Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Schools and Early Learning – Factors associated with developing a Reconciliation Action Plan, November 2015

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Abstract

Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Schools and Early Learning is a major program designed and implemented by Reconciliation Australia. The program is designed to support all Australian schools and early learning services in developing a higher level of knowledge and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions. The analysis presented in this paper focuses on the factors associated with whether a school has commenced a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) as of November 19th, 2015. The aim was to identify types of schools and early learning services that may not have engaged at the same rate as other schools (all else being equal) and therefore areas where Reconciliation Australia might consider focusing additional attention. Compared to other educational institutions, Infants/Primary schools, preschools, education institutions outside of major cities, those in areas with high migrant populations or low Indigenous populations and those in relatively disadvantaged areas. These types of schools could be a focus of targeted engagement as *Narragunnawali* expands. There were, however, no differences between Independent schools and Government schools once other characteristics had been controlled for.

Acknowledgements

Overview of *Narragunnawali*

Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Schools and Early Learning is a major program designed and implemented by Reconciliation Australia. *Narragunnawali* (pronounced narra-gunna-wally) is a word from the language of the Ngunnawal people meaning alive, wellbeing, coming together and peace. The program is designed to support all Australian schools and early learning services in developing a higher level of knowledge and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions. The program is designed to be delivered at the whole-school or early learning service level, with benefits for all students and staff, as well as for the wider community.

Consultation identified that *Narragunnawali* would be most effective if targeted at teachers and educators as the key drivers of reconciliation. Reconciliation Australia aims to engage teachers through the Australian Curriculum (cross-curriculum priority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures) and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Focus area 2.4). It also aims to engage early childhood educators through the Early Years Learning Framework and the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority National Quality Standards. The existing reconciliation framework of developing *relationships*, showing *respect* and seeking mutual *opportunities* will be applied in schools and early learning services through classroom teaching and learning, the school or early learning service's culture and ethos, and the links with local community through *Narragunnawali's* four outputs. These are outlined below.

Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs)

Schools and early learning services are provided with a model for action using Reconciliation Australia's existing Reconciliation Framework (*Relationships, Respect, Opportunities*), combined with a whole-school and early learning service planning model that incorporates actions *in the Classroom* (teaching, learning, curriculum), *around the school or early learning service* (the ethos within the gate) and *with the community* (the links beyond the gate).

RAPs are not compulsory and participation in *Narragunnawali* is entirely voluntary. They are delivered through an online tool incorporating web-based project management and whole-school or early learning service change tools. For schools and early learning services, the online tool facilitates the development of plans to communicate with relevant local organisations and communities, and provides a suite of actions to choose from. It allows access to resources including teaching materials and links to relevant bodies and organisations.

The tool captures the following information: basic demographic data (address, FTE student enrolment, electorate) as per the existing Commonwealth Department of Education's dataset; working group members and working group survey responses regarding outputs –

at present a 24-question survey looking at outputs (flag flying, acknowledging Country, etc.); specific actions chosen from a finite list, who is responsible for implementing the action, when actions will be completed; and users' own demographic data (self-entered). The tool has the ability to capture a range of other data items which may be incorporated in ongoing discussions between the ANU and RA.

Curriculum Resources

With the introduction of the Australian Curriculum, and the Early Years Learning Framework, teachers in schools, and educators in early learning services, are required to engage in meaningful programming focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions. In response to these professional mandates, *Narragunnawali* contains curriculum resources that aim to fully integrate into nominated RAP actions, from within the RAP developer.

The goal is to support teachers and educators to better engage with the RAP actions for which they are responsible, by providing quality teaching and learning resources that work to complement the professional learning strategy, and by association, teachers' and educators' engagement with their school or early learning service RAP.

Professional Learning

Reconciliation Australia is developing *Narragunnawali's* professional learning component which aims to up-skill teachers and educators already taking the lead on reconciliation in their schools and early learning services, to build confidence in celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions. The professional learning component aims to assist teachers in meeting the National Quality Framework (element 6.3.4) and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Focus Area 2.4) which calls on teachers and educators to "understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians".

