### Associate Professor James Smith presents “Negotiating respectful community engagement approaches to promote higher education pathways among remote Indigenous communities: Experiences from the Whole of Community Engagement Initiative”

>> Professor Sue Trinidad: All right. Seems to have lulled right at the appropriate moment so I welcome colleagues here today, and I respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners of this land on which we're meeting, the Nyungar people, elders, past, present and future. And, I'm Sue Trinidad, because there's quite a few new faces here so just introducing myself, I'm the Director for the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, and we're hosted here, funded nationally by the Australian Government, hosted here at Curtin University. And we have two visiting Fellows coming for 2015 and our first is Associate Professor James Smith from Charles Darwin University, and he'll be talking to us about negotiating respectful community engagement approaches to promote higher education pathways among the remote Indigenous communities.

And we have produced two publications that look at a lot of the different partnerships and wonderful things that are happening across Australia, and I see quite a few of you looking at them there, so if anyone does want a copy of the publications, and our card is there just to let you know a little bit more about what we do. So, information about James: he's the Programme Manager for the HEPPP Whole of Community Engagement Initiative which was funded as part of the HEPPP, or the Higher Education Partnership Programme Initiative, by the Australian Government. And he works with Steve Larkin and within the office of the Vice-Chancellor for Indigenous Leadership at Charles Darwin University.

So, as a part of that role, and it's been interesting hearing James talk about some of the things that he's been doing over the last couple of days, because he's here with us for a week, but he's going to tell you a bit more about the six remote Indigenous communities that he's actually been working with, building aspiration, expectation and capacity to participate in higher education. Prior to coming to [his] Charles Darwin appointment, James has worked in a variety of executive and senior management roles in the Northern Territory, both in the health and education sectors, and he's got a strong background in health promotion, and he's also an Adjunct Fellow here at Curtin University as well as our Visiting Fellow, so I'd like you to join with me to welcome James, I'll hand over.

[ Applause ]

>> Associate Professor James Smith: Thanks very much. So, and just to start off with I would like to acknowledge that this presentation is being delivered on the traditional land of the Nyungar people and pay respects to elders past, present and future. And very fitting to be able to do so during Reconciliation Week as well.

Today's presentation isn't going to be a particularly academic or overly theoretical presentation, it's a presentation that's very much based on experience, and some early experience at that, as part of the Whole of Community Engagement Initiative, and I'll talk more about that as we go on. If you've got questions for me as we go along please feel free to interrupt, just let me know. I would also like to acknowledge a few other people as well right at the beginning rather than at the end, one of which is the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, and for inviting me down to participate in this Fellowship. Really fortunate that I've got the opportunity to look at the equity in higher education policy agenda, and the more specific Indigenous higher education policy agenda, we're doing a bit of comparing and contrasting about those while I'm here so, very much looking forward to that.

The other people that I want to acknowledge are the team that is part of the Whole of Community Engagement Initiative. I'll go through a timeline a little bit later on but essentially this is the team as it stands at the moment, we've got casual, or community-based, Indigenous researchers entering the programme on an ongoing basis as well, but as you can see we're quite a large team. It is difficult to get us all together in the one spot at one time because we do have those remote staff as well. But I guess I want to reiterate that what I'm presenting today are very much my reflections but they're reflections based on a collective experience, of which all of my colleagues have supported me in being able to share with you today.

I wanted to start off by looking at a quote from our Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership Steve Larkin, and I will read it out. “CDU is deeply committed to serving Indigenous people and particularly those in the Northern Territory. The Australian Higher Education experience shows that low rates, shows that participation, high attrition, and low academic success rates by Indigenous people are commonplace. This needs to be disrupted. The universities cannot do this in isolation. Key partners, indeed the leaders, must be communities and families. This is best led through Whole of Community Engagement Processes.”

So he's very strong on the fact that the university as an institution itself, is quite limited in what it can do, and that it's much better to adopt a bottom up, and a really solid community engagement approach in the way that we think around pathways and transitions into Higher Ed for Indigenous students, and particularly remote and very remote Indigenous students. And I guess that's where the Whole of Community Engagement Initiative was born out of some of this thinking. As a bit of background though, the, on the left-hand side here you've got a view of higher education access and outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It was produced in, or it was released in I think July 2012. Steve was one of their expert panellists that was involved in that review, and so, not surprisingly, that focus on community engagement is, to some degree, embedded within the Behrendt Review Report. What came out of that report was some funding through the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme. And there have been I think two Indigenous specific rounds as part of that programme. And certainly the whole of Community Engagement Initiative was funded through one of those rounds, it was 7.5 million dollars, and it's a project from, it was really from January 2014, we're a bit late in getting started or appointing my position to get the ball rolling, so it's really been from July 2014 until June 2016 that funding period. As you can see that's not a hell of a lot of time but it is a lot of money and we're very aware that we're under the spotlight in terms of accountability, and needing to achieve in a short period of time, and that's not always a good thing with a community engagement initiative such as this.

