

Cuba's 'Yes I Can' in Australia. Three Years On
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Abstract

In twenty six countries around the world, Cuba's *Yo Sí Puedo* (*Yes I Can*) mass literacy campaign model has provided basic literacy instruction to over six million people. The model was developed by the Institute of Pedagogy for Latin America and the Caribbean (IPLAC) in 2000, at a time when international donors and New Literacy Studies scholars had turned away from such mass approaches in favour of small-scale localised literacy programs. In 2012, a pilot of this model began in the western NSW Aboriginal community of Wilcannia, funded by the Commonwealth WELL program. In 2013-14, the pilot was extended to two more communities in the same region, with funding support from the Commonwealth and NSW governments. The authors of this paper have been involved in an extended participatory action research evaluation of the pilot phase, a process which has provided valuable practical learning about the Cuban model and how best it can be adapted to the circumstances of Aboriginal communities. This paper presents some findings from the research, including an analysis of the teaching theory and practice embodied in the Cuban-produced resources, and some quantitative and qualitative evidence of the individual and collective impact of the campaign in the host communities. The findings and analysis from the pilot lead to some critical reflections on the value of mass campaigns and the relationship of *Yes I Can* to the Freirian tradition of popular education for social transformation.

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Introduction

On Friday, 14th March, 2014, over 200 people gathered in Central Park in the small remote town of Bourke in western New South Wales, for the graduation of forty eight students from the communities of Wilcannia, Enngonia and Bourke from the Aboriginal adult literacy campaign. The young Muda Muda dancers opened the proceedings with a welcome dance. The Master of Ceremonies, Jack Beetson, a Ngemba man from nearby Brewarrina who is the National Campaign Coordinator and Executive Director of the Literacy for Life Foundation introduced Alastair Ferguson, Chairperson of the Bourke Aboriginal Community Working Party, to give the Welcome to Country speech. Speaker after speaker then rose to congratulate the graduates and express their support for the campaign. The diversity was striking, ranging from the local campaign coordinators, to public servants representing both NSW and Commonwealth governments, to the manager of the Panthers NRL football team, to the Cuban Ambassador to Australia. Finally, Ambassador Monzon, and the Literacy for Life Foundation Chairperson Donna Ah Chee presented certificates to each graduate. Several students then came back to the microphone, to read out letters they had written in their final lessons, thanking their teachers, the campaign team and their Cuban adviser Lucy Peraza. Edward Barker's letter summed up the feelings of many students:

Your Yes, I Can program helped me a lot because before I started these lessons I couldn't understand many things that they taught me at school. It was really hard to understand most of my teachers. But through the Yes, I Can, it has been easier. We all learned at a slower and easier way. Now I can write sentences, paragraphs and even letters so I can do whatever I want to do in my life because I can read, write and understand better.

Thank you to the Yes, I Can Programme for turning my life around.

That night, the graduation made national news on NITV, and appeared again the following night on SBS.

In this paper, we present findings from an extended participatory action research evaluation of the pilot of the Cuban-designed *Yes I Can* campaign in Aboriginal communities in Australia. We begin by explaining the campaign model, the local context of the pilot, and the pedagogy of the *Yes I Can* lessons operate. We then present some quantitative and qualitative data on the campaign outcomes and its impact in the pilot communities. In the third section, we consider the history and theory underlying the Cuban model, and whether it represents a Freirian popular education approach to the literacy. In conclusion, we call for a renewed focus on the relationship between mass literacy campaigns and social transformation.

The Campaign Model & The Australian Pilots

While never previously attempted in Australia, the mass campaign model for building adult literacy has been a feature of development efforts in many countries over several hundred years, and most recently in countries of the Global South (Arnové and Graff 2008). As two international experts describe it:

The mass campaign approach... seeks to involve all segments of society in order to make all adult men and women in a nation (*or region*) literate

within a particular time-span. Literacy is seen as a means to a comprehensive set of ends – economic, social, structural, cultural and political (Lind & Johnston 1990, p.85).

In keeping with their scale, mass literacy campaigns measure their initial success using simple population-level definitions of the literacy rate, i.e. the number of people able to read and write a simple sentence or paragraph about one's life in one of the official languages of the country concerned. Unlike small-scale literacy courses and programs, which have virtually no impact on the overall rate of literacy measured in this way, mass campaigns set out to achieve population-level change. They generally form the first stage of a much longer process, in which previously 'illiterate' adults are encouraged to participate in a staged process of non-formal mass adult education, designed to build literacy, numeracy and general knowledge in the population as a whole, up to at least the level achieved through basic (i.e. primary) school education (Bhola 1984).

The pilot in Australia followed a model which we first worked with in the national literacy campaign in Timor-Leste (Boughton 2010). This model was developed in 2000 at the Institute of Pedagogy for Latin America and the Caribbean (IPLAC), part of the Enrique Jose Varona University of Pedagogical Sciences in Havana, Cuba. Since then, it has been deployed in 26 countries, helping more than 6 million people to acquire basic literacy. Following a period of preparation, in which the national structure and resourcing is laid down, the campaign rolls out at a community level in three phases, each of which supports the other two. **Phase One**, called *Socialisation and Mobilisation*, seeks to engage the whole community in addressing the problem, with visits to every household to identify people willing to take part, extensive community education, promotion and publicity, and enlistment of local organisations and agencies as campaign partners and sponsors. **Phase Two** comprises a set of *basic literacy lessons*, taught to groups of 15-20 adults per class by specially-trained local facilitators using the Cuban *Yes I Can* ("Yo Si Puedo") audio-visual resources. **Phase Three**, which is called *Post Literacy*, engages the partner organisations working with the campaign team to provide opportunities for the new graduates to consolidate their literacy in structured activities and work experience, with the aim of building pathways into further education, employment and socially-useful community work. All three phases have to begin, in a sense, at the same time, and continue simultaneously, for the campaign to gain the required momentum. We have likened this to the three spokes of a wheel, each of which must be strong for the wheel to continue rolling.

