

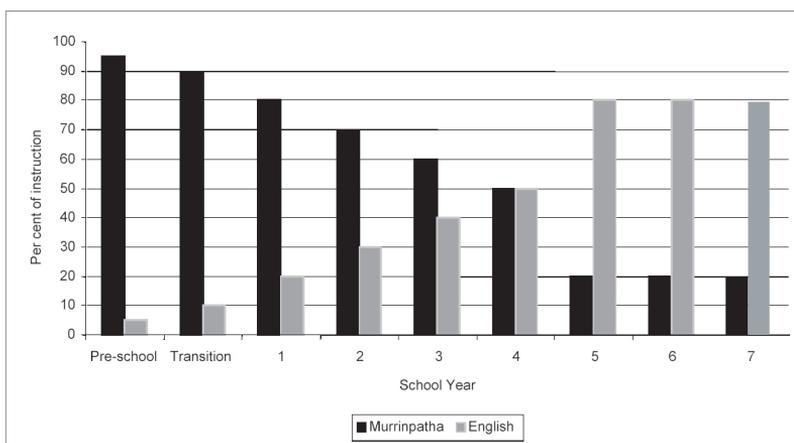
5. Education and training

There are two broad perspectives against which the purpose and performance of education in the region may be assessed. The first is culturally grounded and considers what Aboriginal people want from education. According to one analyst, with reference to Arnhem Land communities, many Aboriginal people selectively procure aspects of Western education and ignore others that do not suit their needs or aspirations (Schwab 1998). Consequently, what is desired from education in general, and from schools in particular, can be very different to what these western institutions expect. These desires have been conceptualised in terms of the acquisition of core competencies to deal with the non-Aboriginal world, the capacity for cultural maintenance, and access to material and social resources (Schwab 1998: 15).

The second derives from an economic development model and stresses a need to acquire the requisite skills for participation in the mainstream economy. From this perspective, educational outcomes are measured in terms of participation rates, grade progression, competency in numeracy and literacy skills, and (for the Vocational Education and Training [VET] sector), course completion. Given the need to develop a statistical profile of the regional population, the entire focus here is on this second perspective. This is not to deny that skills acquired outside of formal educational processes cannot, and may not, lead to Aboriginal participation in the regional economy in other more informal ways, for example in art and craft production and in land management. The problem for socio-economic profiling is that these more culturally grounded attributes are difficult to quantify and lack readily accessible data sources.

There is no doubt that formal schooling is seen locally as encompassing cultural education, including instruction in Murrin-Patha and, to a limited extent, other local languages. For this reason, although Thamarrurr Regional School (TRS) (formerly Our Lady of the Sacred Heart) remains administered by the Northern Territory Catholic Education Office, it has been a bilingual school since the 1970s with Murrin-Patha forming a lingua franca basis for an introduction to formal education with instruction in English gradually phased in by Year 5 as shown in Figure 5.1 (Reynolds 1994; Walsh 1990). In fact, of course, the Thamarrurr population is multi-lingual, not just bilingual. To varying degrees, aside from Murrin-Patha, five other local languages are used in the Thamarrurr region along with Aboriginal English, Australian English, Kriol, and potentially up to ten other languages from the immediate social network of Thamarrurr people ranging from Kununurra up to Bathurst Island (Walsh 1990). This complex basis for social interaction highlights the importance for TRS of stressing a cultural foundation to pedagogy.

Figure 5.1. TRS bilingual instruction distribution, pre-school to Year 7



Source: TRS, Wadeye

At pre-school, virtually all instruction and activities are conducted using Murrin-Patha with only 15 minutes per day in English. The ratio of Murrin-Patha to English slowly rises with advancing school years so that by Year 4, instruction is delivered equally in both languages. This changes from Year 5 through to Year 7 with four hours per day presented in English and only one hour in Murrin-Patha, while secondary education beyond Year 7 (mostly by correspondence) is in English only. Culture days are also provided every fortnight to teach local languages other than Murrin-Patha.

The Aboriginal leadership team at TRS views the bilingual program as an essential component of educational provision in the region. Through learning Murrin-Patha cognitively, the aim is to provide a basis for competency in English. This also enables an easier exchange between Aboriginal teachers and pupils, while the infusion of local culture into the Murrin-Patha program by way of storytelling, bush activities, and contextual curricula materials ensures that students are well-grounded in the Murrin-Patha world view. One practical extension of this is a proposal to establish a Junior Rangers program linked to the Caring for Country activities of Thamarrurr Rangers. As for benchmarking learning outcomes, assessment profiles in Murrin-Patha reading, writing, and oral skills are established, although these are more to inform internal school processes regarding staffing requirements and development needs.

