# Inquiry into Education in Remote and Complex Environments

## World Vision Australia's submission

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## Introduction

World Vision Australia (WVA) recognises the major disadvantage First Nations children face in their education journey. World Vision is a child-focused international community development organisation and, since 1974, we've been adapting our successful community-led development approach to support First Nations communities to lead their own development. We have partnered with First Nations communities for nearly 50 years to deliver First Nations early childhood education and youth programs to ensure Indigenous children and young people are educated for life through both-ways learning. We welcome the Parliamentary Inquiry into Remote Education and our submission will specifically focus on First Nations children and communities.

## Background

- First Nations children represent 43.7% of children in remote areas compared to around 6% of all children in Australia. Therefore, this inquiry should have a primary focus on First Nations children.
- First Nations children are twice as likely as non-Indigenous children to be developmentally vulnerable (41.3% and 20.4% respectively).
- We already see a gap in attendance rates which indicates a low level of engagement in the education system by First Nations students. In 2017, the overall attendance rate for Indigenous students nationally was 83.2%, compared with 93.0% for non-Indigenous students.
- The educational outcomes for First Nations children are well behind the broader Australian population and this gap is not narrowing at any significant rate. NAPLAN results show only Year 9 numeracy is on track for narrowing out of eight areas.
- The only educational Closing the Gap indicator which is on track to be reached is Year 12 attainment. The target to halve the gap in Year 12 attainment by 2020 is on track, and the gap has narrowed by 12.6% over the past decade (from 36.4% in 2006 to 23.8% in 2016).
- The most recent Closing the Gap Report 2020 shows that early childhood education and school attendance rates, reading and literacy outcomes, and Year 12 attainment rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children tend to decrease with remoteness.

### *Education and the United Nations Convention Rights of the Child*

Article 28.1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) requires Australia to recognise the right of the child to education, with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity. In particular, under this international convention Australia must:

(a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all

(b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need

(c) Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means

(d) Make education and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children

(e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of dropout rates.

Australia has undertaken to 'respect and ensure' these rights for every child, without discrimination of any kind (Article 2.1). Geography, remoteness, distance, language, culture, religion, disability and sex cannot be used as excuses when a child's right to education is at stake.

According to Article 29.1 of the CRC, education of children should be directed to:

(a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential

(b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations

(c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, the country from which he or she may originate and for civilizations different from his or her own

(d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of Indigenous origin.

(e) The development of respect for the natural environment. (Unicef 1989)

It is therefore a child's right to have access to education, and for that education system to respect the child's own culture, language and values.

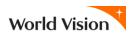*Education and the United Nation Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People*

In 2009 Australia became a signatory of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Under the Declaration, Australia has made several commitments and acknowledgements including enabling First Nations people to negotiate self-determination, native title and treaties. WVA recommends that the Australian Government consider these specific articles under the UNDRIP in relation to remote education. (Hobbs 2019)

Under Article 14:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning

2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination
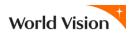
3. States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.(UNDRIP 2007)

## Recommendations

To improve education for First Nations children, especially those in remote contexts, World Vision Australia recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to:

1. **Ensure every school is funded to have a First Nations cultural educator or coordinator**, a local traditional knowledge holder who is employed as a core staff member to make schools more culturally aware and culturally safe

2. Support teachers working in remote areas to learn the local First Nations culture and language through **mandatory cultural immersion programs**.

3. Establish an **Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme** outside of standard school hours to support all First Nations students attending primary school and high school.

4. Partner with the private sector to ensure **all First Nations students have internet access** and the technology (laptops or tablets) to access online learning resources

5. **Promote the Nurturing Care Framework** to ensure First Nations children are supported in their early years for lifelong learning and development, including through nutrition, responsive care giving, security and safety

6. **Support caregivers and families** of First Nations children and increase opportunities for them to be engaged in their child's learning journey from the beginning.

7. **Expand the early childhood education subsidy** for First Nations children from age 3.