The initial proposal was to work with five communities, and because we were a bit late in getting started we went back and negotiated with the Commonwealth to expand that to six remote Indigenous communities and we made sure that there was a spread between both the top end and central Australia. We've also set it up as a large-scale multi-site participatory action research project. So what that means is that, as part of the project we're trying to document very carefully our process, how we're going about that, what we're doing, why we're doing that etcetera, probably much more rigorously than what we would, or what the university in my experience would normally do for most programmes that are funded through programme funding, in contrast to research funding.

And importantly it has also been underpinned right from the beginning with the partnership approach. The partners that are involved are the Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges and Education, and Steve as Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership is also the director of that, and that is a joint initiative between Charles Darwin University and Bachelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, that are also a partner in their own right as well. We've also got Northern Territory Government, in particular the N.T. Department of Education, and I'll talk around some of the sensitivities in having them involved in that as we go on as well because there have been a lot of political sensitivities around their engagement at this particular point in time. And, also the North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance, and they're taking the lead around a lot of land and conservation management work through this project.

In terms of the aim and objectives of the project, as Sue said earlier it's to work across six remote Indigenous communities, and it's to essentially build aspiration, expectation and capacity to participate in higher ed. Quite a mouthful, the objectives are there, I won't read them out but, the general sense is to work in partnership, to think around both way or two way learning approaches, to co-create knowledge, to respect Indigenous knowledges and so forth as well.

In terms of the communities in which we're working in, we've got four in the top end and two in central Australia and we've broken them up across three different teams. So we've got Yuendumu and Galiwin'ku in East Arnhem Land, we've got Maningrida and Gunbalanya in West Arnhem Land, and then we've got Tennant Creek and Yirrkala as well.

As a bit of an idea, in terms, and that's not indifferent to Western Australia in terms of some of the distances that need to be travelled, but as a bit of an idea, we've got staff that are based in Darwin over here that fly down to Alice Springs, and then drive up to Tennant Creek to be able to participate in the initiative. So we're looking at a two hour flight on Qantas there and a five-hour drive up there just to get to the community to be able to do the work that we're doing. Hence the importance of having community based researchers involved where we're working alongside them to build capacity, but also to draw on their expertise and knowledge and skills that perhaps the university hasn't done so well up until now.

As you can see the numbers within those communities vary, some are larger, some are smaller, some have very transient populations which change quite markedly between the wet and the dry season within the NT context, so there's a whole range of factors just within that, that are difficult for us to deal with.

I wanted to touch base now briefly on how we ended up selecting those communities because it's an interesting, has been an interesting process from my perspective, for a community engagement process. A steering group was formed to oversee the project, and that was made up of key leaders within the partner organisations, so often a chief executive or a director or a senior manager within that organisation. And that was established in February, 2014, and that was as a follow-up I guess to some of the discussions that were held when we first submitted the bid, which was before I came on board which was much later in July, 2014. But, from February, 2014, there was this process, and again I'll talk about the timeline in a moment, of negotiation between those key partners around what the selection criteria should be in choosing those communities. What was interesting for me is the communities themselves were strikingly absent from that process, and that was a really important thing to take on board for a project like this because it actually meant that we then had to almost go back and renegotiate, or negotiate I guess, access and to work with and through those communities, despite the best intentions of the steering group.

As you can see there's some example selection criteria there but essentially it was enrolment completion data both in school and in VET, and in fact we looked a lot at existing programmes that were already happening, whether they be vocational programmes or programmes that sat outside of the education sector. Looked at infrastructure, so what buildings were there, there were child and family centres being built in some of them, Bachelor Institute had learning, pre-existing learning centres in some of those locations. And bandwidth as well, so that notion of internet and being able to have access and thinking about online learning was also an important consideration. But as I mentioned they weren't, the communities themselves weren't involved in that short-listing process and I'll talk more about that as we go on.

In terms of what the project timeline has looked like, I was appointed in 1st July. Interestingly our first report to the Commonwealth was due on the 30th of June, so my first task as programme manager was to write a report about something that, where nothing had happened and, it was interesting anyway. [Laughter] But it, what that meant is that that it was full speed ahead from there. We did have the tentative site selection sorted by early August. I would have, I thought I was coming into a project where that had already been sorted and clearly it hadn't been, and clearly the steering group was still struggling, still negotiating around those selection criteria about which communities best fit the bill to participate. And whether we've got that right or not is another story.

