

**Final Report on the  
North West  
Early Childhood and Primary Teacher  
Workforce Development Strategy  
*Stage Two***

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2009



## Acknowledgement to Country

Out of respect, the Murdoch University staff working on this Project would like to acknowledge that this Project has been penned on *Nyungar* Land.

We would also like to acknowledge the many Aboriginal lands that we have travelled through during the course of the Project.

We hereby acknowledge all past and present Traditional Owners, Elders and Custodians of these lands. It has truly been a privilege to stand upon your country, to look and to listen, which provided us with the best way forward. Education is *Nidja Ngulla Nyungar Wadjela Kaatijin* which translates as 'education is everyone's business'.



## Executive Summary

The aim of this project was to further develop an Early Childhood Teacher Workforce Development Strategy for the remote North West of Western Australia (WA). Funding from this Commonwealth Seeding Grant formed Stage Two of this strategy, Stage One having commenced in Semester One 2009 through funding from the Australian Government and the WA Department of Education and Training to support the COAG Universal Access to Early Childhood Education agenda.

The success of the project to date is a tribute to the close collaboration between Murdoch University's School of Education, the Australian Government's Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and the WA Department of Education and Training.

The project is located in the remote Pilbara and Kimberley regions of Western Australia, which face enormous challenges in achieving both UNESCO's Millenium goals of *Education for All* and the more recent Australian 'Closing the Gap' campaign initiatives (Price and Jackson-Barrett, 2009). To this end, both the Commonwealth and State governments have sought ways to improve the educational opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students living in these regions. In particular, there has been a focus on improving access to high quality Early Childhood Education (ECE) for all children.

The need for highly qualified Early Childhood teachers, prepared and fully equipped to work in remote and rural locations is critical to the success of this strategy. This urgent need is exacerbated in WA by a predicted 2.2% growth rate in student numbers over the next ten years (Personal Communication, DET WA, 9/11/9). The Global Financial Crisis has seen lower numbers of teachers resign or retire than usual. However there is still a predicted severe shortage of teachers in WA over the next ten years.

A central focus of this project has been to provide opportunities for Aboriginal Islander Education Officers (AIEOs), Teacher Assistants<sup>1</sup> (TAs) and Child Care Workers (CCWs) who already live and work in the region to become teachers in and for their communities. These potential teachers already have a strong understanding of and attachment to the context in which they will teach. For many, it is their home where they were born. For others, it has been a life style choice to move there. Whatever their circumstances, all of these potential teachers are connected by 'country' and community in their own unique way, which in our opinion adds value to the importance of this project.

This detailed report presents recommendations for future workforce development based on the preliminary findings from this six-month study, as presented in chapter 13.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms Teacher Assistant (TA) or Education Assistant (EA) are used interchangeably as the different schools use different terms.



# Key Outcomes

## **1. Recruitment and Enrolment Semester 2 2009**

Eleven students were enrolled in the Bachelor of Education Early Childhood and Primary program in Semester 2, 2009. Eight students came from the following towns in the Kimberley and Pilbara: Kununurra, Broome, Karratha, Tom Price and Newman. In addition, a further two students from Kambalda, in the Goldfields region of WA, were included in the program, together with another student originally from the North West (NW) of WA.

These 11 students are in addition to the ten students who enrolled in Stage One of the project (initiated in Semester One 2009 through DET WA/Australian Government funding). The combined cohort for Stage One and Two is 20 currently enrolled students, as one student has withdrawn from the program due to changed personal circumstances.

## **2. Recruitment and Enrolment Semester 1, 2010.**

A focus in Stage Two was the further recruitment in the Kimberley towns of Halls Creek, Derby, Fitzroy Crossing, Wyndham and Kununurra. Five Indigenous and two non-Indigenous applications are currently being processed for admission in Semester One, 2010. We have also received an expression of interest from a potential student from the Northern Territory.

As we write, we are continuing to field expressions of interest (EOIs) from prospective students in the region and across the State. Clearly, there is an untapped desire and need for opportunities to access University study in the model offered by this project.

## **3. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Individual Study Plans**

Each student has been interviewed and an Individual Study Plan developed, based on their prior study or work experience.

Students with Diplomas in Children's Services (Early Childhood Education (ECE)) were awarded Advanced Standing for three units. The majority of students intend applying for between two to four units of RPL. The RPL process however, is complex and time-consuming and requires adequate resourcing.

As the majority of students work full-time and have extensive study commitments, they have initially enrolled part-time with the option to increase their study load if possible in the future.

## **4. Student Retention and Progress**

All students enrolled in Stage One in Semester One 2009 passed their enrolled units – some with Distinctions and High Distinctions. Results for Semester Two will not be available until

mid-December but informal feedback from Unit Coordinators indicates they are all expected to pass.

All students indicate that they are keen to continue their studies next year.

## **5. Mentoring**

Each student has been offered the opportunity to self-select an in situ mentor, who is paid a minimal amount for their mentoring services, through DET. Students who have not yet selected a mentor have accessed members of the Project team for on-going support.

Feedback from students indicates that mentoring support either by on-site mentors or members of the Project team has been critical to their success.

Mentoring workshops were held in major regional centres and were well attended and received by the participants.

Currently, mentors are paid a minimal sum for a maximum of 20 hours of mentoring, through the DET funding. However, our view is that this needs to be reviewed in terms of adequacy and sustainability.

## **6. School Experience Placements**

Students will be provided with opportunities to participate in a range of school experience placements across sectors including ECE, Primary, Government, Independent and Indigenous community-based settings.

## **7. Short Courses**

Initially, it was anticipated that short courses may be able to be offered in the North West of WA. However, with the limited number of students who are spread over such a vast area, this is currently not economically viable.

However, if and when sufficient numbers warrant the implementation of short courses, our discussions with Notre Dame University (Broome Campus) has flagged it as a suitable venue for short courses. There is also the potential for using TAFE sites.

## **8. External Studies**

Murdoch University is one of the few universities in Australia that offers almost all its Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in both internal and external mode. The use of information and communication technologies (ICT) facilitates a high quality delivery of these programs.

All the students in this program are enrolled as external students. They access lectures via Lectopia and are provided with networking support from tutors and other students through on-line units and email.



There is no doubt that the opportunity to study externally, so that the students can remain in their communities, is critical to the success of this program. Reassurance that the students were not required to attend extended block release time in Perth was critical to their initial decision to enrol.

To assure the quality of the program and to develop the understanding of Murdoch University's academic staff of the specific issues in these regions, there is a strong preference for us to visit the students. This has been well received by the students who welcome our efforts to come to them.

## **9. Commonwealth Seeding Grant**

The Australian Government's grant for this project was significant in that it enabled us to progress to a second stage of the *North West Early Childhood and Primary Workforce Development Strategy*. However, to provide the service and produce the outcomes discussed in this report has necessitated considerable supplementary funding from other sources.

In conclusion, our philosophy for this Project can be summed up in the words of our Prime Minister, Mr Kevin Rudd:

*"Our challenge for the future is to cross that bridge and, in so doing, to embrace a new partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians ... the core of this partnership for the future is to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians on life expectancy, educational achievement and employment opportunities.*

*We need a new beginning – a new beginning which contains real measures of policy success or failure; a new beginning, a new partnership, on closing the gap with sufficient flexibility not to insist on a one-size-fits-all approach ... but instead allowing flexible, tailored, local approaches ... a new beginning that draws intelligently on the experiences of new policy settings across the nation."*  
(Apology Speech, 13 February, 2008)



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## Acknowledgements

This study has relied on the generous support of many people. Their individual contributions are gratefully acknowledged.

District Education Offices of the Kimberley and Pilbara regions

Principals and Teachers, schools in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions

Current and prospective students

Current and prospective mentors

Errol D'Rozario, Manager, Attraction and Retention, DET

Freda Ogilvie, Project Manager, Office of Early Childhood Development, DET

Chris Glass, Deputy Program Chair, Initial Teacher Education (Rockingham), Murdoch University.