In every country, the campaign begins with a pilot to test the method and materials and adapt them to the local context. In Australia, the pilot occurred in two stages. The aim was to discover if (and how) the *Yes I Can* model could be adapted to the special 'fourth world' (Smallwood 1986) conditions of Aboriginal communities in Australia. The first stage began in Wilcannia in the second half of 2011, led by a Steering Committee of national Aboriginal health and education leaders and funded by NSW and Commonwealth governments (Boughton et al 2013). In July 2013, the pilot moved to a second stage, involving two more communities in the Murdi Paaki region of NSW, Bourke and Enngonia. Both stages were conducted under an agreement with IPLAC, which provided advisers

trained in the model to live on-site in the pilot communities and assist with the deployment. The University of New England was the overall project manager, and led the evaluation.

Table 1 below summarises the outcomes to date. As at July 2014, 81 people from three of the most educationally and socially disadvantaged communities in Australia have successfully completed the *Yes I Can* literacy lessons and moved on to the post-literacy phase.

Table 1. Summary Statistics 2012-2014

	Wilcannia	Bourke/Enngonia	Total
Adult population	279	486	765
Est target population (40%)	112	194	306
Surveyed	103	173	276
Expressions of interest	41	122	163
Interest/surveyed	39.8%	70.5%	59.1%
Starters	40	78	118
Graduates	23	58	81
Completion rate	57.5%	74.4%	68.6%

Notes:

- In Stage Two, the campaign ran five intakes and achieved 64 new graduates, 7 from Wilcannia, 15 from Enngonia and 42 from Bourke;
- This was 14 more than the targets set in the campaign funding contracts;
- 60% of the graduates (38) were female;
- Average completions per intake rose by 60%, from 8 in Stage One to 13 in Stage Two;
- Retention rates reached 74% in the new sites, Bourke & Enngonia, which is very high for adult literacy courses.

In addition to these outcomes, fifteen Aboriginal people from these communities, including some graduates from the earlier intakes, have been trained to work in the campaign as organisers and literacy facilitators. Most importantly, the campaign gained the support of a wide cross-section of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community, which in many cases took the form of practical contributions and participation in campaign activities. Despite these achievements, there are still significant numbers of Aboriginal adults with low literacy in Wilcannia (est 90 +) and Bourke (est 220) who have not joined, and the campaign needs to continue in those locations. There are also significant challenges in maintaining participation levels in the post-literacy phase. To achieve a higher rate of adult literacy at a regional level within five years, will require a significant 'scaling up' of the campaign.

During the pilot stage, the Aboriginal Steering Committee worked with a corporate sponsor, Brookfield Multiplex, to establish a national not-for-profit organisation, the Literacy for Life Foundation, to take responsibility for this 'upscaling'. The Foundation has now begun preparations to extend the campaign to four more of the 14 communities in the Murdi Paaki region of western NSW;

and to other regions around Australia. The aim is to achieve a substantial reduction in the number of Aboriginal adults who have little or no English language literacy; and by this means, to make a significant contribution to overcoming Indigenous disadvantage in Australia.

Contextual background. The Region and the Communities

The mass literacy campaign model developed by IPLAC is designed to operate on a national and global scale. Nevertheless, every country and every community brings its own history and context to the process. This is particularly important in Aboriginal Australia, which consists of hundreds of separate independent 'First Nations' and language groups. To contextualise the campaign to this local reality, the national campaign team was required to undertake ongoing collaborative research with the local partner organisations, the local staff and the participants. This began in the preparatory phase, and continued through all three phases of the campaign, informing the way the national and local staff approached their work. This section of the paper summarises some of this research.

The Murdi Paaki region of western NSW has an 'identity' based on a long history of its eighteen communities working together, initially under ATSIC, and more recently via the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (MPRA) (Urbis Keys Young 2006). The other communities include Brewarrina, Broken Hill, Cobar, Collarenebri, Coonamble, Dareton, Goolooga, Gulargambone, Ivanhoe, Lightning Ridge, Menindee, Walgett, and Weilmoringle. The region includes several Local Government Areas, and also overlaps with the western region of the NSW Aboriginal Land Council.

The Aboriginal people of the region come from many different tribal and language groupings, and the pattern of settlement today is a product of a long and often violent history of colonisation. Non-Aboriginal people entered the region in the mid nineteenth century, but already by then, imported diseases which arrived with the invaders had spread inland, reducing numbers by up to 90%. After an initial massive expansion of the pastoral industry forced many of the remaining people off their lands, drought and recession at the end of the nineteenth century led to another change in settlement patterns. For the next seventy years, the region was progressively divided up into smaller holdings, on which Aboriginal people found intermittent work as shearers, fencers and fruit and cotton chippers (Thompson 2001). The dispossession of the original Aboriginal owners and occupiers of these lands was facilitated through forced removal to several government stations and missions in the region established in the first half of the last century. This period also saw the emergence and slow growth of an Aboriginal civil rights movement, which demanded full citizenship rights and the return of some of the stolen lands (Goodall 1996).

Following the successes of the Aboriginal civil rights movement in the 1960s and the 1967 Referendum, the first 'modern' Aboriginal political organisations were established in the region in the 1970s. In Bourke, an Aboriginal Advancement Association formed, followed by a Housing Cooperative. (Kamien 1978). Across

the region, there arose other organisations including the Western Aboriginal Legal Service, the Western Women's Council and several local Aboriginal Medical Services. In 1983, the NSW Land Rights formalised the existence of local Aboriginal land councils (LALCs), and the number of local Aboriginal organisations continued to grow through the 1980s and 1990s.

In 2007, the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly's Regional Plan described the makeup of the regions different Aboriginal peoples as follows:

Many Aboriginal people today have difficulty tracing their descent to particular language groups because of the disruption brought about by European settlement. However many people in the Murdi Paaki region can trace their ancestry to the Paakantji/Baakandji, Ngiyampaa, Wangaaybuwan, Ngemba, Wayilwan, Murrawari, Wangkumara, Muti Muti, Ularai, Baranbinja, Malyangapa, Gamilaroi, Kuja, Budbadjui and Gunu nations. European influence came relatively late to far western and north western NSW and it has been possible for Aboriginal people of the Murdi Paaki region to conserve and pass on more of their culture and language than many of the Aboriginal peoples of coastal areas. (GHD 2007, p.12),

In total, at the 2011 Census, the region had an Aboriginal population of 8378 people, an increase of 3% since the last census, over which period the region's population as a whole was in decline. Aboriginal people now comprise over 17% of the total population, making them a very significant minority. The Aboriginal population is also much younger than the non-Aboriginal population, with an average and a median age of 15 (AANSW 2014). This means the Aboriginal population's importance in the region's social and economic development is set to grow in coming years. At the same time, there has been a major decline in opportunities for so-called unskilled work, and so the education level of the population will be crucial to any attempts to maintain a viable regional economy. Already in 2013, the Commonwealth's Remote Jobs & Communities Program (RJCP) website had identified 251 job seekers in the Far West Region NSW, and 768 in the Upper Darling region, i.e. 1016 people overall. We can safely anticipate from the PIAAC data (see below) that a significant proportion of this population will have very low English language literacy.

