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**Tom Calma**  
Aboriginal and Torres  
Strait Islander Social  
Justice Commissioner

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25 November 2009

## Indigenous education at the crossroads



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## The human right to be heard

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- A fundamental aspect of human rights is about giving voice to the voiceless; allowing people who are **affected** by policies to be part of the drivers that **shape the policy**.



## Reforming agendas

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- Education systems in Australia are constantly being changed and modified. One practice is thrown out and a new one brought in, as if change in itself is a good thing and will lead to better education.
- There is no one-size-fits-all framework that you can apply to education – and this is especially the case in Indigenous education.



## Competitive advantage for Indigenous students

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- Being literate in an Indigenous language is a competitive advantage in the workplace and mandatory for certain jobs.
- Many remote employment opportunities are based on Indigenous languages and culture.
- Indigenous languages can now be studied in Years 11 and 12.



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## International evidence

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- A growing body of international evidence supports bilingual education approaches over English-only approaches.
- Bilingual education is proving to be the best approach to assist students to transfer from their mother tongue literacies to second language literacies.



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## Consider the consequences

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- It is the students and their families who suffer compound disadvantage when school education is poorly managed.
- Poorly focussed school education can lead to unemployment.



## Lesson 1

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- *Listen to us – implement regional education plans in consultation with local Indigenous people – and honour them.*



## Inputs and outcomes

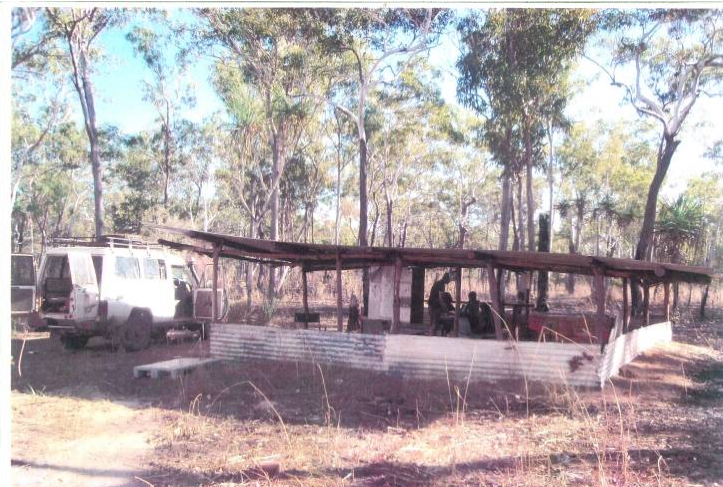
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- We must consider the education **inputs** – the resources provided by government – as well as the **outcomes** – national testing of student performance.
- School education is not a level playing field. Not all schools enjoy the same level of resources. Not all students receive a full-time education.



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## Yikarrakkal Homeland School



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## Yikarrakkal classroom





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## Tasmanian primary school



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## Lesson two

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- Ensure that there is equality of inputs when there is an expectation of equal outcomes.
- Expand assessment criteria by measuring and valuing the unique skills and competencies of Indigenous students



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## Graduation ceremony of students from Garrthalala homeland school



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## AIME

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- A unique style of structured education mentoring to link university students with high school Indigenous students in a one-on-one relationship.
- AIME's objectives are to increase Year 12 completions and university admission rates for all Indigenous Australian students who participate in the program.



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## Indigenous student's guide to postgraduate scholarships

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- The flier in your conference bag refers to post graduate guide that provides a comprehensive overview of every post graduate scholarship available.
- It covers disciplines as varied as science, medicine, social work, business, and engineering.
- Tell other Indigenous graduates.



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## Our voices

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- This week the Australian Government announced its support and funding for a new national representative body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- It will be a voice that is capable of leading, influencing and monitoring policy and legislative development in education and in other areas of public life.



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## White Ribbon Day

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- Today is the *International Day for the Elimination of violence Against Women*.
- The message is for zero tolerance for violence against women.
- Along with the Prime Minister I urge all men to take an oath to end violence against women.
- We must stop the 1,000 assaults on Australian women every day.



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## Resilient young people

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- There is no handbook that shows teachers how to assist students to develop a **sense of identity**.
- Young people need to know and understand who they are, where they belong, and to whom they are important.
- You are those people.