## Abbreviations

AIEO	Aboriginal Islander Education Officer
AISWA	Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia
ARC	Australian Research Council
BEd ECE	Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Education and Primary) program
CCW	Child care worker
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CV	Curriculum vitae
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DET	Department of Education and Training (WA)
DHS	District High School
EA	Education Assistant
ECE	Early childhood education
EOI	Expression of interest
HEI	Higher education institution
HELP	Higher education loan program
ICT	Information and communication technology
ITE	Initial teacher education
NW	North West
PD	Professional development
PSAC	Prospective student and admissions centre
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
SES	Socio-economic status
TA	Teacher Assistant
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
WA	Western Australia



## Preface

This Project is built around the central tenet and key guiding principles of relationships and respect.

Central to the way the program is organised and, we believe, to its success, is the emphasis on developing strong relationships between the students, mentors and academic staff. It has been important, from the very beginning, that members of the Project team meet the students informally and face-to-face, to build a strong relationship and share our stories. It has also been important for us to maintain regular contact by visits, phone calls, email and Skype so that this relationship develops around mutual trust.

Travelling to their towns and communities was also considered critical so that we could develop a sense of the land and the communities in which they lived. This helped to contextualise the students and enabled us to relate to the places in which they lived, worked and studied. Through regular visits to their communities we could develop a much deeper understanding of the issues and challenges they faced while studying externally.

The development of this strong bond is clearly valued by the students, as their feedback highlights:

*“Thank you for all your help. To have your support and also meeting you face to face is going to be so good for all of us up here. I am so excited about this opportunity.”*

*“To finish off, I would like to say thank you for your kind words and encouragement. This has helped me to follow through with the application.”*

*“Its great to know we all have your support in our studies.”*

*“Thank you so much for all your assistance to me in the application for the Teaching Scholarship. I look forward to meeting you in person when you come up to ....”*

It is important then, that we begin this final report by saying who we are so that you, the reader, who does not know us, can begin to get to know us. Then we will introduce you to some of the students and the uniqueness of the ‘Country’ that makes up the North West of WA. This approach is very much based on Indigenous protocols and research methodologies (Wilson, S., 2008).

## About us

### Chief coordinators

#### Libby Jackson-Barrett

Libby is a lecturer in the School of Education at Murdoch University. In the past, Libby had responsibilities for teaching units in Kulbardi's Aboriginal Tertiary Entrance Course (KATEC). She now teaches in a variety of undergraduate courses within Murdoch University's teacher education program.

Libby has completed her Masters degree and as a Whadjuck/Wudjari Nyungar Yorga, her research interests include exploring factors that promote and develop successful outcomes for Indigenous students in education.

Libby has a particular interest in critical pedagogy, diversity, inclusivity and Indigenous education issues.

### Anne Price

Anne is the Program Chair (Primary Teacher Education), Academic Coordinator of Primary School Experience and lecturer in Curriculum Development for Practitioners and Professional Issues in Teaching. Together with Libby Jackson-Barrett, she also co-ordinates the *North West Early Childhood Teacher Workforce Development Strategy: Stage One*.

Anne was formerly a secondary teacher and Deputy Principal and has extensive experience working in remote Indigenous and multicultural communities and District High Schools (DHS). She has particular expertise in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and strategies for the recruitment and training of ITE students from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds and remote/rural communities.

Anne's Doctoral dissertation entitled *Chelas, Ansars and Acolytes: Becoming a Teacher in and for Remote and Culturally Diverse Communities* examined the Trainee Teacher program developed by Christmas Island District High School, in collaboration with Murdoch University. This program assisted Teacher Assistants, employed at the school, to successfully engage with a Bachelor of Education degree program at Murdoch University and become teachers in their own right (Price, 2005). The program featured recognition of prior learning, mentoring support and distance learning and was awarded a Department of Education and Training Equity and Diversity Award in 2002.

This work prompted Anne's interest in providing opportunities for Aboriginal Islander Education Officers, Education Assistants and Child Care Workers in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions of Western Australia, to become teachers in and for their communities.

### Anne Winterton

Anne is our Project Manager and part of her role is to keep the Project team on track. She manages all the administrative aspects of the project including the budget, travel and workshop arrangements, report writing, preparation of written material and liaison with the students and mentors as well as the district offices and schools in the North West.

Anne brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the program, having previously managed both major national reviews as well as State-funded research. She has a strong background in educational administration, having worked in a number of universities locally, interstate and overseas. Her skills, including her attention to detail, were critical to the success of the program given the complexities and timelines involved in fulfilling the project requirements.



### Other team members

Other members of the Project team are Dr Libby Lee-Hammond who has a wealth of experience in Early Childhood Education, and Dr Susan McKenzie and Dr Judy McCallum, both of whom have expertise in the field of mentoring.



## Background

### The North West Early Childhood and Primary Teacher Workforce Development Strategy: Stage One

Murdoch University's School of Education, in collaboration with the Western Australian Department of Education and Training, initiated a *North West Early Childhood and Primary Teacher Workforce Development Strategy* in January 2009.

The strategy was aimed at developing career pathways for Aboriginal Islander Education Officers (AIEOs), Teacher Assistants (TAs) and Child Care Workers (CCWs) to become Early Childhood teachers working in and for the remote Pilbara and Kimberley regions of Western Australia. The strategy acknowledged the need for a coordinated approach to teacher workforce development (Noonan, P., 2005).

The strategy offered TAs, AIEOs and CCWs already working in these regions the opportunity to enrol in Murdoch University's fully accredited Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood and Primary) program. Successful applicants enrolled in the Bachelor of Education program either full-time or part-time and studied externally, to enable them to continue to live and work in their own communities.

The students are supported by a community-based Mentoring Program informed by empirical evidence and scholarly literature (for example Baird, J. 1993; Martin, G. 2000; Price, A.E., 2005 and MacCallum, J. 2007). Another key element of the strategy is the development of an articulated Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process, which enables each student to have relevant work, or community experiences credited towards their degree. The process is informed by National RPL Principles (AQF 2004) and relevant international literature (Mac Pherson and Brooking, 1992; Andresen, L., Boud, D., and Cohen, R., 2000; Taylor, T. & Clemans, A., 2000, and Breier M.; Cantwell, R and Scevak, J., 2004).

Funding for Stage One of the Project came from the WA Department of Education and Training and the Australian Government as part of a workforce development strategy to address the current and predicted shortage of fully qualified and appropriately trained early childhood teachers in the North West. On completion of the course students will be fully qualified teachers able to teach from Kindergarten to Year 7. Significantly they will be able to bring their own knowledge of their unique communities, languages and cultures to their teaching.

## The North West Early Childhood and Primary Teacher Workforce Development Strategy: Stage Two

Stage Two of this project was funded as a one-off seed funding grant from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) for projects aimed at exploring best practice/innovative models for up-skilling and retaining early childhood and care professionals.

Stage Two continued to focus on the recruitment and retention of Teacher Assistants, Australian Indigenous Education Officers and Child Care Workers located in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions of Western Australia in the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood and Primary) program as external students. In addition, the following new initiatives were introduced:

- Recruitment of applicants from the Kimberley and Pilbara regions of Western Australia, in particular from the towns of Halls Creek, Fitzroy Crossing, Derby, Wyndham, Kununurra, Karratha and Port Hedland. In these areas, there are significant early childhood education needs and teacher recruitment and retention is a serious problem;
- Provision of an extension to the site-based Mentoring Support Program for Teacher Assistants, Aboriginal Islander Education Officers and Child Care Workers;
- Provision of a culturally-sensitive Professional Development program for Mentors in the region;
- Development of an articulated recognition of prior learning (RPL) process in collaboration with relevant professional development providers;
- Development of individualised study plans for students;
- The availability of a supported multi-modal external study program;
- Provision of opportunities for students to undertake school experiences in cross-sectorial contexts, including Indigenous and non-Indigenous child care centres, community organizations and schools;
- Development of articulation pathways with the TAFE sector to enable students who do not meet university entry requirements to co-enrol in the Certificate IV level courses and the BEd Early Childhood and Primary degree. An initial meeting has been arranged with Central TAFE Leederville to follow-up this avenue;

- The availability of short courses and other relevant professional development in the Kimberley and Pilbara. Students participating in these course could use them for RPL credit; and
- Liaison with organisations such as NGALA and Child Inclusive Learning and Development Australia to coordinate and accredit their professional development programs towards the BEd degree.



