

11. THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

Pathways for the Future

Each of us must realise the power and potential for change when just one individual armed with the right mind-set decides things can be better, and rejects absolutely the notion that second or third rate is good enough for Aboriginal children (Sarra, 2007, p. 8)

The Quality Teaching Indigenous Project school studies described in the previous chapters focused on improving teacher quality in the development and delivery of innovative curriculum strategies for teaching Aboriginal histories and cultures in Australian schools. This federally funded initiative, administered by the state education department impacted on many students (Aboriginal and non Aboriginal) and teachers in twenty schools as they engaged in a journey of learning about, and improving their understanding of, Aboriginal histories and culture. The school studies provide evidence of empowering communities to work together to design authentic, culturally responsive pedagogical practices for all students. The project drew upon the NSW Department of Education's Quality Teaching Model (QTM) to frame the discussion on quality teaching. The implementation of Quality Teaching supported the development of student centred pedagogical practices that reflected creative and innovative integration of local Aboriginal histories and cultures. These practices represented new approaches in each school as they utilised new technologies and focused in particular, on promoting student engagement, high order thinking, substantive communication between students and teachers and the importance of holding high expectations for student achievement (NSW DET, 2003).

The dimensions and elements of the Quality Teaching Model were closely aligned to and informed the objectives for the Quality Teaching Indigenous Project. Specifically the pedagogical focus was to improve teachers' understanding of local Aboriginal cultural knowledge so that teachers could apply their new found skills and understanding in the teaching of Aboriginal perspectives embedded in the curriculum in culturally responsive and inclusive ways. In addition, the project aimed to improve the engagement of Aboriginal students in learning processes and for teachers and schools to engage much more dynamically with Aboriginal parents and the local Aboriginal community. The underlying pretext was to 'close the gap', to address the relentless persistence of Indigenous students' disadvantage in educational attainment when compared to the rest of the student population as exemplified in Australia's National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and international assessment measures such as the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results.

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SCHOOL CONTEXTS AND APPROACHES

In each of the seven schools, the contexts and settings varied in terms of the type, location, enrolment and proportion of Aboriginal students. These settings ranged from a larger primary school in western Sydney to small primary school in a rural community in south west of NSW to a medium sized primary school in a remote regional centre of western NSW. The secondary schools included a comprehensive school in a regional setting in south western Sydney with a large student body (over 1000 students), another secondary school on Sydney's northern beaches (approximately 900 students) and a special needs K-12 school in Sydney's northern region catering for children with specific medical needs drawn from across the state of New South Wales.

Project Plans and Action Learning Teams

In each of the seven schools the projects were planned and guided by an action learning team with support from officers of the NSW Department of Education and an academic mentor. Although the size and composition of the teams varied, the action learning teams were made up of a member of the school's executive team (principal or deputy principal); a member of the local Aboriginal community (often a parent from the school) and or a representative member of Aboriginal organisation (usually the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group or AECG), and an academic mentor with skills in the area of Aboriginal education. In the planning and organisation of the projects the composition of the action learning team assisted in the effective implementation of the projects in the schools.

Professional learning activities varied from school to school. They included a variety of literacy programs for all students, some with a particular emphasis on Aboriginal students. Some accelerated literacy programs utilised *Interactive whiteboard* technologies with a focus on Aboriginal cultures. Maroon primary school introduced the teaching of an Aboriginal language (Wiradjuri) program. Other school projects included a collaborative community based visual arts-based project; a bush garden project; the formation of an Aboriginal dance group at one school. Others still focused on numeracy topics and innovative mathematics pedagogy. Generally the variety of approaches were tailored to each school's unique context. One very successful program at Coral Secondary school engaged ICT in the production of mini projects such as family and local Aboriginal community histories. This program provided an important link to the school's local Aboriginal community and encouraged parents to become involved in the school.

Other school studies illustrated that by adopting an action learning change model, together with the kind of support provided by the teams, most teachers were able to make positive changes in how they approached their teaching, in particular in their awareness and understanding of Aboriginal cultures. In this way the project contributed to achieving at least some incremental progress and positive change, in the sense that schools and school educators were acknowledging and valuing local Aboriginal culture, history and knowledge.