Staff recruitment started in August / September 2014. We've got three community engagement leaders, three mentor and enrichment officers, a teacher liaison leader position, project coordinator and a half-time evaluation manager as well. Most of the staff commenced between September and October. As I mentioned before, it was also a participatory action research project, so we wanted to make sure that we had ethics approval to be able to set it up as such, but obviously a significant barrier for us was that we, at the time, did not have community buy-in, we didn't have that support from the community so, again, we forged ahead, we put in the ethics application. Interestingly we were granted ethics approval without having had done any consultation, but we were very clear to our Human Research Ethics Committee that that was certainly part of first engagement process, was to be talking to communities and that they'd have that opportunity to either opt in or opt out, it was their decision.

The community visits commenced very shortly after that, and it was January 2015 when we had our first community-based Indigenous researcher come on board. And I want to spend a bit of time just talking about staff recruitment because I think that this has been a really important part of this community engagement journey. What happened, because we were looking for a whole range of staff simultaneously, that actually made, allowed us to think around the makeup of the team in contrast to just the attributes that the individuals would be bringing, and that was really important because we were able to think about a mix of skills and experience that would assist us to do this work well. We were also able to think about mentoring opportunities within the team environment early on as well. One of the things that we did was we looked at existing relationship staff had with the preferred communities in which we were working, bearing in mind that we hadn't actually approached any of these communities. What we know anecdotally, is that community engagement, good community engagement takes time and it's based on good, solid, trusting relationships with the communities. What we knew is that we had this significant pool of staff that had pre-existing relationships with some of these communities which essentially could save us some time, for a project that was behind time but was also perceived to be much better for the communities themselves as well. We certainly had Indigenous representatives on all of our selection panels as well, again generally from our partner organisations, or people that had worked closely with Charles Darwin University.

However, and I've got a few photos up there of examples so, I was fortunate that I had worked in Gunbalanya previously for nearly a two period. Lisa, our community engagement leader for Yuendumu, is standing there with Simon Fisher. Simon and her did the first joint Masters in Australia around Indigenous knowledges in CDU back in the, I think around 2000. And Simon also was subsequent to that her PhD supervisor based on the cultural knowledge that he brought to that. Millie Olcay, our community engagement leader, she had worked as a senior lecturer with Batchelor Institute as well, and she had worked in the early childhood space in Gunbalanya at Maningrida, and Yirrkala as well. And, I'll talk about Lawurrpa separately as well so, at the end there we've got Lawurrpa Maypilama and she's been employed as a community research leader. She's quite a tremendous woman. She was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Letters last year by Charles Darwin University for her contribution to health and education research over a 25 year period. She's worked in in an inordinate number of projects with the university, but that last point there, the need to push boundaries and institutional recruitment policies and processes was a really interesting barrier that we met with employing her. We employed her part time rather than as a casual and, within our university, to employ somebody either part time or full time it's a slightly different recruitment process to casuals, casuals is much easier for us to do. Without advertising the position we could only give her a part time contract of less than six months, so we had to get first special approval to be able to appoint her for the period of the project as opposed to a six month period. We had to get special approval to use an alternative recruitment process that veered away from the western recruitment process expected of us, and that included having community representatives endorse her participation in the project and recommend her as the person, and it was also an opportunity for us to say listen there's, the reality is the pool of people with her, that level of expertise, and Indigenous knowledge, cultural knowledge within the community are quite limited, and that it pays for an initiative like this to have the best people that we can doing that, and that set up a precedent within the project to employ some really highly valued cultural leaders within each of the communities in which we've recruited to so far.

And it's also, having her on board as well has been really valuable in keeping us honest to a lot of process around thinking around Indigenous knowledges and practices. So some questions to ponder at this point in time are, what do the terms community and community engagement mean to you? And I'll talk a little bit about that as we go forward because they certainly have meant different things to different people within our team, within the communities in which we're working, within the steering group, etcetera. What does culturally respectful community engagement look and feel like? Again, there's very divergent opinions around that. And how do you know if you've achieved successful community engagement or not? Often, in a lot of community engaging projects, you don't have those checks and balances in terms of how you're going along, you might think you're doing a good job but how do you actually ascertain whether you are doing the right thing, whether you are meeting community needs and so forth? So I guess just park some of those questions there, have them in the back of your minds as we move on.

In terms of how do we define community, or put simply we actually didn't define community at all. We felt that, or we recognised that there were different views about what community among our partners, staff and Indigenous citizens meant, and we felt that that was really important to acknowledge. We felt that the people in those communities were best positioned to advise us about what the term meant to them, and again, like I said, that was divergent within communities themselves, let alone across the different communities in which we were working.