## 2

# Logistics of Country

Before continuing, it is necessary to place the Project in its geographical context. What follows is a Western way to view Country but it is hoped it will assist readers to gain some understanding, at least, of the vast distances and travel implications involved in working in this region.

### Location

Western Australia (WA)<sup>2</sup> is the largest of Australia's eight States and Territories and covers an area of 2,525,500 square kilometres. This accounts for approximately one third of the entire Australian continent.

The area is divided into seven major geographical regions being the Kimberley, Outback, Pilbara, Coral Coast, Central Coast, Perth and the South West.

Despite Western Australia's huge size, the population is less than 1.8 million, 80% of whom live in and around the State capital city of Perth.

Whilst this Project was managed from Perth, the main focus was in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions, which are located in the north and north-west of WA.

### Kimberley region

The Kimberley<sup>3</sup> is the State's most northerly region, and encompasses an area of almost 424,517 square kilometres. With a population of just 34,000 people, it is largely a wilderness area with spectacular scenery and a hot, tropical climate.

The population lives in the towns of Broome, Kununurra, Derby, Halls Creek, Wyndham and Fitzroy Crossing. There are also more than 100 Aboriginal communities of various sizes, scattered throughout the region.

### Pilbara region

The Pilbara<sup>4</sup> lies to the south-west of the Kimberley and covers a total area of 507,896 sq kms (including off-shore islands). Whilst the eastern part is largely desert, the region is

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.australianexplorer.com/western\\_australia.htm](http://www.australianexplorer.com/western_australia.htm)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.dlgrd.wa.gov.au/Publications/StatInfo/RegionMaps.asp>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.dlgrd.wa.gov.au/Publications/StatInfo/RegionMaps.asp>

home to fantastic rocky landscapes and a land that is rich in natural resources such as iron ore, natural gas and salt.

Most of the 46,000 inhabitants live in the major towns of Port Hedland and Karratha, and the smaller towns of Roebourne, Dampier, Onslow, Pannawonica, Paraburdoo, Tom Price, Wickham, Newman, Marble Bar and Nullagine.

## Accessibility

One of the challenges that faced the Project team has been access to the students, mentors and prospective applicants in these remote regions.

In the Kimberley, only the towns of Broome and Kununurra are accessible from Perth via commercial aircraft. Similarly, only Port Hedland, Karratha and Newman in the Pilbara are serviced with regular flights.

Air travel *between* towns in both regions is either very infrequent or non-existent. Whilst it is possible to fly directly between Broome and Kununurra, air travel between Newman and Karratha or Karratha and Port Hedland for example, is routed via Perth. This adds significantly to the time and length of the overall journey and naturally impacts upon cost.

All other Kimberley and Pilbara towns must be accessed by road, with 4WD being the preferred mode of transport.

The vastness of the State, coupled with the availability (or not) of commercial flights to the regions has meant that each visit by academic staff has usually entailed many hours of travelling, both by air and by road (Table 1), and has always necessitated an overnight stay of at least one night, but often more.

Whilst travel costs represented a major expense to the Project, it was also costly in terms of time, with academic staff spending many days away from their home base in Perth. However, as previously stated, regular face-to-face contact between members of the Project team and the students was seen as critical to the ultimate success of the Project.



**Table 1: Travel times<sup>5</sup> and accessibility to towns in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions**

Region	From	To	Distance (km)	Journey in hours	
				Road	Air
Kimberley	Kununurra	Perth	3,148	38:09	3:15
	Kununurra	Wyndham	101	1:13	
	Kununurra	Halls Creek	359	4:16	
	Halls Creek	Fitzroy Crossing	289	3:27	
	Fitzroy Crossing	Derby	258	3:14	
	Derby	Broome	221	3:12	
	Broome	Perth	2,172	27:00	2:30
	Broome	Kununurra	1,044	12:44	1:20
Pilbara	Karratha	Perth	1,536	18:46	2:00
	Karratha/Perth	Perth/Port Hedland	241	3:08	9:35
	Karratha/Perth	Perth/Newman	561	7:10	5:25
	Karratha	Tom Price	398	5:37	
	Tom Price	Newman	275	3:31	
	Newman	Perth	1,182	14:21	1:40
	Port Hedland	Perth	1,635	19:48	2:00

<sup>5</sup> <http://rac.com.au/Travel/Driving-holidays/Journey-planner.aspx>,  
<http://www.qantas.com.au/travel/airlines/home/au/en>, <http://www.skywest.com.au/>,  
<http://www.virginblue.com.au/>



# 3

## Project development

### Phase one

The primary focus for the Project team during the first three months was:

- The recruitment and enrolment of students from the Kimberley and Pilbara regions;
- Developing and delivering a professional development program to mentors and other school teaching staff; and
- The induction of potential applicants to assist them to develop an understanding of the Bachelor of Education program and requirements for university study prior to their commencing study in Semester 1, 2010.

### Phase two

During the second three months of the program, attention focussed on:

- Identifying and incorporating professional development modules offered by relevant external providers into a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process;
- Investigating ways to extend school experience opportunities across sectors so that students could develop skills in working in Indigenous and non-Indigenous Child Care centres, schools and community organizations; and
- Identifying and developing 'Short Course' versions of specific core units from the Bachelor of Education program that could be delivered during the summer/winter breaks in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions.

Whilst the above were identified as key focus points, our experiences demonstrated the need to first develop a relationship with schools and communities, which was going to be critical to the success of this Project.

Each of these six components will now be examined in turn.



## 4

# Recruitment and enrolment

## Recruitment

### Process

An initial visit to the Kimberley and Pilbara by members of the Project team, including the School of Education's Lecturer/Indigenous Support Officer, had already taken place as part of the Stage One strategy. Visits were made to Indigenous and non-Indigenous Child Care Centres, government and independent schools, women's groups and community centres.

During these visits, an overview of the program was explained to all interested parties including Aboriginal Islander Education Officers, Child Care Workers, Teacher Assistants and Principals. Questions were answered concerning entry requirements, the potential for RPL and studying externally. The culturally appropriate medium of 'yarning' was used in meetings with Indigenous potential applicants.

Concerns were also raised in relation to other teaching programs including 'Fast Track' programs and those that required lengthy block release, where applicants needed to be away from their communities for extended periods.

The contact details of interested parties were collected and expressions of interest forms (Appendix 1) were distributed. Follow-up contact was made with potential applicants via phone and email, following the receipt of expressions of interest.

### Outcome

A significant number of AIEOs and TAs attended these meetings. As an example, 11 interested applicants attended in Halls Creek and nine in the Fitzroy Valley. Long, frank and open discussions alleviated many concerns about the program, in particular, its professional standing and the need for block release.

As a result, 21 potential applicants were identified in the Kimberley area and nine in the Pilbara. They were offered the opportunity of enrolling either in mid-2009 or the beginning of 2010. Many applicants indicated that they would prefer to wait until the beginning of 2010. Before making a commitment, they wanted to think carefully about it and yarn amongst themselves.

This process of enabling them plenty of time prior to making a commitment was considered critical. It allowed Indigenous participants to "self-determine" how entering an ITE

program, such as Murdoch's, would be of benefit to themselves and, more importantly, to their communities.

## Enrolment

### Outcome

As a result of the June 2009 induction visit, 11 students enrolled in the Bachelor of Education program in Semester 2, 2009. Eight students came from the following towns in the Kimberley and Pilbara (the number is shown in brackets): Kununurra (1), Broome (1), Karratha (2), Tom Price (1) and Newman (3). Three of these newly enrolled students are Indigenous.

In addition, a further two students from the Goldfields region of WA (Kambalda) were included in the program, together with another student from the north-west of WA who was currently living in Armadale - an outer metropolitan suburb of Perth.

### Student progress

The five students from Karratha and Newman were visited whilst Project team members were in the area conducting the Mentoring Professional Development Workshops.

Each student was given a pack containing, amongst other items, the guidelines for Mentoring Student Teachers (Appendix 2) and the guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning (Appendix 3).