8. **Support schools to adopt an individualised approach** which focuses on addressing the social and cognitive gaps for each student at commencement or primary school, so education gaps are closed early

9. **Reform the curriculum** to enable science, technology and mathematics (STEM) to be taught through traditional First Nations knowledges and practices, especially in remote communities

10. **Explore trialling an increase of school hours** in remote communities in consultation and partnership with remote First Nations communities to support students with homework and focus on embedding STEM into traditional knowledge and practices

11. **Reform the approach to Vocational Educational Training** so programs in remote communities are developed in partnership with First Nations community leaders to build their community's capacity and contribute to advancing their self-determination, self-management and self-governing.

## Terms of Reference

### • A child's journey through early childhood, primary, secondary, vocational and tertiary education in remote communities, like the tri-border region of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory;

The foundations of education are developed before a child is even conceived. The antecedents of prenatal education include the parent's education background, race, income and other social factors attributed to the parents. In this sense, polices should consider how to prepare parents and, more importantly, how to support parents to enable optimal educational outcomes for their children. (Qiu, Shen et al. 2017)

Antenatal brain development is of paramount importance and is affected by smoking, alcohol and drug use and nutrition during pregnancy. Nutrition and environmental factors also play a major role for babies in their development. Strong attachment to their parents and carers is another important factor for optimal brain development because 90% of brain development occurs before a child's third birthday. The role that caregivers and families provide in early years, the quality of those interactions as well as supports the families have access to in their parenting journey are of critical importance.(UNICEF 2018)

Early childhood education is vital and, while there has been much focus in this area, there is still a lag in starting early childhood education as well as a gap in attendance rates for First Nations children. (O'Connor, O'Connor et al. 2020) Aboriginal childhood services are also potentially poorer resourced to focus on social and education development. (Holzinger and Biddle 2018)
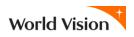
With the gap in cognitive and social development (which can be attributed to the antecedents described above), First Nations children on average are behind from the start of their primary education. This gap typically closes for First Nations children in the first year of education but remains significant. This gap is a catalyst for disengagement from learning and the school environment. Over the subsequent school years, the gap in educational outcomes widens until, on completion of Year 12, First Nations young people are significantly behind their peers in all educational measures. (Winch 2016)

There are various programs which have been aimed at closing the education gap which are primarily aimed at high school students. These initiatives have had limited results. Furthermore, these programs tend to target high performing or underperforming First Nations students with little focus on those who are performing at an adequate level where additional supports could enhance their educational outcomes or minimise the risk of them falling into underperformance. (Guenther, Lowe et al. 2019)

The gap in education outcomes at Year 12 means there are far less First Nations young people matriculating into tertiary education which, in turn, limits their employment options. (Bandias, Fuller et al. 2014) Evidence also suggests that education gaps have broad impacts on  health in terms of life expectancy and social and emotional wellbeing. (Cutler and Lleras-Muney 2006)

### • Key barriers to the education journey, including the effects of environmental factors such as drought on families and communities;

World Vision has been working to address some of the key barriers to early educational success for many First Nations children for the last eleven years. Whilst we have had some success providing culturally strong programs where families feel safe and encouraged to support their children's development and early learning, we have also observed some key structural barriers that need addressing if First Nations children in many remote communities are to make successful transitions to formal education.

*Lack of physical infrastructure to support families*

In urban settings families have a raft of facilities to support them in their parenting journey; playgroups, early learning centres and neighbourhood centres provide safe, nurturing environments for families to learn and gain confidence in supporting their children's development and transition to formal schooling.(Jackiewicz, Saggers et al. 2011) World Vision is currently working with nine remote communities who have no such facilities and are desperate to support their young families by having a physical space where parents/caregivers can come together, learn from each other and develop and practice their skills in relation to supporting their children's development and feeling confidence in doing so. Currently, parenting programs and playgroups often operate under a tree or on a local river bank – neither being conducive to fostering the value of early education among families or the broader community.