In 2011, only 48% of the Murdi Paaki region Aboriginal teenagers aged 15-19 were in education, compared with 66% of non-Aboriginal teenagers. There is also a significant and growing gap, as in NSW more generally, in Year 12 completions, with only 14% of the Murdi Paaki region Aboriginal adults having completed 12 years of school, compared with 30% of non- Aboriginal adults. Similar participation gaps exist in TAFE and Higher Education participation and completions, with only 32% of the Murdi Paaki region Aboriginal adults aged 15+ with a post-school qualification, compared with 45% of non- Aboriginal adults (AANSW 2014).

The first step in any effective development strategy must be to raise the overall literacy level in the adult population, since a more literate culture in the community is an essential foundation for ongoing educational improvement. Based on the total Aboriginal adult population, we estimate there are up to 3000 Aboriginal people aged 15 and over in the Murdi Paaki region who have low or

very low literacy, defined as at or below Level One on the scale devised for the OECD-sponsored Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) (OECD 2012). It is safe to assume that this section of the Aboriginal population will be over-represented in the regions unemployment figures, in the people with health problems, in the families which have trouble getting children to go to school, and in the people who are caught up in the criminal justice system. For a literacy campaign to overcome this problem within a five year period requires between 300 and 600 people to graduate per year. This was not the goal of the pilot stage, however. Rather, the aim was to undertake further testing and development of the campaign model, to discover what would be required to upscale it to a regional level.

The Pilot Communities

Bourke was one of the largest towns which the colonisers established in the region, originally as a river port, as was Wilcannia. In 1938, an abattoir opened on the edge of town which then provided unskilled and semi-skilled work, as did the Department of Main Roads and the Shire Council. In the 1940s, a new wave of Aboriginal occupation began, with the arrival of Wangkumara people who had been forcibly removed from Tibooburra South West Queensland to Brewarrina Mission Station, from where they had begun a long walk home, but were stopped by flooding (Barker 2014). The Bourke Aboriginal reserve was established in 1946 on 46 hectares on the western edge of town (Kamien 1978; Cowlshaw & Mackay 2006).

Aboriginal people lived at Enngonia since the nineteenth century, but the Aboriginal reserve, where the majority of people now live, was only gazetted in 1957. As with Bourke, Enngonia people had come from a range of other localities, but in the 2005 Community Working Party Plan, it was said that the majority identified with the local land owning language group, the Murruwarri people; while some families claimed Kunye and Bidgiti descent. Many of the Murrawari people living at Enngonia came from Weilmoringle and nearby localities, and still had ties with families living at Weilmoringle (Burns Aldis 2005; Cowlshaw & Mackay 2006).

In the 1970s, at the same time as Aboriginal organisations were emerging, the rural economy was heading into a long term decline, in part due to drought but also to mechanisation and rationalisation which resulted from the growing dominance of agribusiness companies in the rural sector. The abattoir closed in the 1990s. As economic conditions declined, social problems increased, race relations became more toxic and rates of arrest and incarceration climbed. Worsening relations between sections of the Aboriginal community and police culminated in outbreaks of street violence (called 'riots' by the media at the time) in 1988 and 1998 with multiple arrests (Cowlshaw 2004). The government focus on indicators of so-called community dysfunction continued in 2010 and 2012, with Bourke and nearby Brewarrina the subject of two separate investigations by NSW Ombudsman, focussing on child protection issues. The reputation of Bourke as a dangerous place was reinforced by media reports in early 2013 stating:

The remote north-western NSW town of Bourke has topped the state in six of the eight major crime categories in the past 12 months, prompting a call for a "full-hearted attack" to fix drug and alcohol problems in the town. (SMH 2 February 2013).

These conditions have not been improved by the failure of several local Aboriginal organisations to overcome problems of internal conflict and mal-administration.

Table 2, below, shows that in 2011, the adult population of the two new communities (15 & over) not enrolled in school or further education was approximately 500 people.

Table 2. Adult population not in education, Bourke & Enngonia 2011

Location	Males	Females	Total
Bourke	202	247	449
Enngonia	22	15	37
Total	222	262	484

Source: 2011 Census Tables

However, Aboriginal Affairs NSW claim that the ABS 'undercount' means that, on average, the Aboriginal population may be about a fifth larger than counted. The initial target population for the literacy campaign, based on the conservative assumption of 40% having low literacy, was therefore 250-300 people. To date, 58 people in these two communities have completed the *Yes I Can* lessons (See Table 3, below).

***Yes I Can* Pedagogy. Theory and Practice**

Until our work on the campaign in Timor-Leste (Boughton 2010; 2012;2013) and the first pilot in Wilcannia (Boughton et al 2012), only one previous study in English had analysed the Cuban *Yes I Can* campaign model (UNESCO 2006). This section seeks to provide a more comprehensive account, firstly of the process by which the model is contextualised to local conditions, and secondly, the pedagogical theory and practice of the *Yes I Can* DVD lessons.

Contextualisation

Contextualisation refers to the process of adapting the model to the circumstances of the country, region and community where it is being used. Contextualisation occurs across all three phases of the Campaign and is a continuous process. However this adaptation takes place within the Campaign structure itself and within the *Yes, I Can!* curriculum. In other words, the integrity of Campaign model including the lessons must be maintained. Each community that enters the campaign – and each region, and country – has to decide what aspects of the Campaign model can be changed to make it more responsive to local conditions. In the pilot stages in western NSW, this has been done in each phase.

