The Role of the Residence: Exploring the Goals of an Aboriginal Residential Program in Contributing to the Education and Development of Remote Students

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Recent media and policy focus in remote Aboriginal education has turned to boarding schools. The general rhetoric is that boarding schools will allow Indigenous Australian students to have access to quality education and to learn to 'walk in two worlds'. However, to date, there has been very little exploration of the lived experiences of Indigenous boarding schools, either from broader political and sociological perspectives, or from the schools themselves. Furthermore, understanding of how the residential side of boarding constructs the use of time and presents educational and social development opportunities is lacking. This paper aims to begin to address this, by presenting the goals and intended outcomes of a residential program for remote central Australian Aboriginal students. Through analysis of 17 semistructured interviews with residence staff, this paper identifies the two overarching goals of the program, as well as the more specific learning outcomes from which the program expects its students to benefit. The research presented is preliminary data that forms part of a broader PhD study of postboarding school expectations and outcomes for remote Aboriginal students, their families, and their communities.

■ **Keywords:** Indigenous education, remote education, boarding schools, residential program, structured time

Background and Literature

Discussions of remote Indigenous education have taken various forms over the past decades. From assimilation policies, to deficit approaches, to current, pragmatic discussions, it has always been a complex field. Like most areas of political and social focus, however, certain trends in research and policies have been evident. Despite an extensive history in Australia, boarding schools have recently emerged as one of the current trends in discussions surrounding Indigenous education and have received a large increase in political and media attention. Justification for this appears to be related to long and expensive (often ineffective) efforts to improve educational outcomes for remote and very remote Indigenous students. Despite numerous policies and significant investment, it appears (statistically) that very little has changed in this area. With the implementation of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), the spotlight on remote communities has intensified, as students appear to be well behind their non-Indigenous and urban counterparts. The mixed results of other focused federal initiatives such as the recent Remote School Attendance Strategy will likely once again leave room and need for a new approach. The recent launch of the Northern Territory ten year educational strategy, (informed largely by the Wilson (2014) Review of Northern Territory Indigenous Education), states that all senior high school students from remote or very remote communities will be required to board in provincial cities or regional towns. In his review, Wilson (2014), pointed to the apparent lack of alternatives:

> The only way to meet the needs of a small and thinly distributed student population for a substantial secondary education including a breadth of options in the senior years is to aggregate students into larger groups. (p. 143)

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Some of the challenges attributed to education in rural and remote communities include limited resources, pressures to amalgamate services, limited ability for teachers to attend professional development events, difficulties accessing relief staff, increased costs in reimbursing travel expenses and producing learning materials, and needing to engage in whole class teaching due to the prevalence of multigrade classes (Drummond, 2012; Drummond, Halsey, Lawson, & van Breda, 2012; Lock, Reid, & White, 2011). These unavoidable and ongoing complexities of remote and rural communities have meant that boarding has already been a choice for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Despite this, a paucity of research exists to examine the implications of boarding for these students, families, and communities.

Boarding Schools: From Past to Present

The academic literature surrounding boarding schools and Indigenous peoples that does exist largely covers the historical effects of past policies and practices over periods of colonisation in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States of America (Ellinghaus, 2006). It is widely recognised amongst Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples that the historical purpose of boarding schools was to assimilate their peoples into the dominant society of which they lived (Evans-Campbell, Walters, Pearson, & Campbell, 2012; Robbins et al., 2006; Smith, 2009; Woods, 2013). Central to assimilation policies was the practice of removing Indigenous children from their families and placing them in institutions where they were to have mainstream thinking and living instilled into their worldviews. Policies related to boarding schools and transracial adoption of Indigenous children between the 1860s and 1980s demonstrate the similarities of the outcomes of these programs on the children themselves, their families, and their cultures (Ellinghaus, 2006; Engel, Phillips, & DellaCava, 2012). In contrast, contemporary Australian discourse of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding schools thus far is largely in report or media form, considering the practical imperatives of boarding without any acknowledgement of the underpinning philosophical or sociological assumptions that are driving its need.

