

Editorial[‡]

In 2013, the Cooperative Research Centre for Remote Economic Participation's (CRC-REP) Remote Education Systems (RES) project team brought together a collection of papers built around a central theme of 'red dirt thinking'. This theme reflected a view the authors had, that education and schooling in remote communities should be relevant to the context (that is, the 'red dirt') in which it is provided. We proposed this as a conceptual framework in which to challenge conventional wisdom about success, disadvantage and aspiration in remote schools.

Two years later, the RES project has all its data in and has empirical evidence from more than 1000 participants. In this special edition, the paper by Guenther, Disbray and Osborne responds to the important question of what matters to locals in remote communities. What does success look like from the standpoint of remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders? It turns out that success and successful teaching are not necessarily the same as much of the research literature says it should be. They are dependent on the red dirt context in which they are generated.

The other papers come from researchers who are either recently completed or soon to complete postgraduate students. Their work provides new and fresh perspectives on issues related to remote education and speaks to red dirt thinking.

Osborne's paper on Anangu histories sheds fresh light on how contemporary education has developed in the tristate region of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. He claims that 'history matters' if we are to consider how 21st century education should respond to the local context — in this case one that has been influenced by cows, bombs and missionaries.

Townsend's paper investigates the use of mobile technology for Initial Teacher Education students, particularly focusing on remote and regional parts of Queensland. Based on his findings, he sees a link between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural philosophies and the affordances offered by mobile devices.

Funk, Guthadjaka and Kong's article reflects on learnings from the development of a site called 'BowerBird' which trialled the use of social media to record sightings and information about local species of plants and animals. This work sits at the interface between western science and Yolŋu epistemologies. The paper captures something of

the tensions that exist at the interface, but more importantly, it captures some of the learnings that are generated through a collaborative process.

Over the four years of the CRC-REP RES project, the importance of boarding schools as a response to the educational needs of high school students has become increasingly prominent. There is a dearth of independent empirical research on the topic, particularly as it relates to remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Benveniste, Dawson and Rainbird's article on how one residential program in South Australia contributes to the needs of remote boarding students, fills an important gap in Australian literature. Similarly, Mander's paper on Aboriginal parents' perceptions of their children's boarding experiences in Western Australia, sheds light on this important topic.

Lovell's paper on multimodal learning that goes on in central Australian art centres informs our thinking about the nature of learning, where customary activities interface with learning and economic participation. She argues that the multimodal customary assets of art production processes are intrinsically valuable, regardless of the value of the art product. Similarly the learning that happens and is shared in the creation of art has value which goes beyond the value of education as a vehicle for economic participation.

The array of papers presented in this special edition of The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education reflects the diversity and complexity of issues that emerge from the red dirt. The need for contextually and culturally responsive approaches to remote education become apparent as we consider the various challenges educators face to ensure that learners can maximise the benefits from their learning. The aspects of remote education covered here — how to take account of local histories, traditional ecological knowledge, emerging technologies, boarding school options, learning through the creative arts, how we take account of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander standpoints in constructing a successful education — just scratch the surface. Underneath the surface we'll be sure to find more 'red dirt' as we carefully consider how to deliver meaningful education and learning opportunities for Indigenous people in remote Australia.

John Guenther
Guest Editor

[‡]The original version of this Editorial was published with no author name. A notice detailing with this has been published and the error rectified in the online and print PDF and HTML copies.