

REMOTE DELIVERY – NOT JUST EDUCATION WORK!

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Abstract

Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) is a unique education provider based at the town of Batchelor 100kms south of Darwin with other facilities in numerous towns and communities throughout the NT. Educational delivery from BIITE extends to indigenous people from throughout Australia. In addressing the needs of such groups in remote localities, including those in correctional services facilities, the authors address a range of complexities in their work that extend well beyond their core duties as educators. This paper seeks to explain these layers of complexity and discuss the opportunities and challenges of educators in remote delivery with specific reference to their experience in partnering NT Correctional Services. The role of educator will be shown to include aspects of logistical planning, consultative activity, liaison and framework negotiation with any by other special organizations while balancing these tasks with the everyday tasks of course delivery in the classroom.

Welcome to this section of the program. I am a lecturer who has been working with Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education over the last five years. For the last three years I have been involved closely in links with the NT Correctional Services Centres in Alice Springs and now at Berrimah, just outside Darwin.

The paper I am presenting today falls into six sections:

1. Background description of Batchelor Institution.
2. Relationship with NT Correctional Services – Don't they have their own educators?? Why are outside lecturers relevant? Are there advantages?
3. Different models of arranging delivery between institutions – funding/ liaison / initiating planning / determining needs / targeting student groups etc
4. Ownership of the program, responsibilities of the teaching organization and community.
5. Course goals, institutional goals – outcomes in terms of the course, outcomes in terms of relationships and ongoing partnerships....
6. Conclusion – Tips and Where To From Here?

Part 1. Background description of Batchelor Institution.

Batchelor has been operating as an adult indigenous education institution for over 30 years in the Northern Territory, and now includes students enrolled from various other parts of Australia. It started in the mid 1960s as a small annexe of Kormilda College, a boarding school which operated for Aboriginal high school students from small communities who were studying in Darwin. It's original purpose was to help prepare Aboriginal assistant teachers for their role in the classroom in primary schooling.

Accessing tertiary education has proved to be a difficult task for many Aboriginal people in many different situations due to lack of educational opportunity due to limited facilities and resources in small communities. Along with a social and personal history that means a great many people are barely literate many Indigenous people in the Northern Territory face a life where this lack of knowledge and skills presents a wide range of serious barriers to participation in the wider Australian society. They are also disadvantaged by this with regards to management of their own communities. In this context, Batchelor Institute has grown greatly in the last three decades from that base to now having it's own facility at the town of Batchelor.

The courses offered by Batchelor Institute now cover education studies, health work, land and resource management, community development and maintenance, social science, art and craft, linguistics and foundation (or general basic adult education) studies. For many years Batchelor has used various programs to facilitate the movement of Aboriginal people into further academic study as well as giving a wider range of personal choice in lifestyle matters. (Thorpe, T. & McGrath, M., 2003, np) The main choices of course for students in this respect include the Certificates in Spoken and Written English (AMES) and the Preparation for Tertiary Studies courses. Another strong area of Batchelor Institute is the linguistics study area especially with so many students who have an Indigenous language as their first language.

During this time, Batchelor has focused on delivering to isolated Indigenous communities alongside welcoming students from urban areas of other states. To do so, the Institute has focused on a range of delivery strategies. The Institute consists of the main campus located at Batchelor, along with another main campus at Alice Springs. There are also annexes at Katherine and Tennant Creek. Furthermore there are study centres operating in many communities throughout the Northern Territory. We have had a connection with Kununarra in the Kimberley region of Western Australia and have had a study centre at Yarrabah near Cairns. There is usually only one lecturer based in communities where a study centre exists, and the study centre is used to allow visiting lecturers to come and teach in the community for one or two week blocks.

Most courses conducted by Batchelor Institute are based on students being able to study in a classroom at one of the annexes or campuses for a week or two at a time. In between these intensive study periods they are able to use study guides and homework assignments to further develop skills and study practices

learnt during their classroom experiences. This is known as mixed mode delivery. In communities lecturers are able to offer courses in more flexible ways especially if the lecturers are based in those communities. In recent years the Institute has been developing resources and methodologies for distance delivery. One course is currently trialling this distance delivery at Berrimah Correctional Centre just outside of Darwin.

Part 2. Relationship with NT Correctional Services – Don't they have their own educators?? Why are outside lecturers relevant? Are there advantages?

