education must focus on concepts and strategies that affirm and grow Indigeneity and develop Indigenous leadership. This is a direct contrast to the current system of measures, where efforts to recognise and incorporate Indigeneity within the tertiary sector are often tied to Reconciliation Statements and Action Plans, NAIDOC celebrations, policies of inclusion and

the dominant cultural markers of success. Typical outcome measures for Indigenous people are tied to poor attrition and retention rates, and low rates of graduation. Universities place much effort on ways to improve these rates by addressing the ‘under-achievement’ of Indigenous students. Little effort is directed toward recognising and maximising the inherent strengths and values that students bring with them – which could influence success rates, and impact on students’ opportunities to be dynamic, empowered, Indigenous leaders of the future.

Kinnane et al. (2014) identified that, for Indigenous students, key determinants of success include individual family and community relationships, with the result that programs that leveraged and enhanced these relationships were becoming increasingly effective.

2.6 Factors that contribute to success for Indigenous students

It is essential to have a workable framework for measuring progress towards equity outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and this should include the role of access programs in contributing to tertiary education outcomes. Notably, the Behrendt report called for a review of the role of access courses and an assessment of their effectiveness, given that an assessment has never been conducted in the almost-25-year history of Australian access education. There is a clear lack of information on measuring success specifically in Indigenous access and enabling contexts: a gap which this research project seeks to address. Consequently, the available information on measuring success for Indigenous students must be interpreted from broader higher education contexts, as described below.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) recently developed a set of indicators for a performance measurement framework for equity in higher education. The authors adopted a ‘life cycle’ approach to undergraduate students, considering the elements of pre-entry, offers, acceptance and enrolment, the university experience and graduate outcomes. Across the student ‘life cycle’ timeline, AIHW (2014) identified 61 potential indicators, organised into a framework of three tiers:

- Tier 1: Education attainment and outcomes (key targets and goals for equity programs and policies) – 23 indicators
- Tier 2: Precursors of higher education attainment (including developmental outcomes, aspirations and educational performance) – 9 indicators
- Tier 3: Education system performance (effort and strategies demonstrated by universities and the government) – 29 indicators.

The AIHW (2014) report rightly concluded that there are ‘significant individual, family, structural, and policy factors’ affecting educational attainment. For example, Leese (2010) noted that unreasonable expectations and a lack of cultural capital may influence a student’s journey even before the student arrives on campus.

It is beyond the scope of this review to examine the AIHW indicators in detail. Instead, this review focuses on elements that are specifically related to students’ entry into and experience of access education. In its discussion of the precursors to higher education attainment, the AIHW (2014) study identifies contributing factors that help to determine whether a student will gravitate towards higher education study (see Table 1). From the perspective of access education, it is particularly

useful to focus on issues that were identified as possible sources of ‘pathway inequity’ (AIHW 2014: 24), such as:

- Are students from particular equity groups less likely to perceive higher education as a valuable and attainable goal for their own lives?
- Are students from particular equity groups more likely to choose different pathways into university?
- Are students from particular equity groups less likely to accept offers, enrol, attend, transfer, change and complete their university degrees?

Table 1 Indicators within the ‘precursors of higher education attainment’ domain, as presented by AIHW (2014: ix)

Influence of university representatives	Vulnerability across developmental domains
Intention to apply for university	Literacy and numeracy
Expectation to complete university	School attendance
Parental intent for students to apply for university	Year 12 completions
	ATAR [^] scores

[^] Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank

The AIHW (2014) study also reviewed factors that contribute to low outcomes specifically for Indigenous students, grouping these into five areas:

- Historical factors (including cultural exclusion, discrimination and poorer access to services)
- Low academic achievement (this impacts on entry rates, and also results in poor confidence amongst Indigenous students, leading to lower aspirations for higher education)
- Aspirations (including individual, school and societal aspirations)
- Limited knowledge of post-schooling and career pathways
- Higher education retention, success and completion.

It is worth noting that metrics for Indigenous students are based on data collected by institutions or governments about students who have *self-identified* as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander on their enrolment forms. For a variety of reasons, some students elect not to self-identify, so the available data undercount the actual Indigenous student population; this problem has been well-recognised (Wilks & Wilson 2014).

2.7 Best practice in teaching and supporting Indigenous learners

In a very practical sense, there is a need to consider how different modes of teaching delivery can benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, with emphasis on course relevance, structure and location. Within the higher education and VET setting, relevant issues include curriculum content, mode of teaching delivery, staffing, organisational structure, leadership, pastoral care and university-community relations.

The area of teaching and learning has been explored to some extent through initiatives such as the Australian Indigenous Studies Learning and Teaching Network, which was established in 2011 (Barney 2014). The Network has examined ‘coalface’ questions such as course marketing, standards

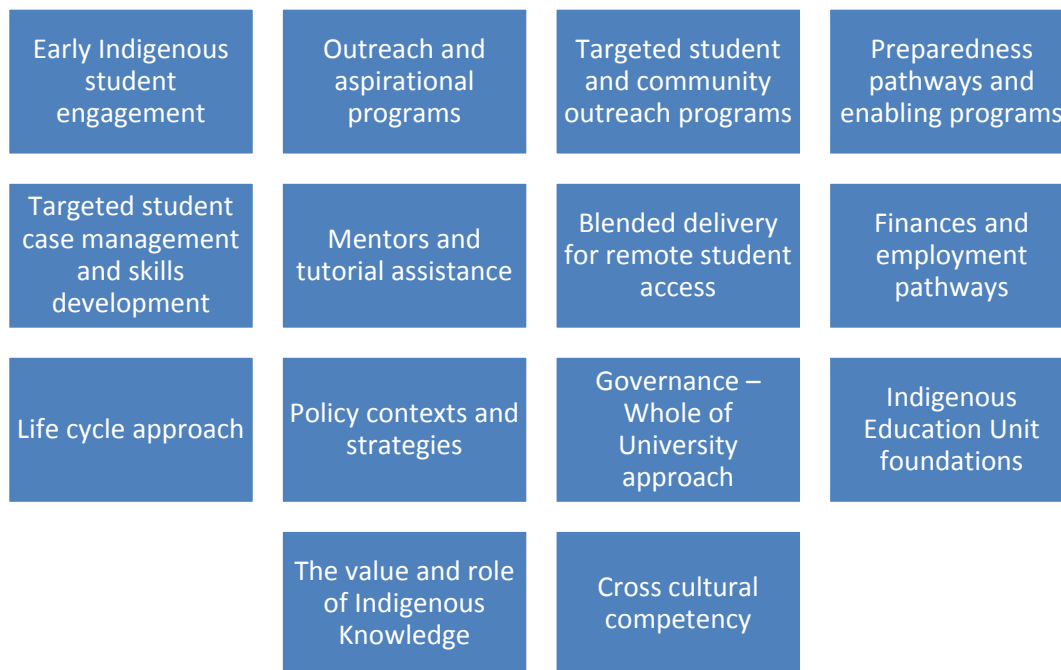
and benchmarking, and also addressed broader philosophical questions regarding assumptions about those learning Indigenous studies.

Earlier work by Pechenkina and Anderson (2011) conceptualised a four-pronged approach to support for Indigenous learners: partnerships, pathways, productivity and leadership. They explored each aspect through a lens of Indigenous strategy as ‘core business’ for universities.

Kinnane et al. (2014) described several best-practice considerations relevant to Indigenous education. Their framework encompasses all aspects of education, from student identification right through to educational policy (Figure 1). Within their framework, Kinnane et al. identified three elements of leading practice that were specific to preparedness pathways and access programs:

- Aspirational programs linked to community and student outreach (ensuring that students are informed, engaged and supported as well as monitored and evaluated)
- Indigenous mentoring programs, with a particular focus on regional Indigenous youth culture (such as the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME))
- Merit-based early intervention programs that support and enhance the skills of talented students (such as the Aurora project, which offers internships, placements, scholarships and an in-school enrichment program).

Figure 1 Elements of a leading practice framework for Indigenous education in Australian universities (adapted from Kinnane et al. 2014: 12-14)



A recurrent theme in the literature on Indigenous education and the literature on access education is the need to build partnerships at all levels. Edwards et al. (2013) rank partnerships (with community, schools, tertiary institutions, employers, industry groups and social enterprise) as one of the five key factors linked with raising participation. Community relations were discussed at length by Anderson et al. (1998), who concluded that many universities were committed to partnerships

but pressured by cost constraints. Some 15 years later, it would seem that this commitment has continued and perhaps strengthened (e.g. through strategic plans and Reconciliation Action Plans). However, details on expenditure and outcomes in relation to partnerships are still difficult to pinpoint.

A recent addition to the literature on Indigenous access programs is the work by Turnbull (2014). Turnbull reviewed the existing pre-tertiary pathways offered in Australia for Indigenous students, and completed a program evaluation (research questionnaire) regarding student and staff experiences at Curtin University. Turnbull identifies five key issues as being relevant to a successful student experience: pastoral care, cross-cultural engagement, a whole-of-university approach, the availability of on-campus accommodation, and communication with students between block on-campus attendances. Turnbull recommends that access education programs should include: ‘academic writing and culture (including, in particular, in-depth research and referencing skills), written and oral communication skills, mathematics, and online learning methodologies’ (Turnbull 2014: 15).

A recent meeting of the Global Compact Network Australia discussed the value of examining Indigenous engagement through a human rights lens, and it may make sense for universities and other educational institutions in Australia to consider the value of this approach. In particular, the Network noted that the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous peoples includes the following four principles:

1. Self-determination
2. Participation in decision-making (underpinned by free, prior and informed consent and good faith)
3. Respect for and protection of culture
4. Equality and non-discrimination (GCNA & AHRC 2014).

Many universities in Australia (particularly regional institutions) already have a commitment to growing engagement with their communities, as demonstrated by national movements such as AUCEA (Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance). Here, the UN Principles may offer a new perspective on why and how to engage respectfully and meaningfully.

2.8 Program structure and teaching approach

The AIHW (2014) notes that delivery modes and attendance options may influence both enrolment rates and completion rates amongst disadvantaged students. This may occur in complex ways. For example, in courses offered through distance education, off-campus learning may offer greater flexibility for students to manage their competing study, work and life commitments; but they may be negatively affected by the available support services, which will differ from those for on-campus students (AIHW 2014).

Course content and delivery method can have an extraordinary impact on course outcomes. This is demonstrated by Charles Darwin University’s experience with their Preparation for Tertiary Success course (which involves face-to-face delivery of Western and Indigenous Knowledges) compared with their Tertiary Enabling Program (a mixed-mode, mainstream access program). CDU recorded quite different outcomes for the two courses. It is possible that the outcomes are linked to the Indigenous

Knowledges element included in the Preparation for Tertiary Success course. Kinnane et al. (2014: 78) include a comment from one interviewee who noted that:

... in addition to building academic skills, enabling courses need to include exploration of the disciplines offered within universities and the opportunity to investigate the intersection of Western and Indigenous Knowledges within the particular discipline they are considering entering.

The Indigenous Knowledges component may add a depth to the Preparation for Tertiary Success course that enables students to reflect closely on learning styles and develop the skills required for study success.

Another relevant aspect of course structure is the use of block-release periods. Turnbull's (2014) report for the Office for Learning and Teaching describes the use of block-release periods for Indigenous students to complete pre-tertiary study, after a review found that Curtin University of Technology's existing pathway programs were not meeting the need of Indigenous students, particularly those from (geographically) isolated locations. The report suggested a 'hands-on' experience to be offered through a block-release program, to reflect curriculum needs and the connections between students' communities (Turnbull 2014). A two-year trial was proposed, commencing at the Curtin Centre for Aboriginal Studies in 2015, but it is unclear whether this has been implemented.

At CQUniversity, the Tertiary Entry Program (TEP) is delivered online, with two, one-week residential blocks each term (one at the beginning of term and one at the end). The residential format offers blocks of intensive learning, face-to-face contact with peers, and an opportunity for one-on-one time with lecturers and staff. The residential blocks are also designed to demystify the university campus and help students to become familiar with the on-campus university offerings. In a recent review of the CQUniversity TEP, King (2011) proposed that the program should be considered a 'special case' for enabling, and should not be collapsed into the access programs offered elsewhere at the university. However, the review resulted in TEP being benchmarked against other similar offerings, with a particular emphasis on:

- Focussing more on completions than extending flexibility to students
- Reducing the number of courses available and concentrating energies on a reduced range of offerings
- Continuing to draw on courses and resources developed elsewhere, to which TEP teaching and support approaches can be joined
- Adopting practices that encourage students to take increasing responsibility for managing their learning time.

These recommendations may have been sensible from an operational perspective, particularly for the purposes of increasing the 'success' of the program. However, it was not clear how these changes link with the needs of Indigenous students and broader Indigenous communities. Some of these issues were addressed in a second review of TEP, undertaken in 2012 (Barnett, Buckskin & Harreveld 2012). The second review suggested that TEP should be overhauled to align with CQUniversity's direction, incorporate Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum, and maximise learning outcomes for Indigenous students. Since 2012, TEP has evolved into 'an external, flexible,

online digital learning program offered to Indigenous Australians throughout Australia – in urban, regional and remote communities, and in correctional centres’ (Fredericks et al. 2015). It is presently going through a revitalisation process in order to further align it with the changing needs of Indigenous peoples within the University sector and to maximise all forms of support available to Indigenous learners.

2.9 Models for supporting Indigenous students

Many universities within Australia support Indigenous students through dedicated Indigenous support centres, with some of these having been in existence since the early 1970s. Multiple universities use this approach (Bin-Sallik 2003; Rigney 2001), often combined with strategies to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff are employed in academic and support roles. The vital role of Indigenous units and centres within universities settings is well documented (Bin-Sallik 2003; Morgan 2001; Rigney 2001).

Kinnane et al. (2014) are firmly in favour of Indigenous centres, citing their role in lifting the number of Indigenous students attending university. However, Kinnane et al. point out that many Indigenous centres continue to be over-burdened and under-resourced. In addition, the question of isolation or ‘siloeing’ of Indigenous centres is an ongoing debate, with some authors suggesting that Indigenous-specific centres can lead to marginalisation through ‘separateness’ (Kinnane et al.). This is contrasted by authors who argue for the benefits of having a (culturally) safe space where students can seek support and the symbolic value of Indigenous centres (e.g. Pechenkina & Anderson 2011).

Kinnane et al. (2014) identify five Indigenous support models currently used in Australian universities:

1. **Mainstream support model**, where there is minimal or no support specifically for Indigenous students
2. **Standard model**, where support is delivered through an Indigenous education unit
3. **School model**, where Indigenous studies programs are offered along with student support
4. **Governance-driven model**, which is closely tied to key performance indicators, such as those for executive staff
5. **Indigenous knowledge centre model**, which may take the form of a discrete unit focussed particularly on introducing Indigenous knowledges to the otherwise Western-based education system. Kinnane et al. (2014) note that this model can provide spaces where both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students can engage with Indigenous issues.

The history and features of each model are described at length in the Kinnane et al. report. The standard model has been in place for many years, although it is increasingly being adapted to mix mainstream access programs with dedicated Indigenous support. Kinnane et al. suggest that the Governance-driven model and Indigenous knowledge centre models represent leading practice in this field.

The ownership underpinning Indigenous support is also a relevant issue. It is now over a decade since Malin and Maidment (2003) proposed the concept of Indigenous Learning Communities, which would use education and learning to increase social capital in a region. The entities they proposed would be Indigenous-controlled, providing a combination of both government and Indigenous-controlled services across the spheres of education and training, language and culture, and health

and well-being. More recently, the *On Stony Ground* report specifically examined the relationship between governance, institutional structures and higher education outcomes relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Moreton-Robinson et al. 2011). The report concludes that many Australian universities are not fulfilling their obligations for Indigenous-related governance, raising questions about whether the criteria for awarding Indigenous Support Program funding are, in fact, appropriate.

The support and ownership models adopted in the VET sector are less clear. Griffin (2014) notes that support services in VET institutions are critically important, but recognises a tension between providing individually tailored support and system-wide support. This is an important consideration, as the distinction between Australia's post-secondary education sectors is increasingly blurred, with movement towards a more integrated tertiary sector (Jonas 2012). The number of Australian institutions operating in both VET and higher education sectors is expected to increase (Moodie 2010), and this raises new questions about how Indigenous access can be best supported in a mixed-sector environment. The VET system is already recognised as a key entry point into education for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, with many students transitioning from VET into higher education (Griffin 2014), and a high proportion of Indigenous Australians participating in VET (Karmel et al. 2014). Questions about support models and ownership structures will be a critical part of this transition.

2.10 Rethinking policy settings that inform Indigenous access programs

Access to higher education remains a key pathway to redressing entrenched socio-economic disadvantage. However, 'to succeed at university Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students need access to a range of social, financial and academic support' (Behrendt et al. 2012: xii). While all Australian tertiary institutions have an inclusion and diversity agenda in their strategic plans, there is little evidence regarding how they achieve this for Indigenous Australians and where improvements may be made. It is also relevant to ask questions about how Indigenous education outcomes could, or should, be positioned within universities as core business, rather than simply as an issue of equity (Andersen, Bunda & Walter 2008).

Pechenkina and Anderson (2011: 1) propose that the current policy and financing framework surrounding Indigenous engagement in higher education needs to be re-aligned, particularly with regard to addressing 'the opportunity cost resulting from the failure to provide a transition path for capable Indigenous people into higher education'.

Indigenous peoples individually and collectively need the skills and knowledges afforded through education to assist in making a strategic reinvestment in their situational transformation (Smith 2003). For Indigenous peoples, this is not about moving away from Indigenous cultures but rather re-positioning them and embedding them within education pathways in a way that strengthens Indigenous peoples. Relevant concepts include 'two ways', 'both-ways' (Harris 1990; Purdie, Milgate & Bell 2011) or 'bicultural' (O'Sullivan 2007) learning.

Amongst the different access courses offered by Australian institutions, there is a need to acknowledge that the rationale for (and often the funding of) Indigenous programs differs substantially from that of other access programs. Within the overall policy environment

guided by the widening participation agenda, there is a strong argument for developing access programs specifically for Indigenous students.