As RAPs are used as the conduit by which to support educators in engaging in meaningful actions, the first stage for professional learning will therefore focus on providing support for the implementation of RAPs in schools and early learning services. As part of the *Narragunnawali* community, schools and early learning services will have access to online resources and information that links directly to each action in the RAP developer. Resources for professional learning may include detailed case studies, podcasts/video series with discussion guides, and associated online forums for professional conversations. The aim is to provide teachers and educators with contextual knowledge and a deeper understanding around the actions in their Reconciliation Action Plans, which will better enable teachers to meaningfully promote reconciliation in their school or early learning community.

National Awards

Reconciliation Australia will develop a national awards program to reward Australian schools and early learning services that are driving significant change in their communities by building and/or maintaining strong relationships with their local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The awards will have a web-based, case study application process. Schools and early learning services cannot self-nominate and must be nominated or endorsed by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. The model may include State/Territory finalists and a national winner and prizes will likely be opportunity and experience based rather than monetary.

Focus of this paper

At the time of receiving data for this paper (November 19th, 2015), there were 414 schools and early learning services that had commenced a RAP (including those that developed a cluster RAP, where multiple schools/services are part of the same RAP). This makes up a very small proportion of in-scope education institutions, with a little under 10,000 schools in scope alongside a little over 10,000 early learning services. This low take-up reflects the relative infancy of the program, as well as the voluntary nature of the program.

One of the benefits of the low take-up is that any evaluation of the effect of *Narragunnawali* will be much more robust as it will be possible to build in an experimental design and also obtain pre-program or baseline data from those institutions that are yet to sign up. Furthermore, it is possible to analyse the characteristics of those institutions that have commenced a RAP and compare them with those that haven't to look at the factors associated with being an 'early adopter.'

These early adopters may be atypical. However, analysing their characteristics gives insight into types of institutions that may need a particular focus as *Narragunnawali* expands. With that background in mind, the focus of this paper is to look at the factors associated with the probability of a school or early learning centre commencing a RAP. The final section of the paper provides some concluding comments and future plans for evaluation and monitoring using similar data.

Factors associated with engagement with the RAP

The analysis in this section focuses on all schools and early learning centres within Australia and considers the factors associated with whether or not (by November 19th, 2015) they had commenced a RAP. The data for the analysis is constructed from three datasets as follows:

- Population dataset – The complete sample of schools as provided to the ANU by Reconciliation Australia. There were 9,957 schools in total and a further 10,108

early learning centres, with information available on location, level, gender mix, and socioeconomic status (amongst other things);

- RAP dataset – The schools and early learning services that have commenced a RAP, as provided to the ANU. There were 414 in total, excluding those set up as 'sample schools'; and

- Geographic dataset – Information on the area in which the school is located, sourced and customised from the 2011 Census of Population and Housing.

With three datasets, there are two sets of linking that needs to be undertaken. First, it is necessary to link information from the population dataset to the RAP dataset. This was done automatically using statistical software, based on exact match between school name, State/Territory and postcode. There were 30 schools that could not be linked. The resulting data was called 'Linked Data 1'.

The next linkage that took place is the area level information from the 2011 Census. There were two possible area level variables that could have been used for the linking – postcode and Local Government Area (LGA). Given the geographic size of some of the postcodes a decision was made to use the latter.

In addition to errors in transcription for this linkage, there was also the problem of changes between the 2011 version of the LGA naming and the version used in the Population dataset complicating the linking. For this reason, a combination of automatic and manual linking was used. The automatic linking between the Geographic dataset and the Linked Data 1 was carried out first, with the resulting data sorted first by name and then by whether there was a record in (a) both datasets (b) Linked Data 1 only or (c) Geographic data only. Those observations that fell into category (b) were interrogated manually. If a matching but differently worded observation could be found under category (c) then the wording was changed on the Geographic dataset. If a matching but differently worded observation could be found under category (a) then the wording was changed for the category (b) observations on Linked Data 1.

The above process was repeated until as few category (b) observations as possible remained. In total, there were 172 observations remaining in category (b) in what we label 'Linked Data 2'.

