

Good to Great Schools Australia

Report review: The Case for Urgency: Advocating for Indigenous Voice in Education

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ACER recently published [The Case for Urgency: Advocating for Indigenous Voice in Education](#).¹ The paper does not meet the basic standard of good research because rather than building a balanced, research-based perspective, it focuses on constructing a rhetorical case. It is filled with unsupported assertions, inconsistent quality, density of citations and loaded statements. An example is its unbalanced treatment of the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy (CYAAA) when addressing case studies of educational programs.

The authors do not review ongoing works in indigenous education in a way that fosters constructive discussion and enables learning from various program successes and struggles. Instead, they confuse the issues and lessons that the case studies offer. The authors claim, “no one-solution will remedy Indigenous social or educational disadvantage, but neither will policies premised on ideological views.”² However, they do not sufficiently cite evidence or research to support their proffered solutions.

This is not a proper research as it does not fit into accepted standards. The title of the paper indicates it is for advocacy. Although there is no contradiction between good research and advocacy as they can be one and the same, all research must still go by research standards. According to the [Australian Association for Research in Education Code of Ethics](#):

“Researchers should recognise the uncertainty of all claims to knowledge, and in particular should recognise that justifications for research methodologies depend upon epistemological views which are disputed and uncertain. Where research results are presented in a context where this is not well understood, researchers should beware of presenting them as though they were infallible. *They should declare the existence of alternative professional opinions to their own. Responses to those opinions should be honest and measured.*”³

In terms of research methodologies, it is not simply a literature review as described on the AER website. Several of the charts are labelled as “Author data file”,⁴ presumably from Dr Gillan in his role with the Northern Territory Department of Education. Some original research was carried out in analysing educational policies and in presenting the case studies. Yet problematically, the case studies lack proper citation or discussion of methodology. This raises significant pertinent questions around the selection of these particular case studies. There are many other initiatives that are relevant to the subjects, are well-known, well documented, publically funded and established by Indigenous leaders or organisations. Why were these case studies chosen over them?

¹Gillan, K. P., Mellor, S., & Krakouer, J. (2017). [The Case for urgency: Advocating for Indigenous voice in education](#). Australian Education Review, No. 61. Melbourne, Australia: Australian Council for Educational Research.

²*ibid*, p. 1

³Australian Association for Research in Education Code of Ethics: <https://www.aare.edu.au/pages/aare-code-of-ethics.html>. Emphasis added.

⁴e.g. Gillan, Mellor, & Krakouer, 2017, p. 10, 30, 33, 35

The document may not have undergone proper peer review given its lack of research rigour; it might also not make it through peer review in its current form. Additionally, the role of ACER in approving the publication and, more generally, the way the organisation runs peer review is questionable. One of the authors, Suzanne Mellor, is the editor of the Australian Education Review series, which published the paper.

Whether advocacy or careless research, or both, authors' positionality and potential conflicts of interest should be made clear.⁵ The most egregious of these is that Dr Gillan, according to the back cover of the paper, is Executive Director of Education Partnerships in the Northern Territory Department of Education, and is thus a high-ranking employee of an organisation involved with several of the case studies. This is clear conflict of interest. To quote Dr Gillan's paper, "social actors with a vested interest in a reform agenda may believe and claim that change has taken effect when no change has occurred (Loughlin, 2004)."⁶

The Literature Review

The first three sections of the paper outline the history and context of indigenous education, indigenous educational achievement, and a lineage of Australian education policies aimed at indigenous peoples. Section four summarises the challenges faced in indigenous education and presents case studies of how they have been addressed.

The authors present five propositions. The first three boil down to: the brutal colonisation of Indigenous Australians is an ongoing experience that places them at social and economic disadvantage in ways closely tied to educational achievement, urgently requiring "nuanced, variable and flexible policies"⁷ responding to the complexity of Indigenous communities and their social reality.

