

## FLEXIBLE LEARNING: DEVELOPING OPPORTUNITIES

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**Index:** Flexible Delivery, Indigenous Australians, Culturally Sensitive Interactive Delivery, Access & Equity

**Abstract:** The delivery of training in a culturally sensitive, flexible manner is vital to achieve positive outcomes when training indigenous people. Within this paper I will examine many of the do's and don'ts when delivering culturally sensitive training. Case Studies will be presented where practitioners can work together and determine how delivery can be adapted to promote cultural sensitivity. From delivery to the outcome of flexible delivery. A range of outcomes from the Case Studies will be presented and evaluation techniques and evaluation instruments will be discussed at the reaction and learning level.

### INTRODUCTION:

In summary this presentation will move from examining culturally sensitive flexible training methods to learning new evaluating strategies. Both will ensure that informed learning and positive outcomes take place.

*Nothing remains forever what it was. Everything is on the move. Everything is transformed by nature and forced into new paths. One thing withered by time, decays and dwindles. Another emerges from ignominy, and waxes strong. So the nature of the world is altered by age.*

Roman Poet, Lucretius (2000 years ago)

We are wise to observe these words and reflect on them for the purpose of education and training and with special reference to the delivery of vocational training in remote locations to Indigenous people.

Cultural sensitivity is arguably one of the most topical and controversial issues today. Culturally sensitive training is however a must when delivery training to Indigenous groups across any vocational skills area. Access and Equity principles state that people with cultural and linguistic backgrounds other than those of the dominant group, should be accommodated in the provision of training services.

In the delivery of training to remote indigenous communities there are many different issues that have to be resolved and considered. These include the distances needed to travel, the appropriateness of Courses and trainers, resources, interactive delivery methods and the ability to think intuitively.

Finally but importantly, culturally sensitive delivery.

### **Background Data:**

Just under 3% of the population of Queensland are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with a sizeable proportion of that population residing in remote areas of Queensland. Transport and other costs related to geographic remoteness add to the cost of food, housing, infrastructure and service delivery. Additional social issues, range from poor health, lack of adequate housing, school retention rates and so on.<sup>i</sup>

According to the 1996 Census, the rate of unemployment for Queensland's Indigenous population was approximately 23%, excluding indigenous people on special projects, it rises to 35%. Queensland's overall unemployment rate was 9%. Youth unemployment for the same period was 45%. In addition, only 18% of the State's indigenous population aged over 15 years had completed year 11 or 12.<sup>ii</sup> Therefore the lack of sustainable economic employment and business opportunities for indigenous people in the State, means that around 47% of Queensland's Indigenous population aged 15 years or over, had an annual income of \$10,000 or less.<sup>iii</sup>

Another grave area of concern is that there has been an enormous upturn in prisoners in Queensland. Some five years ago there were approximately 2300 prisoners in custodial centres. In starkest terms the prison population has more than doubled in a period of five years with 4780 prisoners in the custodial correction system and close to 21,000 in the community corrections system.<sup>iv</sup> A large 24% of these are Indigenous. What happens when these people are released? Well this will no doubt be the subject of another paper.

It is well recognised by the Queensland Government that improved education leads to higher levels of employment opportunities.<sup>v</sup> The main deficits that have been determined

are:

- high innumeracy rates,
- poor spelling and comprehension rates,
- high skills deficits, particularly in the areas of plant operators and trade skills

### **Scope of Training Delivery:**

Our programs range from life skills to Management Training through employment related Vocational Education and Training to Traineeships and Apprenticeships to training program development, and delivery to overseas students. The majority of our work has a community focus, and it is not just about education, narrowly defined in quantifiable outcomes, but about the development of pathways and opportunities for indigenous people.

The scope of our registration is broad (28 Vocational Areas up to Advanced Diploma) this extensive range of Courses enables our clients to access a high variety of skills training across many competencies. Just as importantly is our philosophy that Education is for all, and we deliver Training "Anywhere, anytime." We currently deliver training from the remote isolated islands in Torres Strait down through the gulf communities, out to Mt. Isa across to Cairns and surrounding regions, then down the Coast, in Townsville, Mackay, Rockhampton, out to Emerald, Gympie, Toowoomba then throughout Brisbane and surrounds down to the Gold Coast and into N.S.W. (see attached Diagram 1-Map of Queensland). Now also to overseas students. We cover an area of some 1.8 million square kilometers in our scope of training delivery, currently.

### **Culturally Sensitive Training:**

Lesley Wemyss Training Company has developed strategies and benchmarks in the delivery of culturally sensitive training, these are:

- Culturally appropriate language and setting for training.