*Lack of well-developed holistic school transition programs*

An important part of World Vision's early years programming is supporting successful transition for children commencing formal schooling. Our programs work with parents and other family members to build their confidence to interact with the school personnel, gain confidence in the school environment and understand the importance of their engagement in the school community. While we can do much to improve children and families' readiness for school, we find it more difficult to influence the school's readiness for children. Often teachers have a very basic understanding of the local culture or the expectations of families and children. Teachers especially in the first grades are often young, inexperienced and sometimes fear engaging with First Nations families or the broader community. Through our programming we have been able to encourage teachers to visit our playgroup program to meet parents and enjoy on country outings so that they can see the strengths of both children and family members. This has radically changed the perceptions of teachers and their ability to engage with First Nations children and their families.

Just as school engagement is a critical component of the educational journey, the school environment is key to education engagement. School cultures need to be welcoming and acknowledge the language and culture of the children attending. Teacher training is essential to support culturally-safe school environments, where the curriculum is delivered within a culturally relevant framework and where students are supported in culturally appropriate ways. (Munns, Martin et al. 2008)

Racism remains a common experience for First Nations children. This racism can be from peers, teachers or administrators and the way the system is structured which marginalises First Nations children. This racism can be direct and overt, or it can be through the racial bias of teachers and administrators who develop subconscious negative biases towards First Nations children. (Bodkin-Andrews and Carlson 2016) This means that First Nations history and culture, particularly when delivered as a deficit, can potentially be harmful knowledge when developing First Nations understanding and perspectives. (Vass 2012) It is important that First Nations knowledge is approached and developed through a strength-based framework that enables cultural capability and safety within the education system where First Nations values and traditions are acknowledged and appreciated.

Parent, carer and community involvement in the education journey is very important. The personal experiences of parents, carers and community members mean they are often fearful of engaging in the school environment, particularly when there are real language barriers to overcome, when they do not recognise the value of the education being offered, and particularly when they cannot see the connection between education and improved wellbeing for their children and communities. These attitudes can be passed on to children in their care. The engagement of these key people in a child's life – parents, carers and community members – is critical for their engagement in school processes, priorities and curricula. (Lea, Thompson et al. 2011)

*The Digital Divide*

There are additional barriers to the education of First Nations children in remote communities, including technological barriers. Never has the digital divide between First Nations children and their peers been more pronounced than during the COVID-19 pandemic. The immediate need for school closures and education to be moved primarily online meant the gap in access to online learning became a stark indictment of the disadvantage which First Nations students face. The 2014–2015 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) shows that 78.6% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had accessed the internet in the 12 months prior to the survey. There were large differences in access based on geography, with 88.8% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in metropolitan areas accessing the internet in the past 12 months, compared to just 47.5% of those living in very remote areas. Just under two thirds (62.7%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote areas (which includes large towns such as Alice Springs and Broome) accessed the internet in the past 12 months. Furthermore, 71.1% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in metropolitan areas used the internet every day, compared to 36.5% of those in remote areas, and 19% of those in very remote areas. In another study, the Centre for Appropriate Technology collected data on internet access in an infrastructure survey of homelands/outstations in the Northern Territory. It found that 37.0% of the 401 small communities visited had internet coverage, but in 80.0% of cases coverage only extended to one house. (Rennie, Thomas et al. 2019) This was an issue recently raised in the media, which shed light on the experience of First Nations students in Wilcannia where teachers were forced to hand deliver lessons because online access wasn't possible.

Closing the digital divide is an obvious and relatively easy fix that should be prioritised in addressing the educational gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. With an ever-evolving education system which will only increase its dependence on online learning and technology in the future, the gap in online access must be addressed as a priority. There are opportunities for Australian governments to work closely with the private sector and the community themselves to close this gap in internet access so First Nations students and their parents and carers can access educational materials online.

