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Title

Taken for a ride? How the education vehicle breaks down for First Nations people wanting to get ahead.

Abstract

The 'education is the key' mantra is often used as a metaphor in remote First Nations communities to indicate the importance of learning to achieve some measure of socio-economic advantage. It is fair to say that First Nations people have bought into education and training vehicle with enthusiasm. The Year 12 completion data coming out of Closing the Gap suggest that 'gaps' are closing. The rates of people holding certificate qualifications in remote communities are also increasing at a fast pace. But the vehicle appears to be breaking down as it heads along the road towards jobs and economic participation.

This paper presents an analysis of Census data from 2001 to 2016 to show trends in qualification uptake, year 12 attainment, employment and income. The data, based on the 'very remote' regions of the ABS Remoteness Classification Structure, points to strong growth in educational achievement, consistent with Closing the Gap. But our 'break down' of the data into non-Indigenous, First Nations language speakers and First Nations English speakers shows little change in the economic fortunes of language speakers. The authors unpack why this may be and consider what might need to change for the vehicle to get back on the road again.

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