There are many educators employed by NT Correctional Services to deliver programs to the people on the inside. So why did they approach Batchelor Institute? The reasons are several:

- i) It gives the correctional services organisation an opportunity to develop flexible responses in the selection of available training. By utilizing special expertise in partnership with other organizations it creates a win-win arrangement for both partners as well as enlarging the options available to potential students without needing to create a larger education staff. It also recognizes that some courses are best conducted in a short-term manner. Furthermore it allows courses with very highly specialized knowledge to take place which would not otherwise be available.
- ii) For a great number of offenders, prison is seen as the place to go to get training. Various correctional services staff have recounted to us that when the offenders receive news of their imminent release they are sometimes very concerned because it will mean cutting off the training they are undertaking. This partnership is one step in building an awareness that the opportunities for training are available once offenders have been released.
- iii) Batchelor Institute is also placed in a unique way to follow up many of the offenders when they leave the prison. (refer to section one) Because of the annexes in other major towns and study centres in many communities, Batchelor Institute can offer a realistic and ongoing support for people when they leave the correctional services institutions. (expand further?)
- iv) It increases the pool of expertise available to deliver programs meeting the needs of the students. It does this in a way that does not place extra demand on funding within either organization.
- v) It also supports the engagement of correctional services residents with outside educational contexts as well as the specific personnel within the prison. This is a significant social contribution to have contact with people who don't actually work for the prison! As such it supports easier social participation upon leaving the correctional services facility.

Overall the following courses and events have occurred

1. The provision of basic literacy and numeracy courses outside the normal educational resources of the prison.
2. The use of the Batchelor Institute curriculum as the basis for development of art and craft skills in the prison.
3. A successful implementation of an interpreting course at the Berrimah facility in 2004.
4. The introduction of a tertiary enabling program in distance format for some offenders at the Berrimah facility. This is an innovation using distance learning strategies that will hopefully support other students in distance learning.

The partnership we are involved in dates from mid 2002. At one stage of that year the men's CSWE program in Alice Springs was able to have a surplus staff member, however there was some uncertainty about how to fully utilize that position. At the same time the Alice Springs campus of Batchelor Institute was approached by the Alice Springs Correctional Services education officer with the suggestion of a literacy and numeracy program in the Industries section of the prison. Men who were working in a variety of manual trades activities could not use a ruler or read a basic information text or follow instructions. The proposal took shape as a 16 week program for each morning of the week. All the students involved were enrolled in Certificate One in Spoken and Written English.

This model of delivery was found to be very successful in terms of outcomes achieved. In many literacy programs where students attend class in blocks of one week each month, and often do not attend for a variety of reasons, CSWE staff have been concerned that the outcomes of the course were not realistically achievable. However with the benefit of regular classes, it was evident that real progress was made during the program. Half of the students graduated with certificates and most other students were awarded a statement of attainment for modules completed.

In the delivery of the Interpreter Training course it was a slightly more complicated process with the Aboriginal Interpreting Service being involved as a third stakeholder. This program has been conducted just once in the Berrimah Correctional Services facility, with several men graduating as qualified interpreters. A great graduation ceremony as did the Spoken and Written English students in Alice Springs. These graduation ceremonies were significant for promoting learning pathways to other offenders, and have made it possible for students to go on to other courses upon exiting prisons.

Part 3. Different models of arranging delivery between institutions – funding/ liaison / initiating planning / determining needs / targeting student groups etc

For us at BIITE, becoming involved with NT Correctional Services, does often seem very similar indeed to remote community development even though the class lives just 10-20minutes from the main urban centres. Remote delivery to most students from Batchelor more commonly means traveling long distances for

staff and students and spending time away from jobs, family and home on the part of both students and staff.

However this experience of community delivery is a vital part of the role of a BIITE lecturer and illustrates a uniqueness about BIITE as an educational provider. Lecturers at BIITE do not simply spend their days in preparing sessions and activities in which students achieve outcomes according to the accredited curriculum. We also become very experienced brokers in dealing with other communities and organizations.

This process is similar to the roles that lecturers stationed in communities very often carry out. As well as being educators, lecturers are often instrumental in forming partnerships. Promoting the profile of Batchelor Institute in the community connected with the lecturer often takes a great amount of time. To just get a program started involves building rapport with local organizations. Programs that may have previously not worked may leave negative perceptions of the Institute with the community. Programs that may have worked but are not able to be continued result in some feelings of disappointment. There is a constant need of attention to connections with organizations as well as the day to day classroom training tasks.

Therefore relationships to stakeholders are constantly in need of monitoring. In the context of NT Correctional Services, this partnership is a growing one. In order to be involved with correctional services a significant amount of work was required before even beginning to teach lessons. Just as an isolated community has it's own protocols that a visiting lecturer needs to consider, going to work in prisons involves lecturers in some extra work. Suitable rooms had to be found, resources had to be discussed, starting times had to fit in with the community routine, students with the appropriate needs had to be identified, security requirements had to be fulfilled. In filling this last requirement some barriers were found for some of our staff, who felt that the scrutiny was a personal intrusion, although they had no prior convictions themselves! This kind of delivery is far more than making an appointment for a person to turn up for a seminar, have half hour set-up and then leave without a trace at the end of the day!