Bass (2014) provides a recent scholarly and theoretical analysis of the underlying objectives of boarding schools for disadvantaged or lower socioeconomic status groups in America by exploring boarding schools through Bourdieu's models of capital (education capital, social capital, and cultural capital). Australian media reporting has reflected such discourses, of the social and (mainstream) cultural capital that remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students purportedly gain, and for whom this education is only available through attendance at metropolitan boarding schools. Such discussions have only scratched the surface in what boarding is believed to provide for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, as thus far, analysis of an actual boarding environment and the rationale behind the particular activities and experiences provided to students has not been undertaken.

Recreational Time and Adolescent Development

Generally, adolescents spend more than half of their waking hours in leisure activities that are outside of school, which means more than half of any boarding student's time is spent in the residence or attending recreational activities (Blomfield, Corey, & Barber, 2012; Larson & Verma, 1999). Recreational or leisure activities are frequently classified in youth development literature as being structured or unstructured. In mainstream Australian society, structured activities are generally defined as those that are adult-organised and directed and are highly structured, skill-focused pursuits requiring commitment and regular participation, providing a clear set of activities with which to engage (Barker et al., 2014; Fawcett, Garton, & Dandy, 2009). Unstructured or less-structured time, by contrast, is time spent in voluntary activities where there are fewer adult guidelines or instructions (Barker et al., 2014). Structured activities that require some effort, challenge and concentration, are hypothesised to be of the greatest developmental value to adolescents, whilst unstructured free time is believed to be a source of psychosocial risk due to the opportunity to engage in substance use and other antisocial activities (Trainor, Delfabbro, Anderson, & Winefield, 2010). Structured activities have also been shown in non-Indigenous populations to have positive outcomes related to identity development. However, this is only possible if the social context offers certain conditions such as choice, support for individual volition, empathy, and a meaningful rationale for engaging in activities (Ryan & Deci, 2000). While this body of literature and justification for structured time may be relevant to the development of non-Aboriginal youth, it is unclear as to whether this would be as relevant in remote Aboriginal youth populations. The ability for students to be autonomous in their recreational time is also likely to be limited in an environment where a number of students are living and being cared for, such as boarding. Furthermore, the potential implications of remote Aboriginal students moving from a high degree of autonomy in communities where leisure time is often less (overtly) structured, to a highly structured boarding environment, is unknown. Therefore, the justifications for how an Aboriginal residential program structures the time of its students is of interest, as are its educational and philosophical goals.

The term 'self-determination' in Australia has been used since the 1960s to express the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and was a reaction to the assimilation era — roughly 1950–70 (Kowal, 2008). 'Self-determination' presents a counter to 'assimilation' in policy debates promoting Indigenous economic development that juxtapose preservation or maintenance of Indigenous culture, and moving toward equity in socioeconomic

outcomes such as educational attainment (Dockery, 2010). However, it is not within the scope of this paper to analyse the particular use of this term in broader political debates. In the field of youth development, the literature explores self-determination in the non-Aboriginal population in what is termed 'self-determination theory'. Self-determination theory is a theory of human motivation that focuses on the development and functioning of personality within social contexts (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Optimal human functioning, as the theory proposes, is dependent on satisfaction of three basic psychological needs — competence (sense of confidence), autonomy (sense that behaviour is expression of self), and relatedness (sense of connectedness) (Lloyd & Little, 2010; Watts & Caldwell, 2008). As 'self-determination' can often be a term that is used when describing desires for the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities, and may have different meanings or interpretations, it is interesting to explore how residential staff construct this term and their understanding of its meaning for their students.

Cultural Considerations in Adolescent Development

Early adolescence, such as the time when a student will begin boarding, is a critical time at which youth begin to interpret their social worlds and when their adult identities develop (Erikson, 1994, as cited in Kickett-Tucker, 2009). A body of international literature, largely with North American populations and native Canadian youth, has explored connections between racial identity and health and wellbeing of young Indigenous people (Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol, Hallett, & Marcia, 2003; Kickett-Tucker, 2009). According to these youth, a strong sense of self, connection to family and kin, Aboriginal language, Aboriginal culture, inheritance, appearance, and friends are important contributors to their racial identity. Attached to these contributors is a myriad of skills, knowledge, attributes, emotions, judgements, and expectations about being Indigenous (Kickett-Tucker, 2009). Aboriginal youth living in urban regions are considered to be more at risk for developing problems with their social and emotional wellbeing than those living in remote and rural towns (Zubrick et al., 2006), however it is unknown whether this is true for those who are boarding. Furthermore, the implications of boarding on Aboriginal students' racial identities and ability to integrate the contributors to this in an urban environment so far from family and home should be considered carefully.

