

8. EDUCATION OUTCOMES

There is a wide range of literature on educational outcomes for Indigenous students, and there is considerable debate about how the differences in academic achievement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students can be addressed. This literature points to a vast range of factors that have an impact on educational outcomes, ranging from health and nutritional issues (eg hearing problems, poor nutrition, poor eyesight) to family, social and economic factors (eg parent's education level, parental discomfort with schools and cultural notions of shame and fear of failure, and socio-economic background).^v

The objectives of the Department of Science, Education and Training's (DEST's) sponsorship are to improve education outcomes for students by increasing awareness of the importance of school, linking education with future career opportunities, generating and reinforcing intentions to stay at school, and through this, improving attendance and retention in school. There are clearly limitations in the ability of an annual event to significantly influence school attendance and retention, given the range of factors that influence this behaviour, and there are also limitations in measuring the impact of the Croc Festivals™ on these behaviours. This section therefore addresses the specific sponsorship objectives with regards to awareness, attitudes and intentions, and explores possible influences on literacy and numeracy. The first component of this section sets the context for this analysis, by providing feedback on the activities that directly focus on education and careers.

8.1 OBSERVATION RESEARCH

8.1.1 *'I want to be' workshop*

For the three Festivals that were attended as part of the research (Port Augusta, Alice Springs and Moree), the 'I want to be' workshop included two components, the introductory talk and video showing personal stories of people's success, and an activity where children could see a range of careers and get an ID photo taken in a specific career. The scheduling program indicates that these two components were not linked, so that school groups went to one, both or neither activity. For example, in Alice Springs the majority of students went to either one or the other, although five schools went to both and ten schools did not go to either (out of about 70 schools). Approximately 80% of the students in Alice Springs went to one of the 'I want to be' workshop. This is important to keep in mind because Alice Springs did not have a careers market, so that a significant minority of students did not attend any activities directly on careers. For Moree and Port Augusta the proportion that attended one of the 'I want to be' workshops was lower, with around half going to one or both of these activities. Caution should be taken with these figures however, as they are based on the scheduling only, so do not reflect any changes that happened during the Croc Festival™.

Feedback from the students who had been to these activities was positive, indicating that most found it interesting and learned *“lots of new stuff”* from their involvement. Teachers did not comment specifically on this activity, although broadly some felt that, especially for the older kids, their involvement in the Festival encouraged them to start thinking about their career.

The ‘I want to be’ workshop was recalled by a large number of students in the post-Festival research with students making particular reference to the activity where they got to choose a career and have their photo taken. High school students responded well to the video in the second ‘I want to be’ workshop:

“The ‘I want to be’ workshop was fun and got you to think about what you want to do.”

“The ‘I want to be’ workshop opened me up to new things.”

“It pushed that we should go to school.”

Observational research conducted of the ‘I want to be’ workshops found that there were high levels of engagement, and that most students took an interest in the goal setting activities and the inspirational stories given by facilitators. Several students also discussed their own personal story when asked questions about what they wanted to be. It appeared that most students engaged well with this activity, and there were not any clear differences based on gender, especially as the career paths demonstrated a wide range of options. The activities delivered messages about co-operation and teamwork, self-esteem, goal-setting, risks associated with behaviours that limit life choices and developing relationships. The activities clearly emphasised the importance of school for the students’ future. There was not much focus on numeracy or literacy, although students were encouraged to read information about different careers.

8.1.2 Careers market

Observational research was conducted of the careers market in Port Augusta and Moree. Based on the scheduling information provided prior to the Festival, for Port Augusta approximately 15% of students attended the careers market and 28% in Moree attended the careers market. Although caution needs to be taken with these figures, as they are based on scheduling only, this does suggest that a significant number of students are not participating in the careers market. In addition, there was no careers market in Alice Springs because the NT Government had conducted a careers forum in Alice Springs prior to the Croc Festival™. There was some criticism of the lack of a careers market in Alice Springs by teachers who expected *“more emphasis on careers for senior kids.”*

In each of the careers markets there were a range of organisations represented, including tertiary education providers (eg Sydney University, University of New England), State and Commonwealth government sector organisations (eg Police, Fire Department, Roads and Traffic Authority, Department of Housing), and local service organisations (eg Kamilaroi Family Violence Prevention Service).

Observational research suggests there was minimal engagement with students attending the careers markets. School groups queued at the door, and then followed a path through the careers market going from stall to stall. Most stalls provided give-aways to students, and there appeared to be little dialogue between activity facilitators and students. Indeed, the focus for students was clearly on gathering the give-aways, and the tendency was for students to look at what items were on offer, and if this was something they were interested in they would stay in line, or if not they would move to the next stall.