The final step in the data preparation was to transform the characteristics of the schools into a format that is suitable for analysis. Given the relatively small number of schools and early learning services with RAPs, it was necessary to use a reasonably parsimonious or simple model. As more schools and early learning services develop RAPs it will be possible to include more variables. Table 1 gives a list of variables used in the analysis, as well as the average values for that variable. The first part of the table is a list of binary variables, or those that take on a value of one if the school or early learning service has that category and zero if it does not. For these schools and early learning services the value in the final column represents the proportion of schools and early learning services

that fit into that category. The reference category against which these schools and early learning service should be compared is given in the second column. For other variables the value in the final column refers to the average across the sample of schools and early learning services.

Table 1   Explanatory variables used to analyse the factors associated with engagement

Variable name	Reference category	Proportion/average
Catholic school	Government school	0.090
Private school	Government school	0.061
Special school	Government school	0.022
Child care centre	Infants/Primary school	0.304
Preschool	Infants/Primary school	0.120
Combined year levels	Infants/Primary school	0.058
Secondary school	Infants/Primary school	0.088
Single sex school	Co-ed school	0.522
Boarding school	Non-boarding schools	0.011
School in inner regional Australia	School in a major city	0.221
School in outer regional Australia	School in a major city	0.119
School in remote or very remote Australia	School in a major city	0.041
Per cent of area identified as being Indigenous		3.203
Per cent of area born overseas		24.195
SEIFA advantage/disadvantage percentile of area*		63.763
Victoria		0.248
Queensland		0.180
South Australia		0.072
Western Australia		0.106
Tasmania		0.023
Northern Territory		0.015
Australian Capital Territory		0.017

Note: * A higher value for the SEIFA advantage/disadvantage index represents a more socioeconomically advantaged area.

Like many of the explanatory variables in the analysis, the dependent variables is binary – taking on a value of one if the school or early learning service has commenced a RAP and zero if it has not. Across all schools and early learning services, 2.1 per cent could be identified as having commenced. As mentioned, this is an underestimate due to the difficulty of linking the RAP dataset to the Population dataset when there are multiple schools with the same name. This is an issue that will be picked up in the discussion.

In order to analyse the factors associated with commencing a RAP, a regression-style analysis is used. Specifically, we consider whether a particular variable is associated or correlated with having a RAP whilst holding constant or abstracting from all other variables in the model. For example, we know that Catholic or Private schools are more likely to be Secondary schools than Infants/Primary schools. In our analysis, we look at whether Catholic or Private schools are more likely to have a RAP than a Government school regardless of whether the school is a Infants/Primary or Secondary one. Similarly, we look at the association between the Indigenous share of the area and having a RAP for a given level of remoteness. This is not quite a causal relationship, as there are other unobserved characteristics that aren't in the model. But it is getting closer to a direct association.

We present the results in Table 2 as marginal effects or the difference in probability of having a RAP compared to a school or early learning service with the base case characteristics. The base case characteristics are described underneath the table, but are

in essence a school with the reference category characteristics from Table 1 for the binary variable and mean characteristics for the continuous variables. The marginal effects for the binary variables are then expressed as the difference between a school or early learning service with that characteristic and a school or early learning service with the base case characteristics whilst holding all else constant. The marginal effects for the continuous variables are expressed as the difference in probability from a one-unit change in that variable. The statistical significance of the relationship is given in the final column, as described underneath the table. We discuss the results from each of the groups of variables below the table.

Table 2   Factors associated with engagement with a RAP

Variable name	Marginal effect	Significance
Catholic school	0.0135	***
Private school	-0.0027	
Special school	-0.0084	
Child care centre	0.0022	
Preschool	-0.0087	***
Combined year levels	0.0253	***
Secondary school	0.0142	***
Single sex school	-0.0001	
Boarding school	0.0272	***
School in inner regional Australia	-0.0021	
School in outer regional Australia	-0.0101	***
School in remote or very remote Australia	-0.0097	***
Per cent of area identified as being Indigenous	0.0003	*
Per cent of area born overseas	-0.0002	*
SEIFA advantage/disadvantage percentile of area*	0.0001	***
Victoria	0.0015	
Queensland	0.0131	***
South Australia	0.0284	***
Western Australia	-0.0023	
Tasmania	-0.0045	
Northern Territory	0.0159	
Australian Capital Territory	0.0757	***
Predicted probability of base case	0.0138	
Pseudo R-Squared	0.0771	
Sample size	19,953	