I think an important part of the process has been we've, which the steering group had in its mindset right from the beginning, was inviting community representatives onto the steering group as well. But the negotiation that's been mired around that, in terms of identifying the right people, going through appropriate cultural processes and practices within some of those communities, has taken quite the time so, actually we haven't had any community based researchers join our community until, join the steering group meetings until earlier this month so, we're nearly a year into the, since we first began, and it's only now that we've got those people coming around the table, and the strength of what they had to say in that steering group meeting was quite incredible, I think blew a lot of the other steering group members away in terms of how important this initiative was to them and their communities.

As I've mentioned, there were differences in cultural understandings of what community constitutes as well, and what's interesting is there's also no consensus in academic scholarship around what community constitutes, and particularly what it constitutes within Indigenous context as well. So on we went on our merry way. As I've mentioned, differences in opinion across the staff in defining community engagement. There are also different discourses related to engagement, and certainly those different discourses play out differently within different socio-political context and I'll give an example in a moment around that.

The other thing we were facing is that there were differences in experiences amongst staff and participating communities about a preferred community engagement approach so, staff, bearing in mind that we had appointed our community engagement leaders, were relatively senior roles, all of our roles, or most of our roles have been research active positions so, most have had some experience in research. And our community engagements were level C, so they were equivalent of a senior lecturer within a university structure, these are people that have done lots of community engagement work but also had the research skills. But even in-between them, their experiences were so different and diverse in terms of what community engagement meant, how you do that and what that looks like.

Along with that, they also had different theoretical conceptualisations, they drew on different frameworks, different values, different principles in the way that they conceptualised that. Each very valid in their own right, each had done work in different disciplines, or different sectors, and you can imagine that there are those differences and subtle nuances between them. And we actually did a bit of mapping around those community engagement frameworks and models, particularly those that are being developed in and with communities in the Northern Territory, and I'll give you some examples of those in a moment as well.

I mentioned earlier on around the political context and having Northern Territory Department of Education as a partner. What was interesting for us is that, here with this, right smack bang, when we were starting, August 2014, a Northern Territory Indigenous Education review was released, which set out a whole range of recommendations, some of which were politically palatable, some which were not palatable at all to many communities. So that set a scene for us that was interesting to start with. Now we were going in to talk around building aspiration about pathways into higher education, that review set out to move, to essentially shut down secondary schools in some of the remote sites that we were working in, and to move towards a boarding school model where we were moving those students into regional centres to be able to access secondary school. So, as you can imagine, the priority at the community level might not have actually been pathways into higher education, it might have actually been pathways into secondary education for some of their students.

Since then the, I guess within that political, socio-political environment, there's been a whole range of other things going on. We've had a, you know, clearly in WA, you've had an interesting environment around potential closures of remote Indigenous communities. We've had a Prime Minister who has spoken around lifestyle choices, which got some quite heated backlash nationally as well, people like Warren Mundine. We've had the Indigenous Advancement Strategy announced, and there was a significant reduction in funding as part of that announcement, a lot of Aboriginal community controlled organisations lost funding as part of that, or had limited funding, that certainly wasn't going to meet the needs of their communities, particularly in the youth engagement sector. So that was a struggle for us because a lot of those organisations we were partnering with on the ground to do work, and to think about sustainable models moving forward.

And then there was also the Departmental response down here to this review that had been done. Interestingly the review, one of the issues with the review is that the consultation process was quite minimal, and hadn't engaged well with remote Indigenous communities as well. So, I guess, in thinking around the subsequent plan, that's been a real issue that we've had to negotiate. What's interesting though is this word engage, engaging, engagement that pops up in the discourses of all of this work. So we're going in talking around this project, which has a name, Whole of Community Engagement, at the same time you're hearing the word being used in different, or having different connotations in different areas. So, a high level of scepticism I guess within communities around, oh you're doing engagement work, I've heard about that, sometimes it's good, sometimes it's not good, sometimes it will meet the needs of my community, most often it doesn't. So, we've had to negotiate that very carefully. It hasn't been an easy journey but it's, it's been one that we've had to be very aware of, of those other policy discourse that are happening around the sites.