EMERGING THEMES

Currently in NSW government schools there are more than 40,000 Indigenous students, representing 5.4% of the 736,000 total student enrolment. These data reflect a demographic trend towards a more youthful Indigenous population as compared to the rest of the nation. Importantly the school age cohort is almost double the proportion of the Indigenous population in NSW and Australia (NSW DET, 2011). While project support ended in 2009, Federal Government support to the states has continued to focus on reducing the achievement gap in reading, writing and numeracy performance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. By 2011 in NSW 89 schools with significant numbers of Indigenous students received funding under the Smarter Schools *Schools in Partnership* program to assist with improving student achievement and school outcomes.

Program Achievements

In this section the essential features of the Quality Teaching Indigenous Project over its four year lifespan are summarised and some of the key new learnings and effective strategies that emerged among the schools are highlighted. These features are seen as essential aspects of good practice. In particular, teaching about Aboriginal histories and cultures, working with Aboriginal students and engaging in a meaningful way with local Aboriginal communities are elaborated. Themes that capture good practice, both in teaching and in policy development, are summarised as follows, and reflect the importance of:

- supporting teacher professional learning in a collaborative learning environment;
- active and supportive leadership within the school;
- understanding contexts and the complexities of student learning;
- applying technologies and new learning projects in a culturally responsive way;
- understanding and valuing Aboriginal knowledge(s) and expertise;
- connecting and engaging with local Aboriginal communities.

These themes may inform future pathways and strategies in Aboriginal education. The underlying philosophy here is based on a collective spirit of reconciliation and acceptance of a shared history and a common future between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians which seek to address the inequities and injustices that currently exist in many facets of Aboriginal peoples lives as compared to all Australians. What is noted here is that the current mainstream emphasis on educational attainment for Aboriginal students reported in standardised national testings systems like NAPLAN most often is measured at the expense of maintaining Aboriginal cultural connections. Rather what is more culturally valuable as well as educationally sound is a more holistic approach that allows for the vibrancy of Aboriginal culture and knowledge be enmeshed within the curriculum and embedded in the learning

process so that it is valued for the unique features it brings to the wider Australian contemporary culture.

Supporting Teacher Professional Learning

This study of a large-scale professional development program highlights the importance of school education sectors providing support for teachers' and support staffs' professional learning about Aboriginal histories and cultures that further develop their knowledge of, and contact with, local Aboriginal communities and the cultures they represent. The main professional learning outcomes for the staff involved in this study included:

- engaging in professional collaboration around a specific literacy and numeracy teaching/learning practices that the valued collaboration as a forum for professional conversations;
- engaging in an action learning process and its application in the Quality Teaching Indigenous Project and how this enhanced understanding of the learning process
- prioritising the importance of having time to reflect on pedagogical practices – teachers valued the opportunity and time to discuss and reflect on their teaching practice;
- achieving a sense of renewal and revitalisation of their teaching practices across a number of key areas;
- gaining greater confidence in drawing on and embedding aspects of Aboriginal culture and knowledge(s) into their teaching and into particular subject areas;
- improving teacher understanding of particular teaching strategies and key resource packages;
- gaining greater proficiency as a result of training and experience in using a number of different interactive technologies, and
- achieving better engagement with Aboriginal communities, building more sustainable connections within the community, visits with Elders to local Aboriginal sites, greater confidence in including Aboriginal perspectives in teaching.

There was also notable evidence of positive attitudinal changes among many of participants in the project schools that indicated for some participants that the changes were transformational. These findings are reinforced by the implementation plans from the NSW Smarter Schools National Partnerships on Literacy and Numeracy (NPLN) in which schools participated in indepth 'cultural immersion' activities. As a result teachers have participated in professional development programs conducted by the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated. Cultural immersion experiences were conducted by local elders including visits to cultural sites, storytelling and discussions of local cultural knowledge as deemed appropriate by the local communities. "As a result teachers reported that they felt more prepared to create learning experiences to meet the needs of Aboriginal students in class. Teachers also reported that they felt more

confident to create Personalised Learning plans with family members that suited the needs of individual students" (NPLN, 2011).