Behrendt et al. (2012) highlighted two of the key questions around policy (and investment) decisions for Indigenous access education: (1) student places for access programs tend to be based on allocated numbers, rather than being demand-driven; (2) funding shortfalls can threaten the success of enabling programs. Behrendt et al. recommended:

That the Australian Government, VET providers and universities collaborate to improve the reach and effectiveness of enabling courses for disadvantaged learners, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including:

Reforming Commonwealth Grant Scheme funding so that it increases with the number of students undertaking higher education enabling courses; and

Facilitating tracking of students who undertake enabling courses at one university and move to and enrol at a second university so that both universities gain recognition for success. (Behrendt et al. 2012: 51)

2.11 Indigenous approaches to critical pedagogy, teaching and learning

Gregorcic (2009: 357) presents an epistemology of critical pedagogy that describes cultural capital (for Latin American Indigenous peoples) as the ‘power for social integration beyond capitalism, [which] produces new social relations and contributes to the creation of an egalitarian society with greater social welfare’. Gregorcic (2009) develops an epistemology of a new pedagogy:

... which spring from the wealth of social and collective knowledge that embodies the power for social interventions, allowing people to create and recreate societies of dignity: new goals of education (for social justice and alternative sociality), integrity of knowledge (instead of present fragmentation of knowledge in Western education systems), knowledge inseparable from its social ethos and material base (and not depended on economic orientation of the state), determined by the whole community and not by state institutions or plans, horizontal and not-hierarchical approach inside the classroom and community, resonance with the environment and cultural heritage of the community. (Gregorcic 2009: 635)

Critical pedagogy evolved out of Freire’s (1972) theory about the relationship between liberation and education. ‘Conscientization’ was the term used by Freire to encapsulate the complex ontological, epistemological and ethical-political elements of education as a practice of freedom (Glass 2001: 19). Smith (2003) embraced Freire’s theory, arguing that educational outcomes for Indigenous peoples can be transformed through the process of ‘conscientization’. Smith (2003: 10) explains that, when Indigenous peoples are experiencing educational crises (as Pechenkina and Anderson (2011) reported was the case for Indigenous Australians) the following actions can assist:

Indigenous educators must be trained to become ‘change agents’ in order to transform the undesirable circumstances

Indigenous educators must develop a ‘radical pedagogy’ and become teaching agents for change. These changes need to be informed by their own Indigenous cultural preferences relevant to their own critical circumstance.

This concept of a 'radical pedagogy' aligns with Turnbull's (2014) observations of the importance of adopting and adapting appropriate teaching styles and learning environments when developing access programs for Indigenous students.

This research project is informed by an approach to Indigenous education that is theoretically aligned with the Freire's (1972) concepts of conscientisation, which have been further developed in a range of indigenous contexts, including Indigenous Australian (Purdie, Milgate & Bell 2011), Native American (Villegas, Neugebauer & Venegas 2008), First Nations (Battiste & Henderson 2000) and Māori (Smith 2003). Conscientisation is the process of developing a critical awareness of the social reality in which individuals exist through reflection and action. Action is seen as being fundamental to the process of changing reality (Freire Institute 2015).

Smith's (2003) extensive work focusing on conscientisation with universities and dual-sector institutions in New Zealand, the USA, Hawaii and Canada has resulted in demonstrated changes in outcomes across those institutions and communities. In the Australian context, Malin and Maidment (2003) extended the work into Indigenous education, examining theories of neo-marxism, cultural capital, resistance, post-colonialism and visible pedagogy.

Turnbull (2014: 9) drew on the work of Lilla Watson and Darlene Oxenham to describe Indigenous terms of reference for education: a 'set of protocols that ensure that Indigenous knowledge, experience and values are respected and taken into account during any Indigenous project or decision-making processes'. Turnbull (2014) noted that, in the context of developing teaching and learning programs for Indigenous students (and specifically access programs), it is important to adopt (and adapt) the appropriate teaching styles and learning environment. Furthermore, these should involve a consideration of the 'significant others' in the lives of Indigenous learners, including their family and social networks, as conflicts amongst these may have a substantial influence on educational outcomes.

Learning and teaching environments that are positive, self-affirming and reflective of Indigenous realities and aspirations are important in assisting Indigenous peoples to see relevance in the value of education. Moreover, these kinds of learning environments build on Indigenous perspectives; they recognise that there are Indigenous paradigms consisting of ontologies, epistemologies, methodologies and axiologies that operate as supporting platforms, thus offering strength and vitality for Indigenous people. In drawing on this rather than dismissing it, universities can offer Indigenous Australians an ability to increase choices and decision-making capacity. Incorporating the appropriate pedagogies, methods and processes within access programs would be a powerful alternative for these students, who are often additionally marginalised because they are in an access program and not another award program offered by the institution. Thus, in bringing together these themes, it is relevant to consider how access programs can support Indigenous students to navigate the contemporary tertiary education landscape, while continuing to value and build on their Indigenous qualities. This research seeks to explore these themes from the perspectives of both staff and students.

Smith (2003), in his keynote address to the Alaskan Federation of Natives convention, stated that there are a number of crucial features involved in creating an Indigenous space within universities for the advancement and development of Indigenous peoples:

- Capacity building by employing more Indigenous academic staff and, where necessary, growing them
- Capability building by uplifting the skill and leadership level of Indigenous academic staff
- Developing Indigenous staff into leadership positions across the academy
- Growing a critical mass of Indigenous intellectuals who have a consciousness about their Indigenous roots and responsibilities
- Developing curriculum options that are built around Indigenous interests first and foremost
- Growing both horizontal (participation across the institution and disciplines) and vertical (Indigenous programming for Indigenous students first and foremost) equity development within institutions
- Reclaiming equity definitions from the neo-liberal economic hegemony that tends to argue against compensatory forms of equity in favour of the 'level playing field' form of equity that simply entrenches the 'status quo'
- Putting equal emphasis and accountability on access, participation, retention and success of Indigenous students.

As Wilks and Wilson (2014) conclude through their literature review about Indigenous education, knowledge gaps still exist in the areas of Indigenous pedagogy and how it may be linked with the teaching of Indigenous studies, program evaluation, and information specific to particular student cohorts.

2.11.1 Both-ways learning

'Both-ways' approaches to education are gaining ground as a way of developing learning environments that are inclusive, welcoming and flexible. The Batchelor Institute (in Ober 2009: 34) states that 'both-ways is a philosophy of education that brings together Indigenous Australian traditions of knowledge and Western academic disciplinary positions and cultural contexts, and embraces values of respect, tolerance and diversity'. In an Indigenous Australian context, both-ways education is about:

... drawing on concepts and understandings from both Indigenous and Western knowledge systems. It's about everything that makes up an Indigenous person's identity, and then finding a bridge from this knowledge to link into new Western academic knowledge that are important to student's chosen field of profession. It is our way of telling our stories, it's about our way of making meaning in our world. Both-ways is about going from the known to the unknown, using current knowledge as a springboard to gain new conceptual academic understandings. Both-ways teaching/learning is being open-minded enough to see that there are alternative methods of reaching a goal, than following a strictly mainstream approach. (Ober 2009: 39)

A both-ways approach to access education would involve flexible teaching and learning practices that specifically focus on developing students' cultural awareness and recognise the different cultural contexts within which learning can occur. It might explicitly teach cultural traditions and knowledge systems to expose the institution's dominant paradigm and build students' confidence in their abilities to work with the system.

2.11.2 Exploring 'path+ways'

Cajete's (1994) discussion about pathways in relation to Indigenous education is also relevant for this research. He states that:

The concept of Pathway, revealed in numerous ways in Indigenous education, is associated with mountains, winds, and orientation. Learning involves a transformation that unfolds through time and space. Pathway, a structural metaphor, combines with the process of journeying to form an active context for learning about spirit. Pathway is an appropriate metaphor since, in every learning process, we metaphorically travel an internal, and many times external, landscape. In travelling a Pathway, we make stops, encounter and overcome obstacles, recognise and interpret signs, seek answers, and follow the tracks of those entities that have something to teach us. We create ourselves anew. *Path* denotes a structure; *Way* implies a process. (Cajete 1994: 55)

Indigenous Australian access and participation in training and higher education can be considered a key pathway to learning and development, and to redressing entrenched socio-economic disadvantage. Students travelling their pathway will need to make stops, encounter and overcome obstacles, recognise and interpret signs, seek answers and follow the tracks of others who have something to teach them. They will create themselves anew in the process and offer themselves new choices. On graduation, students will be able to contribute to their families and communities in ways they could not before they journeyed on their pathway.

Cajete's (1994) concept of 'pathway' is highly relevant to exploring Indigenous access education. The 'path' in this context is the well-thought-out structure on which the curriculum is developed, combined with the landscape of the university or learning institution. The 'way' refers to the process for students as they navigate their educational institution in their learning journey. As Cajete (1994) notes, this may involve some transformation of the inner Self.

For a successful access education experience – either in respect of higher education or VET – we contend that both these elements must knit together to form the student's own learning 'path+way'.

3 Research methods and questions

This project used an interdisciplinary approach to explore the socio-cultural and educational aspects of access education programs. The research involved (a) a literature review, (b) a desktop data scan, (c) a national roundtable discussion with stakeholders, (d) a comparative case study based on individual interviews, (e) data integration and analysis, and (f) research translation to develop a conceptual model.

Ethical clearance for the project was provided by the CQUniversity Human Research Ethics Committee (certificate H14/10-213). The research was informed by the Ethical Guidelines for Research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and the AIATSIS Guidelines, specifically for people whose languages may be an Aboriginal and /or Torres Strait Islander language.

3.1 Research questions

The research addressed two key questions:

1. Using insights from both theory and practice, what are the key components of best practice in preparing regional, rural and remote Indigenous students for entry to comprehensive educational pathways?
2. What are the determinants of success for access education in an Indigenous context? How should 'success' be interpreted, considering institutional and governmental goals, as well as the ability of Indigenous peoples to pursue their own learning goals?

These questions straddle the domains of pedagogy, curriculum, mode of delivery and ethos of implementation. Subsidiary research questions included:

1. What is the underpinning role of respecting, developing and/or extending cultural capital in the overall success of access education programs in lifting participation rates? How does this compare with current practice?
2. What statistics, data and information are currently available regarding the design and implementation of Indigenous access programs, and how can these be synthesised to inform an evidence-based approach to ongoing program development?
3. What innovative models of governance and/or ownership could be developed to allow Indigenous peoples to drive their own preparatory programs (as foreshadowed in Teasdale & Teasdale 1996; Behrendt et al. 2012)?
4. What are the policy and resource implications for regional and/or dual-sector institutions servicing regional and rural/remote Indigenous populations? For example, how can Australian universities be better supported to help Indigenous people attain educational qualifications? How does this interact with delivery on their Reconciliation Action Plans, formalised Indigenous Strategies and inclusiveness goals?

3.2 Research methods

Firstly, a literature review and desktop analysis were conducted to examine the available information about Indigenous access education programs. The outcomes of the literature review are summarised in the Background Section of this report, and were used to inform the qualitative data collection. The outcomes of the desktop analysis of existing Indigenous access programs are reported in Appendix A.

Secondly, the research involved qualitative approaches to qualitative data collection. The data collection involved two phases: (1) a National Roundtable on Indigenous Access Education and (2) individual interviews.

The National Roundtable on Indigenous Access Education was held at CQUniversity on 5 December 2014. It involved more than 100 participants from university, community and industry organisations who met to discuss four key issues relevant to Indigenous access education: (1) the meaning of success for Indigenous students, (2) respecting and growing cultural capital, (3) governance and ownership of Indigenous access programs and (4) the development of resources and policies for Indigenous access programs. The Roundtable was designed to inform the one-on-one interviews conducted for this study and contribute towards recruiting potential participants. The Roundtable

agenda is included in Appendix B, the discussion paper distributed to Roundtable participants is included in Appendix C, and a summary of the outcomes is included in Appendix D. The Roundtable provided an opportunity to build on existing relationships and introduce new voices into the conversation about Indigenous access education. Yarning about the development of an ‘ethos statement’ began at the Roundtable, and this work will continue to build towards the goal of producing a nationally-relevant instrument.

Individual interviews were conducted with three cohorts:

1. Staff who teach into access programs (to document the approaches used in Indigenous access courses at CQU, CDU and FUA (as three examples of regional, dual-sector institutions)
2. Students – including current students, students who have successfully completed an access program, and students who exited without completing (to understand the needs and experiences of Indigenous students, including the factors that contribute to their completion or non-completion)
3. Community and stakeholder representatives with experience in access programs or experience in employment and community support (to gain insights on the broader, indirect impacts of access courses in the community and in the workforce).

The research involved 25 interviews with staff and students and 4 interviews with community and stakeholder representatives, conducted during April and May 2015. The individual interviews were guided by question prompts². Through yarning³, participants discussed the ways that Indigenous learning journeys can respect and grow cultural identity while simultaneously developing study skills, and considered interpretations of ‘success’ from the perspectives of students, communities, institutions and government.

Table 2 Number of staff and student interview participants across institutions

Institution	Staff	Students
Charles Darwin University Darwin (Northern Territory)	6	5
Federation University Ballarat (Victoria)	2	1
CQ University Rockhampton (Queensland)	4	7
Total	12	13

Participants for the interviews and Roundtable were recruited using opportunistic and ‘snowball’⁴ sampling (see

² A copy of the interview guide is available on request to the research team.

³ Yarning is an informal, relaxed discussion that requires the building of a relationship as researcher and participant ‘journey together visiting places and topics of interest’ relevant to study or research; yarning provides a culturally safe conversational process for sharing stories and ideas (Bessarab & Ng’andu 2010: 38).

⁴ This process involves asking current participants to recommend others who may be interested in taking part.

Table 2 for an overview of interview participants). Local people who are known to the community were asked to assist with recruitment, and information about the research was broadcast on general and social media. This approach to recruitment enabled us to make use of both organised and informal community networks.

Data analysis involved an open-ended process of thematic coding and cross-referencing. The findings, as is usual for qualitative research, are context and situation specific (Collis & Hussey 2009). Care is needed if these results are extrapolated to situations beyond the local, regional university settings from which the data were sourced.

The desktop review (reported in Appendix A) revealed that detailed information about enrolment and graduation statistics for access education are not readily available at the national level:

- Mission-based compacts between the Commonwealth and individual universities are generally available, but these provide figures on undergraduate and postgraduate students, with access programs rarely (if ever) reported
- Reconciliation Action Plans are available from individual universities, but typically do not contain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolment statistics
- There is no national regulatory body for access education; with the exception of Academic Board approval at each institution, access programs are not accredited. This means that there is no TEQSA or ASQA reporting⁵, and there is no representative peak body that would ordinarily assist in collating this information⁶.

The only data that do appear to be available (on request) are those linked with Commonwealth funding models, and where applicable these are already contained within the Behrendt report. Hence, the desktop research component of this research has been somewhat constrained by the lack of information available about Indigenous access education.

4 Key findings from the individual interviews

This section provides a summary of key findings from the individual interviews. Participants' voices are retained through direct quotations wherever possible. To preserve participants' anonymity, interview data from all three universities have been merged for this summary.

4.1 Staff interviews

The staff interviews aimed to gain an insight into enrolment practices (e.g. eligibility criteria), ethos of offering and any barriers to student success. At the beginning of each interview, participants were asked to give brief details on their professional history in working with Indigenous students in access education. The questions then explored participants' experiences of teaching into access programs, their views of student success, any challenges they had experienced, their suggestions for improvement, their experience of 'best practice', and their views on students' educational and personal 'path' vs '+way'.

⁵ TEQSA: Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency; ASQA: Australian Skills Quality Authority.

⁶ For example, professional bodies such as those for psychology or engineering play a role in collating and reporting student data.

The 13 participants had varying backgrounds, including secondary school teaching, ITAS tutoring and lecturing. Their experience in teaching access education ranged from 18 months to 30 years.

Preparing students for further study

All staff participants agreed that access programs effectively prepare Indigenous students for further study. One participant, whose experience spanned many years, observed the changes witnessed over time:

'One thing has changed enormously in bridging programs and it's the student cohort that enters those bridging programs. Traditionally it was older people who had missed out on opportunities ... [we still have] that past cohort, [but] more recently ... we are also getting school students who have exited the school who are seeing it as an alternative pathway to university.'

Participants felt that 'bridging programs are imperative to close the gap', and '[access programs] prepare students better because [there are] different administration procedures and [students] feel a bit more like [they] belong to a program ... [it's] like being an undergrad'.

One participant shared:

'I think enabling courses are really fantastic for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students ... because past history within the education system has meant that Aboriginal students have never really been looked at as intelligent and have not had that positive reinforcement of being able to go and do further education within higher ed or TAFE ... and I know that we are trying to change that way of thinking for teachers in mainstream.'

One participant described an access program where students spend the first three weeks of the program as distance education students, before coming to campus for the first of two residential schools, each lasting one week. Students are able to access lecturers and engage in face-to-face communication where any issues they have encountered can be resolved.

'By the end of that week, they leave [residential school] ... still with a little bit of fear of the unknown, but feeling very solid and strong about being able to contact their lecturers, being [able] to talk to us about anything for their study, and they learn not to be fearful of asking questions because there is no shame here ... that's what we want them to do: [ask questions].'

One participant described an access program as:

'... very much built on an Indigenous curriculum and we help [students] understand how they can bring who they are from their identity as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people into the Western system and ... how to map that with what is mainstream and the information that can be there ... they start to understand that they can bring both of those cultures into their courses and I think that's really important. ... They feel like they do have a lot of knowledge because they know about themselves and that's very empowering.'

One participant noted 'the biggest problem is that we work on Murri time too much in our [access] program'.

Others comments included:

'... if the students are engaged, the support is fantastic, the resources are very good, and the pace of the program gives students an opportunity to grasp the key things that are covered and those key items are directly linked for success, [for] successful entry into an undergraduate program.'

'Honestly I think it's brilliant because it works and the students that work with us and complete are happy and confident and ready to move onto the next step.'

'[The access course] on language is a real beauty. It's just so good, it really takes the student from absolute minimum right through to exactly what's needed for first year university. The math course ... starts off at real basic primary and goes right through.'

