

Thinking outside the box: A remote VET-schools program challenges traditional boundaries

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What do a school and community do when mainstream education is failing its students and those students are not completing secondary schooling? This paper reports findings from part of a national project looking at the contributions of rural schools to their communities. In Cooktown, Far North Queensland, the solution was to form a partnership between the school, local community, and State and Commonwealth education authorities, and to plan and implement a VET-in-schools program. Now in its fifth year of operation, the program has multiple beneficiaries: youth; individual community members and groups, and the wider Cooktown region. The community's youth have developed a new-found self confidence and sense of direction for the future, culminating in increased school retention rates and subsequent employment or employment pathways. On a broader level, community capacity has increased as school and community work together to effect change and build a positive future for all. In such a diverse community, of Indigenous and non-Indigenous, newcomers and locals, the initiative could easily have failed. Using a case study methodology, this paper outlines the reasons why it didn't, including a leadership process which focuses on extensive consultation with stakeholders, and a willingness to take risks by pushing traditional boundaries of Government policy and practice.