Importantly what these outcomes establish is that enabling teachers to engage in an authentic way with Aboriginal people and Aboriginal cultural knowledge requires the support of governments and educational institutions to provide adequate funding to allow teachers the opportunity to undertake professional learning activities focused on Aboriginal education and Aboriginal cultural knowledge. This includes making funding provisions for teacher release from day to day duties, and supporting teachers time to reflect and discuss their teaching practices with colleagues and Aboriginal mentors. Such opportunities support teachers to take risks to integrate new strategies and innovative teaching methods including co-operative and team teaching practices and the incorporation of interactive technologies that enhance learning engagement amongst students. Such findings are reflected in the emphasis in the new National Teaching Standards (AITSL, 2011) that specifically require teachers to have an understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and demonstrate their capacity to work with Aboriginal students, as required skills in initial teacher training and at each stage in their career development.

Active and Supportive School Leadership Teams

Among the schools where significant positive changes occurred, the project teams were generally marked by a distributive or facilitative leadership. Given that the team membership ranged from between five and eleven participants, it emerged that a facilitative approach was the most effective. This meant that the team leader, generally a principal or deputy principal, brought their team together, encouraged discussion and factored in a period of confusion and messiness at the start that disrupted traditional practices and beliefs. Consequently team members were encouraged and supported to take risks, to make and follow through innovative decisions that resulted in the team accepting responsibility for progressing the project. In some cases, such as in Carmine school, an even more loosely controlled or distributed process (often more empowering for teachers), enabled projects to evolve in a more organic way. In general, the adoption of a facilitative leadership style meant that teams were able to maintain momentum over a number of years and to achieve a number of the project aims.

There is strong evidence that the support of academic partners made a positive contribution to schools. How academic partners participated in the project teams varied across the schools. In some cases there were changes in who acted as the academic partner during the project. Also there were some concerns about the correlation between the expertise of a partner and the direction of the project. Where the relationship worked between the team and the academic partner, the academic partner was able to play an important, valuable, supportive role, assisting the team to map the issues they wanted to address, and provide feedback over time as the project developed. In some cases the relationship over the life of the project oscillated and evolved as staff and/or academic mentor changed.

A number of teams noted that what also contributed to their success was the involvement of other external Aboriginal education workers, such as Aboriginal aides, Aboriginal Education Officers, and consultants, as well as other professional partners, such as a speech therapist or a literacy/numeracy expert.

Research (Bass & Avolio, 1990, Craven 2005, Burridge, 2009) points to the role that good leadership has in driving positive reforms in schools. This is of particular importance in the introduction of Aboriginal education programs. Evidence from the *Dare to Lead* program established to encourage good leadership in Indigenous education affirms the need for collaborative and innovative leadership in effecting positive change in schools. An evaluation of a successful award winning project, at Coral Secondary school notes:

There is evidence of strong collaborative leadership and a strong whole school focus... There is evidence of a reduction in suspensions and 'timeouts' for Aboriginal students over the last four years is impressive. (Dare to Lead Excellence in Indigenous education awards, 2006).

Transformational leadership allows 'leaders to raise followers' consciousness levels about the importance and value of designated outcomes and ways of achieving them' (Barnett, McCormick, Connors, 2001, p. 3). Transformational leaders inspire direction, motivate followers, and challenge and develop individuals' potential to reach higher goals. Such total engagement (emotional, intellectual and moral) encourages followers to develop and perform beyond expectations. Transformational leadership therefore involves a whole school approach to change. It is concerned with gaining a commitment to a set of values, statements of 'what ought to be' which then become the heart of the culture of the school. It is how to 'imbue whole institutions and societies with a sense of purpose' (Mant, 1997, quoted in Horan, 1999, p. 21).