Boarding Context

There are many and varied boarding and residential programs available across Australia that accommodate remote Aboriginal students. The four most common types of accommodation are; hostels, family group homes, boarding schools, and residential colleges/programs. Consequently, research and findings in this field will also vary

according to individual context of each boarding house site. The particular case study used for this paper is referred to as a residential program, as the residence or boarding house at which students stay is at a separate location to the schools that they attend. The diversity amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, languages, customs, and laws is also a significant factor in interpreting findings from this research. The majority of students accessing the program of focus are from remote Aboriginal communities across central Australia. The program currently has capacity for up to 100 students, however at time of data collection approximately 60–70 students were enrolled. Both male and female students (the ratio of which varies) currently access the program, however live in separate buildings and are generally separated during activities and meals.

Methodology

The research involved initial observation and engagement with the residential program through (researcher) volunteer hours over a period of two years. This particular study focuses on the perspectives of residential staff, though it is part of a broader doctoral project that incorporates opinions of school staff, parents, past students and remote community members. Prior to commencement of the research, approval was gained from the Central Queensland University Human Research Ethics Committee, the Aboriginal Health Research Ethics Committee, and the Central Australian Human Research Ethics Committee, as well as relevant educational committees.

This paper presents the initial findings from semistructured qualitative interviews conducted with 17 residential staff (ten females and seven males). Staff interviewed represented a range of positions and experience working at the residence. The majority of staff held positions as fulltime, part-time, or casual youth workers, however team leaders and management were also interviewed. Experience working in the program ranged from 18 years to eight months. Interviews followed a semistructured interview guide which included open ended questions including topics such as staff expectations of their role, intended outcomes of the program, and what they believe students want or need from boarding. The interviews were audiorecorded, transcribed, and thematically analysed with the assistance of NVIVO®, a qualitative data analysis software tool. A process of constant comparison across participants was used to organise the individual data into overall program goals (Strauss & Corbin, 1991). To do so, transcripts were systematically coded in a process that moved data from general (e.g., open) codes to more focused (e.g., selective) codes relating to the broad research questions.

As a result of this process, it was deemed that two major overarching goals of the program underpinned more specific objectives articulated by staff. One of the major goals is that students be able to 'walk in two (both) worlds'. In

order for this goal to be achieved, the program frames itself with objectives such as viewing boarding as an educative environment, skill development for mainstream society, and the learning of commitment and routines. The second major goal of the program is to equip students to become 'self-determining' through development of self and identity and critical thinking skills.

Findings: Goal 1, 'Walking in two worlds'

The ability for students to 'walk in two worlds' is frequently stated to be one of the main aims of the program. The 'two worlds' in this context, as understood by the authors, is the dichotomy of mainstream Australian society as the 'wider world' and remote Aboriginal communities as the other. Participant 17 articulated what they believe it means to 'walk in both worlds':

> The program's goal is to equip students to walk in both worlds. Which means coming out of this program they should still have a strong sense of their own cultural identity, still have their own language, still be able to function in their own communities. But they should also be able to function in mainstream society if that's what they wanted to do.

The concept or goal of equipping students to walk in two worlds is not unique to this program. For example, the Cape York Institute is a well-known and publicised program with improvement in family and community stability stated as a key goal. Improved access, uptake, and achievement in education is a further cornerstone of the program, including, within this, the promotion of secondary education through boarding programs. 'Boarding school is expected to enable children to be 'bi-cultural', so they are competent not only within their own community but also in the mainstream world beyond' (Performance and Evaluation Branch, 2013, p. 31). What is little explored, however, is which aspects of boarding environments may achieve this. While the residential staff often described educational outcomes that students gain from school, the everyday life skills and experiences gained from the residential side of the program were also deemed important.