During Phase 1 (Mobilisation and socialisation), our understanding of the local context helped to determine the selection of an appropriate lead agency, the recruitment of local staff, the choice of location for the campaign office and training facility, the hours of work, the selection of working group members, the organisation of the launches and graduation classes, the local sponsors and partners approached, the priority areas for the local survey, and a significant amount of the content of the initial training e.g. background to the campaign in Australia and an introduction to the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF)¹. We also had to take account of legal and administrative structures specific to Australia and these communities e.g. Centrelink and job service agency requirements on participants, school attendance legislation and those of the Probation & Parole service. Most importantly, the survey provides a wealth of information about the issues which are most important to people with low literacy in these specific communities, information which then helped to inform the overall way we built support for the campaign, including the choice of local slogans and the words used in publicity brochures.

During Phase 2, the *Yes, I Can!* Lessons, the contextual understandings built through the socialisation and mobilisation work were incorporated into the way the lessons are conducted, but without changing the basic lesson sequence and structure. In Bourke, each of the 3 intakes opted for running the classes over three days, Monday-Wednesday, in the mornings. In Enngonia, they chose to have longer classes, but only meet on two days, Monday and Tuesday, to fit in with local arrangements for getting to Bourke for shopping. Following on from the pilot in Wilcannia, we continued with a practice called 'catch-up.' This involved local staff, with adviser support, timetabling three additional one hour sessions at different times for students who have missed a regular lesson, to ensure no one falls too far behind. Other changes to take account of local conditions included undertaking pre- and post- literacy assessments using the ACSF; developing our own model lesson plan structure for each lesson; development of practice activities for each lesson which included local words, phrases, and examples; relating the positive messages to the local context; and relating Grenadan words and phrases to local usage. It was also built into the ongoing facilitator training sessions, and our monitoring and review process, including weekly reflections on the progress.

In Phase 3 (post-literacy) all the activities were determined in consultation with local staff and the participants, and many were specific to the particular needs of these communities and delivered in partnership with local agencies, such as the Bourke Aboriginal Health Service and the Enngonia Public School. We also had to ensure that activities complied with participants Centrelink and job-seeker obligations; and built pathways into courses available through local VET providers.

¹ The ACSF is used in Australia to identify five levels of performance across the four domains of reading, writing, learning, oral communication and literacy. Government-funded literacy and numeracy programs are expected to align with this framework, and in Stage One of the pilot, we mapped the Yes I Can lesson outcomes against three of these domains (Boughton et al 2013).

The Lessons

The Cuban-made DVD lessons are a defining feature of the *Yes I Can* model. When participants arrive for their class, they sit in chairs, behind desks, with a large TV screen at the front of the room. The facilitator introduces the lesson briefly, and then the students watch a 30-minute DVD on a TV screen. On the DVD, they see a class of five “actor-students” learning how to read and write from an “actor-teacher” and an “actor-assistant teacher”. From time to time, topics being talked about in the class will be illustrated with footage of scenes from the region of the actor-students. In Australia in the pilot stage, DVDs from the 2003 Grenada campaign are being used. During the lesson, the facilitator stops the DVD, so the “real” students can discuss a topic, or complete an activity in their workbooks which they have just seen completed by the actor-students. Following the DVD lesson, participants spend another 30 minutes doing practice activities. Watching the DVD lesson and completing the practice activities takes a maximum of one hour.

The teacher on the DVD uses a “traditional” phonics instruction method, building letter and sound awareness, and the technique of writing, then the ability to hear, read and write letters, words and phrases, progressing by the final lessons to sentences and paragraphs. Each letter is learned in the initial 42 lessons through association with a specific number, using a Guide Table e.g. 1 – a; 2 – e; 3 – i; 4 – o; all the way to 26, in the case of the English version. The Cubans call this method “alphanumeric”, and it was adopted because of the belief that, even in communities with very little literacy, there is some familiarity with numbers because of money and markets. The numbers correspond to the importance of the letter in constructing words, e.g., in the English version, vowels are 1–5; and the subsequent numbering follows as closely as possible to the frequency of each consonant’s use in the language of instruction.

The lessons are divided into three stages. There are 7 basic introductory lessons, 45 reading, writing and revision lessons, and 12 consolidation and extension lessons with assessment activities. Lesson 1 introduces the model, and Lesson 64 is an evaluation activity for the facilitators. Lessons 2–7 are designed for people with no prior experience of reading and writing, and include exercises to practise holding a pen and forming simple shapes. Because almost all the participants in Australia have had some basic instruction in the past, we have been able to skip over these lessons and go straight from Lesson 1 to Lesson 8.

Each lesson follows a predictable structured sequence, which the Cubans call an “algorithm” and which the students and facilitators quickly learn. As further discussed below, the lesson begins with a discussion topic, which introduces a key letter or word. Easily recognisable icons in each lesson cue the students to observe, listen, speak and write, following the example of the students on screen. From time to time, the lesson is paused to allow students to complete exercises in pre-printed workbooks or writing pads, exercises they have just seen the actor-students do on screen. Each class ends with another period of practice of the letters and words learned during that session. As suits people with minimal or no prior literacy and minimal confidence as learners, the initial steps are very small, beginning with motor skills, then vowels and consonants, then diphthongs,

reading, generating and writing words using these graphemes. Progress remains slow until lesson 46, at which point participants begin to write sentences and then learn “connector words” to form paragraphs. Along the way, very basic punctuation is also taught. From Lesson 50 onward, comprehension of more complex blocks of text is regularly checked, and students learn to fill out forms with basic personal data. Then, in the last eight lessons, students complete exercises which form the basis of the assessment of their competence at the exit point, in that they learn to produce in their workbooks a simple letter to a friend including description and opinion. An outstanding feature of this structured pedagogy, which emerged from our direct classroom observations, is that local facilitators quickly learn how to teach the lessons through following the example of the actor-teacher, while, at the same time, students are learning to become literacy learners by the same process, watching and copying the learner behaviour of the actor-students. A ‘community of practice’ is quickly established, and is one of the aspects of the model which students and staff most value.

Assessment

There is no formal assessment in the *Yes I Can* model, in the sense of a test. Instead, the local staff and the Australian and Cuban advisers review student progress by observing the class and the student work that is completed in the pre-printed workbooks and locally-generated worksheets. This is in effect a continuous assessment process. Detailed weekly records are maintained showing who is “advancing” and who is not, and those who are falling behind or struggling receive additional support.