I wanted to use this as a interesting example as well. So this, oh I'm sorry… This one over here was the project brief that we developed right at the beginning, and I'll be the first person to say yes I acknowledge that it's far too wordy, it's not probably the best project brief, but it was the best that we could do on the run as we were entering communities. What was interesting though, after our inaugural visit to Yuendumu, 7th through 9th of October, just over one month afterwards, this corker article appeared in the Canberra Times by Jack Waterford the editor-in-chief, Lots of Talk but Scant Results. So this was a very friendly reminder to us that we were already being asked to be accountable, after one visit to one of the communities, around the funding that we were being allocated and what we were trying to achieve. As it turned out, there's a really positive story that came out of that, in that, this project brief had been shared by a non-Indigenous person within that community, to Jack Waterford, and had not sought permission to share that with him. He certainly didn't consult CDU around the article that he wrote, and had he done that he would have found out that we were actually engaging in a much more culturally respectful process than what he says we weren't doing in that article. The good thing about it, was that it really got the community behind us, and the community saying well we actually want you and that's our choice, and this is our community, it's not his, it's not his community. It certainly wasn't the non-Indigenous person's community despite the fact that he'd worked there for a number of years. And we had letters of support, phone calls, etcetera coming in very strongly, once it was found that this editorial had been published.

So, a key lesson learned, and something interesting there also is that we had made a, quite a deliberate decision where we had sat down with our media advancement section within the university and said we actually don't want to do any media around this project until we've got some runs on the board, until we know that we've got community behind it, until we're getting some success stories out, and it's only now that we're starting to get to that point. But, we were trumped.

Ethics is really, is also a really important process I think when you're engaging in community engagement work, particularly in remote, in very remote settings. As I mentioned before, we had to put in our submission to our Human Research Ethics Committee, and yes it was approved but yes we had to update them on the process that we were going to along that journey. So that was all fine and dandy, and we had an information sheet as part of that and, after consulting with the communities. By the way, all of the six shortlisted communities all agreed to participate in the initiative, there was absolutely no pushback whatsoever from any of the communities, and they were actually very thankful that they were being asked at the front end rather than being told that a particular programme was coming in to deliver something, and that they actually have some control over what this programme looks like and it is looking, shaping up to be quite different across the different communities. But, we were able to get the information sheet. No, we went back to Human Research Ethics Committee, and we had to negotiate around the information sheet and we said listen, the feedback that we've got is that the communities that we're working with actually want different information sheets, there are different words, there are different understandings in the way that some of this is framed, can we do six separate information sheets for each of the communities? And HREC's decision was no. That was a very blatant no, you will have one plain language statement information sheet as part of your ethics approval, and you should be able to negotiate one plain language statement.

So, after a bit of argy-bargy around that, we thought okay, well let's try and do the best that we can around that, so we went to all of the communities, we engaged with some of the cultural authorities and leaders within those communities around, how does this go, can this translate into local language, we're really interested to know. And every time that a community came back and said oh, this sentence is wrong or this bit, we then had to go back to all of the communities and say, how does this work for you? An interesting journey. There were two words in, or two ideas I guess in there that didn't translate well, one was the word vision, and the other was the word higher education. [Laughter]

But, what we did get agreement from, from HREC, was, because we've got that opportunity at the end of the information sheet to ask questions, we've also got that ability for community members to ask questions and clarify around those terms knowing that they can be problematic. So anyway, there's an example over there I think that that would be Warumungu, Tennant Creek language of some of the translation so, the plain language statement, and HREC didn't have a problem with us translating it at all as long as it was the same sheet being translated, so that's being translated into language at the moment. We've also got approval to get informed oral consent as well, so that it doesn't have to be, so this information sheet may actually be spoken to some people that are being engaged in the research process as well.

What's interesting, after this sort of six month negotiation, and we've been able to continue the research through the process, so HREC have been actually quite supportive of the project, but what's interesting is that they've now taken this as a good practice case study if you like, to be able to share with other people that are engaged in Indigenous, remote Indigenous research across the NT, so that's actually a really good system change within the university as an outcome from the project. Or we think so anyway.

Logistics of community engagement. As I mentioned, large geographical area, and that's something that is easy for us to talk about, but the reality is we need to resource that really well, and that hadn't been well thought-through when the original project application was put in. We've got, we are at a point now with the staff level that we've got that we need a full time travel officer essentially, and whether that be four wheel driving, whether it be light aircraft, whether it be going across Cahill’s Crossing there, going into Gunbalanya, and there's a photo I took when it, I was coming back out from one of the visits. And the dirt roads and some of the things that we've got to think through.

We had a capacity building camp the other week for our remote and Indigenous researchers. So that was fine. They were based in, just out of, or they were in Kakadu National Park, in a campground there, just out of Jabiru. That's fine. There was a vehicle rollover, not so good. There was a fatality, not so good. As it turned out, our staff didn't have a sat[ellite] phone on them, so I couldn't contact them to find out whether it was them, whether they were safe or not. We've done some quite significant risk assessment plans as part of this but that was one example where we had perhaps slipped up. But a real challenge. The other challenge that we've faced this year has been cyclones as well so, we were hit with two cyclones earlier in the year, and that's affected four of the six communities which we're participating in. And poor old Galiwin'ku, oh sorry, Elcho Island just here, that was a Cat[egory] four, Cat five when it came across there. Lost a lot of housing, there was a tent city put up, so again we're going into talk around pathways into higher education when people have lost their houses, they're living in tents, they're struggling to get the kids to school, let alone engage in the conversation about pathways into higher education.