> Now even a year here, or even 6 months, can be quite instrumental in terms of teaching your kids all sorts of skills that prepare them for the world of work and just the world of being able to live in a very functional manner. (Participant 1)

'Living in a very functional manner', as quoted here, is presumably referring to living or functioning in mainstream society, however, presents a dangerous assumption. When promoting skill development and living skills, it must be recognised that these students already live in a very functional manner in their own communities. Often it is the very ability of children to function well in their remote community and attend school on a regular basis that precedes their acceptance into the program. Therefore, the discourse of staff around skill development often

fails to acknowledge the vast skills that students already possess. Frameworks of education should be provided that acknowledge the cultural capital that Aboriginal youth bring with them (Zubrick et al., 2006). The following sections explore how the program teaches students to walk in the mainstream world, by incorporating education into the residence, providing experiences and skill development, and through commitment and routines.

Incorporating Education into the Residence

One of the major focuses of the residential program is to ensure that the time spent out of school — which largely surpasses the hours spent in school — is an educative environment. It claims to be fairly unique in this sense, as traditional boarding environments are generally seen as places where children simply live, eat and do homework. However, considering the amount of time spent in the boarding environment, perhaps the capacity of the residence to contribute to education is overlooked. Participant 1 suggests that residences that cater for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may need to focus on providing an educative setting even more so than boarding schools with a more mainstream cohort, due to the complexities of the remote educational environment in which they spent their early schooling:

> The kids have access to school 30 hours a week, but because of their backgrounds the kids in terms of their educational achievements and so on, if you are going to indeed provide an educative setting which allows the kids to achieve their year 12, which is not the holy grail . . . then unless the boarding environment sees itself primarily as an educative environment and an equal partner, collaboratively with the school setting, then that gap is not going to be made up.

Reframing the residence as a place of education further allows a clear focus and direction for the time that students spend there. This moves away from previous models of the residence, which are said to have focused more on 'entertainment' and 'babysitting' type activities, and allows justification of every activity that takes place, so that everything they do 'must have a purpose, and that purpose needs to be grounded with an educational focus' (Participant 1).

One of the ways in which this is approached is to underpin the recreational program at the residence with the Duke of Edinburgh award. By linking activities to the Duke of Edinburgh, students take part in a range of activities such as physical recreation (e.g., soccer, basketball, softball, football), skill development (e.g., woodwork, cooking, music), and community service. As students progress through the bronze, silver, and gold levels of the award, South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) points can also be gained. Furthermore, if students are to spend time away from the program, they can easily return and continue from where they left off, as all activities are recorded, assessed, and reported.

So in that way, it is legitimising, the recreation program now is kind of a legitimate function of the residence, because it's still working towards that goal of SACE as well as the independent living skills and you know their exposure to different experiences. (Participant 2)

For remote Aboriginal students to interact and function in the 'wider world' or mainstream society, proficient communication in the dominant language, English, is imperative. One of the major cultural strengths of remote Aboriginal communities is that many have retained their languages, however, this often means students are learning English as a second or third language. Immersion in English at the residence and exposure to the language in a number of situations thus 'sharpens up their English skills massively, which is a huge advantage' (Participant 17). The recreational program also deliberately puts the students in a range of social situations with different people, which forces English speaking skills and confidence to use English to 'improve dramatically' (Participant 1).

Despite the program's potential and ability to enhance educational attainment and quality for students, it is frequently emphasised that year 12, or SACE attainment, while being the 'measure', is not the 'Holy Grail' or the 'be all and end all'. Furthermore, 'given the complexities of community life etcetera boarding has to be about so much more than just the academic environment in the classroom' (Participant 1). Staff described how what students learn 'in between their schooling' is equally important. Thus, while graduation is acknowledged as a significant achievement, and a milestone for students, staff believe that even if students have been at the residence for a short time, and not necessarily achieve graduation, they still have the potential to benefit. There is also recognition that students, naturally, are unique and varied in what they are able or wanting to gain from experiencing the program. Therefore for some students, often 1000 km from home, the 'ability to function and cope in that environment' so far from home and family is an achievement, so 'what they get in terms of their education is a bonus, on top of that' (Participant 2). Examples of what students are believed to learn in between their schooling were often framed as 'skill development' or access to experiences in mainstream society.