That said, we have previously mapped *Yes I Can's* outcomes against the ACSF. Completion of 64 *Yes I Can* lessons means students exit with basic reading, writing and learning competence at level 1 minimum or 2 maximum on the ACSF. This enables them to fill out basic forms; write personal letters; and write up to 2 paragraphs on a personal topic; read with comprehension up to 2 paragraphs on a familiar topic. Obviously some students can perform at a higher level but this is the minimum standard. Importantly students gain significantly in terms of self-esteem and confidence, ability to follow a daily routine, ability to complete tasks, ability to work as part of a team, ability to manage own time, capacity to identify as a learner, and valuing literacy and learning as a core part of their own life, family life and community life.

Positive messages

This is a critical element in the *Yes I Can* model. At the beginning of each lesson, the actor-teacher introduces a simple sentence which includes the letter to be learned in that lesson, but which also contains a particular message in relation to attitudes and values, comparable in some respects to the “generative themes” of Paulo Freire’s culture circles. The sentences on the Grenadan DVD lessons include:

1. Open the gate
2. Let kids be kids
3. People love peace
4. My thoughts are with you
5. Take care of the sea (from over fishing, pollution etc)
6. Our future is secure

7. Love your family
8. Put the rubbish away (recycling and disease)
9. Look after the woods/forest (we say 'scrub', or bush)
10. Give me a hand (solidarity)
11. Music is part of our culture
12. I am a friend
13. Elderly are important. They need our love and respect
14. Mind the time
15. Help your family.

After watching the “actor-student” class discuss this topic on the DVD, the local facilitator stops the player to allow a discussion to occur in the “live” class. Students are asked: “What do you think about this message?” or “Is this important here for us?”. The aim is to stimulate reflection about the social conditions in which the students live. This also helps to contextualise the lesson to the local circumstances of the students, and it generates new local words, using the letter for that day’s lesson.

Participation and outcome data

Table 3 below provides the summary data over the five separate intakes of *Yes I Can* classes during Stage Two

Table 4. Summary data, Stage Two *Yes I Can* cohorts

Intake	Wilcannia 3	Bourke 1	Bourke 2	Bourke 3	Enngonia	Total
Expressions of interest		40	34	24	24	122
Starters	16	16	22	19	21	94
Withdrawals	9	5	7	2	6	29
Graduates	7	11	15	17	15	65
Retention	44%	69%	68%	89%	71%	69%

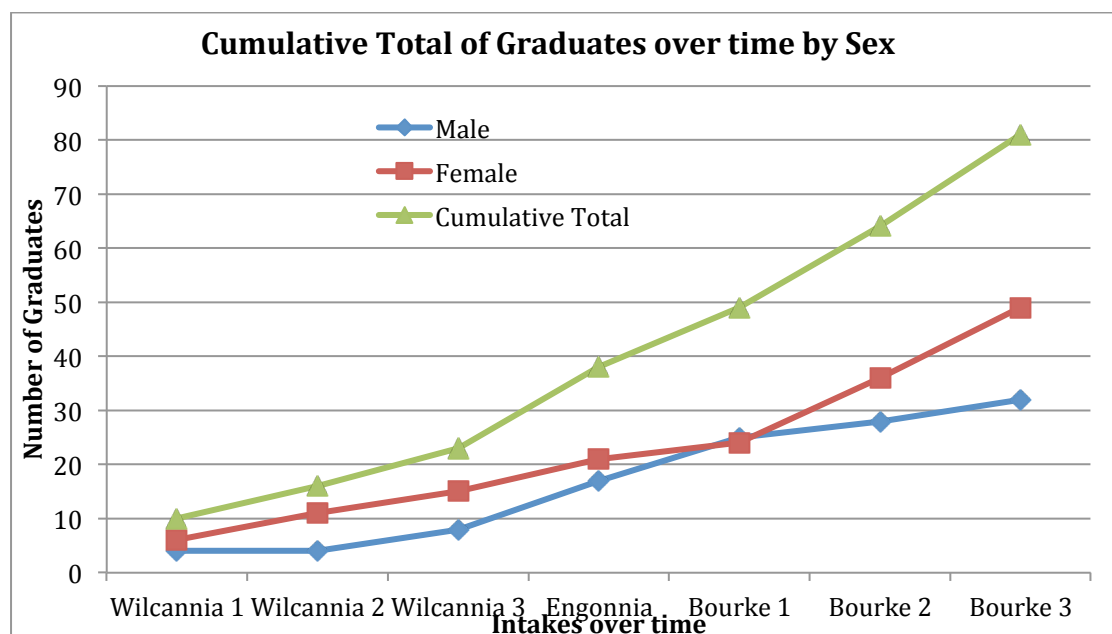
The ‘expressions of interest’ are derived from the survey process, when the local staff ask people who have been identified as needing assistance with literacy to ‘sign up’ to join the *Yes I Can* classes. Additional expressions of interest are gained from people who come into the campaign offices to ask if they can join, having heard about it from friends and family. However, people are only counted as ‘starters’ if they attend a minimum of 3 lessons in the first four weeks. In other words, people who attend for only or two days and leave are not counted as genuine enrolments. In fact, some of these people subsequently return to join a new intake. To date, we have received 12 new expressions of interest for a fourth intake in Bourke, scheduled to begin in October 2014, subject to funding.

Withdrawals

Once people have attended for more than 3 lessons, participation is generally maintained unless there are significant personal and family crises, or if people move or take up employment. As described above, every effort is made through catch-up classes to ensure that everyone who wants to can complete the lessons

and graduate. The withdrawals are slowly being reduced as local staff become more experienced, and as the processes for working around local crises become more effective. The main issues which cause people to withdraw are childbirth, grief, moving away, poor health, drug and alcohol problems, family issues, and police, court and probation/parole problems.

Overall Outcomes of Pilot Stages



The aim of a campaign is to achieve a significant rise in the literacy level of the population as a whole, at community, region and ultimately national level. While a pilot is not a campaign, it is still possible to see, from the above graph, that a trend is emerging, in which a growing number of people, at this stage more women than men, have completed the *Yes I Can* lessons. This is the first stage of a longer process, of which the campaign is the first step to building a stronger culture of literacy and learning in these communities.