The feedback received from the students was very positive. They had settled into university study, were enthusiastic about their program and were enjoying the on-line lectures. They were receiving good support from their mentors and were managing to fit their studies around their jobs and family responsibilities.

The Karratha students were in regular contact with each other and with the Stage One students who had begun the program in semester one. They had an established learning circle and met regularly to study and provide support and assistance to each other.

The two students in Broome and Kununurra were visited at the same time the Induction visit was taking place. These students were also engaging successfully in their first introductory units and had made contact with the Stage One students in the community.

The Kambalda students were visited in October at which time their RPL, Study plans and mentors were organised.

### Assessment

Although final results will not be available until after the Board of Examiners meets in mid December, informal results to date indicate that all students are expected to pass, having received on average Credit and Distinction grades with some High Distinctions.

Several students have just completed their first school practicum. All were successful and received positive feedback from their mentor teachers and supervisors. Indicative comments include:

*“X has a professional manner, takes an interest in the students and has been willing to make changes to lessons in order to maintain student engagement.”*

*“Y should make a good teacher. She could already see which students needed more individualised lessons and which extension after the first day. Well organised, punctual, asked questions and accepted feedback.”*

*“Z is a reflective prac student who takes time to consider the “big picture”. Shows initiative and follows directions well.”*

*“A has a calm, confident manner with the children. She is very reassuring and displays the skill of scaffolding children’s learning to help them achieve rather than just give them the answer. She shows great initiative in the classroom when assisting staff and students.”*

### Student feedback

Students offer the following comments on their introduction to university study.

*“I am very excited to be in this program, it’s a fantastic opportunity and I look forward to meeting you and Libby in a couple of weeks!”*

*“Thank you for sending the application to me. I am really excited about this opportunity and look forward to setting up my study plan and getting started. Look forward to talking with you soon.”*

*“That is so weird I was just listening to you on the lectopia lecture as you emailed me! I liked what you discussed in your lecture on Social Justice. I lean towards this topic matter in educational issues facing society today, so I got a lot out of the unit guide readings, lecture and task work this week.”*

*“I must say I am a bit nervous about starting next week and hope I can fit it all in with work and being a busy mum as we all are, but I am sure I will be fine (fingers crossed).”*

*“Almost time for exams ...am full swing into exam prep at the moment. I realised something this past week ... I have gone from saying “when I get my degree...” to “when I am teaching ...” it feels like a reality now which is great!! “*





## 5

# Mentoring professional development program

### Introduction

The selection and professional development of mentors was considered critical to the success of the Project.

Each student had been asked to nominate a mentor in their local area. The mentor needed to have had relevant professional experience in a primary or early childhood setting, as well as a personal philosophy that was consistent with the Project's aims.

Mentors would be provided with a half-day culturally-sensitive mentoring professional development program, which would be delivered in the major centres in the Pilbara and Kimberley.

The expression of interest form for mentors and supervisors for student teachers (Appendix 4) was emailed to all schools in Broome, Karratha, Tom Price and Newman, where the workshops were being conducted. Other prospective mentors, such as school administrators and other interested participants, were also invited to attend with a view to further broadening and developing capacity in the region.

### Process

The Mentoring Workbook (Appendix 6) and Mentoring Guidelines (Appendix 2) were developed by Murdoch University academic staff with experience in mentoring programs and in consultation with Indigenous academics and community leaders.

The professional development program incorporated Indigenous ways of knowing and established mechanisms for Indigenous students to bring their perspectives into the program.

Mentors were surveyed (Appendix 7) prior to delivery of the program to ascertain their previous experience and understanding of mentoring as well as their needs and expectations of the professional development. A follow-up survey (Appendix 8) was conducted after they had attended the workshop, to assess the degree to which their needs had been met.

Students will be surveyed (Appendix 9) after each semester to develop further understanding of their needs and the usefulness of the mentoring program. The first survey will be conducted shortly, at the end of Semester Two, 2009.

Mentors will also be asked to complete a timesheet, outlining the type of mentoring support they have offered.

This information will assist us in the development of future mentoring guidelines as we gain a better understanding of the areas of need for students.

As well as being inducted into the Murdoch University approach to Early Childhood education, mentors were also provided with training in School Experience Supervision, as it was anticipated that they may also act as School Experience supervisors for this cohort of students and other Murdoch University students who undertake rural and remote school experience placements. This would enable capacity to be built within local communities to support students enrolled in the Bachelor of Education program, as well as others involved in Murdoch University's wider rural and remote school experience programs.

## Outcome

Four, half-day Mentoring Workshops were held in Karratha, Newman, Fitzroy Crossing and Derby during September 2009. The workshops were widely advertised to all schools in the respective areas (Appendix 5).

An offer to run a workshop in Tom Price was extended, however a busy professional development (PD) timetable prevented this from taking place this year. A one-on-one meeting with the mentor was then arranged for when she was in Perth during the holidays.

Prior to each workshop, participants had been emailed a survey (Appendix 7), to not only ascertain their prior experience and understanding of mentoring, but also to stimulate their thinking about the mentoring process.

During each workshop, discussion centred around four main themes:

- What do effective mentors do?
- What might students need in terms of mentoring across contexts?
- What can you offer to the mentoring process?
- What do you anticipate gaining from the mentoring process?

Participants were invited to record their responses on cards that were collected after the workshops. The collated responses were then emailed back to the participants and may also be used as poster presentations for future workshops (Appendices 10, 11 and 12).

Each participant was given a copy of the mentoring work book (Appendix 6) which was used as a stimulus for "Think/Pair/Share" discussions.



Participants attending the Newman PD Workshop

A total of 24 participants attended the workshops. Whilst some of the attendees were mentors, a number of current students attended as well as interested teaching staff from the various schools. Between them, they had an impressive range of expertise to bring to the mentoring role.

### Support for mentoring role

A key feature of the workshops has been the overwhelming support by all the participants for a mentoring program for student teachers and new graduates, particularly those studying part-time, externally and in the North West. One participant said that she wanted to be a mentor because she could empathise with women with families who were working and studying externally as this had been her personal experience as a student.

Many of the mentors and teachers related personal experiences of having been informally mentored in the early stages of their careers and noted that this had been critical to their professional development. Several remarked that if it had not been for their mentor, they would not have made it through their university course or their first year of teaching.

Participants also expressed an awareness of the need to work together to support each other, as each had different strengths and areas of expertise.

### Student needs

A particular focus in three of the workshops was the need to consider the unique context of living and working in comparatively isolated areas in the North West. Many of these communities are culturally and socio-economically diverse. Additionally, the population is highly transient. This transience and diversity is reflected in each primary classroom and

provides unique opportunities for teachers to develop programs that meet this complex context. Mentors who have experience working in such communities are able to provide important contextual knowledge to support student teachers.

At the conclusion of the workshops, a number of participants completed expression of interest forms (Appendix 1) for future involvement in the mentoring process. All participants received a Certificate of Participation (Appendix 13) for inclusion in their portfolios.

It is anticipated that further development of a core group of mentors throughout the region will overcome the possible shortage of suitably qualified mentors in specific towns. The recent promotion of the program through advertisements in local papers and through the mentoring workshops aimed at developing a more extensive database of mentors.

During October for example, following publication of our newspaper article, we received an expression of interest from a Level 3 Classroom teacher in Karratha with extensive early childhood and specialist literacy experience.

### Unexpected outcome

An interesting outcome of the mentoring program has been that whilst both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students were encouraged to find a suitable mentor in their locality, by the end of the semester, only one of the Indigenous students had in fact nominated or maintained a mentor.

The other Indigenous students do, however, maintain regular contact with the Indigenous academic Libby Jackson-Barrett, and it is to her that they go to for assistance. We have speculated about the reasons for this. For instance, given the communities from which these students derive, there may be few, if any other Indigenous peoples with the appropriate qualifications to assist. We feel that this is an area worthy of further research.

We intend applying for Australian Research Council (ARC) research funding in 2010, to assist us to develop a better understanding of 'mentoring' in rural and remote communities from an Indigenous perspective.

In our experience, having an Indigenous person in a key role gives an explicit understanding that quells the fear and anxiety of entering a western institution. They are not alone. There are a pair of dwonks (ears) that they know will be prepared to listen and give assistance as needed.