Experience and Skill Development in Mainstream Society

Through what the recreation program offers, students are exposed to many different opportunities in the city that they would not have access to in their home communities. For example, beach outings, Australian Football League (AFL) games, ice-skating, and local festivals show students a range of activities available in the city, whilst also allowing them to be 'immersed in their confidence with people, so it's not just going to a place and looking scared, but you actually know somebody there, you've got some contacts you've got a life, when you're here in Adelaide' (Participant

8). There is also a strong focus on attaining specific certificates or training that may be useful once students leave the program, for example: driver's licences, pool lifeguard training, yellow card for construction, food handling for hospitality, or whatever is appropriate for the student's needs. Skill development through everyday recreational activities such as woodwork, cooking, music, and sports are also woven into the program. The purported benefits of what such experiences and opportunities provide for students and their learning ranged from the individual skill development described above, to social learning and development. For example, Participant 4 explains:

You know like I say it's everything, its social skills, listening skills, living skills, social interaction skills, you know . . . getting along with people, empathy, understanding other people's opinions, sympathy, understanding how someone else feels, negotiation skills . . . and right down to the basic things of how to catch a bus . . . handling of money, and budgeting, all of the everyday skills that we take for granted.

Participant 6 agreed that these experiences also aid in 'teaching them a bit of social skills out and about, a lot of them don't cope with being in a public setting . . . but it's more like trying to get them to experience different things'. This social skill development is purportedly multifaceted, in that students are learning the skills of living together in the 'community' of the residential program, as well as learning the 'mainstream social graces' (Participant 8). Again, something that staff often failed to articulate was the rich knowledge and skills that these students possess in their ability to function in Aboriginal society. Integration or enhancement of the cultural and social skills students already have appears to be limited in the program. This is in part due to the large majority of staff being non-Indigenous Australians, deeming it inappropriate for cultural skills to be taught by these staff. However, it is possible that acknowledgment of these skills or two-way learning from the students to the youth workers could occur, in part to continue their respect for culture and connection to their aboriginality, but also to ease some of the power dynamic by placing the youth worker in a position of 'ignorance' or 'lack of social knowledge'. Having a more open place where both ways are acknowledged could create a space for students to explore which aspects of their lives overlap and which parts are to be kept just as home or school life. Therefore, rather than focusing on difference between cultures, and placing each 'world' at opposite poles, focusing on these commonalities may be the key to walking amongst both worlds confidently. In reality, these students only live in one world, their own individual reality, and simply move between places of different societal and cultural structures and expectations.

Commitment and Routines

Part of the requirements of the recreational program involves students needing to commit to two particular

activities a term. This is explained as being part of teaching accountability and responsibility necessary for living and working in a mainstream environment. A common example cited by staff is that of committing to a sports team. If students are unable to attend training for whatever reason, they are required to personally phone the coach and advise them of non-attendance. Furthermore, if students are injured, it is expected that they still attend the match and be part of the team.

> *So most boys that we've come in contact with from communities they just like to play football, they don't like to do any of the other elements involved with actually doing that in a metropolitan manner. So here at [program name], if you want to play football, you need to go to training, and if you don't go to training, then you probably won't get the gig'. (Participant 1)*

Some staff mentioned how learning commitment and responsibility was also about more general attitudes from some students such as, 'if I don't feel like it I don't have to do it, I don't have to do it today I can do it later, I'm not feeling well, or I'm tired, or its cold' and that there appears to be 'no sense that "if I want to achieve this, I have to do that"' (Participant 17). This may be due to the fact that students need to 'get used to routines and structure which is so foreign to them', and that 'the education sort of comes in second to those things' (Participant 14). If the students do indeed adapt to the routines and structure of the residence environment, they may then internalise the behaviours — internalisation being the process by which individuals integrate externally based behavioural regulations into their own personal attributes, values, and regulatory styles (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Watts & Caldwell, 2008). If students were to internalise the behaviours expected from the routines and structure, then these would be seen to be 'really helpful' for future endeavours, such as 'waking up at the same time, making breakfast, going to school every day' (Participant 9). Staff also noted that by 'having some structure, like the morning routines, how by the end of term a lot of our girls have stuck with it and are doing really well, and can look after themselves really well, (Participant 6). However, the reality of whether these routines are actually internalised, or perhaps their irrelevance when students return to community, was also questioned: 'I think that when they go back home a lot of things just go out the window', and 'I find as soon as they come back from holidays it's hard to get them back into those routines again' (Participant 7). Despite this, the overall belief was that routines and structure were there to benefit students, especially if they were to 'go out into the real world and get jobs'. This particular articulation once again points to a limited and one-sided view of what 'the real world' is, and the belief that getting jobs is the end goal. Little critical analysis was presented by staff of why routines may not be internalised by students, and what may contribute to the struggle to move seamlessly between the structured routines of the