Impact analysis

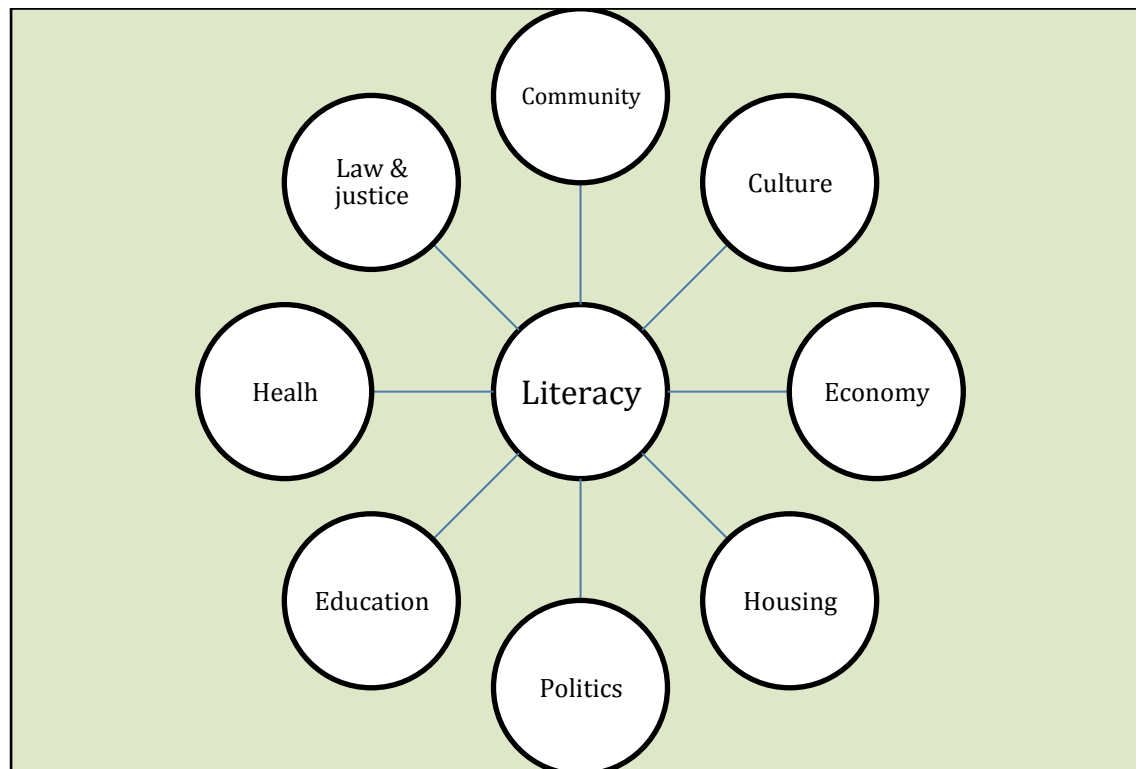
Since the first pilot began in Wilcannia at the end of 2011, 276 people have been contacted through the household survey, 118 have joined a *Yes I Can* class and 81 have completed it. In addition, 15 people have been recruited and trained as local staff, others have participated in the local working groups, and several hundred have taken part in public campaign activities. While this has been done as a pilot, and is by no means a mass campaign as yet, there is now substantial evidence emerging of the impact such a campaign can have in the communities it reaches.

To analyse the impact over time, we have developed a framework which identifies eight different 'domains' of development, through which people's positive engagement in social change needs to be supported:

- 1) The economy e.g. employment, income, participation in labour market programs;
- 2) The community e.g. active membership of community organisations, participation in community building events, membership of sporting clubs;
- 3) The formal education system e.g. school participation, parental involvement in children's education, participation in vocational education;
- 4) The wider political system e.g. voter registration, utilisation of political system;
- 5) The housing sector e.g. through better-managed tenancies, involvement in housing association management, housing improvement and building programs;
- 6) Cultural maintenance activities e.g. native title organisation membership, subsistence economic activities, local language maintenance;
- 7) The health system e.g. utilisation of health services, actions against substance abuse;
- 8) The law and justice system e.g. reduced arrest and incarceration, utilisation of legal services.

These domains and indicators were identified from studies of the impact of mass literacy campaigns in other countries (e.g. Burchfield et al. 2002; Maddox 2007), and from recent Australian writing on indicators of Indigenous health and wellbeing (e.g. Prout 2011). The frameworks is illustrated in Diagram 2, below.

Diagram 1. Framework for understanding the impact of literacy on development



The key to this model is that each domain interacts, not only with people's literacy levels, but with each of the other domains. So, for example, while

improved literacy can be a pathway to improved engagement with health services, for example in the form of action to deal with substance abuse in the community, this can have a positive impact, not only on health, but also on incarceration levels and employment. The evidence of impact during Stage Two is still being analysed, and this work will continue through a longitudinal study once the resources for this have been secured.

Participant Evaluations of the Campaign

The participation and completion levels are an indication that the campaign is achieving outcomes for those who join; but the real meaning, the impact that becoming more literate has on the participants themselves, is more clearly demonstrated in their own accounts. One source for discovering this has been the letters which the students compose at the end of the *Yes I Can* lessons, in which they are encouraged express in their own words some of the experiences and benefits they gain. Each student has consented to these letters being made public, to assist others to see the value of the campaign and what they have achieved. The introduction included the words which Edward Barker read from his letter out at the march graduation. The extracts below from a representative sample of other student's letters provide additional testimony of the campaign's value.

I'm writing this letter for letting you know about all good things this programme campaign has done. It has brought a lot of families together, and taught them well, as for me, it has made me confident in myself, receive and give respect, and also gave me knowledge, I didn't get in school because I didn't get to complete my schooling. I found it challenging and fun that made me want to get involve more. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for this programme as my people and self-needed it. I have learned a lot and would like to keep on going with it, and help my people more. Chelsea Dennis, Enngonia.