These propositions are debateable. In terms of relevance in explaining the ultimate causes of Indigenous disadvantage in Australia, they may be accepted. However, proximate factors to education include pedagogy, curriculum, attendance, recruitment and retention of educators, preparation of educators for remote school context and the diligent governance of seriously disadvantaged schools. Such pertinent factors are ignored in this report.

The fourth proposition is that major changes in policy and practice must be enacted, since previous ones have been largely unsuccessful. While this assertion is hard to disagree with, authors provide no guidance in relation to the major changes needed. The fifth states, "Active engagement of Indigenous families and communities in the education of their children is paramount. *Anything that detracts from this participation will contribute to the unlikelihood of 'closing the gap.'*"⁸

Certainly, family and community engagement is important. The authors, however, fail to deal with the critical issues around provisioning of education by schools, in particular, the need for effective instruction by teachers. A lack of a focus on pedagogy, except in demonising CYAAA's innovations and general reference to indigenous language and culture, is a glaring omission. In a sense, this results in poor outcomes on engagement, placing the onus to provide quality, research-based instruction on communities instead of schools. To make matters worse, the authors leverage engagement for its rhetorical positioning in the paper, rather than supporting the concept through rigorous research.

⁵[AARE Code of Ethics](#)

⁶ Gillan, Mellor, & Krakouer, 2017, p. 72

⁷*Ibid*, p. 2

⁸*ibid*, emphasis added

Real solutions are lacking, largely because the authors fail to engage in a productive or rigorous treatment of educational endeavours in the case studies (discussed below). The paper therefore relies heavily on the large-scale quantitative measures, despite the authors correctly identifying that they may “not adequately measuring the particular Indigenous knowledges that the students bring to school and apply to their learning,”⁹ rather than on-the-ground realities.

Case Studies

The propositions raised in the first three sections constitute the framework for discussing case studies, which seems to be the core of the paper and its value proposition, built around five challenges:

- Challenge 1: Deficit and race-based assumptions in Indigenous education
- Challenge 2: Living away from home to study – Boarding schools
- Challenge 3: Raising school attendance and engagement levels
- Challenge 4: Providing the best start – Early childhood education
- Challenge 5: Engaging Indigenous communities in educational programs.¹⁰

Although not exhaustive, as they fail to address the importance of pedagogy, these challenges could have provided a framework for discussion of the case studies.

The authors promise to “review, analyse and critique programs in terms of the utilisation of the collective rather than the selective Indigenous community voice, and the degree to which meaningful participation by the ‘recipients’ of that program occurred.”¹¹ Despite its promises, the 7 case studies take up only 11 pages of the report’s 88 pages. The report’s first 12 pages, by contrast, are spent introducing Indigenous history before education is even addressed – important context, even if already known and understood in the Indigenous education debate – but this imbalance contributes to its inability to offer robust solutions.

Despite saying, “we hope to model programs that illuminate the power of ‘participating voice’ in policymaking, and encourage more rigorous research review processes of such programs,”¹² the authors do not deliver. It is rather strange to talk about a more rigorous research process and not follow through in the paper. There are numerous issues in this regard throughout the case study section.

In sum, the basic requirements for case study research (or even research review) are not followed throughout this section. Case studies are treated very differently, with inconsistent and uneven use of evidence to support claims. All the case studies are worthy of in-depth review, discussion, and even debate. However, the authors seem intent on building a rhetorical case rather than a research-based one, with the six initial programs posited as exemplary and CYAAA coming at the end seemingly to represent the antithesis of best practices.