Understanding Contexts and the Complexities of Student Learning

Given the unique contexts at each school and the complexities of the factors involved in shaping student learning, the data on student learning outcomes was largely gathered from teacher comments about student interest and engagement rather than by any formal assessments or individual test results. Research (Rowe 2003, Hattie 2003) shows the clear links between teacher quality, student engagement and positive learning outcomes. Overall higher levels of student engagement, more on-time attendance and lower levels of truancy were reported by teachers. At one school, teachers noted that students had become more motivated to learn, had shown more interest in their school work, valuing their lessons and their school education. Schools also responded by taking on projects related to what they saw as important learning needs for their students and their local context. At Crimson primary school the main focus was on numeracy, and teachers found their students valued learning mathematics by going outside the classroom and applying concepts in the world beyond school. The teachers at Teal primary school felt that taking a hands-on approach to teaching and learning, by

introducing activities involving the use of concrete objects and references to Aboriginal cultural practices also helped to make learning more authentic for students. For teachers at both Coral and Carmine schools a valuable outcome from their participation in curriculum workshops and excursions to Aboriginal historical sites was their increased commitment to supporting Aboriginal students to achieve improved outcomes in mathematics – to appropriate year and stage levels.

Use of Personalised Learning Plans

Carmine and Coral schools introduced the use of Personalised Learning Plans (PLPs) for Aboriginal students. Teachers felt that the use of PLPs was effective in improving student engagement. PLPs are designed to provide individualised mapping of student learning are part of the Federal Government's 'Closing the Gap' initiative currently under implementation. The central focus of the PLP process is:

- identifying what students already know, what they need to do to reach or exceed mainstream standards, and how best they can do it
- setting clear targets against key learning, and if appropriate, behaviour and attendance outcomes
- developing and applying curriculum appropriate but personally targeted teaching and learning
- strategies to communicate knowledge and key skills and deal with different paces of learning
- monitoring, reviewing and revising each student's learning goals and procedures to achieve them
- working to undo barriers to learning, whatever their causes, including fostering the best possible
- conditions for learning with the help of parents, families, support staff and community agencies (DEEWR 2011 p. 2).

The National Partnerships on Literacy and Numeracy (NPLN) program which forms a part of the 'Closing the Gap' strategy reinforces the application of PLPs in schools:

There are several elements of personalised learning and development and implementation of PLPs have [that] contributed to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The most significant factor in improving student outcomes is the quality of teaching and learning. This is supported by a substantial body of international and national research. A key feature of PLP implementation is the provision of professional development, resources and ongoing support for teachers designing specific teaching strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, especially to target literacy and numeracy (DEEWR p. 9).

The NPLN program also reinforces the findings of this research project in stating the importance of quality teaching and learning; emphasising the need for adequate resourcing of programs and for continuing teacher professional development.

Applying Technologies and New Learning Projects in a Culturally Responsive Way

The opportunity for students to use some of the latest digital technologies was seen as one of the key features of the project. In all the schools in the study students gained additional opportunities to work with new technologies and most schools showed great progress in this area. A feature at a number of the schools was that teachers were able to select and apply a number of different Information Communication Technologies (ICT) to address particular learning needs. These included an interactive white board, various digital technologies such as the use of *Claymation* and *Marvin* to enable animation and video production, and video conferencing to improve communication between groups and schools. The outcomes resulted in greater student engagement and an improvement in their skills base, all which are likely to prove beneficial to them in the future.

Schools also experimented with a number of new learning activities. Magenta Secondary School provided opportunities for students to become part of the school's editorial committee for the school journal and allowed them to showcase their work both at the school and in the wider community. At Carmine School this was achieved through a community based creative arts projects, cultural heritage displays, as well as by arranging video conferencing with other schools. The result for many was an enhancement of the students' self concept and greater pride in their cultural roots.

Some of the organised events were seen as small first steps, but were identified as helping to bring about notable change at the school. These included raising the Aboriginal flag for the first time at one school or setting up a Koori room as a way of creating a teaching and learning environment and a welcoming space for the community. A number of other new learning projects involving students included a mural project, establishing a bush garden that drew on local Aboriginal history and knowledge, starting up an Aboriginal dance group and through a creative arts project involving the local Aboriginal community. Implementing the *Sounds Words and Yarning (SWAY)* literacy program at one school was another important new learning project.

One key feature of these projects was that their approaches involved culturally responsive practices that were mindful of utilizing existing resources, as well as developing new resources; that avoided ethnocentrism and stereotypes of Aboriginal people; that utilized local Aboriginal cultural knowledge as much as possible in a culturally appropriate way and that were empowering for young Aboriginal students to celebrate their cultural roots.