### Student feedback on mentoring

*"L is instilling a confidence and faith within myself and abilities. I have her encouragement as she often says to me that "you can do this". She recently accompanied me to ... a nearing community to help me do some research on the ... as part of my studies with ASI 174 Indigenous studies. This was a great experience. Thank you Murdoch for the provision of this essential resource."*

*"I fully support and appreciate the face to face regular contact I have from my local mentor. Without this person's help my course work would be much more difficult to get through and gain the marks I do. At times I feel its too much to cope with and my mentor is able to support and encourage me when I need it to keep going and not give up.*

*Their assistance at exam times and for feedback before and after assignments is invaluable and for me crucial as studying externally online and from a very remote location can be difficult and is isolating.*

*Without supporting mentors and valuing their role in this process, I believe the course would not be as well received as it is and success in it may be impacted also."*

*"Studying as an external and mature age student with little tertiary education knowledge, the mentoring has been of great assistance to my course of studies during semester one and two. The mentoring program has allowed me both a greater understanding of the course of study and the assessment process. The mentoring has greatly reduced the worry factor, less stress more knowledge."*

*"It would be fantastic and helpful if we were able to continue with the mentoring program next year as we all know studies are going to be tougher and having the support there, especially being external, would be beneficial. Also what is important is the fact that the lecturers, Anne and Libby also mentor us, this is invaluable and I smile at the fact they help when ever or where ever they are needed."*

## Reflections from participants following mentoring workshops

*"An opportunity to listen and share in discussions about the importance of mentorship and some of the challenges and rewards of being both a mentor and mentoree.*

*..... The importance of a respectful, supportive and trusting relationship between both mentor and mentoree. The potential for both individuals to gain from the experience. A reminder of the importance of mentorship in the lives of those who are studying.*

*I thoroughly enjoyed the meeting – informative but relaxed. All were made to feel welcome and the willingness of Murdoch staff to share their information with other organisations such as ... was very much appreciated."*

*"Being aware and understanding current educational philosophies and being familiar with effective educators and their work.*

*Awareness of the support roles of Universities in mentoring teachers."*



## 6

# Induction of potential applicants

### Purpose

The aim of the induction visit in August 2009 was to follow-up with the 18 potential applicants who had shown an interest in the BEd ECE and Primary program during the previous visit in June, but had indicated that they would prefer to commence their studies in Semester 1, 2010.

Preparation of these potential applicants for university study is a strategy that is integral to the successful recruitment and retention of these students for whom university study may be a new and daunting prospect.

The induction visit was conducted by Libby Jackson-Barrett, during which she visited potential applicants in the following towns (the number of potential applicants is shown in brackets): Kununurra (3), Wyndham (2), Halls Creek (5), Fitzroy Crossing (3), Derby (3) and Broome (2).

Libby was accompanied by Freda Ogilvie (Project Manager, Office of Early Childhood Development and Learning, DET) and Errol D'Rozario (Manager, Attraction and Retention, DET). Freda has lived and worked in the Kimberley region for over 25 years and has a strong community network. Accompanying Freda on the journey enabled Libby to establish initial relationships with both students and staff.

During the face-to-face discussion with the potential applicant, each was provided with:

- an outline of the BEd ECE and Primary program and initial units;
- an overview of university study;
- a guide to enrolling on-line;
- a glossary of university terms;
- an explanation of the mentoring program;
- a preliminary RPL assessment; and
- information on how to access other students in the group via email or Face Book.

In addition, they were given information relating to the \$10,000 Scholarship from a Commonwealth and WA State Government-funded initiative, managed and administered by

the WA Department of Education and Training, which is currently available to successful applicants.

Following this induction, members of the Project team continue to be available to answer on-going questions via phone, email, Face Book or Skype (as appropriate).

## Outcome

As well as providing induction information to the 18 potential applicants, a number of other outcomes emerged from the September 2009 visit.

The Project team member held meetings with various Managers, Principals and other staff in Child Care Centres, Early Learning Centres and Schools (Government and Independent) and outlined the aims of the Project to engender their support.

Resource materials relating to Indigenous Health Education programs and Indigenous Scholarships were provided to the Principal at Wyndham District High School in response to initial conversations.

A Literacy Specialist working in the East Kimberley offered to be a Mentor Coordinator for schools across the Kimberley, including Derby, Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek.

Discussions were held regarding the development of "Platform Schools" in the Kimberley where students from the metropolitan area and the North West can undertake supported school practicum. This has a two-way potential. Firstly, Murdoch students get the practicum experience in the Kimberley and Pilbara and secondly, students from the Kimberley and Pilbara get the experience of networking with metropolitan students.

Several newly appointed AIEOs and EAs, upon their request, were provided with information about possible future pathways into teaching, upon completion of their TAFE Certificates 3 and 4.

An important aspect of the success of the program to date has been the regular face-to-face contact being made between members of the Project team and applicants, enrolled students and key stakeholders in these communities.

Following this induction visit, members of the Project team will remain in regular contact with the applicants and other key stakeholders to answer any on-going questions.

To keep both interest and commitment alive in local communities, articles on the mentoring workshops were also submitted for publication in the towns' local newspapers (Appendices 14 and 15). Interested parties were invited to make contact with the University for information concerning future mentoring opportunities in these towns.



# 7

## Recognition of prior learning

The Project recognises that many of the students and applicants have extensive cultural and linguistic knowledge as well as professional experience from having worked in the Early Childhood sector.

### Process

Upon enrolment in the course, the students were interviewed to determine the extent of their knowledge and skills and were then advised for which units they may wish to consider applying for RPL. They were provided with specific unit outlines for the BEd ECE and Primary program and an RPL package to assist them to address the criteria and gather evidence to support their application. Students are currently developing their RPL portfolios ready for submission prior to enrolment in specific units.

These findings are then 'mapped' against the aims and objectives of the core units in the BEd program. This process is on-going throughout the course of study, and members of the Project team will assess applications on a case-by-case basis.

Furthermore, students are being advised of any potential professional development (PD) delivered by external providers which they may wish to attend and use as evidence in their PD applications. They have also been provided with information on how to access information about relevant PD opportunities in their towns.

An example of a potential PD opportunity is the development of an action learning project in a child care setting. Students will be encouraged to work with a child care centre or playgroup to develop and implement an action research project relevant to the centre's specific needs.

### External providers

Other opportunities for students to access professional development in their communities that is being offered either by schools or external providers and which may be used to support their RPL applications, continue to be investigated.

Students in Karratha are now included on the Pilbara Community Development Centre's mailing list and will be contacted when relevant PD is being offered.

Informal and preliminary discussions have been held with organizations such as Child Inclusive Learning and Development Australia Inc (CHILD) who coordinate PD for Child Care

workers in the North West and Play Group WA, with a view to inviting the students to participate in relevant activities.

The forging of such networks with other government and non-government agencies working in these communities has been another positive bi-product of this project. As part of the RPL process, students are now acutely aware that accessing relevant PD opportunities will be of benefit when applying for RPL in the future. This acknowledgement that PD offered in remote locations by various agencies can contribute towards educational development of prospective teachers is an efficient and sustainable strategy.

## 8

# School experience

### Introduction

All applicants will be required to undertake the required number of school experience days to meet Teacher Registration regulations.

The majority of these days will need to be undertaken in a mainstream school setting, and students will be encouraged to develop a range of experiences by completing their school practicum in government and non-government schools within their locations.

To broaden students' experience, the Project team planned to negotiate with Indigenous and non-Indigenous Child Care Centres and other relevant community organisations to enable students to undertake at least one, 15-day school experience in one of these settings.

### Outcome

We have now secured offers for students to undertake placements in a variety of settings throughout the Pilbara, Kimberley, Goldfields and metropolitan WA. These include government and non-government schools. In particular, Fitzroy Crossing has a number of 'feeder' DET schools that could accommodate our students for short-term placements.

The Deputy Principal of Wyndham District High School and a current ECE teacher, have offered to provide practicum placements when required.

There is also the potential for students to undertake one of their School Experience placements with Pindan Play Group, a Traditional Owners facility, which services a mobile playgroup for four different groups of Aboriginal children and parents in the surrounding Kununurra area.

