Role Models and
Leaders Australia

**Evaluation of Girls
Academy Program:
Summary Report**

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lirata

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INTRODUCTION

This report summarises the findings of an independent evaluation of the Role Models and Leaders Australia (RMLA) Girls Academy, a program designed to overcome barriers to education for Aboriginal girls. The evaluation was undertaken by Lirata Consulting between September 2018 and September 2019.

The evaluation draws on data collected via a mixed methodology encompassing surveys, interviews, focus groups/conversation circles, analysis of monitoring data and site visits. The analysis examines the Girls Academy Program across a number of dimensions including relevance, effectiveness, impact, efficiency, sustainability, barriers and enablers, and governance and management, whilst also providing recommendations for the ongoing success and improvement of the program.

The full Final Report of the evaluation was completed in February 2020. This Summary Report outlines key findings from the full report, and also contains the literature review prepared as part of the evaluation.

CONTEXT

Role Models and Leaders Australia

RMLA is a not-for-profit charitable organisation founded in 2004 by Olympian and champion basketballer Ricky Grace with the support of the Chesson Family. The Girls Academy Program is the largest and highest profile aspect of RMLA's work. Following extensive lobbying with the Australian Government, the first Girls Academy opened at the Clontarf Aboriginal College in Perth in 2004. There are now 43 Girls Academies over 47 campuses in Western Australia (WA), the Northern Territory (NT), New South Wales (NSW) and Queensland (QLD).

Girls Academy Program

The Girls Academy Program was established with the aim of overcoming the barriers that can prevent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls from completing their education, entering the workforce, reaching their full potential and positively contributing to their communities. The key intended result of the Girls Academy Program is:

> *A confident educated Indigenous girl capable of breaking the cycle of disadvantage by creating a successful future for herself and having the capacity to positively influence others.*

The program works in partnership with the school system to provide culturally grounded, community led activities that aim to nurture and develop the girls' self-concept, confidence and self-esteem, strengthen and support their resilience, and encourage and support school attendance, achievement and academic success. The program seeks to support Academy girls to complete and graduate from 12 years of schooling, with a post-school plan that they have the capacity and support to successfully implement. A draft program logic for the Girls Academy Program has been developed by RMLA and outlines the program's intended outcomes.

The Girls Academy Program expanded rapidly from 14 Academies in three states in 2016 to 43 Academies in four states in 2019, with funding from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) and Departments of Education in WA, the NT, NSW, and QLD. Philanthropic support, donations and fundraising

provide additional revenue for the program. In May 2019, Federal Government funding and oversight of the Girls Academy Program passed from DPMC to the newly established National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA).

Program delivery

In order to achieve its aims, the Girls Academy has developed five core program elements that provide the structure and rationale for the program's activities.

1. Well Being – I am Me, I am beautiful
2. Health – Healthy Body, Healthy Mind
3. Cultural Knowledge and Understanding – Cultural Connections
4. Future Pathways and Careers – Imagine
5. Leadership – Be the Change

A broad range of activities is linked to each of the five program elements. Some are consistent across all Girls Academies, but individual activities are prioritised according to the needs of each local Academy and the specific characteristics of the community they are situated in.

EVALUATION

With the support of its major funder, the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA), in 2017 RMLA decided to undertake two evaluations of the Girls Academy Program to provide it with independent evidence of the extent to which it was meeting its aims. The first study was conducted by PwC: *The estimated economic impact of the Girls Academy Program, August 2018* (PwC, 2018).

The second evaluation was conducted by Lirata Consulting and its findings are summarised in this report.

Its primary purpose is to contribute to the program's ongoing development and implementation, by enabling RMLA and its partners to learn from work to date and to improve policies, processes and methodology. The secondary purpose is to contribute to strengthening RMLA's accountability to key stakeholders, including funders and sponsors, by generating a credible body of evidence in relation to the program's level of quality and value.

The current evaluation has focused on:

- Assessing the **relevance** of the Girls Academy Program, including the extent to which the five core program elements have been implemented as intended, the extent to which the programs and their implementation reflect the underlying values of the Australian Government's Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS), and the extent of relevance to community needs at each site
- Investigating the level of **effectiveness** of the Girls Academy Program through analysing participant outcomes in the four key result areas of personal development, school attendance, academic achievement and post-school transition, along with other positive or negative outcomes
- Identifying evidence of overall program **impact**, including school and community impacts over time
- Assessing the level of **efficiency** with which the program is being implemented

- Assessing the **sustainability** of program benefits for individual participants, and the level of sustainability of the program model and its delivery over time, especially during periods of expansion
- Identifying internal and external **barriers and enablers** to effective program delivery, and critical success factors that contribute to successful implementation
- Identifying **strengths and areas for improvement** in organisational and program governance, management, processes and systems that impact on the success of the program
- Providing clear and actionable **recommendations** to further strengthen the program and its implementation.

Methodology

The evaluation methodology used mixed methods, including surveys of Girls Academy staff (n=57) and key school contacts (n=26) on key indicators relating to the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability, barriers and enablers, and strengths and opportunities for improvements to the Girls Academy Program. Qualitative methods were also used to gather more in-depth explanatory data through visits to 5 of the programs 37 sites.

These included targeted interviews, conversation circles, focus groups and observations with girls attending the Academy program (n=55), past students (n=4), family members (n=11), Girls Academy staff, including Girls Academy Regional Managers, Program Managers, Development Officers and Post School Options Officers, (n=20), Girls Academy Advisory Group members (n=11), key school contacts (n=22) and external stakeholders (n=9) at five Girls Academies in the Northern Territory (1), Queensland (2) and Western Australia (2).

A desktop review of program and management documentation was also undertaken, as were interviews with RMLA Management (n=15) to assess the governance and management of the Girls Academy Program.

Data from all sources was synthesised and used to address the **key evaluation questions**:

1. How **relevant** is the Girls Academy Program model and its implementation to the values and needs of its key stakeholders?
2. How **effective** is the Girls Academy Program in achieving its intended results for participants?
3. How **efficient** are RMLA and the Girls Academy Program in using available resources to achieve the program objectives?
4. What **impacts** does the Girls Academy Program achieve within schools and communities, and how do these occur?
5. How **sustainable** are program benefits for individuals, schools and communities?
6. What are the **enablers, barriers and critical success factors** for effective and sustainable implementation of the Girls Academy Program?
7. How could organisational and Program **governance, management, processes and systems** be further strengthened to enhance program delivery?

The evaluation framework provides a formal rubric for rating the Girls Academy Program on each of the first five evaluation questions as either *Poor*, *Adequate*, *Good* or *Excellent*.

Limitations

A number of limitations to the evaluation methodology were encountered:

- The sample of sites visited and stakeholders spoken to formed only a small proportion of total sites and enrolments.