Participation in schooling

The TRS is the only school in the Thamarrurr region. Located at Wadeye, it offers formal schooling to Year 7. The school provides for children from pre-school age up to some secondary years, although the latter is provided mostly by correspondence. The nearest secondary school is a newly established independent one at Woolaning near Batchelor, although historically links have long been established with St John’s College in Darwin. At the time of writing, three Wadeye residents were enrolled there. Given the current size of the regional school age population (626), and its expected growth over

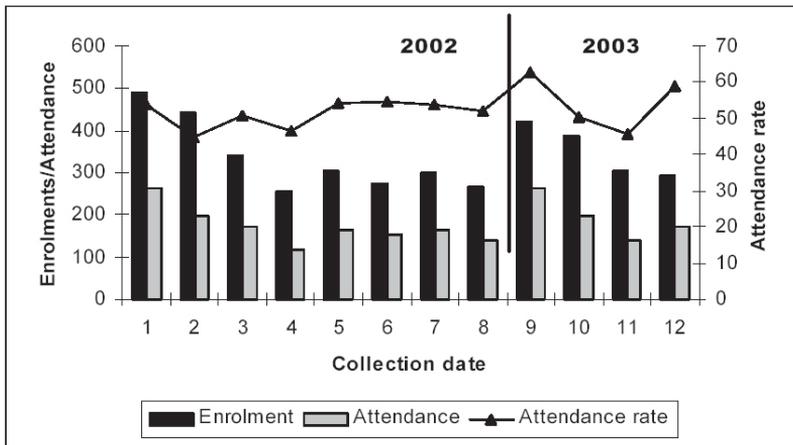
the next 20 years to 1140 (Table 2.5), this lack of full secondary education facilities at Wadeye is anomalous when set against other Northern Territory towns with similar school age numbers.

Most outstations in the Thamarrurr region have no direct access to a school, although there is a small school at Kuy with 20 students and one teacher, while some outstations are trialling an initiative of having a local person teaching children, enhanced by irregular visits from Wadeye-based teaching staff. Some children from outstations in the east of the region attend the Nganmarriyanga (Palumpa) Community School, as well as the school at Daly River. Thus, part of the issue in terms of enrolment and attendance at TRS relates to accessibility for some outstations which are more than two hours travel time by four-wheel drive during the dry season.

Enrolments and attendance

In the first half of 2003, an average of 351 enrolments was recorded at TRS. As in previous years, these enrolments peaked (at 420) in the first month of the school year (February) and progressively declined thereafter to reach 307 by September. Thus, by September only 56 per cent of the region’s school age population was enrolled, although at the beginning of the 2003 school year this amounted to 67 per cent. While those attending school are always fewer than the numbers enrolled, the actual rate of attendance remains relatively stable over time at around 51–54 per cent. This is because attendance numbers decline in tandem with enrolment numbers. Clearly the educational impact of relatively low levels of school enrolment is compounded by low school attendance. This is shown in Figure 5.2 which charts the numbers enrolled and numbers attending. Also shown is the attendance rate for each of the school months in 2002 and the first half of 2003. Clearly, aside from the fact that not all children of school age are enrolled, and the fact that even fewer attend classes, there is also a problem of retaining those that turn up at the beginning of each school year.

Figure 5.2. TRS enrolments, attendance, and attendance rates by school month, 2002 and 2003



Source: TRS, Wadeye

These shortcomings are further emphasised at the individual grade level with all grades at pre-school and primary levels having fewer than 20 students in attendance by the second half of the school year, and some (Transition and Year 7), having fewer than 10 attendees (Table 5.1). Also apparent is the fact that boys are least likely to be enrolled, and are even less likely to attend classes, with some indication from the September and previous monthly data that this gap widens with age. There are currently 10 girls completing Year 11 via correspondence, and two of these are enrolled in Northern Territory Open Education Centre (NTOEC) courses. Of particular note are those enrolments in foundation studies (Years 7–8) as this is a bridging course for children who have finished primary but are not ready for high school. A further point of note is the current low enrolment in Kardu Kigay, a special school-to-work program designed to retain senior boys (Kigay) at school. This program commenced in 1999 with funding from the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), and CDEP and aims to strengthen literacy and numeracy skills as well as self-esteem among young men (aged 16–20 years) with a history of poor school attendance.