There was more engagement between activity facilitators and teachers, although there were several school groups who did not have a teacher with them. In Moree there was one clear interactive activity in the careers market, with other stalls having computer screens and other props that could be used by students if they wished (undirected). The tertiary education providers had information about what students need to study for different careers, and these were provided on an ad hoc basis (written material only). There was no clear emphasis in this expo on the importance of school for careers, and indeed with many stalls it was not clear if the message was about what the organisation provides to the community, or what that organisation offers with regards to career opportunities.

Feedback from the students on the careers markets was very positive. Almost all students that had gone to the careers market spoke very positively about it. However, the responses suggest the interest in this activity for most was on the give-aways rather than the content of the expos.

Several teachers were disappointed with the careers market as it was seen as a “snatch and grab”, and it was felt the careers market should be more interactive. This finding is consistent with previous research. A number of participants suggested that facilitators should have activities so that students have to earn promotional materials, rather than just be given them e.g. answer a question and receive a hat. Many were also unsure about the extent to which students engaged and learnt during the activity. Some said they “*think kids get something out of it*”, but it was acknowledged this is difficult to measure.

Nevertheless, most were very positive about the concept, as they felt it provided exposure of different options for children who often “don’t know what’s out there”, and improved expectations for the future.

“Shows them they are capable of more than just a grade driver.”

“If you don’t show people the stars, they never look at them.”

Businesses and organisations spoke positively of the careers market, as some felt their involvement was an investment, as they are committed to increasing Indigenous employment, and the careers market was seen as a good opportunity for local businesses and organisations to promote their businesses as a career option. However, as with teachers, there was some criticism of the limited engagement with students in the careers expo. As well, several people suggested that the level of involvement of local businesses could be improved.

Teachers also suggested that the careers market was unsuitable for younger children, particularly primary school-aged students, as careers information was viewed to be a little premature.

8.2 AWARENESS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Several of the sponsorship objectives of DEST centre on enhancing awareness among students in regard to:

- The benefits of staying in school
- Potential career opportunities

These objectives are driven by the goals of the Department of Education, Science and Training, through the Croc Festivals™, to:

- Create an opportunity to demonstrate a diverse range of potential career opportunities through the careers market, and to
- Promote a broad cross-section of organisations promoting both Indigenous and non-Indigenous employment opportunities

Several students demonstrated their learning with regard to the importance of school and careers. Clearly these are messages that are delivered within schools already, but the Croc Festival™ reinforces these messages and provides examples of “successful” individuals and organisations that offer career opportunities. For example, there were clear links with these messages and local initiatives in Weipa, where a strategy “got to be earning or learning in 2005” targets 16 year olds. It was felt that the Festival itself reinforced this strategy.

The research found a strong recall of messages about the range of career opportunities available. For example, one student commented *“this makes me really think there are heaps (of careers) out there”*, while another said *“you get a chance to look at more jobs and it gives you more ideas on what to do.”* The responses also varied, in that some responses suggest involvement in the Festival provides suggestions or ideas for career options, while other responses indicated that their involvement had encouraged them to start thinking about their careers – *“makes me realise I need to have a hard think about what I want to do”*.

Teachers also commented on the increase in the level of awareness of the importance of school and career opportunities.

“Students picked up on the need to get good jobs, to attend school and be active in learning. Students became aware of the importance of reading and writing from exposure to Croc skills workshop facilitators and the science workshop ‘Questacon’.”

The research suggests that for many students messages about careers and the importance of school are delivered successfully through Croc Festivals™, although there are limitations in that not all students attend activities in relation to these objectives. As well, the success of these activities is influenced by the interest of the students themselves, and we believe the limited engagement of the careers markets means that students who are not already contemplating their opportunities are unlikely to receive strong messages about different career options and what is required to realise these opportunities.

8.3 ATTITUDES AND INTENTIONS TOWARDS SCHOOL AND CAREERS

DEST has a range of sponsorship objectives aimed at influencing attitudes and student intentions, as follows:

- To promote and reinforce positive attitudes towards staying in school to increase opportunities
- To increase confidence to pursue a range of career options
- To generate and reinforce intention to stay at school to increase opportunities
- To generate and reinforce intention to investigate different career options

The research found that most students could articulate messages around the importance of school for their future when asked directly about the importance of school, and linked school with careers. The following quotes reflect the most common responses to this question:

“Better education, better careers.”

“Because everyone here tells you that to get into work you have to do certain things, levels of school.”

“So you can learn, so you can do a job in the future.”

“School is important to get a good education. If you achieve at school you achieve at life. Getting a good education allows you to get good jobs.”

“You need to do it (school) so you can get a good job.”

For many there was an understanding that school influences their future opportunities, and while it is difficult to determine if these attitudes continue beyond the Croc Festival™ and under the influence of other social, economic and environmental factors, participation in the Festivals clearly arms young people with an understanding that may help them to think beyond their immediate future.