- An understanding of the basic protocols for consultation, negotiation and participation with Indigenous.
- An appreciation of diversity within the Indigenous communities.
- And a manner respectful for the understanding of culture, people, history and land.

There are a number of do's and don'ts with regard to culturally sensitive delivery. Contained within the 'do' list are the following:

- Priority number one is to select the right trainer.
- Select the appropriate learning materials.
- Learning must be interactive.
- There should be two-way learning i.e. equal priority to European and Indigenous knowledge.
- Do not set-up individual competitiveness, it is not conducive to Indigenous learning.
- Provision of specific Literacy and Numeracy support where required.
- Sensitivity to family / tribal structure – family commitments and natural shyness.
- Awareness of the collaborative learning styles of indigenous.
- Consistency of training staff.
- Positive relationship development between learners, trainers and family.

Conversely there are a number of don'ts that need to be taken into consideration as well:

- Thoughts taken and expanded from the Torres Islander Academic, Dr Martin Nakata, that while being aware of cultural sensitivity is a good thing – it should *not* be at the expense of outcomes.
- While visual and oral modes are often the most successful modes for Indigenous learners, do *not* preclude the use of texts, in other words don't bypass texts if they are necessary for the outcome.
- While we know that Indigenous learn best by the collaborative process and don't like to be individually competitive, be careful that in following this learning style, that they will not cope with, or even access the individually competitive world of higher education or employment.

### **What Are the Major Ways Education for Indigenous People can be Effective:**

- Establishment of effective arrangements for the participation of the community members/family members in decisions regarding training, delivery etc.
- Increase the number of Indigenous people as educators or engaged in the education process.
- To increase the opportunities for Indigenous people to be administrators.
- Choice (as to providers).
- That all remote schoolchildren have choice and access to education.
- Access for all Indigenous to further post-school education at home or away.
- To support the cultural needs of Aboriginal people within the education cycle.
- To provide community education and support to uphold their needs.
- To have 'sufficient' LLN skills for the goals that they wish to achieve.
- For all Indigenous students to have an appreciation of their history, culture and identity in the past, today and in the future.

- To ensure that all Australian students, especially the young, have an understanding of Aboriginal history, culture, identity and place in our history and our present.

*“Perhaps the greatest dangers are those of arrogance, complacency and the ability to defend that arrogance and complacency. An acknowledgment of inadequacy is a prelude to change. A defence of arrogance is a denial of any need to change.”* (Edward de Bono “ I am right you are wrong”)

What we always need to do as educators is think, re-think and be creative.

*“We are locked into our institutions and structures as we are to our beliefs (about education, Indigenous etc.). The paradox is that as we move forward into the future there is more need for change than ever, yet there is less room for change because everything is locked into positions.”* (Edward de Bono)

We are moving into a new millennium where we have not invented the jobs we need the training for in the next few years. How is it that we can't come to terms with being flexible in our delivery and tailoring it directly to the needs of the client?

We can go to the moon, but we can't predict tomorrow's weather – is this because we are better with static systems where the variable does not change? i.e. not what humans are!

In the following Case studies, we (as a Company) have outlined what we were presented with and how we managed the situations. (see attached)

I pose the following questions:

In Torres Strait:

- How would you initiate training and organise the first visit?
- How would you advertise the Course (Workplace Trainer)?
- Who would you send?
- How would you advertise the Traineeships system and organise this in the community for further training?

In a Mine in far North Queensland:

- What would be the first move to deliver the training?
- How would you turn around the negative training culture?
- What would be the first steps in planning the training for the Indigenous coming into the mine i.e. LLN needs, Skills needs and Career pathways.
- How do you ensure that training will be continually monitored and successful?

Now for the big picture – how does education work in the workplace – we will examine some specific examples.

## **Evaluating Training**

As the training dollar is tied directly to outcomes i.e. work or further training, there has to be accountability. However it is sometimes rather contradictory to the outcome we, as trainers, are looking for, that is, skills or knowledge transfer and hopefully an attitude change.

‘...It is also recognised that the problems (Australian) Indigenous face (in relation to outcomes) are exacerbated by their low skills, insufficient education and training and often long lengths of unemployment’ (Prepared by Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education Reference Committee, March 2000). So as a result often over training has to also deal with transference of skills, knowledge, self-esteem, confidence and job search skills. How does all this get measured and evaluated?

If we go back to the principles of Workplace Training then we can measure our success in skills and knowledge transfer and attitude change through using the techniques of maximum reaction and learning level for each participant.