'I do think that the current program prepares the students more effectively than any [other] ... bridging program that I have worked in before and there is ... a number of big differences ... rather than focus solely on academic skills, [or] teaching academic skills, we actually have a program now which has ... an underlying layer if you like of skills that actually help build students in terms of their lifelong learning. You know, things like resilience, being creative, having good strategic awareness, asking, being able to ask questions and make meaning out of what's been said in a paragraph. And so the whole program has that at the basis of it. ... We ... focus on ensuring that we have a "both ways" philosophy in it, so we don't talk just about ... and read about Western-type things, we actually get them to bring out what they know in terms of the "both ways".'

'... bridging programs ... are very effective in preparing students for further university studies. ... I think the question is whether they are able to complete those programs or not. ... My experience tells me that they are, [but] ... there is a high attrition rate. I don't think that's just applied to Indigenous students but in a tertiary enabling program in general. ... I think that is where we need to revisit the programs that we are currently delivering.'

'[The access program] is very important because it gives [students] prior experience to ... assignment writing. ... They are learning some very basic and some very, very necessary skills in terms of time management prior to being in a situation where they're really under a lot of stress when they first start tertiary studies. So if a large amount of that stress can be eliminated it then gives them much more confidence when they move into tertiary [education].'

Indigenous culture in course content

When asked if access programs specifically include aspects of Indigenous culture, participants talked about the content of the courses they teach. Some participants said their courses did not specifically contain Indigenous culture. One participant noted that *'we can use whatever examples we want to'* and another said *'we are Indigenous [the course content so] that it can be related to more from a*

student's perspective, they can relate more to their own culture and also to the people, [and] non-Indigenous people can get a better understanding as well'.

Another participant commented:

'I use a lot of black authors, so whether it be academic papers, writers, film makers, artists, other academic lecturers. We use role models; we use Elders, so we have all of that mapped into our Moodle courses and the curriculum. We use a lot of YouTube so that's videos that are all about Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders speaking and mapping out a lot of their history and aspects that we are actually dealing with, within the curriculum. I think it also gives a lot of students a whole lot of information about their own identity too, so that also brings a lot of strengths to themselves because they sort of get a grounding to really knowing who they are and how they can map their educational journey.'

One participant noted that the courses *'weren't really designed for Indigenous students; they were designed for across the board. I then designed my program to suit Indigenous students, so it was around their culture'*.

'It doesn't specifically include Indigenous culture ... however ... [the] program does have both ways focus of Gumna which comes from east Arnhem where ... the metaphor is of the salt water meeting the fresh water and mixing and creating new knowledge.'

'The answer to that will be yes, we have one ... unit ... in particular [where] we introduce students to the concept of place and we look at the relationship between culture, place and identity. We address Indigenous issues in that unit.'

Student success

Participants generally felt that student success *'depends on ... where students are in their life or their understanding of what will be required from the bridging program. Those who come in with a good understanding ... take on the hard work and dedication ... for some ... it's just not the right time or place for them at this stage of their lives and it just doesn't work and they're not successful'*.

One participant remarked:

'My view of success is a little bit [different] from the university. I know that one of the important aspects of our ... program is to ... get students into ... feeling empowered to gain a place into undergraduate courses, so that is a great success, but there are other successes. ... For me, [it is] about self-esteem, growing, being strong in your identity, understanding what the Western educational system is, gaining other sorts of employment or opportunities for employment. ... For me another success is it broadens students' ideas for career pathways, it helps students find their voice, it helps them be able to write, so there's a whole lot of levels of success mapped within that we probably as a university don't call an actual success.'

Student success was explained by other participants:

'Of course the ultimate aim of the students and the people teaching them is that the students complete successfully and then are able to articulate into a degree program and succeed in

tertiary studies and that's the aim that students usually come in with and that we certainly have for them as their teachers. But as a second [point] I'd like to think that even if a student doesn't succeed in the sense of passing every course and going onto university, that they leave ... feeling empowered in some way, that they know something that they didn't know before and that they have attained some kind of feeling of achievement, rather than of failure even if they don't complete for some reason.'

'I guess the main aim is for students to achieve enough to successfully pass the standard that's set through assessment ... it's very well scaffolded for success.'

'I am of the understanding that many bridging programs are not successful, that there are many students who apply and enrol ... some don't start but for those that start they often drop out for a variety of reasons.'

'We try and use ... Aboriginal and Islander role models, whether they're from within in a traditional story, or whether they're a metaphor like gunma, milpri, those sort of things.'

'Success ... wasn't without a lot of effort ... a lot of time communicating with lecturers.'

'Those who are able to complete the program ... most of them do very well once they start their university studies.'

Student outcomes

Participants focused first on the positive outcomes for students. *'All the data show that exiting enabling students do very, very well in their future studies'; 'those students who have really committed to excel, they are really high achievers, they go on to undergrad and do extremely well'; 'the biggest outcome is they go on to be successful in undergraduate study and they also gain confidence ... they gain motivation, they do gain person skills [and] life skills ... as well ... it is a really good outcome'.*

Students' increased academic skills were noted by one participant:

'I think the bridging programs are a wonderful idea particularly [for teaching] students how to do academic writing and understanding how to reference in different ways. This, I believe, is one of the hardest things and one of the most daunting things for students both Indigenous and non-Indigenous.'

Other comments included:

'[Students have the] opportunity to develop the ultimate story for themselves. [It gives them] choice, and confidence and also the understanding that they're as good as everybody else. I love my job.'

'The main positive outcome really is ... the success of the students and the confidence that they gain and the good word of mouth advertising that they provide for us. But I guess ... the most telling thing ... is that a lot of mature-age students with children ... wish that their sons and daughters after completing [Year 12] would do something like the [access] program so that they knew what to expect when they went to university. I don't really have anything negative to say because if the student knows what's expected and is able to work with that

they do succeed, the main [thing] is ... we can't really provide internal ... motivation for a student who is not yet ready.'

'I see education as a form of transformation ... even the tertiary enabling programs in general are evenly weighted primarily in terms of completion rate. ... Indigenous students who come to do our enabling program, their success ... can be evaluated in many ways, for ... some of them, this is a new experience ... and the fact that they have to go through a structured program like this is a new experience for them as well. But once they are able to understand the system they realise that actually what is being taught itself is not really that difficult. ... If there is a challenge it is primarily the fact that perhaps the lecturers don't see the system as something which is new to these students.'

Participants were asked to reflect on negative outcomes for students. While one participant could not *'think of any negative at the moment'*, others felt there was not enough research on the reason why students *'simply drop-out. ... I suspect it sometimes occurs because it's not the right learning environment that's been created for them to learn'*.

Other comments on negative outcomes included:

'I suppose the only negative outcome is [students] might get a little bit used to the extra support we offer in the bridging program.'

'The negative is ... that support isn't continuous through the years, so consistency.'

'One of the issues I've found ... over time is that students will race in and they'll rattle out an essay on paper and submit it ... getting the idea through to them [that] you write, and [then] you start thinking and that's when you start the editing process – 1, 2, 3 ... if that's all they've picked up during the time with me I've done my job.'

'... there is always a cohort ... who leave things to the last minute to submit ... I ask myself is it because they haven't accessed a computer, [are they] disorganised or overwhelmed ... right now? How much support is required for any of these students? ... I can't perform the ultimate hand holding. There has to be this transition to self-responsibilities, so I feel as if I've done as much as I can do without breaking that boundary for allowing self-responsibility to kick in.'

Challenges

Participants were asked about challenges they experience teaching into access programs. Their responses varied:

'I don't [experience challenges] but it's ... because I'm fairly passionate about giving people an opportunity to go to university if they haven't had that opportunity.'

'The biggest challenge for me is to make sure they're not working on Murri time, to make sure their assignments are coming in and to also keep the line of communication open. ... We have to continually keep up-to-date with our students which is very, very time consuming.'

'The different range of experience of the incoming students is a massive challenge ... the level that they're at, how they learn, how they pick up on things so, some are visual learners, some

oratory learners, some verbal learners so that's a challenge ... but I think we've come to a way of doing it that meets more of those needs.'

'The main challenges are ... really ... quite shocking when you first encounter them, [some of the] circumstances that some of the students have come from or perhaps are still dealing with. There are major obstacles to their success just in the way that they have to live. We've had students who've tried to study while living in their cars; we have students dealing with horrific home lives. ... This usually [relates] a lot to some of the young ones who haven't succeeded at school. It's really no wonder that they weren't able to succeed at school and I think a lot of the times when these young people don't succeed, it's not just the lack of motivation. The motivation isn't there because they're too busy worrying about their survival, rather than higher order achievement. That's the big challenge, [for] a lot of students; it's their emotional state that prevents them from doing well, not their intellectual ability.'

'When I was teaching in the bridging programs in the prisons, [there were challenges]. It didn't take into account people's cultural background.'

'Nearly every person who walks in [has] a very heavy history ... it's not a remote learning experience, it's actually very much learning about themselves ... as a learner, so it's a personal experience and that can be very confronting. We have a lot of strategies in place. We use a lot of artistic therapy modalities as well. We use the alley learning dimensions as an integral structure for understanding our learning and that gives us a discourse to use throughout the unit. So we do go on the rollercoaster with each student and that is about ... learning to build up those resilient behaviours and resilient thinking and ... creative problem solving throughout the time that they spend with us to be ready for what comes next.'

'... there are students who just find it all too overwhelming ... some of it's because they've got children at home, and some of it's because maybe their father passes away, and so they have to attend all the rites, yes, and so it's all that sort of thing that are challenges ... I can see that we're getting better at doing it each time and so we're proud of that.'

'... if we could deliver [the program] in more simple language, we'd still achieve the outcome, we'd still develop academic language but we don't need to stress them out at the beginning.'

'... I think there has not been so far a very good placement test for students before they come into this program. I haven't come across a system yet that [is] able to really place students in ... because what we [are] seeing is that in the classroom we have students of different abilities and levels and sometimes [that] can create big challenges in the classroom.'

Suggestions for improvement

Participants gave these suggestions for improvements to access programs:

'One thing that's very important in this university is the enabling programs sit outside the higher education division and, well, there is no easy answer to where it is the best place to sit. ... I think that there is a chance that we could be undervalued or overlooked. ... From the

student point of view [bridging program] graduates are very valuable to the university and they are highly valued so that's a dilemma.'

'I think it's just a cultural thing ... that's what the program is all about ... instil better study skills so that ... our students can cope better in undergrad. So I don't think it's something that [you] can simply eradicate, it's just a problem that continues to occur.'

'I guess we could have more time with those students, extra tutorials. I know several students have asked for extra tutorials [and] one-on-one assistance. I'm not sure if one-on-one assistance is necessary, or small groups might be better so a bit more time would help that.'

'I like the fact that we have two res [residential] schools a term; I think that's really important. [And] we're improving on the program and how we do things all the time.'

'... teaching the students how to reference and how to do academic writing around their own cultures would be really helpful because reading information that's not relevant to them makes it even harder.'

'... the best thing is to have pastoral care available.'

'The availability of people to talk to ... would probably be the one single thing that would help us. ... It's ... often just the case of listening carefully, and then thinking about what would best support the particular student, and though sessional teachers are wonderful, they give a lot of time that they are not paid for, but of course they're not obliged to do so and if for some reason you had a sessional teacher who cannot or is not willing to do that, that leaves the students that they teach high and dry at times. [And] that's the main thing ... they need as much, if not more support than your general undergraduate.'

'... prepare [students] even before they come ... to our program ... we are targeting mainly people ... who can [not] be classified as a traditional learners, who know the system a little bit, so we need to remember that these are not traditional learners and therefore we need to be able to see whether we can do something to reach them before even they get to our program.'

'... we look at [students'] strengths rather than their weaknesses ...'

'... it's [going] back to the real basics, and working through and getting [students] up to where they have to be.'

'... the way it can be made better is, as we use some of our methodologies, like the lifelong learning programs [and] like the format cycle where you arrange classes according to the preferred styles that students like to learn in, and we know now ... to give them hands on things.'

'We're always looking at ways to do things ... we're always constantly re-evaluating. ... It's got a bit of an action research element to what we're doing ... it's about learning from the experiences and even when situations don't go well in the class we can actually turn that

around ... as a group [and ask] what can we learn from that. ... To get the outcome that we need, [we need] to be strong learners.'

'... to remind all students in the first 2-3 weeks as things are settling that there are going to be many questions and many individual requests and if I accidentally miss you, it's not personal, it's just the flurry of activity.'

Best practice

Participants were asked about 'best practice' for Indigenous access programs and their suggestions for essential inclusions. Participants explained:

'When you're developing the teaching [and] learning strategies [there needs to be] a fundamental understanding of cultural differences ... unless it's done at that fundamental level there's always a chance that it's going to be seen outside the mainstream and we'll just go on doing what we've been doing forever.'

'Because our people are "yarners"⁷ I think a lot of the students especially our mature age students struggle with the technology of distance education and especially if you get students from communities. We need to be able to ... do more face-to-face teaching. ... Residential school does do that to a limited extent but actually trying to get the students to attend residential school is an achievement in itself.'

'Best practice would be ... to incorporate Indigenous culture [in coursework] and use Indigenous examples and cater to Indigenous ways of learning through story-telling. ... But I think ... that all Indigenous students aren't always the same. ... I think it's best practice for all learning, in particular Indigenous [learning] is just recognising that everyone is different, everyone has got a cultural background. I don't really believe in sameness.'

'We need to have face-to-face [learning] because we ... work really ... well with each other. We kind of have an opportunity to become a big family and that's really important for the way that we work. ... Our residential schools are structured to a point ... we have a cultural session which is a time where students ... can have a bit of a cultural thing happening.'

'... the mode of delivery for Indigenous students should be face-to-face. The reasons for this is it's a better way of learning and it's what students ... are used to. Not only that, I think that with Indigenous students often they don't have the computers or the technology to go with the deliveries.'

'[Our access program] isn't just for Indigenous students. ... We don't at this stage have anything specific; curriculum now tends to focus on preparing for study skills, rather than content. If content was included I think it would be a ... very good thing to include some aspects of Indigenous studies. ... If, for example, the Aboriginal Education Centre or some similar body came and said to us "we believe that there is a need for this and that" and if they

⁷ Yarning is an informal, relaxed discussion that requires the building of a relationship as teacher and student (or researcher and participant) 'journey together visiting places and topics of interest' relevant to study or research; yarning provides a culturally safe conversational process for sharing stories and ideas (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010: 38).

asked us to deliver it, or if they offered to come and deliver it themselves, that would be more than welcome.'

'I feel that computing is essential for any student ... if I've got Indigenous students logging in from a remote area there is no guarantee that their connectivity is going to be smooth ... when people are living out bush ... they perhaps are a little bit further disadvantaged.'

'... our student cohort are people that have been in the workforce or they've been home with the children, that sort of thing. ... I think respecting and valuing what people bring with them [has] to be included in the design of the course; [it] is critical. Relational learning is very important ... we've actually found that the face-to-face delivery works ... it's the face-to-face where people can actually separate out a little bit [from] their family or community, or other obligations and just focus for that day or that week on what it is they need to do and set up ... the study habit and learning that'll see them through.'

'... we do celebrate, that's something I haven't said, we celebrate when they ... get something. ... We get Indigenous lecturers from within the uni to come talk to them, whether it's about a content area, or ... what it's like being ... in a university so we're giving them the ... picture from that Aboriginal or Islander point of view, not just white fella view.'

'I would think that the mentoring process is ... absolutely necessary.'

'... we need to move from that traditional mode of delivery to a variety mode because ... people learn differently.'

Staff considered that elements needed for best practice were: recognise cultural differences, recognise that Indigenous people are 'yarners', Indigenise the curriculum, tell stories, consider the impact of social determinants (particularly their impact on students' learning opportunities), support students to come away from family responsibilities to learn, increase students' computer skills, develop students' study habits, provide mentors and, as most of the staff explained, provide face-to-face delivery of courses.

'Path' vs/+ 'Way'

Participants were asked to outline their views on the balance for Indigenous students in terms of their educational journey and their personal journey ('path' vs/+ 'way'). While some participants felt it was difficult to respond because *'it's something determined by the individual'* and *'everyone has a different journey'*, the following responses captured the analogy:

'[It's about] how people match together their personal journey with their educational journey. ... I just think they are so intertwined that if you try to divide those two that you are on a path to failure. I think ... we have to consider an individual's place where they are in life, what they've fought, where they're going and hoping to get out of the education and find the way, the educational way, that will suit them, keeping in mind that we do have the constraints of accreditation. ... So we have to marry together our acknowledgment that every person will bring a different experience and so they can't just be stuck on a pathway that is already established. ... If we use that analogy, if we step off the path and we fall ... we fall off the edge of the cliff. ... That's what we do in education ... we make people get on this little

narrow path, they fall off the cliff and that's the last we see of them, as they disappear down there. Whereas a 'way' suggests a more flexible approach.'

'I think that for Indigenous students their educational journey can be difficult because they [are] maybe first generation university students or TAFE students. Also their personal journeys with poverty and all those sorts of things can be more difficult than non-Indigenous students. Some of our non-Indigenous students have a similar pathway, but not as many as our Indigenous students.'

In one participant's opinion, closer liaison between the Aboriginal Education Office and the teaching staff would be beneficial to students' educational journeys:

'Unfortunately comparatively few of the Indigenous students that we've had through [the bridging program] have completed it. I'm not completely sure why that is, although I have given it some thought. It's actually quite difficult to know because they tend to be quite reticent in coming forth but I've always wondered ... whether in the past they've experienced poor treatment or discrimination or something that makes them less trustful. They're not usually forthcoming ... they would go to the Aboriginal Education Centre first and it's usually they who would make me aware that there is a particular issue in a student's life. There are exceptions ... it makes all the difference if they have really good support and encouragement from beyond.'

'Does it have to be "versus" the way? I think the path in any of us who are travelling on the journey through life, our cultural, and our personal one has to come with us, it should never be taken apart because our study, and our life, and our work is a part of our life not our whole. And so to have a whole person and to deliver also to our Indigenous students, they need to bring their life with them, study is a tool not the journey.'

'My view is on the balance for Indigenous students in terms of their educational journey and their personal journey. To be quite honest I don't [think] it [is] versus anything ... I think the educational journey is a personal learning journey.'

'I think many may think that there is a contradiction between their educational journey and their personal journey and I would argue that ... is not the case. ... When you look at educational journeys as a traditional style of education ... we have ... a contradiction there, but if you look at education from [an] holistic approach, and why I use the word holistic because I believe that is what is needed, so not just whether you can write that essay or not but [to] also allow [a] different way of thinking, allow a different way of people writing assignments.'

