Learning, earning and yearning: Disruption, innovation and expansion in Indigenous education

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Abstract
‘What for, I do this?’ asks an Aboriginal young man who has just become the first in his community to finish high school. Rather than celebrating his achievement, he felt the need to ask one of the most profound questions in education — what for or why? This particular story, discovered during the course of my PhD research, leads to an even larger question: How do we personalise education?

The question seems a mile away from the perennial debate in education – ‘back to basics’ versus an expansive education agenda. Conservatives in the ‘back to basics’ corner rightly point out that proficiency in literacy and numeracy is fundamental to successful economic and social participation later in life, while progressives in the expansion corner justifiably point to the need for all learners to become producers and not mere consumers of learning, by learning to learn, by thinking critically and creatively, by developing self-identity and expression, and by becoming more entrepreneurial and culturally engaged in a globalised world.

A new paradigm that synthesises these forces is necessary, if not urgent. This presentation proposes such a paradigm by drawing upon national and international theory, data and literature calling for greater disruption, innovation and expansion in education; by gifting Indigenous young people with educational experiences that go to relevance, context and ‘place’, identity and character, agency and enterprise, aspiration, culture and a sense of learning, earning and yearning.