- Site visits could not be undertaken in NSW.

- Monitoring data was unable to be accessed in WA and NSW.

- Survey response numbers were lower than expected.

These limitations affected the robustness of some evaluation findings, and this is flagged in the full Final Report where relevant.

FINDINGS

Relevance

The analysis suggests that the Girls Academy Program is highly relevant to the needs of its stakeholders and, in particular, Aboriginal girls. It was considered culturally appropriate, included strong collaboration with Aboriginal Australians, and was generally accessible and responsive to local needs:

- It provides additional staff to schools to enable more direct contact and support to Aboriginal girls

- It provides a room and safe space for Aboriginal girls within each school

- It is increasingly staffed by Aboriginal women who are more likely to form strong connections to Aboriginal girls

- It sits outside the school curriculum and therefore can focus on girls' general wellbeing including social, family, health and other issues that impact on their education

- It provides girls with opportunities to participate in social, recreational and leisure activities outside of school time

- It is strongly connected to Aboriginal Communities and Elders

- It is responsive to local needs and very embedded within the community

- It provides direct support, including transport and food to encourage attendance.

While no stakeholders found any aspects of the program irrelevant, there were a number of opportunities for improvement identified, including ensuring that the core elements of the program are consistently embedded across all Academies, determining what the program model looks like for students at different year levels, clarifying the Academies' role in behavioural management with schools, improving individual schools' cultural understanding of Aboriginal people, and ensuring all Academies are well aligned to community need.

Schools and Academy staff across all Academies visited identified a number of girls who were not engaged with the program or with school. Further work is required to understand what more could be done to engage these girls and whether the program model needs to be adapted to better meet their needs. While school staff felt positive about RMLA listening to suggestions about the program, Academy staff were less

positive about this and further work is required to understand the nature of the issue confronting schools and Academy staff.

Using the evaluation rubric, the program's performance on the criterion of Relevance was rated as **Excellent**. The strength of evidence was high.

Effectiveness

Based on the data analysed, the Girls Academy Program seems to be effective in engaging Aboriginal girls in school, and to have a moderate impact on their attendance in the NT and QLD compared to Aboriginal students not engaged in the program. Stakeholder perceptions regarding the effect on attendance were stronger than the quantitative data suggests. Perceptions of stakeholders were positive in relation to the program's impact on improving academic achievement leading to year 12 completion, but no quantitative data was available to support this.

Perceptions were somewhat less positive on the program's effectiveness in assisting girls achieve their post-school options with the evaluation supporting RMLA's intent to do more work in this area, including the establishment of a Post School Transitions program.

Factors impacting on effectiveness included:
- Having a welcoming and inclusive space within the school which helps the girls feel safe
- Active support to be present with the girls and resolve any issues which arise at school or which are stopping the girls getting to school, again helping the girls feel safe and like they are moving forward
- Building connections with parents which means parents will feel more positive about the school and be more active in getting their girls to attend
- Practical strategies including checking attendance, taking girls to class, providing transport, food etc.
- Encouragement and rewards for attendance which help build motivation and reinforce positive behaviour
- Advocating and working with the school to reduce barriers to engagement generated by the school.

Using the evaluation rubric the program's performance on Effectiveness was rated at each of the five sub-criterion levels.
- *Strong identity and personal development* was rated as **Excellent.** The strength of evidence was moderate.
- *Increased engagement in school* was rated as **Adequate**. The strength of evidence was moderate.
- *Increased attendance at school* was rated as **Adequate**. The strength of evidence was moderate.
- *Improved academic achievement leading to Year 12 graduation* was rated as **Adequate**. The strength of evidence was moderate.
- *Successful post school transition* was rated as **Poor**. The strength of evidence was low.

The program's performance for Effectiveness overall was rated as **Adequate.**

Limitations

The strength of evidence for each of the sub-criteria is moderate or low and caution should be exercised in placing reliance on the ratings.

Impact

The analysis suggests that the Girls Academy Program has a positive impact on a range of domains investigated in this evaluation. The main pathway to impact appears to be strong relationships between Academy and school staff, and Academy staff with other school staff in roles that support Aboriginal students. Girls' relationships with other Academy girls and meeting the broader Academy population at events like the year 12 Summit created positive impacts for students.

School and Academy staff were positive in relation to the broader impacts of the Academy program on the schools' approach to working with Aboriginal students, relationships between the school and the Aboriginal Community, and on girls' families. Survey responses from school key contacts and Academy staff indicated that the Girls Academy had a positive impact on the community, limited evidence, other than anecdotal, was given for this. Having a Girls Academy within a school was perceived to have some positive impact on other students in the school.

Using the evaluation rubric, the program's performance on the criterion of Impact was rated as **Good**.

Limitations

The strength of evidence was low and caution should be exercised in placing reliance on the rating.

Efficiency

The analysis suggests that the Girls Academy Program requires substantial expenditure due to two main factors: the staffing model, and travel costs connected with the widely dispersed and sometimes remote sites. Staffing of individual Academies operates on a 25:1 ratio of participants to staff, with a minimum of two staff per Academy. This level of staff resourcing is intermediate between the 'high end' of programs which involve intensive support, and the 'low end' of primarily volunteer-based or high-volume support services.

Given the Academies are located across four states and territories, travel is a major cost in providing support and training to Academy staff, providing a leadership presence by RMLA management, promoting the program to new schools and Aboriginal Communities, and managing relationships with government and other funders. While efficiencies have been created in more newly established Academies through the location of a number of programs in close geographic proximity to each other, travel will continue to be a substantial cost to the program.

Resourcing was identified as a problem for staff with poor access to IT clearly an issue in QLD Academies. Other issues included inequity in resources between programs for boys (rooms, capacity to fund trips and activity), and the adequacy of the Academy room. Program documentation and resources, while available through the organisation's shared drive, do not appear to be meeting the needs of all staff.

The evaluation did not analyse the value for money of the program, but findings from research undertaken by PwC indicated that the Girls Academy Program returns $1.31 for every $1 spent. This report considered a range of direct impacts of the Girls Academy Program including educational outcomes, income and

employment, welfare changes, justice changes and changes in health reported outcomes. Based upon their review, PwC estimated that the Girls Academy Program provided a benefit-cost ratio of 1.31.

Given the continuing growth in number of Academies over time, it would be useful to repeat the economic analysis in future to assess any changes in this ratio over time.

The available evidence indicates that the Girls Academy program is delivered reasonably efficiently within the scope of the resources available to it.

Using the evaluation rubric, the program's performance on the criterion of Efficiency was rated as **Good**. The strength of evidence was moderate to high.