In order to begin the second program of Certificate in Spoken and Written English, discussions were held over a period of three or four months prior to the program commencing. While this process related to logistical considerations, deeper agendas were also discussed during this time. Particular importance was attached to developing an awareness of participating in training that could continue when offenders had commenced life on the outside. The particular target group of offenders was different from the first program as they were all low security men who were soon to be released.

This time around it was necessary to negotiate different timetabling ideas due to different availability of staffing resources. Instead of every day delivery, the lecturer was able to schedule one week blocks of teaching and a visiting tutor was in attendance to support the students with follow-up revision and extension.

This program was different in that several of the students enrolling would exit at different points during the delivery of the course.

In the delivery of the Preparation for Tertiary Studies course, it was intended that resources would be designed to support students studying the course by distance education. Whilst there is some minimal contact between the lecturer and students the majority of the work is being undertaken by students from the resources supplied. Some modification is needed because of lack of access to the internet. This factor may cause increasing difficulty as students progress into other stages of the course, although the availability of lecturers locally will help to overcome this. Regular tutorial support has been planned to support the students with advice each week or each fortnight.

Part 4. Ownership of the program, responsibilities of the teaching organization and community.

Working with the Correctional Services NT prisons involves lecturers in developing partnerships with the organization. Although you could say that developing partnerships is not a part of the role of the lecturer, it is the lecturer who interfaces between BIITE and NT Correctional Services most often. In fact, building such partnerships with the community is a unique facet of the role of Batchelor Institute lecturers. In some instances in remote communities, partnerships have been entered into with a local community council. For example at Kintore, near the West Australia border in the Western Desert region, the delivery of a program was once organized in such a way as the target student group were employees of the local government council. The course involved the aims of improving the literacy and numeracy skills these employees may have needed on the job. The council provided a venue and allowed time for the students to participate in the program, which delivered by the Institute as part of it's operational budget. Other partnerships have taken the official form of memorandums of understanding, or flexibe response funding.

Our connections with NT Correctional Services is more of the first kind of partnership. Naturally BIITE seeks to provide an educational service where other organizations cannot, and emphasizes the needs of Indigenous communities. By working in the prisons this helps BIITE in developing the strength of it's own program base which serving a particular group of students not supported in the same manner by other organizations.

A program delivered in a remote community takes on the special needs of the community. It also requires the participation and support of that community for success. This is no less the case when delivering in NT Correctional Services. In competing or complementing the range of other activities within a correctional services facility the success of the outcomes require the support of officers as well as the students. This means that lecturers entering NT Correctional Services often spend a significant amount of time explaining their programs to officers as well as students.

This contributes not only to the successful achievement of outcomes in the class but ensures that correctional services officers are able to advocate study to students on behalf of Batchelor Institute. It improves the public profile of BIITE at the same time. For many students BIITE is well positioned in order to provide a pathway of study for offenders upon leaving correctional services. BIITE offers a positive supportive framework especially for Indigenous students that may not be the same with mainstream education providers.

We move towards being a team with the community instead of training providers. Whilst there is a lot of discussion about private providers, and education and training becomes a commodity that is passed through transactions in business plans, at Batchelor Institute there has been a significant attempt to envisage our role in a broader sense. While it is true that like all accredited training organizations we set goals in terms of enrolments, contact hours delivered in order to attract funding and we operate with financial and business contexts, we also strive for other goals that whilst they do not directly support our funding base, they involve more personal and qualitative aspects of educational engagement.

Therefore we often move away from a 'business' framework of doing transactions involving providing an educational service to being more closely joined in terms of our goals.

Part 5. Course goals, institutional goals – outcomes in terms of the course, outcomes in terms of relationships and ongoing partnerships....

What were the goals for the prison? Did the partnership support these goals?

Outcomes are also the bread and butter, indeed the dollars and cents for the training provider! Discuss whether outcomes in prison are better than for students working outside the institution? Why is this so? What might the implications be?

Are our outcomes being achieved? I would like to consider this from both the point of view of the prison and the point of view of Batchelor Institute.

From the point of view of Batchelor Institute, our first efforts with the Certificate One in Spoken and Written English produced significant outcomes. In many of the campus and community classes at the time, lecturers felt that it was not a worthwhile curriculum to use and that it was too difficult for our students, with their lack of educational engagement, to achieve. However in conducting classes each day over 16 weeks, half the class graduated with the Certificate One in Spoken and Written English, and nearly all the other participants had gained statements of attainment in one of their modules. We concluded, as a result, that intensive involvement in the program was one of the keys to success. If students are studying regularly outcomes are better – commonsense really, but often difficult to ensure in the case of many of our Indigenous communities! In a weird kind of way, it seems like prison might be a suitable training location!