Understanding and Valuing Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge(s)

Another theme that emerged during the study was the different ways in which Aboriginal cultural knowledge(s) were understood. While materials were prepared to help staff better understand what cultural knowledge(s) involved, in some cases, the term was not clearly defined at the start and it remained for each team to explore this concept and arrive at their own interpretation and meaning. Over the course of the project a number of different views of what constituted Aboriginal cultural knowledge(s) emerged.

One perspective was that cultural knowledge was about teachers making an attitudinal change, where teachers developed a stronger empathy towards Aboriginal people and an appreciation that, despite the challenges, teachers could learn about Aboriginal history and culture and begin to draw on that knowledge to make some positive differences in their teaching.

Another perspective was the recognition of the existence of a distinctive Aboriginal perspective – one that acknowledged various Aboriginal histories, cultures and knowledge(s). Also teachers came to realise that each community had its own distinct local histories, cultures and knowledge(s) – especially of the land and connection to Country. Local Elders were recognised as some of the most important people holding and being able to share access to that knowledge. In this way teachers could draw on that local knowledge to improve their students' engagement and learning.

Another view was that some staff recognised the importance of the Aboriginal staff at the school – seeing them as a key resource, with knowledge of the local community, in some cases as brokers who had access to knowledge and who could assist teachers to access and learn about local Aboriginal cultural knowledge. One teacher indicated that because they had an Aboriginal teacher/adviser as a member of their project team they were able to learn a great deal more about Aboriginal cultural knowledge than if that teacher/adviser had not been there. In that case the Aboriginal staff member was seen as a broker – who could both access knowledge and make contact with key people in the local community. A number of staff mentioned how they had also developed a new-found respect for Aboriginal staff at their school – both for the teachers and the support staff.

Connecting and Improving Engagement with Local Aboriginal Communities

Overall a major change reported by school staff was their improved links and connections to their local Aboriginal community, including increased consultation in relation to their teaching and the increased capacity to value and draw on the community knowledge(s) and expertise. As noted above, at the same time there were identifiable changes in the attitudes of a significant proportion of teachers. A number of teachers said they had developed a new found respect for the Aboriginal staff (including support staff and teachers) at their school. In some cases this involved teachers realising for the first time the positive contributions these staff members could make to learning at the school, especially through the cultural knowledge that they could bring to teachers'

relationships with students, parents and carers, and the ability of Aboriginal staff to engage with their local Aboriginal community.

While some staff noted the change that occurred was incremental and partial, for others it was seen as transformative (Mezirow, 2000, Bass & Avolio 1990). For these participants it meant that they were able to move through a number of distinct stages – from initial discomfort, uncertainty and confusion, through to a deeper level of knowledge and understanding about their local Aboriginal community. Hopefully this meant that they had moved to a more sustained and ongoing, culturally engaged and inclusive approach to their teaching.

It was also evident that the project was contributing to the goal of implementing the restorative work with Aboriginal communities (Board of Studies 2001: Bin-Sallik & Smallacombe, 2003). Such goals were achieved through strengthening the connections between schools and local Aboriginal communities (including with both Aboriginal parents and local Aboriginal community agencies).

Understanding the Pressures on Local Aboriginal Communities

A notable feature of each of the local Aboriginal communities connected to a school in this study was the varied nature of their relationships with their schools and their capacity to be engaged in making connections with school staff and students to share local cultural knowledge. In many cases members of the local community were relatively disadvantaged in terms of their own educational attainments, employment and income levels, and standards of health and housing. Aboriginal Community members continue to experience the impact of dispossession of their land, obstacles to connections with their own cultural pathways and ongoing racism.

Acknowledging these factors did not mean schools were taking a 'deficit view' of their local Aboriginal community. Rather it pointed to the need for schools to recognise their role in reaching out to positively engage with their community. It meant that despite disadvantages, as this study shows, where schools did reach out and look for connections and contributions, taking a 'strengths view' of the community, there were a number of Aboriginal Elders, community groups and parents who were interested and wanted to be positively involved with schools to support students' learning.

It was important for each school to explore who the school saw as their local Aboriginal community or communities in searching for answers to questions like who should be included in consultations. Questions asked included... who represented the community on education or cultural issues? How could schools best make contact with these groups individuals? What cultural protocols needed to be followed? While efforts were made to assist schools in this process, there was a need at a number of schools to better understand how relationships could be developed and strengthened over time.