But again, some of the logistics of that is that, in our disaster management plan for the university, we have really good guidance on how we deal with outreach staff that are going into these communities and coming out, had no plan of action in the way that we treat, or work with, our remote community based employees within those regions. Do we evacuate them? Do we give them the option to evacuate? Or to stay with their families? What does it mean? Fortunately at that time we didn't have too many on, and the person who's based on Elcho Island that week happened to be over in Yirrkala so we, because she was out of the community that she normally works in, we were able to evacuate her out. And, you know, it just gives you an idea of some of the context we're working in. Effectively what it meant though, because of these timeframes, is that we were out of that community for nearly, probably a month and a half to two months and there was a lot of concern around would that community engagement process keep going on, would we have to revisit it, go back to the drawing board and that sort of stuff.

Again, having a community based researcher involved in the project was really influential with that. She was able to continue a conversation, we were able to bring her in to the central team as well, so she was able to work on a lot of translation of research interviews that had been done prior to that etcetera, etcetera so, there's certainly ways around some of that.

Something else I mentioned before was drawing on the experience of previous community engagement models, tools, frameworks etcetera. It didn't take us long to find a whole heap, and some that people, as part of our team, had been involved in developing as well. Notwithstanding, many of them preferred to use their own tools that they had developed themselves. So this one over here was an Indigenous engagement framework that Lisa Watts in central Australia had done in and around water management. This one was a, this wasn't done by the team but that was certainly done by other experienced Indigenous… not necessarily Indigenous, but other researchers that had been involved in Indigenous and remote Indigenous research for a very long time in and around Charles Darwin University. And there was a whole journal issue dedicated to the topic based on different people's experiences.

Remote Ready, that was probably more for staff, getting staff equipped to travel out, some really, to remote communities, but some really good practical tips and advice in there that dovetailed with some of the community engagement processes, particularly around cultural protocols and understandings. And then over here, the Dilly Bag, so the Aboriginal Research Practitioner's Network, they've developed that. Essentially they're western tools that have been reworked to have more of an Indigenous flavour to them, but they certainly have not been developed based on Indigenous knowledges to start with.

And I guess moving on from that, as I mentioned before, within the scholarship there's a whole range of stuff out there in our community engagement, there's journals dedicated to the topic, etcetera. As I've mentioned it's an intersectoral term, so again it means different things to different sectors, but very few sectors within themselves can agree on what the term actually means. But you will often see this list of words down here, relational and partnership approaches, empowerment, consultation, global practice, sustainability, and more recently, collective impact, as well. You'll also see some pockets of literature that focus more around Indigenous community engagement specifically, and some of the cultural underpinnings and the need to think about Indigenous knowledges and practices. And then there's another bunch of research around higher education and community engagement specifically as well.

So we've had a look at some of that, we certainly haven't published anything yet. What we're keen to do is actually talk about the process that we've gone through, and map that against what the scholarship says in all of those areas as well.

The other thing that was really interesting in that process, particularly around Indigenous community engagement is, that there's quite a bit written in Canada around this, very little in Australia written on that topic, and very little in New Zeeland as well, which I found quite surprising as well because I was expecting to find a lot more coming from New Zealand than what we did.

Going back to this notion that community engagement can mean different things to different people, and it can look different depending on what the purpose is as well, so the top left there you've got Lisa working with Simon in Yuendumu, and there they were having to negotiate with PAW Media around the space that they could use for research etcetera, that they thought that the community would feel comfortable in. Down here, that's out on a homeland, out of Galiwin'ku. And again, having discussions sitting down on the beach around a campfire are often the ways that, or are often the places where the best discussions happen, in very informal contexts where people feel comfortable, often out of hours as well so, that is something that I've really got to pay some homage to the staff that are involved in this project, is that they are working ridiculous hours, they're working, definitely working out of hours, they're working a lot of weekends, often away two weeks at a time to do this work well. And that's something I haven't really mentioned but, we've tried to make sure that the visits aren't quick visits to communities, that they're going in for at least a week or two weeks at a time, and going back at least once every month to each of the communities in which they're working.