Sustainability

Only limited data was available to the evaluation on the sustainability of outcomes for girls in their post school years. The Girls Academy program do not yet collect monitoring data on this area, and evaluation resourcing was prioritised to site visits with current participants rather than follow-up of past participants. A small number of interviews with past participants identified ongoing positive outcomes for individuals. Examples of individual positive outcomes suggest that this is the case for at least some students, but further data is needed to assess overall sustainability of outcomes.

No specific issues in relation to the growth in the overall Academy program impacting on sustainability were raised by Academy staff, however concerns were expressed in relation to increasing workloads and high administrative requirements.

Using the evaluation rubric, the program's performance on the criterion of Sustainability was rated as **Adequate**.

Limitations

The strength of evidence was very low for sustainability of individual outcomes but high for sustainability of the program through expansion. Caution should be exercised in placing reliance on the individual outcomes rating.

Barriers and enablers

The analysis suggests that there are more challenges for remote Academies in terms of overall resources available to support the Community. Issues of staffing and provision of support were identified through the evaluation for the remote site visited.

Strong relationships with local Aboriginal Communities and stakeholders was found to be positive at the Academies visited and integral to their successful outcomes. Engagement of school leaders was also found to be important in ensuring the Girls Academy was well integrated within the school and not siloed from the general school community, and this was also evidenced.

Issues of resourcing were identified by Academy staff including having more girls enrolled than their target numbers, and tensions between focusing on girls who were engaged in the program or reducing support to them to more actively engage those who were not engaged in school. In four of the five Academies visited, staff are currently attempting to do both, but acknowledge that resources do not always make this

possible. Enrolments in the Girls Academy generally seem in line with targets, but there are still a significant number of Aboriginal girls in partner schools not attending.

Staffing is an issue raised by most stakeholders as both a strength and limitation of the program. Strong and highly skilled Aboriginal women are seen as important to the success of the program, however difficulty in recruiting Aboriginal women, with the required skills, is not always possible. Improvements in this area were identified.

Some issues were found in relation to the adequacy of documentation to enable staff to do their work effectively.

Governance and management

The evaluators were asked to review RMLA's governance and management systems alongside the evaluation of the Girls Academy Program. An initial assessment of these systems in January 2019 identified a number of gaps, and a set of improvements were recommended across areas including governance, Human Resources, finance, knowledge management and more. A subsequent review in August 2019 found that some of these gaps had been rectified, and planning and work was evident to address others.

A new Board is in place that includes Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women to better reflect the program's target group who are young Aboriginal women. The organisation has restructured to ensure that it has the required level of management support to manage its growth, including the addition of two new Aboriginal General Managers to support its operations.

There are opportunities to further strengthen RMLA's systems for staff support and development, state and Academy level budgeting, knowledge management, and program data collection.

CONCLUSION

The Girls Academy Program has evolved from small beginnings and is now operating at scale across four states and territories. The program has demonstrated the ability to offer culturally relevant and engaging support to Aboriginal girls, and there is strong qualitative evidence of effectiveness across the sites visited during this evaluation. Given the positive benefit-cost ratio of the program identified through prior research, the Girls Academy Program represents a promising model of support, enabling positive outcomes for Aboriginal girls.

Strength of evidence available to the evaluation varied widely across the evaluation criteria. Only minimal quantitative monitoring data was accessible, and only a small portion of Academy sites were able to be visited by the evaluators. These limitations should be borne in mind when considering the reliability of findings.

The organisation and the Academy are dealing with a range of operational and governance challenges that impact on the delivery of the program. While RMLA has made progress in some areas over the past year, further improvement is needed to gain best value from the program and increase sustainability. A range of opportunities for improvement are identified in the full Final Report, and key recommendations are summarised below.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Undertake further analysis of academic achievement data across states to identify whether there are specific barriers or issues to girls achieving academic goals, taking into account location-specific issues. This will require negotiation with each jurisdiction to determine the most effective way to obtain this data including issues relating to privacy.

2. As part of the Monitoring and Evaluation strategy include mechanisms to follow up with graduates periodically after program exit, to collect data on longer-term pathways and outcomes for girls.

3. Include the development of a long-term infrastructure plan in RMLA's Strategic Plan.

4. Develop a suite of mandatory training for RMLA staff covering privacy, bullying and harassment, cultural safety, Work Health & Safety, Working with Children Requirements, and any jurisdiction-specific legislative or policy requirements.

5. Undertake a training needs analysis across the Girls Academy Program to identify what gaps there are in staff skill and knowledge. Develop a plan to address these gaps which may be at the individual, Academy, state or regional level.

6. Develop a business continuity plan.

7. Invest in a risk management system that can be used by staff throughout the organisation to ensure that all risks, including those at the local site level, are captured and dealt with, and near misses collated in order to highlight system gaps.

8. Following the outcomes of the Compliance Review, develop a legislative compliance system that includes identifying all legislative and other compliance requirements. Record these in a register that assigns responsibility for monitoring compliance and includes routine reporting of compliance status to the Board.

9. Introduce a consistent system for meetings and for recording key information about meetings, including decisions made and actions assigned, at the individual Academy and regional level.

10. Work with funders to implement a streamlined and consistent set of indicators and reporting requirements for the Girls Academy Program across jurisdictions. This could include mapping the data collection and reporting requirements, and indicators to ensure these are accurate. Where inconsistencies are identified undertake conversations with funders to agree on modifications to achieve greater consistency.

11. Develop a central repository of program data, and efficient ways in which to populate this with information supplied by individual Academies, to enable more effective use of organisational data for reporting, evaluation and program planning.

12. Revisit the work done on the Monitoring and Evaluation framework and consider next steps in progressing this work, to further evidence the outcomes for girls due to their participation in the Girls Academy Program.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

A brief literature review was conducted by Lirata Consulting during the preparation phase of the Role Model and Leaders Australia (RMLA) Girls Academy Evaluation.

The purpose of the literature review was to assist with establishing the theoretical context for the evaluation in program areas that support student capacity building: school engagement, retention, achievement, wellbeing and post-school pathways. The review helped guide the evaluation methodology and informed development of the data collection tools.

Due to resource limitations, the literature review was targeted in scope. While there is a significant body of general literature on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, specific studies of school-based programs supporting student capacity building were limited, with even fewer specifically focusing upon Aboriginal students and girls in particular.

Findings have been summarised under four broad areas:

- The policy context for the Girls Academy Program, as articulated via the Closing the Gap Strategy
- Previous evaluations of educational programs that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including one specifically focused on examining supports to diminish the impact of educational disadvantage for Aboriginal girls
- An overview of the characteristics of effective school-based programs
- Key themes emerging from the general literature on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.

Policy context: Closing the Gap

The Girls Academy Program is one a number of programs established to address the significant disadvantage that Aboriginal girls experience in relation to education and falls within the scope of the Australian Government's Closing the Gap initiative. While established prior to the introduction of Closing the Gap, the Girls Academy Program has strong links to a number of priority areas identified in this strategy.