The Koori Cultural Program, an example of how schools can challenge racism and deficit assumptions about Indigenous education, relies on only three sources, none of which are scholarly or independent. One is from the school itself, another from an anecdotal report by the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association (which helped to design the program), and the most cited is a newspaper article from *The Age*.¹³ Similarly, in the next two case studies on the Wunan Foundation and the Clontarf Aboriginal Academy, the authors

⁹ Gillan, Mellor, & Krakouer, 2017, p. 32

¹⁰ *ibid*, p. 59

¹¹ *ibid*, p. 58

¹² *ibid*

¹³ Flitton, D. (2015, May 17). Thornbury Primary School runs only Melbourne Indigenous language program. *The Age*. Accessed from: <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/thornbury-primary-school-runs-only-melbourne-indigenous-language-program-20150514-gh1jy0.html>

repeatedly cite the program's writing on their own efforts as factual without any background discussion (critical or even basic) on the organisations. No formal evaluations on any of the three programs was cited or mentioned; even while stressing that formal evaluation was needed, the authors were comfortable drawing conclusions on program quality and outcomes based on the limited, conflicted and anecdotal evidence presented.

In the case studies on early childhood education, the Families as First Teachers (FaFT) program is discussed citing only the Northern Territory Department of Education, which runs the program. In mentioning an ongoing formal evaluation, no issue was raised about the Northern Territory Department of Education nor the University of Melbourne (which is a partner in the program) in the evaluation process. Apparently, standards of independence in evaluations are contextual – perhaps the main author's employment with the Department of Education impacts this flexibility.

The selective use of internal and popular media citations is incongruent with the authors' calls for evidence-based research and is not of the standard for a publication by the Australian Council for Educational Research. If the authors are advocating for the use of evidence, then why do they cite unverified and biased media articles and not research evidence? Why did the Australian Council for Educational Research publish case studies that treat statements from popular media sources as research evidence?

In all five case studies named, the involvement of indigenous community members is mentioned, but there is no mention of substantive community collaboration in developing the programs as well as the rigorous and sustained use of educational evidence. This seems to contradict the authors' central argument that these are required for successful Indigenous education efforts. Again, pedagogy is left out almost completely as it does not seem to factor into the authors' epistemologies.

Of greater concern is the Gunbalanya School case study, which is compared to CYAAA under challenge 5, engaging indigenous communities. The section has only one citation from 2002 that comes from the lead author's own study. Presumably, data for this section come from this source, Moyle & Gillan (2013) *Case Study: Promoting Indigenous School Leadership and Governance*,¹⁴ but without citation – this amounts not only to poor research practice, but also self-plagiarism by Dr Gillan. The document is not even publicly available. There is also clear bias in presenting the case, even beyond the scholarly treatment. For example, the Gunbalanya case includes a large image of their community engagement program, which adds richness and authenticity to the program. However, although readily available, no comparable image was presented for CYAAA. Despite such bias, while their co-principalship model is laudable, the Gunbalanya School case does not demonstrate substantive collaboration from or consultation with indigenous communities in creating or running educational programming. Ironically, even if woefully understated, CYAAA's case demonstrates greater community consultation and involvement.

The authors rightfully stress the need for formal and independent evaluations, but neglect how few of their case studies have been properly evaluated. Of all the programs, only the evaluation of CYAAA (as part of CYWR) is mentioned in Sara Hudson's definitive [research report](#)¹⁵ on the rigorous evaluation of Indigenous programs.

¹⁴ Moyle, K., & Gillan, K. (2013). *Case study: Promoting Indigenous school leadership and governance*. Darwin: Charles Darwin University.

¹⁵ Hudson, S. (2017). *Evaluating Indigenous programs: A toolkit for change*. Research Report. The Centre for Independent Studies. Retrieved from: <https://www.cis.org.au/app/uploads/2017/06/rr28.pdf>

CYAAA Case Study

The treatment of the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy (CYAAA) is among the most egregious issues in the paper and should be dealt with directly and in-depth. Oddly, given the comparative cases, CYAAA is included as the culminating example of what not to do when addressing the challenge of Indigenous community engagement. It is set up as a paper tiger for easily illustrating the main points of the report, but this required numerous additional cases of deficient research practice by the authors. The paper summarises that CYAAA failed and in fact is responsible for community violence because it did not meet two important criteria: ensuring community involvement and using education evidence. We contend these assertions and have elsewhere presented ample evidence to the contrary¹⁶ – none of which are included in *The Case for Urgency*. As the authors do not follow good academic research practices, including selective citation of media sources, the case study contains major inaccuracies that cloud all the discussed issues.