The school studies showed that schools did improve their engagement with the local Aboriginal community. Generally this involved connecting with local Elders and community representatives, including some from local community agencies. In a number of schools including Cammie, Crimson and Maroon, Aboriginal community representatives were already actively involved with the school and in

these cases their involvement was deepened as a result of the project. Where schools reached out for the first time to Elders in the community or to representatives from the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) or other organisations, involvement with the school was a welcomed initiative. In these schools efforts were made to organise meetings with parents, set up an Aboriginal parents group and start a regular newsletter to inform and involve parents more in their children's learning. At a few schools community involvement was limited, often due to external pressures on local families and agencies that prevented regular participation in school activities. These schools mainly relied on working through Aboriginal staff at the school – seeing these staff as the main brokers of knowledge about the community.

Overall, findings from this study show that where school staff did make an effort to change their attitudes and behaviour, staff were able to move beyond involvement with mostly negative or 'deficit' issues related to attendance, discipline and disengagement from learning, to a more positive focus. This commonly involved developing improved relationships with different parts of the local Aboriginal community that were focussed on learning – in some cases even developing examples of joint learning and reciprocal exchange of knowledge, such as occurred at Coral Secondary school.

EFFECTIVE TEACHERS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Education is an essential pathway to bridging the divide in educational attainment between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Research on best practice models for teaching Indigenous students points to the level of teachers' commitment as the crucial link to student engagement in the classroom, improvement of student self-concept and student retention rates at school. As one teacher put it:

A lot of learning to do with Aboriginal kids is based totally on personal relationships. The kids who stay on at school and are supported and do well, most of them have had good experiences in strong personal relationships with the teacher (BurrIDGE, 2009, p. 240).

Another comment points to the importance of teacher attitudes to cultural knowledge and the capacity to relate to Aboriginal people

It's getting the staff confident enough to work and mix with Aboriginal people for a start... You've got to get people comfortable working in groups with Aboriginal people (BurrIDGE, 2009, p. 240)

One other aspect of good practice was teachers' ability to apply culturally appropriate methods of working with Aboriginal people. These practices included following basic principles of keeping Aboriginal people involved and informed of school activities, making Aboriginal people welcomed by organising informal school meetings, often through the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups. Often local AECG's exist in many school communities, and ensure that initial consultations and introductions are made through an Aboriginal person or

someone who knows that community and is trusted a member. There is a large body of research which points to the fact that good teachers and good teaching matter (Craven, 2005; Hattie, 2003; Rowe, 2003). This is particularly important when teaching Indigenous students. A federal education ministerial advisory group noted in 2001 that:

In relation to teachers ...there is a direct link between teacher quality and Indigenous student learning outcomes. Specifically ...teachers demonstrate their professional standards by their commitment to preparing all students for a productive and rewarding life as citizens in a democratic and multicultural Australia and by their commitment to achieving educational equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (MCEETYA, 2001a, p. 3).

Effective Teachers Need Good Training and Professional Development

Research has shown that teachers who have undertaken professional training either in pre-service training or in professional development courses have a better understanding of Indigenous history and cultural issues and exhibit greater confidence in teaching these in the classroom. Research on pre-service training in teacher education conducted by Craven (2005, online) found that:

pre-service Indigenous studies courses do make a positive difference. Teachers who have undertaken such courses report knowing significantly more about subject matter and teaching Indigenous students and have higher teaching self-concepts across a range of domains, compared to teachers who have not undertaken such courses. ... These results offer empirical evidence for ensuring teacher education courses include Indigenous studies teacher education courses. These teachers are passionate about their teaching and about wanting to make a difference to the level of educational disadvantage faced by Indigenous students.

Once teachers are working in schools it is important to support them to be more effective in improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students by providing regular and ongoing professional development opportunities – especially in those schools with a significant numbers of Indigenous students.

