

Preliminary Report of the Combined Meeting – Ngukurr Language Centre and Ngukurr School:

An Opportunity for Evaluation of Government Engagement

This report was dictated by Ian Gumbula of Gumbula Consultancies in Ngukurr to Jennifer Macdonald at CDU.

What: Ngukurr Language Centre and Ngukurr School Combined Meeting

Where: Ngukurr

Date: 21st June 2017

The research team presented to the meeting and all the attendees agreed to the meeting being recorded.

Culture Document:

The school recently called off school for one day so they could have a meeting about a culture document they had drafted. This was in response to an incident where a 7 year old boy was put in the back of a police van to teach him a lesson, after the school called the police when the child was being naughty at school (see: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-04-11/police-officer-apologises-for-putting-child-in-back-of-van/8432482>). The draft was presented at the meeting.

Comments:

- This incident has not been handled in a sensitive way and this is making community members feel really sad.
- The Culture Document draft has already been written and the community has not had an input into it. It's just what the school wants to put in the draft and they are assuming that the community will accept that.
- It seems that this is a move by the school to cover up what happened, as they try to discipline staff under cover so they won't get in trouble as a school, as opposed to looking at themselves as educators in, and for, the community.
- It is unclear whether this Culture Document is trying to influence students. The school is telling the community the sorts of culture they should have. The school is telling the community they can have culture but only at certain times. They are trying to turn local people into the mainstream.
- The school needs to know and understand the kinship system – who's their gagu and abija, and this is what the Language Centre is proposing to teach at the school. The school is saying yes but only in a small amount of allocated time and space where it can fit around the curriculum.
- Culture should be included in *everything* the school does. The Culture Document should reflect this and follow the expectations of the community.

Language Program in Ngukurr School:

The Language Centre and the School discussed the funding of the Language Centre's school program. There is a clash between the two organisations because there's not enough funding for language programs in schools. There's no money for the program or to employ people to run the program. All community members at the meeting talked of their desire for culture to be included in the school curriculum. The school principal was supportive of this idea. Robin Rogers suggested applying for a joint grant for funding, which everyone agreed was a good idea.

Comments:

- It is difficult to make comments about government engagement in this situation because the government is the employer of both organisations. What role does the government play in this situation, if they fund both the education programs in the community and the language

program? Should they be supporting more funding for language education programs, especially if they are supported by the community and both organisations?

Comments from Ngukurr Researchers

The organisations usually have separate meetings and it was confusing as to why this was a combined meeting.

This meeting and its agenda items were driven by both directors and the school staff members. Some of the things they were talking about should be things that come from the community. It was very frustrating to see the community not being given a chance to engage with the issues discussed.

There was no involvement of the local community leadership in the meeting. There were local people there but they already work for those organisations, not from around the community. That is a problem when they are talking about such a big issue as language and culture being taught to our children.

It was concerning to see something like culture discussed in the manner that it was. School and community home life are different, and local children act differently in each of them. School is an institution that is provided to help children with their learning, not change their behaviour and their culture. Before something like a culture document is drafted there needs to be input from the community for what goes into it, because we're talking about our own kid's behaviours, manners and culture.

Should we be asking the government to support a program that is trying to change the culture of our children? Or should we be asking them to support the Language Centre for programs that inspire and support our children? The school kept saying that language programs in schools are a government service and government should be supporting them. So why is it not happening here in Ngukurr? There should be support from the government for language programs to be happening in government funded institutions like the school.

The communication from the school, particularly from the chairperson of the school council, was done in a very forceful way and was not sensitive to the seriousness of what had occurred with the 7 year old child and what was then being discussed around culture in the school. This made people feel uncomfortable and like the school is trying to change the behaviour and culture of children in Ngukurr. If children are naughty at school, their parents and the community elders should be called, not the police. The school should be making sure an incident like this never happens again and they should be looking at their own culture as educators for the community.

Attendees:

Jackie Van Den Bos (NgLC coordinator)
Grant Thompson
Angelina Joshua
Linda Pascoe (Ngukurr School Principal)
Linda Williams (Chairperson of the School Council)
Other school employees

Research team:

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