In sum, the authors advance accusations, claims, and conclusions without supporting evidence. As with the other case studies, they selectively cite non-research publications as evidence. In particular, they quote several media articles and opinion pieces, which are obviously not scholarly or research-based sources. They cite pieces from *The Guardian* who have had to print a retraction and apology on other aspects of Cape York work,¹⁷ yet neglect pieces that discuss positive aspect of CYAAA. In basic research ethics, if authors are willing to use media articles as evidence, they should do so in a balanced way.

Additionally, they consistently failed to use readily available sources of evidence, selectively and misleadingly use content from the ACER evaluation and other reports, neglect to properly contextualise cited evidence, and state conclusions reached based on assumptions, limited evidence, or no evidence at all. The discussion of the case study lacks necessary context regarding the community itself. The remote community of Aurukun has faced issues with law and order, particularly with disengaged youth, for many decades. This is for obvious reasons, tied to historically extreme challenges around education. For example, in 2007, (pre CYAAA) average attendance was as low as 28 per cent at Aurukun school,¹⁸ but *The Case for Urgency* authors fail to mention this background.

This is part of a broader pattern of selectively citing available evidence. They cite the ACER evaluation of CYAAA¹⁹ while dismissing the report that responded to it²⁰ and misrepresenting it as an evaluation. The results of Queensland's Teaching and Learning Audits^{21,22} – which ACER itself developed – are ignored by *The Case for Urgency*, yet it tells a vastly different story. These reports were provided to ACER as part of its audit of CYAAA. Additionally, although only citing it a few times, the authors seem to be drawing heavily from the 2016 Queensland Government DET review of Aurukun,²³ which was extremely problematic and to which GGSA has thoroughly responded elsewhere,²⁴ although the authors of the paper ignore the response. In sum, the DET review was full of factual errors and a profound lack of understanding community context and history. None of the review team saw the school in operation, the CYAAA and school leaders were not provided with any opportunity to respond, the school team was hampered from

¹⁶GGSA (2016), [Farrago: Response to the Review of School Education in Aurukun](#).

¹⁷ "Apology to Noel Pearson" <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/may/22/apology-to-noel-pearson>

¹⁸ Grossen, B. (2013, July). [Evaluation of the academic progress of children served by the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy](#). Hillsboro, Oregon: Centre for Applied Research in Education, p. 5.

¹⁹ACER (2013, June). [Evaluation of the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy Initiative](#).

²⁰ Grossen, 2013

²¹ DET (2011), [Teaching and Learning Audit: Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy](#).

²² DET (2014), [Teaching and Learning Audit: Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy](#).

²³ DET (2016), [Review of School Education in Aurukun](#)

²⁴GGSA, 2016

preparing for the review, the reviewers overlooked key artefacts, and misleading comparisons were made to schools with much higher levels of educational advantage. *The Case for Urgency* suffers from many of these issues.

Community collaboration

The authors' central claim is there was "inadequate participatory community engagement in the development and implementation of education policies and programs."²⁵ They leave out contrary evidence.

Specifically, the authors discuss a lack of community engagement in the original decision to start the model, stating: "the CYAAA was not an original part of the CYWR (Katz & Raven, 2013), which meant that not all of the Aurukun, Coen and Hope Vale communities were formally involved in the decision-making process for the set-up of the educational program, of which they became a significant part."²⁶ However, sources are available from GGSA, CYWR, Family Responsibility Commission (FRC) reports and media coverage about Hope Vale requesting the model.

