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What is the case for evidence based policy in education? Challenges of building evaluation infrastructure in the NT.

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The case for evidence based policy in Indigenous education seems incontestable. While the need for improved outcomes is great, the documented record of proven approaches for remote area education service delivery is scant. Such evaluation findings as do exist rely on too small case studies, is often advocacy based, and do not deliver sufficient information (longitudinal, randomized, clear effect sizes, validated and replicated) to be trustworthy. Yet the lead times and resources required to generate research of this ilk are not attractive to policy people who need just in time material and instant, fundable solutions.

If, as seems likely, Australian federal government policy mimics the United States in creating a new push for evidence based school programming, chances are the generation of evaluative research to fill the need will occur within southern institutions where the cultural specificities of remote area indigenous education will not be brought to the fore. Building resident expertise attuned to the problems of our region, capable of generating relevant, useable, timely and robust primary evidence to drive syntheses and hence investments in best practice, seems a critical area for investment.

Somewhat controversially, this paper asks if the against-the-grain efforts that would be required to build the infrastructure that would sustain a program of high quality primary research upon which to produce systematic analysis is actually worth it.