The Closing the Gap journey formally commenced in 2008 following a strong campaign that aimed to achieve equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in health and life expectancy within 25 years. Six Closing the Gap targets were introduced, contained within an overarching Commonwealth, State and Territory agreement called the National Indigenous Reform Agreement. A school attendance target was added in 2014 and an expanded early childhood target was added in 2015 following the expiry of the remote early childhood education target.

Following the release of the 2019 Closing the Gap report (Commonwealth of Australia Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019), the government committed to refreshing the strategy based on learnings from the first ten years. The strategy has been renamed Closing the Gap Refresh and includes an increased focus on working in partnership with Indigenous communities, using strengths-based and

community led approaches, greater collaboration with State and Territory governments, development of evidence-based strategies and increased accountabilities for outcomes.

The Australian Government recognises its important role in Indigenous education, including:

- Improving opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to attend and thrive at school, regardless of location
- Ensuring that gender-specific educational needs are identified and addressed
- Funding complementary activities that support engagement, attainment and completion in school and post-school education. (Commonwealth of Australia Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019)

The purposes of RMLA Girls Academies are consistent with these aims and the Closing the Gap Refresh directions.

The 2019 Closing the Gap final report on 2008-2018 outcomes identified that only two of the seven targets were on track to be met (Commonwealth of Australia Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019). A number of the Closing the Gap targets relate to improvement in educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people including:

- Halve the gap in year 12 attainment by 2020
- Close the gap in school attendance rates by 2018
- Halve the gap in reading and numeracy by 2018
- Halve the gap in employment by 2018.

Only one of these educational targets is on track to be met - halving the gap in year 12 attainment by 2020. From 2006 to 2016, the gap for this target reduced by 13 percentage points, with 65% of Indigenous 20-24-year-olds attaining Year 12 or equivalent tertiary Certificate qualification (up from 47%) (Commonwealth of Australia Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019). Indigenous attendance rates (82% nationally) did not improve from 2014 to 2018 and remain below the 93% non-Indigenous attendance rate.

The attendance gap widens throughout secondary years, increasing from 8 to 14 percentage points and is more pronounced in remote schools. Rates of consistent attendance (defined as students attending 90% or more of the time) were also lower at 49% for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students compared to 77% for non-Indigenous students. In secondary school, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls' consistent attendance was 41%. The overall employment gap for 15- to 64-year-olds did not decrease: between 2006 to 2016, while non-Indigenous employment remained around 72% nationally, Indigenous employment rates fell to 47% (Commonwealth of Australia Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019).

Additional data highlight the significance of Year 12 attainment to young people's post-school opportunities. The unemployment gap is highest in the 15 to 24 years age group. For Indigenous young people, the unemployment rate of 27% is significantly higher than the non-Indigenous rate of 14% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). While underrepresentation in universities persists, the number of Indigenous enrolments and completions significantly increased over the past decade. Indigenous enrolments more than doubled, to 19,237 in 2017, a 69% increase from 2007, with young women comprising two thirds of the cohort (Commonwealth of Australia Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019).

Evaluation programs

This section provides a brief overview of previous evaluations of key school-based programs that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Only one evaluation was found of another program specifically supporting Aboriginal girls.

Girls Academy program – Estimated economic impact

To date, one study has been completed on the Girls Academy Program - PricewaterhouseCoopers' cost-benefit analysis of *The estimated economic impact of the Girls Academy program* (PwC, 2018)*.* Analysis of 2016 ABS Census Data indicated that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls who complete year 12 are significantly more likely to achieve certificate level or higher post-school qualifications; more likely to be employed; less likely to be on welfare and incarcerated; and have better health outcomes than those who do not complete year 12.

PwC's analysis of qualitative data collected by RMLA the review found that:

- Girls attending the Academy Program were more likely to complete Year 12 than those not attending the program, creating a number of additional benefits to society that would not occur had the program not been run

- The program on average improves Year 12 completion by 5-7% with this increasing over time

- The Girls Academy program had a Benefit-Cost Ratio of 1.31:1

- Some Academy schools perform significantly better than this average, improving Year 12 completion by 50%. This suggests that some Girls Academies are more successful than others and that there is significant room for Girls Academy Programs to effect greater social impact.

Clontarf Boys Academy

The most well known school-based education program in Australia to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people is the Clontarf Academy program for boys, run by the Clontarf Foundation. The program operates in over 120 schools across Australia catering for approximately 8000 boys. The program operates through providing football academies at schools using sports like Rugby League and AFL to engage and retain boys in education. While the focus is on sport, a range of other activities are also provided including camps, excursions, leadership and team-building exercises, tutoring and homework assistance, and health and hygiene checks. Like the Girls Academy Program, the Clontarf Program has expanded rapidly in recent years through the injection of additional funding.

An evaluation undertaken by the NSW Department of Education (Yu, Rintoul, Hao, Watkins, & Wan, 2017) of 12 of the 25 Clontarf academies operating in the state at the time identified a number of processes important to its success. These include:

- Careful recruitment of staff (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) who are passionate, dedicated, respected in their local community and able to build strong and trusting relationships with the boys

- Clear communication channels between Clontarf and the school in order to minimise potential misunderstandings and misgivings, particularly around the rationale for time spent out of the classroom during school hours and the program being only for Aboriginal boys

- Ensuring that the Academy and its staff are involved in the school and not just a 'tack on'

- Provision of resources and a sufficiently large physical space for the Academy to operate

- A holistic approach by the Academy in terms of the variety and intensity of activities offered and a broad-based approach to wellbeing.

The program was highly regarded by schools, students, parents and community members but statistical analysis of educational and criminal justice outcomes showed only modest impact. While the analysis found a positive attendance effect for Years 7-9, no significant effect was identified on retention, NAPLAN, long suspensions or re-offending. The study concluded that the Clontarf Program was operating a break even in terms of value for money in the schools sampled.

Girls at the Centre

The Smith Family's *Girls at the Centre* Program is an aspirational program that aims to counteract the high absenteeism and school drop-out rates of teenage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls by helping them to build constructive relationships with each other, their schools, families and community members

An evaluation of a pilot at Centralian Middle School in Alice Springs (Lea, Driscoll, & Robinson, 2012), found that the program met its objectives of improving Indigenous girls' literacy, life skills and goals, and improved attendance and retention to Year 12. The program is comprised of wraparound case management and a range of life skills activities.

Following extensive consultations, observations and case studies, the Girls at the Centre Program was reported to be highly valued by school staff, girl participants and their families. Many contributing factors accounted for the positive outcomes found in this evaluation, mirroring the OECD's (2017) designated practices for success. These included community engagement and strategic partnerships, and the allocation of resources to support girls' education. The dedicated girls' room and welcoming space for parents and community members was highlighted as a positive factor.