Final reflections

Participants were invited to give final reflections the end of the interview. Comments included:

'... enabling courses need to continue forever.'

'How are we making it possible for people to move from TAFE or the VET sector without [there] being a lot of hoops [to get through]? And those hoops can be administrative hoops. They can be just a nightmare for students trying to find how they articulate through to higher

education. ... We do have quite a percentage of people with VET qualifications ... they are just such a cohort to get into higher education and they're undervalued. We're wasting talent.'

'I think [a] little bit more needs to be done before [students] get into our program. ... We have certain expectations and what we don't ask ourselves is, "what do they also expect from us?" and whether there is a match from that, and for me that is really important.'

'I think [there is] scope for ... a broad curriculum-style of document for each of the courses [in the access program] so all the unis that are doing it are on the same page. ... [It might say] "Okay, it's going to be an Indigenous studies based literacy type program and here are some good ideas to run from". ... At the moment there's not a lot of guidance ... and I was pretty lost [in] the first year. ... I shouldn't say it but the lecturers at the time were very precious ... I was just a worker, not part of their elevated world.'

'... if they had Aboriginal learning centres within ... universities and TAFE colleges and get them to help to come up with a curriculum that pertains more to Indigenous students, rather than having information in there that has of no relevance to [the students] at the start of their educational journey.'

'I'd like them to feel more confident about [the access program] and about study and to feel truly welcome and part of the group and that they can trust us. They can trust the teachers [and] they can trust the other students to treat them well.'

'...ever since I started in [the access program], I felt that it was regretful that more Indigenous students did not complete. I'm well aware of their reticence to identify ... they [have] experienced so much discrimination that they don't trust us. ... I think it's a cause for shame. Surely people now should be proud of their heritage and not feel that they have to hide it? And certainly I have never heard or seen any student or teacher in the university, thank goodness, say anything derogatory about an Aboriginal student or Aboriginal or Indigenous people as a whole, but I get a feeling that they [the students] have experienced it elsewhere, and that is why they don't automatically trust us in the same way that another student might.'

'I would just like to see more models of this program or similar programs that are respectful of Indigenous knowledges and value people's experiences around Australia.'

Figure 2 Summarises the final reflection of teaching staff with regard to access programs.

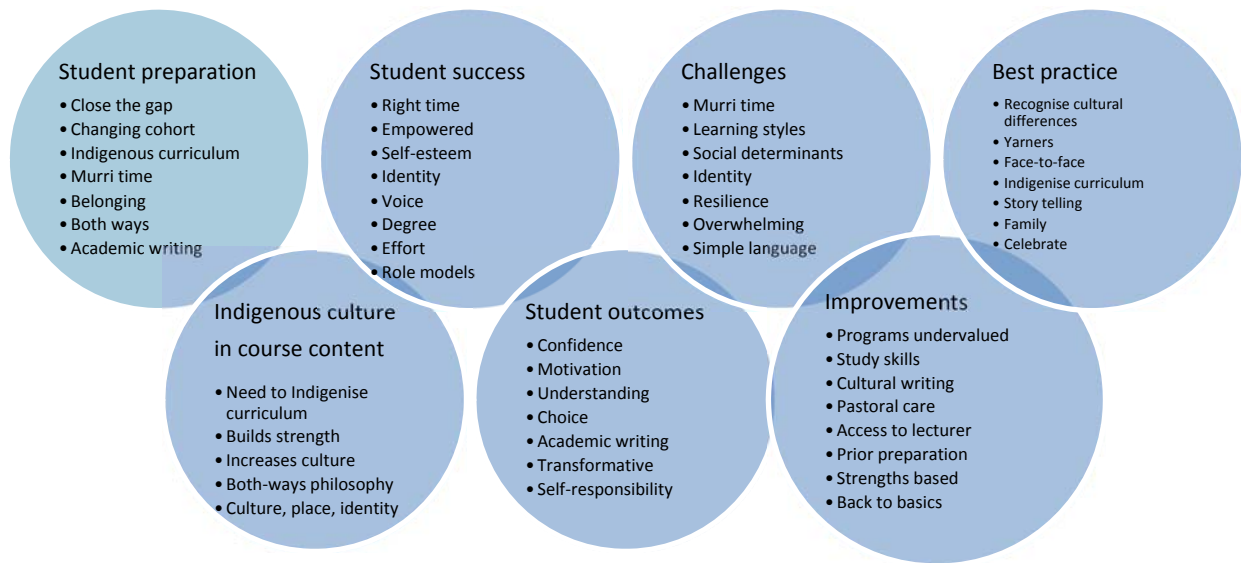
Figure 2 Summary of teaching staff's final reflections on access programs



Summary of staff interviews

Figure 3 **Error! Reference source not found.** presents a summary of the key themes emerging from staff interviews

Figure 3 Summary of key themes emerging from staff interviews



The interviews showed that staff considered the learning journey as an holistic pathway. In addition to delivering practical skills, staff felt that access programs revealed an *‘underlying layer’* of skills such as *‘resilience’* and *‘strategic awareness’*, and that inclusion of Indigenous culture in course content was imperative because it builds *‘strength’*, *‘culture’* and a sense of *‘place and identity’*. Staff argued that curriculum needs to be delivered in plain English, in a way that recognises Indigenous people as *‘yarners’* and *‘story tellers’*. In addition, they suggested that *‘both-ways’* methodologies should be considered in curriculum planning, that recognition of *‘cultural differences’* needs to be taken into account, and that *‘face-to-face’* delivery is the most effective teaching method.

4.2 Student interviews

A total of 13 students were interviewed for this research: three who had successfully completed an access program, one who had exited an access program without completing; and nine who were still journeying through their access program. It is important to note the single interview with a participant who had exited an access program without completing was due to a lack of response to participant recruitment.

The interviews focused on students’ perceptions of and experiences in access education, to provide a depth of understanding on how the courses affirm their identity and develop confidence for further education at the VET or higher education levels. Thus the interviews sought to understand how access programs can assist in developing the skills and attributes for further study, and how access programs can assist in supporting the growth of knowledgeable and confident Indigenous leaders for the future. Interview data from the three universities have been merged to maintain participant anonymity.

4.2.1 Students who have successfully completed an access program

The three participants who had successfully completed an access program have all gone on to further studies or work in higher education. These participants had also undertaken other studies (TAFE) before enrolling in their access program.

For one participant, the decision to enrol in an access program was *'easy ... I applied for a job and was told I wasn't intelligent enough for that job'*; it was this comment that motivated the student to gain a degree by first enrolling in an access course. Other reasons for enrolling included *'because I didn't finish High School'*, *'my Year 12 marks wouldn't allow me to enrol in a university course straight away'* and *'I wanted to gain a few more skills before [enrolling in] a degree'*.

Two students who successfully completed an access program were taught face-to-face, and the third was taught through a mix of on-campus and off-campus study.

'Path'

Participants were asked about their experience in the access program in terms of their 'path', that is, how they learned to navigate the formal setting of the university's procedures, administration and assessment requirements. Participants explained: *'I did learn that I was eligible for a lot of scholarship and assistance with regards to my studies and it has made doing my studies a lot easier'*; *'if you need help you have to organise with the lecturer to meet them, and ... communication skills, writing down ... assignment due dates ... being independent ... being organised'*; *'they taught us very well ... they didn't expect people to have prior experience and they knew what we needed'*.

'Way'

Participants were asked about their experience in the access program in terms of their 'way', that is, how they felt about learning, the value of what they learned and how they felt about themselves as learners. Participants' responses included: *'it makes you feel worthwhile and that you can learn, it doesn't isolate people'*; *'it enabled me to learn [how] I learn best and that was hugely beneficial ... it enabled me to become an avid learner and to succeed [in] my current studies'*; *'I've learnt [to] be more savvy, [more] organised, [to] build on communication skills ... [and to] make friends to help you out'*.

Further study

Participants were asked how the access program helped them to prepare for further study at university. One participant explained *'[I've learned] to go online a lot and even download the app online on my own, I can also keep up-to-date'*. Another shared *'it [has] taught me how to research, how to write, how to reference and how to study and how to ask for help'*, while the third participant has *'enrolled into a Bachelor of Environmental Science, so it has helped me [enormously]'*.

When asked if the access program helped their lifelong learning journey in other ways, participants said *'it taught me what type of learner I am and how to successfully retain information and how to interoperate while studying my assessment tasks'*, that *'it helped me with time management [and] organisation ... skills'* and *'[the program] finished but [teaching staff] help didn't'*.

Indigenous culture in access programs

Two participants said their access program included Indigenous culture. One participant explained that they *'had really benefited from [having Indigenous culture in the program] because I learnt a lot*

about other people's cultures who were in the class' and the other shared that 'knowing both sides of the world, like your ... non-Indigenous and Indigenous ... side [and] having to live and learn both sides would empower me to greater things'. The third participant said the program they were enrolled in did not include Indigenous culture as part of the curriculum.

When asked if the access program helped to expand or strengthen their identity, confidence and/or values as an Indigenous student and an Indigenous person, responses included: 'Absolutely, being surrounded by Indigenous peoples strengthens your Indigenous identity'; 'Yes, there was no discrimination. It helped I was treated like everybody else'; '[it] helped me a lot with being confident, doing things myself instead of waiting for someone to help you out'.

Expectations

Participants were asked if the access program was what they expected and if it helped them to get what they wanted. Replies included: 'Yes it absolutely did ... I wanted to enrol into university and promptly after completing, that's exactly what I did'; 'it was one hundred and ten percent more than I expected it to be ... it helped me to get to where I am and now I have finished my degree'; '[it] was just a little bridge over to my career road ... that little push and that little bit of help, helped [me]'.

Challenges

When asked if there were challenges encountered when participating in the access program and if the thought of withdrawing ever occurred, all participants shared that they had encountered difficulties (that included being away from home to study) and had thought about withdrawing. However, even with issues that were outside of learning, 'support was always there' and one participant was 'glad I did stay the course'.

'The support, non-judgemental support' helped one participant to overcome challenges, while '... helping others to learn the course content' helped another. The third participant's family played a large part in supporting them through the challenge of being away from home for periods of time: '[my Mother] said "if you want to reach these goals that you want, you have to make sacrifices even though you're leaving your family behind"'.

Best and worst aspects of the program

Comments about the best and worst aspects of the access program included: 'The best aspects were identifying what type of learner I was and applying it to my ... studies. ... The worst aspects ... they couldn't really cater for everyone's learning capabilities'; 'the extent of what I was able to learn and pass on to my kids was enormous'; 'the best [aspect] was reading a novel ... Freedom Rider [by] Nelson Mandela ... it changed my life'.

The most important thing learned included: 'that people believed in me ... they believed ... I could become a better person, a leader for my people ... that kept me coming'; 'I [now] know how I learn best ... [and] the program allowed me to strengthened my [time management] skills'; '[I learnt] that I can do it, and sadly, that other ... Indigenous people within the community look up to you when you are a university student or graduate in a different way than before going to university. It shouldn't make a difference, but it does'.

Advice to new students

When participants thought about what advice they would give to new students considering enrolling in an access program, participants felt *'[bridging programs] should be compulsory ... [it doesn't matter] how intelligent you are or how much you think you know, [it fills] that gap that's missed between school and university'; 'I would highly recommend [the bridging program]'; 'keep calm, if you have any troubles please ask for help ... and keep up to date, at least two weeks before your due date'*.

Advice to staff

When participants considered advice they would give to staff teaching access programs to Indigenous students, they said *'there wasn't much of a cultural understanding ... in the classroom, [that's where] I struggled ... there should be more cultural awareness'*, and *'cultural awareness programs are absolutely fantastic [and if] you haven't got any previous experience working with Indigenous students [you need to be aware] every single [student] is different ... [and] has different learning abilities'*, and to *'be aware of [students'] differences. A lot of Indigenous students are dyslexic and [don't] necessarily know it'*.

Courses that should be included

When asked if there should be any particular course included in the bridging programs, one participant suggested *'real Aboriginal history should be included ... it would be really nice to have an Elder from the area you are in giving some history of the area that you are studying [on]'*. Two participants suggested team activities: *'team-building exercises, I think that our class would have hugely benefited from it just because we had such different backgrounds and ages'* and *'organise a [sports] game [to] make them feel like ... you're one of our team, you can be a leader too and teach us what we're good at'*. One participant suggested *'inspirational speakers, they are amazing ... [it's] always a huge, huge positive to have within a class environment'*.

Advice to universities and governments about access programs

Given the opportunity to speak to universities or governments about supporting Indigenous access programs, one participant said *'[access programs] are essential, they should be compulsory ... you might find that instead of dropping out or failing a few times in their first year [of university studies, bridging program students can] take a different path'*. Other participants commented that *'governments and universities [should recognise successful bridging programs that] put up the success rates in students studying and completing degrees ... if that support was available to them throughout the duration of their degree you would have a higher success rate'* and *'I'd say have more opportunities for Indigenous people ... share the news around [that] if they didn't get enough score to enter a degree at university, they could have another opportunity to enter a degree [through a bridging program]'*.

Summary of completed students' comments

The following diagrams present a summary of the key themes that emerged from interviews with Indigenous students who have completed an access program.

The first diagram presents a summary of the descriptive phrases that completed students used in terms of transformations that occurred within their inner Self (Figure 4).

Figure 4 Summary of 'inner transformation' themes arising from interviews with completed students

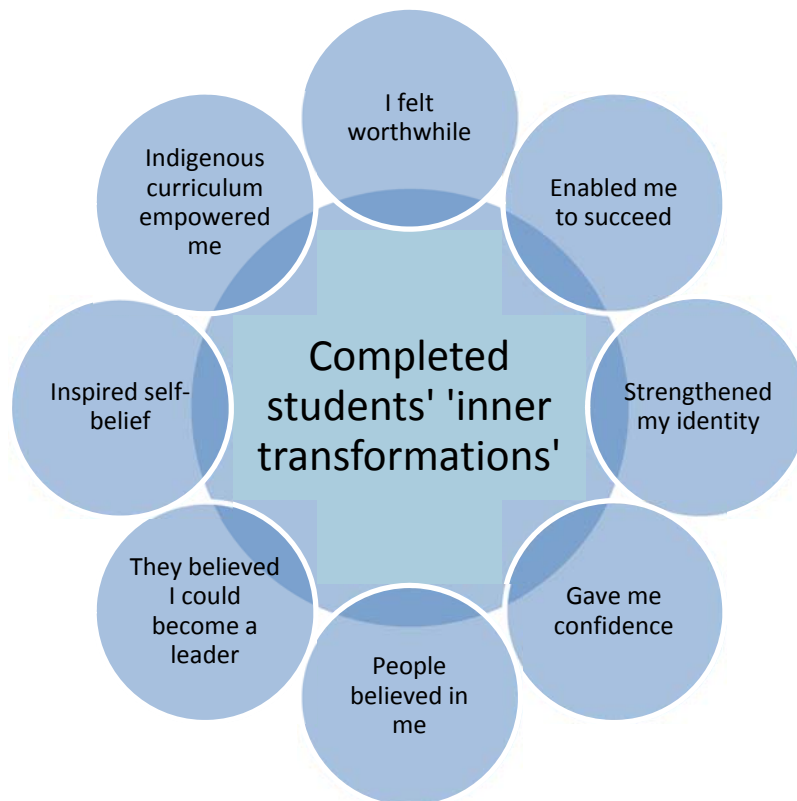
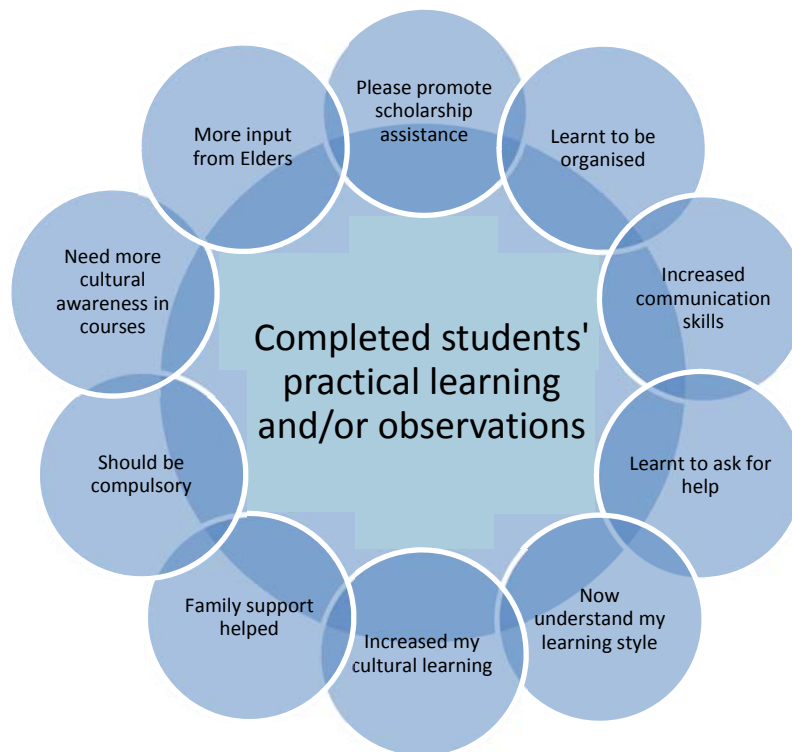


Figure 5 Summary of practical learning and/or observations arising from interviews with completed students



4.2.2 Student who exited the access program without completing

The participant who enrolled in an access program and exited without completing was encouraged to enrol by a family member. The program assisted the participant to *'scrub ... up on maths and English'*; however, the program did not help to expand or strengthen the participant's identity, confidence and/or values as an Indigenous student or as an Indigenous person. The participant left the program because it was *'just too hard for me'*.

The participant suggested that the situation could have been made better through *'more support'*. The advice this participant would give to new students considering enrolling in an access program would be to *'ask for help'*, and that staff teaching in access programs for Indigenous students should *'understand that not everyone is at the same level'*. A course that included *'more cultural stuff would be good'* and universities teaching bridging programs should *'make it easier for Aboriginal people; speak plain ... don't speak academically'*.

4.2.3 Students who are still journeying through the access program

Of the nine participants interviewed who are still journeying through their access program, six have undertaken other studies (primarily TAFE) before to enrolling in the access course. Before deciding to enrol, some participants considered their *'family responsibilities'*, others *'learnt ... the computer'*, and another *'made myself a timetable'*.