It can be around existing early years programmes which is the case there. So we're recognising that cost, we're talking about higher education. The way that many of the communities conceive education is that it's a lifelong journey and that it starts from the early years and goes right through till old age. So certainly we're working with the early, working in the early years, we 're working in primary schools, we're working in secondary schools, and we're also working with a lot of adult learners, and other organisations in these communities. Got a few examples here, this one up here was during a, sort of like a career development day if you like, or a career exploration day, at one of the schools in Gunbalanya. This little fella here, quite cheeky on the day. But, again, asked lots of questions, really inquisitive, wanting to know more about what the options could be, and came up with some… they came up with some really good ideas of where they want to work in the future, jobs that may not exist in their community, I think it was this young fella who wanted to be an air conditioner fixer. So, and I can tell you that there's people that get paid a hell of a lot of money to go out to these remote communities to fix air conditioners, and I thought that would be quite a prosperous career for that young fella I reckon if he wanted to pursue that. [Laughter]

And then of course there's other settings that are more formal, or more traditional, sitting around a table doing some planning work etcetera, with elders such as, we're really fortunate that, you can't see in this photo very well but, Yalmay Yunupingu, and Djuwalpi Marika are two people employed through our programme as well, so Yalmay's been a bilingual educational expert for over 30 years in the NT, and has been really pivotal to thinking through this initiative.

Coming back to some of those questions earlier, and I guess reframing thoughts, how do you know if community supports your activity? Who is best positioned to provide that support, and what evidence do you actually need? We're often asked, particularly by the steering group or, how do you know that the community supports you? Well, we've got verbal confirmation, we've had lots of meetings with people that have all said that they're interested. But then again, from home, are they the right people within those communities that we need to be talking to? How do we ascertain that? Whose word do we take over somebody else's word in terms of who these people are? Letters of support. A very Western way of working, but it's actually a transactional way of engaging with communities, which some communities have become very accustomed to, and they actually will ask, well we should do a formal agreement, it needs to be a partnership agreement and we need to get all the TOs to sign off, or we need to get all of the cultural authorities, in relation to education, to sign off on that. Meeting minutes, so when we've been engaging with organisations, seeking their support for the initiative, or their buy-in, something that's been a real barrier within the very remote context we've been working in, is that often with those organisations, they seldom reach a quorum. So they might have a Board of Directors, or Board of Management, but more often than not they don't have enough people there to reach quorum. Where does that leave us? Yes they've expressed support, but... And, you know, it's a difficult one. Other examples are artwork as well, people wanting to really talk about the partnership through a piece of artwork, and this is how we will work, this is what it will look like, etcetera, as well.

I have mentioned there absolute importance of recruiting community based Indigenous staff. I mentioned before some of the challenges with the university with Lawurrpa Maypilama but, certainly with some of our casual staff as well that's been an issue. The way that the university pays is, with our casual staff, you get paid after you, two weeks after you've done the work. If we were to do that as part of this initiative, we would lose face with some of these key cultural leaders within the community, if they've done work they expect to get paid and rightly so. So we've had to do a couple of different things to be able to manage that, sometimes it's been to set up an alternative payment system, sometimes it's been to put pressure on the university, accounts payable and our HR payroll, to fast-track that and to do it out of synchronisation to the normal pay run. It certainly hasn't been an easy task that one. But it's something where we're collecting a lot of evidence as part of our process, that we can feed in to inform system change as well.

Communicating in local languages, absolutely paramount, understanding the need for good cultural brokers in the type of work that we're engaged in is really important. But what I'll say there is that it's also important for our non-Indigenous staff to be receptive to learning language as well. So we've got one staff member, a non-Indigenous staff member, who quite frankly is incredible at learning languages, so she's at a point now where she can speak very good Yandruwandha. She writes, she puts out of office things in her email in Yandruwandha now, as well, rather than English and things like that, so we're really pushing the boundaries in terms of thinking around the way that we use language within, both the community setting but also the institutional setting that we're working as well. And we'll have an ongoing conversation with the Ethics Committee around that as well.

I guess I just wanted to finish up on saying that, overall in a lot of the community engagement work we've done, the communities are saying that their dream is of a conversation between a parent and child that starts with, so what degree are you planning to study for when you go to university? And we want this dream to become commonplace rather than an exception so, they're very, very committed to showing pathways into higher education, but we've also got to be receptive to the fact that those pathways are very different, it can be through VET, it can be through enabling programmes, it can be through, it can be later in life, so mature age students, and we've got to be receptive to those different pathways, what they might be and what they might look like. We've also got to be receptive to the fact that it might not be about remote Indigenous students going into a urban location to be able to access universities, that we utilise our regional campuses, and our learning capacity, much better than what we do at the moment.

That's all from me. I will leave it there, and I'd love to have any questions that you might have.

>> Professor Sue Trinidad: Okay, well thank you very much, we've got five minutes for questions so, who would like to start? Questions? Yes?