There were also a few examples where students' involvement in the Croc Festival™ increased their confidence in pursuing a career. A student from Port Augusta High School, who made items to sell at the Festival and provided some amateur hairdressing for a fee, said that this involvement made her even more determined to be a hairdresser. Several trainees also spoke very positively about their experience and the confidence it has given them, and several felt that this will have an influence on their ability to pursue a

career. While this feedback was not true for the majority of respondents, for some their experience with Croc Festival™ has the potential to increase confidence in pursuing a career.

In the research few students spoke about their intentions with regards to school and careers. Most articulated concepts about the importance of school, but few spoke about any changes in their behaviour that is likely to come of this (and we suggest that this is difficult for students to articulate and also very difficult to measure). Only a couple of responses referred to their intentions:

“Yes, school is important, I won’t stuff around at school, I’ll try and go to year 12.”

“Yes, make me have a hard look at what I want to do.”

“Yes, I’ll start planning for a career. I know what level you need to get a job.”

“The video (‘I want to be’ workshop) made me think about going to Year 12.”

Some teachers also mentioned that the retention rate for Indigenous students has increased in recent times, and it was felt that this may in some way be influenced by the Croc Festival™, although most were hesitant to identify direct cause and effect relationships. A number of teachers mentioned higher attendance in the lead-up to the Festival:

“There’s high attendance that week. Some kids that don’t come to school go to the Croc Festival™.”

Several teachers were positive about the impact of the Croc Festival™, believing that this is an important motivator with regards to school. It was felt that the Croc Festival™ added to the wider learning experience, and the demonstration of their increased motivation was the number of students who did their practice outside of school hours. As well, motivation was seen to be enhanced when students had seen other students now working for the Croc Festival™ as trainees. A few trainees were identified as having gone onto further study, and it was felt their involvement in the Croc Festival™ had an impact on this. A number of teachers and schools also use the Croc Festival™ as a reward for school attendance in the weeks leading up to the Festival. This means that, in the short-term at least, school attendance is improved as a result of the Croc Festival™.

Role models were also identified as an important motivator for students, as seeing Indigenous people as activity facilitators was seen to have a positive effect on the students. Evonne Goolagong-Cawley was mentioned frequently by students, as were relatives and local community members who were noticeably involved in the Festival.

These results suggest that the majority of students received positive messages about the importance of school and a wide range of career opportunities, and that for some of these students this has influenced their attitudes to school and their future. However, it is difficult to determine what impact this has on intentions, as

few spoke about how their participation is likely to influence their behaviour. Feedback from teachers suggests that the Croc Festival™ has a large impact on student attendance in the lead-up to the Festival, but many were reluctant to comment on the impact after participation, because of the complex range of social, environmental and economic factors that influence attendance, and the difficulty for a three-day event to address these.

8.4 BONDING TO SCHOOL

DEST's sponsorship objectives include "to create an opportunity to improve attendance and bonding at school". To assess this, students were asked during the Croc Festival™ whether attending the Festival had changed how they feel about school. While many said that there had been no change, a significant number indicated that they did feel differently about their school. The responses suggest that some students feel a greater sense of pride in their school, especially for those performing, and that others see school in a more positive light because it provided an opportunity to attend the Croc Festival™. Several Port Augusta students also spoke positively about the stall that their school had as part of the Festival, and felt proud of this.

"We are proud to be representing our school."

"School is more fun, I want to learn more."

"Feel good about school because look forward to Croc Festival™ (if did not go to school would not be able to go to Croc Festival™). It helps attendance rates – I want to be there because of Croc Festival™."

As well, several students and many teachers spoke of the change in their relationships during the Croc Festival™. While about half of the students we spoke to said their participation did not influence their relationships with their teachers, several said that it did change things in that it enhanced the levels of trust with their teachers, and this made the students *"feel a bit more important"*. Other students also felt that their teachers *"talk to us more and open up about things – they talk more about life stuff"*.

Teachers also spoke of the changed relationship due to their involvement. Most felt that it benefited their relationship, and provided more social interactions with the students, as well as providing an environment that is more relaxed and trusting. Several also said it gave them a *"chance to get to know them on another level. At school there are a lot of problems with behaviour, but here we get to see kids on a different level."* One teacher demonstrated the difference by recalling what one of her students had said to them *"thanks for bringing us, it's the best day I've ever had at school."*

These results indicate that the Croc Festival™ does have an impact on students' bonding with school, but the extent of this, and the impact this has on attendance, is difficult to measure.