The added involvement of the Association of Independent Schools of WA (AISWA) now also means that students will be able to undertake practicum in a variety of Indigenous community schools throughout the region.

In order to assure the quality of this program and in keeping with the Murdoch University School Experience policy, members of academic staff will need to visit the students on at least one school experience rotation, to observe their teaching.



## 9

# Short courses

### Process

Members of Murdoch University's academic staff were invited to develop 'Short Course' versions of specific core units that could be delivered during the summer/winter breaks in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions.

It was intended that the courses be similarly structured to the Summer School units that are currently offered at the Murdoch University campus, where students are required to attend four-hourly sessions from Monday to Friday, complete readings and submit assignments during the following weeks.

The short courses could also be made available to qualified teachers wishing to upgrade their qualifications and be credited towards Graduate Certificate or Masters-level programs.

### Outcome

The delivery of short courses in the current locations is problematic.

Given the vast distances and relatively few students in each location, it is not economically viable to deliver short courses as originally anticipated. Even if they were offered in regional centres, such as Karratha or Broome, travel to and from these centres, the need for accommodation and the students being away from their families, work and communities would be problematic.

The University will continue to investigate this possibility as numbers of students grow, but at this stage it is not viable.



# 10

## An evaluation of the project

Our experience has clearly indicated that there is an unmet need for access to university education by people in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions. Murdoch University's external delivery mode enables this need to be met.

### **1. Number of expression of interest forms distributed**

Expression of Interest (EOI) forms were distributed during the recruitment and induction visit conducted by Libby Jackson-Barrett and during the mentoring PD visits. They were distributed in the towns of Wyndham, Kununurra, Halls Creek, Fitzroy Valley, Derby, Broome, Karratha, Newman and Kambalda between June and October 2009.

As a result 30 EOIs have been received to date with more being received weekly.

### **2. Number of applicants recruited**

Eleven students enrolled in the Murdoch University BEd ECE and Primary program in Semester Two, 2009. Eight students came from the following towns in the Kimberley and Pilbara (the number is shown in brackets): Kununurra (1), Broome (1), Karratha (2), Tom Price (1) and Newman (3).

In addition, a further two students from the Goldfields region of WA (Kambalda) were included in the program, together with another student from the north-west of WA who was currently living in Armadale - an outer metropolitan suburb of Perth.

These eleven students are in addition to the ten students enrolled in Semester One, 2009 as part of Stage One of the *North West Early Childhood and Primary Workforce Development Strategy*. These students are located in Broome, Karratha, Port Hedland and Tom Price. All of these students have successfully completed Semester One units and remain in the program.

A further five Indigenous and two non-Indigenous applicants have applied for admission for commencement in Semester One 2010. These students are located in the towns of Wyndham, Derby, Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing. We are continuing to receive expressions of interest from the region. We have also received interest from further afield in the Northern Territory.

### **3. Survey questionnaire to participants following mentoring PD**

Twenty one potential mentors attended PD offered in the towns of Karratha, Newman, Broome and Fitzroy Valley. All participants have been sent a post-workshop survey.

We have distributed Certificates of Participation together with the combined participant responses from the four workshops, and anticipate that this may precipitate further feedback.

### **4. Number of applicants intending to apply for RPL**

All enrolled students (from Stage One and Two) have been provided with an Individualised Study Plan indicating possible units for which they may apply for RPL.

Each student has been given an RPL package explaining how to apply. To date, two students have applied for RPL for two units and both have been successful. The students handled the necessary paperwork well, given that they had already been given the Recognition of Prior Learning booklet.

All other students are anticipating applying in the semesters prior to the unit being delivered. All students are developing portfolios that include relevant work experience and PD that can be used to support their RPL applications.

### **5. List of cross-sectorial institutions that offer to host school experiences**

The Project team has had offers from a range of government and Independent schools across the region to host school experience students. These include Kununurra, Wyndham, Fitzroy Valley, Leonora and Halls Creek District High Schools, Newman and West Newman Primary Schools, as well as primary schools in Broome and Karratha. The Project team is continuing to develop close networks with schools in the region to support student school experiences.

### **6. The number of short courses that are able to be developed and delivered regionally**

With current enrolment numbers and students spread across the Pilbara and Kimberley it is not economically feasible to deliver short courses in the region.

The School of Education has a number of short courses which are delivered on the South Street Campus during the summer term. If and when student numbers were sufficient to warrant regional delivery, this could be arranged.

As a part of this Project, discussion was also held regarding the potential of conducting short courses at Notre Dame University's Broome Campus.



## **7. Dissemination**

Several means of dissemination have already occurred regarding this project.

This includes publication of a journal article in the peer-refereed Australian Journal of Teacher Education, Vol 34, 6 December, 2009 entitled *Developing an Early Childhood Workforce Development Strategy for Rural and Remote Communities*, co-authored by Dr Anne Price and Elizabeth Jackson-Barrett. The paper is currently available on-line via the Early Publications site of the AJTE website.

Information regarding the Mentoring PD has been published in the *Pilbara Echo* and *Newman Mail*.

Dr Anne Price and Libby Jackson-Barrett also gave a presentation to staff at the School of Education Research Forum in July 2009.

Indigenous methodology: 'yarning' (Power, 2004) and the power of word of mouth — or otherwise known as the Indigenous grapevine. Given that yarning is a central tenet within Aboriginal culture, and given the extensive connections Aboriginal peoples have with each other, 'word' has gotten around within the Aboriginal communities that Murdoch University is supportive of its Indigenous education students. We know this because of the vast number of enquiries we are presently receiving.



# 11

## Key barriers

### Distance and accessibility

The Project team believe that the two major barriers are undoubtedly DISTANCE and ACCESSIBILITY, which then impact upon both time and cost.

As outlined in Chapter 2 – Logistics of Country, travel to and within the Pilbara and Kimberley regions is both time-consuming and costly. The extra costs associated with working above the 26<sup>th</sup> parallel are recognised in Federal and State government taxation and employment subsidies and need to be factored into future projects of this nature.

### Entrance requirements

Those applicants who already had a Certificate IV or above, were able to enter the BEd ECE and Primary program via the University's standard entry pathway.

Indigenous applicants who did not have a recognised qualification but who, following an interview and written application to Libby Jackson-Barrett, were considered suitable, were offered entry via a special Indigenous entry pathway. This entry pathway for Indigenous applicants is well utilised each year.

This opportunity was however critical to enabling entry to the program for those applicants who, for varying reasons, have not had the opportunity to undertake formal study and yet have clearly recognisable skills.

Assessing the students' suitability is a very important step in this process, as it would be detrimental to them if they were set up for failure in their first experience of university study.

### TAFE courses

Those students who it was felt were not ready for university study, were advised to enrol in TAFE courses.

Accessibility to the TAFE Certificate IV or higher courses is however limited in the North West of WA. For example, the Wyndham TAFE does not offer Certificate IV in Early Childhood.

The current Federal government initiative to remove TAFE fees for Child Care Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas is seen by the Project team as a positive step. Unfortunately, the alternative access programs delivered at University require the applicants to attend full-time on campus in Perth for an extended period and this is not viable for these students.

Of concern would be the imposition of entry tests on Schools of Education as been suggested by some recent commentators. Whilst the members of this Project team argue for the need for high professional standards for ECE and Primary teachers, it is at exit level that these should be measured rather than at Entry Level.

### Financial resources

Extra financial resources and, in particular, staffing allocations are required to support students who may come into the program with limited formal educational experiences.

### Status of program

During recruitment and induction visits, concerns were raised by Principals, teachers and prospective students that this course was a 'fast track' course and that this had the potential to undermine the quality of the graduates and the profession.

Following reassurances that applicants would need to complete all the requirements with the exception of recognised Advanced Standing or Individualised RPL, support for the program was secured.

### Block release

Another key barrier identified was 'fear' that the program may require extended block release time away from the communities. Reassurance that this was not the case resulted in continued interest and support.

### On-line application process

As the first step towards enrolment, this process can potentially present a barrier to applicants who are unfamiliar with University procedures and discourses.

Whilst we encouraged students to attempt the process, we received many requests from the applicants to assist them. We did this in real time via phone and internet.