>> Audience Member: I'd like to know, when you first start in a community, with no one there, who's the first point of contact, how do you identify what would be a good place to start?

>> Associate Professor James Smith: I would say it's probably different for each community. So more often than not what happens is that the entrance into a community is through a service as opposed to an individual person, so it could the school, it could be the health centre, it could be the local shire or regional council. At least that's been my experience, but what that does along with [inaudible] and if you, is that, you end up having to go through another layer of powerbrokers, and non-Indigenous powerbrokers, within the community, before you'll be able to get to the key cultural authorities within the community so, that's been a real challenge as well, but something that we've had to do very deliberately in some community context, otherwise we wouldn't have been able to get them to do it. You, one of our central Australian communities is a good example, where one of our staff had a really good relationship with that community but she actually had to say, irrespective of that relationship, I've got to go through these non-Indigenous powerbrokers, the CEOs, the health centre manager, the school principal etcetera first, because if I don't do that, they'll all be offside and we actually won't be able to engage well with those organisations irrespective of what the local community want.

>>Audience Member: I have two questions. The first one is, in your numbers at Yirrkala, you had 820, is that including the outstations or just Yirrkala itself?

>> Associate Professor James Smith: I think that's just Yirrkala itself, but certainly we're working closely with the homeland schools there as well. Yirrkala's a really interesting one for us because that is one of the sites where they're shutting down the secondary and they're building a residential facility in Northern Boy. It's about 16 k[ilometres] away. And, you know, lots of politics involved, but the school council, the Yirrkala School Council, have been very supportive of the initiative, provided lots of support and encouragement in terms of being able to get on with the job.

>> Audience Member: And since the Bruce Wilson report, and review, has the, have your partnerships improved with the Education Department?

>> Associate Professor James Smith: Like many education departments, there are a whole range of different people within that system. What we've found is that those, you know, again as you find with a lot of government departments, very siloed areas within those departments, so we're actually joining the dots a lot for the department around, are you talking to this person since they're doing this and they're doing this and we think that's important to achieve where we're heading. So we're finding we're doing that a lot. The Indigenous Education Review Implementation Team has been a really key team for us to engage, but as has Curriculum, as has Workforce Development, we're doing a lot of stuff around supporting assistant teachers, to think about what their journeys might look like. We've got, our community engagement area has been rolled into the Indigenous Education Review Team now but there, certainly there have been different, oh VET in Schools has been another one. So we've been linking with different areas of the department quite carefully, but we're also watching who the department's talking to outside of our space as well. So, as an example, CDU has a partnership with the new Michael Long Learning and Leadership Centre that's been developed. And, interestingly, they've commissioned Bruce Wilson to write their education plan. So, you can imagine, that education plan is very much aligned to the strategy, we've got a relationship there, so that gives us an in to be able to work with that centre as well around what they're doing, and maybe build in some discussions there around pathways into higher education and that that might mean for students they're approaching.

>>Louise Pollard: Sorry I have a question. Sustainability beyond your funding, I think it was the middle of next year?

>> Associate Professor James Smith: Yeah.

>> Louise Pollard: And it takes that long to build those relationships, you touched on that, have you thought much about your sustainably kind of beyond?

>> Associate Professor James Smith: Yeah we have. That's a.

>> Louise Pollard: That's a magical question.

>> Associate Professor James Smith: That's a fun, yeah it's a fundamental principle for everything we do in moving forward is, is what we're doing sustainable, and how can we make sure that it is sustainable? Part of that has meant that it's probably taken us a bit longer to have what a lot of other people see as tangible outputs, but that's because we're having conversations around what does sustainability look like for us. I guess the one way that we're doing that at the moment is to build capacity within communities, build Indigenous research and evaluation capacity, because we know already that there's some spinoff research projects that we're finding, where we'll be able to continue some of those staff even beyond this initiative. But the reality is it's not long enough. And it's, you know, it's, as we said at the beginning, it's not an insufficient amount of funding, it's a significant amount of funding, we need to be accountable for that but, we still recognise that it's not enough time, so. It will be lovely to extend and expand but that's not the reality of our funding, current funding cycles, but we're trying to do everything that we can to make any actions as sustainable as possible.

>> Professor Sue Trinidad: Yes, Mike did you have a question?

>> Associate Professor Mike Dockery: It's all right, I don't think we've got time to start.

>> Professor Sue Trinidad: Okay. Alright. [Laughter] Okay, yes it's five o'clock and I wasn't sure whether there was someone else about to come in here. So, this has been recorded, and the PowerPoint and the transcript and the recording will be put up to our website, so if you need the address it's on the card, and that will be up in, shortly, shortly. So thank you very much everyone, and please join me again to thank James.

[ Applause ]