residence and home life. Furthermore, regardless of how staff articulate the role of routines and commitment, one may question whether the message is really about compliance, rules, and consequences, which would then convey a simple message of co-operation and involvement, not collaboration and engagement.

Overall, the goal of the residence to equip students to 'walk in two worlds' is one that aligns with the general discourse other programs. However, the degree of structure and dominance of mainstream skill development in the program does pose the question of how the program is able to incorporate or acknowledge aspects of the 'other' world. Furthermore, how do students learn to navigate between the two worlds and develop a sense of self, especially when they are at a crucial time in identity development? Research conducted with non-Aboriginal youth suggests that structured activities, such as those provided in the program, are not only thought to provide individual skill development, but opportunities to explore, define, evaluate, and express core aspects of their identities (Busseri & Rose-Krasnor, 2009). Providing a range of activities and exposure to challenging experiences, unfamiliar people, and new ideologies also contributes to the promotion of identity formation and finding 'someone to be' rather than just finding 'something to do' (Busseri & Rose-Krasnor, 2009; Coatsworth et al., 2005; Waterman, 2004). In the context of remote Aboriginal communities, one may question the applicability of this theory of identity formation, as its basis is in mainstream society, developed by non-Aboriginal people. For example, due to complex cultural and familial ties, it is often the case that young Aboriginal people will understand who they are and their roles in their family and community from a very early age.

Work by Chandler and colleagues, particularly that of Chandler and Lalonde (2008) and Chandler et al. (2003), with Canadian youth has significant findings surrounding personal persistence, identity, and suicide. The work is extensive and cannot be summarised fully here, but it is pertinent to note that they found personal and cultural continuity are necessary conditions for personal cultural identity, and that high costs are associated with not meeting identity-securing requirements. Essentially, the ways in which individuals adapt to inevitable change over time while persisting as the same person through time have an intrinsic role in psychological wellbeing. Canadian Aboriginal youth were found to be at higher risk of losing what ties their past, present, and future together, therefore losing track of their future outcomes (Chandler et al., 2003). Although these studies were not conducted in the specific context of Australian Aboriginal youth, they do present evidence that identity formation and continuity of self are likely to be significant at the time when students are boarding, therefore should be treated with care and consideration. Staff did recognise that development of self and identity were important aspects of students' time in

the program, and generally discussed this under a broader goal for students to become 'self-determined'.

Findings: Goal 2, Self-Determination

Alongside the program's goal to equip students to 'walk in both worlds' and to have the skills necessary to operate in mainstream society, staff at the program maintained a strong focus on students being able to become self-determining. As introduced previously, 'self-determination' can have different interpretations. From what staff presented, it is believed that their views of self-determination tie more closely to 'self-determination theory' (i.e., the satisfaction of psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness) (Lloyd & Little, 2010; Watts & Caldwell, 2008), than to broader political debates of self-determination. It is the researcher's understanding that foundations of self-determination that the program staff wish students to gain in this context included 'knowing who they are', development of 'critical thinking' ability, and the skills and knowledge to 'decide their own futures'. Thus, their depiction of self-determination is parallel but not synonymous with self-determination theory.