## • *The role of culture and country in a child's learning;*

While there have been significant improvements in teaching First Nations history and society, there is still much work to be done in terms of decolonising the Australian school curriculum. Much of the history content still has a Eurocentric perspective. First Nations history also has a deficit focus which teaches much of contemporary First Nations experiences and little of the rich cultural history of First Nations communities. (Hickling-Hudson and Ahlquist 2003)

*The importance of a 'both ways' approach*

World Vision has co-designed its education programs with First Nations communities over several years. Throughout this time there had been strong calls from the communities themselves for 'both ways' education. Remote communities want their children to be able to succeed within their own communities and cultures, but also to succeed in the mainstream world. Many are desperate to have bilingual programs endorsed as a basic right, where children entering school are taught in their community languages so that they can develop the competencies required to learn in the school environment before they are required to learn in English.

For most Australians, the first years of schooling build upon children's existing knowledge and skills - knowledge acquired through their shared experiences with their families prior to entering the classroom. World Vision has observed that the first years of schooling often simply ignore much of what First Nations children already know and can do – knowledge and skills that which they have obtained through their shared experiences with the families. Unlike other Australians, First Nations

children are asked to acquire new knowledge and skills that do not build upon their previous experiences. In addition, many are asked to acquire and learn in a new language. Often teachers assess the children as having no foundational skills, yet we have found that when the curriculum is purposefully adapted to build upon their existing skills and knowledge, learning is accelerated in a similar way to that of non-Indigenous children.

A 'both ways' approach is critical to First Nations children's success in the early years of schooling. Children need to be exposed to mainstream approaches as well as having their own First Nations approaches to early learning validated and encouraged before entering school. This both-ways approach should continue to be validated and encouraged as students proceed through their primary years.

Embedding traditional knowledges and practices, and delivering them through First Nations pedagogies, should be implemented as a way of decolonising the curriculum. This has been done in various settings in the past and should be explored as part of education standard setting. For example, Warlpiri teachers in Central Australia have been developing their Warlpiri curriculum for over twenty years. They have developed early readers based on traditional Warlpiri stories for each reading level, making it possible for children to move through reading levels by reading stories that are familiar to them and make sense in terms of their cultural understandings. Unfortunately, the utilisation of the Warlpiri curriculum over the years has been undermined by the vagaries of ever-changing educational policies and the relative experience or inexperience of various school principals and teaching staff. (Disbray and Martin 2018)

Learning on country should be acknowledged as a best practice pedagogical model for First Nations students. The embedding of traditional ways of epistemology (being), ontology (doing) and axiology (knowing) should be considered when attempting to deliver western pedagogies to First Nations children, particularly in highly traditional settings. There are examples of using the Montessori model of education as an alternative way of providing education to First Nations children which is much more aligned with traditional First Nations education. (Holmes 2018)

The education of non-Indigenous teaching staff must go far beyond cultural awareness training. Cultural immersion programs are an example of going beyond cultural awareness which is delivered through didactic curriculum to cultural capability through building real-world experiences and connections with First Nations people and communities. Opportunities for learning on country should be undertaken to build stronger understandings of, and connections to, Aboriginal ways of being, doing and knowing. Having school personal who are educated in bicultural teaching and learning is essential if educational gains are to be made.

The focus should not be on the model of education, but the result of education attainment relevant to the lives of First Nations people in remote communities. If this means an entirely different model of education for First Nations children, then this should be seriously considered. There may be additional costs of developing and delivering different models, but this should be considered in the context of broader social multiplier benefits and the public good.

*The need for First Nations teachers as core school staff*

When traditional knowledges and values are taught in schools, they are often delivered by non-Indigenous teachers who have limited capability to authentically deliver this curriculum. World Vision Australia recommends that every school have a cultural educator; a local First Nations community member who is employed as a core staff member to develop the cultural capability of students and the education system. (Rosnon, Talib et al. 2019) This would make schools more culturally safe for First Nations students while increasing awareness of the rich culture and history of First Nations communities. In turn, this would help reduce discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Having cultural educators in schools would also improve the skills and

knowledge of non-Indigenous teachers, building their cultural capability so they can teach First Nations content with confidence. First Nations educators could help equip non-Indigenous teachers with the knowledge and understanding to discuss First Nations culture and history in depth in the classroom. For example, World Vision is working with teachers to support them to feel more comfortable and better equipped to cover First Nations content with their students.