Note: The base case school is a Government, Infants/Primary, that is co-ed and does not provide boarding and located in a major city. The base-case school has the average values for the three continuous variables from Table 1. A higher value for the SEIFA advantage/disadvantage index represents a more socioeconomically advantaged area. Those coefficients that were statistically significant at the 1% level of significance are labelled ***, those significant at the 5% level of significance only are labelled **, and those significant at the 10% level of significance only are labelled *.

School type

There was no significant difference between in the probability of commencing a RAP between Government schools (the base case) and Independent schools or Special Schools. However, Special schools make up only a very small proportion of schools (less than 5%). There is, however, a difference between Government schools and Catholic schools with the latter being significantly more likely to have commenced a RAP. What the

results imply, therefore, is that even though the interaction that Reconciliation Australia has had with the Government, Catholic and Independent sectors has been the as consistent as possible, Catholic schools appear to be more likely to have signed up.

School level

There was no difference between childcare centres and infants/primary schools in terms of the probability of having commenced a RAP. There was, however, a difference with preschools[1] as a subset of early learning services, which were significantly less likely to have commenced. The marginal effect was not, however, very large.

Those schools that cater to secondary students either combined or solely are significantly and substantially more likely to have commenced a RAP compared to those that cater to infants or primary students only. The differences are quite large with more than twice the probability for those schools with secondary students. There are two potential explanations for this, both of which require further analysis once the program has been around for longer. First, it may relate to the size of the schools. Schools with secondary students tend to be larger and therefore there is greater scope for a particular staff member in those schools to engage with a RAP. The other explanation is that school leaders feel that the resources and activities within the RAP are better-suited or more important for older students. This is an area worth pursuing with the qualitative data collection.

School sex composition.

There was no difference between co-ed schools and single sex schools in terms of RAP engagement.

Boarding schools

While there are very few boarding schools in Australia (and the sample), those schools which provide boarding facilities are much more likely to have commenced a RAP. Indeed, the probability is almost three times as high as the base case school. In many ways this is a positive finding. Boarding schools are seen by some as a resource for remote Indigenous students without access to good quality schooling. Furthermore, those students that do attend schools that provide boarding (Indigenous or non-Indigenous) spend more time within the school and have a much closer and more intense interaction with staff and other students. It is particularly important for these schools to ensure their

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[1] There is some uncertainty around the distinction between child care centres and preschools in the data. The distinction is made based on the variable 'type', which includes four categories: Child Care Centre; Family Day Care; Kindergarten; and Preschool. The first of these two are grouped into the variable 'child care centre', as they cater to a greater range of children and have a greater focus on custodial care. The latter two are grouped into the variable 'Preschools' and tend to cater to children in the year or two before full-time schooling. This distinction, however, is somewhat blurry and the variable comes from data provided to Reconciliation Australia and has not been validated. So, while it has some valid information, it should therefore be treated with caution.

curriculum and practices are supportive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories.

Remoteness

Those schools and early learning services outside of major cities are less likely to have commenced a RAP than those in major cities, with the difference largest for outer regional, remote and very remote schools and early learning services. Keeping in mind that the model is controlling for the proportion of the area that identify as being Indigenous, this result probability indicates the affect of distance on being an early adopter. This is an area for Reconciliation Australia to potentially focus additional attention on.

Indigenous per cent of area

There is a small positive association between the per cent of the area in which the school is located that identifies as being Indigenous and the probability of commencing a RAP. This is in many ways a positive finding as Indigenous children may receive a particular benefit from attending a school or early learning service with a RAP. However, as the program is not focused on Indigenous students or communities only, there is a danger that those non-Indigenous students who attend schools with fewer Indigenous students may be missing out.