Development of Self and Identity

Development of a sense of self and identity in the program appears to be a construct made from a combination of skill development and exposure to opportunities, as outlined above, but also a more nuanced notion of confidence in knowing that 'they are ... somebody ... that they can do what they want to do, and that there is something out there for them, even more so than 'just getting a job' ... but to give them a sense of who they are and a direction they might want to go' (Participant 3). Therefore their 'self-development' is seen as a large part of what occurs during their time in the residence. As Participant 13 describes, 'like someone who starts in year 8, by the time they get to year 12 they've just learnt so much, about themselves, about what they want'. The youth workers' role is thus perhaps to 'be there for them, to support them, guide them, role model for them, teach them life skills, teach them resilience, teach them ... to believe in themselves, that they can have a good future if they work hard at it' (Participant 12). Therefore, the ways in which the residence responds to and understands the crucial self-developments of their students is paramount; 'we have these wonderful opportunities here to help them to develop to be strong, and their thinking' (Participant 8).

Access to education is identified as a key tool for change, however staff emphasise that it must be 'true education', because that is what leads to 'empowerment and self-determination'. This kind of education is not measured by 'just a certificate' but is about 'really learning, being able to understand that they are important, that they have a voice, and they're allowed to speak and be valued with that voice, and that they do have opportunities' (Partici-

pant 10). This is believed to be what will give students true power in their life and to choose how they want to live it, no matter where that may be.

> *Whether or not kids actually choose to go back to their community, or whether they choose to go somewhere else, is entirely up to them, as it ought to be. But what we need to be is not directing or controlling those pathways, we just need to be making sure they've got the skills, abilities, aptitudes and so on to be able to make informed decisions, and then to be able to meaningfully undertake that. (Participant 1)*

Although staff clearly advocate for students to develop a sense of self and identity, and provide structured experiences that provide opportunities for this, the positive outcomes of structured activities related to identity development (in non-Indigenous populations) are only possible if the social context offers certain conditions such as choice, support for individual volition, empathy, and a meaningful rationale for engaging in activities (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Therefore, despite the well-meaning intentions of the program, it is possible that within the structure of the recreation program there may not be enough capacity for students to be autonomous in choice of activity. Larson (2000) also believes recreational activities contribute to positive youth development when associated with feeling internally motivated and feeling ownership in their lives and the activity, in turn providing opportunity for high motivation, attention, and challenge. Although the recreational program allows for student choice within a range of activities, it is possible that students still lack a feeling of ownership over their time and how they spend it. Assertiveness of students, or lack thereof, may also be a contributing factor in their ability to contribute to the program. 'Student Voice' came up as an activity that the residence conducts where students have the opportunity to 'have their say', however it was noted by a number of staff that this was often ineffective with little meaningful discussion arising. Furthermore, in maximising the educational opportunities and the focus on recreation having a 'distinct purpose', the program may be limiting the opportunity for the students to retain the internal motivation associated with positive youth development. Participant 17 proposes that ensuring student goals are aligned to the goals of the program may indeed be something worth considering: 'There's no sense that "if I want to achieve this, I have to do that" and that may be because what we are trying to get them to achieve isn't lined up with their goals, that's entirely possible'.

Critical Thinking Skills

Critical thinking skills were deemed important to staff in student's development of contributions to self and context. Staff therefore appear to believe that in order to become self-determined in their lives, and to have the ability to make informed choices about their pathways, children not only need to develop their sense of self and belief in their

future, but also to 'develop some critical thinking skills'. One youth worker described this:

> So to be able to think about what they want to do with their own lives, to think about their communities and the changes they would like to see and to be able to work out strategies for their own behaviour and for their own communities. I want to see them able to make good decisions for themselves, and to be able to decide what that means for them. And that would be something they could use down the track, so where they come across problems in their lives, be that with work, with employment, with family, with relationships, whatever that is, to be able to look at the situation and think of different ways out of it and to be able to make a decision. (Participant 17)

The ability to think critically and to 'question your behaviours and the behaviours of your friends, to be able to talk to people about making different choices' is something that the program claims to teach through its approach to students, so 'instead of the 'you must do this now' it's having the time to talk through why something is happening the way it is, and having students make a decision about what they are going to do' (Participant 17). This was also described as being 'street wise', and having 'the smarts to stay safe, the smarts to say no, when to walk away from a dangerous situation' (Participant 4). Furthermore, staff were consistently open about successful futures being determined by the students and their own decision-making, for example:

> And really all we care about is that that's an active decision that that young person makes. Now if that's to go to Alice Springs or Port Augusta, that's got nothing to do with us, we just need, if we are truly about empowering people, we need to just provide opportunity, and equip them with the skills to make informed decisions, that are about them. (Participant 1)

Overall there was strong consensus on this, coming back to the overriding goals that 'what's important is to see the students become self-determining, confident, and be able to walk in the wider world' (Participant 15). Therefore, skill development and experiences alone will not necessarily be enough; 'we can give them all the lovely things and teach them some skills, but if they don't have the understanding and wisdom that goes with it, then they . . . don't give themselves the opportunity potential or they endanger themselves in a later job' (Participant 8).