The decision to enrol in an access program was *'easy'* for more than half the participants. One participant described it as *'an easy decision but also difficult [because of family responsibilities]'*. For two participants it was a *'hard decision'* because *'I felt like I couldn't do anything'* and *'because I'm on disabilities [payments]'*. Another participant enrolled in an access program *'to become a role model to my children'*. Six of the students studied via distance education, while three received face-to-face learning.

'Path'

Participants were asked about their experience in the access program in terms of their 'path', that is, how they learned to navigate through the formal setting of the university's procedures, administration and assessment requirements. More than half of the participants explained that they had only just begun their studies and were *'still learning ... the procedures'*. Others *'spoke to a lot of people ... and learnt from Moodle'* or had *'help and support'* to navigate through the formal settings of the university. This support helped one student to *'feel like I'm not alone'*, while another discovered that *'you've got to do everything to the best of your ability to be able to ... get a good mark and really commit to university life'*.

'Way'

Participants were asked about their experience in the access program in terms of their 'way', that is, how they felt about learning, the value of what they learned and how they felt about themselves as learners. Almost half of the participants said they were still finding their way in terms of how they felt about learning. Participants' responses included:

'I've always felt a little intimidated by the thought of ... university. The bridging program has eased a lot of that anxiety and stress, so I'm actually ... enjoying my learning experiences now ... the value of what I've been learning has been monumental ... and ... has made me feel ten times better about myself as a learner.'

'[I've] been shown that I can do ... really well.'

'[I've] learnt about myself as a learner ... I think I've really grown ... [and] my resilience has grown.'

'As a learner I'm really proud of myself.'

Further study

Participants were asked how the access program helped them to prepare for further study at university. One participant explained *'it's making me learn routine ... and time functioning'*, *'it's preparing me for further study'*, *'just learning a lot'* and *'helping me to understand the time management aspects of study ... and understanding that I need to speak and communicate better'*. Other participants felt the program was preparing them for further study through *'understanding the processes of assessments ... essays and reports'*.

When asked if the access program helped their lifelong learning journey in other ways, some participants shared that they had overcome fears: *'I've had to do a ... bit of public speaking ... through that I've ... learnt not to be afraid and ... I know that's going to help me in the future'*. Others talked about gaining a greater understanding of their history: *'it has given me a greater understanding of where my Nanna and the older generation have come from and to really connect with them'*. Many said the access program was extending their lifelong learning journey by equipping them with *'everyday life'* and *'study'* skills.

Indigenous culture in access programs

All but one participant said their access program included Indigenous culture. One participant highlighted the importance of including Indigenous culture in the courses: *'half the things I learnt about my homeland I didn't know myself, I've learnt a lot'*, *'we were taught some of the [welcome*

and acknowledgement] protocols which are really, really good to know and understand' and 'we've had to learn about [two ways learning] and it's really helped because ... there are a lot of Indigenous people who ... want to do the Western way of learning, so it's really helped'.

When asked if the access program helped to expand or strengthen their identity, confidence and/or values as an Indigenous student and an Indigenous person, all participants said 'yes'. Additional comments included:

'It has definitely helped to expand and strengthen my identity, my confidence and my values as an Indigenous student and a person ... each assignment that I do, each piece of knowledge that I've learnt ... builds that confidence, my identity ... and my history as that Indigenous person.'

'Normally I'm shy, but now I'm looking people in the face and listen[ing].'

Expectations

Participants were asked if the access program was what they expected and if it helped them to get what they wanted. Replies included: *'It's really helping me be where I want to be'; 'It's not what I thought it would be, I didn't think it would be as exciting a journey as it is'; 'I was not expecting the amount of help that is available'; 'it wasn't what I thought it was because it's a very friendly, supportive environment'.*

Challenges

When asked if there were challenges with participating in the access program and if the thought of withdrawing ever occurred, some participants said they had not experienced any challenges or thought about withdrawing, while others had encountered difficulties. Difficulties included: *'I miss my family and friends [when away studying]; 'navigating the computer'; 'the whole time-management thing'; 'there are challenges ... every time I look at an assignment ... [but] I'm getting more and more confident as the weeks progress'.*

Even though students were challenged, only one had thought about withdrawing – because of caring responsibilities. This student chose to persevere because *'this will help my niece and nephews to know that I have gone through university, survived, enjoyed it immensely and I've come out and now I'm in the career that I wanted'.*

The situation could have been made better *'if I'd had a computer refresher course to start with' and 'being able to access lecturers ... has helped me meet challenges'.*

Best and worst aspects of the program

Comments about the best and worst aspects of the access program included: *'[being] involved in the campus ... lifestyle ... I got to see my lecturers and I got to be with other students ... being able to really focus in on the work without the distraction of my family'; 'gaining skills to ... continue tertiary studies'; 'meeting new people'; 'just learning to be busy again is good'; 'the learning'; 'there's no bad [thing]'.*

The most important thing learned included: *'time management'; 'I didn't think I was really smart until I came here'; 'being myself is OK'; 'I'm a pretty good public speaker'.* Other comments included:

'[In] the Indigenous community ... we are all trying to better ourselves ... if we just keep looking and studying and just keep educating ourselves we will start to better not just ourselves but our communities and our ... country.'

'Just how important education is and why we need more help with education.'

'I'm learning to strengthen my identity and value as an Indigenous student.'

'It's good to be an Indigenous community member because I haven't really been part of the community before.'

Advice to new students

When participants thought about what advice they would give to new students considering enrolling in an access program, participants' responses included: *'come here with an open mind'; 'you get great friends'; 'don't look back, just do it'; 'it's worth doing ... think of your goal ahead everyday so you can reach it'; 'I'd say "do it", you get so much confidence ... it definitely prepares you for future studies'; 'it's a good course'; 'it'll be the best thing you'll ever do'; 'go for it'; '[it will] not only help [you] it [will] help [your] families as well, I'd say "go for it, don't worry about what anyone else is thinking"'*.

Advice to staff

When participants considered what advice they would give to staff teaching access programs to Indigenous students, comments included *'I don't think there would be any advice I'd give [staff], I feel they're doing a great job'; 'just keep doing what you are doing because it's good'; 'keep the same level'*. Other suggestions included *'sometimes it goes just a little bit slow for us'; 'be more lively because we're young ... and that makes the learning interesting'; 'advertise more to encourage more students'*.

Courses that should be included

When asked if there should be any particular course included in access programs, most participants said they *'couldn't think of any'*. Some participants suggested: *'more outdoor [courses] like getting out into the community'; 'culture and learning is very important to the Indigenous studies'; '[a] computer refresher ... and creative writing so that you can pick up your English skills'*.

Advice to universities and governments about access programs

Given the opportunity to speak to universities or governments about supporting Indigenous access programs, participants said:

'[The government] need to ... encourage more Indigenous students to come to university.'

'These courses are important ... [they are] giving people confidence.'

'Supporting Indigenous bridging programs ... will help close the gap.'

'Supporting [bridging programs] allows people in rural and remote communities to access this support to get them into university, we need more Indigenous students ... coming out of universities with degrees.'

'The more we're going to get into these universities, the more we're going to get educated, which means the more the ... Indigenous communities themselves are going to grow and close that gap.'

'Keep up the good work, I reckon they're doing an excellent job.'

'Don't ever stop, keep going with [the bridging programs].'

Final reflections

Final reflections at the end of the interview were added by some participants and included: *'this has been a very exciting journey for me and I'm glad I didn't ever, ever think about giving up'*, and *'I feel more confident about being able to go ahead and possibly ... do further study'*.

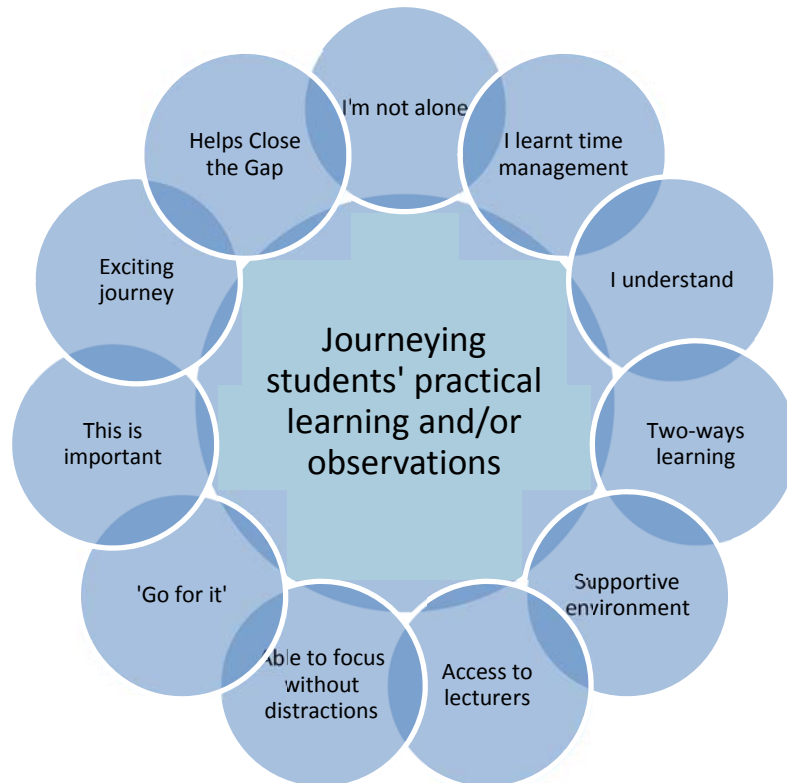
The following diagrams presents a summary of the key themes related to students still journeying through access programs (Figure 6 and

Figure 7).

Figure 6 Summary of 'inner transformations' arising from interviews with students still journeying through access education programs



Figure 7 Summary of practical learning and/or observations arising from interviews with students still journeying through access education programs



4.2.4 Summary of student interviews

The following diagram presents a summary of the key themes that emerged from the student interviews (Figure 8).

Figure 8 Summary of key themes emerging from student interviews

Completed students	Exited student	Continuing students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholarship • Communication • Feel worthwhile • Ask for help • Learning style • Cultural learning • Confidence • Support • Family • Belief • Leader • More input from Elders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture omitted • Too hard • More support • Ask for help • Plain English 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not alone • Grown • Resilient • Proud • Time management • Not afraid • Understanding • Two-ways learning • Supportive • Confident • Identity • Important • 'Go for it'

Students felt that when their learning journey was supported by cultural learning, as it increased their cultural identity. While the support available through the access program was imperative to success, family support and the belief of others in students' abilities was also vital in encouraging leadership qualities and expectations of success. Knowledge of scholarships and other assistance prior to beginning study would be beneficial, as would team-building activities, more cultural awareness within the access program, and more input from Elders.

While the *early exiting student* had been encouraged by family to study and practical skills for learning were included in the program, more support was required. The program did not include cultural learning. While it is difficult to draw a conclusion from the input of one participant, the voice of this individual must be respected, and it seems that the lack of cultural understanding within the access program and the lack of required **support** impacted negatively on this individual's learning journey. This is particularly evident when this student's experience is compared with the journeys of completed student, where *available support built confidence, engendered feelings of success and increased students' perceptions of self-worth.*

While many *journeying students* were still navigating their way through the tertiary education system, they recognised they were not alone on the journey. The practical skills imparted thus far had increased their understanding, helped develop time-management skills and allowed focus on studies. With this, came the self-realisation of personal growth. *The supportive environment built resilience, confidence, allayed fears and encouraged personal pride and self-acceptance.* Moreover, access programs that included Indigenous culture and both-ways learning increased students' Indigenous identity. In contrast, a lack of cultural understanding within access programs appears to constrain learning.

Across the *completed and continuing students'* learning journeys, the themes of belonging, strength, resilience, confidence and self-esteem were important. These themes combined to produce feelings of success, allay fears, increase self-acceptance and increase feelings of self-worth. They were attributed to the supportive environment of access programs. Similar themes were identified by

teaching staff as positive student outcomes. In particular, Indigenous culture in course content was viewed as building strength and culture for students as well as increasing a sense of place and identity.

4.3 Stakeholder interviews

The interviews with stakeholders were designed to gain insights into the broader, indirect impacts of access courses in the community and the workforce. By including industry representatives in the study, the researchers sought to further understand the systemic barriers to access and participation in education (e.g. Brown & North 2010) and ultimately to explore ways to coordinate access education to address these barriers.

The four participants in the stakeholder interviews were all Aboriginal Australian community and industry representatives. Their industry and community experience included the development of or lecturing into access programs, and management positions within training and employment and/or community support organisations. Participants' past involvement with access programs included participating in programs before employment, and assisting staff, community and family members to enrol in access programs.

At the beginning of each interview, participants were asked about their understanding of the role of access education and whether or not they had been involved in access programs. Participants then discussed their involvement with access programs, their observations about the outcomes of access programs, and their suggestions for future development.

All participants understood the role of access programs to prepare *'either early school leavers or mature-aged people who are looking to go to university'*. This was expanded by one participant who said that, *'even though employment might be a result [of completing an enabling program], that's not the role of the program'*.

Outcomes of access programs for students

Outcomes for Indigenous people who have undertaken access programs *'are varied'*. From an employment perspective, participants said that *'if [job applicants] have been through a bridging program, it's not raised as part of their qualifications'*.

One participant involved in developing access programs said that a new approach involves *'more face-to-face [on-campus teaching] with Indigenous students and they seem to be completing it, and it seems like a bit more success rate in the last two years'*. Another participant involved in developing access programs said that *'some people gain a huge confidence boost in terms of feeling like they can achieve something'*. This participant went on to explain that, for those who have completed *'an Indigenous-specific bridging program versus a mainstream one, it's around affirmation of skills, affirmation of Aboriginality and maybe they even learn more about their culture than they have before they came in'*.

The same participant noted that *'some who are in mainstream bridging sometimes get frustrated ... it could be their first contact back with education in a long time ... if they felt when they were at school that they were marginalised and a victim of racism then when they're in bridging they may get those feelings back'*. The participant went on to say:

'Outcomes are different in terms of whether people go on to further study, whether... [they] take a break ... [or whether they] get a job for a while. ... I never think it's a failure because people come out of a bridging program different to when they went in ... they grow more, they develop more, they experience more and so that learning is all part of making them who they've got to be in the end.'

From an employer's perspective, having staff enrolled in an access program means that *'there is a requirement for more support and [pause] not only with dealing with the course itself but their externals of their own life that are happening at that point in time. They need support around that as well so they can continue the process'*.

Positive outcomes

Participants described two types of positive outcomes: study skills (*'learning how to write academically'*), and individual achievement: *'success for the individual in terms of [enrolling] and setting some goals and moving through that journey to achieving their next goal and getting ready to embark on the next journey'*.

One participant suggested that the positive outcomes could be extended to the wider community if access programs had *'a component'* where students, prior to finishing, engaged with Indigenous school children.

'A lot of our kids have either fallen behind in schooling due to whatever family reason, [or because] of the school system itself, but if they have the opportunity to be engaged in that process whether it be in Year 9 and 10 ... there would be lots more kids that would progress through into the university role ... take one step further and have the conversation back with families ... so those parents are aware that there's a transition [to university] for those kids ... and that they're there to support them when the kids return back to the community.'

Transformative change

Three participants knew of *'numerous'* examples of Indigenous students who have been able to make a transformative change at the broader/community level due to their participation in an access program. One participant commented that more *'promotion of bridging programs [through] letting the community at large know of people who have been successful after a bridging program'* was important.

One participant suggested that transformative change is seen *'not so much [in] the community broadly or industry, but it's actually the community of the future because [enabling program students] are influencing their little children about the benefits of education and role modelling that and talking in a different way about education than they may have done'*.

Difficulties or negative outcomes

The difficulties or negative outcomes identified by participants relate mostly to the support offered in access programs. For example, one participant described students *'not completing the program'* because they could not get tutors for maths and English: *'it's Maths and English people need for higher education'*. Another participant felt a major issue was the *'support level'*, which was *'adequate'* when students were in university, however, was inadequate for *'external'* factors that pressure students; *'if [you] can link both of them then you'd have a higher success rate'*.

One participant observed that:

'Large numbers of people don't go through, I'm talking about individuals who may have a lot of complex issues and problems ... [who] make the choice to leave because at the time it's not the best option for them ... and that creates a feeling in the community that no one passes and that people just drop out and so that quickly spreads that negativity.'

The participant continued: *'[some] students get really frustrated because ... they see the bridging program is part of a bigger system of institutionalisation, so they see that versus what the education can afford them ... they see the negativity of the institution versus the positive thing'.*

Future skills required for industry

Participants were asked, as employers, work colleagues and community members, what types of skills they would like to see developed during an access program. One participant commented that *'the community is changing and changing rapidly and Aboriginality is changing, it is a fluid, dynamic thing'*. Within this changing landscape, the participant explained they wanted to:

'[See Indigenous people] become critical thinkers and be very conscious and aware of the content they're learning [and] being able to analyse and critique ... critical in the sense of the analysis of deep thinking around things and being conscious of what they're learning and conscious of where we as Indigenous people are within the world and maybe thinking about where they as an individual Indigenous person need to be and where they want to see their community be, because in a sense ... the next generation need to carry on, so part of it is about how do we grow ... the next generation of Aboriginal people.'

Two participants would like to see more *'work experience during the bridging program'* with one participant explaining that, when graduates begin work, *'they expect that this is the way it is, when it is completely not'*. The other participant shared that *'a lot of the people in communities, they're long-term unemployed so if they do work it's only part time [so] it's about getting their heads around that, that it's a full-time environment whether that's in education or employment'*.

Another participant felt that access programs should have *'more Indigenous oriented units ... where they [focus on] individuals and how they study'*.

Industry links to program development

While one participant was not aware of any examples where community or industry work directly with a university to help develop or deliver access education to the Indigenous community, another participant noted that members from community were consulted in their region during program development. One participant's organisation had liaised with a university *'to engage in a course and to get qualifications for my staff and employees ... [so staff] can move onto higher positions or have that skill base where they are actually getting real outcomes in the workforce'*.