Many of our students look to the campus to provide a safe and supportive environment for study which they cannot find at home.

From the point of view of the prison the results are somewhat mixed. We have not yet seen the continuing involvement of the men in programs when they leave the prison in any significant way. However, it must be acknowledged that this partnership is one that has only developed over the last three years. Three years in terms of funding requirements is almost an eternity, yet in the sense of setting up partnerships for delivery three years is almost just long enough for a basic introduction so that we now feel comfortable working with one another!

Part 6. Conclusion – Tips and Where To From Here?

Where to from here for BIITE and NT Correctional Services? There is a current expectation that the delivery of Certificate in Spoken and Written English will continue to be offered in Alice Springs Correctional Services. (Check with Shane...) A new set of offenders has been identified with interest in the course in interpreting (check more information with Madonna). The course in Preparation for Tertiary Studies has also been discussed with relation to adoption of a distance delivery model that could allow this course to be carried out in prisons. It is clear that the model of partnership offers great opportunities for significant educational engagement. It goes beyond the contractual obligations associated with project funding to a relationship where trust and commitment are built together as both organizations confront the challenges involved with working alongside indigenous communities seeking change.

Tips for working in partnership.

Be prepared to take at least a year or two to establish rapport and trust. While some partnerships are well organized, and the parties implement each side of the agreement according to contracts and memoranda of understanding and it all works with a minimum of fuss. I believe that these kind of dream situations are the exception to the rule. It is more likely that any partnership will take some time to develop. There must be trust established, transparencies of objectives, confidence that after an initial meeting one of you will call the other back a couple of months later to follow up on things.

Be prepared for things to be less than ideal. As an educator going out to many isolated communities throughout central Australia and having lived in Arnhem Land for a decade, there are numerous things that can effect the delivery of educational programs by visiting lecturers. Although one would think that a correctional services facility is a much more controlled environment than these communities it isn't always the case! Facilities and staffing provide just two examples. During our initial experience in the Alice Springs facility our classroom was in the corner of a workshop and was often interrupted by the sound of grinding machines. There was one day when we turned up to enter the industry section to commence our teaching session only to be informed that the normal officer was not on duty that day and no-one could find a spare set of keys! (They did however manage to open the locked gate about 15 mins later, however the joke about the keys stuck!)

Staffing. This is a vital part of the picture. Just as in isolated communities a change of staffing can render a program ineffective so it is with working in the correctional services organizations. A rapport may be built up with particular officers who know the way the program operates. If the officers are changed on fairly short notice, upon the next time the visiting lecturer arranges a teaching session there is a need to once again establish understanding of the rationale and the needs to support the program. Partnerships need constant support and renewal.

Be prepared to review and evaluate together.

This is vital as the success of the program includes the objectives of both partners. Successful outcomes for only one of the partners will mean a lopsided project and decrease the likelihood of future support. Also evaluating and reviewing together increases the chance of developing the same script for implementing future programs. This is a process in which both partners reach beyond the piecemeal approach of lecturers coming in and out as programs commence and conclude, and reach towards building a common set of outcomes and goals.

Personal Reflections as an Outsider Working In.

At the time of the beginning this project it's maybe not surprising that I had one or two negative thoughts. However, I had worked as a volunteer in the prison visiting centre in Alice Springs a few times previously, and had also visited prisons by myself and as part of church ministry teams on a few other occasions. So it wasn't so intimidating to me as it was to some of my colleagues!! These little negative thoughts were gradually turned to positive ones during the participation in the programs.

I think the valuable part of it was the way that the offenders themselves responded to us personally. On the first level, I think they enjoyed the socialization with people who didn't wear uniforms or who were part of the 'establishment'. Some of the offenders we worked with didn't have regular family visits, and so the contact with outsiders who brought in interesting things for them to do was quite a treat! Whatever the results achieved in the courses, this could well be an informal outcome of great worth.

On the second level, I found myself enjoying teaching students who came from a relatively stable environment, although always knowing, it is a correctional services institution after all – of course it is controlled! In many other contexts lecturers are engaged in so many community issues that impact upon the classroom environment, which are relatively absent from this experience. I enjoyed the frequency of contact with the students (although it is possible for students to disappear from a classroom even in this context!) and saw that results are indeed achievable.

The experiences we've had with the NT Correctional Services have prompted the Institute to build upon these connections. Partnership with NT Correctional Services is a key part of the way Batchelor Institute relates to the NT community

and serves a group of students who are marginalized but still seeking to improve themselves and their life situations. Although it is a demanding context and challenges lecturers to take on wide ranging tasks over and above their classroom delivery, this is one of the key challenges that Batchelor Institute staff seek to engage with.

References

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