Using the model of Staged Evaluation:

|                               |   |                                |
|-------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| I'll do it                    | ⇒ | Demonstrate skills / knowledge |
| We'll all do it together      | ⇒ | Set project                    |
| You do it yourself            | ⇒ | Set project while you're away  |
| Do it again for over learning | ⇒ | Track Participants             |

Training delivery should meet the appropriate outcomes of the local employment market and always be evaluated against these. Outcomes should be relevant to the community or remote situation in which the participants live. Training should benefit the whole community from which the participants come.

We try to adopt a two-way or both-way teaching methodology, which allow for the best of both cultures to be combined in the development of our training delivery.

In general evaluation strategies should meet the assessment guidelines of the training Unit, but as well incorporate the underpinning knowledge. However important in the evaluation process is the application of contingency skills and problem solving in other situations outside the original learning. This is where the stayed evaluation process is so important not only for reinforcement of the learning but the measurement of learning levels.

Our success in delivery is due to the application of these strategies, as well as our ability to be flexible in our delivery and evaluation methods.

## **Conclusion**

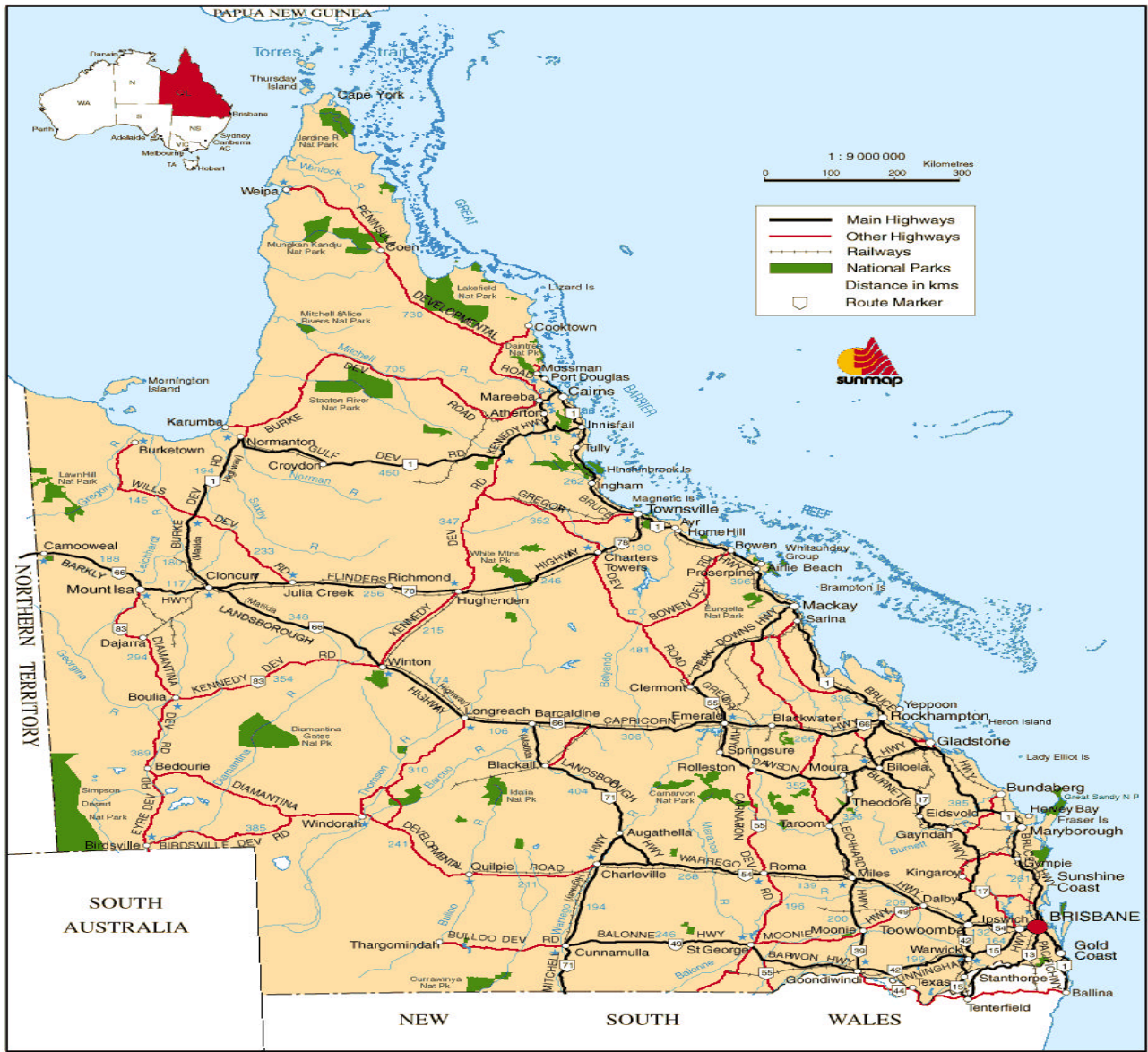
We have achieved some great results with our vocational training delivery to remote Indigenous Australians, highlighted by two of the case studies presented. However, we recognise there is a long way to go, there are no easy or quick solutions, only a flexible and sensitive strategy is needed.