Table 5.1. TRS enrolments and attendance by grade level and sex, September 2003

Grade level	Enrolments			Attendance		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Preschool	16	7	23	9	5	14
Transition	11	10	21	3	5	8
Year 1	9	14	23	6	8	14
Year 2	12	16	28	8	11	19
Year 3	9	14	23	6	6	12
Year 4	16	18	34	7	10	17
Year 5	8	15	23	5	10	15
Year 6	13	13	26	8	11	19
Year 7	6	18	24	3	5	8
F/Sa	34	30	64	14	18	32
Senior Girls	n/a	15	15	n/a	10	10
Kardu Kigay	3		3	0		0
Total	137	170	307	69	99	168

a. Foundation studies

Source: TRS, Wadeye

As for rates of enrolment and attendance by single-year age group, Table 5.2 shows these for September 2003 on the assumption that grade level directly corresponds with single year ages from pre-school at age four to secondary ages from 13–16 years. If this is so, then just over one-third of four-year-olds were enrolled in pre-school and 22 per cent of these actually attended. The peak age for enrolment appears to be among six- and seven-year-olds in Years 1 and 2 as these are the only ages at which enrolments exceed

50 per cent. They also represent the peak attendance rates, with one-third of children at these ages attending.

At the other extreme, barely one-third of secondary age children are enrolled, and only 18 per cent of this age group are actually attending school, although the rate of attendance is lowest among 12-year-olds at only 13 per cent. This reveals that the maximum exposure to education within the population occurs early at ages six and seven, but even at these ages the vast majority of children in the region are not attending school.

Some idea of the depth of non-attendance is provided by statistics collected by TRS on the duration of absences from school among those not attending. This is shown in Figure 5.3 for the 2002 school year. Clearly, there is only a very small group of regular attendees, totalling 57 in 2002, if fewer than 30 days absence in the year is adopted as the cut off. Accordingly, the vast majority (82%) of enrolled students are frequently absent from school for cumulative periods amounting to more than 50 days in the year.

Table 5.2. Estimated population-based enrolment and attendance rates by single year of age: TRS, September 2003

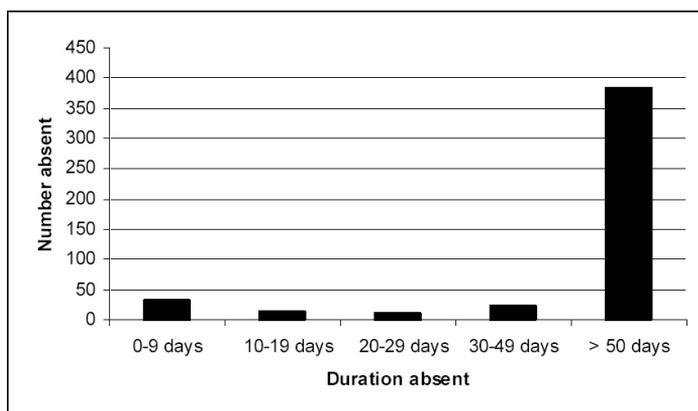
Single year of age	Population (1)	Enrolment (2)	Attendance (3)	Enrolment rate (%) (2/1)	Attendance rate (%) (3/1)
4	62	23	14	37.1	22.6
5	44	21	8	47.7	18.2
6	42	23	14	54.8	33.3
7	55	28	19	50.9	34.5
8	63	23	12	36.5	19.0
9	69	34	17	49.3	24.6
10	58	23	15	39.7	25.9
11	65	26	19	40.0	29.2
12	60	24	8	40.0	13.3
13-16	226	82	42	36.3	18.6

Source: Community Census and TRS, Wadey

Retention rates

Although data are not available from which to establish grade level retention rates, a key aim of the school is to retain enrolment and attendance through to eventual employment. Success in this area is fairly limited to date with only 11 recent school leavers in mainstream employment and the rest either on CDEP or in receipt of welfare. Of course, to a large degree this reflects the nature of the local labour market with limited formal employment opportunities for relatively unskilled school leavers. However, from a labour market perspective, retention to Year 12 from Year 10 has been shown to have the greatest impact on employment prospects for Aboriginal people (ABS/CAEPR 1996; Hunter 1996), yet the numbers on Year 11 correspondence courses remain very few.