One participant discussed the positive attributes of online learning: *'we have the capacity to bring Indigenous communities and industry from New Zealand and Canada and elsewhere [into the] digital interface ... there's greater capacity for diversity of Indigenous voices through the digital interface ... [such as a] New Zealand fisheries company and how they are very successful and entrepreneurial*

around engaging in industry like fishing and fisheries and trawling in a good sustainable way that fits into their cultural way ... that we could utilise in the same way for Saltwater people⁸.

Indigenous-owned educational institutions

When asked for a view about Indigenous-owned educational institutions that could help deliver access programs, one participant thought *'it depends on how those institutions are governed ... as long as they've got Indigenous staff and they have engagement with the Indigenous community and they have flexibility in relation to being able to deliver their programs and not be so structured as the current system ... you'll get the outcomes you require'*.

Another participant said if access programs were *'run by an Indigenous-owned organisation in partnership with the university ... that's a good way to promote bridging programs, and then ... Indigenous people would trust the system a little bit more'*.

One participant explained:

'There is enough curriculum developed to have a virtual Indigenous university that would fit and find a place in Australia ... there's capacity for community organisations and Indigenous organisations to roll out and deliver training ... whether it's in education, whether it's specific to their nation, so you could have an organisation that is a tribal or a nation organisation that's specifically focused on training their people under a form of self-determination or royalty payments of funding that they get around training up their own mob. ... We should be working in partnership with each other. ... I think there's some kind of training and education that universities shouldn't do, so I wouldn't like to see necessarily the university run some training that was only about deep, Aboriginal knowledge that's owned by some group. I think that group should own that and we should then work in partnership with that, so I'm talking about specific cultural knowledge. That then ensures the ... Intellectual Property and cultural integrity of that particular cultural knowledge to that group. And then we support them in terms of economic development.'

Easier entry to access programs

One participant felt that increased support and resources would help to make it easier for Indigenous people to enter into access programs:

'The opportunity to have a scholarship where they can be based at the university ... where there is no cost to the individual, with accommodation and food and flexibility. ... Because we have such a huge population of young people with young families ... a lot of kids that I'm aware of have had true aspirations, but then during their life they've fallen pregnant at a young age and ... feel that they've lost that opportunity, where I believe there is still that opportunity, it's just being able to have resources available to support them.'

⁸ Australian Indigenous Saltwater peoples have deep spiritual connections to the sea and its resources (McNiven 2010).

The participant also suggested that a childcare facility would help people with young families to attend access programs.

Another participant continued the digital theme by suggesting that an online program ‘for people from all over Australia to access’ would be helpful.

One suggestion included ‘promotion of bridging programs’, ‘stop, start pathways need to be looked at’, ‘fast tracking’ is important for students who have skills but because ‘their confidence is so low about their own skills ... [they] have all the attributes they need, they just need the confidence part [that can be provided through] motivational study skills, they don’t need all the rest’.

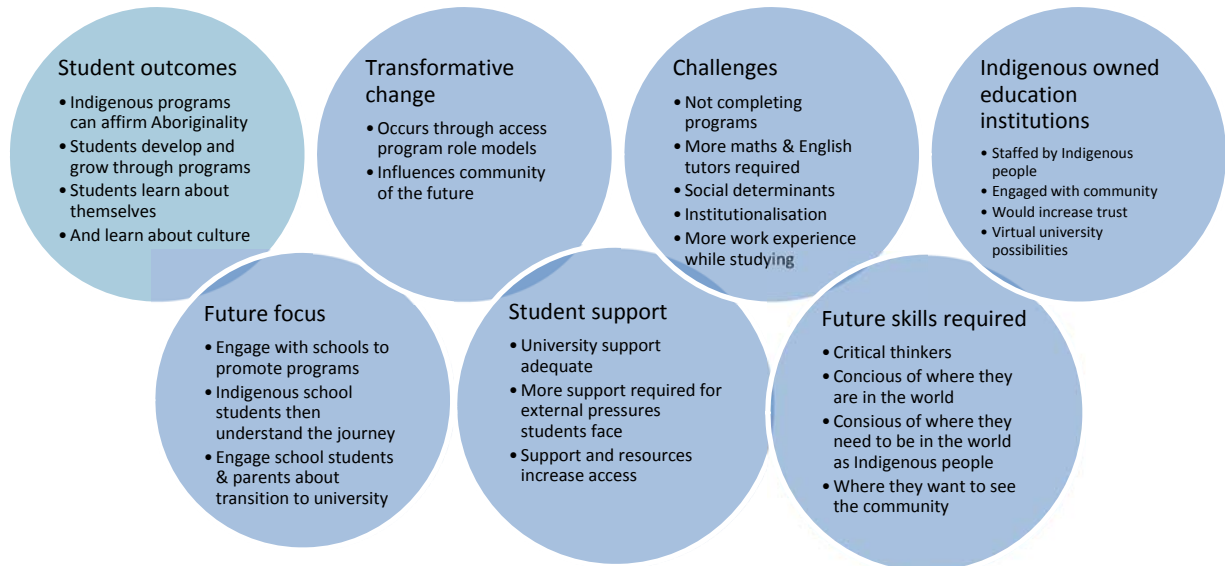
Final reflections

Final reflections were added by two participants:

‘There is a need for early intervention programs throughout the Indigenous community, and I believe there’s a definite need for targeted education officers and employment officers who engage with kids, not only in high school, but also in primary schools so that ... no kid that fails school. ... If there are Indigenous children who are at school that fail to complete an assignment and fail to complete a test that [they have the] opportunity to sit with an Indigenous officer to actually complete that and hand [it] in so that they finish [Year 12] schooling.’

‘Bridging programs are a fantastic way to re-engage people in education and also with themselves, [to] get in touch with ... their skills, to gain some confidence in themselves, [and] thinking about reaffirming themselves. ... [Many people] haven’t done that in a long time, they’ve been focused on doing things for family or community or children. ... Some young women [who start bridging programs have been] so focused on their children and their partners and their parents and grandparents and pleasing everybody and all those sort of things in terms of living and trying to get money, trying to feed the family, trying to feed themselves, have a safe home, that actually the essence of who they are gets really marginalised and minimised and so the bridging program in a sense gets them to think about who they are, what is their culture, what is culture, who are they, where do they fit, where do they fit in the world and then what they want in the world. [It] starts to change a bit of focus and give something to them as individuals and ... more broadly ... it’s like a pebble. When you put the pebble in the pond and then it just ripples. And it’s just so beautiful to watch that happen to students and to see how they grow and develop through bridging and how they then start to take those next steps for the next couple of ripples out and all the people and the influence they have in that ripple.’

Figure 9 Summary of key themes emerging from stakeholder interviews



5 Discussion

5.1 Access programs: multiple ‘paths + ways’ of success

The qualitative data presented in this study demonstrate that success in access programs can be viewed as a multi-layered construct. For Indigenous students, success in access programs is variously seen as increased ‘*cultural identity*’ and the development of ‘*voice*’, self-realisation, self-acceptance and ‘*pride*’. These comments reflect transformations of inner Self that are compatible with Cajete’s (1994) seminal work about ‘*pathways*’ in relation to Indigenous education. Curriculum and the learning space (path), as well as the student’s navigation of their educational institution (way), may initiate some transformation of the inner Self (as described by Cajete 1994). Both are integral to students’ learning journeys and educational outcomes.

This research identifies that access programs are considered an ‘*important*’ and ‘*exciting journey*’; the program is the vehicle that brought about the transformation of student’s inner Self through the building of ‘*resilience*’, ‘*strength*’, ‘*confidence*’, ‘*self-esteem*’, ‘*self-worth*’, ‘*cultural understanding*’ and ‘*identity*’. Across the completed and continuing students’ learning journeys, the themes of belonging, strength, resilience, confidence and self-esteem produced feelings of success, allayed fears, increased self-acceptance and built feelings of self-worth. These positive experiences were credited to the supportive environment of enabling programs, which, in turn, underlines the critical importance of pastoral care and support by institutions and staff who deliver programs for Indigenous students.

Further, access programs with supportive environments were linked with an increase in ‘*successful*’ outcomes. Success in this instance, as noted by Anderson et al. (1998: xvi), relates to ‘*the aspirations*

of Indigenous peoples as their own aspirations'. Extending this view, success also relates to the inclusion of culturally relevant learning journeys, as expressed by participants in the research project.

5.1.1 Barriers to the 'paths + ways' of success

Many participants who teach in access programs explained the programs as being '*scaffolded for success*', and suggested that students articulating into higher education programs is viewed as success. However, participants also pointed out that, for some students who drop out of programs, '*it's just not the right time or place for them at this stage of their lives and it just doesn't work ... they're not successful*'. Staff explained that for some students, study is overwhelming because of family and community commitments.

Anderson, Bunda and Walter (2008) argue that formidable barriers confront Indigenous students, including high levels of socio-economic disadvantage, rurality and limited exposure to the individual, family and community benefits of higher education. Numerous other barriers exist including:

... [a] lack of physical access to educational institutions; individual and cultural isolation and alienation; dissatisfaction with courses of study and educational delivery modes; inflexibility of higher education systems; unfamiliarity with and lack of confidence in academic requirements and skills; lack of access to educational resources; lack of family support; high rates of household crowding and family and personal disruptions; ... the personal, family and financial burdens of spatial relocation; and the pull of community and family commitments. (Anderson, Bunda & Walter 2008: 7)

Related to these barriers are other factors that influence participation in higher education, such as paid employment, competing family priorities and housing quality (Hunter & Schwab 2003; Levin 2003). However, having someone in the household with positive educational experiences has a positive influence on the household (Hunter & Schwab 2003).

5.1.2 Overcoming barriers and increasing access program success

Institutions offering access programs must recognise the complexity of barriers facing students, and develop teaching, learning and pastoral care models that understand and respond to this environment in ways that enable success. Kinnane et al. (2014: 9) suggest that success exists on a spectrum defined by 'individual (personal) and collective (community) terms, as well as a range of measures utilised by universities and government departments'. Interestingly, while a few of the teaching staff involved in this research touched on the deliverables expected by universities and government bodies (for example, completion rates, attrition and costs of delivering access education), these measures were not mentioned as an important outcome by most participants; instead, success was viewed from a student perspective, in terms of inner transformations of individuals such as increased '*confidence*', '*self-worth*' and '*strength*'.

According to Kinnane et al. (2014), the notion of success of access programs often differs from that of standardised education reporting (such as numbers of enrolments and completions). Kinnane et al. (2014: 45) expanded the concept of success to include failure, which can include students 'sticking with it' even when they fail coursework.

The participants involved in this research also viewed success through a different lens:

'[Success is] about self-esteem, growing, being strong in your identity, understanding what the Western educational system is, gaining other sorts of employment or opportunities for employment. ... It broadens students' ideas for career pathways, it helps students find their voice, it helps them be able to write, so there's [many] levels of success mapped within that we as a university don't call an actual success.'

This notion of success included inner transformations, not necessarily course completion:

'Even if a student doesn't succeed in the sense of passing every course and going onto university, [it's] that they leave ... feeling empowered in some way, that they know something that they didn't know before and that they have attained some kind of feeling of achievement, rather than of failure even if they don't complete for some reason.'

Kinnane et al. (2014) contend the key determinants of success for Indigenous students include individual family and community relationships; programs that leverage and enhance these relationships increase program effectiveness. These themes were echoed throughout this research, from students, staff and stakeholders. Moreover, while support offered through the access program itself was considered imperative to success, family support and the belief of others in students' abilities was also seen as vital in encouraging leadership qualities and expectations of success.

A best-practice model of Indigenous access education must reflect an understanding of the importance of Indigenous perspectives of success as multiple 'paths + ways' during the course of the learning journey. It must also include an understanding of the external pressures experienced by many students (such as family, financial and housing pressures). According to Turnbull (2014), this requires cross-cultural engagement and a whole-of-university approach, as well as consideration of 'significant others' and the social networks in the lives of Indigenous learners (networks that, at times, produce conflict and influence educational outcomes).

5.2 Access programs: multiple 'paths + ways' of strength

The importance of an Indigenous-specific curriculum was raised by all cohorts involved in this research. Including Indigenous culture in the course content was seen as strength building. In addition to delivering practical skills, teaching staff felt that access programs revealed an '*underlying layer*' of strength-related skills such as '*resilience*' and '*strategic awareness*'. Including Indigenous culture in course content builds '*strength*', '*culture*' and a sense of '*place and identity*'. Learning journeys supported by cultural learning will increase cultural identity through recognition of the cultural capital that students bring with them into their learning journey.

5.2.1 Recognising Indigenous students' cultural capital as a strength

The cultural capital of Australian Indigenous students has not been widely recognised in access program frameworks. Devlin (2013) explains that the concept of cultural capital is vital to understanding the experiences of students who come from low-socio economic backgrounds. As noted in the Background Section, cultural capital has been defined as the collection of components (such as mannerisms, skill base, preferences, shared values and objects such as clothing) that are acquired through being part of a particular social group. The sharing of elements and objects infers shared cultural capital and creates a sense of group power, group position and collective identity. A lack of cultural capital is recognised as a major source of social inequality.

Unequal access to economic and cultural capital requires policies that will work towards resolving the ongoing disadvantage and racism experienced by Indigenous Australians; it is a task primarily for mainstream Australian society (Browne-Yung, Siersch, Baum & Gallaher 2013). In terms of creating best-practice approaches for Indigenous access education, this concept suggests that the meaning and context of Australian Indigenous cultural capital needs to be understood and considered when developing access programs. It also suggests that Indigenous cultural capital needs to be recognised and incorporated by universities across the curriculum and in models of teaching and learning delivery.

5.3 Both-ways learning, pedagogy and curriculum

While Indigenous students may enter universities with a lack of cultural capital for navigating the formal systems and processes, they come with individual and community ways of knowing and learning. The both-ways philosophy of education, as discussed briefly in the Background Section, is relevant here. As Ober (2003) notes:

Both-ways is about strengthening one's identity and in the process becoming more aware that Indigenous people can draw from their own knowledge systems to complement and strengthen their own professional aspirations. (Ober 2003: 39)

This research reveals that access programs aligned with the both-ways philosophy can support inner transformations of Self related to strength, knowledge acquisition, growth, identity and voice. This suggests that both-ways approaches to learning may be an important element of best practice in Indigenous access education.

5.3.1 Curriculum and the both-ways learning journey

In this research, staff felt that access programs can support students' Indigenous identity through Indigenous curriculum and through both-ways methodologies that create a sense of belonging. In this way, access programs can be part of efforts towards Closing the Gap.

An important observation in the literature and from this research is the recognition of the sense of '*belonging*' that access programs can engender for Indigenous students. The World Health Organisation (Wilkinson & Marmot 2003: 13) points out that 'institutions that can give people a sense of belonging, participating and being valued are likely to be healthier places than those where people feel excluded, disregarded and used'. This notion is linked to the social determinants of health, where 'good health involves reducing levels of educational failure, reducing insecurity and unemployment and improving housing standards' (Wilkinson & Marmot 2003: 11), all of which impact upon educational outcomes. This sense of '*belonging*' was clearly identified by the students involved in this research.

This research showed that students who complete an access program are better able to navigate and understand the tertiary education system and are better prepared for tertiary education. They develop practical skills such as: (1) organisation and communication skills, (2) learning to ask for help and (3) being able to identify their own learning style. Students identified that these practical skills all assist with program completion. Support within the program built confidence, engendered feelings of success and increased students' perceptions of self-worth. This research suggests that access programs that incorporate both-ways methodologies advance learning outcomes for Indigenous students.

5.3.2 Both-ways understanding

The ‘radical pedagogy’ that aims to transform undesirable circumstances (as described in the Background Section) is relevant to this concept of both-ways understanding. It is part of the process of ‘conscientisation’, and includes drawing away from the ‘grip of dominant hegemony’ (Smith 2003: 2). This research suggests that, within the context of Indigenous access education, any drawing away from mainstream processes is in its infancy. An understanding of this ‘radical pedagogy’ prior to its introduction is essential for universities and institutions where Indigenous access programs are taught. This understanding could be the first step in the process of developing innovative models of governance where Indigenous people drive their own preparatory programs.

We contend that, to begin this process, ‘both-ways understanding’ is required. ‘Both-ways understanding’ requires that universities and other entities involved in developing Indigenous access programs come to understand and respect Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous ‘Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways Of Doing’ (Martin 2003: 9-12). ‘Both-ways understanding’ involves a system-wide process of cultural awareness by the developing bodies, achieved through cross-cultural competency and a whole of university approach (as discussed by Kinnane et al. 2014).

‘Both-ways understanding’ and the both-ways philosophy can be viewed as the ‘pathway’ to the future: a future where Indigenous ways of Knowing, Being and Doing are respected and honoured as one particular pathway to knowledge. As Bat, Kilgariff and Doe (2014: 883) contend, the both-ways learning framework ‘presents the opportunity for the wider tertiary sector to use this learning approach that is built on knowledge shared by the first peoples of this land, establishing a uniquely Australian methodology that incorporates, at its heart, the reconciliation between all Australians and the opportunity to learn, both ways’.

A best-practice approach for Indigenous access education must incorporate the concepts of both-ways learning and both-ways understanding, combined with a ‘radical pedagogy’ that challenges current practices and accommodates innovative models of practice.

6 Towards a model of best practice for Indigenous access education

This section presents an emerging model for best practice in Indigenous access education, based on the outcomes of this research. At its core is the concept of both-ways learning, as a vehicle for recognising and advancing Indigenous knowledge. This approach recognises that there are multiple ‘path + ways’ (Cajete 1994) for delivering curriculum – with learning institutions offering the ‘path’, and providing the capacity for Indigenous students to navigate their learning journey ‘way’.