Let us say that training is akin to following a fenced path, with many twists and turns, in order to reach a predetermined goal at the end of it. With this in mind we ensure that the Vocational Education we offer to Indigenous people offers equity, cultural sensitivity, choice, support and diversity as well as opportunities which is a great deal more than simply education for Indigenous.

Indigenous people need to be in control of their own destinies and if we white people are to be a positive part of this then they must stop trying to manipulate and control and start to listen and learn. We need to be receptive to and appreciate the richness of Indigenous culture. We need to ensure skills transferred will be current and relevant to the job market. We need to think right outside the 'box' and train for today's and tomorrow's skills.

If you find that these ideas have no value for you – give these ideas to someone who needs them as much as you do.

It is against this background that we deliver training in remote Queensland.

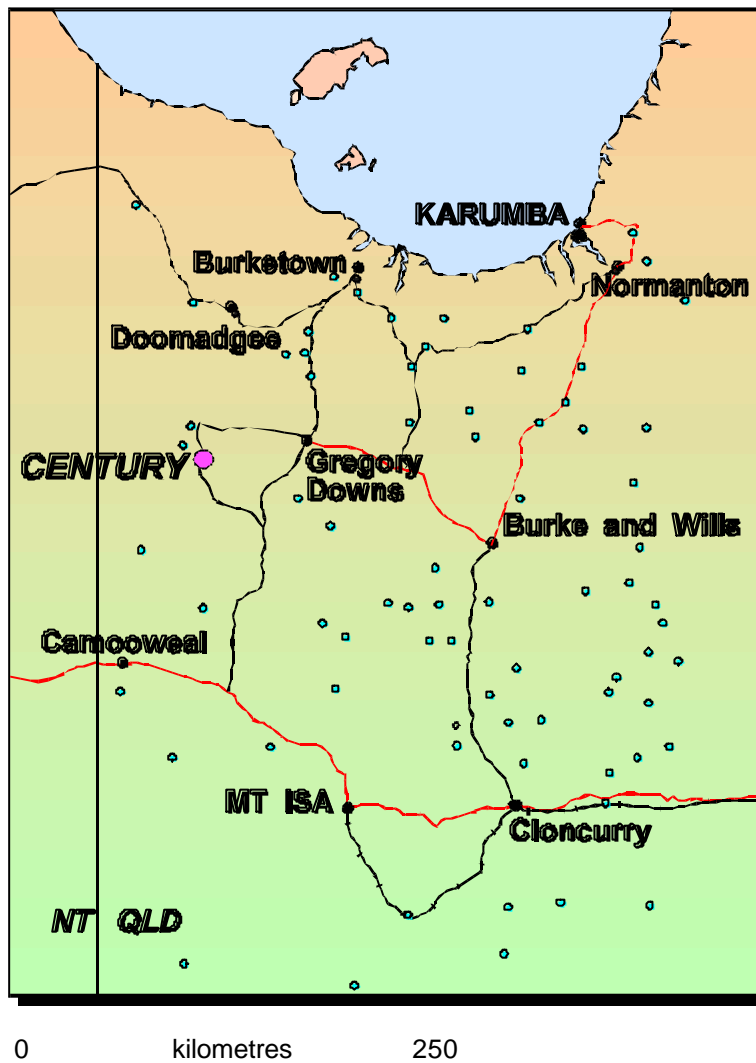


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Program 1 map of Queensland

QS 097392

**Setting:** The Gulf of Queensland – the Pasmaico Century Zinc Mine



*Diagram 1 - Map of the Gulf Communities*



## REFERENCES

- <sup>i</sup> Queensland Government, *Queensland Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Economic Development Strategy*, February 1998, pp 9-10.
- <sup>ii</sup> Queensland Government, *Ibid*, February 1998, pp 14-15.
- <sup>iii</sup> Queensland Government, *Ibid*, February 1998, pp 15.
- <sup>iv</sup> Queensland Corrective Services Commission, *Future Directions for Education in Corrections*, paper by Alison Hunter, delivered Queensland Corrections Conference, 1999.
- <sup>v</sup> Queensland Government, *Summary – Queensland Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Economic Development Strategy*, February 1998, pg 2.

## ADDENDUM

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