Mentoring was reported to be one of the key features that attracted girls to the Girls at the Centre Program. This involved interstate trips and homestays with host families. Travel was considered to be an appreciated opportunity to broaden girls' horizons.

Girl Coaches were also identified as key to the success of the program. They are encouragers, conflict mediators and negotiators, providing support to girls, families and school staff. They provide practical support to the girls, 'hassling and helping' them to stay connected with school and fulfil their potential. They are considered to be pivotal in strengthening family and school relationships.

Although Girls at the Centre is described as a program for Indigenous girls, non-Indigenous girls do also participate. This is seen as inclusive and nurtures positive peer relationships, with girls mixing in wider circles and sharing their diverse interests.

The overall program impact was found to justify its funding and continuance, with potential to be expanded to other sites, including urban, large regional, and non-Indigenous settings, and with consideration of a boys' specific program at Centralian Senior College. The authors recommended *Scaling Up — From Vision to Large-Scale Change: A Management Framework for Practitioners* (Management Systems International, 2012) as a useful guide to assist with this planning.

The Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME)

AIME is a program working with 12- to 18-year-old Indigenous secondary school students to bridge the pathway to university. Over 15,000 Australian students have participated in the program, along with 5,000 university student mentors

The program comprises structured group sessions on university campuses which are led by Indigenous university students who act as role models, and involves Indigenous and non-Indigenous university students assisting the school students one-on-one. Presenters express high expectations of the students and share a message of resourcefulness and capability, with reference to cultural histories and the right to education (Harwood, McMahon, O'Shea, Bodkin-Andrews, & Priestly, 2015). These sessions are accompanied by one-to-one mentor visits to students at their schools.

Harwood and colleagues (2015) evaluation of AIME found positive impacts on students' aspirations to complete secondary school and continue in further study or enter employment. One of the significant themes highlighted in the evaluation included the role of Indigenous success as part of the activities and conversations. The program and its discourses place a strong emphasis on personal and cultural assets. The theme of students 'stepping up' is based on the recognised barriers to students realising aspirations, such as low confidence or 'shame'; stepping up is explained in terms of personal action to realise aspiration and is connected to the 'cultural wealth of Ancestors'. Importantly, the program is not about *improving* students' aspirations, but validating, exploring and strengthening them. The mentoring relationships that develop were found to value each individual 'for who they are' and 'what' they bring to the program, with an emphasis on both valuing and appreciating an individual's aspirational capital.

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Youth-centred context specific programs

Based upon previous literature that emphasises the importance of the specific context, Flouris, Crane and Lindeman (2016) reviewed a range of youth programs in three remote Indigenous communities in Central Australia within the frame of 'youth centred-context specific' program delivery. This framing explicitly prioritised local community needs, and appraised programs in terms of acting upon those needs. The study comprised 60 qualitative interviews with stakeholders across a range of youth programs, and examines the framing through the perspectives of young people, service providers and the broader Aboriginal community.

It was concluded that programs for youth wellbeing should not work solely with young people. The whole community orientation promotes strong cultural and intergenerational relationships and knowledge transfer. Youth programs, therefore, need to operate in a way that is 'flexible, appreciates the different understandings of time and community and is informed by a mix of recreational, skill development and traditional cultural elements' (Flouris et al., 2016, p. 50).

The study noted differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspectives on the purpose and value of youth programs. Non-Aboriginal service providers tended to advocate for structured programs with identifiable learning outcomes, whereas Aboriginal service providers and community members emphasised the value of safe spaces and activities as 'preventing problematic behaviour'. The authors suggest that access to programs should not be conditional on the realisation of particular outcomes, but should foster opportunities for more specific strategies and outcomes over time.

Characteristics of effective programs

Indigenous peoples have experienced colonisation practices which have undermined young Indigenous people's access to their identity, language and culture, and have not had access to the same level of quality education as non-Indigenous peers.

These two forces in combination have undermined the educational opportunities and outcomes of successive generations of Indigenous children and young people, at times with catastrophic effect. (OECD, 2017, p. 16)

Promising Practices

The OECD (2017) report, *Promising Practices in Supporting Success for Indigenous Students,* examined the experiences of Indigenous students in Queensland, Aotearoa/New Zealand and four Canadian provinces to identify policies and practices that support Indigenous students' school engagement, academic success and wellbeing. The focus was on reviewing system and school-level practices.

Common characteristics of successful schools included inspiring leadership, strong relationships across the school community, committed and capable staff, using multiple modes of student engagement and support, with sustained, deliberative, targeted and monitored effort and systemic support, particularly in relation to school attendance. Working closely with students and having respectful partnerships with parents were significant to all the gains achieved by and for the students.

Additional factors associated with student achievement were summarised as 'high-quality teaching, including high expectations for all students, respectful relationships with students and relevant and responsive curriculum delivery' (OECD, 2017, p. 117).

Munn, O'Rourke and Bodkin-Andrews (2013) undertook a large mixed methods research project in 52 NSW schools where Aboriginal students were a minority, in order to investigate the conditions of success for Aboriginal students. The qualitative component of the research examined the four schools that were identified through the quantitative analysis as being the most successful in enhancing Aboriginal students' social and academic outcomes. The key themes relating to the schools' ways of working to support Aboriginal students' success were:

1. Strong relationships across the whole community (social justice perspective)
2. Aboriginal cultural spaces are central to the work of the schools (culturally inclusive curricula)
3. Aboriginal people are central to the work of the schools (social justice perspective)
4. Aboriginal perspectives and values are prioritised and embedded in school and classroom curriculum (culturally inclusive curricula)
5. Specific focus on quality teaching and this is considered from an Aboriginal perspective (culturally differentiated quality teaching)
6. Conscious shift from a wellbeing community mindset (primarily focused on looking after students' wellbeing), to a learning community mindset (building student wellbeing through a serious concentration on learning; culturally differentiated quality teaching)
7. Targeted support for Aboriginal students (social justice perspective)
8. Relationships between teachers and students work towards Aboriginal students as important, responsible and able to achieve (social justice perspective).

(Munns et al., 2013, p. 2)

Zyngier and colleagues (2014) reviewed 'pull-out' programs that were organised in schools by external providers, withdrawing 'at risk' students from the mainstream curriculum to support their school completion and achievement. This systematic review of the literature also drew on the programs documented in the Learning Choices database. The review found that effective programs provide strong social support, intellectual challenge, and are attuned to immediate and longer-term needs of young

people. The authors recommended that effective programs need to be integrated into mainstream offerings and not be targeted to remediating the skills of just a few students.

