



## **Promoting Engagement into Education in a Discrete Indigenous Australian Community**

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One of the most challenging, but urgent National and State priorities in Australia is meeting the targets of the Closing the Gap policy, designed for the achievement of equity across health and socio-economic indicators for Indigenous Australians. While targets aimed at raising Indigenous wellbeing and prosperity cut across early childhood, schooling, healthy homes, safe communities, health, economic participation and governance and leadership, these areas are not mutually exclusive. Given its broad-scale implications, commitment to improving education holds particular significance, not only in its short-term prospects of academic success, but in its long-term potential for improving outcomes across all other target areas. Key to improving Indigenous educational outcomes is student engagement, broadly defined as “the extent to which students identify with and value schooling outcomes, have a sense of belonging at school, participate in academic achievement and non-academic activities, strive to meet the formal requirements of schooling and make a serious personal investment in learning” [1]. The aim of this presentation is to share the preliminary findings of an Australian Research Council supported project being conducted to develop a community action model to promote engagement into education for students residing in a discrete Indigenous community. Data was generated using a Participatory Action Research approach to support whole-of-community action. Findings indicate a need to better understand how the interplay of larger social structures including gender, ethnicity, health, welfare and safety, socio-economic status and family issues, and systemic constraints impose on, and shape possibilities for educational and social opportunity and outcomes for Indigenous children. The key concern for the school in working at this interface was establishing a nurturing environment by committing to a whole-of-community approach to education. The findings hold particular significance for linking evidence-based research and policy to maximise opportunities for Indigenous students to lead more healthy productive lives and engage in meaningful futures.