Figure 5.3. Duration of absence from school, TRS 2002



Source: TRS, Wadeye

The impact of low retention is reflected in census data on the highest levels of schooling completed as reported in the 2001 Census and shown in Table 5.3 for adults (those over 15 years). According to these data, only four per cent of adults in Thamarrurr reported Year 11 or 12 completion in 2001. Converting this to a population estimate in 2003 indicates that only 41 Aboriginal adults in Thamarrurr completed school beyond Year 10. By contrast, 56 per cent (an estimated 593) reported less than Year 8 as their highest level and 16 per cent (169) indicated that they had never attended school.

Table 5.3. Highest level of schooling completed among Aboriginal residents of Thamarrurr region, 2003

	Year 8 or below	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Did not go to school
% of adults ^a	56.1	12.1	11.2	1.2	2.7	16.0
Estimated no. ^b	593	128	118	13	28	169

a. Based on 2001 Census

b. Calculated using 2001 Census-based rates against 2003 population

Source: ABS, 2001 Census and Community census

Outcomes

As already noted, from the standpoint of participation in regional economic development, educational achievement is a key prerequisite. While studies reveal a positive relationship between economic status and indicators of educational achievement such as highest level of schooling completed (ABS/CAEPR 1996), an important shortcoming is their lack of measurement of the quality of education outcomes. For example, age at leaving school or highest level of schooling completed does not necessarily equate with school-leaving grade level achievement. In fact, for many Aboriginal students in remote areas of the

Northern Territory, age or grade level is a poor indicator of achievement as many Aboriginal students perform substantially below their age and grade levels in terms of literacy and numeracy competencies (Northern Territory Department of Education [NTDE] 1999). Thus, while data on participation in the education system provide an important indication of access and utilisation, it should be noted that they reveal less about outcomes in terms of demonstrated ability, no matter from what perspective this might be measured.

Table 5.4. Year 3 and Year 5 MAP performance results for reading: TRS, 1999–2001

	1999	2000	2001
Year 3 test			
Number in cohort	19	22	28
Number of participants	19	11	14
Participation rate (per cent)	100.0	50.0	50.0
Number achieving benchmark	0	0	0
Achievement rate (per cent)	0.0	0.0	0.0
Year 5 test			
Number in cohort	11	24	16
Number of participants	11	13	5
Participation rate	100.0	54.2	31.3
Number achieving benchmark	0	0	0
Achievement rate (per cent)	0.0	0.0	0.0

Source: TRS, Wadeye

In the Northern Territory, outcomes from education are measured using benchmarks according to the Multilevel Assessment Program (MAP). This is a curriculum-based assessment that tests students' knowledge and skills in numeracy and reading. It is administered annually under separate arrangements for urban and remote Northern Territory schools. The MAP tests are set at various profile levels—two through to four. At Year 3 level, it is expected that most students will be achieving profile level two, while profile level three is the benchmark standard for students in Year 5. These benchmarks represent an agreed standard of performance that professional educators deem to be the minimum level required for students at particular key stages in their educational development in order to make adequate progress. Prior to the tests, teachers make evaluations of each student before assigning them to a particular test level and exemptions can be, and often are, made if teachers believe that students are likely to achieve near zero scores (NTDE 1999: 156). In accordance with Australian government benchmark reporting requirements, eight-year-old and 10-year-old students were tested equating to Years 3 and 5. The results for reading and numeracy testing at TRS are shown in Tables 5.4 and 5.5 respectively for 1999–2001. Clearly, according to these data, students at TRS have consistently per-

formed very poorly in both reading and numeracy, at both Year 3 and Year 5 levels, both in terms of participation in testing and in achievement.

