

COMMUNIQUÉ

OECD Seminar on Indigenous Education *Effective Practice, Mutual Learning*

14-15 May 2007
Cairns, Australia

Officials from Canada, Chile, Mexico, New Zealand, the United States of America, Australia and the OECD met in Cairns, Australia on 14-15 May 2007 to share approaches that are improving the educational outcomes of Indigenous peoples. The Seminar provided government policy advisors and programme designers with further insights into how successful practices could be translated into other countries or contexts to support strong futures for Indigenous peoples across the world.

The Seminar demonstrated the growing recognition of the value of sharing and expanding our knowledge of what effective practice is occurring in these countries and finding ways to enhance our mutual learning. There was a significant Indigenous presence at the seminar and this was considered a critical success factor in both the proceedings and in any future actions.

The seminar examined a range of topics including:

- Early childhood education
- Using data to drive performance
- Higher education
- Building student, parent and community demand for quality education and productive school community partnerships and
- Language and culture.

It also considered effective practice in: family and community information strategies; improving student engagement and outcomes through sport; building student success with Aboriginal parents; grade level achievement; working with teachers and effective teacher training programs; and overcoming poverty to attain postsecondary degrees.

Key concepts

Participants noted that success for Indigenous peoples means success for the globe and highlighted the critical importance of Indigenous peoples defining and determining the purpose of education.

Seminar participants heard from Mr Noel Pearson of Australia on building demand for high quality education to “give capability for Indigenous people to choose lives they have reason to value”. Mr Pearson noted that there was often a fine line between good policy and bad policy and that policy advisors needed to be aware of the fine calibration necessary to avoid deleterious effects on Indigenous peoples.

Participants agreed that effective practice is underpinned by the strength of engagement with local community, parents and students. It needs to:

- Honour cultural distinctiveness - start with recognition of, and respect for, the culture and identities of Indigenous peoples
- Focus on aspiration, success and innovation - explicitly promote high expectations
- Understand the purpose of learning from the perspective of Indigenous peoples – finding answers to the question, “Learning for what?”
- Emphasise community ownership - “community based” and “community paced”

- Build “demand side” expectations (students and parents), whilst ensuring a high quality of practical and focussed responses from the “supply side” (teachers and schools).

Creating better whole-of-government pathways both vertically across spheres of government and horizontally within spheres of government was also an important underpinning factor for success.

Seminar considerations and outcomes

Seminar participants identified a number of priorities where countries may continue their work together. These are outlined below.

- Building and investing in **early learning programmes** which are the foundation for achievement in later life. Representatives from New Zealand and Canada discussed quality early learning experiences in childcare settings. There was considerable interest in creating conditions for ongoing demand for learning through engaging families in early learning programmes. The Seminar participants believed that more work should be done to identify investment returns in the early years: 0-3 year olds and 4-5 year olds. This should be achieved by developing better formative evaluation processes and improved longitudinal data to demonstrate and better inform return on investment in early learning and education.
- Representatives from Canada, Australia and the United States of America discussed important considerations in developing and using **data as a driver to improving educational outcomes**. The Seminar participants supported evidence based and data informed policy development and discussed data strategies that were able to ‘put a face to achievement’ through personalising learning and mapping progress at the individual level. Data could be used to create conversations, build relationships, heighten expectations and could target relevant support to students, teachers and schools while at the same time recognising where success has been achieved. Designing appropriate data models and their dimensions need to consider how the audiences will use this data to drive improvements. This may require some customising to Indigenous contexts, particularly quality measures, which are best defined through reference by Indigenous people. Future action in this area was to consider indicators of quality education as well as supporting more internationally comparable data sets.
- The Seminar heard that **higher education** engagement by Indigenous peoples is generally low across the participating countries. Innovative practices were required to engage and sustain Indigenous participation in higher education and to close the relative participation gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in higher education. A stronger collective responsibility between government, educational institutions, Indigenous communities, businesses and employers was required to build post secondary education pathways for Indigenous peoples. A representative from Mexico presented the Seminar with information on Higher Education in Latin America for Indigenous peoples. This presentation noted the value of separate Indigenous institutions, inter-cultural universities as well as the need for mainstream universities to establish special programmes for Indigenous peoples.
- Characteristics of effective practice for initiatives across the world were seen to depend on **schools and communities working together** towards shared objectives with high expectations of the outcomes. These objectives needed to recognise the purpose of education from Indigenous perspectives but also needed to reach out to business and future employment opportunities in order to

support strong Indigenous futures. Representatives from Australia and Canada outlined some of the key elements to building productive school and community partnerships. A further Canadian presentation outlined effective practice in supporting Indigenous people to complete training and take up positions in the education workforce as well as the economic benefits of this involvement. Future actions included sharing information on ways to facilitate community engagement and develop Indigenous leadership from the grass roots to the elite political level as well as the professional development for school leaders and teachers. The multiple impacts, both in Indigenous communities and the wider community of developing the capacity of the Indigenous educator workforce was also noted by Seminar participants.

- The **revitalisation and preservation of Indigenous languages** was seen as a pressing issue for community and educational partnerships. The Seminar observed that Indigenous languages were in varying states of use, but that Indigenous languages were the first languages of many people. A Latin American expert analysed the importance of Indigenous cultural and language issues in the region. He noted that Indigenous languages were linked to the “world view” of Indigenous peoples and that these languages provide the impetus for new terms of collaboration between Indigenous communities and educationalists. There was particular interest in initiatives that improved proficiency in Indigenous languages.

Initial priorities for further work

The Seminar endorsed the value of further international forums to continue sharing effective practices in improving the educational outcomes of Indigenous peoples. With regard to the OECD work program, the preferred way forward was to address the issues through existing studies or networks rather than creating a separate stream of Indigenous-specific work.

- A report on the seminar will be provided to the OECD's Education Policy Committee meeting in November 2007.
- A proposal will be put to the 20-21 June 2007 meeting of the OECD's Starting Strong Network to support a strand of work on Indigenous Early Childhood Education.
- The participating countries agreed to continue the Seminar's steering committee as a way of assessing which studies and networks could efficiently address Indigenous issues. It was agreed that the Steering Committee would discuss the possibility of developing more internationally comparable data sets for Indigenous populations by reference to the OECD's Indicators of Education Systems (INES) Technical Group, and integration of indigenous issues into existing or new review activities of the OECD such as *Tertiary education*, *Vocational education and training*, *Recognition of non-formal and informal learning*, and *Education and diversity*.

Participants from across the represented OECD countries recognized the value of this seminar as an opportunity to pursue further bilateral relationships. For example, some representatives will pursue an exchange of information on good practice in the teaching of numeracy skills to Indigenous students.

The work of the Seminar will also be referred to the organisers of the World Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Education to be held in Melbourne, Australia on 7-11 December 2008 for consideration in the conference proceedings.