National Teaching Standards

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) has released its National Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2011) making it mandatory that all newly trained teachers and those seeking professional advancement attain skills in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their communities. Under Professional Knowledge, Standards 1.4 (Figure 13) and 2.4 (Figure 14) require teachers to:

Professional Knowledge				
Standard 1 – Know students and how they learn				
Focus	Graduate	Proficient	Highly Accomplished	Lead
1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students	Demonstrate broad knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture, cultural identity and linguistic background on the education of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds	Design and implement effective teaching strategies that are responsive to the local community and cultural setting, linguistic background and histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students	Provide advice and support to colleagues in the implementation of effective teaching strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students using knowledge of and support from community representatives	Develop teaching programs that support equitable and ongoing participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by engaging in collaborative relationships with community representatives and parental carers

Figure 13. National Professional Standards for Teachers: Standard 1 Know students and how they learn.

Standard 2 – Know the content and how to teach it				
Focus	Graduate	Proficient	Highly Accomplished	Lead
2.4 Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians	Demonstrate broad knowledge of understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages	Provide opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages	Support colleagues with providing opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages	Lead initiatives to assist colleagues with opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages

Figure 14. National Professional Standards for Teachers: Standard 2 Know the content and how to teach it.

The implications of these requirements for educational institutions are that they must allocate greater resources to the professional training of teachers within teacher education courses and in schools to ensure that they are competent in addressing the complexity of issues that arise when working with Aboriginal communities and teaching Aboriginal students.

Relationships with Community and Parents

Finally it is important to restate that developing supportive and mutually cooperative relationships between the school and the local Aboriginal communities is a central feature of good practice. It is about acknowledging and recognising local Aboriginal histories, cultures and knowledge(s). It means making real and meaningful connections and linking back to how and what is taught to students. This includes reaching out in a positive manner, making meaningful connections and working in a collaborative way with Aboriginal families to develop and foster parental support for regular school attendance and improved learning outcomes of their children at school. All of this cannot be achieved without a high level of teacher involvement and commitment to Aboriginal education.

The central element to the success of programs to improve educational attainment of Aboriginal students is the level of teacher commitment to the programs and strategies noted within these chapters. Teacher commitment implies not just having the pedagogical skills for the quality of teaching, but the resilience and the capacity to break through some of the barriers which may occur in the implementation and eventual success of these programs. Further, the school and its related community must be supportive and engaged in the processes to ensure positive outcomes. This commitment can be summarised in this diagram.

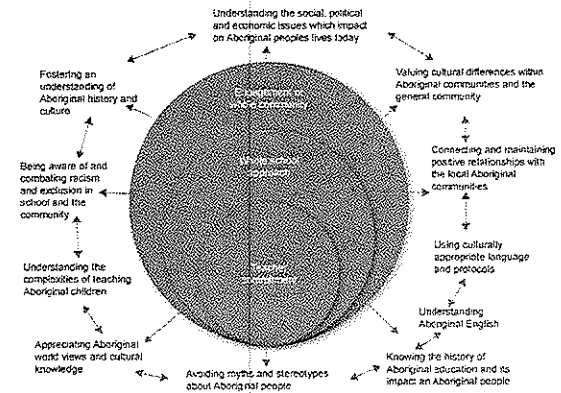


Figure 15. A whole school and community approach to Aboriginal education.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have summarised the themes that emerged from the school studies outlined in this project. These schools ventured on a journey to improve teacher knowledge of Aboriginal cultures and histories and as a result assisted Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student learning in this vitally important area of the curriculum. The themes outlined here are not revolutionary, but they have the capacity to be transformative. They are based on substantive investigations with teachers, policy makers and Aboriginal communities. Evidence from surveys, interviews and analysis of documents were supplied by the individual schools through a well planned action learning process. The school studies illustrated that resourcing projects that involved teachers in collaboration with academic experts and members of their local Aboriginal communities delivered innovative teaching

programs over a substantive period of time. As a result, schools demonstrated that these approaches do produce positive educational outcomes for teachers and students.

Governments at all levels, through their policies, must focus on providing resources that are strategically tailored to improve teacher professional learning and through this, teacher confidence to embark on the journey of working with Aboriginal students, their parents and their community in a mutually respectful and educationally productive ways. A journey which can be complex yet rewarding, and which, in improving relationships between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal people will ultimately contribute not only to Aboriginal student educational attainment but indeed to the processes of reconciliation.

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