Lamb and Rice's (2008) review of international empirical research and data from 25 Victorian schools sought to identify effective strategies to increase school engagement and completion. Key strategies identified included mentoring, pathway planning and careers guidance, attention to student welfare, social skills, and targeted skills development to boost achievement. Importantly, the focus on students was found to work best in tandem with family support, case management and whole school initiatives to personalise education, including relevant curriculum offerings in vocational education and training, early intervention for literacy/numeracy development, and applied and project-based learning. Effective programs were found to set high expectations for student attendance and behaviour, supported with pastoral care.

Lamb and Rice (2008) suggest that the most effective programs:

- Foster connectedness between students, parents, the school and the community
- Increase the trust placed in students
- Provide tasks for students with immediate, tangible benefits
- Make spaces within schools and curricula for diverse student needs
- Address poor achievement
- Address students' practical personal obstacles to staying at school.

A number of studies (e.g. Holdsworth, 2011; te Riele, 2012, 2014; Zyngier et al., 2014) recommend multi-faceted and integrated approaches to student engagement and achievement, and emphasise the importance of locally driven programs. There are diverse approaches that are equally successful, on the basis that programs are designed and flexibly implemented to meet the needs of the specific student group, in the specific context of the school and its community. This body of research also underlines the importance of well-prepared and committed teachers with appropriate support systems, especially access to professional networks and development resources.

Martin (2006) provides a strong analysis of key themes and strategies in available literature relating to the participation and achievement of Indigenous youth in school education. Martin's analysis focused specifically on psychological factors and influences relating to student motivation and engagement. A summary of these findings is provided in the tables below.

Self

SUB-THEME	KEY ELEMENTS/STRATEGIES
Positive identity as an Aboriginal	Encouraging pride in culture, teachers understand cultural background and history of culture, professional development of teachers, Aboriginal Studies/perspectives in curriculum, drawing on expertise of Indigenous community, mindful of Anglo-European bias in materials, use of culturally familiar and relevant materials
Positive identity as student and academic self-concept	Sense of belonging at school and in class, good relationship with teachers, supportive and positive expectations, relevant curriculum, support from peers, parents and community
Academic resilience	The 5Cs: Confidence, Control, Commitment, Coordination, and Composure

Cognitive and affective

SUB-THEME	KEY ELEMENTS/STRATEGIES
Academic achievement facilitators	Parental/caregiver encouragement and support, positive peer influence, quality pedagogy, inclusion at school
Academic motivation/ engagement facilitators	Self-reliance, confidence, task orientation, parental/caregiver support, positive peer influence, valuing of school, enjoyment of school, effective schooling
Attendance facilitators	Interesting and fun schoolwork, supportive network, mentoring, role modelling, well trained staff, flexible learning plans, relevance, achievability of work, transport, addressing health and welfare, safe and secure environment, fluency in language of instruction, affective state conducive to attention and concentration
Learning styles	Group orientations, cooperative learning, spontaneous, personal, listening, indirect questioning, spatial and visual, observation and trial

Failure dynamics

SUB-THEME	KEY ELEMENTS/STRATEGIES
Fear of failure and shame	Careful with criticism, not singling students out, constructive and courageous view of mistakes, reducing link between worth of person and academic failure, cooperative learning climate

Socialisation and child-rearing

SUB-THEME	KEY ELEMENTS/STRATEGIES
Role of family	Optimistic expectations for student, encouragement and support of student, positive academic goals, valuing of school and education, nurturance of child, supportive autonomy. Strong school-home links (a) recognising parents'/caregivers' educational disadvantage, few educational resources at home, lack of skills to help child, parents'/caregivers' lack of confidence to approach teacher and (b) increasing parents'/caregivers' knowledge of the education system, knowledge of child's progress, cooperation on school activities and projects of substance

Pathways and transitions

SUB-THEME	KEY ELEMENTS/STRATEGIES
Educational transition	Fully briefing staff on students' backgrounds, professional development to help deal with Indigenous students and issues, fully briefing students about high school, developing inclusive and embracing school climate, facilitating teacher-student relationships (approachability, availability, helpfulness), early intervention with literacy and numeracy difficulties, good school-home links, supportive parents/caregivers and peers, confidence of student, commitment and determination of student, maximise opportunities to succeed, peer support/mentoring, positive role models, positive expectations by all stakeholders

Significant others and their contexts

SUB-THEME	KEY ELEMENTS/STRATEGIES
Effective schools	Good leadership (particularly), respect and value individuality of student, link effectively with families/home and community, create a welcoming environment for students, demanding but accommodating academic curriculum, high tolerance, supportive and innovative teaching strategies, facilitate positive teacher-student relationships, affirm cultural heritage of students
Effective teachers	Possess specific (a) personal characteristics (warmth, friendliness, high but realistic standards), (b) attitudes and values (confidence in students, positive attitude towards Aboriginality, respect for Indigenous culture), (c) knowledge and skills (knowledge of content, students, effective means of facilitating content acquisition), (d) strategies for effective teaching (individualised approaches, handling group dynamics, facilitating cooperation, appropriate remedial instruction), and (e) roles (being a student of Indigenous culture, innovator of teaching techniques, an agent of social change, school-home liaison, community involvement)
Good relationships	(a) Between teacher and student – caring teacher, acceptance by teacher, teacher high in warmth, teacher supportive of student autonomy, getting to know students, developing trust and respect, developing teachers' cultural knowledge; (b) between student and school – connections between school and Indigenous community, inclusion of Aboriginal Studies, Indigenous teachers; (c) between student and pedagogy – challenging and interesting work, effective helping strategies, positive expectations of teachers for students, teacher satisfaction, respectful ideological view of Indigenous culture, collaborative school planning, and effective early intervention
Pastoral pedagogy	Three key relationships in the classroom: (a) 'Substantive relationship' – subject matter important, interesting, arouses curiosity, authentic etc.; (b) 'Interpersonal relationship' – warmth, positive expectations, getting to know students, respecting individuals etc. (c) 'Pedagogical relationship' – teaching that engages, variety in methods, arouses curiosity, clear explanations, not too rushed etc.

Contribution to general principles of behaviour

SUB-THEME	KEY ELEMENTS/STRATEGIES
Positive Psychology	Avoid unbalanced deficit approach, identify and build on strengths ('broaden and build theory' of positive emotion), encouraging pride of Indigenous heritage, proactive rather than reactive approaches to areas of need, foster catalysts in the school (intrapersonal such as self-esteem, motivation, positive attitude, interest in schoolwork).