When I first started this Yes, I Can Programme, I was very scared because I was the eldest in a class of younger students. But now I am enjoying every moment of it. The Yes, I Can Programme taught me how to respect my fellow students and also taught me how to spell properly and write letters, also how to read books to my grandchildren. I also enjoyed the way teachers have taught us. June Smith, Bourke

I did a lot of practice in the lessons and it taught me to do better in my reading and writing and it stopped me from being shame and learnt me how to spell and write sentences and paragraphs so I've learnt so much in this Yes, I Can program and it is so special because we have got our own mob teaching us. Thank you Yo si puedo. Yes, I Can is mad, thank you. Kelvin Smith, Bourke

I am so glad I joined the Yes, I Can program. I have learned so much in the past 12 weeks. Now I can help my kids with their homework from school. It's just really good we learned so much from this program, so thank you for the

effort in helping us and time and driving out to this little community.
Stephanie Gillon, Enngonia

I'm Bettyanne Edwards. I felt that I wasn't confident with myself. I'm very proud of myself and two sons, for trying the Yes, I Can program. I'm confident that I can do anything I put my mind too. I hope that everyone enjoys it as much as I did. Bettyanne Edwards, Enngonia.

I would like to thank you all for giving me a chance to learn in the programme. I did not do much schooling as I was growing up and didn't get a good education but now I feel I can do anything. You helped me to do things I didn't think I could do like help my grandkids with their homework and writing letters but the best thing of all you made me feel good about myself. Also a big thank you to Fiona and Rick for being such good facilitators and also to Lucy and the rest of the staff. If I can do it anyone can. Rebecca McKellar, Bourke

Interview Data

Further evidence from the staff and participants has been gathered through interviews conducted by project Research Associate Dr Stephen Smith and by freelance journalist Chris Ray, who wrote a feature article for the Sydney Morning Herald Good Weekend. The analysis is ongoing, but a number of key themes have been identified so far:

- Participants feel safe, supported and relaxed because they are being taught by family and people they know
- School and other formal education experiences in the past have left them feeling they could not learn, but the campaign classes have shown them that they can
- The classes have brought families in the community together in ways they have not previously experienced
- Many people now feel that they can go on to do more study, and to apply for jobs
- One of the most important goals that people have is to be able to help their children and grandchildren do better in school
- There is a great deal of gratitude and respect for Cuba the Cuban advisers for their contribution to them and their families, and for the work they are doing to build literacy in other countries
- Other people in their community and people in other Aboriginal communities should be given the chance to join the campaign

Staff interview extracts

"You have to build trust and respect before you can do anything with our people. The Cuban program has done that..

"The best things about "Yes I Can" – to start with it's all about our own people... our own people doing it - doing it for themselves. Our own people delivering the lessons...

"I see our "Yes I Can" program - I seen it, what it's done – it's done amazing things. It's brought families back together... . It's bringing our community back together. It's making us become one again

"We have women who have never been to the hairdresser in their lives. Men too frightened to walk into a butcher shop because they don't know what to ask for.. They are afraid to go straight into TAFE. They find it puts them under pressure. Yes I Can is a stepping stone for them to go on to TAFE to learn job skills or go back to school...."

"It's changed people's lives dramatically, because some of them don't drink no more. We've got young fellows that've moved on to go into the mining courses. We've got the young girls talking about what they want to do." Lillian Lucas, Bourke Coordinator

"It was about the trust. It was all about trusting people. You know what I mean. Like at one stage they knew they could trust me and Rick. I think that's when everything fell into place...."

"When I see 'em cringing or when I see a look on their faces that I know they need help, but they won't put their hand up or ask for it. So, I think it's just all about if you know who you're dealing with; what their problems are and what their problems were, and how to deal with it without making a big fuss about it as well, you know what I mean. Because they're low key people, and they like to be quiet." Fiona Smith, Bourke Facilitator

"I think the place is important where you're holding it.... It was like it was their home here. They felt more at home...."

"The best thing is that you have your own people running it. And I think that is really important because we help them have a better understanding of what the (DVD actor) teacher is teaching. So, we break that down..."

"Yes, really shy they are. When they are in the class it's different. So we get a lot of laughter as well as learning. And a lot of laughter. A lot of smiles. They can just tell us what they want. Sing out. They just feel like they are at home" Tannia Edwards, Enngonia Coordinator

Students interview extracts

"I didn't do it to be a smart Alec – I did it to be there for my grandchildren when they need me and to try to understand the work they are doing at school. I've had my granddaughter in Year 6 come home to me and say, 'Nan, can you help me with my homework?' When I looked at it I said, 'You've got to be kidding, I've never seen anything like that in my life....'"

"My reading and writing is better but I don't think I'm going to stop now. I want to learn a bit more, because there's a lot to learn out there." June Smith, Bourke.

"It was a lovely class with lovely teachers. The teachers have a lot of patience and they wait until we've finished. And there are catch-up classes so no one gets left behind. ...It wasn't like school where we had to sit down for a long time with no breaks. At Yes I Can they give us a break if we need a break. It just feels like family around them....Most of us can read and write a lot better now. We've gone through the classes together and the community is working together better. People are talking to each other more and it's helping them to stay out of trouble better" William Cubby, Enngonia.

Boughton, B., & Durnan, D. (2014). *Cuba's 'Yes I Can' in Australia. Three Years On*. Paper presented at the Australian Council of Adult Literacy Conference 3-4 October Surfers Paradise.

"If I can improve my reading and writing a bit more I'll go back to TAFE to do some construction courses. I had chances to do a lot of courses before, but I didn't try them because I couldn't write properly or read..."

"I got a little fella now. I want to help him learn as he grows up. Sammy likes books; he likes writing and drawing. Sometimes he'll come to me with a book and want me to read it to him." Samuel Shillingsworth, Enngonia.

"The magistrate gave me a chance. She could see I was trying. I would have gone straight to jail otherwise." Hogan Shillingsworth, Enngonia

Yes I Can and Freirian Popular Education

A common response from colleagues when we describe the *Yes I Can* model is to ask to what extent it is 'Freirian', i.e. consistent with the pedagogical philosophy of Paulo Freire. At one level, this may be the wrong question to ask, since, as Kane (2001:53) writes:

Given the variety of interpretations accorded to Freire's work, including many which bewildered Freire himself, it has become almost meaningless to talk, in the abstract, of a 'Freirian' approach to education.

Nevertheless, the question reflects a genuine concern that *Yes I Can* as we describe it is less participatory and more 'teacher-centred' than Freire would have supported. Whether or not *Yes I Can* conforms to one's idea of Freirian pedagogy, it is still important to ask if the *Yes I Can* model, as it is implemented, is an empowering process, one which properly belongs with the tradition of transformative adult education known in Latin America and many other places as popular education.