Aboriginal Education Assistants or similar roles have been employed in schools for a long time thanks to the strong advocacy of First Nations people and organisations in pushing for these roles. These roles, however, are primarily focused on education support, pastoral care and to enable engagement for First Nations students across Australia. Aboriginal education assistants do not typically deliver cultural education, though some schools are privileged to benefit from Aboriginal education assistants who have delivered and facilitated cultural education in their schools. (Price, Jackson-Barrett et al. 2019)

The proposed role of a First Nations cultural educator or coordinator should not be seen as an optional or tangential role, but rather be employed as part of the core teaching staff of a school. This is important to only give the teaching of First Nations culture and knowledge the attention it deserves, but to also signal a shift in the priority of schools to become more culturally safe and inclusive environments. The role of a First Nations education coordinator would include:
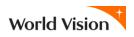
1. Providing cultural awareness education in the classroom
2. Coordinating community educators to attend the school to provide education, including sharing First Nations history, language, stories and knowledges
3. Coordinating on country learning experiences for students, teachers and school staff
4. Providing cultural awareness and capability training for teachers and school staff
5. Supporting cross curriculum embedding of First Nations knowledges, such as teaching science, geography and mathematics through First Nations practices and approaches

In the social sciences and arts, schools typically have teaches specifically employed to deliver history, geography, art, drama, music, industrial arts, home economics and language. These have long been considered core learning requirements for students, often delivered by teachers with expertise in the respective subject field. It is now the time to value the knowledge, culture and practices of the first peoples of Australia to be core education for all students.

## • *Community and family structures that support a child's education and their attendance at school;*

First Nations communities and parents are rarely given the opportunity to have self-determination in the education of their children. The system seems punitive in expelling for truancy. While truancy should not be supported, it is counter intuitive to expel a student from not attending, which then leads to further educational exclusion. The onus for educational engagement and achievement is often directed at students and parents, rather than exploring deficits in the education model as some of the reasons why the student is not engaging. This same misplaced onus is reflected in government policy linking welfare payments to school attendance. Previous research in Victoria empirically demonstrated that school engagement is related to educational outcomes, where engagement includes the child's relationship with his/her peers, the school environment and the student's motivation him/herself. These findings suggest that the focus should be on reforming the education model to meet the needs of First Nations students rather than expecting students to assimilate into a model which they struggle to fit. (Winch 2016)

Through its 'both ways' approach developed with the guidance of First Nations communities across Australia, World Vision has worked with families and community leaders to ensure they are actively engaged in their children's education. The following case study is used to illustrate the power of building on what the children and their families already know to achieve educational outcomes.

Miriam lives in a small community in the Western Desert. She has been attending playgroup with her grandchild for a number of weeks. Even though Miriam turned up regularly, she rarely interacted with the staff or the children. Rather she would sit in a corner and observe from a distance. That was until she accompanied her grandchild on an 'on Country' excursion. Once on country, the playgroup facilitators discovered a new Miriam. She immediately took charge and proceeded to instruct both the children and their caregivers on the various bush foods and animals that were easy to find. She helped the children look for animal tracks and to 'read' the signs until they came upon the animals they were looking for. She showed everyone how to dig for honey ants and how to eat them once they were discovered. The non-Indigenous staff reflected on how the power dynamic had changed as soon as they were on country; they were immediately the visitors needing to be educated. When they returned to the playgroup, the newly discovered authority experienced by Miriam was replicated as she 'took charge' of the playgroup and developed learning games and stories for the children based on their experience on country. From that moment on she became an active member of the playgroup, an advocate for early learning in her community and a leading figure in discussions about children's education.