While access to a positive school learning environment is critical for student achievement, at the same time the research evidence indicates that student characteristics have a significant influence on outcomes (Hattie, 2009). Student ability is strongly influenced by prior learning, attitudes and physical influences formed outside schooling in family and community contexts. Research suggests that the key to improving educational achievement, for all learners, is high quality individualised instruction and tailored support that is responsive to students' diverse backgrounds. The Productivity Commission's (2016) analysis of Indigenous school achievement found that schools which adopted an individualised case management approach to supporting the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieved the greatest success in lifting Indigenous school achievement and student performance.

Key themes

In this section, some of the key themes highlighted above are explored with further reference to previous studies.

Disengagement and alternatives

Increasing school attendance is often identified as a to be a key focus for many educational programs aimed at engaging or reengaging Indigenous youth in school education. In investigating the causes of secondary students' academic disengagement, Bodkin-Andrews, Dillon and Craven (2010) identified a causal link between a heightened sense of academic self-concept and patterns of disengagement for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. High self-esteem and self-regulation are associated with Aboriginal young people's good psychosocial functioning (Hopkins, Zubrick, & Taylor, 2014).

Results of Briggs' (2017) study into the links between attendance, retention and engagement of Indigenous senior students in an urban environment support the link between absences and student disengagement. A clear positive association was found between retention to Year 12 and superior attendance, although the need for suitable alternate pathways for some students, rather than increased attendance was noted.

te Riele (2014) reported on national research on 900+ flexible learning programs in schools and TAFEs (62%) and stand-alone programs (38%) serving 70,000+ students. Flexible learning programs re-engage secondary students at risk of non-completion and early leavers, achieving valued outcomes in student credentials and career pathways, wellbeing and personal growth. The most common learning focus areas are literacy and numeracy, life skills and mentoring, conducted within broader programs of student-centred curriculum. Many focus on pathways to employment, offer accredited and non-accredited vocational studies and formal school certificate studies. Although attending a flexible learning program does not necessarily close off university pathways, going on to university is atypical for flexible learning program graduates (te Riele, 2012). The majority of flexible learning programs are co-educational, with only 3% specifically for girls.

Relationships/connection

The OECD's (2017) *Promising Practices in Supporting Success for Indigenous Students* report highlights community engagement as crucial to achieving strong outcomes in student wellbeing in cognitive, social, affective and physical dimensions and Indigenous relational and cultural dimensions. 'Schools that have achieved sustained improvements for Indigenous students recognise the key role of Indigenous parents, leaders and other community members and have actively built relationships with these important people in their students' lives' (OECD, 2017, p. 16). Establishing schools as community hubs, connected with local community organisations such as health and mental health services was identified as a promising strategy to support students' and families' wellbeing.

These and other learner-centred, inclusive pedagogical approaches, flexible assessment methods and the involvement of Elders and Indigenous support staff were all found to contribute to students' academic outcomes.

Gray and Hackling (2009) conducted research in two government schools in Western Australia, both of which were regarded as successfully retaining and engaging 'complex' cohorts of senior students. Based on a survey and focus groups with Year 11 students, and school achievement and retention data, this study identified three main factors associated with supportive school culture:

- Respect – mutual, acceptance, belonging, intellectual challenge, appropriate curriculum

- Relationship – confidence, support, involvement, young adult environment, pedagogy, guidance
- Responsibility – independent learning, balance, flexibility, discipline, opportunities.

Students who were 'doing well' academically indicated high self-efficacy, satisfaction with subject choices and had a sense of belonging at school. 'Struggling' students were less confident and had a weak sense of belonging and while they were satisfied with their subject choices, they were uncertain about their decision to stay on through the senior years.

Sarra and colleagues (2018) considered the role that *high expectations relationships* can have in promoting collegiate staff environments, strong teacher-student relationships, and trusting and supportive relationships with parents and carers. High expectations relationships was a concept used to refer to viewing high expectations through a relational lens where a relational space of trust can be built that enables both motivation and a jointly reflective approach to support quality learning.

Teachers' belief in all students as competent learners, shared decision-making and actions to ensure safe, respectful and equitable learning spaces exemplify inclusive processes of resilience building (Kirk et al., 2017). Students' sense of belonging in school is a key factor in resilience that is enhanced through a collaborative culture encouraging students' participation and decision-making and thereby strengthening their self-esteem, self-efficacy and relational confidence (Henderson, 2012). Students' social connectedness was associated with engagement and retention beyond Year 11 (Gray & Hackling, 2009).

Cultural recognition

The *Promising Practices in Supporting Success for Indigenous Students* report (OECD, 2017) identified that wellbeing and engagement should be supported by practices of cultural recognition embedded in relationships, curriculum materials and teachers' knowledge of First Nations history and culture. This was considered important to students feeling they are known and belong in school. Key strategies for student engagement are centred on incorporating and visibly valuing Indigenous cultural symbols and practices such as talking circles, culturally-based inquiry, including Indigenous science and mathematics, community and land-based activities, life skills and mentoring.

The report (OECD, 2017) recognised the importance of Indigenous teachers as role models who can communicate with students in their home languages. However, there was noted to be a need for expansion of Indigenous staff across all jurisdictions as a matter of priority. Ensuring Indigenous staff and students feel comfortable in the school is essential. Providing a dedicated room is a valued practice in many schools and providing a mentor or graduate coach can support and enhance students' motivation. This was a feature of one high-performing Canadian high school in Alberta where staff had regular contact with First Nation communities and the Indigenous support worker closely liaised with families.

Hopkins, Zubrick and Taylor (2014) found that the psychosocial functioning of Aboriginal youth in 'low risk' families was significantly impacted by exposure to racism. As interpersonal and institutional racism are commonly experienced in school contexts (Mansouri, Jenkins, Morgan, & Taouk, 2009), promoting the resilience of Aboriginal and minority youth may be enhanced in schools that have adopted anti-racism strategies (Nissim, 2014), including provision of culturally relevant content and pedagogies and community connectedness (Kirmayer, Dandeneau, Marshall, Phillips, & Williamson, 2011). Acknowledging and challenging racism are resilience agents in this context (Bodkin-Andrews & Craven, 2014).

There is some evidence that contextual factors are more impactful than individual factors for ethno-racial minority youth. For example, Ungar and Liebenberg's (2013) study with Canadian youth found that cultural adherence and involvement in one's community had greater impact than individual or relational factors.

Mentoring

Ware (2013) found that formal mentoring can have a positive impact on the behavioural, academic and vocational outcomes of at-risk youth. Benefits range from improved self-esteem to increased school engagement and reduced participation in antisocial behaviour

Under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS), formal mentoring has been provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth either through mentoring specific programs such as those delivered by AIME or as part of an Academy program. School-based academies such as the Clontarf Foundation and Role Models and Leaders Australia have been funded to provide mentoring in addition to other wrap around activities to youth at risk of disengagement.