The extent of CYAAA's engagement with the community was unprecedented in Queensland Indigenous education history. CYAAA undertook extensive community consultation in Aurukun on the implementation of the CYAAA model in 2009.²⁷ Over 95 members of the Aurukun community were closely consulted, and over 77 per cent of Aurukun residents demonstrated commitment to the model. In 2009, the then Mayor (Neville Pootchamunka) and Deputy Mayor of Aurukun (Phyllis Yunkaporta) joined the CYAAA leadership team on a trip to the United States to research Direct Instruction. They returned to Aurukun and helped implement the model in the school. In 2010, the then Mayor of Aurukun was appointed to the CYAAA Board, where he remained until his sudden passing in 2012.

Available information on CYAAA's extensive family engagement strategy and community partnerships was also ignored. The authors of the paper, perhaps due to over-reliance on the DET report's narrow form of family and community engagement, neglect this engagement even though it would have buttressed their message on community collaboration.

CYAAA worked closely with local families on the Culture Program and, in 2013, won the Premiers' Reconciliation Award. In 2015, CYAAA sponsored a linguist to work for six months in Aurukun, developed a number of Wik language resources, and created a dedicated language space in the school. In 2016, CYAAA funded an indigenous member of the curriculum writing team to spend time in Aurukun to meet with elders in order to inject local cultural content into the Culture Program curriculum materials. The CYAAA has partnered with several community organisations in Aurukun around sports, arts, health and culture.

The authors suggest that co-principalship model should be at the heart of the model, perhaps unaware that Coen, Hope Vale and Aurukun all had sole indigenous principals at one time or another, or that Aurukun had an indigenous principal at the time of the problems. Or perhaps, are they suggesting that schools should be required to have a non-Indigenous principle in addition to an Indigenous one? The authors seem unaware of past well-known examples of co-principalship in remote Aboriginal communities in Queensland over the past decades, nor do they provide any evidence (aside from one case study) to ascertain the appropriateness or effectiveness of such a model.

²⁵ Gillan, Mellor, & Krakouer, 2017, p. 73

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 72

²⁷ Grossen, 2013

Performance and improvements

The authors state that, "in 2016, six years after the agreement 'linking' the Cape York schools, the CYAAA had not achieved its intended educational achievement objectives"²⁸ and that "the impact of the CYAAA on academic outcomes is now impossible to fully assess, but the NAPLAN participation and achievement data clearly shows the anticipated benefits have not been realised."²⁹ They provide no real discussion or evidence beyond scattered and selective claims.

For example, selectively citing the ACER evaluation, they state that "The ACER evaluators found that most students at the CYAAA were still performing well below the national benchmarks in literacy achievement"³⁰ without discussing any gains made or how this compares to similar schools of populations of students. Anyone with an understanding of the context would not find this surprising or damning; underperforming students should be compared with comparable schools and in terms of their own growth, not with nationally normed benchmarks. They state appropriate evidence from another report,³¹ although the authors mistakenly identify it as an evaluation, accurately stating that "literacy outcomes had increased in each year of the evaluation."³² However, the authors then insinuate that it was inaccurate and biased without providing any tangible evidence or examining the actual claim.

Nonetheless, in this regard, the CYAAA demonstrates clear success. Professor John Hattie, a highly respected academic and author of the definitive book on educational meta-analyses, analysed the CYAAA's student NAPLAN results and recently stated:

I analysed the data from 122 of [the CYAAA's] students. Learning growth effect-sizes were calculated for all students where they completed a NAPLAN test over two occasions (Year 3 and 5, or Year 5 and 7). The average effect-sizes are all substantial. For Years 3-5, there has been greater than the Australian average growth: 181 per cent greater in Reading, 98 per cent greater in Writing, and 181 per cent greater in Numeracy. This is the good news; the program is truly making a difference; but the sobering news is that the students have to make 3+ years growth in a year to catch up.³³

In addition to excluding and contradicting such readily available evidence, the authors also leave out positive outcomes mentioned even in the sources they cite. The report omits improved professional development for teachers or the other positive findings from the ACER evaluation. They also failed to highlight anything positive from the CYWR evaluation, such as improved attendance at Aurukun.