### Continuity of resources

The combination of funding from DET and DEEWR, as well as significant 'in-kind' support from the School of Education has been critical to the success of the program to date.

It is the project team's view that continued funding is crucial to its sustainability, not only for this cohort of students but other potential applicants.

# 12

## Unexpected Benefits

### More students!

#### Case A

A participant in the Newman PD Workshop was a Zimbabwean immigrant who was teaching in the secondary school. He has a Master of Education and was interested in beginning doctoral studies through Murdoch University.

His wife, and several other Zimbabwean women living in Newman, were qualified teachers but did not know how to get their overseas qualifications assessed. Subsequently, he sent through their CVs and we have begun the process of having them assessed through Murdoch University's Accreditation Office, with a view to these women continuing with further study to enable them to apply for teaching positions in due course.

#### Case B

Following the Mentoring PD Workshop in Karratha, an article was prepared for the local newspaper, the *Pilbara Echo*.

Shortly after submission, the Project Manager was contacted by a staff member at the newspaper who had seen the article and wanted to enquire about transferring her partly completed course of study from her existing university to Murdoch University.

#### Case C

Two Indigenous students from the Kimberley (one from Halls Creek and the other from Broome), who already have Bachelor degrees, have applied to enrol in Murdoch University's Graduate Diploma in Education Primary, commencing in 2010.

Whilst they are not eligible to participate in the Project under discussion, they will join the learning circles established in each town and be provided with on-going support by the Project team. As these two women are employed in the TAFE sector, they will provide the foundation for a TAFE/University relationship.

In addition, one other Early Childhood Worker from Halls Creek has applied for entry into the Bachelor of Early Childhood (Primary).

Two Indigenous teachers have made enquiries about further study opportunities through Murdoch University's Masters degree programs.

## Co-ordination

A Literacy Specialist working in the East Kimberley offered to be a Mentor Coordinator for schools across the Kimberley, including Derby, Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek.

## Independent schools

Another unexpected benefit of this Project has been a recent meeting between the Project coordinators and the Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Independent Schools Association of WA.

The CEO was keen to investigate opportunities for AIEOs working in remote Indigenous schools throughout WA to become teachers via this model. A letter will be sent out to Principals in the regions, asking them to consider the proposal and submit an expression of interest if they would like to participate.

## Expanded school experience opportunities for metropolitan students

During recruitment, induction and mentoring visits, members of the Project team held meetings with Principals in various locations to discuss the potential to expand Murdoch University's burgeoning Rural School Experience Placement program. This program aims to provide metropolitan students with the opportunity to undertake at least one school experience in a rural or remote school.

On the whole, Principals were keen to host students for these placements and saw this as a positive step in attracting and retaining graduate teachers in their communities.

There is potential, for example, for Murdoch students who are enrolled in the new Sports Science/Education degree to undertake one school experience at Kununurra DHS, where the Indigenous Clontarf Sports Academy is based.

Kununurra DHS is one of the largest district high schools in WA with the student population being over 50% Indigenous. Murdoch students would not only expand the sports component of their degrees but have the opportunity to gain essential understandings of working and teaching with Indigenous students, building up their cultural competencies.

These students must be provided with a compulsory Pre-Practicum Induction by suitably qualified Indigenous presenters who have knowledge of specific cultural sensitivities and protocols for gender, skin and language groups in the North West. These practicum students must understand that they are representatives of the Murdoch University education programs and as such, will be sought out by AIEOs and TAs enrolling in the Murdoch University ECE and Primary program.

## Cost factor

A key barrier identified was the cost of travel and possible housing problems. Currently, there are a limited and diminishing number of Rural School Experience scholarships available from DET and it is recommended that these be continued and increased. Principals are investigating possible alternative housing options for students.

## Murdoch University and school community partnerships

Further positive outcomes from recruitment, induction and mentoring visits were the opportunities for Murdoch University to offer a range of support to individual schools and communities.

As an example, meetings with the Year 11 and 12 coordinator at Halls Creek DHS have led to invitations for students to visit the Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre Murdoch University when in Perth. Further information regarding the courses and facilities offered through the Kulbardi Centre are being distributed via the Halls Creek TAFE. Promotional material was left at all places visited.

## Murdoch University staff development

Not only members of the Project team, but other Murdoch University staff have acquired a better understanding of external/Indigenous study and the country. This has been achieved in several ways.

Firstly, Libby Jackson-Barrett and Anne Price have presented material at the School of Education weekly Research Forums. In these oral and visual presentations, we have shared with other staff our first hand experiences of working in these remote communities. Issues such as broadband speed, unpredictable mail services, distances between towns, cost of living, regional demographics, language and cultural diversity have been raised and discussed in these forums.

Secondly, we have arranged for different staff members to accompany each of us on visits to the Kimberley and Pilbara or, we have scheduled our visits to coincide with other staff who may be working on other projects in the region.

In this way we have been able to introduce other staff to our students and ensure that a collegiate network is built up between Murdoch University staff and our students. These face-to-face introductions support the key principles underlying this project – RESPECT and RELATIONSHIPS.

The staff who have accompanied us had never been to the Pilbara and Kimberley and now have a much better sense of the opportunities and challenges facing these vast and remote regions. These staff members are looking at ways to incorporate these new understandings into their teaching and research profiles.

One staff member has, for example, been investigating ways to deliver her Gifted and Talented Course in Karratha and Newman, as this was a need identified by teachers at the mentoring sessions.

As a result of the high profile this program has attained within the School of Education, there is a much greater general understanding of the need to respect the specific needs of external students living in remote communities.

Currently, the School of Education is undergoing a major review of its BEd programs, due for introduction in 2011. Fundamental to the changes embedded in this review is the need to acknowledge the increasing diversity of the student population.



# 13

## Recommendations

This project has been very successful in the attraction, recruitment and retention of students from the Kimberley and Pilbara regions.

While this project demonstrated substantial benefits, continuation of the mentoring support program will require additional funding. Given its critical role in supporting students from regional and remote areas in entering Early Childhood teaching, we will be seeking government support for continuation of this project.

We make the following specific recommendations.

### Recognition of prior learning

Whilst the awarding of RPL can be a problematic and contentious issue (Price and Jackson-Barrett, 2009) it has been a key attraction for students entering this program. Firstly, it potentially reduces the length and cost of their study and secondly it acknowledges and values their prior skills.

The development and application of a high quality RPL is complex and time-consuming. This would need to be factored into future funding for the University. In developing its RPL process, the Project team has been informed by relevant international literature as well as preliminary findings from staff focus group survey data (Price 2005, Price and Jackson-Barrett, 2009). Analysis of this data suggests that RPL should be awarded on a case-by-case basis through the submission of evidence-based portfolio and interview. Importantly it is noted that providing RPL for Foundational or Introductory units may be counter-productive.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Guidelines are important to assist students to apply for RPL. Guidelines should include the types of skills and knowledge needed to be demonstrated and ways to demonstrate them.
2. Various alternative ways to demonstrate RPL should be incorporated. Further investigation is required to develop RPL processes that can accommodate marginalised worldviews such as Indigenous, Women's and Workers knowledges. (Price and Jackson-Barrett, 2009)

3. The exemption process needs to be rigorous to ensure high standards are maintained but flexible enough to enable students to demonstrate knowledge and skills in a variety of ways (written submission, portfolio, interview, work resume, cross-institutional credit etc).
4. Suitably qualified academic and general staff need to be provided with sufficient training, financial resources and work-load hours to develop and administer the RPL process.
5. Advanced Standing for Diplomas achieved more than ten years previously should be awarded.

## External study

The availability of an external study option, which did not involve extended block relief time in the metropolitan area, was critical for the students in this Project to successfully engage with the ITE program. This mode of delivery offered them the possibility of studying without leaving their work, families and communities. The use of more advanced forms of information and communication technology (ICT) has overcome many of the traditional problems associated with external study.