This is only one example of the power of being on country, drawing on local knowledge and expertise to support children's learning. While this is a small example and a small step, it had powerful impacts in that community. Where other organisations fail to engage families in their children's early learning, World Vision has been able to engage up to 90% of resident families in our early learning programs. Our success is built upon a both ways approach, adapting the curriculum to each context, adapting training of staff to build on their existing knowledge, utilising the knowledge and authority of Elders to support families, and training and employing local staff. When families feel safe, respected and valued, they are eager to be involved and support their children's education.

World Vision, in partnership with Melbourne University and remote communities in the Northern Territory and Western Australia, has adapted the Australian Abecedarian Approach to Early Childhood Education. The approach was identified by the Central Australian communities themselves as one they could identify with and that could be adapted to incorporate a lot of cultural knowledge and ways of knowing. Working with the communities on adapting the three pillars of the approach – Conversational Reading, Learning Games, and Responsive Caregiving – has ensured that the curriculum and pedagogy reflect the local culture and language in each community. The process of adaptation with each community has been an important community education initiative of its own. By adapting the learning resources so that they reflect the local culture and can be delivered on country in the playgroups and in homes, the communities have developed a thorough understanding of the approach, its value and the outcomes it is designed to achieve. Consequently, they are able and very willing to support their children's learning in real and meaningful ways. (Page, Cock et al. 2019)

*• Effective government initiatives, past and present, that support remote communities to enable greater educational outcomes, including those that have improved attainment in literacy and numeracy;*

World Vision has worked with the Warlpiri communities of the Central Desert for twelve years. Over that time, we have witnessed the impact of a group of aging Warlpiri teachers who attended a school in the late 1970s and early 1980s. They represent a generation of Warlpiri people who are fluent in speaking, reading and writing both English and Warlpiri. These teachers also completed their teacher education through a special teacher education program for remote teachers delivered in the 1990s. Since that time, they have worked tirelessly to build a bilingual, bicultural education program in their communities but have been thwarted over the years by ever changing education policy and changes in school principals. Despite this, one of them has recently been made deputy head of Yuendumu School – a long overdue recognition of her commitment and expertise. These

Warlpiri teachers are continually distressed by the low literacy and numeracy achievement of children and young people in their communities and they want a similar approach to bilingual education that they themselves experienced and benefited from many years ago reinstated. They are all close to retiring and are concerned that soon none of them will remain in the workforce. Therefore, these teachers also want to see a special program for place-based teacher education so that the next generation of children will also experience being taught by Warlpiri teachers.

World Vision is also distressed by the lack of community-based early childhood programs in the communities in which we work. As stated earlier, we are currently working in nine communities in the West Kimberley that once had thriving creche's and playgroups through a bipartite arrangement between the State and Commonwealth government that ended some 15 – 20 years ago. These facilities were built by the State Government and received operational funding from the Commonwealth government. With the introduction of a user pays child care system, these services lost their operational funding over time and, with the loss of secure operational funding, the State government stopped investing in the upkeep and maintenance of the buildings which are now unusable in many cases.  World Vision was able to secure a grant under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy to provide operational funding for six of these services and short-term philanthropic funding for three communities. Neither of these arrangements, however, are sustainable in the long term and World Vision would like to see a return to bipartite arrangements between State and Commonwealth governments to ensure the long-term viability of remote services such as these.

*Kindilink Need for effective school transition programs*

In Western Australia the State government has introduced a school transition program aimed at three and four-year old's. World Vision is collaborating with the State government on this initiative in the communities where we work. This is a very successful program when local women are trained to deliver the program and World Vision in partnership with Melbourne University have been able to provide the training, mentoring and coaching for local women. World Vision would like to see a real emphasis in the future on providing training for local people. We are confident that the return on investment would be considerable in better preparing children and their families for the first years of school.