The authors ignore the successes of the other 2 CYAAA sites and make no attempt to explain Coen and Hope Vale's attendance, results and community support. Only a vague comment on them is included: "The primary schools at Coen and Hopevale, which have maintained good attendance and retention rates, will remain subject to Queensland Department of Education policy and procedures."³⁴ This statement implies that the other sites have simply not declined, as if that might be assumed, whereas in fact all three sites improved in measures across board, including attendance and retention. In fact, readily available NAPLAN

²⁸ *Ibid*

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 73

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 72

³¹ Grossen, 2013

³² Gillan, Mellor, & Krakouer, 2017, p. 72

³³ J. Hattie. (2016). [Shifting away from distractions to improve Australia's schools: Time for a Reboot](#). Jack Keating Lecture at Melbourne Graduate School of Education

³⁴ Gillan, Mellor, & Krakouer, 2017, p. 73

data on the My School website shows that in 2016 CYAAA Coen achieved among the highest levels of literacy and numeracy in remote indigenous schools in Queensland.

Curriculum and Direct Instruction

The authors state that “Pearson’s belief is that quality pedagogy can improve Indigenous academic achievement, which is probably uncontested, but his belief that quality pedagogy can be provided by the specific pedagogical model known as ‘Direct Instruction’ (DI) is contested by many education experts and researchers.”³⁵

Any educational researcher will point out that few (if any) pedagogic approaches are uncontested. Suffice it to say that Direct Instruction has a mountain of research findings to back it up, including in the meta-meta-study by Professor Hattie,³⁶ which is acclaimed to be among the most successful pedagogical methods, drawing on 304 studies with a total sample size of 42,618. Regardless of how one feels about Direct Instruction, it is improper to claim it is not research-based, more so, to link it to the challenge of community engagement. Allan Luke, a critic of DI, notes that, according to the 2013 ACER evaluation “DI has provided a beneficial framework for staff continuity, instructional planning, developmental diagnostics and professional development in school contexts where these apparently had been lacking.”³⁷

The authors also claim that “in addition to the problematic pedagogical issues associated with DI, from 2010 until June 2016, students in CYAAA schools were not taught the Australian curriculum (ACER, 2013; O’Brien, 2016).”³⁸ On top of O’Brien being a report from *ABC News*,³⁹ this statement is also inaccurate.

CYAAA’s curriculum covers the Australian Curriculum and not all instruction utilises Direct Instruction – not that the two (DI and Australian Curriculum) are even mutually exclusive. The Class component consists of evidence-based instruction (Direct Instruction) with a strong focus on accelerating learning progress for students. The Club programs consist of physical education, music, and science. The Culture programs consist of humanities and social sciences, the arts, and technology.

The curriculum was endorsed in 2009 by a working group comprising of representatives from State Departments of Education and Training (DET) and Communities (DoC), Commonwealth Departments of Education, Employment and Workplace Reform (DEEWR) and Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) and Cape York Institute, judging it “data, research and evidence based in every element from pedagogy, teaching and learning planning across year levels, assessment and reporting.”⁴⁰

The authors also state that, “community attitudes towards the controversial education reform have been bitterly divided, with some community members supporting the DI approach and many others opposing it, because it was not preparing children for mainstream schooling.”⁴¹ However, there is no evidence of bitter opposition to the school.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 72

³⁶ Hattie, J. (2008). *Visible Learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. London: Routledge.

³⁷ Luke, A. (2014) On Explicit and Direct Instruction, ALEA “Hot Topic”, Australian Literacy Educators’ Association, May, <http://www.alea.edu.au/documents/item/861>, p. 2

³⁸ Gillan, Mellor, & Krakouer, 2017, p. 72

³⁹ O’Brien, C. (2016, July 5). Aurukun school review recommends offering Year 7 and 8 classes, security upgrade for teachers. *Australian Broadcasting Company (ABC) News*. Accessed from <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-07-05/aurukun-review-announced-school-to-reopen/7569946>

⁴⁰ GGSA, 2016

⁴¹ Gillan, Mellor, & Krakouer, 2017, p. 73

Community violence

Finally, the authors claim that: "The publication of the latest NAPLAN results coincided with media reporting significant social disruption in the Aurukun community, as the underlying governance challenges erupted, largely as a result of community objection to the program (Sarra, 2016)...The lack of broad-based participation by the community has been the key driver behind community tension, violence and disengagement in the school in Aurukun since the program was implemented."⁴² They fail to mention that Chris Sarra runs an educational consultancy,⁴³ that is in direct competition with GGSA for contracts with schools. There is no evidence for widespread opposition to the school.