Per cent of area born overseas

Those areas that have a large per cent of the population that was born overseas were less likely to have commenced a RAP than those students with a lower per cent. The marginal effect for this variable appears small, though it should be kept in mind that it is calculated as the change in probability from a one-unit increase (from 22.258 per cent to 23.258 per cent). This is a finding of relevance to Reconciliation Australia as there is no reason why those students who were born overseas or whose parents were born overseas would not benefit from a RAP. This may be evidence that a reframing needs to be made to make sure that schools and early learning services see it this way as well.

Socioeconomic status of area

Those areas that are in relatively advantaged areas are more likely to have engaged with a RAP than those in relatively disadvantaged areas. Once again, the marginal effect reflects the scale used for that variable (from 1 to 100). There is strong evidence that in Australia those schools and early learning services that have relatively disadvantaged students or are in relatively disadvantaged areas struggle with resources and need to devote more time to remedial and behavioural (as opposed to academic) programs. Those disadvantaged schools and early learning services may just not have the time to engage with a RAP and may therefore need additional resources and support to do so.

State/Territory

Schools and early learning services in the Australian Capital Territory have a very large probability of having commenced a RAP, almost six times the national average. There may be unobservable characteristics driving this difference, however it may also reflect the proximity of these schools to the main office of Reconciliation Australia. There was a second tier of jurisdictions – Victoria, South Australia and the Northern Territory – that appear to have a larger probability, controlling for a range of other characteristics. The last of these was not statistically significant, however the marginal effect was reasonably large. Given the analysis controls for socioeconomic status, remoteness, Indigenous share of the area and the per cent of the area born overseas, it would appear that State/Territory education policies may be having an association.

Concluding comments

The analysis presented in this paper focused on the factors associated with whether a school or early learning service has commenced a RAP (as of November 19th, 2015). The aim was to identify types of schools and early learning services that may not have engaged at the same rate as other schools (all else being equal) and therefore area where Reconciliation Australia might consider focusing additional attention. The 'early adopters' that were identified are clearly different to other schools and early learning services in observable ways, and that is useful information.

Null results are also important in this type of analysis. An important finding, therefore, was that there were no differences between Independent schools and Government schools once other characteristics had been controlled for. This suggests that engagement with the sectors had been reasonably even, though it should be noted that there was a difference with Catholic schools, which were found to have a higher probability.

There were, however, schools and early learning services that appear to have engaged more slowly than others. This includes Infants/Primary schools, preschools, education institutions outside of major cities, those in areas with high migrant populations or low Indigenous populations and those in relatively disadvantaged areas. These types of schools could be a focus of targeted engagement as *Narragunnawali* expands.

The analysis presented in this paper is just an initial quantitative look at the data available. There is much more that could be done as the program matures and more schools sign on. In addition to updating the analysis on a semi-regular basis, some proposed future analysis is outlined below:

- Stocks vs flows – The analysis presented in this paper looked at the stock of schools that had engaged with a RAP up until a certain period of time. It is also important to analyse the flow of schools into a RAP over given time periods (for example 2015 compared to 2016). This will help establish whether the very-early

adopters were different to the early adopters and whether they were different to later adopters.

- School level factors – A reasonably parsimonious model was used due to the small number of schools already engaged. However, a more complete model would include additional information on the schools themselves. This includes (but is not limited to) – size of the school; NAPLAN or other test scores; socioeconomic status of the students, not just the area; the per cent of students identified as Indigenous; characteristics of the teachers; or the year in which the school was established. A separate set of variables would need to be constructed for early learning services as well.

- Spatial analysis – All of the schools in the Population dataset are geo-coded. In this analysis, such data was used to link area level information to the school. However, with more schools available it would be possible to undertake a more detailed spatial analysis. For example, does the distance from another school with a RAP increase or decrease the probability of a given school engaging themselves?

- Specific actions – Due to the small numbers of schools and early learning services, it was not possible to analyse the factors associated with specific actions commenced or completed. This is a very important area for further analysis.

The proposed future analysis does not mitigate the important findings from nor the rigour of the current analysis. It is hoped that these results will support the ongoing development and improvement of this very important policy initiative.