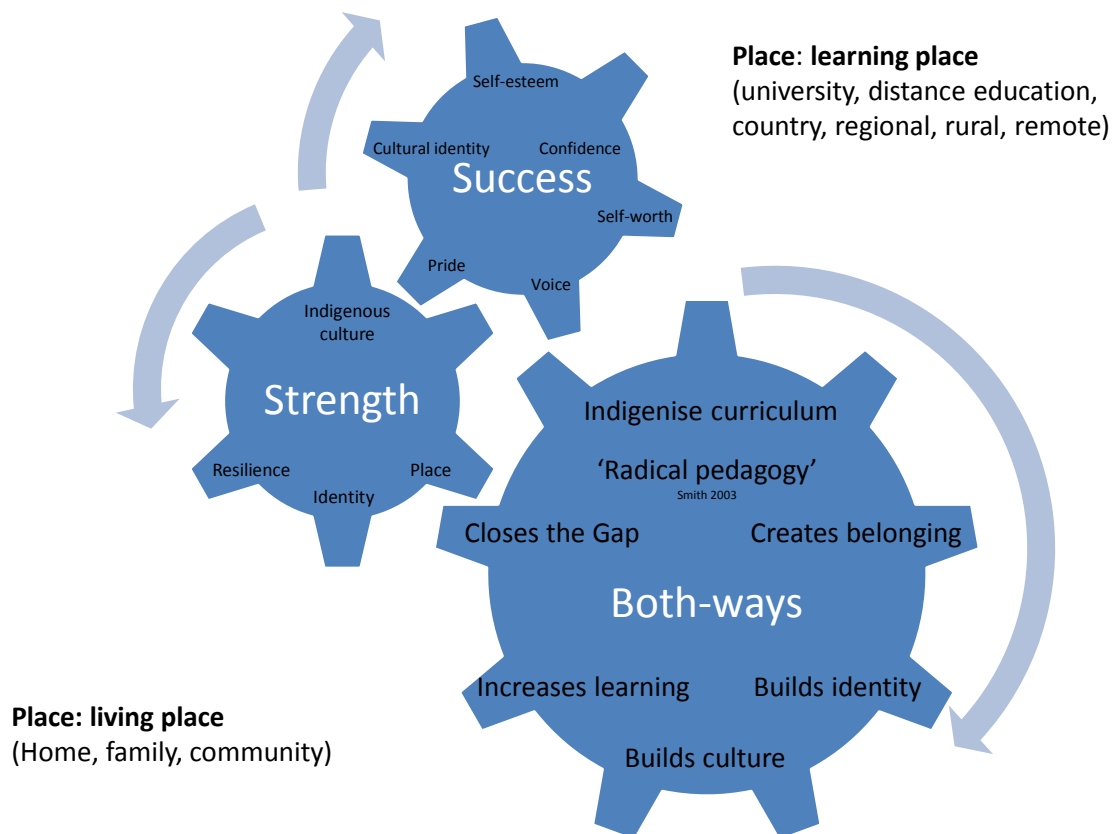
In the context of Indigenous access education, ‘path + way’ can be reconceptualised as ‘the place of learning’: the path + way where we bring with us our stories of ‘local place’ (now), our ‘histories’ (past), and the experience of ‘learning transformation’ (future) that occurs in the place of learning, influenced by our place of living, all of which work together to create a journey where we can build and enrich our identity, culture and vision of future pathways.

6.1 Conceptual model of best practice for Indigenous access education

Figure 10 presents a conceptual model of best practice for Indigenous access education, developed as an outcome of this research. The model illustrates interlocking concepts, with both-ways learning

influencing the process of building strength and the notion of success. The interlocking constructs are influenced by the internal place (university) and the external place (home). Pivotal to the success of Indigenous access education is recognition of the importance of cultural learning in the curriculum.

Figure 10 Conceptual model of best practice for Indigenous access education



Source: Conceptual model developed from the research findings

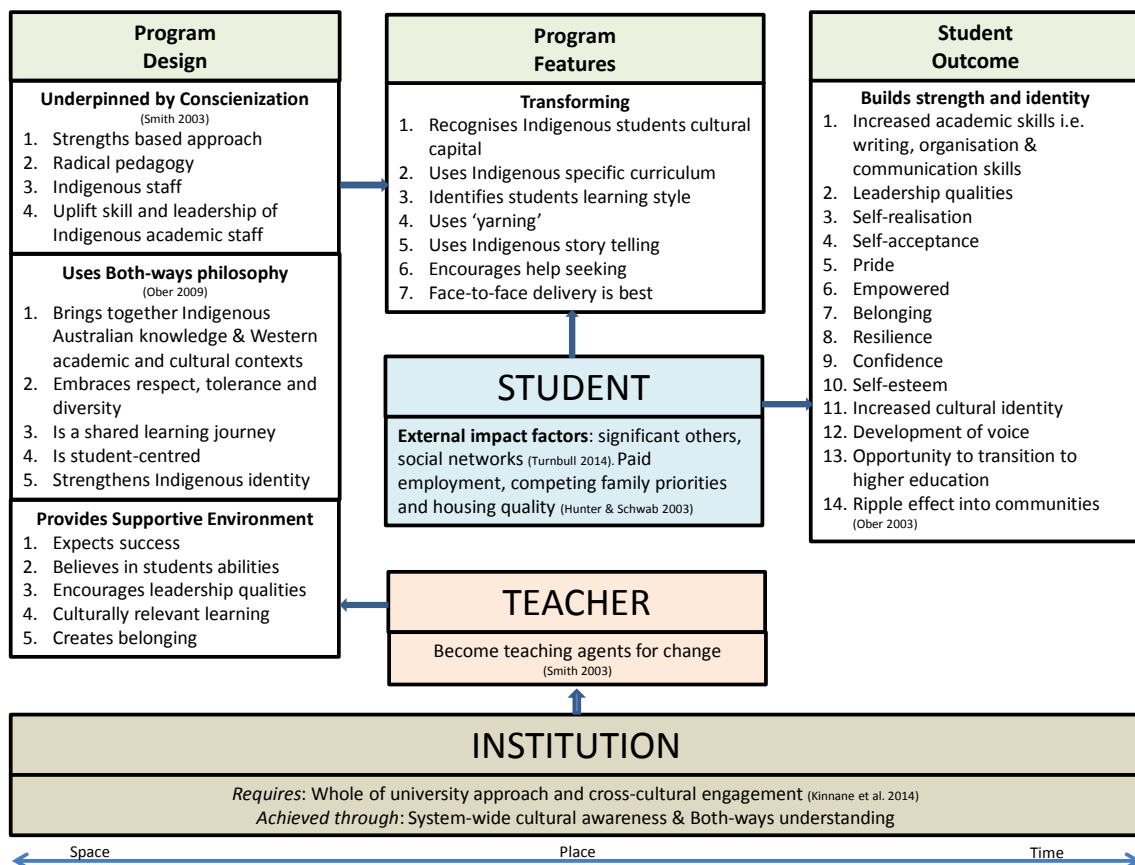
The purpose of the model in Figure 10 is to assist program developers as they consider how to best respond to their unique Indigenous cohorts in a way that can achieve the greatest impact on participation outcomes, and generate other indirect benefits for Indigenous students, particularly those from regional, rural and remote backgrounds. The conceptual model identifies key themes that emerged from this research as being critical elements of success in Indigenous access education.

6.2 A model for strength, transformation and success for Indigenous access education

The higher education system as a whole can be viewed as a transformation process with inputs, processes and outputs: where 'inputs include factors relating to students, teachers, administration staff, physical facilities and infrastructure, the processes include activities of teaching, learning, administration, and the outputs include examination results, employment, earnings and satisfaction' (Sahney, Banwet & Karunes 2004: 155). The model below seeks to capture this process through an Indigenous education perspective, to conceptualise the design, development and delivery of Indigenous access programs (

Figure 11).

Figure 11 A model for strength, transformation and success in Indigenous access education



Source: Conceptual model developed from the research findings

The conceptual model in

Figure 11 brings together the various themes emerging from this research in a way that can guide the design and evaluation of Indigenous access education. The model recognises the critical role of the institution and the teacher in creating an environment for students to learn and providing the 'path' for students' learning journeys. Students are placed at the centre of the model to recognise that access education is, in essence, a process of supported self transformation. The student is

influenced by and, in turn, influences the program of study they seek to undertake, the learning environment, and a range of external factors.

The conceptual model illustrates the need for ‘an integrated policy approach’ to advance Indigenous higher education, because ‘the issues are systemic’ (as identified in the first report of the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council to the Minister for Higher Education (IHEAC 2006: 5). ‘No single policy initiative will be able to achieve the “snowball” effect that is so desperately needed’ to advance Indigenous higher education (IHEAC 2006: 5).

Policy implications are relevant in every part of the model, beginning with the institution. For success in Indigenous access education, institutions require a whole-of-university approach and cross-cultural engagement (Kinnane et al. 2014). This research suggests that this can be achieved through system-wide cultural awareness and both-ways understanding.

Indigenous units that operate within university systems need effective support to begin to address the systemic issues relevant to Indigenous higher education. IHEAC (2006: 5) identified some of these issues, including ‘the recruitment and support of Indigenous students, the recruitment, support and promotion of Indigenous staff, and the building and strengthening of Indigenous studies and Indigenous research’.

Figure 11 highlights the importance of teaching staff, and shows that staff must be supported to work as change agents. The model also recognises the range of external factors that influence students and impact on their ability to maintain their enrolment in the program. Within the framework emerging from this study, a strengths-based approach and the both-ways philosophy are recognised as foundations for best practice in Indigenous access programs. As part of this, the research reveals that access programs need to use an Indigenous-specific curriculum, recognise Indigenous students’ cultural capital, identify students’ learning styles, utilise ‘yarning’ and storytelling, encourage students to seek help, and recognise that face-to-face delivery promotes learning. These practices will support the transformation process for students and, as revealed in this research, result in positive student outcomes that build strength, build identity and promote success.

The two conceptual models presented above (Figure 10 and

Figure 11) help to bring together the multiple layers of elements of access education and show how it can be better tailored to reflect the unique needs of Indigenous students. From a curriculum perspective, the conceptual models emphasise the need to incorporate Indigenous content, develop

awareness of and respect for Indigenous learning styles, and reflect on the position or environment from which Indigenous students enter university environments.

The conceptual models are designed as guides for best practice, which invite further thinking about access education. They encourage those involved in developing access education to recognise the program as a pathway to strengthening individual learners, and to examine what access education can offer for students, teachers, institutions, and the Indigenous peoples of Australia.

6.3 Developing a best-practice approach for Indigenous access programs

This research reveals the foundations required for a best-practice framework for Indigenous access programs. Best practice involves a complex interplay with considerations of pedagogy, curriculum and mode of delivery, superimposed by the institutional ethos and drivers for implementation, and framed by local, regional and national Indigenous perspectives. Support structures for staff and their professional development needs must be considered.

This research demonstrates that strengthening of access education for Indigenous Australians can provide an excellent platform for offering Indigenous students the best chance of ‘success’ – with ‘success’ having a multi-layered interpretation that spans participation (for the institution), personal identity and confidence (for the learner) and broader community and indirect benefits.

6.4 Next steps: ‘closing the loop’ between equity policy, research and practice

The findings in this qualitative study exist within the context and situation where they were gathered (Collis & Hussey 2009). This means that care is required in extrapolating the results beyond the local, regional university setting from which the primary data were sourced. However, the findings contribute to best practice in Indigenous access education in three ways: (1) they support improved understandings of the importance of access education, (2) they demonstrate the value of access education in building strength and success for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and (3) they reveal several important dimensions for developing best practice in Indigenous access education. The findings of this localised study can inform national policy discussions and contribute to an improved understanding of access education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In this way, this research contributes to the agendas of widening participation and Closing the Gap.

Consistent with the need to promote Indigenous issues, research dissemination is been a key element of this project. The project team has engaged with a range of stakeholders, especially through the National Roundtable on Indigenous Access Education, hosted at CQUniversity in December 2014 (summarised in Appendices B, C, and D)⁹. The research findings will be shared at a range of Indigenous and mainstream gatherings focussed on education practices; draft submissions have already been made to the NIRAKN and NATSIEHC International Indigenous Research Conference, the Indigenous Content in Education Symposium and New Zealand Association for Research in Education (NZARE) Conference (‘Kia Rapua he huruhuru e rere ai te reo o te manu Toroa.

⁹ Further details of the National Roundtable are reported in the Milestone 2 document for this project. Visit the NCSEHE website for more information.

Emancipation through education'). The research was also reported at the National Forum on Indigenous Pathways and Transitions into Higher Education, held in October 2015.

The research results offer insights to access education that can be taken up by the Indigenous and broader higher education sectors to improve policy and praxis for Indigenous Australians for the future. Access education has been shown as a key element of success for Indigenous Australians in addressing disadvantage and changing future participation in higher education. Thus, it needs to be the best possible access education that it can be!

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Appendix A: Summary of key information relating to Indigenous access education programs in Australian universities

The following information was sourced from publicly available websites, together with direct contact by telephone to clarify and/or collect further information.

University	Indigenous section	Name of preparatory program	Duration	Courses/Structure	Comments
Charles Darwin University	Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges and Education (ACIKE)	Preparation for Tertiary Success (PTS)	1 Year F/T	<p>In semester 1, students study the following core units:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Identity • Strength and Success • Reading and Reflection • Introduction to Mathematics <p>In semester 2, students study the core unit of Discipline Inquiry; and three electives from the following:</p> <p>Learning in Communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ways of Knowing • Introduction to Science • Advanced Mathematics 	Multi-mode delivery: On campus & online study
University of New England	Ooralta Aboriginal Centre	TRACKS tertiary preparation program	1 Year F/T Enabling Course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University and Study Skills • Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies • Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities • Academic Literacy 	On campus or online study

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information and Communication Technology in Higher Education (Students must also complete one undergraduate course in their chosen field) 	
Curtin University	Centre for Aboriginal Studies	Aboriginal Bridging Course	1 Year F/T	<p>Compulsory Core totalling 40 credit points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Study Skills Introductory Computing Reading and Writing for Further Education Mathematics for Further Education 	Indigenous Tertiary F/T or P/T Enabling TEP 1 & TEP 2; F/T is 6 months over 2 semesters - studied on campus or online. It involves four units of study over 2 semesters
Edith Cowan University	Kurongcurl Katitjin Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research	Indigenous University Orientation Course	Can be studied 1 Year F/T or P/T	This is a mainstream program	On campus or online
Monash University	The Yulendj Indigenous Engagement Unit	Indigenous Enabling Program [IEP]	1 Year F/T	Mathematics; Academic Skills; Up to 2 undergraduate units	IEP is a F/T Indigenous-specific pathways program. Delivery is on campus
CQUniversity	The Office of Indigenous Engagement	The Tertiary Entry Program (TEP)		TEP is an enabling program that is delivered by the Office of Indigenous Engagement to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to assist them to gain the skills, knowledge and confidence to undertake university study	F/T - enrol in 3 courses per term. P/T - complete one or two courses per term

University of Tasmania	Riawunna Centre	Murina Pathway Program – enabling course: pathway to higher education	1 Year F/T	Students must complete 4 of the following in semester 1, and 4 in semester 2: Computer Skills; Cultural Studies 1; Cultural Studies 2; Academic Study Skills 1; Academic Study Skills 2; Learning and Communication Skills 1; Learning and Communication Skills 2; Intro to Aboriginal Studies 1; Intro to Aboriginal Studies 2; Intro to University Studies: Business; Intro to University Studies: Art; Intro to University Studies: Sociology; Intro to University Studies: Education; Intro to Science; Intro to University Studies 2	Can be studied F/T or P/T; on campus
University of Newcastle	The Wollotuka Institute	Yapug	1 Year F/T- The Yapug program is designed to provide a pathway into a preferred undergraduate degree program	Students are placed into one of the 4 pathway programs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Sciences • Education, Arts, Social Sciences and Design • Business, Law, Commerce and IT • Engineering and Science Two compulsory courses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal Tertiary Foundations • Directed Study 	On campus, F/T or P/T
University of Adelaide	Wirtu Yarlou	University Preparatory Program (WY-UPP), Adelaide & Pt Augusta campuses	2 core courses and a choice of 1 or 2 electives each semester	Core courses are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous Studies A • Indigenous Studies B • Studies in Humanities A • Studies in Humanities B • Aboriginal Knowledges A • Aboriginal Knowledges B Students should also choose two electives	1 Yr F/T; on campus, exit available after 6 months. Each course is worth 3 units; 12 units = a full-time study load

University of Technology Sydney	Jumbunna	UNISTART	1 Year F/T	<p>First semester, students must study 3 of the following & an elective for their degree:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balancing World Views: Introduction to Aboriginal Cultures • Academic Cultures and Practices 1 • Introduction to Social Theory 1 • Mathematics 1 <p>Second Semester: students study 2 of the following + 2 electives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Cultures and Practices 2 • Introduction to Social Theory 2 • Mathematics 2 	F/T only; on campus Diploma course modules. Indigenous specific program & popular with international students
University of Western Australia	School of Indigenous Studies	Aboriginal Orientation Course	1 Year F/T	<p>All students enrol in two core subjects each semester:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal Voices 1 and Aboriginal Voices 2 • Foundations of University Study 1 and Foundations of University Study 2 <p>Plus a minimum of two electives each semester, depending on their planned degree</p>	F/T only; on campus
University of Southern Queensland	The Centre for Australian Indigenous Knowledges (CAIK)	Indigenous Higher Education Pathways Program (IHEPP)	6-8 mths F/T or 12-18 mths P/T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mathematics for Living • Introduction to Computing Basics • Nguya Goolpanie? What Did You Say? Study Skills • Imbala: Hearing to Understand: Thinking to Write 	Can be studied F/T or P/T; distance; students may enrol in more than the 4 core courses
Murdoch University	Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre	K-Track	1 Semester F/T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Big Ideas • Your writing tool kit • Understanding your world 	F/T only; on campus or online; may be followed by further study in

					the mainstream OnTrack program
University of Canberra	The Ngunnawal Centre	The Ngunnawal Foundation Program	1 Semester F/T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundation Study Skills • Foundation Communication Skills • Up to 2 undergraduate units 	Can be studied F/T or P/T
James Cook University	School of Indigenous Australian Studies	Tertiary Access Course (TAC)	6 month F/T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to Academic Learning • Learning with Technology • Critical Literacy: Text Analysis • Mathematics 	On campus
University of Western Sydney	Badanami Centre for Indigenous Education	Badanami Tertiary Entry Program (BTEP)	16 weeks (recom)	<p>Module 1 (32 hours) - sentence writing skills and requirements of university</p> <p>Module 2 (32 hours) - academic paragraph writing skills and ability to comprehend academic article</p> <p>Module 3 (64 hours) – step by step process of writing an essay</p>	Self-paced; distance; literacy only
University of NSW	Nura Gili, Kensington Campus	Pathways Enabling Program	1 Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-Business Program • Pre-Education Program • Pre-Law Program • Pre-Medicine Program • Pre-Social Work Program 	Intensive residential preparatory courses
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT),	Ngarara Willim Indigenous Centre	Dual sector Uni – Vocational Education Pathway – Diploma/Certificate	Indigenous Access Scheme	Alternative Entry – e.g. profile prep: photography portfolio – personalised method – no prerequisites	On campus.
Southern Cross University	Gnibi College of Indigenous Australian Peoples	Preparing for Success Program (PSP)	F/T for 12 weeks or	Three compulsory units [communication, study and numeracy skills] & 1 elective	On campus or by distance