Table 5.5. Year 3 and Year 5 MAP performance results for numeracy: TRS, 1999–2001

	2000	2001
Year 3 test		
Number in cohort	22	28
Number of participants	11	12
Participation rate (per cent)	50.0	42.9
Number achieving benchmark	0	2
Achievement rate (per cent)	0.0	16.7
Year 5 test		
Number in cohort	24	16
Number of participants	12	3
Participation rate	50.0	18.8
Number achieving benchmark	0	0
Achievement rate (per cent)	0.0	0.0

Source: TRS, Wadeye

Reasons for this are properly the concern of the school, including its Indigenous leadership team, together with parents and the community as now represented by the Thamarrurr working groups on families and youth. However, the school advises that MAP results to date need to be interpreted with caution. This is because up until 2001 TRS students were placed in a grade that fitted their development level. As a consequence, children were often two or three grades behind their urban school peers with whom they were compared in MAP testing, with the result that Wadeye students were seen to be ‘failing’, as indicated in the data above. At the end of 2001 a decision was made to align students at TRS with their peer groups. This involved children skipping a grade or two (and in some cases more than two). Thus, 2003 is the first year that children have been in the age appropriate class, and for this reason MAP results may not show any indication of improvement for a few years. Children who are in Year 4 now will be better off by the time they reach Year 7 than the Year 7 children in 2003. Thus, 2002 and 2003 have been transition years towards closer alignment between age and grade level, and the outcome should be more meaningful MAP test comparison in the future.

However, even if this leads to a relative improvement in testing outcomes for TRS students, current data suggest a need to consider the implications of literacy and numeracy levels for planning objectives to the extent that these require a future supply of skilled labour for work in mainstream occupations. One implication of poor school performance is evident in the lack of Aboriginal adults in the region with formal qualifications. The only comprehensive data available on this are from the 2001 Census and these can be used to estimate 2003 levels. On this basis, it is estimated that 16 Aboriginal adults have an advanced diploma, 12 have a certificate level qualification, and the vast majority (97%) have no formal qualification. Judging by the school attendance levels, and the literacy and numeracy levels indicated by the recent MAP performance results shown

above, there is little indication that this low level of post-school qualification will substantially alter in the near future. At the same time, much depends on participation and outcomes in vocational education and training.

Participation in vocational education and training

Post-secondary education and training leading to the acquisition of formal qualifications is available from the Northern Territory Technical and Further Education (TAFE) system and from private providers. Data on course and module enrolments are available from the Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training (NTDEET) for individuals in their database where Wadeye is indicated as the training provider location. Table 5.6 shows the number and proportion of Aboriginal enrolments recorded at Wadeye in this way for successfully completed courses by course level in 2001.

Overall, 88 individuals successfully completed courses in 2001, most of whom (77 per cent) were female. However, around three-quarters of all successfully completed courses for both males and females were in short miscellaneous enabling courses with no formal certification attached. Only 20 successfully completed enrolments were in certified courses, with all of these (except one Diploma) in Certificate levels I–III. As for the field of study, this was not indicated for the majority of cases (67), while the remainder was in building, and in health and community services. In the same year, a total of 48 enrolments were not successfully completed. Most of these (32) were module-only courses, five were at Certificate I level, seven were Certificate II, and three at Certificate III.

While data on course and module completions were not available beyond 2001, data on course enrolments specified in national training packages were made available for 2002. Overall, in 2002, 44 individuals (19 males and 25 females) were enrolled in nationally accredited qualification courses designed to lead to a qualification specified in a national training package. Most of these (22) were at Certificate I level, six were Certificate II, and 14 at Certificate III. As for the age distribution, all of those in Certificate I courses were aged 15–19.

Table 5.6. Assessable Aboriginal enrolments successfully completed by TAFE course level: Wadeye, 2001^a

Course level	Males		Females		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Module only	14	70.0	53	78.0	67	76.1
Certificate 1	3	15.0	3	4.4	6	6.8
Certificate 2	1	5.0	7	10.3	8	9.1
Certificate 3	1	5.0	5	7.3	6	6.8
Certificate 4	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Diploma	1	5.0	0	0.0	1	1.1
Total	20	100.0	68	100.0	88	100.0

a. Excludes Aboriginal status not stated

Source: NT DEET, Darwin

Enrolments in other nationally accredited courses, not leading to a qualification specified in a national training package were more numerous (157). Most of these trainees were female (96), and they were either at Certificate I level (82), or involved a basic statement of attainment not recognised by level (73).

As for outcomes, key performance measures in the VET sector tend to relate to efficiency, effectiveness and quality. In relation to the effectiveness of the training system, the key indicator is the rate of successful completion of modules—the components from which courses are constructed. In 2001, a total of 207 module enrolments were recorded. Of these, 124 (60%) were successfully completed (75 by females, and 49 by males), and 83 (40%) were not successfully completed (56 by females and 27 by males). In the successfully completed modules, the field of study was mostly not stated (62%), while most of the remainder was in building, health and community services, and TAFE multi-field education courses.