AIME has been the most comprehensively evaluated Indigenous mentoring program in Australia. KPMG's (2018) recent economic evaluation of the AIME Program demonstrated its impact in generating positive economic and social returns for participants and the broader community. The evaluation directly attributed to the AIME Program the attainment of higher levels of education (school, VET, and university progression and attainment) for participating mentees. It also had a direct benefit to mentors in terms of developing valuable and transferrable skills through their involvement in the program.

Harwood and colleagues (2015) evaluation of the AIME Outreach program reported positive results for participants (mentees). The Outreach program is based on the recruitment of university students as mentors who provide advice and personal support to Indigenous school mentees from years 7 to 12. The evaluation reported that the program had been effective in strengthening participant's school and post-school aspirations, sense of engagement, and sense of identity. The achievements and impact of the AIME Program were found to be comparable to those of the AIME Core Program, as measured by school progression rates, school completion rates and evaluation survey results. Outcomes from both programs were better than the national average at the time.

Ware (2013) identified several factors as critical to the effective functioning of formal mentoring for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

At the level of program design and implementation, what works includes:
- Starting mentoring before young people exhibit antisocial or criminal behaviour.
- Obtaining Indigenous community input into planning and delivery of mentoring programs
- Integrating mentoring programs with broader youth services (such as counselling, health and employment)
- Culturally tailoring mentoring to the diverse backgrounds of students and their communities.

Within the mentoring relationship, what works includes:
- Long-term, respectful and mutually fulfilling relationships between mentors and mentees
- Parental involvement in the mentorship relationship, which can improve parent-child relationships
- The use of one-on-one models that account for mentor competence
- Consistent regular contact and mentors who have experienced similar challenges to the mentee.

The effectiveness of gender-specific mentoring strategies, such as for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls, has yet to be comprehensively measured.

Holdsworth (2011) reported that mentoring featured in sixty percent of Australian school-based programs aiming to support students at risk of non-completion. The need for further Indigenous mentors was highlighted in the media recently with a report questioning the need for further evaluation of the Australian Indigenous Education Scholarship (AIES) program and the associated dropout rates due to a lack of support for young Indigenous students (Hose, Brennan, & Higgins, 2018).

Ware (2013) provides a detailed overview of the characteristics of mentoring programs that work, and suggests that mentoring is particularly relevant to the Indigenous context as it is believed to fit well with Indigenous teaching and learning styles, as well as strengthening connections with community.

Using a mixed-methods, exploratory longitudinal study design, Crooks and colleagues (2017) found that a culturally-relevant school-based relationship-focused mentoring program for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth led to better mental health and improved cultural identity. The mentoring program focused upon promoting mental wellbeing and the development of cultural identity. These positive findings were maintained even when sex and school climate were accounted for. Post hoc analyses indicated that girls benefited from the mentoring program more than boys. Overall, the results indicated that the mentoring program helped participants develop their intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, and enhanced their cultural and healthy relationships knowledge base, and was found to be a promising approach to supporting wellbeing among Indigenous youth.

The Mentoring Pilot project used mentoring approaches to improve literacy and numeracy achievement, attendance and retention for identified at-risk Indigenous students (Purdie & Stone, 2005). Students in Years 8, 9 and 10 are targeted in the program, as this is where retention for Indigenous students begins to decline at a more rapid rate than for their non-Indigenous peers. Mentors provide guidance and information on a range of future educational and vocational options as well as school-based projects which aim to increase attendance and retention rates.

Resilience

Resilience is commonly defined as young people's positive adaptation manifesting in 'good outcomes' despite adversity (e.g. high levels of stress and life difficulties; Masten, 2014). Resilience studies have identified a broad range of protective factors and buffering or promotive processes at the individual level as well as those embedded in the young person's ecological context, such as those activated by families, communities, youth services and schools (Noltemeyer & Bush, 2013).

Factors and processes are highly contextual, yet 'global' factors and processes have also been identified. For example, Ungar (Ungar, 2006) reported that the International Resilience Project in 14 diverse, mainly non-Western contexts on 5 continents, found 7 clusters of common resilience factors:

1. Access to material resources (e.g. food, housing, basic resources for development)
2. Meaningful and supportive relationships
3. Positive identity (i.e., sense of purpose and recognition of personal and social strengths)
4. Having some power and control (to make decisions and act for change)
5. Cultural adherence (i.e., engagement in local cultural practices)
6. Social justice (i.e., sense of being treated fairly, finding meaningful experiences with social equality)

7. Cohesion (feeling part of something bigger or a sense of social or spiritual responsibility).

Research on resilience building in school contexts has emphasised interrelated factors of young people's capacities and agency, teacher responsiveness and inclusive school culture. Protective factors include students' sense of belonging, positive relationships, meaningful participation and problem-solving skills (Masten, Herbers, Cutuli, & Lafavor, 2008).

Pedagogical and social support are also factors in academic resilience. According to Martin and colleagues (2010), interventions for building academic 'buoyancy' for navigating everyday ups and downs of school life and academic resilience (in the face of more prolonged and complex pressures) should focus on strengthening students' control, confidence, coordination (planning), composure (lowering anxieties) and commitment (persistence).

Wellbeing

As a fairly recent strategic focus or pedagogical movement, wellbeing is associated with schools' health promotion and welfare initiatives. While specific outcomes relating to health are identified in school curricula, individual wellbeing is taken to be more idiosyncratic and concerned with students' holistic development in social, emotional, cognitive, physical and spiritual domains. McCallum and Price (2016) argue for a broad 'positive and proactive' approach to wellbeing education that addresses individual, collective and environmental elements. For individual students' wellbeing, the aim is to provide the opportunity, access, choices, resources and capacities to aspire to their unique sense of wellbeing.

The Australian Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY, 2018) developed measures of wellbeing through consultation with young people and their families on what they considered most crucial for 'a good life'. ARACY's wellbeing indicators include safety, material necessities, learning (as measured by achievement in literacy, numeracy and science), participation and social support, positive personal and cultural identity.

A recent report on young Indigenous people's health and wellbeing (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018) highlighted education, language, positive identity and cultural capital as important aspects of Indigenous youth wellbeing.

Summary

This literature review highlights the limited evaluation to date of engagement and mentoring support programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Previous evaluation of factors that are believed to impact upon student capacity building is limited to the Smith Family's Girls at the Centre program, the New South Wales Department's funded Clontarf Academies and the AIME Mentoring Program,.

The reviewed research literature provides a general indication of the some of the key factors likely to support Indigenous students' school engagement, academic success and wellbeing. These factors include inspiring leadership, strong relationships, committed and capable staff, multiple modes of student engagement, and systemic supports, particularly relating to attendance. The Girls Academy evaluation examined these factors when considering the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability, and barriers and enablers of the Girls Academy program.

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