Historically, Cuba's 1961 campaign pre-dated Freire's initial work in Brazil, and was one of its inspirations. The Cuban manual for its high-school facilitators included a series of themes which paralleled the generative themes which Freire developed through his culture circles (Fagen 1964). While they were codified in a facilitators' manual (*Alfabeticemos or Let's Teach Literacy*), they were derived from the close knowledge of the condition of the peasants and the issues of importance to them which the Cuban educators had acquired through the experience in the guerilla campaign and in the immediate aftermath of the victory in 1959, when thousands of volunteer teachers left the cities to re-open primary schools. Jaime Canfux, who was eventually to become one of the 'authors' of the *Yes I Can* model, was one of these teachers, before becoming a leader in the 1961 campaign (Remple 2014). The experience gained in the 1961 campaign was then extended to other countries where Cuban literacy advisers worked on literacy campaigns, including Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau and Nicaragua, all of which were also supported by Freire, and which also used manuals. The *Yes I Can* model is a direct product of that international experience.

Felipe Pérez Cruz, a historian of Cuba's literacy work, writes that Freire, on his part, was well aware of the Cuban approach and that he endorsed it, when he met Cuba's Education Vice Minister and one of the 1961 campaign architects, Raul Ferrer, in 1965 at the World Conference Against Illiteracy in Tehran. Pérez

Cruz interviewed Cuban advisers with whom Freire discussed the issue again in Angola in 1978 and in Nicaragua in 1979-80:

From the point of view of the Cuban educators, the Freirean method of generative words required a teacher or activist with a relatively high level of education and schooling. The need to massify (sic) the number of people who would be made literate, as was the case in the Cuban campaign of 1961 as much as in the one that was underway in Angola, forced them to enlist literacy workers who could read and write but did not necessarily go beyond the general low educational level inherited from the deposed colonial and neocolonial systems. Freire expressed his satisfaction with the rationale provided by the Cuban advisors. In São Tomé, Freire would later experiment with the Cuban idea of the primer and manual." (Pérez Cruz 2007:696)

Likewise, the US critical pedagogy theorist, Jonathan Kozol, attests to the bond between Freire and Ferrer:

Freire and Ferrer are trusted friends. Their views have not been borrowed, each from the other; rather, they have been inspired by a common viewpoint and shared experience. Unlike most other contemporary educators of renown or power, Freire and Ferrer have forged their pedagogic views among the people they set out to teach, close to the soil, living in the villages and homes of the poor, toiling beside the campesinos to win both land and liberation (Kozol 1978, p.354).

Some Cuban educators, it is true, were initially critical of Freire. However, in 1986, the leading Mexican popular educator Carlos Núñez organised an adult education conference in Havana, initiating a relationship which continued over many years, and inspiring a group of Cuban adult educators who since then have worked to promote the ideas of both Freire and the wider Latin American movement. (pers.coms., Nydia Gonzales & Felipe Pérez, May 2010). Moreover, many Latin American scholars argue that this tradition did not begin with Freire, but can be traced back to the work of Jose Marti in the first Cuban revolution in the nineteenth century (Streck 2008).

A related criticism has come from scholars identified with the New Literacy Studies (e.g. Street 2001), who argue that mass campaigns ignore and devalue local literacy practices, in favour of a nationally-driven agenda. Our evaluation of the pilot in Australia demonstrates that this does not apply to the *Yes I Can* model, which is contextualised to local circumstances as much as possible, and adapted to local realities. In fact, the degree of local control exercised by facilitators and participants, which is one of the model's strengths, makes it almost inevitable that people will "take hold" (Maddox 2007) of literacy during the campaign in ways that accords with their own cultures and histories.

That said, not all elements of the model are negotiable; inclusivity is mandated, as is tight central monitoring and control. In this, *Yes I Can* continues the tradition of the 1961 Cuban campaign, of which Raul Ferrer said:

"... we did not want a random, affable, but drifting atmosphere to be the substitute for old time methods of control. We did not want the kind of aimless atmosphere identified with certain liberal fashions such as Summerhill." (Quoted Kozol 1978, p.350)

So while some may claim that the structured and pre-developed character of the lessons and the central monitoring and control disqualifies the Yes I Can model from being called popular education, we agree with Schugurensky (2011) who says that to focus only on Freire's literacy lessons and culture circles is to ignore the breadth of his philosophy and practice.

In the end, as much as local solutions are desirable, social change of the kind Freire advocated, able to transform the intolerable social circumstances in which millions now live, will only come through international movements on a scale not seen up until now. While low literacy is not always a barrier to participation in social change movements, it substantially reduces the capacity of such movements, as they grow, to maintain participatory democratic processes. If the *Yes I Can* model leads to increased community control over the development agenda while at the same time building and strengthening links of solidarity among different populations in the Global South, then it deserves to be seen as a continuation of Freire's own global mission. The evidence, as always, is the work of history. The proof will only come from more detailed longitudinal studies of impact over time in specific country contexts. This paper is a contribution to this much larger program.

Conclusion

The international experience of mass literacy campaigns demonstrates that, in order for a campaign to lead to significant social change in a community, it has to become supported by a wider movement which has a program for development and social transformation (Arnové and Graff 2008). Existing patterns of educational inequality, whereby some adults are literate whereas others are not, are the result of institutionalised practices in the past, and these continue to have an effect in the present. Acquiring literacy is a first step towards changing existing patterns of inequality in the distribution of power and wealth which inhibit peoples' efforts to take control of their own development.

The Cuban *Yes I Can* model has given rise to a global literacy movement, involving millions of people across 26 countries. These mass literacy campaigns are attracting considerable support around the world, from governments, especially those with a social reform agenda (Artaraz 2012; Muhr 2013); from literacy advocates and practitioners working through governments and international agencies; from scholars and practitioners working in the tradition of popular education (e.g. Abendroth 2009); and, not least, from the millions of people who choose to participate in them. One advantage of the international character of the *Yes I Can* model is that it connects people to events beyond their own community and their own country, where they can see what has been achieved in other places. This helps to keep alive the idea of the possibility of a different future. Ultimately, the test of their value will be whether or not they have a positive impact upon the populations, societies and communities involved, something which only empirical research on actual campaigns, like the studies we are reporting here, can reveal.

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