Conclusions and Future Directions

This paper has examined the goals and educational strategies of an Aboriginal residential program. In interpreting any research conducted in this area, two main factors must be acknowledged. First, homogeneity must not be assumed amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities; urban, remote or very remote, even within and amongst individual communities. Second, the uniqueness of the boarding environment, its model (e.g., residential program, boarding school, family group home,

hostel), staffing, student numbers, structure, and funding should all be taken into account. From evaluating the preliminary data presented here, it is apparent that two overarching goals are present in the residential program of focus: for students to 'walk in two worlds' and for them to become 'self-determining'. These goals are purported to be achieved through a number of mechanisms: framing boarding as an educative environment, developing individual skills, adapting to commitment and routines, and developing self and identity alongside critical thinking ability. By framing the focus of the residential program as educational, and attempting to provide as many opportunities as possible for students, the program exhibits an underlying belief in the benefit of structured activities. Youth development and recreation/leisure literature supports structured leisure time, however such research has been conducted in populations that do not reflect a boarding environment, or the context of remote Aboriginal students. Furthermore, one may question with the logistics and reality of running a boarding house of up to 80 students, whether structured programs allow more supervisory control over students' time, and less room for students to get into trouble.

Generally, from a mainstream perspective, adults do not value adolescent behaviours that involve unstructured activities such as 'hanging out', therefore often do not provide the spaces and settings for engaging in less-organised and less-regulated leisure activities. However, as positive peer interactions are considered developmentally beneficial, identifying the ways in which they can be enhanced and allowed to occur freely may be an important consideration for residential programs. Less structured time may not be as quantifiable as structured time, which produces clear and measurable outcomes, however may have a role in assisting the development of self-determination and skills needed to live autonomously once a student leaves the residence. Increased understanding of the development and maintenance of adolescent peer and social relationships in remote Aboriginal communities, as well as the ways in which these adolescents structure and use their leisure time, would enhance the ability of residences to incorporate and adapt to the contexts from which their students come from.

As discussed above, 'walking in two worlds' or 'both worlds' is a major goal not only of the program of focus, but also for other Indigenous boarding programs. The underlying implication of this goal is that the world of a remote Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island community is a 'different' world to that of mainstream society. Although it is not the researcher's belief that focusing on difference is particularly useful, and that this can lead to unproductive hegemonic discourse, it is generally acknowledged that the more flexible and less structured use of time in remote communities contrasts with the dominant focus on structured time in mainstream environment. It is indeed possible that from an 'outsider'

perspective, one may not be able to understand the structure of time in remote communities, however anecdotal evidence suggests that unstructured social time has been dominant across multiple generations. This is therefore likely to present a conflict for students in what they have grown up with and what they are now expected to adhere to. Furthermore, hegemonic structures are likely to exist within Aboriginal communities themselves, and may be evident in peer relationships, adult–child relationships, or in and between family groups. The approach to acknowledging the importance of such relationships whilst bringing students into a boarding environment should involve meaningful consideration, and would likely benefit from extended consultation with community and family members.

Finally, the identity formation that is assisted by the structured activities and experiences provided in the residential program may be relevant to the mainstream world, but how does this manifest once students return home? What are the implications for their cultural and personal identity development, especially in light of Chandler and Lalonde's (2008) significant work on cultural continuity? Are these students truly equipped at the end of their time in boarding to confidently move between both worlds? This is something that only the students themselves can answer, therefore further research will explore the experiences of students once they have left the structure of the boarding environment, and how they are able to integrate the skills and experiences gained at the residential program in their lives.

Acknowledgment

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