

CRITICAL ISSUES

experiencing firsthand what no textbook or video clip could convey. At the other end are young Indigenous boys and girls who indisputably know that there are a whole bunch of young and gentle souls from a place called Radford – somewhere 'out there' – who seem to genuinely care and who, better still, keep coming back to spend time with them. This is a much welcomed certainty in their lives and an important constant. Each return grows trust and deepens the relationship between Radford and the communities.

Over 200 Radfordians have now attended pre-schools, primary and central schools serving the Gamilaraay people. Over the course of these visitations there has been a growing maturity in the relationship between those with significant privilege and those without. A greater understanding of the particular needs of schools with a high percentage of Indigenous children, as well as an empathy with Aboriginal culture and history, are simultaneously nurtured.

After spending extended time in schools in the Gamilaraay region, our students' service learning philosophies usually evolve from the simplistic and egocentric 'I want to make a difference' to a more complex, practical and wider-reaching grasp of what is required in authentic and sustainable service practice. As one student wrote:

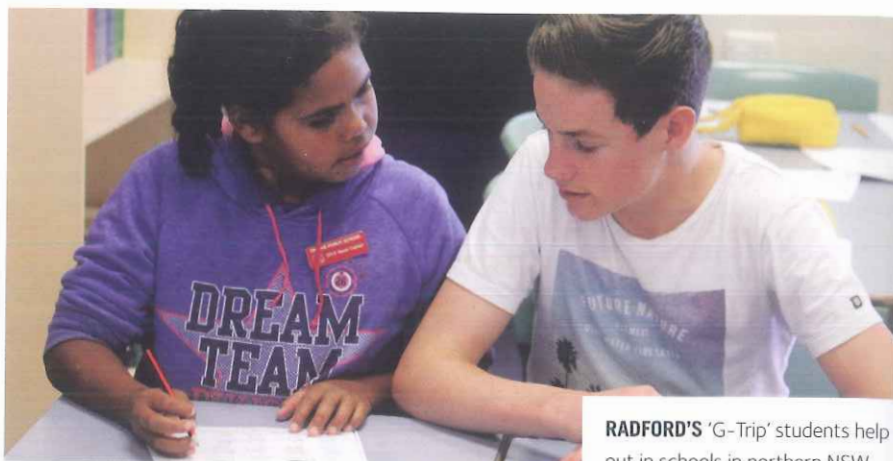
There exist immensely complex problems that we cannot pretend to fully understand. Not understanding is no excuse for not trying. I dream of a straightforward fix. Unfortunately, it is far too late to be so simple.

Wrestling with the complexities of how best to address the inequities in educational opportunity in our country, the students come to a realisation that they can only effectively do so after having had some real experiences working, playing, listening to and living alongside all stakeholders.

It is my dream that those who participate in a G-Trip will one day return to finish the work that has been started. ■

GEORGE HUITKER

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RADFORD'S 'G-Trip' students help out in schools in northern NSW.

BEST PRACTICE

ACHIEVING SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES FOR INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

The Australian Indigenous Education Foundation this year released its *AIEF Compendium of best practice for achieving successful outcomes with Indigenous students in Australian boarding schools*. The Compendium is a collation of qualitative data and examples of practice drawn from the experiences of those working with Indigenous students.

KEY FINDINGS

AIEF has identified the most important drivers of a successful Indigenous education program as:

1 LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT

A genuine and personal commitment from the school leadership to the program.

2 RESOURCING

Indigenous education programs must be resourced sufficiently and effectively to ensure success and sustainability.

3 ATTRIBUTES OF STUDENTS

To ensure that students most likely to succeed receive the opportunities available in scholarship programs, focus on students who demonstrate enthusiasm, aspirations and a positive attitude to learning, and who have parental support.

4 SCHOOL STRUCTURES AND FRAMEWORKS

These need to be student-centred, carefully conceived and implemented to ensure the right staff are in the right roles and have the resources needed to do their jobs effectively.

5 RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships with Indigenous students, their families, their communities, with the broader school community, with external organisations and other schools are critical and far-reaching. At the heart of these partnerships and relationships is effective communication that is regular, respectful, open and inclusive.

6 WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

A school environment that is supportive and welcoming is one that is genuine, authentic and entrenched, rather than purely symbolic.

7 LEARNING AND TRANSITION SUPPORT

Where needed, additional support for Indigenous students needs to be targeted, responsive to students' needs and focused on ensuring that all students complete Year 12 and successfully transition to a sustainable career or further study.

AIEF has established an online community for practitioners in Indigenous education. For more information about AIEF and the Compendium visit www.aief.com.au; to engage in the online community, visit compendium.aief.com.au. □