**• *Innovative approaches to workforce, including recruitment, professional learning, retention and support, and lessons from communities that could be more generally applied;***

There are fundamentally three levels of building cultural capacity: cultural awareness, cultural safety and cultural immersion. Most of the time efforts to build cultural capacity are just directed at the superficial level of cultural awareness which is essentially a knowledge-based approach. The risk is that this can often be a deficit-based model which can create a level of cultural bias against First Nations people. Cultural capability can be created though other ways, such as real-world engagement with First Nations peoples, cultures and knowledges. Cultural capability is about creating positive attitudes and beliefs about First Nations peoples and cultures. Cultural safety is achieved through changing practices and creating environments which support and nurture First Nations students. (Aseron, Greymorning et al. 2013)

Cultural immersion programs are an effective model for creating real-world experiences for non-Indigenous people. Cultural immersion should be mandatory training for teachers working in remote areas where over half of the students are First Nations children.  Cultural immersion is a positive way to engage local communities and empower them to provide leadership in education of their children. Teachers who teach in remote schools should also be required to learn the local language

as part of their localised training to be able to deliver flexible culturally appropriate teaching to First Nations students whose first language is not English. (Brasche and Harrington 2012)

Increasing the First Nations workforce within the education system should be a priority and is the single most impactful way of improving educational outcomes for First Nations children. While there was an increase in the proportion of Indigenous teachers from the 2011-2016 census of 1.17% to 2.02%, it is still far below population parity with around 5% of children attending school being from a First Nations background. In addition, the education disadvantage experienced by First Nations children should also be considered and therefore a much higher proportion of First Nations teachers should be employed to create culturally safe learning environments. (Trimmer, Ward et al. 2018)

A program which exists in the United States is the 'Knowledge is Power Program' (KIPP). This was largely promoted through the book *Outliers.* The main premise of the program is extending school hours for disadvantaged and marginalised students who may not benefit from the additional education opportunities that more affluent students typically receive outside of school. Fundamentally increasing school hours led to improved educational outcomes for the cohort of disadvantaged students. This could be explored through extending school days for an additional hour where embedded cultural pedagogies could be used to deliver curriculum outcomes. (Nichols-Barrer, Gleason et al. 2016)

The translation of curriculum into traditional languages should also be considered as the current curriculum is challenging for remote students who have English as a second or further language.

*• Access and support to deliver the Australian Curriculum (including STEM) in a flexible way to meet local learning needs and interests of remote students, including examples of innovative ways in which the curriculum is being delivered in remote schools*

Science, Technology and Mathematics (STEM) are the foundation of modern learning. As discussed above, additional hours before or after standard school time could support improved STEM outcomes for First Nations students by focusing on traditional practices which can embed STEM as an approach rather than embedding traditional knowledges into STEM which has often been the method. For example, biology could be taught through bush tucker and medicine and land management. Maths, for instance, could be taught through traditional story-telling and technology could be taught in the context of using technology to maintain traditional practices, particularly with digital technology. (Osborne, Paige et al. 2019)

In the Western Desert schools are partnering with CSIRO to make the STEM curriculum contextually relative to the children who are engaging with the ranger program to take their learning on country. These sorts of initiatives should not be left up to individual schools and arrangements, but built be systematically supported embedded into an approach to First Nations education in remote areas. (Jorgensen 2020)

*• Successful pathways to ensure students have the knowledge and skills they need to enter further education and the workforce.*

In many remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities, skilled staff often come from outside the communities. A majority of these skilled staff are non-Indigenous people who may come for personal reasons such as higher salaries, promotions or altruism. These workers are highly transient with limited long-term investment or transferred community benefits.

Many First Nations communities often have limited consultation on the directions of their community in relation to Vocational Educational Training (VET) courses being delivered. This

includes how such courses align with future opportunities in the community and how capacity can be built through accredited training. First Nations communities should be consulted, and they should have the right to determine what accredited VET courses should be delivered in their communities to meet self-determined capacity building requirements. This would enable First Nations people to obtain sustainable employment within their own community. Therefore, it is critical that the VET industry change how training is delivered in remote Frist Nations communities in order to better meet community needs and aspirations. Greater opportunities need to be provided for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their communities to gain direct access to accredited training and to secure fulltime employment within their own community. (Waters 2019)

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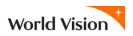
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