8.5 INFLUENCE ON SCHOOL CURRICULUM AND LITERACY AND NUMERACY

DEST is committed to enhancing the impact of the Croc Festival™ over the longer term, and is therefore interested in the ways in which schools and teachers incorporate the Festival in the curriculum. Most teachers included in the research spoke about activities they did either before or after the Croc Festival™, linking the classroom with the Festival. The main ways that the Festival influences schools are in:

- Providing resources/materials during the Festival to teachers that they can use in the classroom, especially true for careers and health.
- Providing opportunities for teachers to make contact with organisations. One teacher said that prior to the Festival they did not know about an Aboriginal employment organisation that promotes careers and employment paths to Aboriginal students, and now because of the contact made they have arranged for this organisation to visit their school, and it was felt this would not have happened otherwise.
- Providing inspiration for incorporating ideas and themes in the classroom. For example, one teacher said the Festival demonstrated that it is “best to use practical activities and let students’ curiosity take over”, and that her involvement provided ideas to do this in the classroom. Another teacher had used the health expo for ideas on how to study the human body and nutrition in the classroom, and another said that they are going to set up an information bay on health in the classroom based on their participation in the Festival. One teacher had used the Croc Map for numeracy and literacy exercises.

“We used the map from the Croc Festival™ in maths and we used the timetables to get them to understand timetabling. The songs from the Festival were also used – we got the kids to write down the words and work out what the song was about. The secondary kids utilised the workbooks and the video.”

Croc Festival™ also provides a workbook for teachers, and the results suggest that few teachers have accessed this resource. It appears resources picked up during the Festival have a greater impact than the teachers’ workbook.

In terms of numeracy and literacy, it was difficult for people to comment on the direct impact of the Croc Festival™ on numeracy and literacy. There were, however, a few examples provided that suggest there are links between the Croc Festival™ and numeracy and literacy. Several teachers said that in the lead-up to and during the Festival many children who do not normally attend school regularly go more often, and that in this time they would learn more than they would otherwise. For many schools attendance at the Festival is used as a reward for good behaviour or school attendance.

A number of activities involved counting and repetition that teachers and facilitators believed helped students to practice numeracy skills. Some of the activities that involved counting included those such as learning hip-hop dance steps, counting rhythms in the drum workshop and the Questacon activities.

In Port Augusta and Moree a numeracy and literacy program is run either before or after the Festival (and sometimes both) and is linked with themes of the Festival. For example, the students read from their Croc Festival™ workbooks. The “Solid and Deadly” booklet, though not recalled by a large number of respondents, was seen as providing useful activities that were drug and alcohol and health related. However, there was some criticism that the booklet was targeted at students with sound English language proficiency:

“I have seen the booklets provided as part of the Festival to children – they are geared towards very literate students and so we are unable to use it very much.”

One activity facilitator suggested that the booklets be a lot simpler with more pictures and activities, rather than words.

Others mentioned that the Croc Festival™ forms part of the school curriculum. A number of schools in Port Augusta have incorporated an enterprise class as part of the lead up to the Festival and this involves students making craft items to sell at the Festival or costumes for performing on stage. One teacher linked this to numeracy and literacy because enterprise involves numeracy and contextual maths. For example, students use ratios to mix the plaster for plaster moulds and use measurement for costume design. Others said that before and after the Croc Festival™ many of the class writing exercises are based on the Festival experience.

In Port Augusta and Thursday Island teachers mentioned a skills program that they run before the Festival that gives basic office experience to students in making phone calls and using a fax machine. Students call local businesses and organisations to promote the Festival and to source items for the Festival itself. This was also seen to increase communication skills and confidence in communicating. This was seen as particularly important in Thursday Island as it gave students an opportunity to speak with business owners in English.

For students who did not speak English as their first language, the Festival was seen by a number of teachers as an important form of interaction, giving students a chance to speak English with students from other schools.

However, most teachers were pragmatic about the effect a three-day event can have on numeracy and literacy:

“I can’t see how any three-day event can have a long-term impact on literacy and numeracy unless, if they like learning that way, they may want to learn more and come to school more.”

“I don’t know if the Festival has a lasting impact academically but I would like to think they do. I don’t know how you would ever measure something like that.”

“There isn’t really any impact on literacy and numeracy. In the classroom kids spend so much time on literacy and numeracy that there isn’t enough time for hands-on, interactive learning but this type of learning has the biggest impact.”

Another outcome that is not directly linked to literacy and numeracy but that may be relevant is greater involvement of the community in the school and the school curriculum as a result of the Croc Festival™. For example, in Moree one school has a “mini-Croc Festival™” where representatives from organisations like health, emergency services and other community organisations hold workshops for students. The idea for this was derived from the Croc Festival™ itself.

These results suggest there are many examples of teachers incorporating the Croc Festival™ in the classroom, utilising ideas and resources provided at the Festivals. It appears that teachers build on the enthusiasm and energy that the Croc Festival™ generates in their students to enhance involvement in class activities. The extent to which this happens clearly depends on individual teachers, and there are opportunities to enhance the degree to which the Croc Festival™ concepts and resources are incorporated into the classroom.