They directly link violence in the community to the school model; no evidence is provided. The claim was refuted in multiple media articles last year, but only the accusations are named in the paper. John McCollow, who has written his own critiques of CYAAA's use of Direct Instruction, stated:

The implication that use of the [DI] program has somehow contributed to the problems in the community is unsupported hyperbole that undermines rather than strengthens [the case against DI]. Social unrest and violence have been unfortunate features of the Aurukun community for a number of years predating the establishment of the Cape York Welfare Reforms or the CYAAA.⁴⁴

Conclusion

In this review, we have pointed out a number of ways *The Case for Urgency* does not fulfil the basic requirements of a research publication. Perhaps most important is that, beyond the general issues and the unfair attacks on CYAAA, the paper neglects the fundamentally important knowledge and practice of raising Indigenous schooling outcomes in remote communities. Significantly, it fails to advance an alternate model that can be done in (i) standard government and church schools and (ii) at anything approaching the cost of a standard primary school in any system. The authors of the paper could have discussed such a model through a more thorough and rigorous treatment of the case studies – and especially through an approach that creates dialogue rather than clouding the real issues.

Ironically, while the authors advocate for indigenous people to have a voice, they neglect the indigenous leaders involved in establishing the CYAAA initiative. They erase their participation, ignore what leaders have publically stated in support of the model, and fail to invite them to engage in dialogue about their critique. Perhaps the greatest irony is the authors' use of the Uluru Statement of the Heart as a central paradigm of their report; a principal author of the Statement is central to the efforts of the CYAAA.

In our own research-based view – you can find our rigorous data and reports on our website⁴⁵ – GGSA (including CYAAA) stands as a beacon, quite independently of the hard lessons we have gained along the way. It has in fact illustrated that the kinds of best practices discussed in the paper can be done, even if it is never as simple as *The Case for Urgency* authors make it out to be. In addition, it has shown that certain kinds of pedagogical practice make a difference, regardless of the exogenous factors. It demonstrates what committed educators have always known – that Indigenous students learn conventional school knowledge when they are taught by committed educators through research-based practices, and this does not have to come at the cost of their language and culture.

⁴² *ibid*

⁴³ The Stronger Smarter Institute. <http://strongersmarter.com.au/about/history/>

⁴⁴ McCollow, J. (2016). *Schooling in Aurukun*. Research Report 49. TJRyan Foundation, p. 10.

⁴⁵ Good to Great Schools Australia, evidence base: <https://goodtogreatschools.org.au/our-results/evidence-base/>

It is of course inevitable that there are wins and losses, but if the efforts of GGSA are fairly examined, the wins indicate hope rather than despair. Science moves in steps as it builds on the shoulders of past achievements. Based on research evidence, what next should GGSA be doing in the view of the paper's authors? Their view seems clear: discontinue CYAAA. What the alternative would be seems less clear, given the case made in the paper that past policies and attempts have largely been ineffective. A more honest treatment of the case studies could have contributed to the indigenous education debate by offering lessons learned as alternative to the norm.

Readers of *The Case for Urgency* should treat any statements or conclusions with extreme caution and as unsupported. ACER should issue a retraction or errata for damaging statements made. This is not simply because of the attacks on our organisation and damage to the hard work of many in these communities and schools, but also because we value the issues raised here and desire a discourse that will help, rather than hinder the future of indigenous youth and their communities.