			P/T for 1 year		
Victoria University	Moondani Balluk Academic Unit	Indigenous Foundation Program Mumgu-Dahl. St. Albans campus, VET College.	1 Yr	Learn in practical settings at local Indigenous community organisations – develop leadership and mentoring skills Learning, project-based VE course in a culturally safe environment.	F/T – on campus. May be aligned to Moondani Balluk Indigenous Academic Unit
The University of Melbourne	Murrup Barak	3 Months residential B/Arts (Extended) for Indigenous Students	4-year degree integrating bridging subjects into the first two years of BA	In 2009, the University first introduced the BA (Extended), an embedded bridging program for Indigenous students which includes residence at Trinity and other residential Colleges of the University of Melbourne	The Faculty of Arts, Trinity College and Murrup Barak jointly coordinate the program
Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education	Batchelor Institute	Preparation for Tertiary Success – Preparation and Enabling (in all areas of study)	Offered in collaboration with CDU	A Registered Training Organisation (RTO) Batchelor Institute delivers vocational education and training - a strong focus on remote delivery, vocational areas aligned to remote community employment opportunities, and foundation skills including work readiness	
University of South Australia	David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research	None	N/A	N/A	UNISA Foundation Studies – a mainstream program
Australian Catholic University	Centre for Indigenous Education and Research	None	N/A	N/A	

Australian National University	Tjabal Indigenous Higher Education Centre	None	N/A	N/A	
Bond University	Nyombile Indigenous Support Centre	None	N/A	N/A	
Charles Sturt University	Centre for Indigenous Studies	None	N/A	N/A	
Deakin University	Institute of Koorie Education	None	N/A	N/A	
Federation Australia University [Uni of Ballarat]	Aboriginal Education Centre	None	N/A	N/A	
Flinders University	Yunggoendi First Nations Centre for Higher Education and Research	None	N/A	N/A	
La Trobe University	The Indigenous Education Group	None	N/A	N/A	
Macquarie University	Warawara Department of Indigenous Studies	None	N/A	N/A	
Queensland University of Technology	Oodgeroo Unit	None	N/A	N/A	

Swinburne University of Technology	Indigenous Education	None	N/A	N/A	
University of Wollongong	Woolyungah Indigenous Centre	None	N/A	N/A	
University of Sydney	Koori Centre	None	N/A	N/A	
University of the Sunshine Coast	The Buranga Centre	None	N/A	N/A	
Griffith University	Gumurri Student Support Unit	None	N/A	N/A	
University of Notre Dame	Nulungu Centre for Indigenous Studies	None	N/A	N/A	
University of Queensland	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit	None	N/A	N/A	

Appendix B: Event program – National Roundtable on Indigenous Access Education

**National Roundtable Program Information
5 December 2014
CQUniversity Rockhampton**

Time	Session	Presenter / Panellists	Where
8:30am	Registration desk with tea/coffee available		29/Courtyard
8:45am	Marshall at Courtyard		29/G.07
9:00am	Opening Housekeeping Apologies	Professor Bronwyn Fredericks	29/G.07
9:05am	Welcome to Country		29/G.07
9:10am	Setting the Scene Attendees' Introductions: Who is in the room?		29/G.07
9:30am	Keynote 1:	Professor Graham Hingangaroa Smith, CEO & Vice Chancellor of Te Whare Wananga o Awanuiarangi: Indigenous-University	29/G.07
10:15am	Keynote 2:	Wendy Ludwig, Director of Operations Indigenous Leadership, Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges & Education, Charles Darwin University	29/G.07
10:45am	Morning Tea		Marquee/ Courtyard

11:15am	Student Panel	Kevin McNulty Narelle Pasco Brady Hutchinson Clare Bond Charlene Mann	29/G.07
12:00pm	Questions arising: Thoughts triggered from the keynote and panel sessions	Prof Bronwyn Fredericks Dr Susan Kinnear	29/G.07
12:30pm	Lunch		10/Level 2
1:15pm	Staff Panel	Dr Pamela Croft Warcon Dr Fred Cahir Wendy Ludwig TBA	29/G.07
1:45pm	Group work Session 1 Four questions with 10 minutes each		29/1.01
2:30pm	Afternoon tea		Marquee/ Courtyard
3:00pm	Group work Session 2 Four questions with 10 minutes each		29/Room 1.01
3:45pm	Developing a National Ethos Statement		29/Room 1.01
4:15pm	Learnings from the day		29/Room 1.01
4:30pm	Presentations and Close		29/Room 1.01

Appendix C: Discussion paper

Path+Ways: Towards best practice in Indigenous access education

A discussion paper for
The National Roundtable on Indigenous Access Education

**5 December 2014
CQUniversity North Rockhampton**

Bronwyn Fredericks, Susan Kinnear, Pamela CroftWarcon, Julie Mann, Carolyn Daniels

Preamble

In Australia, regional and remote Indigenous students are under-represented in both higher education and vocational education and training. Access education courses are important in lifting participation rates and potentially in encouraging mobility between the sectors, yet there is a clear lack of evidence underpinning their development. The central purpose of this discussion paper is to prompt **thought and debate** on the key issues relating to Indigenous Access Education. The document has been prepared as part of a research project funded by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, titled 'Best practice bridging: facilitating Indigenous participation through regional dual-sector universities'. The aim of this project is to develop a best-practice framework for Indigenous bridging education programs, emphasising regional and comprehensive education settings. Delegates attending the National Roundtable in December are asked to familiarise themselves with this document, and in particular, to be prepared to engage with the discussion questions provided in section four.

Key definition

Access (or enabling) education relates to courses that provide a pathway for people wishing to gain entry to higher education, by providing one or more courses focussed on foundation and/or preparatory skills. For vocational education providers, enabling may refer to non-assessed modules (for example, literacy, numeracy and employee skills). Enabling is not recognised as part of the Australian Qualifications Framework, but enabling loading is included in the Commonwealth Grants Scheme. For vocational education providers, enabling may refer to non-assessed modules (for example, literacy, numeracy and employee skills).

1. Literature: overview of key themes

A recent review of literature on Indigenous access education has highlighted a series of key themes and issues that must be considered, when examining what it means to pursue 'best practice'¹. These are explored briefly below.

Education has a key role in addressing Indigenous disadvantage; yet it remains poorly understood

Gaining post-secondary education is linked with a range of benefits in both the economic and social domains, and these may be receipted in both private and public terms (Deloitte Access Economics, 2011). Social equity in relation to higher education has been a part of national policy discourse in Australia since 1990 (Cuthill & Jansen 2013). The last two decades in particular have witnessed increased global interest and awareness of the importance and need for Indigenous participation in the higher education sector. Despite this, the participation rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in higher education settings remain below that of the broader Australian population. In fact, recent statistics for Indigenous education outcomes led Pechenkina and Anderson (2011) to declare a state of 'crisis'.

¹ A full copy of the review of literature milestone report will be made available on the NCSEHE website at a later date.

If the educational targets for Indigenous peoples are to be met, there is a need for 'fresh thinking'

The Australian government has set a target whereby at least 20% of university undergraduate program enrolments are to be students from low socio-economic backgrounds by 2020 (Bradley et al. 2008). However, the national widening participation agenda will require a tangible shift in practices as tertiary institutions attempt to cater to a more diverse student body (Leese 2010). Devlin (2013) has called for fresh thinking and leadership to respond to the changes facing the sector and identify 'what works'.

Enabling education has a special role to play in the widening participation agenda

Behrendt et al. (2012) noted that, in 2010, over half the Indigenous students entering university did so by an enabling pathway, compared with only 17% of non-Indigenous students. Moreover, Indigenous students face a formidable array of barriers in pursuing post-secondary education, including high levels of socio-economic disadvantage, rurality and limited family and individual exposure to the individual, family and community benefits of higher education. Given this, institutions offering enabling programs must be cognisant of this complexity of barriers faced by Indigenous students, and work to provide a teaching, learning and pastoral care model for enabling programs that responds to this environment and the Indigenous individuals within it.

The evidence on best-practice teaching is scant

Research on access education is still in its infancy, with little evidence to guide the development of effective programs (Lum et al. 2011; Nakata et al. 2008), and almost none that is specific for Indigenous Australian students. Most existing research material on bridging programs is limited to course-evaluation style approaches, which are largely focussed on students' perceptions and/or experience, and less on attainment or broader capacity-building outcomes.

Indigenous approaches to teaching and learning must be recognised

Turnbull (2014) noted that in the context of developing teaching and learning programs for Indigenous students – specifically including enabling programs – it is important to adopt (and adapt) the appropriate teaching styles and learning environment. The theoretical grounding for research in Indigenous education is theoretically aligned with the concepts of conscientisation (Freire 1972), further developed over time within Indigenous Australian (Purdie et al. 2011), Native American (Villegas et al. 2008), First Nations (Battiste & Henderson 2000) and Māori (Smith 2003) contexts. Learning and teaching environments that are positive, self-affirming and reflective of Indigenous realities and aspirations are important in assisting Indigenous peoples to see relevance in the value of education.

There needs to be more opportunities for a discussion about what constitutes 'success'

Recently, AIHW (2014) described some of the commonly used equity performance indicators in higher education, including measures of access, participation, retention, success and completion. However, Kinnane et al. (2014: 9) concluded that 'success exists on a spectrum defined by individual (personal) and collective (community) terms, *as well as* a range of measures utilised by universities and government departments' (emphasis added). It is also clear that the determinants for success

are multiple and complex, including family and cultural factors and the formal settings adopted by learning institutions.

Pursuing best-practice will require taking a comprehensive view

Within the university or TAFE setting, some key areas to consider with regards to best-practice in access education include issues of curriculum; mode of teaching delivery; staffing; organisational structure; leadership; 'pastoral care' and university-community relations. Models for Indigenous support also vary, with Australian universities adopting one or more of mainstream, standard, school-based, governance-driven and Indigenous Knowledge centre models (Kinnane et al. 2014). However, it is not clear what models have been adopted (or adapted) for the vocational education and training sector (e.g., at TAFE institutions).

Policy and positioning are both important in the widening participation agenda

In the recent past, policy making in the education sector has focussed squarely on the widening participation agenda. However, whilst all Australian tertiary institutions have the inclusion and diversity agenda in their strategic plans, there is little research-based evidence regarding how, and to what extent, they achieve this for Indigenous Australians, and where improvements may be made. Questions have also been raised in respect to how Indigenous education outcomes could, or should, be positioned within universities as core business, rather than simply as an issue of equity (Andersen et al. 2008).

2. Key data summary

It is not the aim of this document to provide detailed information or statistics regarding Indigenous access, participation and success within the Australian higher education sector more generally: this information is broadly available and effective summaries of the key trends have been prepared in the recent past (e.g. AIHW 2014; Behrendt et al. 2012). Nevertheless, in order to provide a contextual basis for the Roundtable discussion, Appendix A presents key information regarding the number and nature of Indigenous access education programs offered by Australian universities.

In addition to the above, it is worth acknowledging that detailed information regarding enrolment and graduation statistics does not appear to be readily available at the national level:

- Mission-based compacts between the Commonwealth and universities are generally publicly available, but these provide figures on undergraduate and postgraduate students, with access programs rarely (if ever) reported
- Reconciliation Action Plans are available from universities, but typically do not contain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolment statistics
- There is no national regulatory body, with the exception of Academic Board at each institution; access education programs are not accredited (i.e., there is no TEQSA or ASQA reporting); and there is no representative peak body that would ordinarily assist in collating this information².

² For example, professional bodies such as those for psychology or engineering play a role in collating and reporting student data

The only data that do appear to be available (on request) are those linked with Commonwealth funding models, and where applicable these are already contained within the Behrendt report.

3. Discussion questions: thinking prompts

Discussion point 1: What is the status quo for 'access education'?

Delegates are asked to consider their interpretations and experiences of 'access education' across a range of formats – be these formal, informal, in VET, in Higher Education, distance, on-campus, or any other structures or modes.

Discussion point 2: What are the key determinants of success, and how should success be interpreted?

Delegates are asked to consider this question particularly with respect to the promotion of Indigenous needs and learning styles that will allow students to affirm their Indigeneity whilst participating in tertiary education:

- How might a student interpret 'success', with respect to pursuing their own learning goals?
- How might the community interpret 'success'?
- How might the staff interpret 'success'?
- How might the broader institution (university, TAFE or other) interpret 'success'?
- How might the government interpret 'success'?

Discussion point 3: Respecting and growing Indigeneity

What is the underpinning role of respecting, developing and/or extending cultural capital, in the overall success of bridging education programs in lifting participation rates? How does this compare with current practice?

Discussion point 4: An Implementation and Ethos Statement for Indigenous Bridging Education in Australia (mechanics)

This Statement is intended as a framework to guide the development of Indigenous bridging programs, especially those delivered by current and/or future regional and dual-sector universities. However, delegates are invited to consider broader use and applications:

- Who will use this Statement? Should we limit this to Australian contexts?
- What format should the Statement be in? (for example, written, videostream, other, combination)
- When and how will we evaluate and report on progress against the Statement?
- How does the Statement interact with other pre-existing instruments (e.g. Reconciliation Action Plans?)

Discussion point 5: An Implementation and Ethos Statement for Indigenous Bridging Education in Australia (content)

Using insights from both theory and practice, what are the key components of best-practice in preparing regional, rural and remote-based Indigenous students for entry to comprehensive educational pathways?

How are models of learning support and training/education delivery different between higher education and VET, and how might they encourage movement between VET and higher education?

How do we (and could we) share best practice?

Discussion point 6: Ownership and governance

What innovative models of governance and/or ownership could be developed to allow Indigenous peoples to drive their own preparatory programs (as foreshadowed in Teasdale & Teasdale 1996; and Behrendt et al. 2012)?

Discussion point 7: What are the policy and programming implications?

Delegates are asked to consider this question particularly with respect to the provision of new information that will assist in achieving a more effective spend on monies made available for Indigenous support programs, in alignment with the governmental targets for participation and student outcomes.

What are the policy and resource implications for regional and/or dual-sector institutions servicing regional and rural/remote Indigenous populations? For example, how can Australian universities be better supported to help Indigenous people attain educational qualifications? How does this interact with delivery on their Reconciliation Action Plans, formalised Indigenous Strategies and inclusiveness goals?

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Appendix D: National Roundtable summary

The National Roundtable on Indigenous Access Education was held on the 5th of December 2014, at CQUniversity, North Rockhampton, Queensland. The event sought to gather information from participants from various backgrounds about the meaning of success for Indigenous students, about respecting and growing cultural capital, about governance and ownership of Indigenous Access Programs and about the development of appropriate resources and policies for Indigenous Access Programs.

More than 100 people from the local (Central Queensland) region, from Western Australia, the Northern Territory, Tasmania, New South Wales and Victoria, as well as international delegates from New Zealand were in attendance, and a cross-section of university, community and industry attended. The program included a mix of keynote presentations, facilitated discussion and panel sessions. A copy of the National Roundtable Program is provided in **Appendix B**. A discussion paper was also prepared ahead of the National Roundtable and circulated to all delegates. A copy is provided in **Appendix C**.

The first keynote speaker, Professor Graham Hingangaroa Smith, explained that individuals' aspirations and needs are not homogenous, that access programs were only one component of a larger system required for growing cultural capital and that language revitalisation is linked with educational outcomes. During the second keynote presentation, Ms Wendy Ludwig invited delegates to think about how to foster (enculture) an ethos of excellence. She also highlighted the importance of education for domestication compared with education for liberation. Wendy asked delegates to consider what space can be made available in National Training Packages to slot in Indigenous content; and for more discussions about the place of Indigenous knowledge as people transition through VET to higher education.

Following the delivery of the keynote speakers' presentations, delegates were asked to identify the key themes, concepts and/or phrases that they had connected with during the morning. Some of the themes documented on the whiteboard included the importance of '*not losing our culture*', '*not losing ourselves*' and the '*need to decolonise*' and the need for '*vision*'. Themes surrounding Indigenous access programs included the fact that they were '*powerful*', that issues related to access education were '*layered*' and that people needed to '*cope with change*'.

The facilitated discussion used butchers' paper to record delegates' responses to four leading questions. Responses to the first question ('what does success look like [to Indigenous peoples]?') included '*pride*', '*liberation*', '*choice*', '*empowerment*', '*knowledge*', '*culture*', '*growth*', '*self-determination*' and '*pride in culture and history*'.

Some responses to the second question ('how do we respect and grow cultural capital?') included: through '*respect*', '*identity*', '*understanding*', '*Elders*', '*individuality and kinship*' and '*through our own lens*'. One participant also contributed the following table, to emphasise the importance of embedding cultural capital across all key curriculum areas (Table 1):

Table 1 Embedding cultural capital across all curriculum areas

Cultural capital	Curriculum		
Culture	Math	Science	Language
Spirituality	Math	Science	Language
Identity	Math	Science	Language
Language	Math	Science	Language

Responses to question three ('what might the ownership, governance and custodianship look like?') included: '*Indigenous*', '*community*', '*self-determination*', '*accountable*', '*self-funded*' and '*equal*'.

Responses to the final question ('what resources and policy settings should there be?') focussed on '*planning*', '*building Indigenous capacity*', '*money*', '*trust*', and '*community*'.

Ideas were also put forward about the possible content of a national ethos statement for Best Practice Indigenous Access Education and included: '*Inspiration/aspiration school system*', '*obligation/contract to fulfil journey*', '*do no damage*', '*guidance statement*', '*institutional outputs vs community outcomes*' and '*authentic coursework [that is] respectful and contextualised*'.

The National Roundtable discussion was very useful in developing the research and recruiting prospective participants for one-on-one interviews, particularly students who have successfully completed tertiary entrance programs, staff members who teach into bridging programs and members of relevant Indigenous community organisations, industry groups and the employment sources sector.