The use of VOIP, such as Skype, has potential for further development with external students.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Adequate resources and funding for external education are required to ensure it is not a second rate option.
2. Adequate band-width speed needs to be provided in rural and remote communities throughout WA.
3. High standard external education modules using multimedia should be developed to support student learning.
4. Web-based technology (web cam, voice over Internet protocol (SKYPE), email, chat rooms etc) should be utilised to facilitate student/student and student/teacher communication.
5. Staff members need to be trained in the use of ICT and in facilitating learning via external education.
6. Students need to be provided adequate ICT training.
7. Staff and students require adequate and on-going technical support.
8. The establishment of learning centres shared with other agencies in remote and urban centres is a cost effective and sustainable way to facilitate student learning.

## Mentoring support

The participants in this Project were provided with mentoring support to assist them with their ITE program. These mentors were self-selected by the participants and had, in most cases, already developed an informal close personal or working relationship. The mentors were given a maximum of 20 hours, through funding from DET, to provide mentoring support. They were given broad guidelines within which to provide support but there was significant scope within these parameters for the mentors to assist the participants according to their specific needs. It was between the mentor and the student to utilise this time appropriately for their needs.

Additional and on-going mentoring support was offered by key members of the Project team, in particular Libby Jackson-Barrett. This was particularly significant for those students unable to find a suitable mentor in their community, at least in the initial stages of their application and enrolment. Whilst many mentors volunteer for this work out of a personal commitment to future workforce development, remuneration for their valuable contributions is seen as a necessary component of a sustainable project.

### **Recommendations:**

1. The selection of suitable mentors is a critical component of any mentoring program. Successful mentoring requires a comprehensive range of both interpersonal and professional skills. This is particularly the case in an inter-cultural environment.
2. A mentoring program requires a coordinator for quality assurance, administration and mediation.
3. While the mentoring program needs flexibility to suit individual needs, it is recommended that a set of clearly established guidelines is developed to ensure mentors and mentees are certain about their roles and responsibilities.
4. Adequate human and physical resource allocations need to be directed towards the program to cover mentoring and coordination time.

## School practicum

Participants in this project are able to undertake their school practicum in a variety of settings and are supported by the University's School Experience office.

### **Recommendations:**

1. School practicum ideally takes place in a variety of contexts but flexibility is built into this system to accommodate the needs of specific groups such as Indigenous students or students from remote locations.
2. Classroom-based cooperating teachers and supervisors need to be trained and given adequate remuneration for this role.

3. To quality assure this program, academic staff from Murdoch University need to observe the participants teach in at least one of their school experiences. This requires funding for travel and associated expenses but alleviates the need for participants to leave their communities for extended periods of time.

## Campus-based project coordinators

Given that these students were external and this was their first experience of University study, the University-based academic coordinators played a critical role in assisting them to navigate the complexities of University enrolment and study.

Fundamental to the success of this was the establishment of personal relationships with the students through initial face-to-face meetings and on-going contact via phone and email. Indigenous academic, Libby Jackson-Barrett, played a critical role in the recruitment and retention of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in Phase One and Phase Two of the project.

### **Recommendation:**

1. Staffing allocation for campus-based coordinators, at least one of whom is an Indigenous academic, to assist with the recruitment process and liaise between the students, mentors, schools and the University is required.

## The recruitment process

Recruitment needs to begin at least a semester prior to enrolment to allow time for students to consider the opportunity. Face-to-face meetings in-situ enables students to develop personal relationships with academic staff, to whom they are more likely to feel confident in asking questions.

Completion of an expression of interest form enabled academic staff to make an initial assessment as to the suitability of the applicant for University study. Some applicants, who did not meet the regular University entrance requirement (Certificate IV) were able, if deemed suitable, to be enrolled via an alternative access pathway. Others were advised of the opportunity to undertake a TAFE course and then apply.

### **Recommendation:**

1. The initial recruitment phase needs to take place at least 6 months prior to the commencement of the enrolment phase.
2. A process of consultation with Principals and members of Indigenous communities should be conducted prior to the commencement of the project so that their views are listened to and respected. This would also help to overcome any concerns and potential misunderstandings about the program.

## The application process

Increasingly, Murdoch University is moving toward a process of 'on-line' applications. These are complex procedures which require familiarity with particular academic discourses (for example the words 'Faculty' and 'School' caused some confusion for one student who was trying to locate the School of Education within the Faculty of Arts. Project coordinators played a key role in supporting the students to navigate this process.

We were also able to liaise with the University's Prospective Student and Admissions Centre (PSAC) to ensure that we were contacted if there were any anomalies with the enrolment of these students. As an example, one student who had not completed one section of the form was sent an automated letter from the University advising her that her enrolment had been discontinued. This was extremely upsetting for the student who had taken a big step in even applying, only to find her application had been cancelled. Fortunately the student immediately rang Libby who was able to calm her down and then liaise with the Administration Office to reinstate her enrolment once the information was received.

Following this we instigated a procedure where these students are now known to the PSAC staff and their files are clearly identifiable. One of us is contacted if there are any concerns.

### **Recommendation:**

1. Campus-based project coordinators need to have allocated workload and project funding to assist with the application process for this cohort of students.

## Scholarship and paid relief

All students in the program are recipients of a one-off scholarship from DET. This amount of \$10,000 is paid in fortnightly instalments while they continue to be enrolled in the Murdoch University BEd ECE and Primary program. In return, the applicants have agreed to work for a minimum of one year for DET in the Pilbara or Kimberley regions.

The scholarship has been a key factor in the successful recruitment of students. It is recommended that further funding be made available for a capped number of students per year (the number being contingent on funding for other parts of the program).

Fortnightly payments are a useful strategy as it means that if applicants do withdraw from the program, they do not have to pay the entire amount back. Students who are currently employed by DET as AIEOs and TAs are entitled to five hours a week of paid relief. This is seen as a significant positive benefit.

Currently, the scholarships are only available to those who make a commitment to work for DET upon completion. Also, there is currently some uncertainty as to whether further scholarships will be available for applicants enrolling next year. Whilst we are continuing to field enquiries from the North West, we are unable to take further applicants until we are assured of Scholarship placements and other funding.

**Recommendations:**

1. Further scholarships be offered in 2010 and beyond and paid relief opportunities expanded to non DET employees.
2. Applicants wishing to work in the Independent sectors or for Child Care Centres in the North West should be extended this opportunity.

## Learning circles

The establishment of learning circles in each town has been very successful. Having at least one other student in each location (many more in Broome and Karratha) has added to the success of the program. The students support each other in their studies even to the extent of minding each other's children whilst they undertake examinations. Students from Karratha also travelled to Broome for a weekend study retreat with the Broome students. They all have each others email addresses and maintain regular contact, especially when they are enrolled in the same units. There is capacity for this to be extended as new students enter the program and are welcomed into the existing learning circle.

**Recommendation:**

1. Students are supported in developing networks with each other in each town and across the region.

## Further Research

The recommendations made in this report are based on the observations of the Project team and feedback from participants. Future in-depth Participatory Action Research using Indigenous research methods and protocols (Wilson 2008), possibly funded through the ARC, would enable a more detailed understanding of the key factors impacting on the participants' ability to engage with the program.

Acknowledging the views of the community and in particular, Indigenous Elders, through such research would be a matter of respect. This mode of research would enable the participants' views and needs to be embedded in the future development of a sustainable and culturally appropriate Early Childhood Workforce Development Strategy for the North West of WA.

**Recommendation:**

1. That Murdoch University, particularly the School of Education, apply for funding for a longitudinal Participatory Action Research project using Indigenous research methodologies and protocols

## Appendices

- Appendix 1: Expression of interest for Murdoch University Teacher Assistant Workforce Development Program
- Appendix 2: Mentoring guidelines
- Appendix 3: Guidelines for recognition of prior learning
- Appendix 4: Expression of interest form for mentors and supervisors for student teachers
- Appendix 5: Mentoring workshop
- Appendix 6: Mentoring workbook
- Appendix 7: Pre-workshop survey
- Appendix 8: Post-workshop survey
- Appendix 9: Student survey
- Appendix 10: Sample poster: "What effective mentors offer"
- Appendix 11: Sample poster: "What students need across contexts"
- Appendix 12: Sample poster: "Benefits for the mentor"
- Appendix 13: Certificate of participation
- Appendix 14: Newspaper article from the *Pilbara Echo*
- Appendix 15: Newspaper article from the *Newman Mail*





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